

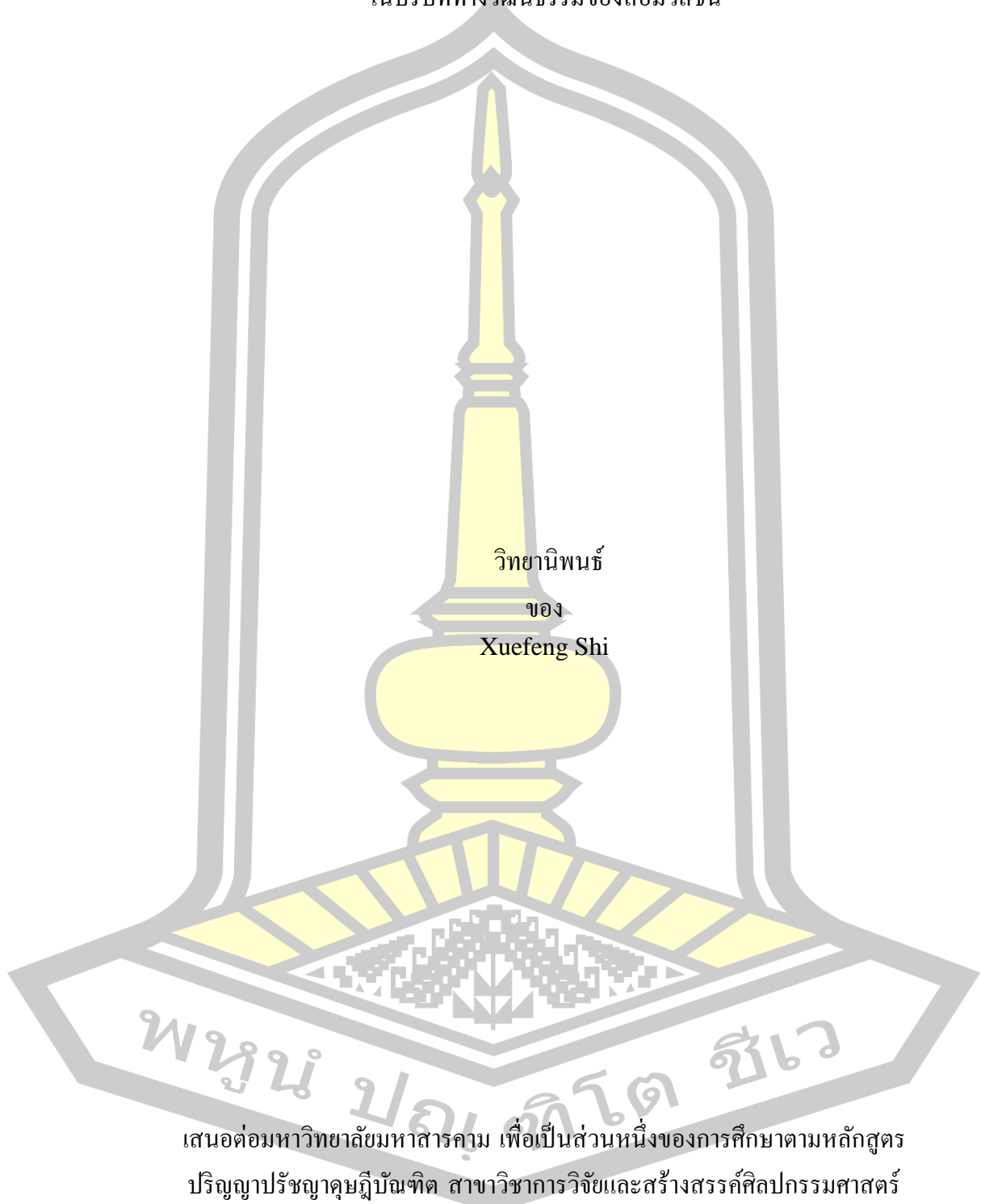
Thesis Title (in English) :Nezha in Chinese Animation:representation and Symbolic Interaction of Legends in the Context of Popular Media Culture.

Xuefeng Shi

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation
June 2024

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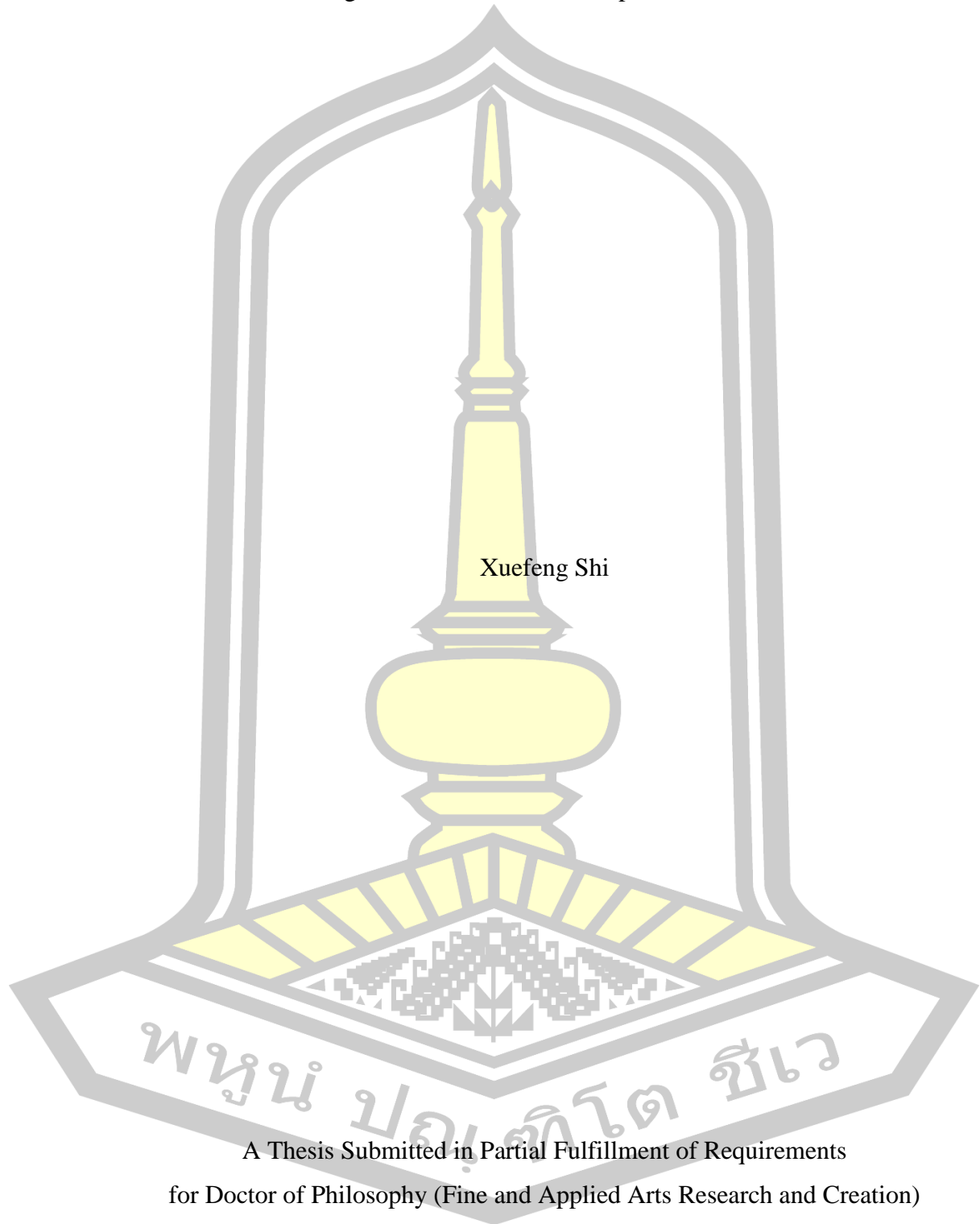


เสนอต่อมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตร
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The examining committee has unanimously approved this Thesis, submitted by Mr. Xuefeng Shi , as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation at Mahasarakham University

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ABSTRACT

Nezha is a child god originating in Buddhist mythology, has undergone cross-media adaptation and has appeared many times in Chinese literature, film, and television. In 2019, the animated film "Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World" achieved unprecedented success. The subversive image of Nezha in the film aroused widespread discussion in society, and the public began to pay attention to various Nezha animations.

This qualitative study using the animated image of Nezha as the text, using the concepts of cultural representation and symbolic interaction, and using content analysis method, document analysis method, and in-depth interview method to collect and analyze the film content, film review content, and Internet content of multiple Nezha animations, review relevant historical documents and materials, and conduct interviews with animation practitioners and audiences.

The objectives of the research : 1. To study the historical origin and animation adaptation history of the mythical character Nezha 2. To study the artistic image of Nezha in different media 3. Study the cultural representation of Nezha's animated image 4. To study the symbolic interaction of Nezha's animated image 5. To study animation cases "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child".

The results of the study are as follows:

The legendary story of Nezha has undergone localization in China. After its image was finalized in the novel "The Romance of the Gods", it has been adapted many times in various media, especially animation media. Nezha plays an important role in the history of Chinese animation development, Reflects the appeal of legendary characters in popular media.

Nezha in popular media has undergone many transformations. Its external image innovated and developed while retaining the core visual symbols; Its inner image changed from divinity to human-god. It reflects the unfamiliarity of design, the

diversification of appearance, and the roundness of character.

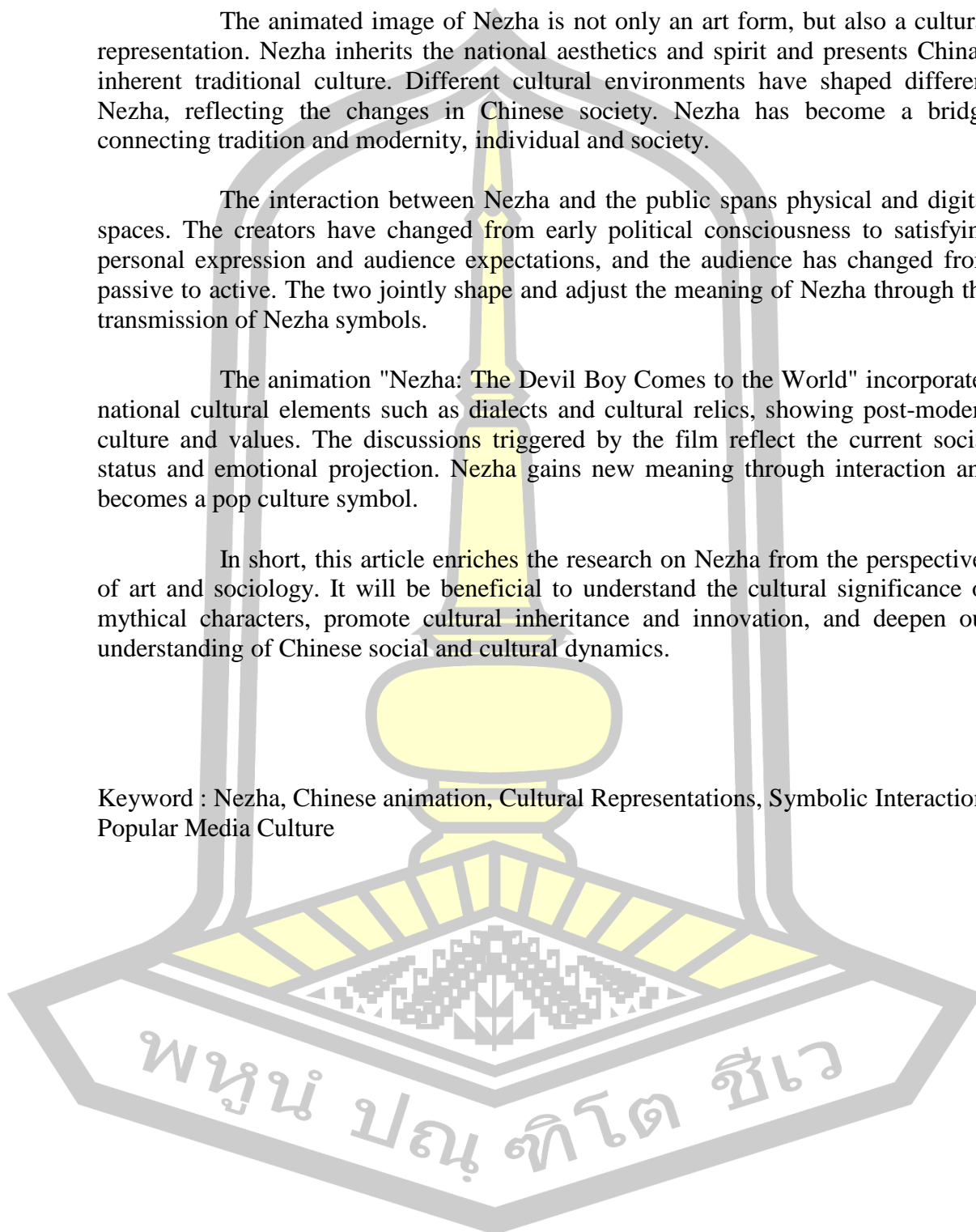
The animated image of Nezha is not only an art form, but also a cultural representation. Nezha inherits the national aesthetics and spirit and presents China's inherent traditional culture. Different cultural environments have shaped different Nezha, reflecting the changes in Chinese society. Nezha has become a bridge connecting tradition and modernity, individual and society.

The interaction between Nezha and the public spans physical and digital spaces. The creators have changed from early political consciousness to satisfying personal expression and audience expectations, and the audience has changed from passive to active. The two jointly shape and adjust the meaning of Nezha through the transmission of Nezha symbols.

The animation "Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World" incorporates national cultural elements such as dialects and cultural relics, showing post-modern culture and values. The discussions triggered by the film reflect the current social status and emotional projection. Nezha gains new meaning through interaction and becomes a pop culture symbol.

In short, this article enriches the research on Nezha from the perspectives of art and sociology. It will be beneficial to understand the cultural significance of mythical characters, promote cultural inheritance and innovation, and deepen our understanding of Chinese social and cultural dynamics.

Keyword : Nezha, Chinese animation, Cultural Representations, Symbolic Interaction, Popular Media Culture



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I have been to Thailand many times as a tourist, and this warm and mysterious country impressed me deeply. This time, I entered the campus of Maha Sarakham as a student, which gave me a chance to know more about the culture, language and education system of Thailand, so I treasure this opportunity to study. They taught me to be rigorous and serious when doing research, and to be friendly and modest when interacting with others.

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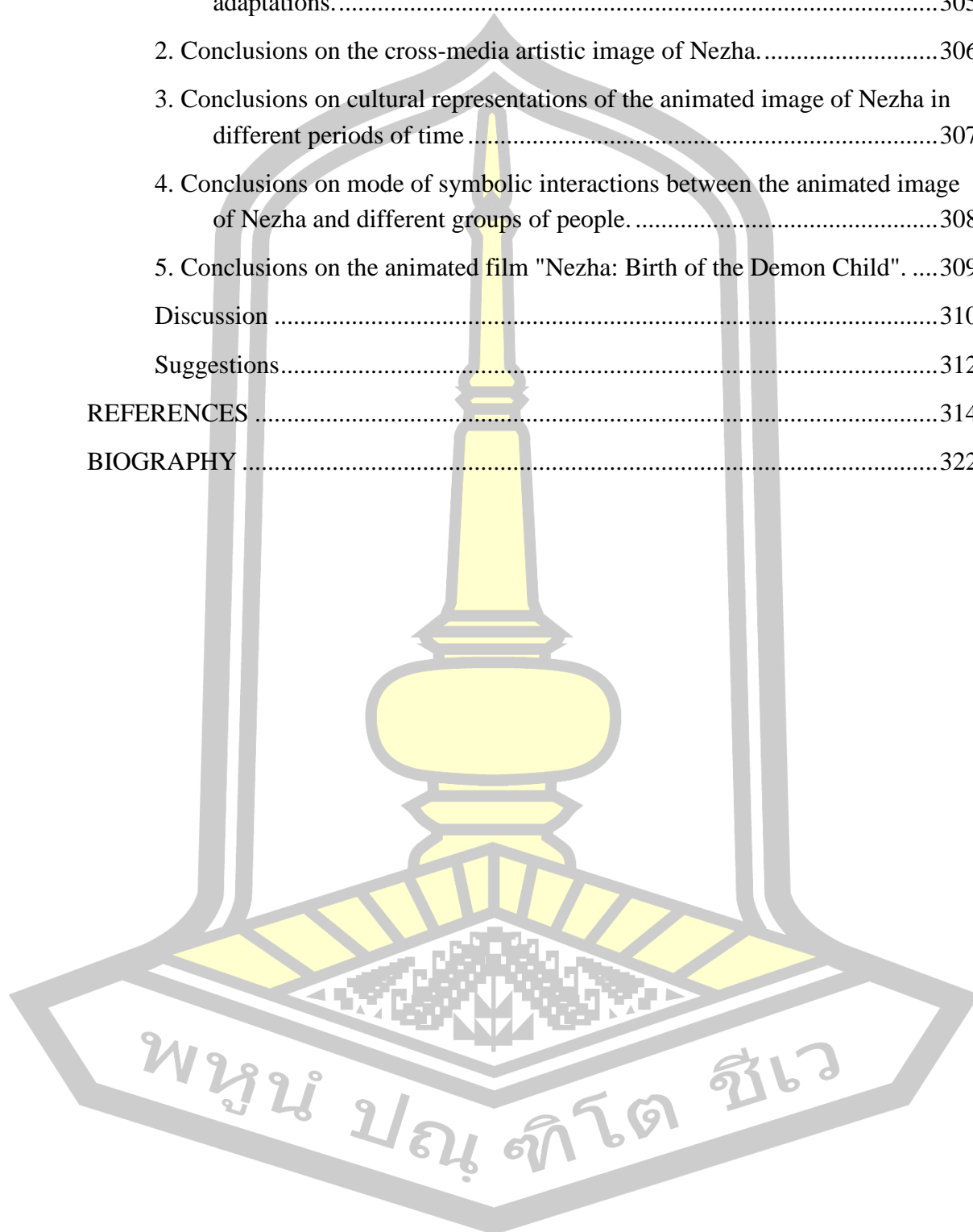
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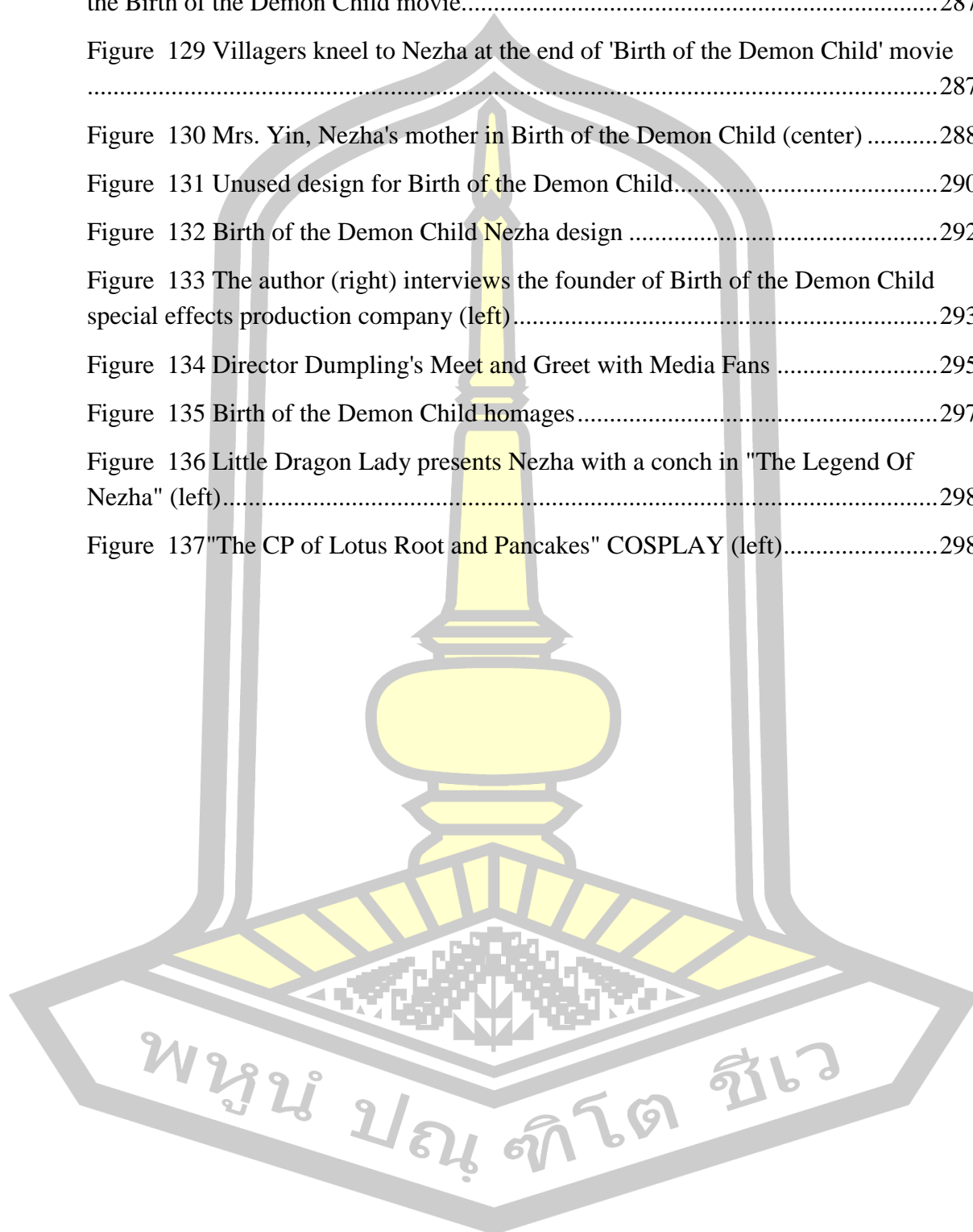
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

1. Background of Research

1.1 Legends and Animations

Mythological legends are an important form of national culture, condensing the crystallization of a nation's history. The writing and presentation of legends' stories and characters are not only the inheritance of history and culture, but also the self-knowledge of human beings. Legends, as a product of human brain, is essentially a kind of fictional art form, which needs to be widely disseminated with the help of the media and art and other objective externalization. The life of legends lies in its dissemination. In the process of historical development, Legends have accomplished the process of spreading culture and transmitting their own values in different ways, constructing and transmitting their own values and meanings among the inheritors, the inherited, the media, and the memories. (Shunguo & Jijing, 2007). The process of transmitting cultural values is accomplished in different ways by Legends.

Animation provides rich interpretive space for Legends and has extraordinary advantages in spreading Legends. In the era of booming popular media, animated images are able to be accepted by a wider range of people in a great range. The Legends stories presented by animation are subliminally reproduced in the medium. A large number of Legends-themed films have chosen to utilize animation as a form of media reproduction for the following reason: animation is a hypothetical art rich in exaggeration and imagery (Wells, 2012). Animation is a hypothetical art rich in exaggeration and imagination (Wells, 2012). It can break through the dimension of time and space, so it has its unique advantages in the expression of mythological themes, especially for the fantasy mythological thinking and space with special artistic expression. First of all, in the form of expression, the freedom of modeling brought by animation is far more than that of live performance, which can make the animated characters show more dynamic visual effects, and then add exaggerations, deformations and other more innovative creative techniques and special movie special effects technology to show the fantastical and exaggerated nature of Legends' story, which can bring the audience an extraordinary visual enjoyment.

Legends and animation both have the special function of breaking down the dimensions of time and space to make narratives (Manxi, 2021). They have a special function of breaking the dimensions of time and space for narrative (Manxi, 2021). They closely link fantasy and imagination to construct a mysterious and romanticized narrative space. The rich Legends stories not only provide a large amount of script material for the creation of animation, but also its unique narrative, which makes people's free-spirited and unrestrained life experience, which is difficult to obtain in real life, to be shown to the fullest extent. The wishes and expectations that are difficult to realize in real life, the vigorous vitality, the mythological thinking that is full of fantasy color and poetry can be shown. Since animation is not limited by live action, it has a lot of fantasy and imagination in itself, thus compared to other types of movies, animation is more advantageous in reinventing and spreading the Legends story.

Chinese Legends stories are mainly based on Buddhism and Taoism's system of gods and fairies. With the gradual development of society and culture, the characteristics of combining gods and historical figures, and linking people with fame, achievements and influence in the earthly society with the gods and fairies appeared, and the Ming Dynasty took "Journey to the West" as the representative of "Nezha and demons" to present Chinese Legends stories to perfection, reflecting the "Creation Myth, God and Buddha Myth, Legends Stories", "Nezha" as the representative of the Ming Dynasty, the gods and magic novels will be the Chinese Legends story perfectly presented, reflecting the "creation myths - gods and Buddha myths - legend stories The development process of "Creation Myth, God and Buddha Myth, Legend Story" has constructed a complete worldview of human, god and devil, and shaped a series of Legends characters with Chinese national characteristics, which have had an important influence on Chinese national culture from ancient times to the present day, and also become an inexhaustible source of inspiration for Chinese animation in the future.

1.2 Popular Media and Chinese Animation

With the introduction of American animation, the first generation of animators represented by the Wan Brothers began to explore Chinese animation and proposed the creation of Chinese animation with a national style. Chinese animation pioneers drew materials from myths and legends, while integrating folk New Year's Paintings, leather shadows, paper cuttings, and ink and wash techniques to create animation works with national aesthetic characteristics, which had a profound influence on the style of the films. At the same time, the animation works produced at different stages of China's history are, to a certain extent, characterized by the characteristics of the times, and the artistic style, presentation techniques and thematic concepts of animation are constantly changing, from the faithful reproduction of the original story to the innovation of the story, the innovation of the characters, and even the subversion of overthrowing the original image.

According to the famous American scholar Napier, "animation is a medium, not just a television program or a movie, and not just an art style" (Napier, 2001). (Napier, 2001) ". Animation is a new type of cultural communication carrier, a typical visual culture, which requires people to actively participate in, perceive and understand the connotation of animation through vision. The creation, development and dissemination of animation cannot be separated from the popular media, and the development of the popular media affects the form and content of animation. In 1919, Walt Disney filmed an animated feature film that was only two minutes long, which marked the emergence of real animation. From this beginning, animation developed rapidly, gradually expanding to almost all video media. This new cultural style has continued to evolve, attracting countless audiences with its unique appeal. Animation and film, and then with the television organic combination together, increased audience, accelerated dissemination, expanding the influence, thus opening up the animation communication channel, to meet people's visual needs, for the dissemination of animation provides a historical opportunity.

Like the origin of animation in the world, the development of Chinese animation advances gradually with the emergence of film technology, experiencing changes from silent to sound, from black and white to color. Early animation creations for a long time were developed under the planned economic system, with animated films

enjoying the same treatment as feature films, documentaries, and science and education films, with the State Film Bureau issuing production targets every year. The State Film Bureau issued production quotas every year, and after the production of animated films was completed, the state practiced collective purchasing (Gang & Xiaoqiang, 2014). Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio (SFFS) Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio (a national enterprise) did not have to consider the market return when producing animation films during this period, and the number of feature films, science fiction films, and art films produced each year were all completed according to the plan issued by the state. The animation of this special period was not only an expression of art, but also a means of accomplishing the ideological and cultural output through the medium of film.

After the reform of China's economic system, household electrical appliances, especially television sets, have been introduced into thousands of households, and television culture has become popular. By 1985, China's television production had reached 16.63 million units, surpassing the United States, second only to Japan, becoming the world's second largest television producer. 1987, China's television production reached 19.34 million units, surpassing Japan, becoming the world's largest television producer, China's television market has realized a large-scale upgrading from black-and-white television to color television.

Compared with movies, TV could attract more attention from the public, people's interest in movie watching and consumption concepts changed, and the consumption of movie theaters was gradually replaced by the consumption of TV sets. At this time, China's animation production and box office shrinkage has made the animation development in the transition period more difficult, animation began to try to enter the TV market, the communication medium by the need to focus on watching the movie, changed to watch an episode of TV animation at home every day, which changed the majority of people's habit of watching animation, and more direct impact on the generation of TV series animation.

In the 1990s, the Internet gradually came into the common people's homes, allowing people to enter a new era of information technology, realizing a full range of information services such as distance education, information, entertainment, business and other information service functions (Sun, 2018). With Flash animation providing convenience for instant playback of network video, people began to love this new form of network animation. Network animation has become a trend in the development of Chinese animation, which has spawned specialized animation categories that mainly serve online playback and downloading. After the cell phone enters the 3G era, cell phone animation and network animation are inextricably linked. Network animation is characterized by simple picture, easy production, low cost and interactivity, and has formed a unique artistic style from the late 1990s to the present.

With the rapid development of the Internet, new forms of media have emerged, distinguishing them from traditional media such as television, newspapers, radio and other forms. New media is based on the Internet, human-computer interaction, digital media and other new technologies to disseminate information to users through terminals such as cell phones, computers, tablets and so on. New media mobile platform refers to media organizations based on the Internet and other technologies to deliver information to users through portable terminals, such as

portals, video sites, live broadcasting sites, WeChat, microblogs and so on. It is characterized by the decentralization of user-generated content.

The rapid development of popular media brings new development opportunities for the animation industry. The development of new media, including digital TV, network, cell phone, PDA, mobile player, etc., not only brings new growth point for the development of animation industry, but also further expands the brand-new broadcasting channels. Utilizing the communication characteristics of network communication which is 7×24 hours per week without any gap, a brand-new network patch advertising mode can be established. Many Flash animations are not only low-cost, but also adopt the method of "network first, TV second", which has attracted popularity and gained good economic benefits. In countries and regions with developed cultural industries, animation and games have long formed a trinity cycle industry chain of animation, cartoon and game. Through combined efforts, this conjoined industry can be made bigger and stronger. With the improvement of people's living standard and the continuous development of technology, the extension of animation is also more and more extensive, and the animation of new media communication mode is also developing, such as the popular network animation, game animation and cell phone animation on the computer.

In the context of popular media culture, media reproduction has become the most widely used concept. Many Chinese mythological Legends characters, such as Nezha, the Great Sage of Qi Tian, the White Lady, Jiang Ziya and other mythological figures with a wide range of audiences, have been transformed into movies and put on the big screen, and have reaped good commercial box office and social reputation. These movies adapted from ancient Chinese Legends character archetypes are known as IP movies, like many movies adapted from best-selling novels or games nowadays (Zhenzhen, 2015) .

When the literary text based on Legends is reproduced through the medium of a movie, it shows that these two types of language rhetoric belong to different linguistic symbolic systems, including image rhetoric, visual rhetoric, and other such linguistic symbolic text systems. Taking the IP movie based on the mythological character of Nezha as an example, from the literary text of the novel of gods and demons to its reproduction on the movie screen, since they all contain a large number of the same type of creative blueprints, to a certain extent they are used to convey a common cultural theme in order to evoke emotional resonance in the audience.

1.3. Nezha and the Study of the Original Origin

As a dramatic character in traditional Chinese mythology, Nezha has been adapted by Buddhism, Taoism and folklore, and has gradually developed into a story framework that is accepted and familiar to the general public throughout history. The story of Nezha is based on the historical background and the social relationships between the characters, and the Nezha is an exhaustive effort to construct a world structure in which Nezha lives, including his appearance, status, class, relationships, magic spells, and biography, etc. This detailed worldview not only provides the narrative basis for subsequent cross-media reproduction, but also provides the basis for the creation of the character of Nezha, who has become a popular figure. This detailed worldview setting not only provides a narrative basis for subsequent cross-media reproduction, but also provides a broad space for the symbolization of Nezha's image.

Unlike movie characters portrayed by real people, Nezha in animated films is based on literary descriptions and people's imagination. The nature of animation art - hypothetical - also gives the Nezha character in animated films a more distinctive and unique "pictorial symbol" attribute. The immediacy, stability and creativity of the animated character in the process of symbolization are all features that allow for the deeper spiritual core of the creator's intention to be attached to the image of Nezha in an appropriate manner. Therefore, after being symbolized, Nezha in animated films becomes a medium for conscious expression and emotional connection with the audience.

There are several important reasons why the image of Nezha in animation was chosen as the research text for this study:

First of all, in the study of the history of Chinese animation, there are two mythological characters that appear most frequently, namely Sun Wukong and Nezha, which are the most well-known characters, and the literary image itself is favored by the creators and loved by the audience, which makes Sun Wukong and Nezha appear in animation much more frequently than other mythological characters, and mostly as the main protagonists, and it is difficult to even find out other influential mythological characters, which indicates the important position and influence of Sun Wukong and Nezha in mythology. This shows the importance and influence of the Monkey King and Nezha in mythology.

Secondly, the animated images of Nezha and the Monkey King have undergone several important evolutions, and the results of these evolutions have directly influenced the development of animation history and coincided with several important historical periods in the development of Chinese society and culture, so there must be some kind of connection between the changes in their animated images and the society and culture, whereas the other mythological characters, due to the relatively small number of animations, are unable to obtain a sufficient sample of the study, and it is difficult to analyze the trajectory of the evolution of the animated images. The evolution of animated images is difficult to analyze because of the small number of animations and the inability to obtain enough research samples.

Once again, although the number of Nezha animations is not as high as that of the Monkey King, the proportion of well-known animations is even higher. Several key works can be selected from the perspectives of social impact and commercial value, with the first animation in New China and the highest-grossing animation in China being based on the theme of Nezha. Some Nezha represents the entertainment frenzy of the Internet media era, while others have even become a weapon against cultural invasion. The constant development and change of Nezha's image has, to a certain extent, reflected people's inner aspirations and shaped certain social phenomena, which has given Nezha a special characterization and importance that is not shared by other animation characters, which is why I chose Nezha rather than the Monkey King.

Finally, it is found that there is already a wealth of research on the animated image of the Monkey King, while there is relatively little on Nezha. Relevant studies began to appear in large numbers only after the phenomenal results of Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, and most of them are single studies from the perspective of film and television art, lacking in the linkage between the evolution of Nezha's image and the evolution of society, which can only be investigated from the perspectives of

sociology and communication studies. In order to study the link between the evolution of Nezha's image and the evolution of society, it is necessary to select multiple works about Nezha to reflect the trend of Nezha's image.

Nezha has been celebrated for thousands of years as a character in Chinese legends, and the character itself has a high degree of cultural connotation and spiritual charisma. The image of Nezha as a "young god" and his iconic adornments, such as the "Mixed Sky Aya", "Qiankun Ring" and "Wind and Fire Wheel", have become iconic visual symbols for recognizing Nezha. The image of Nezha as a "young god" and his representative ornaments, such as the "Mixed Sky Aya", the "Qiankun Circle", and the "Wind and Fire Wheel", have become iconic visual symbols for recognizing Nezha. Through the continuous evolution of animation styles, these symbols have brought audiences rich audiovisual experiences at the level of "energy reference". These narrative symbols imply special references to social and cultural contexts, attracting viewers to immerse themselves in the process of watching the animation, and enabling them to realize the purposes of cultural output, edutainment and transformation of values in a relaxing but not too serious atmosphere.

The rapid development of mass communication media brought about by the development of science and technology has led to an increasing demand for culture. Cultural activities also rely on a high degree of symbolization, and therefore the activity of symbols is also increasing. In the past, the symbol of Nezha, with its "powdered face and vermilion lips," could no longer provide a strong visual stimulus for the public, and so the "superimposition of symbols" became more and more obvious. When the "three-headed, six-armed" Nezha symbol in the original text is continuously squeezed by the superimposed symbols, the original symbol will eventually be swallowed up. In the context of popular media culture, researchers and scholars need to think about how to maintain the core of Nezha's original text and reproduce it in the media, while at the same time shaping the cultural symbols in line with current aesthetics.

I have been engaged in animation research and creation for many years, and during my doctoral studies, I have learned the concepts and knowledge related to sociology and communication. The success of animation works such as *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King* and *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* has made me realize the value of Chinese mythological legends in communication studies, which inspired my research passion. Legends in communication studies, which inspired my passion for research. Through this study, I can understand the development of Chinese Legends animation, the relationship between Chinese animation and the development of popular media culture, how Nezha, a classic Legends character, is reproduced in the medium in the form of animation, as well as the symbolic symbolism behind it, and through the study of the single text of Nezha, I can also understand the Through the study of the single text of Nezha, it is also possible to understand the related problems of Chinese legendary animation. This study uses qualitative research methods to describe and analyze the animated image of Nezha. At the end of the study, it will be possible to see the impact that the development of Chinese society has had on Chinese Legends' animation, and the results of the study will be useful for the Chinese animation industry and research.

2. Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are fivefold:

1. To study the historical origins of the mythological character Nezha and the history of animation adaptation
2. To study the visual presentation and animated image of Nezha in different media
3. To study the cultural representations of the animated image of Nezha in different periods of time
4. To study the mode of symbolic interactions between the animated image of Nezha and different groups of people
5. To analyze the animation case study "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child".

3. Research question

3.1 Who is Nezha? What are his characteristics and story? Why was he adapted into an animation? What Nezha animations are there in China?

3.2 What does Nezha look like in different media? What is the look and character of Nezha in animation? What are the changing characteristics?

3.3 How does the animated image of Nezha reflect traditional culture and spirituality? How has the cultural representation of Nezha changed over time? What factors have influenced it? How does it reflect social change?

3.4 How do creators of different eras design Nezha? How do audiences in different eras interact with Nezha? What meanings of Nezha have been created and changed through interaction? How do people convey the symbol of Nezha?

3.5 What is Nezha like in "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child"? What traditional culture and social status quo does it embody? How does it complete its own construction in symbolic interaction?

4. Definition of Terms

4.1 Legends

Legends is a form of cultural expression and an important genre created by human beings from ancient times to the present day, which first originated from the ancient Greek word mythos or muthos, which originally means "words, stories, narratives", etc. Legends is one of the earliest art forms in the history of the human society, which reflects the origin of art and thinking, and also the early civilization of human society. Legends are one of the earliest forms of art in the history of human society, reflecting the origin of art and thinking, and mapping the early civilization of human society. In the field of mythology, different scholars have different views on the interpretation of myths. Due to the different historical backgrounds and social contexts, scholars have many different perceptions of Legends. The Finnish folklorist Hangke defines myths in terms of form, content, function, meaning and context of telling, that is, Legends are "stories about the gods, religious narratives about the origin of the world, its creation, the initial events, and the typical behavior of the gods" (Bamo & Bumo, 2005). (Bamo & Bumo, 2015) . According to British scholar K.W. Bohler, Legends are narratives with implied meanings in which the protagonists are usually gods and other extraordinary things (Bultmann, 1961) The According to British anthropologist Marilovsky, Legends are supposed to be something sacred and

revered, and they have an extremely important cultural function (Stolz, 1997). The British anthropologist Malinowski argues that legends should be sacred and revered, and that they have a vital cultural role (Stolz, 1997). In China, researchers of myths and mythology are divided, among which the Chinese mythologist Yuan Ke, in his theory of "generalized myth", argues that legends, though not scientific, are fictions linked to scientific fantasies, which map reality through fantasies and adopt a revolutionary attitude towards reality. He argues that legends include myths from the pre-primitive period, fairy tales, Buddhist scriptures, folk legends, historical mythological figures, and mythological novels, among others. (yuan, 2019) . Therefore, in the context of historical development, myth and history are inseparable from memory, and mythological legends are both history and not "real" history, which is a living process of development. It is a living process of development. It can be an image in memory or a story in memory.

4.2 Nezha's Animated Image

Nezha, as an animated character, focuses on complex spiritual concepts expressed through visual storytelling. Animation is a powerful form of expression that relies on moving images to create illusions and tell stories, and it differs from still art and painting because it conforms to the principle of "visual permanence" in cinematic imaging. As Paul Wells explains in *The Foundations of Animation*, animation is a complement to, not a substitute for, natural creation, and has the unique ability to present and explain through images the indescribable and unfilmable in the spirit world. Interpretation, indexing, and the ability to draw emotional focus to a great extent, so that the unnamable and unfilmable of the mental world can be presented and interpreted in images, and then re-recognized, is the biggest difference between animation, as a form of media, and film and television constructions (Wells, 2013). This is the biggest difference between the medium of animation and the construction of film and television (Wells, 2013).

On this basis, the choice of the particular medium of animation for this study is mainly based on the unique creativity that distinguishes animated constructs from film and television constructs, as well as the fact that the animated form of the medium is extremely infectious. In the context of the study of Nezha's animated image, this means that Nezha is used as a medium to express complex spiritual concepts and ideas. Through the process of animation construction, the creator is able to create a visual narrative that tells a story and communicates emotions and ideas. This process is highly creative and involves a deep understanding of the technical and artistic aspects of animation. The unique appeal of Nezha's animated figure is its ability to draw emotional focus and present complex spiritual concepts in a way that is easy to understand and appreciate, making it a powerful medium for storytelling and communication.

4.3 Popular media Culture

Generally speaking, Popular media Culture is the opposite of elegant culture, a new type of culture mainly characterized by popularity and commerciality, and opposed to mass culture, more emphasis on the role of entertainment, such as Giddens defines: " Popular media Culture refers to entertainment that is watched, read, or participated in by thousands or millions of people" (Mukerji & Schudson, 1986). (Mukerji & Schudson, 1986). ". Heiditz further specifies: "Popular culture is that

category of universally available artifacts: movies, audiovisual tapes, CDs or VCDs, fashion, television programs, modes of communication and exchange, etc." (McRobbie & Mcroe, 1986). (McRobbie & Mcrobbie, 2003). ". Based on the above discussion of culture and popularity, it can be simply defined as "popular culture is a common way of life practiced and followed by many people", and is the product of the merging of business and mass media, which not only brands popular culture as commercialized, but also makes it somewhat "manipulable". This not only makes popular culture branded with commercialization, but also makes popular culture have a certain meaning of "manipulation" (F. Yang, 2007), the popularity of culture must be generated by the media, and the popular culture is spread by the electronic media such as movies, TV, and so on, thus forming the popular media culture. In popular media culture, audiences decode media texts through "cultural codes" and bring discourses into their reading of media texts (Scott, 2003), audiences are able to find meanings in their favorite media texts, discuss them by writing and creating new texts, and interact with new technologies, which converge and form a new culture (Geraghty, 2015).

The mass media's powerful replication and unimaginable spreading energy has changed the face of the world, Popular media Culture has risen up in the air like a hot air balloon, and a tendency to expand indefinitely has made the whole of mankind boil.... (Viswanath, Ramanadhan, & Kontos, 2007). The popular culture of the world is a very important part of the human race, and it should be recognized. It should be recognized that the mass media have contributed to the development of popular culture to the present day. The mass media have repositioned the reproduction and reading of popular culture according to their will and value judgments, and as a result, the cultural products that have been disseminated to the public for consumption have been separated from their original spiritual entities and have taken on a different significance, just like mass-produced counterfeits, which, even if they are similar in form to the real thing, have completely changed in significance. Today, we can see Picasso's self-portrait or "Mona Lisa's Smile" everywhere, but this is regarded as a kind of cultural cognition, and the aesthetic meaning and realm penetrated by the portrait no longer become the focus of research. The power of mass communication is to informatize and popularize culture, turning it into cognizable and consumable products, which are not much different from the chewing gums that children like.

Mass communication has succeeded in creating popular culture, constituting the material transmission channel through which popular culture and its modern artistic styles are disseminated, while at the same time directly influencing the meaning conveyed by popular culture. In a sense, popular culture is the result of the labeling of mass communication.

4.4 Movie reviews on Douban.com

Douban is a Chinese social media platform that allows users to share their opinions and interests in different categories of works such as movies, music and literature. It was founded on March 6, 2005 and has become a well-known and important platform for cultural exchange and discussion in China. According to CNNIC statistics, Douban ranked sixth in the utilization rate of typical social applications in 2016, and is a more typical representative of vertical social applications." Public data show that as of the end of December 2020, the registered users of Douban.com amounted to 220 million, and the update and selection of

DouAPP has reached version 7.0.1 generation. The platform has a large coverage of users and a large influence.

Douban, as a community website, provides information about books, movies, music, and other works, with both descriptions and comments provided by users, and is one of the Web 2.0 websites with a distinctive character. In April, 2022, Douban went live with a waterproof military-controlled review function to ensure that Douban ratings always neutrally restored the average view of the movie-watching public.

One of the most important features of Douban is its movie review system. Users can provide five-star ratings and reviews of movies, and their reviews and ratings can have a significant impact on a movie's box office performance and reviews. Many people in China rely on Douban movie reviews to decide which movies to watch, and filmmakers and producers also follow the platform to gauge public opinion and improve their work. Douban's movie review system has also become an important platform for movie criticism and analysis in China. It provides a space for movie lovers to share their insights, perspectives and opinions, and fosters a vibrant online movie community. Many professional film critics and scholars have also contributed to Douban's movie reviews, making it a diverse and comprehensive platform for Chinese film criticism and discussion.

The sample of Douban movie reviews selected for this paper are mainly user-generated reviews and ratings of movie and television productions on the Douban platform. Users can rate movie and television works with five stars and write reviews to share their opinions with other users. These reviews can include personal impressions, analysis of the artistic and technical merits of the film or television work, and suggestions for other viewers. Douban reviews are widely read and influential in the Chinese film industry and can influence a movie's box office performance and rating.

5. Scope of Research

5.1 Research area

The study area is limited to animation or animation episodes produced in China and publicly released and screened, in which Nezha is featured, either as a main character or in an important supporting role.

A total of 79 film and television productions containing the image of Nezha were compiled for this study. Since this study focuses on the construction and dissemination of Nezha's animated image, live-action movies and TV dramas, as well as some animated works that have not yet been released and cannot be evaluated, were excluded, and a total of 15 animated works that met the requirements were selected (Table 1).

Table 1 Animations Featuring Nezha Source:Figure by Shi Xuefeng,2022

num	ryera	movie title	typology	Duration/E isodes	Movie Review Score	Number of ratings
1	1961	The Greatest Showman.	animated movie	113 minutes.	9.4	424857
2	1975	"The Goddess of the Seals".	animated movie	78 minutes.	6.5	73
3	1979	Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King.	animated movie	65 minutes.	9.2	252464
4	2003	The Legend Of Nezha	Animated Episodes	52 episodes	9.1	60979
5	2012	The Greatest Showman.	animated movie	88 minutes.	8.1	17276
6	2012	One Hundred Thousand and Bad Jokes, Season One.	Animated Episodes	12 episodes	8.2	50543
7	2014	One Hundred Thousand and Bad Jokes.	animated movie	100 minutes	6.6	110037
8	2016	"The Spit Seals the Deal	Animated Episodes	36 episodes	6.7	185
9	2016	"I am Nezha	animated movie	83 minutes.	3.7	1238
10	2017	The King? Stop it.	Animated Episodes	15 episodes	7.1	1336
11	2018	The Inhuman.	Animated Episodes	96 episodes	8.9	38726
12	2019	Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child.	animated movie	110 minutes.	8.4	1787390
13	2019	"The War of Rokuro	animated movie	101 minutes.	8.0	512265
14	2021	New Gods: Nezha Re Life	animated movie	116 minutes.	6.8	212511
15	2022	The Second Season of Inhumanity	Animated Episodes	48 episodes	8.4	1454

Taking into account the division of Chinese animation history and the release dates of Nezha's animated works, this study takes time as the line and synthesizes other data on box office, airplay, and the number of Internet raters (Figures 1 and 2) to select a representative number of works as the focus of the analysis. It is important to note that this selection is not comprehensive, and that there may be other animated works featuring the image of Nezha that are just as important. For the purpose of this study, these works were chosen to represent different eras and styles of Nezha animation, and to shed light on the evolution and development of Nezha's animated image. The five works are:

Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, 1979

The Legend Of Nezha, 2003

Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, 2019

One Hundred Thousand and Bad Jokes Season 1, 2012

The New Gods: Nezha Reborn, 2021

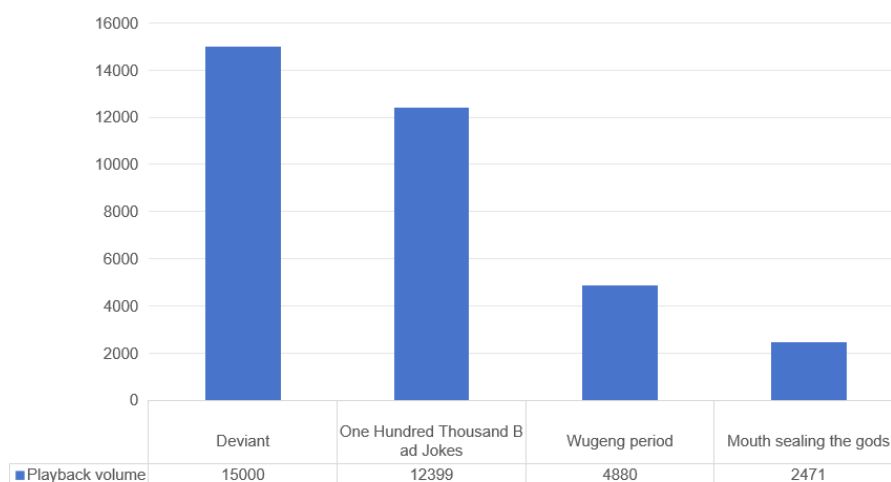


Figure 1 Nezha Web Animation Broadcast Statistics (10K)

Source: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng, 2022

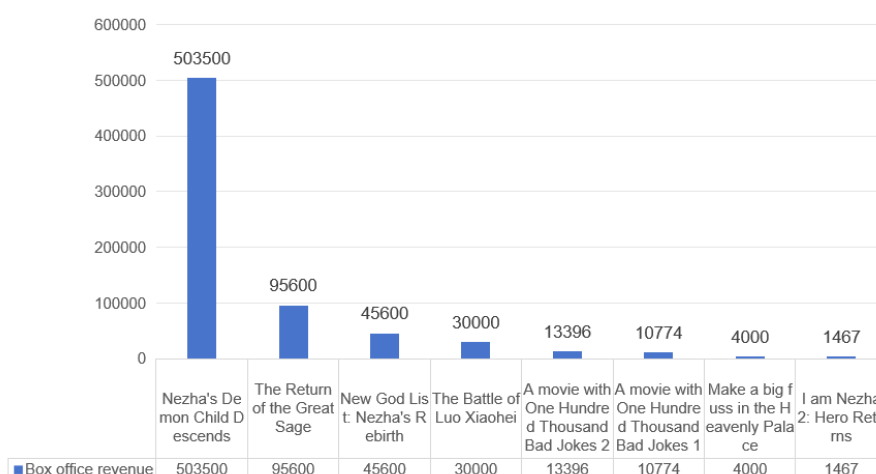


Figure 2 Nezha Movie Animation Box Office Statistics (100K)

Source: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng, 2022

In addition to the commercial value and communication influence of the films themselves, the selection of these works in this study is based on the importance of their cultural representations and symbolic interactions with Nezha in different periods of time. The five animation works selected are classic representatives of Nezha's image in various time periods, with high visibility, widely noticed and discussed, and can be used to understand the portrayal of Nezha's image and its changes from different perspectives, and are highly topical in nature, with a certain amount of contemporary meaning. They are all contemporary in nature and have certain meanings, especially considering *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* and *New Gods: Nezha Reborn*, which better reflect the values and aesthetic interests of the current audience towards the image of Nezha. Moreover, these films are clearly homologous in that they all feature Nezha as the protagonist, and are therefore comparable in terms of the different representations, characteristics and interpretations of the image of Nezha. The diversity of Nezha's image is also highlighted by the fact that different directors and production teams have different interpretations and ways of presenting Nezha's image, which can be used to explore the diverse connotations and extensions of Nezha's image.

5.2 Research time

The time frame of this study is based on Nezha's animation in the History of Chinese Animation (L. Sun, 2018) edited by Prof. Sun Lijun, President of the China Film Academy, from which the key position of Nezha's animation in the history of Chinese animation can be discovered. On the basis of this, the animation work titled "Nezha in China" is refined, and at the same time, relevant studies on the history of Chinese animation are synthesized to determine the research period from 1949 to 2022, with the specific phasing as follows:

Nezha animation after the founding of New China (1949-1977)

Nezha Animation in the Early Reform and Development Period (1978-1988)

Nezha animation before and after the new century (1989-2003)

Nezha Animation in the Age of Globalization (1989-2015)

Nezha animation in the postmodern period (2017-present)

6. Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative study of basic research, and its goal is to find academic answers, this paper utilizes the following three main research methods:

(1) Content analysis method

Content analysis is an umbrella term for a variety of methods for studying media content, and there is no uniform operating procedure. It requires in-depth understanding of different contents to facilitate the acquisition of in-depth hidden meanings, and is often used to "unravel" media content. Through content analysis, it is possible to better analyze the logic behind the construction of Nezha's animation image and the role of Nezha's image as a link between traditional and trendy culture, and to grasp the characteristics of the construction of Nezha's image in different animation works, so as to provide reference for the further excavation and inheritance of Nezha's image. At the same time, the content analysis in this study was also used to identify the themes, emotional tendencies, and use of symbols that characterize discussions about Nezha on Internet platforms. In addition, this study analyzes the

content of movie reviews by Douban audience through content analysis to uncover the audience's interaction with Nezha. Unlike survey research or experimental methods that require people to answer various questionnaires or observe people's behaviors, this is an objective and systematic descriptive analysis of communication content.

(2) Literature analysis method

Literature analysis method is mainly used to explore the historical background, development process, current situation and problems of the research object by collecting, organizing, analyzing and evaluating relevant literature. By collecting, organizing and analyzing relevant materials from ancient literature, mythological legends and modern literary works, the historical process of the origin, development and cross-media change of the image of Nezha is explored in depth.

(3) In-depth interview method

In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method that allows participants to freely express their views, feelings and experiences through an open and flexible dialog format. Through interviews with the creators of Nezha, it was possible to understand how the creators designed Nezha, what they took into account when designing it, and how they understood and interpreted the meaning of Nezha's culture, etc. This study mainly conducted offline interviews with practitioners and heads of downstream enterprises who have participated in Nezha animation, to learn about their thinking and process in creating Nezha, as well as online interviews with netizens who have been actively discussing Nezha on the Internet, to understand their understanding and awareness of Nezha. The interviews were also conducted with Internet users who are actively discussing Nezha on the Internet.

6.1 Population and Groups

The groups involved in this study mainly include: audiences, animation producers, animation practitioners, researchers, and government officials.

(1) Audience:

refers to the general public who watch animations and animated films.

(2) Animation producer

Animation projects are usually undertaken by companies or studios, and practitioners are organized to carry out animation production. Animation producers are direct practitioners who perform animation drawing, processing, and design on the front line, and are the executors of animation projects. The characteristic of this group of people is that they are personally involved in various stages of animation research and development, such as animators, modelers, original painters, designers, voice actors, script writers, etc.

(3) Animation practitioners

Animation practitioners do not directly participate in animation production, but perform other coordination and leadership work around animation, such as investors, promoters, distributors, publishers, planners, producers, etc. In addition, creators who perform secondary processing on animation works can also be classified as this group of people, including self-media practitioners, cosplayers, etc.

(3) Researchers

As a comprehensive art and communication medium, animation has strong research value. In addition to artists and designers, it also attracts researchers and scholars from various industries, such as authors, critics, and sociologists. , communication scientists, writers, etc. to conduct theoretical research.

(4)Government officials:

refers to the decision-making level of the cultural sector, including local and national officials. The government plays an important role in policy guidance. Favorable or unfavorable policies designated by government officials will have a profound impact on the development of animation.

6.2 Research Area

Main Research Areas: Chinese Animation and Animation Episodes

Sub-field: Animated Images of Nezha in Different Periods

6.3Data Collection

6.3.1 Content data collection

(1) Video content data collection

Watch the video and record key plot points and dialogue ; Analyze the actions and dialogue of characters in the film to understand their personalities and motivations ; Document the themes and emotional expressions in the film ; Analysis of the film's symbols, symbols and metaphors

(2) Collection of film review content data

Identify the commenter's position and perspective ; Analyze key themes and points mentioned in comments ; Compare reviews and opinions of different reviewers on the same movie

(3) Internet content data collection

Collect relevant web articles, social media posts and comments ; Analyze keywords and topics mentioned in web content ; Study the attitudes and emotional expressions of Internet users ; Examine the discussion and opinion distribution of online content on specific topics or events

6.3.2 Document collection

Collect relevant research papers, books and reports ; Review key concepts and theoretical frameworks mentioned in the literature ; Analyze research methods and data results in the literature ; Compare the understanding and explanation of the research object in different literatures

6.3.3 Interview data collection

Invite participants for individual or group interviews ; Use open-ended questions to guide participants to delve deeper into the topic ; Record the words and expressions of participants during the interview ; Analyze the core ideas and themes covered in the interview data

6.3.4 Data collection tools or equipment

Video playback equipment (computer, DVD) ; Computers and smartphones ; Text editing software and text analysis tools (chart making software) ; Data collection software (web crawler software) ; Text analysis tools or data analysis software (word cloud software) ; Libraries and online databases ; Document management software (EndNote) ; Audio and video equipment

6.4 Data Synthesis and Analysis

I carried out data synthesis along with collecting data using the research framework as an introductory classification tool. After that, I will organize the information in detail according to the outline of each chapter in the research paper. My research mainly applies the concepts of "representation" and "symbolic interaction" in communication studies to analyze the relationship between the development of animation media and the development of society and culture, and at the same time, analyzes the evolution of Nezha's animation image in different social periods.

6.5 Research representation

6.5.1 Full text of the study

-Descriptive analysis

6.5.2 Research articles

-International journals, Scopus level or ERIC

7.Literature Review

Through the collection and organization of related literature, it can be seen that the current research on Nezha is mainly characterized by two features: first, it is conducted from the perspectives of culture, religion, literature, art and commerce, and second, there are fewer studies conducted from the perspectives of communication and sociology.

7.1 About China Legends

The research devoted to Chinese Legends stories and animation with Legends story themes is mainly focused on creation, aesthetics, artistic characteristics and ethnicity.

Gao Princeling's dissertation, "Research on Picture Decoration in Chinese Legends Story Theme Animation" (2010) analyzes the decorative features of Chinese Legends story theme animation films, and sorts out and analyzes the process of its evolution and its causes. Deng Jia's Study on the Aesthetic Characteristics of Chinese Legends Story-Themed Animated Films and Their Value to Children's Aesthetic Education (2011) analyzes the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese Legends story-themes animated films from the perspectives of character styling, background design, color, music, etc., and concludes that Chinese Legends story-themes animated films should have the functions of amusing the emotions with aesthetics, promoting the good with aesthetics, enlightening the mind with aesthetics, and passing on aesthetics to the next generation. The function of Chinese Legends story animation. Dong Liang's "Study on the Ethnicity of Legends Story Characters in Chinese Animation" (2018) discusses "ethnicity" from three different perspectives, namely "national culture", "national spirit", and "national aesthetics". connection between "ethnicity" and characterization. Li Xi's "Research on the Art Style of Chinese Legends Story Legends Theme Animation" (2019) discusses Legends Story Legends animation characteristics, and researches the art style of Chinese Legends Story Legends theme animation at the current stage in terms of character image, scene and color, and mood. Chen Lu's Research on Characterization of Legends Stories in Domestic Animation Based on Visual Symbols (2020) takes ancient Chinese Legends stories and images of

Legends stories as the starting point of the research, analyzes in detail the design concepts of Legends story characters in terms of styling, costumes, props, etc., and discusses the rules that should be followed in the shaping of Legends story characters. It also discusses the rules that should be followed in the molding of Legends' characters. Li Yuhang's "Postmodernist Characteristics in New Century Domestic Legends Story Theme Animation" (2020) compares and contrasts the postmodernist characteristics of new century domestic Legends story theme animation with the "Chinese School", which is an important creation of Chinese animation. Wang Liming's *The Application of 3D Technology in the Innovative Development of Chinese Folk Love Legends Tales Animation* (2020) analyzes how 3D technology expresses the characters, scenes, and special effects of folk love legends tales animation, and what are its tendencies.

In the journal paper, Yang Xu (2011) discusses the foundation, methods and principles to follow in establishing the art of Legends stories, and proposes that the creation of animation with Legends stories as the main body must use national culture as the original material and systematically organize the scattered elements of Legends stories. Duan Yanwei (2015) argued that in 1949-1966, Legends stories had a great influence on the elements and characterization of Chinese animation, and the spirit of Legends stories provided sustenance for the creation of animation, and argued that Legends stories are the best carrier for animation. Chen Xiaomeng and Chen Yiyu (2016), through the secondary reconstruction of traditional culture in domestic animation, pointed out that in animation, the demise of the traditional national style does not mean abandoning the traditional culture, but rather the aesthetics take the traditional cultural elements as the source of inspiration for its creation. Kang Yongbin and Li Jianwei (2017) summarized the phenomenon of "remake" of Chinese animated films, pointing out that Chinese animated films, often re-produced high ratings animated films, or literary classics, Legends stories Legends characters as the protagonists, and in the remake of the time, more emphasis is placed on visual aesthetics. Zheng Peng (2017) argues that Chinese animation, in the context of globalization, should maintain the tradition of its Megalopolis, but also combine tradition with modernity, so that Chinese animation has contemporary artistic characteristics. Zhao Yang (2018) believes that Legends stories are an important theme of Chinese animation, and can even connect the history of Chinese animation, and his narrative strategy for the current animation of domestic Legends story themes is the reconstruction of divinity and the return of tradition. Ren Xiaofei (2018) believes that since the beginning of the birth of Chinese animation, Legends story factor has been playing an important role in the creation of Chinese animation, and its primitive way of thinking, Legends narrative way and the creation of the mood have given animation a poetic meaning. Through a comparative study, Huang Meirong (2019) compared Legends story elements in Chinese and Western animation films, pointed out that Legends story elements are a reflection of home culture and values, and proposed that Legends story elements should be utilized as much as possible in animation production. Diao Ying (2020) analyzes the aesthetic representations of Legends story type works, which are the most numerous and complete genre programs in Chinese feature-length animation, as well as the characteristics of ethics, morality, and ritual complexes included in the connotation of the representations, and then analyzes the evolution of Legends story type animation works in terms of

narrative aesthetic values after the new millennium through the evolution of the genre programs and genre elements. Subsequently, we analyze the phenomenal explosion of the transformation of the hero's image in 2015's "Return of the Great Sage", which changes the conceptual paradigm of "Legends Story" in a new context, and further develops both sub and sub forms. These products have enriched the structural system of "Legends stories", further developed the genre system of Chinese Legends stories, and gradually formed the Chinese "Legends story genre" alongside Disney's fairy tales, Japan's gods and monsters, and Europe's folk Legends. and gradually formed the Chinese "Legends story genre" alongside Disney fairy tales, Japanese gods and monsters, and European folk legends.

In conclusion, most of the current literature studying domestic Legends story-themed animation stands on a more macroscopic standpoint to analyze the ideas of ethnicity, culture, and application value conveyed by our country's Legends story animation, and lacks a comprehensive analysis of the changes around the image of animation from the perspective of communication.

7.2 Relevant studies on animation media communication

Form and content, as a pair of spheres that are complementary to each other, have evolved over the course of Nezha's image, and with innovations in communication methods and media technologies, the Legends story archetype of Nezha has continued to penetrate into animation, opera, music, and other media, and its image and values have been given new connotations in a variety of communication mediums.

Animation Art: Huang Jichun's "The Implications of the Character Styling Design of <Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King> for the Nationalization of Animation" analyzes the character styling in terms of style, characteristics, costume design and use of color, and introduces his own script "Clown Rats" based on it. However, the connection between Nezha's character style and the script created by the author is not close enough, and the author does not provide any special explanation; Xie Shuji's "Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Traditional Culture in <One Hundred Thousand and BadJokes>" analyzes the deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional culture in animation from the perspectives of story theme and feminism by applying deconstructivist theories. The choice of perspective in the article is relatively novel, but neither the author of the story theme nor the author of feminism pays attention to the meaning construction after deconstruction. Study on the Creative Transformation of "The Legend Of Nezha"--Taking <Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child> as an Example", the author analyzes the characterization, storyline setting, artistic expression style, and publicity and marketing methods through comparative analysis, and notes that the author has found that there is a tendency of pan-entertainment in deconstruction. The author notes the transmutation of Nezha's image, but the comparison of the two animations is not convincing enough.

Opera Music: Yang Zhenliang's article "The Legends of Traditional Opera: The Three Changes of Nezha" illustrates the diversity of Nezha's opera through the analysis of different types of local operas; Xu Xinyi's article "The Locking of the Demon Mirror and The Three Changes of Nezha" analyzes two miscellaneous operas, namely "Erlang Shen Drunkenly Shoots at the Locking of the Demon Mirror" and "The Three Changes of Nezha". The article "Miscellaneous Operas" takes "Erlang Shen Drunkenly Shooting at the Demon Mirror" and "The Three Changes of Fierce

Nezha" as the objects of study, and analyzes the similarities and differences between various kinds of local operas, Xiongtai operas, movies, and TV dramas in addition to the miscellaneous operas; the article "Musical Inheritance of Nezha's Drums in Zhangzhou" analyzes the characteristics of Nezha's drum music in terms of the cadences, melodic tones, rhythms, and lyrics; the article concludes that this kind of drum music makes a contribution to the preservation of the dying music, and provides the opportunity for folk singing and dancing to be used for the benefit of the people. The article concludes that this drum music has contributed to the preservation of endangered music and provided rare three-beat music for folk songs and dances.

7.3 Studies on Nezha's Literary Archetypes

This research perspective is more of a retrospective study of the archetypes of The Legend Of Nezha, encompassing Legends storytelling and religion, and is characterized by strong archetypal and Legends storytelling colors. Specifically, the research practice is based on the two perspectives of Legends' storytelling through time and folk beliefs through time. There are different ways of researching the Legends story in its chronological retrospect. Including:

First, it is analyzed by collecting and organizing Buddhist classics. For example, Xiao Dengfu's "The Traceability of Nezha" first discusses the origins of the Kungsamun faith, then the relationship between Nezha and Kungsamun, and finally the transformation of Nezha's divine personality, which provides a large number of examples for the study of Nezha's image through the collation of Tang-translated Buddhist scriptures, Song and Yuan historical materials, and Japanese Eastern Tantric texts; Zheng A-cai's "Nezha's Image in the Buddhist Classics" analyzes the early image of Nezha from the accounts of Nezha in the Buddhist classics, especially Tang-translated Tantric texts and the early image materials, in terms of translation name, identity, function, appearance and personality. The early image of Nezha is analyzed in terms of translation, identity, position, appearance, and character, enriching the original image of Nezha and providing research ideas for the study of the image of other Legends' stories; Li Xiaorong's "Supplementary Examination of the Origin of Nezha's Stories" argues for a close relationship between Nezha's stories and the spread of the religion through an examination of Dunhuang manuscripts, the Da Zang Jing, and other documents. Through new perspectives and historical documents, it provides research materials for the Nezha archetype.

Second, research is conducted through Nezha-related motifs. Li Xianglin, "The Legend Of Nezha and the Lotus Motif," begins with the lotus motif and analyzes the original genes of Nezha's lotus incarnation, the lotus culture of the Chinese tradition, and the folk belief circles of the South Asian subcontinent and even the Orient, and ultimately attributes it to the worship of female reproduction. This argument fails to take note of the different contexts of different regions, and so the forced interpretation is easily subject to the traces of a rigid interpretation; Du Mengruo's "The Nezha" interprets the "deep structure" of the story of Nezha's Lotus Flower incarnation from a cultural perspective, arguing that the lotus flower is the main theme of the story, and that it is the most important part of the story, which is the lotus flower. In this work, Nezha's lotus incarnation story is interpreted from a cultural point of view, and it is argued that the motif of the lotus flower was formed in the course of the historical evolution of Buddhist archetypal stories and the intervention of Taoist factors. This line of thought and the related arguments are convincing, but the article only

examines the origins of the story of Nezha's incarnation in the lotus flower, and does not enter into a detailed and in-depth study to understand the relationship between Buddhism and Taoism in the history of Chinese religions.

Finally, there are studies that begin with folk beliefs. For example, Wu Changyu's *Nezha in Taiwan's Folk Beliefs* analyzes the situation of Nezha's beliefs in Taiwan's folk areas through field surveys of temples, greatly enriching the study of Nezha's beliefs in the Taiwan region; Deng Weizhong's *Nezha and the Water Cult* uses the many Nezha temples in Taiwan as a starting point to illustrate the close relationship between China's water cults and Nezha's deeds in a variety of ways. This is a novel perspective, and the conclusions are relatively convincing; Hsu Hsien-ping's "The Distribution and System of Prince Nezha's Temples in Tainan County" collects data by means of field surveys, and comes to the conclusion that geographic relations and the early or late development of these temples are the most important factors influencing their distribution, which to a certain extent enriches the material for the study of Nezha, but the value of the study is questionable.

7.4 Research on Nezha's Animated Image

Currently, there is an abundance of research on Nezha's animated image in China, mainly because the success of several animated works featuring Nezha has attracted many scholars to study the character. However, most of the research is based on the artistic, cultural, and commercial dimensions, or is typified by a particular successful work (especially the study of "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child"). Among the existing studies, Huang Jichun and Wang Jiamin's "Analysis of Character Styling of the Animated Film <Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King>" analyzed the origins of the characters' color schemes, costumes, and facial features in the film, and explored traditional Chinese cultural elements in the animation image design through the analysis of styling. Through the analysis of the styling, it explores the use of traditional Chinese cultural elements in the design of animation images. Huang Jichun's <<Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King> Character Styling Design Implications for the National Culture of Animation> explores the development of Chinese animation, compares the stylistic features of character styling design in China and abroad, and analyzes and explores the styling design of Nezha's image, the application of color, the character's clothing, and the styling of nationalization from the perspective of animation character design. In this book, the evolution of Nezha's image is analyzed and explored in terms of color application, character costume, and styling, while the styling design of Nezha is compared with that of Clown Mouse, and the direction of the later development of Chinese film and television animation is summarized. Cai Zhijun's "Chinese Cartoon Stars: The Characterization of Nezha in <The Legend Of Nezha>" analyzes the relationship between children and heroes, gives new life to traditional characters, and cartoonizes and humanizes the characters of Legends' stories. The author explores the changes in Nezha's image in terms of his personality, upbringing, and interpersonal relationships, as well as how historical and traditional characters in Chinese animation should be cartoonized and how to create a cartoon star that belongs to China.

Chu Shuochun's "Beneficial Attempt of Ethnic Style--An Analysis of the Ethnic Style of Large-scale Animation <The Legend Of Nezha>" explores the combination of traditional Chinese national values, character and storyline, and analyzes the characters' appearance, character, and plot to explore the use of ethnic style in the

design of animation images, which is a useful attempt for the future Chinese animation to shape animation works with national characteristics. By analyzing the characters' appearance, character, and plot, it explores the use of ethnic style in animation image design, which is a useful attempt for how Chinese animation can shape animation works with its own ethnic characteristics in the future.

Wei Yuanliang's "Analyzing the Character Design of <Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child>" explores the characterization of traditional Legends story animated films. The film divides the characters into three categories: main characters, secondary characters, and branch characters, and shapes their images according to their characters' personalities, which enriches the storyline and makes it more dramatic, and at the same time combines them with the complex emotions that exist in the modern society, which creates an image that is different from that of the traditional Legends story characters in the past. It is discussed that in animated films, we should not only pursue the personalization of character design and realistic scenes, but also pay more attention to the expression of the core values of the work.

Xu Yue and Guo Ye's "Characterization Analysis of <Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child>" explores the changes in Nezha's characterization in terms of plot, image design, script characters, and the film's thematic ideas.

Boazqi Sun and Yan Zhu's "Adaptation of Legends Tales and Image Reinvention in <Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child>" explores the author's process of adapting the original Legends Tales stories and modernizing the characters by focusing on the four characters, namely, Nezha, Ao C, Taiyi Zhenzhen, and Lady Yin. In Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, one book on the belief in Nezha has been published in Macao, "The Belief in Nezha in Macao" by Hu Guonian, which mainly explains the origins of the belief in Nezha, as well as some of the activities of worship and ritual, and discusses the cultural connotations of the belief in Nezha as a god in Macao. Most of the other books on Nezha are translations of Journey to the West or Nezha, and there are fewer studies on the subject of Nezha.

According to the survey, most of the literature on Nezha is based on journals and newspapers. Of the 298 journal articles, only 9 were on the image of Nezha and most of them focused on Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, and there were 20 master's theses, of which 3 were on the image of Nezha. The data shows that there is still a lot of room for research on the image of Nezha, and that there is still a lack of information on the evolution of the image of Nezha in the field of animation. Nezha, as a traditional Chinese Legends character, has a profound historical development background, and it is necessary to organize it to find out how it has changed in the course of the development of the times, and how it has been used in animation, so as to facilitate the creation of animation works based on Legends stories in the future.

7.5 Semiotic studies on animation

At present, China's research on cultural symbols of animation art form has always been colored by two basic research theories, namely, cultural science and art communication science at the same time. The research object of cultural theory usually regards animation symbols as the dynamic visual expression of cultural symbols and the carrier of commercial dissemination, and tends to weaken the function of propaganda cultural symbols and the characteristics of traditional animation in terms of national traditional aesthetics and cognitive habits; while the field of communication studies is more accustomed to first classify animation text as

the unique concept of image text in the field of new media, and emphasizes its distinctive and specific information and communication language function structure and the characteristics of animation symbols and their dissemination methods. On the basis of this cognitive foundation, the field of communication science is more accustomed to first categorize animation text as a unique image text concept in the field of new media, focusing on emphasizing its unique and specific information communication linguistic structure and the characteristics of animation symbols and their mode of communication. As far as the present summary is concerned, most scholars in China have focused on the comparative study of Chinese animation symbol culture on the specific methods of displaying national cultural symbols in the images of various animation works and the formal characteristics of symbol expression, focusing on the analysis and comparison, and initially summarizing a variety of national animation roles on the cinema screen. They not only occupy an extremely important position in the symbols of traditional Chinese folk culture, but also are an important symbolic sign that condenses other spiritual and cultural behaviors of the nation and even the unconscious behaviors of the national values and cultural collectives (Han Ruobing, 2013). At the same time, research programs on the theory of traditional animation symbols in Chinese universities have paid particular attention to the study of China's symbolic aesthetic characteristics developed in the traditional animation cultural environment, and these studies have had a positive impact on the relationship between the various audiovisual linguistic symbols indicative of traditional animation works. The research work usually builds on the study of visual signifier theory in the explicit sense, and while further emphasizing the internalized and suggestive role of visual sign indicative rules carried in the traditional Chinese aesthetics, it also tries to summarize and summarize the visual and aesthetic sign characteristics shared by all the world's outstanding oriental art civilizations including our tradition (Yinghui Li, 2012) (Hou Xiaofeng Zhou Li 2011). In addition to the research results listed above, the research method of animation symbolic culture based on the theory of visual communication also tries to start directly from the characteristics of the audiovisual communication of animation works, and the research results mainly emphasize the audiovisual culture of animation content creation, which will bring about an increasingly wide and popularized impact when the audiovisual information is massively copied and self-processed for production and dissemination (Zhang, Kang and Zhou Li, 2011). (Zhang Kang and Hao Yue, 2012). Another innovative idea adopted in the theoretical study of the scope of animation communication may be how to regard the animation medium as a kind of moving image text with multiple independent symbols or communication information characteristics, and at the same time regard it as an important basic theory to be studied in an attempt to delineate a theoretical boundary framework and a basic scope of animation communication. This kind of research idea is conducive to the construction of a more distinctive, as well as more in-depth and perfect, basic system of symbols (Li Tao, 2011).

Compared with foreign research on animation symbols, the scope and depth of research are wider and deeper than that of domestic animation symbols research. According to Saussure's point of view, we can conclude that the essence of symbols is a combination of two parts: the referent and the signifier, or in other words, every symbol can be divided into the referent and the signifier under the human factor. The

"intermediate medium" is the referent part which is used to carry the content to be expressed by the symbol, and its own material nature and material form can be expressed by the parts that can be seen or heard in the animation in the expression of the animation symbol. The representation of the symbol in the audience's mind can be summarized as the referring part, which belongs to the psychological activity of the symbol in the process of acceptance by the audience, and at this time, the symbol expresses a kind of concept.

Therefore, the research on the relationship between referent and denotation in semiotics has undergone a series of integration and adaptation in the field of art film and television, resulting in the evolution of different currents of thought. It can be said that in the research of visual arts, scholars have also begun to try to use semiotics theory as an analytical tool, and the research direction of artistic animation creation has gradually transitioned from "post-modern" to "modern", so that the function of symbols in the logic has gradually gained the favor of researchers. The function of symbols in logic is gradually favored by researchers. In addition, the animation visual art form exists in the more special category, in its many practical specific application technology field theory and specific practical application operation and practice level, also exists or has can be replaced by the expansion of text information and language expression space. In this regard, some of the special artistic applications, but also prompted the researchers to further in-depth attention and awareness of the animated cartoon form in the serious research and qualitative evaluation of the results of the research. In terms of promotional communication strategies for information dissemination, they may also potentially have some obvious advantages and limitations (RuthBartlett, 2012); by analyzing and discussing the introduction of gestural language techniques and the need for their application when narrating animated forms of natural language (MisatoOi, 2013); and by analyzing and discussing the use of animated symbols in the context of audiences with different semantic meanings of homophonic lexemes and the use of animated symbols in their cognitive perception of lexical meaning. The difference in the degree of explicitness expressed in the cognition of lexical meanings and the difference in the degree of cognitive acceptance of linguistic symbols formed in different ways of use, age groups, and audiences' minds (RalfW-Schlosse et al., 2012), etc., all of these innovative theoretical results together construct the next important exploration of the direction of the development of theoretical applied research on the class of animation symbols and the theme and style as the their own value symbols and forms of mobilization, will also present their own unique functional characteristics. There are also animation images behind the reflection of the embodiment of society in the international economic recession and other changes in the situation, the formation of major social strata of the public image characteristics of society and its image behind the existence of the deep-rooted social roots of the problem and other content (RiaWii et al., 2012). This is also a milestone achievement of scholars from foreign research centers in recent years, who have tried to conduct creative academic research on the symbolic image of animation as a new object of study.

To sum up, in terms of communication studies on animated works related to Nezha, research on the character of Nezha has mainly focused on its cross-cultural communication characteristics and cultural semiotics, and most of the analyses and comparisons of the character of Nezha are still based on the theoretical perspectives

of cultural semiotics for comprehensive and dialectical investigations. However, there is no systematic analysis of the symbolic generation and development of Nezha's image from the literary text to the animated video text, nor is there any systematic analysis of the evolution of the symbols. Therefore, in light of the current state of relevant research in China, this paper attempts to analyze the image of Nezha in animated video texts from the perspective of communication and its related basic theories, in order to provide a new way of thinking for the dissemination of Chinese Legends' story characters represented by Nezha.

8. Concepts and Conceptual Frameworks

8.1 Concept to fresearch

This study mainly utilizes the concepts of "presentation" and "symbolic interaction" in communication studies.

The research summarizes the findings of Nick Lacey's 'Image and Representation Key Concepts in Media Studies (2009)', Shani Orgad's 'Media Representation and the Global Imagination (2012)', Richard Dyer's 'Stypography of representation, Stuart Hall's Theory of Cultural Representation (2012)', and the study's findings. Representation and the Global Imagination (2012)" by Shani Orgad, "Richard Dyer's stypography of representation, Stuart Hall's Theory of cultural representation, and other studies on social representations. representation, Stuart Hall's Theory of cultural representation, and other works on related issues in sociology, this study briefly mentions the introduction of related concepts and summarizes the changes in the meaning of the study.

8.1.1 cultural representation

From the perspective of the historical development of the English word "representation", it has gone through many changes in meaning. In his book *Keywords*, Raymond Williams analyzes the historical evolution of the word "representation" in detail. He points out that "representation" is derived from the noun form of the word "present", which first appeared in the 14th century and was originally associated with the verb "to make present", implying that "to make present" is the same as "to make present", which means "to make present". Originally related to the verb "to make present," it meant "the appearance of someone or something, usually a figure of authority, or a psychological manifestation." In painting or theater, it also referred to a manifestation in the eye or mind. In the 17th century, the word expanded further and began to be used to mean "symbol" or "representation," and at this stage it had two overlapping meanings, "(a) manifestation of the psyche and (b) representation of something not something that is present" (Williams, 2014). By the 19th century, the meaning of the term had become more diverse, particularly in the fields of art and literature. However, the concept of "representation" in cultural studies differs significantly from the historical meaning described above.

The concept of "representation" in cultural studies is a complex concept that combines multiple meanings. It is not only the presentation or exhibition of things, but also the process and behavior of performance, and more importantly, it has the meaning of representing the deeper meaning of things by symbols. Stuart Hall, a representative of the Birmingham School, converted the concept of "reproduction", which originally belonged to philosophical epistemology, into the concept of "representation", which is a combination of structuralist semiotics and cultural

studies, thus realizing the concept of "representation". concept of "representation" that combines structuralist semiotics and "cultural studies", thus realizing the "cultural turn" of the concept of reproduction (Hao, 2008). Hall's theory of representation emphasizes the importance of the concept of "representation" and "cultural studies" (Hao, 2008), which is different from the traditional concept of "performance" or "representation", and different from the concept of "representation" in psychology, but closer to the perspective of cultural studies. Hall's representation theory emphasizes the importance of language and symbols in the construction of culture. He argues that culture is constructed through the practices of representation and meaning, "Representation produces meaning through language. (Hall, 1997) ", meaning is not an intrinsic characteristic of things, but is produced through the establishment of relationships and symbols.

Although the term "representation" has different meanings in different disciplines and fields, its application in cultural studies has a specific conceptual framework that combines multiple meanings, as a phenomenon, as an act and a process, and as a practice of constructing meanings through language and symbols.

8.1.2 Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interactionism is a school of theory that focuses on the study of society from a psychological perspective, also known as symbolic interactionism. This theory holds that society is composed of interacting individuals and that explanations for social phenomena can only be found in this interaction. Symbolic interactionism emerged in the 1930s as a sociological theory concerned with individual behavior. It emphasizes the theoretical premise of human subjectivity and the empirical research orientation that focuses on the interactive behavior of individuals. G.H. Mead, an American sociologist, is regarded as the pioneer of symbolic interactionism, and in addition to Mead, W.I. Thomas, C.H. Cooley and others have also made important contributions to symbolic interactionism [1]. Later, H.G. Blumer and M. Kuhn developed Mead's idea of "symbolic interactionism" and formed the Chicago School headed by Blumer and the Iowa School headed by Kuhn, who formed different views on research methods and other issues.

Symbolic interactionism rejects positivist sociology's determinism of social structure, which belittles the subjective agency of actors, and puts forward the theoretical proposition that the awareness, action and interaction of actors constitute society. Its ideological founder, Mead, attempted to explore the relationship between individual thought and action and to develop a social psychology that explains individual consciousness in terms of social action. Absorbing the empirical relevance of truth from pragmatist philosophy and the objective approach to consciousness from behaviorist psychology, Mead proposed a broad behaviorist approach to studying individual experience based on individual actions, especially actions that can be observed by others, and placed the understanding of individual actions and experiences in the overall social context, developing a "social behaviorist The "social behaviorist" approach was developed. After Mead, Blumer systematically proposed a theory of micro-sociology based on "symbolic interaction", the core of which is still the relationship between contextual knowledge such as meaning and self, and social organization (Blumer, 2013) The core remains the relationship between contextual knowledge of meaning and self and social organization (Blumer, 2013).

The basic idea of symbolic interactionism is:

There is no objective meaning in things themselves; it is given by people in the course of social interaction;

People respond to things in the course of social interaction based on their own understanding of their meaning;

A person's understanding of the meaning of things can change over the course of social interaction and is not absolutely constant.

In symbolic interaction theory, symbols are the basic concept. Symbols are all things that represent some meaning to people, such as language, words, actions, objects and even scenes. A thing becomes a symbol because people have given it some meaning that is recognized by everyone (the people involved) (Rose, 2013) . Words are symbols that serve as communication tools for those who recognize or use that type of writing. Language is one of the richest and most flexible of all symbols, and through verbal language, body language (including facial expressions and body gestures), and so on people can convey a variety of meanings and realize complex interactions between people. Objects are also important symbols, such as the school logo, which represents a school, and the flag, which symbolizes a country.

Certain social situations also have symbolic meanings (Lal, 1995) For example, the Chinese believe that the color red represents good luck, so people decorate their marriage occasions in red. For example, the Chinese believe that the color red represents good luck, so people decorate marriage occasions in red. When a member of an organization encounters a solemn scene with a person in charge present, he or she realizes that something may be going on, because such occasions have a special significance in people's experience.

In symbolic interaction theory, context refers to the situation or scene that people face before acting, including the person who is the subject of the action, the role relationship, the person's behavior, the time, the place and the specific occasion. Because people can combine the above factors to express their meaning (Aksan, Kısac, Aydın, & Demirbükten, 2009) . In fact, any symbol with meaning can only be expressed exactly in a certain context. Similarly, one can only truly appreciate the meaning of symbols if they are viewed as a system or if they are understood in a certain context. For example, the action of slapping a person may have different meanings in various different contexts, or even have completely opposite meanings. Thus, interpreting context is very important for understanding human behavior and interaction. According to Thomas, there is always a stage of scrutiny and consideration before a person acts consciously, i.e., to interpret the situation he is confronted with and to give meaning to this given situation, which he calls contextual definition (Lal, 1995) The

8.2 Concept and Conceptual Frameworks

Taking the image of Nezha as the core and the popular media as the background, this study analyzes the research concepts of representations and symbolic interactions, exploring how Nezha, as an ancient mythological character, is culturally represented through the popular media in different social, cultural, and historical contexts in China, and how different groups of people, after being exposed to Nezha's animated video messages, generate symbolic interactions, and jointly How do different groups of people interact symbolically after coming into contact with Nezha's animated video messages, and jointly construct an image of Nezha so that viewers can maintain a connection and empathy with Nezha (Figure 3).

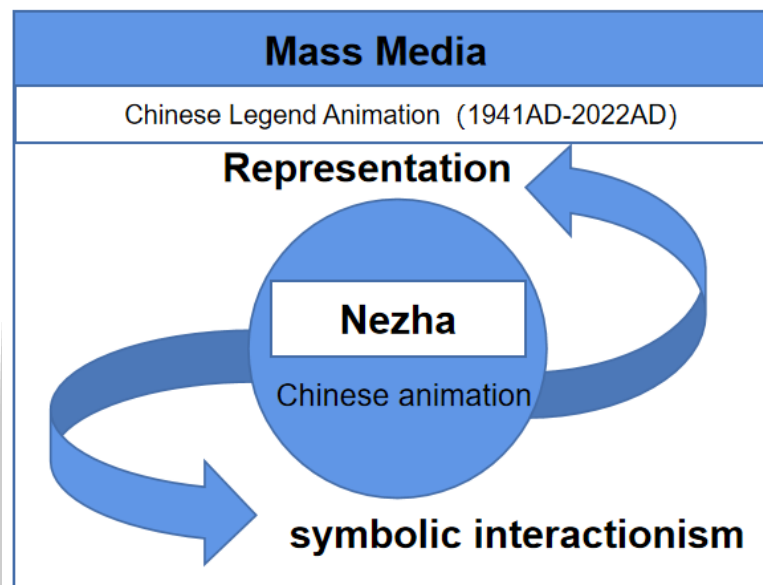


Figure 3 The framework of this article
Source: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng, 2022

9. Chapter structure

CHAPTER I: Introduction Chapter

CHAPTER II: Nezha and the History of Chinese Animation

CHAPTER III: The Image of Nezha in Popular Media

CHAPTER IV: Cultural Representation of Nezha's Animated Image

CHAPTER V: Symbolic Interaction of Nezha's Animated Image

CHAPTER VI: Case Study of the Animation "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child"

CHAPTER VII: Research Results, Discussion and Recommendations

10. Benefit of Research

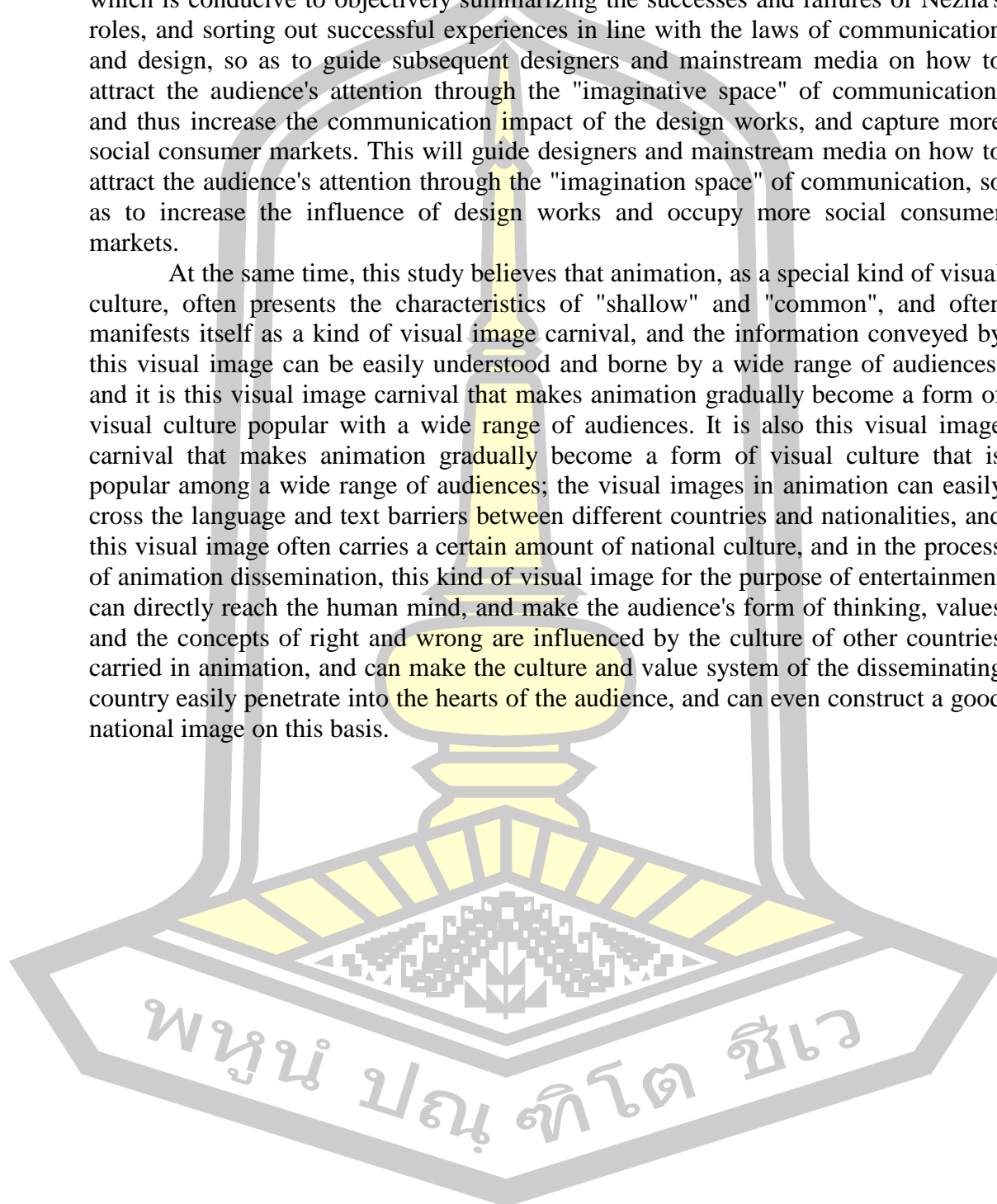
There has been a certain accumulation of research on animated characters and the image of Nezha in China, but most of it has remained at the level of art criticism and design appreciation, and theoretical research from the perspective of communication studies is very rare, which is a relatively novel field. As an interdisciplinary study, this research involves a number of disciplines such as film and television, communication, sociology, art, etc., which is more valuable than a single discipline, and the conclusions drawn from this systematic and comprehensive study can fill in the gaps in various disciplines.

This study further deconstructs the characterization of Nezha in animation from the perspectives of communication and design, analyzes its media representations and design language, and understands the interaction of animation with communication media and social culture in the process, which is useful for helping scholars and researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the evolution of Nezha's image in different periods and media, and to enrich the cross-disciplinary resources of research between communication studies and film and animation.

From a fictional character in Legends' stories to a popular symbol of the "magic boy" image, the design process of each Nezha animation image is a process from textual content to media reproduction. This study analyzes the impact of Nezha's

image on society at different times in terms of box office receipts, media publicity, policy orientation, audience popularity, market acceptance, and cultural influence. This study analyzes the impact of Nezha's image on society in different periods, which is conducive to objectively summarizing the successes and failures of Nezha's roles, and sorting out successful experiences in line with the laws of communication and design, so as to guide subsequent designers and mainstream media on how to attract the audience's attention through the "imaginative space" of communication, and thus increase the communication impact of the design works, and capture more social consumer markets. This will guide designers and mainstream media on how to attract the audience's attention through the "imagination space" of communication, so as to increase the influence of design works and occupy more social consumer markets.

At the same time, this study believes that animation, as a special kind of visual culture, often presents the characteristics of "shallow" and "common", and often manifests itself as a kind of visual image carnival, and the information conveyed by this visual image can be easily understood and borne by a wide range of audiences, and it is this visual image carnival that makes animation gradually become a form of visual culture popular with a wide range of audiences. It is also this visual image carnival that makes animation gradually become a form of visual culture that is popular among a wide range of audiences; the visual images in animation can easily cross the language and text barriers between different countries and nationalities, and this visual image often carries a certain amount of national culture, and in the process of animation dissemination, this kind of visual image for the purpose of entertainment can directly reach the human mind, and make the audience's form of thinking, values and the concepts of right and wrong are influenced by the culture of other countries carried in animation, and can make the culture and value system of the disseminating country easily penetrate into the hearts of the audience, and can even construct a good national image on this basis.



CHAPTER II

Nezha and the History of Chinese Animation

Introduction

In China's vast and colorful mythological universe, the figure of Nezha is undoubtedly one of the most well-known and beloved heroes. The story of Nezha has been passed down and evolved over thousands of years, from ancient classic literature to modern popular culture, and has not only profoundly influenced Chinese values and aesthetics, but has also become an important source of inspiration for the creation of Chinese animation. This chapter aims to explore the history of Nezha and Chinese animation, starting from the mythological origins and motifs of Nezha, and through the embodiment of Nezha in Chinese animation, ultimately outlining the development of Chinese Nezha animation.

Part I focuses on the mythological origins and motifs of Nezha, exploring the multiple identities of the Nezha figure and its symbolic significance in Chinese culture. Nezha's title and identity bear witness to the fusion of Buddhist and Taoist ideologies. From the original son of the god of war, to the son of a general during the Tang and Song dynasties when Buddhism and Taoism were fused together, to the Taoist child god of popular novels during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Nezha's image has evolved to reflect the profound changes in ancient Chinese society and culture. Nezha's appearance and character, especially his handsome boyhood image and his cynical, rebellious and defiant personality, were so popular that they became important material for later cultural creations. Nezha's motifs, such as the haunted sea episode, the killing of his own life and the resurrection of the lotus flower, not only enriched the connotation of Chinese mythological stories, but also provided a wealth of creative materials for Chinese animation.

Part II focuses on the deep connection between Nezha and Chinese animation. As the original material for Chinese animation, the Nezha motif not only provides rich content and forms for the art of animation, but also demonstrates how Chinese animation can adapt to and lead the needs of the times through innovative practices while inheriting traditional culture. Mythological animation has become an ideal vehicle for the expression of the Nezha motif, reinterpreting the ancient myth from a modern perspective, retaining the original charm of the myth while giving it a new significance for the times.

Part III reviews in detail the historical development of Nezha animation in China. From Nezha animation after the founding of New China, through the exploration in the early years of reform and opening up, to the diversified development of Nezha animation around the turn of the new century, to the international dissemination of Nezha animation in the era of globalization, and to the innovation and breakthroughs of Nezha animation in the post-modern era, this development reflects the growth trajectory of Chinese animation art, and demonstrates the importance of Nezha in the history of Chinese animation.

Through an in-depth exploration of the history of Nezha and Chinese animation, this chapter reveals the origins of the original textual image of Nezha, and

also shows how the image of Nezha has become closely associated with Chinese animation and has taken its place in the historical development of Chinese animation.

Part I The Mythical Origins and Motifs of Nezha

Originally derived from the Indian Buddhist legend of Legends, Nezha is depicted as a three-headed, six-armed god who serves as a protector. As Buddhism spread eastward to China, the image of Nezha underwent a series of Chinese transformations. Around the time of the Southern Song Dynasty, this process became apparent, with the image of Nezha being closely associated with Li Jing, who in Chinese tradition has evolved into the King of Heaven, Bishamon, and Nezha being portrayed as Li Jing's son, marking his complete Sinicization.

In the Ming masterpiece *Journey to the West*, Nezha's image evolved further, becoming a child god with magical powers and a fierce warrior for the Jade Emperor. Although his essential image still retains the three heads and six arms, he embodies a unique form that blends the external image with the internal nature of Buddha. In *Nezha*, Nezha is transformed into a Taoist hero-god, although he still has Buddhist elements, and this is where the initial image of Nezha is formed. At the same time, Nezha is imbued with mythological motifs, ranging from the extreme filial piety of "returning bone to father and flesh to mother," to the conflict and confrontation with the dragon race, to the symbolism of the rebirth of the lotus flower. When these motifs are mentioned, they naturally conjure up images and stories of Nezha, and these motifs form the basis for the cross-media transformation of the character in his later life.

1.1 Nezha's Appellation

Nezha, the mythological hero known as a childlike figure, occupies a unique and important place in Chinese culture. However, this popular figure did not originate in China, but rather in ancient Indian mythology, where his original name was "Nalakūvara", which translates as "son of Kubilā". The name is rich in cultural meanings, ranging from "lovely" to "king of dancers," revealing that this mythological figure was not only a warrior, but also a symbol of pleasure and art. As the son of Kūvera, the god of wealth, Nalakūvara's story is a fantastical one: cursed to become a tree for indulging in worldly pleasures, he was eventually rescued by Krishna.

The myth was introduced into China with the spread of Buddhism to the east and underwent several cultural adaptations and reinventions. In the *Sutra of Praise for the Actions of the Buddha*, Nalakūvara is phonetically translated as "Narakūvara," marking the first entry of its story into Chinese culture. Subsequently, in texts such as the *Sutra of the Great Peacock King of the Buddha's Mother*, Nalakūvara's name has been transliterated in various forms, such as "Na Zha Zhuo sock luo" and "Zhuo luo ju tre luo" (Jianru, 2010), which demonstrates the efforts and creativity of ancient Chinese scholars in their efforts to understand and embrace this exotic mythological figure.

The record of Nezha in the Tang Dynasty's Huilin's *Yinyi of All Sutras* provides an important clue to our understanding of his status in Buddhism. Although the "Sutra of Nezha Kubala Seeking Fulfillment" and the "Sutra of Prince Nezha Seeking Fulfillment" mentioned by Huilin are lost, they are sufficient evidence of the

importance of Nezha in Buddhism (Rengong, 2012). The dissemination of these stories and scriptures made the image of Nezha not only have a profound influence in the religious realm, but also occupy a place in folk culture.

The author of *Journey to the West*, Wu Cheng'en, also transformed Nezha's name into one with Chinese characteristics and explained the origin of Nezha's name in the eighty-third episode: "There is the character 'Na' on the palm of his left hand, and the character 'Cha' on the palm of his right hand, hence the name Nezha. The name Nezha is derived from the character 'Na' on the palm of his left hand and the character '吒' on the palm of his right hand. (Chenen Wu, 1992)" By writing Nezha's name directly on his hand to indicate its origin, the Chinese version of Nezha's name has been directly changed in this way, and this modification brings the image of Nezha closer to Chinese culture, to the extent that the Chinese may even forget the origin and background of Nezha's Sanskrit text.

In this process, the title and image of Nezha changed with cultural contact and linguistic evolution. Fu Fangyan, in his *Study of the Changing Image of Nezha*, points out that there are at least seven different Chinese translations of Nezha in the *Da Zheng Xin Xiu Da Zang Jing* (Qiaomao, 2002), reflecting the gradual adaptation and change of the image of Nezha in Chinese culture. After the Song Dynasty, "Na Cha" was gradually replaced by "Nezha".

1.2 Nezha's identity

1.2.1 Period of origin: the introduction of Buddhism to protect the Dharma nightshade

Nezha's identity is directly related to the Heavenly King of Vishamon, with whom Ne-To exists in two different relationships outside of the realm. According to the first theory, Nezha is the grandson of the King of Heaven, Vishamon. According to the *Praise of the Acts of the Buddha*: "Now the king begets the prince Vishramon, and the king of heaven begets Nara Hupa," as well as in the *Vishramon Rituals* by Bukong, "Nezha, the third son, was instructed to carry a pagoda and follow him to the king of heaven (Bukong, Jingse, & Zhi)"; the *Dafang et Daji Yuezang Duanjing* also records that Heavenly King had ninety-one sons, "of whom only the second son, Dokken, and the third son, Nezha, are mentioned in the inner canon"; and Zheng Xin records in the *Kai Tian Chuanxin Jie* that "a certain extraordinary person, precisely Vishamon Heavenly King, was the first to be born in the world. In the *Kaiten Chuanxin ji*, Zheng Zha wrote: "A certain extraordinary person is the son of King Vishamon, Prince Nezha (Gaonan, 1924)", who is depicted as the third son of King Vishamon, hence the common name "the Three Princes". Nezha's duty is to carry the pagoda for his father and return it to the King of Heaven on the twenty-first day of the month, on which day offerings are made in the form of milk porridge or somen porridge. A similar statement is also found in his translation of the "Truly Sayings on Protecting the Dharma with the Army of the King of the North Vishnu," which has Nezha holding a stupa in his hand while Vishnu defends the country at the behest of the Buddha.

According to another theory, Nezha is the grandson of the Heavenly King Vishamon. According to the *Rituals of the Army Protector of the Heavenly King of the Northern Vishamun Kingdom*, "At that time, Prince Nezha, armed with a halberd rod and gazing around with a fierce gaze, was known as Nezha, the grandson of

Vishamun." Ancient texts also record that Nezha was praised for stabbing traitors in the eyes and heart with his vajra staff, striking the heads of those who had broken the precepts with his vajra rod, and proclaiming the truth of the evil in his heart in the presence of the Buddha (Bukong et al.). In short, Nezha's relationship as the son of the King of Heaven, Vishramon, was widely recognized in later times, and whether he was the son or grandson of the King of Heaven was gradually downplayed, but the title "Nezha the Third Prince" was passed down.

Early myths of Nezha's role as a protector of the Dharma in Buddhism were not fixed or unique, and the Fundamental Sayings of All Things Vinaya reveal Nezha's most sacred association with Buddhism by treating him as the reincarnation of the Buddha. In the Bukongso Shenchangzhengyanjing, Nezha is categorized as a "Medicine Fork General" and is classified among the Night Forks, revealing his role as a protector of the Dharma and a dispenser of justice. Further, the Dharani Sutra on the Great Buddha's Dome Rulai's Light Emitting Shengduo Bantara's Great Divine Power Duruwang emphasizes his importance in guarding the heavenly realms and preserving the order of the universe by conferring upon him the title "God of the Heavenly King". In the Sakyadhara Rituals, Nezha is also referred to as the "God of Demons", a title that emphasizes his influence in the underworld and his ability to control evil spirits (Figure 4). In short, the role of the mythological Nezha is to safeguard the Buddha's teachings, eliminate evil, and protect the world. These images of the solemn guardian of Buddhism are very different from the image of the rebellious child that later generations have of Nezha.





Figure 4 Nezha, the Night Fork of the Guardian, in a Chinese thangka.

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/read/cv3351350/>, 2019

1.2.2 The Tang and Song Periods: The General's Son of Buddhist-Taoist Integration

After Buddhism was introduced to China from India, it had a tremendous impact on Chinese spirituality and culture. At the same time, Buddhism was also influenced by Chinese spirituality and culture, undergoing great changes, becoming increasingly Chinese, and eventually making Buddhism an important part of Chinese spirituality and culture.

In the *Kaiten Chuanxinji*, it is written that the monk Xuanlue, who practiced Dharma with great diligence, often walked at night, and once, when he was about to fall down a flight of steps, he was caught by Prince Nezha, the son of King Vishnu, who then offered him a Buddha's tooth as a Buddhist service, which is kept at Chongsheng Monastery. This legend was indeed passed down at Chongsheng Temple, and according to the *Record of the Journey into Tang*, the monk Yuan Ren, who came from Japan, heard the story of "Prince Nezha's offering of the Buddha's tooth" when he visited the temple. According to a record by Zheng Di Hui of the Tang Dynasty.

"Xuan lawyer tasted the night traveling road, Lin Yizhi lost his footing, some people hold the commitment. He saw a young man and asked, 'Who is this disciple?' The young man said: 'a very human, Prince Nezha Prince of Visha also. Embrace monk for a long time.' The teacher said: 'poor cultivation without trouble, Prince of God since the Western Region, there can be done for the Buddha, I hope the Prince to the.' Is to offer a Buddha's tooth, today's Chongsheng Temple collection is also. (Hongmei, 2002)"

During the Tang Dynasty, the belief in Vishnu Tenno was introduced to the Central Plains from the Western Regions, a shift that was largely due to Vishnu Tenno's notable influence in the "military function". Since the founding of the state, the Tang Dynasty has engaged in frequent military operations in the Western Regions, and through these military conflicts, cultural exchanges have been facilitated. Especially during the Tianbao period, the military pressure of the Tang dynasty in the western region intensified, leading to the phenomenon of "inviting blessings to the frontier," which shows that religious rituals were used to pray for military victories in the northwestern frontier region at that time. The real integration of Vishvamitra's beliefs into the social belief system originated from a dramatic incident in the Vishvamitra recorded by Bukong. The story takes place during the Tianbao period, when a coalition of five kingdoms, including the Dashi and Kang kingdoms, besieged the Western Regions. Considering the great distance between the Western Regions and Chang'an, it was impossible to send an army for the time being. A group of monks suggested that Emperor Xuanzong of Tang invites the Hu monk Daguangzhi to ask for the help of the Northern King of the Vishnu Heavenly Kings. Daguangzhi then practiced meditation and asked for the assistance of the King of the Heavenly Kings, and the King of the Vishnu Heavenly Kings sent his son, Dokken, to the Western Regions, and succeeded in helping the Tang army repel the allied forces of the five kingdoms. However, when the Tang army was about to pursue the attack, Vishamitra himself appeared on the citadel and objected to the continuation of the pursuit of the five allied forces. After this incident, it was widely believed in society that Vishwamitra possessed the ability to secure a military victory. In addition to the widespread "statue-making" activities in society after the war, the belief in Vishnu Tenno was further strengthened and popularized.

The deification of historical figures is a major feature of the god-making phenomenon in Chinese history. Li Jing was an outstanding military strategist during the Sui and Tang dynasties, who demonstrated outstanding military talent in many major battles, and repeatedly made great achievements. Emperor Gaozu of the Tang Dynasty spoke highly of him, once praising him in this way: "Li Jing is comparable to the famous ancient generals Xiao Mou and Fu Gongyi, as well as the famous generals of history, such as Han Xin, Bai Qi, Wei Qing, and Huo Zaodi; how can they be compared to Li Jing?" As a result, the Tang Dynasty bestowed upon him the title of "Duke of Wei" in recognition of his military achievements. During the Tang Dynasty, Li Jing was already endowed with an aura of sanctity, and attributes such as Li Jing's ability to fight well and his use of the word "Yakushi", which is similar to the sound of "Yaksha", coincided with that of Vishamon, the king of the Night Forks, who was the protector of the country's military, giving rise to the title "Vishamon Totah Li Tianwang" (Vishamon Totah Li Tianwang).

By the Song Dynasty, the tendency to deify Li Jing was even more significant, and he was regarded as one of the immortals. Zhang Zifang's commentary citing the Xuan Yuan Ben Ji mentions, "The art of war is the tactics of the Xuan Nü, and it is the Jiu Tian Xuan Nü method that Li Jing, the Duke of Wei, utilized (Xiaohua, 2016)." This suggests that the Jiu Tian Xuan Nü Battle Technique mastered by Li Jing was not only a highly advanced art of war, but also a tactic originating from the gods and goddesses. Further, the biography of Yisheng Baodezhenjun mentions, "Shouzhen said to him, 'This is the place where the upper immortals descend.'" (Bing, 2017)" The Shangzhen here means Shangxian, explicitly calling Li Jing as Shangxian. In Miscellaneous Records, Su Shi recorded a strange encounter with a Taoist priest from Deng, who gave him a book signed at the end of the book as "Li Jing, the Immortal of Jiu Xia," which further confirmed Li Jing's status as an immortal in people's minds, and it is worth noting that Li Jing here already had a tendency to merge Buddhism and Taoism, as he was coupled with the Buddhist god of war, but he used Taoist spells and is called an immortal.

With the deification of Li Jing, Nezha, as the Prince of the Heavenly King of Vishramon, was naturally regarded as Li Jing's son. As Yang Donglai notes in his critique of Journey to the West, Li Jing refers to himself as "my son Nezha," a shift that signals the notion of Nezha as the son of Li Jing, the King of the Visharmen Heavenly Kings. The first record of Na Cha's association with Taoism is a story in the Yijian Zhi in which Master Cheng, a practitioner of Maoshan Zhengfa, uses the Na Cha fireball spell to repel a stone spirit shaped like a black bell, which was at this time only at the level of Legends of the Folk. Over time, Nezha was incorporated into the "Secret Methods of the Three Spiritual Officials of the Shangqing Ma Chen Zhu" in the "Daoist Dharma Hui Yuan", a book written in the Yuan dynasty, as one of the subordinates of the Spiritual Official, Marshal Ma, symbolizing Nezha's formal acceptance into the Taoist mythological system. These spells were mostly related to Marshal Ma, which led to Nezha's deep connection with this spiritual official and the acquisition of his attribute of "three heads and nine eyes". Xianzhe, 2019).

The fact that Nezha became the heir of Li Jing and was embraced by Daoist mythology marks a critical point in the evolution of his mythological image (Liu, 2009). Not only does this symbolize the transformation of Nezha from a deity with Indian ancestry to a character with Chinese ancestry, but Nezha's image also evolved from a fierce nightjar to one that is more in line with the image of a proper Chinese Taoist deity, increasing its affinity. The Chineseization of Nezha's image greatly broadened the possibilities for the evolution of his image, and although historical documents left no specific records, the essence of these stories later provided rich material for the portrayal of Nezha in Journey to the West.

1.2.3 The Ming and Qing Dynasties: Taoist Child Gods in Popular Fiction

The construction of the Chinese mythological system stems from two main roots: first, religious institutions, represented by Taoism and Buddhism, which constitute the most prominent platforms for god-making in Chinese history. The second is the widespread beliefs originating from the folklore, in which the people are not only the bearers of beliefs in the gods, but also often the main driving force behind the creation of myths. In addition, creators of popular literature and art played a crucial role in this process, utilizing popular forms of literature and art, such as

drama, novels, and plays, as an effective way to disseminate and innovate mythological images (Liu, 2009), and the second major transformation of the image of Nezha in China was reflected in the novels of the Ming dynasty.

As the interpretation of Legends' stories, Ming Dynasty novels of gods and demons made the abstract and dry words in religious texts more popularized on the basis of folklore imaginations and dramatic interpretations, and benefited from the development of postal stations in the Ming Dynasty, so that the contents of the novels were known to more people at the bottom of the hierarchy, which led to the prosperity of popular novels in the mid- and late Ming Dynasty for a number of reasons, for example, the development of the printing press and progress in the paper-making industry. There were many reasons for the prosperity of popular novels in the middle and late Ming Dynasty, such as the development of printing and the progress of paper-making, which reduced the printing cost of novels, and the renewal of literary concepts, which attracted more and more literati to join in the dissemination of novels and improved the quality of novels, etc., of which the most crucial one was the improvement of the dissemination method of novels (Wenrui, 2005). The improvement in the dissemination of novels in the mid-to-late Ming Dynasty greatly facilitated the consumption of novels, and novels were transformed from writers' works of art into commodities that the general public was willing to buy, thus attracting people's attention and ushering in the prosperity of novels at a time when poetry and literature were the standard literary genres (Chen, 2007). The story of Nezha's identity was also finalized with the continuous improvement of literary works such as *The Complete Book of the Three Religions and Sources of the Search for Gods*, *Journey to the West*, and *Nezha*. In the years since, this version has been passed down to this day as the most familiar and classic Nezha story.

Journey to the West, one of the Four Great Masterpieces of China, was written by Wu Cheng'en, and is the first long romanticized chapter-length novel about gods and demons in ancient China. While the Monkey King is the central character, Nezha also plays a key role in the portrayal of Nezha. In *Journey to the West*, the story of Nezha is partly based on Buddhist accounts, combined with folk legends and story books, and formed a unique creative background through the author's rich imagination and exquisite conception. In *Journey to the West*, Nezha is portrayed as a frontal child god, known as the "Third Prince". Nezha's father is depicted as the Jade Emperor's commander of the heavenly armies, Tota Li Tianwang, making Nezha the third son of Li Jing, along with his two older brothers, Nezha Jinzha and Nezha Muzha. The work transforms the Buddhist Nezha into the main celestial military leader in the heavenly realm, giving him the important duty of defending the heavenly realm. In this classic work, Nezha also serves as a heavenly soldier under the Taoist Jade Emperor, making his debut in the chapter in which he is defeated by the Monkey King after being ordered to capture him (Chenen Wu, 1992). *Journey to the West* combines the author's imagination and creative fictionalization to create a new image of Nezha with unique Chinese characteristics. In *Journey to the West*, Li Jing is no longer the Buddhist Vishamon King of Heaven, but evolves into the Taoist Jade Emperor's leader of the heavenly army, Tota Li Tianwang, who is the Marshal of Demon Subduers. Nezha, the third son of King Tota Li, is an important general of the Jade Emperor, and is named the Great God of the Three Altars of the Sea.

In *Journey to the West*, Nezha's image undergoes a remarkable evolution from a Buddhist protector god to a Taoist hero god. His most distinctive feature is that he is "Taoist on the outside and Buddhist on the inside", which profoundly reflects the spirit of fusion between Taoism and Buddhism (Liu, 2009). Nezha's physical body is presented as a child god with a wide range of magical powers, while his inner nature is that of a three-headed, six-armed Buddhist god of the night fork in the guise of a lotus flower. This distinctive image has made Nezha an extremely famous and beloved deity among the Chinese gods.

Another masterpiece of divine and magical fiction of the Ming Dynasty is the long novel *Nezha* by Xu Zhonglin (controversial), which consists of one hundred episodes of the historical story of King Wu's conquest of the Zhou Dynasty. The first thirty episodes of the novel focus on King Zhou's tyranny and brutality, while the next seventy episodes recount the war between Shang and Zhou, King Zhou's self-immolation, and King Wu's eventual acquisition of the world and the division of the kingdoms. Since the Ming Dynasty, the *Nezha* has been widely circulated in folklore and has had a profound impact on folk beliefs, operas, and Legends. The book's setting of Nezha's identity is clearly influenced by the *Journey to the West* story of Nezha, but there are also many new stories and new depictions.

In *Nezha*, the identity of Nezha undergoes a major transformation, marking the finalization of the image of Nezha in the process of Chineseization. In *Nezha*, the Ming writer Xu Zhonglin depicts Nezha in great detail, especially from the twelfth to the fourteenth episodes of the book, which can almost be regarded as Nezha's biography. The book not only explains in detail the origins of Nezha, but also gives him a new image as a Taoist deity.

In *Nezha*, Nezha is described as the son of Li Jing of Chentangguan, but his origins are not mundane. In his previous life, he was a spirit bead next to the great goddess Nuwa, with magical powers and spirituality. Nuwa placed this spirit pearl on earth to be reincarnated as a human being, thus giving birth to Nezha. Such a background to the story not only lends Nezha a mystical dimension, but also reinforces his close connection to the myth of Taoism. Following the will of the highest deity of Taoism, Yuan Shi Tian Zun, he was reincarnated as a human being, and worshipped one of the Twelve Upper Immortals of Taoism's Kunlun, Taibei immortal Zhen as a teacher, studying Taoism with the aim of aiding Jiang Ziya in the overthrow of the Shang Dynasty, and aiding in the rise of the Zhou Dynasty. In the twelfth episode, it is written that in the thirteenth and fourteenth episodes of *Journey to the West*, Nezha describes himself to the Dragon King:

"I am not an ordinary person, but am actually Ling Zhu, a disciple of the Taiyi Master of the Golden Light Cave in Qianyuan Mountain. I was reborn into the Li family of Chentangguan and became their son. The purpose was to bring about the downfall of the Shang Dynasty and the prosperity of the Zhou Dynasty, and as Jiang Ziya was about to leave the mountain, I was the vanguard of his efforts to break the tyranny of King Zhou and assist the Zhou Dynasty in establishing a state...Nezha, a reincarnated being of Lingzhu Zi, assisted Jiang Ziya in destroying the Shang and prospering the Zhou, in fulfillment of the sacred order given by the Heavenly Father of the First Heavenly Father (Z. Xu & Zhong, 1980). "

Regarding Nezha's reincarnation into the family of Chentang Guan Jing and becoming the son of Li Jing, it is even more spiritual:

"Li Jing heard, rushed to the incense room, holding the sword, only to see a red gas in the room, full of fragrance. There is a meatball, dripping round like a wheel. Li Jing was shocked, looking at the meatball on a sword to cut, scratching sound. When the meatball was separated, a child jumped out (Z. Xu & Zhong, 1980).

The birth of a small child who can run from a ball of flesh is a matter with strong spiritual overtones. However, his behavior and appearance are not very different from those of ordinary folk children. This is the image of the newly born child deity in Taoism.

Since the Nezha, the image of Nezha has undergone a major evolution. In fact, the general public is not particularly concerned about which version of Nezha is more "authentic". The folkloric image of Nezha is a mixture of Taoist and Buddhist images of Nezha, incorporating features from various versions. The image is basically a fusion of the Na Zha of Journey to the West and the Na Zha of Nezha. The stories, which are full of strange and spiritual elements, form the cornerstone of the image of Nezha in people's minds.

In general, Nezha entered China as a vicious Buddhist nightshade protector, and after the Song Dynasty, with the deification of the general Li Jing, he became the third son of King Tota Li of Heaven and became associated with Taoism. In the novels Nezha's identity is further clarified, becoming the Jade Emperor's god of war, while still retaining the image of a child god. Nezha evolved from a Buddhist protector god to a Taoist child god. He is best characterized as an external Taoist and an internal Buddhist, reflecting China's tolerant attitude towards different cultures.

At the same time, the invention of the printing press in the Ming Dynasty, the well-developed postal station, the protection and transmission of large-scale cultural relics, and the organization and archiving of literature all provided the basis and guarantee for the spread of Nezha, allowing the rapid spread of popular and easy-to-understand novels about gods and demons and their preservation for a long time. Just as the written records imported from the outside world, and the development of the literature, Nezha's identity has not disappeared since its entry into China, and its identity has instead evolved and become richer and richer. Instead, his identity has evolved and become richer and richer, and this is reflected more directly in the changes in Nezha's appearance.

1.2.4 Nezha's Appearance and Personality

1.2.4.1 Appearance: Handsome teenagers with three heads and six arms

The Chinese translation of the Buddhist scriptures of the Tang Dynasty is the source of the myth of Nezha. The above mentioned documents not only clearly indicate Nezha's identity and duties, but also initially reveal his character and appearance. As shown below (Figure 5), in the upper right of the image of the Great Sage Vishamon King of Heaven, a baby can be seen being held in the hands of the Night Fury, who is none other than Nezha. This image is believed to be the earliest image of Nezha ever found, dating back more than a thousand years. Images like this provide us with the most authentic visual memory of Nezha.



Figure 5 The Statue of the Great Sage Vishvamitra in the Dunhuang Cangjing Cave, National Museum of Paris, U.K.

Source: <https://weibo.com/1234046597/I1KZXEEh?type=comment>, 2019

Painting, as an art form that incorporates the imagination and processing of its creator, not only conveys information, but also touches people's emotions. In the painting of Vishamon King of Heaven Going to Nezha's Meeting (Figure 6), the image of the Night Fury is creatively rendered: it has a huge head and bull-like horns in the shape of an emperor facing the heavens, with the upper half of its body exposed, and a bulging belly. In terms of costume, Nezha wears a collar around his neck, bracelets on his hands, and a strip of cloth around his waist. The distinctive features of Nezha's painting, such as his horns, demonstrate how the creator combines the animal's features with the textual descriptions to create a unique and imaginative image.



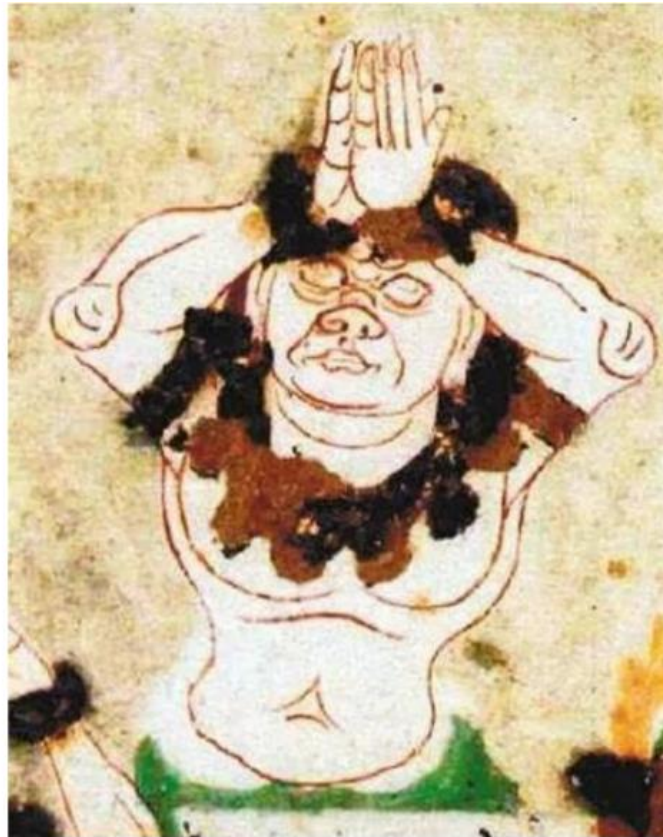


Figure 6 Nezha's Five Generations in Cave 45 of the Mogao Caves, "Vishamitra's Visit to Nezha's Meeting".

<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1641526724396151938&wfr=spider&for=pc>, 2019

The description of Nezha's multi-headed and multi-armed form in the *Jingde Chuanluan Dengluo* (The Record of the Transmission of the Lamp to the Emperor) as "Suddenly, the wrathful Nezha appeared with three heads and six arms (Daoyuan, 2014)" suggests that Nezha's depiction in Buddhist scriptures has a distinctly exotic style. This multi-headed and multi-armed form was portrayed in depth in later miscellaneous dramas, although there was no agreement on the exact number of heads and arms. For example, "Erlang Shen Drunkenly Shoots at the Demon Locking Mirror" shows Nezha with "three heads and six arms," while the second and third parts of "Nezha's Three Transformations" describe Nezha as having "two heads and four arms" or "three heads and six arms. The second and third sections of Na Cha's Three Changes describe Nezha as having "two heads and four arms" or "three heads and six arms. This multi-headed and multi-armed image originates from ancient Indian culture and is similar to the multi-headed and multi-armed image of Lord Shiva, the main god of Brahminism. The image of Nezha as a deity is therefore strongly characterized by ancient Indian culture, and originally appeared as a Buddhist nightjar figure in an exotic form.

In the early Ming dynasty, the book *The Complete Book of the Three Religions and Sources of Searching for the Gods* played a key role in establishing the image of Nezha and his story, and its description of Nezha is very close to that of the later Nezha (Figure 8). In the book, Nezha's appearance is depicted as "six feet long, wearing a golden wheel on his head, with three heads, nine eyes, and eight arms, his mouth spitting out green clouds and his feet treading on a cloud pan (Guiping, 1996)."

This description suggests that the image of Nezha has been transformed into a new image of a tall and powerful general with three heads and eight arms, a gold collar around his neck, smoke coming out of his mouth, and his feet stepping on auspicious clouds, which is not far from the image in Buddhism.

In terms of weapons, The Complete Book of the Three Religions and Sources of Searching for God describes Nezha as follows: "When the spear is drawn, the sky spins and the earth revolves; when the embroidered ball is thrown, the mountain collapses and the sea breaks apart" (Guiping, 1996)" This indicates that Nezha's weaponry has changed, with the appearance of an embroidered ball. These details show the early molding of Nezha's image (Figure 7). Although The Complete Book of the Three Religions and Sources of the Search for God is relatively detailed in its description of the story and image of Nezha, it has changed little compared to Buddhist texts, and is mainly a compilation of existing stories about Nezha. Subsequent adaptations and transformations of Nezha's story have largely been based on the descriptions in The Complete Book of the Three Religions and Sources of the Gods. This work has had a profound impact, not only occupying an important place in cultural history, but also laying a solid foundation for the subsequent development of Nezha's image.



Figure 7 Nezha's portrait in the Qing-issued Xiyue Tianzhuguo Zangban (The Complete Book of the Three Religions and Sources of Searching for Gods)

Source: The Complete Collection of the Origins of the Three Teachings, 1987.

In the miscellaneous drama play Journey to the West, Nezha is depicted as a deity with three heads and six arms and armed with a seven-jeweled mortar and pestle and an eight-petaled ball, who is one of the ten party guardians who protect the Longevity Monk as he travels westward to fetch scriptures. At the same time, he travels to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits on his father's orders to search for and destroy the Monkey King, who is known as the Great Sage of Heaven, in a fierce duel.

This setting was inherited by *Journey to the West*, in which Nezha is a child who is clear and beautiful, strong and brave, intelligent and early, and extraordinary, appearing to be positive and active, which is rare among the group portraits of Chinese deities, and is also in line with the aesthetics of the Chinese for young heroes of that time. The appearance of Nezha in the fourth book of *Journey to the West* is described as follows:

"He wears a golden crown like an overcast basin, and a brocade robe like a flame. His head was covered with a golden hoop, and his chest was protected by a rattan sign. Holding a fire-pointed spear in his hand and stepping on a wheel of wind and fire, with two ears hanging over his shoulder, he swallowed the enemy with one mouthful... The boy was a very handsome and strong boy. It is really: jade face like a full moon, Zhu lips square mouth revealing silver teeth. His eyes are like lightning, his forehead is broad and his hair is in a high bun. The embroidered belt dances in the wind and flies colorful flames, and the brocade robe reflects the sun and releases golden flowers. Surrounding the burning heart of the mirror, the precious armor shining brightly lined with boots. His body is small and his voice is magnificent, and he protects the evil Nezha for three days (Chenen Wu, 1992)."

In the book, Nezha is depicted as a sweet and innocent child god before he transforms, and after he transforms, he is portrayed as a terrifying figure with a Buddhist face. This contrast not only enriches the characterization of Nezha, but also reveals his inherent Buddhist spirit. In essence, Nezha's image combines the mystery of the outer Taoism with the wisdom of the inner Buddha, making him a character with deep cultural and philosophical significance. In the fourth episode of *Journey to the West*, Nezha fights the Monkey King (Figure 4).

"Nezha fought, shouted, called 'change' that is, changed into three heads and six arms, vicious, holding six weapons, is a demon sword, demon knife, demon rope, pestle and mortar, embroidered ball, fire wheel. Yaya fork, pouncing to fight ... only to see that the Prince of the law, will be a body change, changed into three heads and six arms, holding six weapons, looking at. The Demon King also changed into three heads and six arms, with three lances to resist. This prince and make out the magic power, will be six kinds of weapons will throw up. Is that six kinds of weapons? But it was the demon sword, demon knife, demon rope, demon pestle, embroidered ball, fire wheel. He shouted, "Change! One changed into ten, ten changed into a hundred, a hundred changed into a thousand, a thousand changed into ten thousand, all of them were general weapons, like sudden rain and hail, one after another, looking at the demons to beat them (Chenen Wu, 1992)."

Nezha has more weapons in his hands, including the Demon Sword and Demon Chopper, the Demon Subduing Rope, and the Embroidery Ball, among which the Fire Wheeler is a new magic weapon added to Nezha's repertoire. The quotations in these two paragraphs not only account for the central elements of his story, such as his unique weapons and appearance, but also make clear the origins of Nezha's father, Totah Li Tianwang. In his portrayal of Nezha, although based on a Buddhist story, Wu Cheng'en skillfully incorporated elements of Chinese culture in innovative embellishments and modifications. These adaptations make Nezha in *Journey to the West* not just a character in a Buddhist story, but a young hero with Chinese characteristics and great powers (Figure 8)

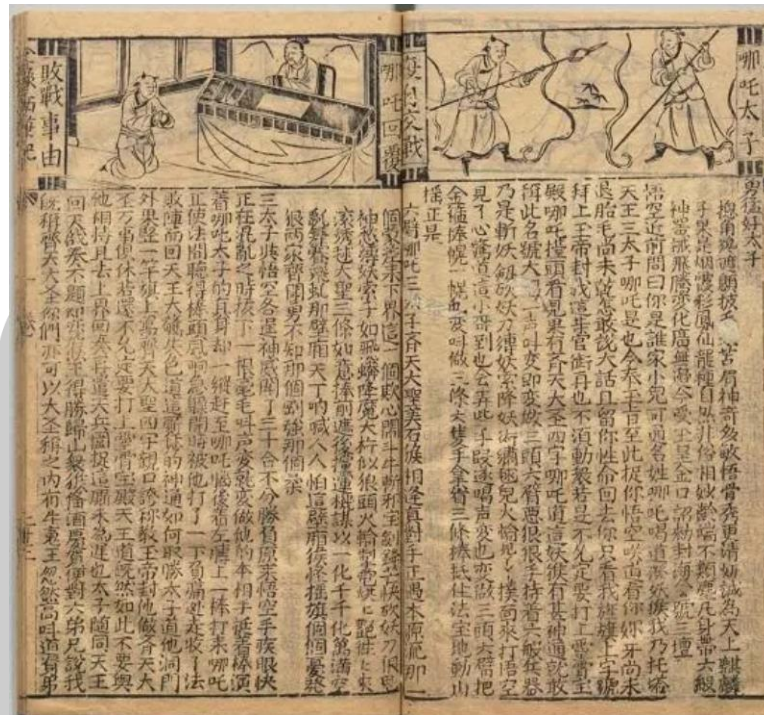


Figure 8 Nezha fighting the Monkey King in the Journey to the West of the Newly Engraved Full-length Portrait in the Ming version.

Source : New Engraved Holography of Journey to the West Biography, 1994.

Nezha, as depicted in *Nezha*, begins as a mischievous and aggressive child who fights against patriarchal oppression and dares to express his emotions. In the kingdom of Zhou, he becomes a valiant general, displaying the courage to fight and kill in the face of foreign enemies. This portrayal shows the complexity and three-dimensionality of Nezha's character - both righteous and evil. In *Nezha*, Nezha is born as a cute baby boy. In the fourteenth episode of *Nezha*, Nezha was born as a cute baby boy: "I only heard a sound, and a man jumped up, with a face like powder, lips like vermilion, and eyes that shone brightly, with a length of oNezhang six feet, a golden bracelet in his right hand, and a piece of red silk wrapped around his belly, with a golden light that shone through his eyes. Nezha's growth to the middle stage of his life was characterized by a handsome appearance, with a height of six feet and a youthful image, which paved the way for Nezha's transformation in the later stages of his life; thirdly, in the 76th episode of the *Nezha*, "Nezha was shown to have three heads and eight arms, to be mounted on a wheel of wind and fire, to have a face of indigo, to have hair of vermilion, to have a forked tongue, and to have seven or eight hands, and to walk into the gate." (Xu & Zhong, 1980) "In *Nezha*, the figure of Nezha undergoes a remarkable evolution at a later stage, becoming a figure with three heads and eight arms, and feet on wind and fire wheels. His skin is blue and his hair reddish-vermilion in color, and he holds various weapons in his many arms. The acquisition of these weapons is mentioned in the book:

"The real man passed on Nezha's fire-pointed spear, which he mastered in a short time; Nezha was about to go down the mountain to avenge his death, and the real man said: 'When you have mastered the spear, I will give you two wheels of wind and fire, and I will teach you the secret of the spiritual talisman.' The real man also gave Nezha a leopard skin, in which he placed a Qiankun map, a mixed sky damask, and a gold brick (Z. Xu & Zhong, 1980)."

In the Nezha, Nezha is depicted as "carrying a purple snake spear in his hand and a wind and fire wheel in his feet. The description suggests that Nezha's weapons and skills were taught to him by Taiyiimmortal, and that these weapons and skills became Nezha's iconic features and symbols (Figure 9)



Figure 9 Nezha's portrait in the Qing Dynasty ink-illustrated book *The True Shape of the Feudal Gods*.

Source: Fengshen Zhenxing Diagram, 2001.

1.2.4.2 Character: cynicism and rebellious defiance

Wrath and ferocity are distinctive features of Nezha's character and appearance, reflecting his role as a Buddhist protector god. In the Buddhist tradition, the guardian deities usually take on a fierce appearance, symbolizing their hatred of evil and their great power. Nezha is particularly notable for this trait. In Buddhist scriptures, Nezha is often referred to as "Wrathful Nezha", such as in the Sea Seal Sutra, which mentions "Nezha's wrath", and describes the power of his abilities, "Wrathful Nezha took the Sumeru and broke it into a hundred pieces," demonstrating his power. "This demonstrates his power and determination.

According to the Northern Vishamon Heavenly King's Rituals for Protecting the Laws of the Armies, Nezha's appearance is described as "..... evil eyes look around right hand amazes at the waist and makes him hold a three-party halberd and lance," while the *Jingde Chuanluan* (The Record of the Lamp) mentions "wrathful Nezha pounces on the emperor's bell. The book "The Record of the Lamp" mentions that "the wrathful Nezha pounces on the emperor's bell". From these depictions, we can observe that the Buddhist Nezha is not a typical handsome hero, but is more characterized by "evil eyes" and "anger" (Liu, 2009). This depiction seems to foreshadow Nezha's later emergence as a heroic figure who eradicates evil and upholds justice, which is a reflection of the Buddhist doctrine of "great evil and great sorrow".

Similarly, in the fourth episode of *Journey to the West*, Nezha's performance before his battle with the Monkey King: "Nezha, enraged, gave a loud shout and called out 'Change', i.e., he transformed himself into a three-headed, six-armed, vicious man, holding six kinds of weapons." It can be seen that although some of Nezha's appearance has been Chineseized, he still retains the Buddhist character of "fury" and "viciousness". In the 83rd episode of *Journey to the West*, Nezha's story is recounted in some detail. After getting into serious trouble, Nezha's father, Li Jing, tried to kill him, and out of anger and dissatisfaction, Nezha cut his own throat, using a knife to return his own flesh to his mother, and picking out his bones to return them to his father. After being reborn by chance, Nezha seeks revenge on his father (Chenen Wu, 1992).

While the Nezha portrays Nezha as a young hero, it also highlights his mischievous character. At the age of seven, Nezha is rebellious and reckless, killing Li Geng and Ao Bing in a moment of impatience, and accidentally killing the child of the Lady Shiji by fiddling with the Qiankun bow; but after all, Nezha's destiny is extraordinary, and Tai Yi Zhen attributes all of Nezha's behaviors to "heaven's destiny" (Z. Xu & Zhong, 1980), which is in fact the author's interpretation of previous versions of the story in terms of a mundane view of heaven's destiny. This is in fact the author's attempt to explain the plot of the previous versions of the story with a secular view of fate. Nezha's bloodthirsty and militaristic nature is further demonstrated by the fact that after his lotus birth, he does not care about old friendships and only wants to kill Li Jing in order to avenge his own death. Such a plot would be difficult for the Chinese to accept, so Nezha ends with a pagoda to teach Nezha to follow the path of filial piety.

In short, the image of Nezha in *Journey to the West* still has many Buddhist cultural imprints, such as the "three days of protecting the religion of evil Nezha", which reminds people of the Buddhist god of the night, and the fact that Nezha is almost never far from Li Jing in the novel, which reminds people of the third prince of the Vishamon King of Heaven, who "...always follows the king of heaven with his pagoda". On the other hand, the Nezha of Nezha belongs entirely to Taoism, especially in the fact that the original Buddha who helped him to be born in the Lotus Flower has been replaced by Taiyi immortal, which almost strips away the few Buddhist elements in Nezha's story.

The evolution of Nezha's image is the result of the interaction and collision of various religions and cultures in Chinese folklore, and the Nezha is the final step, taking it completely out of the context of Indian Buddhism and making it thoroughly

Chinese. After this, the basic image of Nezha has been finalized: a young heroic god, son of Li Jing, the king of the Heavenly Kings, and a general under the Jade Emperor, with the appearance of a seven year old child, and with magic weapons such as the Wind Fire Wheel, the Fire Pointed Gun, the Mixed Heavenly Aya, and the Qiankun Circle, who can transform into a three-headed, six-armed god, with great magical powers, and who blesses the four directions. It can be said that the images of Nezha in later folk Legends and movie and TV adaptations are mainly from the Nezha and Journey to the West, rather than from the original Buddhist scriptures.

1.3 The Matrix of Nezha

Matrix is an exotic term that was first adopted in response to the need to categorize folktales. German scholar Köhler first brought this concept into the public eye, and then gradually used it to study related issues in the field of folklore. There are various views on the definition of the concept of matriarchal theme in Western academic circles, but after the introduction of matriarchal theme into China, researchers in China have more often referred to the views of American scholar Stith Thompson, whose research suggests that: "The concept of matriarchal theme has been widely recognized as a key concept in the study of folklore.

"For the concept of the parent theme, it can be understood as the smallest part of a story that can be passed on continuously and gradually become a tradition. So it needs to have a very prominent and moving power. Generally speaking, a motif can be divided into three types. The first type is an important constituent character in a story, such as an animal with certain abilities, a ghost, or an immortal god, or it may also be some traditional and popular characters, such as the youngest child who is loved by the people, or a cruel stepmother. The second type of motifs relate to some kind of background to the plot - magic artifacts, unusual customs, peculiar beliefs, and so on. The third category of matriarchs are those single events - they encapsulate the vast majority of matriarchs. (Sti & Thompson, 1991)" Building on this original conception, Chen Jianxian defines the mythic motif as.

"They are key components of mythological works, which exist in the context of cultural traditions and can be reproduced continuously; their number is certain, but the use of permutations and evolutionary differences can produce a large number of works, which can be used in different cultural themes and artistic expressions: they inherit the concept of the human being as a communal body. They inherit the concept of human communion, embodying the collective idea of a region, country, region or even the whole human race, and some of them often become the cultural identity of the group due to their long history and high typicality. (Jianxian, 1997)"

Chen Jianxian categorizes the most common mythic motifs into three main types: mythic image motifs, mythic situation motifs, and mythic plot motifs. The first type, mythological image motifs, is the most easily recognizable of the three, including deities, demons, plants and animals, inanimate objects, and man-made objects, with the "gods" and "mythological characters" in the works as the corresponding main representatives; the second type, is generally the plots and themes that have their origins in the backgrounds and related stories of the emergence of myths and myths. The second type is generally related to the plot and theme of the myth, which has its origins in the background of the myth and the related story. The second type is generally the plot and theme that has its origin in the background of the myth and the related stories, etc. Its key content is generally the specific natural

occasions or interpersonal relationships, which is the external support for constructing and enriching the "image"; and the third type is mainly the mother theme that is related to the events and stories generated by the myth, which is generally centered on the "image", and can be fully expanded by the "image". The third type is mainly related to the events and stories generated by the myth, and generally takes "image" as the core to fully develop. Based on the above concepts, it is possible to summarize the mythological motifs of Nezha by analyzing the content of Nezha, which is crucial to the study of the cross-media adaptation of Nezha's image and story.

1.3.1 Origin of the parent topic

One of the earliest references to Nezha is the bizarre act of "returning bone to father and flesh to mother", which is mentioned in some translations of Buddhist scriptures, but these sources have been lost. The earlier records that can be found today come from the Song Dynasty and are based on paraphrases and discussions. The original record of "returning bone to father and flesh to mother" is not available, and we can only rely on later documents to get a general idea of the story. In the *Jingde Zhuanlianluo* (Record of the Lights), it is said that "Prince Nezha returned his father's bones and his mother's flesh to his father, but how could this be Nezha's original body (Dazheng, 1990)." The story of Nezha is elaborated in the Southern Song Dynasty in the *Wulianghuiyuan* (The Five Lamps) and the *Canglang Shiyilu* (Poetry of Canglang), which indicate that the act of "returning bone to father and flesh to mother" was already widely practiced during the Song Dynasty, and that the story appeared in the Southern Song Dynasty at the latest. However, the reasons for Nezha's extreme behavior are not clearly explained in the literature. Only the *Ancestral Hall Sutra* suggests that the practice originated in the "jungle". In his *Biography of the Monks of the Zen Grove*, Hui-Hung of the Northern Song Dynasty states that after "returning the bones to his father and the flesh to his mother," Nezha "was born on a lotus flower and spoke to his parents (Dazheng, 1990). It is clear that Nezha's behavior was not forced by his parents, but that he continued to speak for them even after he was born in a lotus flower, but in any case, the act of harming himself is contrary to traditional Chinese values, in which every inch of skin and every strand of hair of the body was given by the parents, and should not be harmed so easily, much less in such an extreme way as to return the bones to the father and the flesh to the mother. Therefore, in order for Nezha to be fully accepted by the Chinese, his image had to be radically altered and reimagined in a way that was consistent with Chinese cultural concepts, as explained in many later works of popular literature.

1.3.2 Haunted sea episodes

In popular literature, most of Nezha's Buddhist stories have been preserved, and Chinese culture has embellished and interpreted them, with many adaptations made by creators to explain the act of "returning bone to father and flesh to mother", as described in *The Complete Book of the Three Religions and Sources of Searching for the Divine*, which describes how Nezha, after being born for five days, was bathed in the East China Sea, with his feet on the Crystal Palace. The Dragon King demanded a battle but was defeated by Nezha. This is the first time in Chinese literature that Nezha's conflict with the dragons of the East China Sea is mentioned, and the setting is basically the same in *Journey to the West*, where it is written in the eighty-third episode that: "Nezha's behavior has been adapted in many ways.

"This prince three dynasty children on the sea net trouble, step down the crystal palace, catch the more dragon to cramp for the tapestry. The King of Heaven knew this and wanted to kill him for fear of future trouble. Nezha was furious, and with a sword in his hand, he returned the flesh to his mother, the bones to his father, the essence of his father and the blood of his mother, and a little bit of his soul, and went to the Western World of Ultimate Bliss to tell the Buddha. (Chenen Wu, 1992)"

Nezha's conflict with the dragons is first mentioned in *Journey to the West*, but only briefly. The work, Wu Cheng'en, blames Nezha's act of cutting his own throat on the child's mischievousness. When his father, Li Jing, learns of Nezha's misdeeds, he is afraid of upsetting the King of the Dragons and so wants to kill Nezha in order to put the matter to rest, and Nezha kills himself in anger. The conflict between Nezha and the dragons here is very simple: a child's misbehavior, which leaves a lot of room for imagination.

Nezha, on the other hand, is a detailed and vivid account that makes the whole scene extremely exciting, mentioning that at the age of seven Nezha showed remarkable bravery, easily killing Li Geng, the sea patrolman, and Ao Bing, the Dragon King's third son, as if it were a child's play. The twelfth episode of Nezha describes a conversation and duel between Nezha and Ao Bing:

"When Ao Bing saw him, he asked, 'Who are you?' Nezha replied, 'I am Nezha, the third son of Li Jing of the Chen Tang Pass. I am the third son of Li Jing of the Chen Tang Pass. My father is the head of a town that guards this area. I'm here to take a summer vacation and bathe, so I have nothing to do with him; but if he comes to scold me, it won't hurt if I kill him. Third Prince Ao Bing cursed: 'Good thief! The night fork Li Geng is the heavenly king's hall difference, you dare to dare to kill him, but also dare to spread nonsense! The Prince stabbed Nezha with his halberd. Nezha, unarmed and defenseless, lowered his head and dug his way through, 'Don't do it, who are you? Who are you? Tell me your name and I'll tell you what's going on. Ao Bing said, 'I am Ao Bing, the third prince of the Dragon King of the East China Sea. Nezha laughed and said: 'You are the son of Ao Guang. You are arrogant. If you annoy me, I will take out even your old loach and skin him.' The third prince exclaimed: 'I'm so angry! What a thief! Such insolence! He stabbed again. Nezha was in a hurry, and spread his seven-foot Mixed Heavenly Aya in the air, and wrapped it around the Third Prince in a downward spiral, forcing him down into the watery beast. Nezha rushed up and stepped on Ao Bing's neck, lifted up the Qian Kun Circle, and hit the Third Prince's body at the top of the door, knocking it out of the water, making it a dragon on the ground. (Chengen Wu, 2018)"

Nezha was insulted by a nightjar for his illegal act of bathing in the sea, and then killed the nightjar that patrols the sea in the Dragon Palace, insulted the Dragon King, and killed the dragon's son, Ao Bing, knocking him out of his prototype, making him a completely lawless brat, but whether it is in *Journey to the West* or *Nezha*, the authors try to find a rational explanation for the "breaking of bones to return them to his father" behavior of the original. However, in both *Journey to the West* and *Nezha*, the authors are trying to find a rational explanation for the original story's behavior of "returning bone to father and flesh to mother," and the Dragon King and Dragon Son instead become victims of Nezha's story, standing in opposition to him, a fact that many later creators have noted and adapted (Figure 10 11).



Figure 10 Nezha's battle with Ao Binging, the son of the dragon, in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, a comic strip illustrated by Dong Tianye.
Source: Dong Tianye's comic book "Nezha's Troubles in the Sea", 1955.



Figure 11 The battle between Nezha and Ao Binging, the son of the dragon, in Jimei Kousen's "Nezha," No. 3, "Na Tcha's Trouble in the Sea."
Source: The comic strip "Nezha's Troubles in the Sea" painted by Jimei Jiuxuan, 2014

1.3.3 Nezha kills himself

In the earlier versions of *Journey to the West* and *The Complete Book of the Three Religions of Searching for the Gods*, Nezha committed suicide because of Li Jing's desire to kill him for "making trouble in the sea" and for "killing the Shi Ji Niang Niang, which triggered the retaliation of the demonic soldiers," respectively (Figure . 13 and 14), and is depicted in *The Complete Book of the Three Religions of Searching for the Gods* as "cutting off his flesh and carving out his bones in order to return the favor to his father. Journey to the West:

"When the King of Heaven realized this, he was afraid of trouble and wanted to kill him. Nezha, enraged, put his sword in his hand, cut off the flesh to return it to his mother, picked out the bones to return it to his father, returned his father's essence and mother's blood, and returned a little bit of his soul, and went to the Western World of Ultimate Bliss to tell the Buddha. (Chenen Wu, 1992)"

The Nezha, on the other hand, is based on traditional filial piety considerations and states that Nezha committed suicide on his own initiative in order to prevent his parents from suffering as a result of something he had caused, with detailed descriptions of the motives for the suicide, the process of the suicide, and even an evaluation of his behavior by the four dragon kings. The thirteenth chapter of Nezha states:

"The four sea dragon king Ao Guang, Ao Shun, Ao Ming, Ao Ji is looking at the room, only to see Nezha shouted: a person act a person when I killed Ao Bingian, I should pay for the life of the son, how can there be a child even parents of the reason! He said to Ao Guang (Dragon King): I am light, but the spirit bead is also. By the order of the Jade Hollow talisman, I should be lucky to come down to earth, I today cut open the abdomen, router, picking out bones and flesh, return to parents, not tired of parents. What do you think? If not, I'll go with you to the Spirit Heaven Hall to see the Heavenly King, I have something to say." Ao Guang heard this, also, you are so, save your parents, also have filial piety name.' The four dragon kings then released Mr. and Mrs. Li Jing. Nezha then raised his sword in his right hand, first removed one arm, then disemboweled himself, cut out his intestines and bones, dispersed his seven spirits, and returned to the spring with his life. (Z. Xu & Zhong, 1980)."

As mentioned above, this episode of cutting one's own throat comes from the Buddhist account of "Nezha removing bones and returning flesh to his father and mother as a means of enlightening his parents about the Dharma," which, while largely retaining the outlines of the Buddhist tale, is thoroughly Chineseized and Taoist-adapted in the book. Whereas in the Buddhist version, Nezha's act of returning flesh to his parents by removing bones may give the impression of some degree of unfiliality, Nezha's act of removing bones and returning flesh to his parents in order to separate himself from them is portrayed in the Nezha as a complete demonstration of filial piety. However, this "filial piety" leads to the cutting of one's own throat, which is forced by the Dragon King, and is therefore interpreted by many as a revolt against patriarchal authority, and how this is interpreted is always at the heart of Nezha's cutting of his own throat (A. Xu, 2023), which will not be discussed here (Figure 12 13).



Figure 12 Nezha cutting his own throat in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, a comic strip illustrated by Dong Tianye.
Source: Dong Tianye's comic book "Nezha's Troubles in the Sea", 1955.



Figure 13 King, a comic strip illustrated by Chen Shifa.
Source: Chen Shifa's comic book "Nezha's Troubles in the Sea", 1981.

1.3.4 Lotus Resurrection

After Nezha killed himself, his body was resurrected in the form of a lotus flower (Figure . 15 and 16). In *The Complete Book of the Three Religions and Searches for Gods*, it is said that "The World Honored One" made a lotus root for bone, a lotus root for flesh, a lotus root for shin, and a leaf for a garment, and then gave birth. Eventually, Nezha was appointed by the Jade Emperor as the "First Chief of the Thirty-Six Ambassadors", the "World Honored One" in this case being the Buddhist Buddha Rulai, who also remodeled Nezha's body in *Journey to the West*. Unlike the "Lotus Root for Bones, Lotus Leaf for Clothes", "Journey to the West" explicitly mentions Nezha's patricide for the first time, "[Nezha] later wanted to kill the King of Heaven to avenge the killing of his bones", and the Buddha gives Li Jing the "Linglong Pagoda". "With the help of the Linglong Pagoda given to Li Jing by the Buddha, Nezha establishes a father-son relationship with the Buddha and is reconciled. The narrative of Na Cha in *Journey to the West* is similar to that of Na Cha in *The Book of Searching for Gods*. Overall, the image of Nezha in *Journey to the West* is still a "form" of the fusion of Buddhism and Taoism. In Nezha, on the other hand, because of the author's stance on Taoism and Buddhism, the person who resurrects Nezha becomes his master, the Taoist deity Taiyiimmortal, and the material used is an additional jindan, as well as the Taoist concept of the three souls and seven spirits. wrote:

"(Tai Yi immortal) told the Jin Xia child: 'Take two branches of the lotus flower from the Five Lotus Pond, and three leaves from the flower.' The child busy took the lotus leaves, lotus flowers, put on the ground. The real person will be flowers into petals, spread into three, and the lotus leaf stalks folded into three hundred bones, three lotus leaves, according to the top, according to the bottom, according to heaven and earth and people. The real man put a golden elixir in the center of the house, the law with the first heaven, the nine revolutions of the qi, separating the dragon, kan and tiger, nicked Nezha's soul, looking at the lotus, and pushed it, drinking: 'Nezha is not in human form, what to wait for! A loud bang was heard, and a man jumped up, with a face like powder, lips like vermilion, eyes shining brightly, and a length of oNezhang six feet, the lotus flower incarnation of Nezha. (Z. Xu & Zhong, 1980)"

Current research generally links the resurrection of Nezha to Indian fertility worship, and the image of Nezha preaching to his parents from a lotus flower after committing suicide is also depicted in *The Five Lamps of the Huiyuan*, which suggests that the lotus flower is also inextricably linked to Buddhism. His birth was accompanied by the miracle of "walking on a lotus flower", and when he preached, he often sat on a "lotus throne" and adopted the "lotus sitting posture". In Chinese Buddhist art, such as the Longmen Grottoes, there is a Buddhist grotto called "Lotus Cave"; in addition, the symbolism of the lotus flower in Buddhism is extremely broad. Buddhism will be the Buddha's country called "lotus world", the monk's robe is called "lotus clothes", the temple is regarded as "lotus house", the cap is called "lotus lamp", and the folding of the hands is called "lotus lamp". The Buddhist cap is called the "lotus lamp", and the gesture of putting one's hands together is called the "lotus clap", and there is also a special classic in Mahayana Buddhism called the "Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Dharma". In traditional East Asian culture, the lotus flower is often regarded as a symbol of the female yin, signifying the worship of female reproduction

and the wish for many children and good fortune. The similarity between the petals of the lotus flower and the female reproductive organs has made it a symbol of strength and fertility. Since ancient times, the lotus flower has been endowed with the sacred function of "giving birth to children in the lotus flower," and the Great Mother Goddess is a representative of this belief.

The association of Nezha with the lotus flower is therefore of profound cultural significance. After Nezha accomplished the feat of returning his father's bones and mother's flesh, whether he was rescued by Shizun or Taiyiimmortal, Nezha was ultimately reborn through the lotus root. The choice of the lotus flower as the medium for Nezha's rebirth is a creative display, but more importantly, it allows Nezha to complete his rebirth as a fatherless and motherless free man, completely free from the constraints of feudal ethics and morality, at a time when Nezha has severed his ties with his parents and has physically "died"(Figure 14 15). He becomes a fatherless and motherless free man, completely free from the constraints of feudal ethics and morality.



Figure 14 Nezha's Lotus Resurrection in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, a comic strip illustrated by Dong Tianye.

Source: Dong Tianye's comic book "Nezha's Troubles in the Sea", 1955.

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Figure 15 The Lotus Rebirth of Nezha in Jimei Jiu Xuan's *Nezha*, No. 3: *Nezha's Trouble with the Sea*

Source: The comic strip "Nezha's Troubles in the Sea" painted by Jimei Jiuxuan, 2014

1.3.5 Seeking revenge on the father

After his resurrection, Nezha plans to kill his father to avenge his death. The source of Nezha's hatred for his father, Li Jing, is different in *Journey to the West* and *Nezha*, in which *Journey to the West* adopts a quote from *The Triangle Book of Seals of the Gods*, which states that "The King of Heaven knew of the death of Nezha, and, fearing for future trouble, wanted to kill him", suggesting that Li Jing was intent on killing Nezha after he got into trouble, which forced him to commit suicide. In "*Journey to the West*", it is stated that Li Jing had the intention to kill Nezha after he got into trouble, which drove Nezha to commit suicide, and thus Nezha developed a hatred for Li Jing, and after his resurrection, he "wanted to kill the King of Heaven to avenge the killing of his bones", or with the help of the "Linglong Pagoda", which was given to him by Buddha, Nezha was able to kill the King of Heaven with the help of the "Linglong Pagoda". "However, with the help of the Linglong Pagoda given to him by the Buddha, Nezha takes the Buddha as his father, and the relationship between father and son is reconciled (Figure 16 17).

After his suicide in *Nezha*, Nezha should not have harbored hatred for his father, but because Li Jing destroyed his resurrection method and destroyed Nezha's palace, Nezha decided to take revenge. However, Taiyiimmortal believes that Nezha's murderous nature is too strong, and wants to temper it so that his father and son can be at peace. Then, the "Lantern Burner", who has taken the place of the World Honored One, appears on the scene and gives the Golden Linglong Pagoda, which is capable of subduing Nezha, to Li Jing, forcing Nezha to put aside his hatred. The fourteenth episode of *Nezha* reads:

"The Taoist jumped aside and raised his sleeve upwards, only to see auspicious clouds and purple mist swirling around, a thing descending downwards, covering Nezha in the Linglong Tower. The Taoist man slapped his hands on the

tower, and the tower burst into flames, burning Nezha to the point where he screamed 'spare my life'. Outside the tower, the Taoist asked, "Nezha, do you recognize your father? Nezha could only answer: 'Master, I recognize my father. After burning Nezha with the pagoda and subduing him, the Taoist called Li Jing and said, 'Kneel down and I will teach you a golden pagoda. If Nezha refuses to obey, you can burn him with this pagoda. Nezha was beside himself, just secretly screaming. The Taoist said: 'Nezha, your father and son will be at peace from now on, and in the long run you will be a minister of the palace, assisting a wise ruler and accomplishing his rightful goal, so there is no need for you to talk about what happened in the past. (Z. Xu & Zhong, 1980)'"

The Lantern Burning Taoist awarded a pagoda to Li Jing in order to uphold the human relationship in feudal society. Once again, the author emphasizes the traditional notion of filial piety, which allows Nezha to return to the fold. All of these spiritual stories, which have been transposed, have strong Taoist and Confucian overtones and a native Chinese flavor.



Figure 16 Nezha seeking revenge on his father in the comic strip "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King" illustrated by Dong Tianye.

Source: Dong Tianye's comic book "Nezha's Troubles in the Sea", 1955.

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Figure 17 Nezha seeks revenge on his father in Jimei Jiu Xuan's "Nezha" No.3 "Na Cha's Trouble in the Sea".

Source: The comic strip "Nezha's Troubles in the Sea" painted by Jimei Jiuxuan, 2014

By analyzing the motifs of Nezha, it is possible to categorize the typical mythological motifs in the story of Nezha that are directly related to Nezha into the following: three heads and six arms, the slaughter of the dragon's son, cutting one's own throat, the resurrection of the lotus flower, and revenge for killing one's father. In subsequent cross-media adaptations of Nezha's story, at least one of these motifs has almost always appeared. The motifs are used to express the theme of the movie or to portray the character, and the same motif may be interpreted in very different ways by different creators. In some cases, the Nezha motif has been altered to create a distorted version of the motif.

Part II Nezha and Chinese Animation

In his book *Philosophy of Art*, German scholar Schelling suggests that "myth is the necessary precondition and fundamental material of all art (Jiyao, 2009)." While this view may give myths a very high rating, it does emphasize the centrality of myths in artistic creation. The "highly hypothetical" nature of animation allows the Nezha theme to complement the progression of mythological animation - the strange and mysterious world depicted in the story of Nezha provides a rich and deep foundation for the creation of mythological animation; At the same time, the advanced technology integrated into the art of animation has given Nezha's theme the vitality and charm of a new era.

2.1 The Nezha Motif

Although Chinese mythological narratives are often set in the distant primitive period, digging deeper behind these myths, we find that their spiritual essence touches on the eternal issues of human society. For example, the stories of Pangu's opening of the heavens and Nuwa's mending of the sky explore the theme of survival; Jingwei's reclamation of the sea and Yugong's removal of the mountain demonstrate the

perseverance to fight against struggles; the war between the Yellow Emperor and Chiyu reveals the theme of conflict and battle; the love story of the Cowherd and the Weaving Maiden explores the power of love; and the stories of Nezha's "picking out the bones to return to his father and analyzing the meat to return to his mother," as well as the story of Shenxiang's rescue of his mother by splitting the mountain, discuss ethics and morality in depth. The love story of Nezha "picking out bones to return to his father and flesh to his mother" and the story of Sinkiang splitting the mountain to save his mother are in-depth discussions of ethics and morality. These stories revolve around life and death, war and peace, freedom and bondage, emotions and morality. These profound mythological themes have not only traversed the long course of human art development, but also become the "necessary conditions" and "original materials" for animation art creation. They provide a rich and profound material pool for animation works based on mythological themes, enabling such works to tell fascinating stories and at the same time deeply reflect and explore the spiritual pursuit and values shared by human beings.

Nezha's theme is based on a complex and varied worldview, in which the historical background of the feudal dynasty and the interactions between gods, humans, demons and devils form a vivid fantasy picture, providing a rich plot and a wide range of choices for animated film creation. From a macro point of view, the story of Nezha is embedded in a narrative that covers the fate of the family and the country, and shows the major issues concerning the country and society. From a microcosmic perspective, it touches on areas such as family ethics and the bond between master and disciple, encompassing the universal emotional experience of human beings. As Joseph Campbell, an American master of mythology, pointed out in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, "Myths are not actually Legends about gods alone; at their core they tell the story of humanity itself (Joseph & Campbell, 2000)." The deeper themes of myth are not limited to describing the order and emotions of the world of the gods; their fundamental purpose is to explore the state of being of human beings themselves, as well as the attitudes and insights that people have toward the world and natural universe in which they live.

For the creation of animated films on mythological themes, the adaptation of Nezha's story not only ensures that the work attracts initial audience attention, but also provides a platform for emotional resonance with the audience. Take *Nezha Reborn*, directed by Zhao Ji, for example. Although the film expands the setting of Nezha's story to modern times and introduces modern concepts of morality, ethics and law, the core of the film is still very popular and recognized by the audience. As the embodiment of a nation's collective unconscious, myths carry the cultural DNA of that nation and serve as a bridge and link for cultural exchange. Viewers tend to compensate psychologically based on their own experience and cultural background when watching animation on the theme of Nezha, thus quickly gaining psychological recognition and emotional resonance. Therefore, the creation of animation based on the story of Nezha is essentially a continuation and presentation of the common psychological foundation and experience inherent in the nation.

2.2 Mythological Animation

Myth occupies an extremely important position in human culture and art creation, and its transmission method gradually evolves with the evolution of the times, from the initial oral tradition and ritual celebration, to written records, theatrical performances, and then to the modern film and television transmission, each step has witnessed the far-reaching influence of myth inheritance. In this process of evolution, animation art, as a modern communication medium of mythological stories, has become an ideal form close to the fantasy nature of mythological art with its unique technical means and rich imagination.

The strong subjectivity of animation creation is almost entirely a reflection of the creator's personal consciousness, which coincides with the core quality of "self-fantasy" in mythology. The match between animation and mythological thinking provides a more intuitive and vivid expression of the traditional mythological concept of "all things have spirits". Take the contemporary animation with mythological themes as an example, such as the coexistence of foxes, dragons, snakes, monkeys and other mysterious creatures with human beings, which not only shows the "human flavor" of the alien world, but also reflects the creator's profound thinking about the social reality, and it is a kind of "self-fantasy" artistic expression. It is a kind of "self-fantasy" artistic expression.

The art of animation is undoubtedly the best vehicle for the transmission of the story of Nezha. Relying on special effects technology, animation creates a high degree of freedom, enabling the realization of plots and effects that would be difficult to achieve in live action, as well as presenting the wonders of the mythological world in a unique visual way. Mythological animation provides an ideal platform for the story of Nezha, in which the narrative space is free to travel through time and space, and the characters are free to move between the three worlds, which is perfectly suited to the worldview of the story of Nezha. Through the modern reimagining of the traditional Nezha story, animation creators have found new ways of expression and vitality for this classic tale in contemporary society, revealing a new vitality and charm.

As French philosopher Michel Foucault pointed out, "It is not the era in which the myth is told that matters, but the era in which it is told (Murray, 2003)." Animation creators, with the values of modern society and personal life experiences, have innovatively deconstructed and reorganized the traditional mythological story of Nezha. This creative process not only injects new vitality into the traditional story of Nezha, but also demonstrates the deep textual tension and vast life space of the Nezha story itself. Through such innovation and reimagining, the story of Nezha is able to transcend time and space, presenting itself in a new light to contemporary audiences, and allowing this ancient mythological character to take on a new luster in modern culture.

2.3 Nezha Animation

As a cultural trend formed at the end of the twentieth century, New Mythicism highlights the desire for a return to traditional culture and the cultural self-consciousness to reflect deeply on civilization. Scholar Dinan Xie provided a clear articulation of the definition of New Mythicism in 2004: "It is a cultural wave that emerged in the mid-to-late 1990s, based on technological developments (especially film special effects and computer technology), characterized by fantasy, drawing on traditional fantasy works, and with the ultimate goal of commercial gain and spiritual consumption. The new mythicism is a product of the symbiosis of multimedia (including literature, film, television, animation, painting, computers and the Internet) and constitutes an important part of popular culture. (Dinan, 2005) "This definition clarifies consumption and technology as the key attributes of neo-mythicism, and at the same time reveals how it fuses traditional mythological elements with popular media to create new cultural forms and expressions designed to meet the commercial and spiritual needs of modern society, neo-mythicism has become a popular culture that has been through mass media widely disseminated.

Ye Shuxian, a renowned mythologist in China, holds a keen interest in New Mythicism and has further elaborated and supplemented it on the basis of the definition of the scholar Tse Dinan. In his book, *A Compendium of East-West Cultural Roots*, Ye Shuxian gives a profound definition of New Mythicism: "It is a cultural trend that was birthed at the end of the twentieth century, and to some extent it reflects a value orientation in Western cultural thought at the turn of the century. New Mythicism is both a product of the cultural industry and cultural consumption of modernity, and at the same time, in terms of values, it expresses a rebellion against Western capitalism and modernity's way of life, and calls for a return to, and revival of, those aspirations that belong to the world of primitivist fantasies such as myths, sorcery, magic, and fairy tales (Shuxian, 2003)." Through this definition, Ye Shuxian not only reveals the connotation of New Mythicism as a cultural phenomenon, but also points out the cultural value and social significance it represents, emphasizing its importance and influence in contemporary society.

With the advent of the 21st century and the rapid development of modern culture industry and mass media, traditional mythological stories are transformed into an important cultural asset in the creative industry. Through the recoding of traditional mythological stories and resources, the new mythological animation activates the collective symbols hidden in the depths of national memory, revitalizes traditional myths in modern popular culture, and spreads modern values and ideologies. Specifically, "New Mythicism" highlights the historical review of traditional culture and concepts in modern society, reflecting a cultural concern deeply rooted in tradition.

As some scholars have pointed out, "New Mythicism constructs a new set of order and law in the spatio-temporal context of myth through the systematic integration of high generalization and emotional rendering (Zexi & Zhihao, 2021)." In such a cultural trend, Nezha animation has become an integral part of popular media culture. Based on a modern interpretation of the classic Nezha motif, it realizes a deep fusion of the traditional mythological "source text" and contemporary aesthetic

concepts from the perspective of contemporary people's emotional experience and values, and becomes an innovative form of reproduction of real life.

Part III The History of Nezha Animation in China

China's animation pioneers realized early on the advantages and feasibility of mythology as a subject matter for animation, and the animation of Nezha has gone through half a century of development and evolution, and has always been in a process of continuous improvement, enrichment, and innovation. With the debut of Nezha in the 1961 film *The Greatest Havoc in the Palace of Heaven*, his brilliant portrayal as the main character in the 1979 animated series *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King* as the title character, to the portrayal of the stylish Nezha in the 1999 animated series *The Legend Of Nezha* and *The Legend Of The Sealed God*, and the 2014 animated film *One Hundred Thousand and BadJokes* (hereafter referred to as *BadJokes*), which featured the subversive Nezha until the unprecedented success of 2019's *Birth of the Demon Child* ("Birth of the Demon Child"), and the urban teenager who appeared in the subsequent *Nezha Reborn* ("Nezha Reborn"), Nezha has shown a new face in each period of time. Combined with the Nezha animations that appear in the *History of Chinese Animation* edited by Prof. Sun Lijun, President of the China Film Academy (L. Sun, 2018), we can discover the pivotal position of Nezha animation in the history of Chinese animation.

3.1 Founding of New China (1949-1977)

Animation was first a cultural commodity to satisfy adult entertainment. The world's first animated film produced by American Blackton, "The Humorous Phase of Funny Face," featured a portrayal of a gentleman spitting smoke rings at a lady, and the first animation to produce commercial benefits, "Gertie the Dinosaur," was part of a song-and-dance vaudeville show that was later purchased by movie theaters. And unlike for-profit Western animation, Chinese cartoons during the early planned economy were purchased and sold by the state with uniformly defined production targets. This allowed creators to dive into their creations without the pressure of revenue, exploring in the direction of folk art and folktales, forming a self-contained art film with Chinese characteristics (T. li, 2017).

With the founding of New China in 1949, the establishment of Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio in 1957, and the central government's policy of "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend", Chinese animation ushered in its first creative peak. During this period, various masters began to try their hand at animation creation. In 1957, Te Wei, the director of Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio, put forward the slogan of "knocking on the door of comedy style and exploring the road of national forms", which laid down the basic idea of the Chinese school of animation. Early animation creators were masters of many arts. They incorporated traditional Chinese folk crafts such as paper-cutting, puppetry, ink and so on into animation, forming a unique Chinese art film, which is regarded as a unique and national form of film in Chinese visual history. It conceptualized and integrated ethnicity and national style, forming a discourse-based aesthetic genre that allowed it to survive and develop in the cultural and political context of socialism (W. Wu, 2009). Within the first eight years of its existence, the Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio produced a total of 105 films, including 40 animation films, 37 puppet films,

16 paper-cutting films, 3 origami films, and puppet documentaries (D. Li, 2005), which significantly raised the artistic level of Chinese animation works.

Through the flexible application and continuous innovation of traditional artistic techniques such as ink, shadow, opera and paper-cutting, a series of outstanding animation shorts full of strong Chinese style have been born. These works, such as the paper-cut animation "Porky Pig Eating Watermelon", "Fisherman's Boy" and the ink animation "Shepherd Boy", etc., show the unique charm of Chinese animation art, of which "The Great Fool's Palace" is regarded as the masterpiece of this period. In the international context, the late 1950s marked the period of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War, a period when the United States, as the representative of the capitalist camp, and the Soviet Union, as the representative of the socialist world, began to compete on a global scale, and the newly established socialist state of China naturally faced isolation and confrontation from the capitalist camp. At the same time, China's relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated against the backdrop of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Despite such a difficult domestic and international environment, China insisted on maintaining its uniqueness and independence from being knocked down by external powers. It was against this complex domestic and international environment and the backdrop of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War that "The Greatest Showman" was created.

Created by the Wan Brothers between 1961 and 1964, The Great Pandemonium became a milestone in the history of Chinese animation, and is by far the most award-winning and award-winning Chinese animated film¹. The animated film centers on the legend of the Monkey King, in which Nezha plays a supporting role as a typical animated folk doll with a big head, equipped with a wind and fire wheel, a mixed heavenly damask, a qiankun ring, and a fire-tipped spear, representing the forces of Heaven - often seen as the villain. Nezha's duels with the Monkey King are cleverly designed to showcase his slightly awkward and comical fighting style, such as the scene in the film where Nezha gets his feet burned, which is slightly comical but aptly reflects his status as a child. Nezha's animation is inspired by Chinese New Year's paintings and theater faces, and is full of ethnic flavor (Figure 18). In their published article, "Talking about Cartoons," the Wan Brothers mentioned that animation should not only entertain the audience, but should also have educational significance, and emphasized the importance of developing national animation with Chinese characteristics. This laid the foundation of indoctrination for Chinese animation (Wan, 1935).

However, the upcoming "Cultural Revolution" seriously affected the development of Chinese animation. The development of Chinese animation was hindered and slowed down. After the end of the "Cultural Revolution", a hundred flowers opened up, and China's animation industry ushered in its second spring. Chinese animators put themselves into animation creation with greater enthusiasm, adhering to the previous "national style" road, and making new development in the content of the theme, art form and production techniques, etc., and achieved gratifying

¹ The Great Follower of Heaven won the Hundred Flowers Award at the Second Chinese Film Festival in 1963, the Special Prize for Short Films at the 13th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in Czechoslovakia in 1962, the Special Prize for Short Films at the 13th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 1962, the Best Film Award at the 22nd London International Film Festival in 1978, the First Prize of the Second Jury of the National Children's and Young People's Artistic and Literary Creation in 1980, the Third Prize of the Fifth Quito International Children's Film Festival in Ecuador, and the Jury Prize of the 12th Filafoz International Film Festival in Portugal. Third Prize, Fifth Quito International Children's Film Festival, Ecuador; Jury Prize, Twelfth Figueireda Foz International Film Festival, Portugal.

results. In the past "national style" road, in the subject matter content, art form and production skills and other aspects of the new development, and achieved gratifying results.



Figure 18 Poster for the animation "The Greatest Showman"
Source: <https://movie.douban.com/photos/photo/2560760743/>, 1964

3.2 Early Reform and Development Period (1978-1988)

In October 1976, the "Cultural Revolution" ended. A large number of film creators from the dry school back to the factory, they are more full of enthusiasm and actively involved in new creations, China's animation industry began to recover, in just 2 years, Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio launched a dozen animated films. According to Yan Dingxian's memories, "After the Cultural Revolution, the enthusiasm and passion for artistic creation that had been suppressed for 10 years burst out, and was so happy that Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio was the happiest time to live that time. (L. Sun, 2018)"

In December 1978, the party's third plenum of the eleventh central committee was held, re-established the ideological line of emancipation of the mind, seeking truth from facts, from which China entered the reform and opening up of the rapid development of the economy, the animation creation has also entered the second climax, animation theme from the exploration of national style to the national theme of the in-depth excavation of the creation of the various kinds of films harvested a lot of money, the birth of a series of outstanding works, such as "Golden Monkey Smiting the Demon", "Ginseng Fruit" animated movie, as well as "Snow Child", "Three Children" and other short films, as well as "Black Cat Sheriff", "The Story of Avanti" and other TV animations. Among these works, "Prince Nezha's Triumph

"Against Dragon King" is particularly remarkable, not only becoming another peak in the history of Chinese animation, but also carrying a special significance for its release - to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the founding of New China, Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio specially produced this film as a tribute. In celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of China, Shanghai Art Film Studio produced the film as a tribute, bringing the character of Nezha to the stage for the first time as a leading character. Thanks to the relaxed creative environment and political context in China at the time, Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King not only demonstrated high artistic value and won various international awards², but also became a milestone work in Chinese animation.

Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, released in 1979, was not only an outstanding color animated film, but also became China's first large-scale color widescreen animated feature film, in which Nezha portrayed a handsome adolescent with his slender physique, pillbox hairstyle, and red bib get-up (Figure 19). Though inheriting the artistic style of The Palace of Heaven, the story structure of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King is subdivided into "coming out of the world", "making trouble in the sea", "killing himself", and "killing himself", "Cutting Your Own Throat," "Rebirth," and "Revenge," with "Cutting Your Own Throat" in particular being the climax of the story. In particular, the "killing" section becomes the climax of the plot. In order to emphasize Nezha's heroic image, the film portrays the Dragon King as a negative character, and his eating of boys and girls provides the plot justification for Nezha's "killing himself". The movie deeply depicts the conflict and class struggle between Nezha and the Dragon Palace, showing his courage and sacrifice in the face of power and oppression. After "cutting his own throat", Nezha completes his transformation from man to god, and his body, which is remodeled with lotus root, symbolizes that he is free from the bondage of mortals and has become a minor god with sacred responsibilities and missions, successfully portraying a character with deep symbolic meaning (L. Sun, 2018).

This is the first time that Nezha has appeared as an animated protagonist in Nezha, and its own parent theme has undergone a number of adaptations, not least of which is the innovative adaptation that, while faithfully reflecting the spirit of the source material, transforms the mischievous Nezha of the original into a hero who is both naïve and lovable, yet also formidable and powerful. In this film, Nezha is reborn from a lotus-shaped ball of flesh, an adaptation that not only gives Nezha's killing of Ao Bingian a more righteous interpretation, but also makes Nezha's heroism even more distinctive when Ao Bingian is portrayed as the embodiment of evil forces.

The mischievous and even mischievous side of Nezha's portrayal is still present in the film - his reverence for life and understanding of the human condition seem to be missing. However, the adaptation of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King transforms the arrogant and pompous portrayal of Nezha in Nezha, so that all the conflicts have a rational cause. Instead of being a child who causes trouble for no apparent reason, Nezha is transformed into a hero who seeks justice for the people and restores peace in the world. The confrontation with the Dragon Palace is

² Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King" won the Best Animated Film at the Hundred Flowers Award of Popular Cinema in 1980, the 1979 Outstanding Film Award of the Ministry of Culture in 1979, the Special Prize at the Manila International Film Festival of the Philippines in 1983, and the Jury Prize at the Junior International Animated Film Festival of the Club de la Culture de Bourboulas in France in 1988.

also due to the Dragon Palace's disregard for the lives and deaths of the people, which has led to the suffering of innocent people.

In addition, the revenge plot for his father's death was removed from the movie, as was the part where he fights with Nyonya Shiji and is suppressed by the Lantern Burner with the Linglong Pagoda, making Nezha's portrayal of the character more focused on showing a righteous hero rather than just an urchin with supernatural powers.

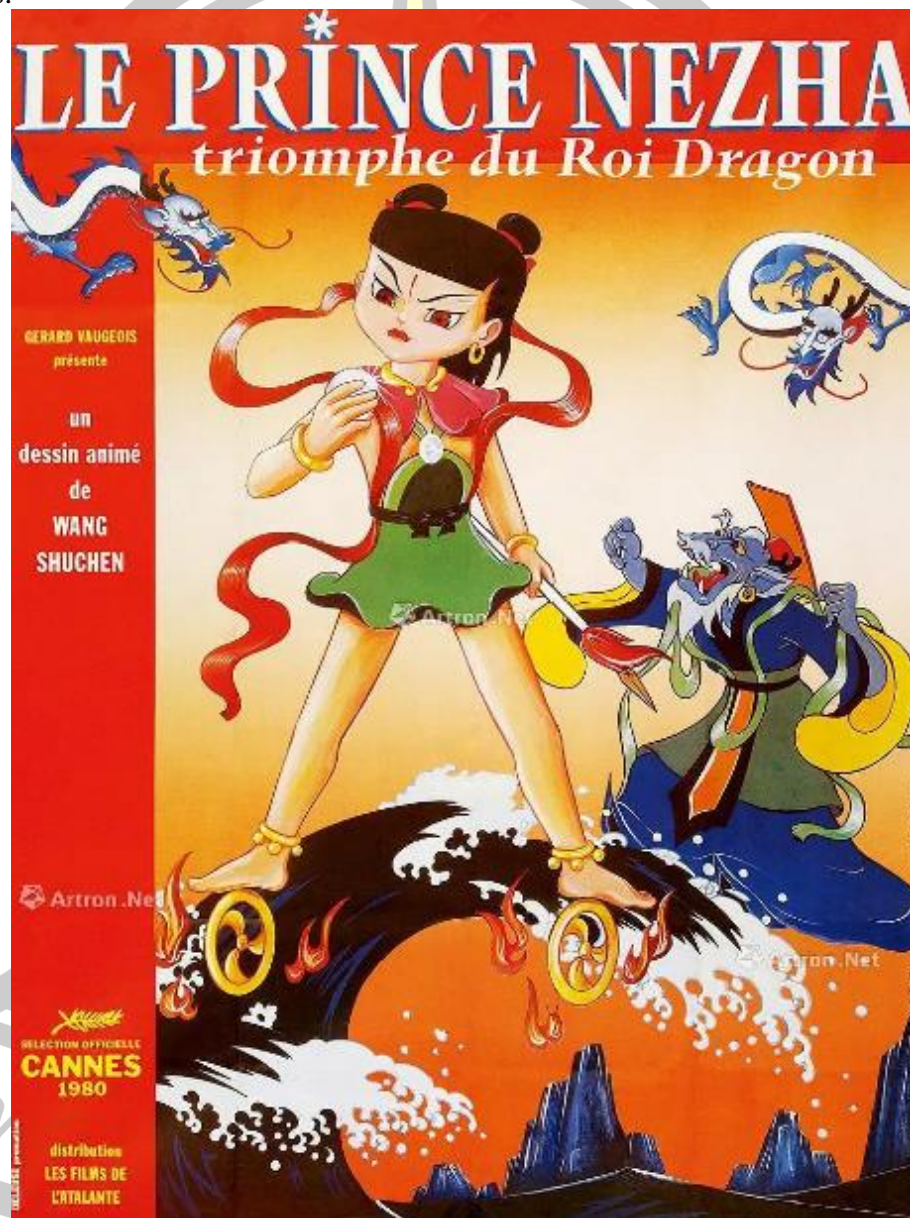


Figure 19 French poster for the animation Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King

Source: <https://movie.douban.com/photos/photo/2366619165/>, 1979

3.3 Before and after the new century (1989-2003)

From the late 1980s to the late 1990s, people's living standards improved, and their interest in movie watching and consumer attitudes changed. The great popularity of television increased the demand for animated films, the broadcast of foreign animated films and animation talents went south to increase the difficulty of animation creation, and at the same time catalyzed the introduction of government support policies and the transformation of enterprises, and Chinese animation began to seek close integration with the market.

The gradual maturity of digital technology makes the cost of animation production greatly reduced, and the movie production technology of animation works also begins to advance by leaps and bounds, and one of the remarkable trends is the rise of large-scale animation serial series. At the same time, Chinese animation in this period was significantly impacted, mainly due to the introduction of a large number of European, American and Japanese animation, such as "Astro Boy" and "Flower Fairy", etc. It is especially worth mentioning that the introduction of a large number of Japanese animation into China has had a far-reaching impact on the creation of local animation. For example, the introduction of "Saint Seiya" triggered a Saint Seiya craze in China. This also made the domestic animation industry began to be sidelined, in order to cope with this wave of globalization brought about by the cultural impact of China's nationalist thinking once again, the CCTV, Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio and other national enterprises, through the traditional literary works of the story kernel of the borrowing, to explore the more profound cultural spirit behind it, focusing on film and television animation function of edutainment and entertainment, before and after the year 2000 to create the Around the year 2000, the company created such animated films as "Po Lin Lantern", "Journey to the West", "The Legend Of Nezha", "The Legend of Feng Shen Bang", and so on. The Legend Of Nezha", "The Legend Of Feng Shen Bang" and other Chinese Legends animation works.

The introduction of foreign animated films not only broke the original pattern of China's animation market, but also inspired the Chinese animation industry to break the routine, try and explore new paths. During this period, many Chinese animation works tended to adopt the Japanese animation style, such as The Legend of Fengshenbang and I'm a Song Maniac, etc. The two animation films produced in 1999 involving the image of Nezha, Journey to the West, combined with traditional Chinese culture, and The Legend of Fengshenbang, fused with the Japanese animation style, demonstrated a very different creative direction. The two animated films produced during 1999, "Journey to the West" and "The Legend of the Feng Shen Bang", combined with traditional Chinese culture and Japanese animation styles, demonstrated different creative directions. The story of Nezha and the image of Nezha have once again been summoned to the new era as a powerful weapon in the fight against China's foreign cultural imports.

The animated version of Journey to the West, released in 1999, was created by director Fong Yun-nam and contains 52 episodes. In this version, Nezha plays an important role in episodes 25, "Wukong Meets the Monster", and 26, "Conquering the Red Child". These two episodes tell the story of Red Child, a self-appointed king of the mountain, who disguises himself as a suffering child to deceive the Longevity Monk in order to obtain his immortality flesh, and as a result, captures the Longevity Monk. Sun Wukong goes to rescue him but meets with setbacks. After many

unsuccessful attempts, he turns to Guanyin and eventually uses the lotus seat to lure Red Child into submission to Guanyin and to Mount Putuo. The animated character of Nezha is lively and mischievous, not just as a background character for the Monkey King, but also as an independent personality and thinker, which makes the character of Nezha even more distinctive and vivid.

The Legend of the Seal of the Gods, also known as King Kong Nezha, was the first Chinese animation to be digitally computerized in 1999, and was based on the book Nezha. Unlike his previous childlike counterparts, Nezha grows to adulthood in this film, still armed with his magic weaponry of the Mixed Heavenly Aya, the Qiankun Circle, the Wind Fire Wheel, and the Fire Tip Lance, and is portrayed in the Japanese anime style of Saints' Row (Figure 20). The story focuses on Nezha's heroic deeds of loyalty to the Zhou Dynasty and his rebellion against King Zhou, representing justice. This change is an innovative exploration of Nezha's animated image, connecting it to contemporary culture and creating an image of Nezha unique to that era.



Figure 20 Poster for the animated "Legend of the Seal"

Source: <https://movie.douban.com/photos/photo/2632372532/>, 1999

In the same year, the 52-episode large-scale domestic animated film Journey to the West was released, which is based on the classic literary work Journey to the West. The animation tells the story of the journey of the Tang Monk and his four disciples: the Monkey King, Porky Pig, Sha He Shang and the White Dragon Horse, who together experience the journey to the West. They encountered nine hundred and eighty-one difficulties during their journey, but eventually succeeded in obtaining the scriptures and accomplishing the right thing. Journey to the West" is a joint venture between CCTV Animation Department and China International Television Corporation (CITVC) Torch Animation Branch. The whole project lasted for six years and a lot of money was invested. More than 2,000 animation and computer technology specialists were involved in the production, and the production team abridged and modified parts of the plot in order to ensure that the cartoon was both

faithful to the original and had a modern aesthetic. Technically, the cartoon was produced using state-of-the-art computer animation software and workstations, and a non-linear computer editing system was introduced for editing and post-processing. Overall, *Journey to the West* has achieved a high level of animation through the use of advanced international animation technology, state funding, and the investment of substantial manpower and material resources. Nezha, who appears in the film, is a supporting character, but his tanned skin, which is different from that of previous Nezha's, is impressive, and his fights with the main character, the Monkey King, are also exceptionally exciting.

As China entered the 21st century, it ushered in a new era of the "Rise of the Great Powers"; in 2001, China successfully joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) after lengthy negotiations; and the development of the television medium played a crucial role in the animation field. By the end of 2000, the three-year "Broadcasting and Television Village-to-Village" project was successfully completed, and thanks to the 320 million yuan of financial support from the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) and the State Planning Commission (SPC), together with more than 1.3 billion yuan of matching investment from local governments, more than 100,000 remote villages received for the first time the symbols of modern civilization! --TV signals, making the population coverage rate of TV viewers in China reach 93.41%, i.e., about 1 billion Chinese people have become a regular TV viewer group (L. Sun, 2018). The popularity of television has created a unique audience base for it, and it has become a popular trend for the whole family to sit around and watch television, and the rapid development of television is also changing people's thinking mode. Compared with the same period of the movie, the TV series shows a significant advantage, which paves the way for animation works to enter the TV market. With the entry of a large number of foreign low-budget animation works, the development of Chinese animation is facing challenges. The state gradually realized this problem and began to promote the development of local animation through policies and other support. Although the Chinese animation industry is still mainly located in the children's market, it has begun to focus on improving the quality of animation and is no longer limited to imitation. As a result, more and more foreign animation co-productions and animation works with Chinese characteristics were born one after another, and the number of Chinese animation enthusiasts was also growing, creating a good foundation for the Chinese animation market. By the end of 2002, many colleges and universities had opened animation majors, training a new generation of talents for the development of Chinese animation.

Launched in 2003, *The Legend Of Nezha* is not only regarded as an animation classic, but also an educational children's animation (Figure 21). In the series, Nezha's image is deeply rooted in people's hearts, remaining in the memories of a generation with his bare feet, red bib attire, Qiankun Circle and Fire Pointed Gun, Mixed Sky Aya on his waist, and Wind and Fire Wheels on his feet. *The Legend Of Nezha* portrays Nezha as a child hero whose qualities of bravery, sunshine and kindness make him a favorite, and whose childishness adds to the image's relatability. In the course of the plot, Nezha, with the help of his friends, successfully overcomes obstacles and foils the conspiracy of Lady Shiji through one adventure after another, presenting a childlike image of a young hero. In the face of competition from foreign

animation, this production breaks the mold by not only maintaining the traditional characteristics of the character, but also successfully constructing an image of Nezha with distinctive Chinese characteristics.

The animated film's conceptualization draws on the storytelling logic of classics such as *Journey to the West*, while introducing new plots and focusing specifically on Nezha's journey of growth. Nezha, the central character in the animation, retains his traditional characterization and is highly consistent with his portrayal in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*. What's special is the miracle of his birth three years after his mother's conception and his subsequent transformation into a ball of flesh. The movie uses Nezha's rebirth as a turning point in the story, showing two notable changes in his image. The first change comes after Nezha kills himself in the sea, a process that seems gentler than the drastic rebirth of "returning bone to father, flesh to mother". Secondly, in order to protect the people and be reborn again, Nezha bravely faced his fate and was willingly sealed in the Linglong Pagoda. With the prayers of the people and the help of Mother Nuwa, he acquires a new image with three heads and six arms, and successfully breaks free from his bondage to engage in a fierce battle with Shiji for 300 rounds, and ultimately triumphs.

The *Legend Of Nezha* centers on Nezha's duel with Shiji, a character who has been reimagined as a representative of darkness and an outright villain. In the course of his duel with Shiji, Nezha not only grows physically, but also spiritually, from a lively child to a "grown-up". This process of growth not only creates a heroic image of Nezha, but also shows his journey from mischievousness to bravery, from egoism to selflessness.

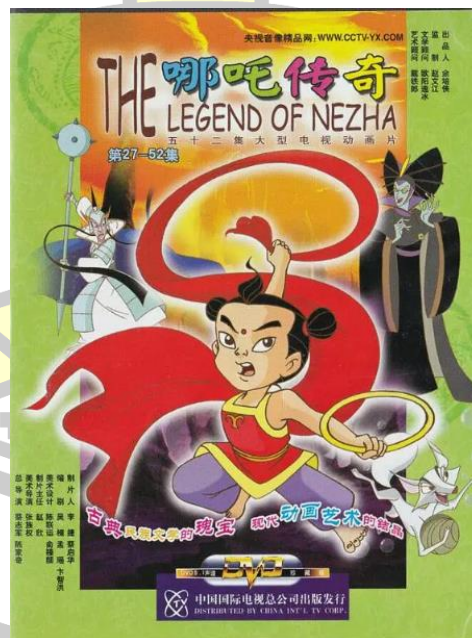


Figure 21 Poster for the anime *The Legend Of Nezha*

Source: <https://movie.douban.com/photos/photo/2355107194/>, 2003

3.4 Age of Globalization (1989-2015)

With the rapid development of globalization and increasing international cultural exchanges, the import of various cultures has had a profound impact on people's spiritual world and has also changed their outlook on life. Under such a background, how to maintain and promote the cultural characteristics and cultural identity of the nation has become an important issue that needs to be solved urgently. The rise of China has become an unstoppable trend, however, due to the long-standing imbalance between economic development and cultural progress, the development of the cultural field has been relatively lagging behind, and the wide spread of Western culture has in a short period of time caused many Chinese to fall into a daze, generating doubts and uncertainty about the value of their own national culture.

As for the animation industry, the creation of mythological animation funded by state-owned enterprises did not improve the animation market too much, and foreign animation continued to seize the market. In order to protect and develop domestic animation, the Chinese government adopted a series of policies to promote the development of the local animation industry, and at the same time, gradually restricted or even prohibited foreign animation from being broadcast on prime-time television, and could only broadcast domestic animation (X. WU, 2006). The Chinese animation industry has been in a state of flux since the early 1990s. Chinese animation, due to the lack of experience in marketization, the animation invested and produced by private animation companies has suffered a serious decline in terms of technology and subject matter, "(2015) The king of survival for domestic animation in the past was to compress the production cost under the government subsidy, so the creators would have a brainwave to cut the cost (Jiao, 2019) ", animation movies of all kinds of themes competed with each other, however, although the number of domestic animation works created has multiplied, they are all low-age animation and science animation with the theme of fantasy and adventure, but the quality of the works began to plummet. The animation about mythological theme was stagnant, and there were only a few works such as "A Porky Pig Falling from the Sky", etc. From then on, China's TV animation refused the orientation and direction of "animation for all ages" from "Dazhuangtiangong" to "Nazha Haunts the Sea", and the concept of creation in face of the market profit was gradually far away from the original intention of artistic creation, and it began to move towards the road of commercialization, and from then on, it moved towards the low-age animation. From then on, it went towards the creation of low-age animation works.

At the same time, with the rise of the Internet, the dominant position of traditional mass media has been shaken, and the Internet has quickly taken over the "absolute" position of traditional media in terms of influence by virtue of its technological advantage of providing voice to the general audience. David Harold compares China's Internet society to the carnival described by Bakhtin, emphasizing the shaping of a new order to challenge the original serious order (Herold & Marolt, 2010). At this time, China's online video platforms are gradually becoming formalized and licensed, but native Internet content is still scarce.

In July 2012, the first season of the webtoon One Hundred Thousand and BadJokes aired (Figure 22), an animation based on a manga that consists of a series of

nonsensical and hilarious short stories that are independent of each other, but with a subtle relationship, and a language that is very much in line with the needs of netizens, and which feature images of Nezha, Pinocchio, Huluwa, etc. The first episode of the animation is based on the origin of Nezha in Nezha. The first episode of the animation is based on the origins of Nezha in the Nezha, and the adventures of Li Jing at the Chen Tang Pass when he learns that his wife has given birth to Nezha. The short four-minute film has gained unprecedented attention, and the total number of broadcasts of the animation quickly exceeded 10 million in three days after it went viral, and the first season of the animation had a high viewership of 1.7 billion, with an average of 90 million clicks on a single episode. The first season of the animation was viewed 1.7 billion times, with an average of 90 million clicks on a single episode. Although One Hundred Thousand and BadJokes is not the first network animation series, in the opinion of many people, the birth of this animation opened the curtain of China's network animation development, triggered the attention of all walks of life, explored the business model, and had a far-reaching impact on China's animation. 2014 One Hundred Thousand and BadJokes movie was released. One Hundred Thousand and BadJokes" movie was released in 2014, which is the first of its kind in China's network animation. The crowdfunding of more than 5,000 investors demonstrated the possibility of profitability when animation improves its quality, promoting a virtuous cycle in the industry (Anim-babblers, 2022).



Figure 22 Poster for the anime One Hundred Thousand and BadJokes
Source: <https://movie.douban.com/photos/photo/2196724075/>, 2012

At the same time, some new forms of animation have also begun to appear on the Internet, and a type of animation known as "kumihimo", which refers to animation that is very short in length in a single episode, has begun to gain popularity rapidly. They usually consist of three to six minutes of content, which is the equivalent of making a cup of instant noodles. When the viewer finishes making the noodles, the anime often ends. The characteristics of anime are that they are short and concise, the plots are usually quirky or light-hearted, and they are relatively inexpensive to produce. This type of animation often originates from four-panel manga, and some works are quite popular and sell well despite their short duration (Baiké, 2024). In the fast-paced lifestyle of today's society, this short and entertaining form of animation is extremely accessible to viewers. Viewers are able to finish watching an episode in just three to five minutes of leisure time, making it an effective means of killing time, as represented by the web-based animation *Inhumanity*.

The original four-panel manga created by Iwang Air, with over one billion readers, was adapted into an animation that aired on the BILIBILI platform in July 2021, with a wide range of cerebral, laugh-out-loud, and adorable characters, showing the hilarious daily life of Chinese gods and demons in the contemporary world (Figure 23).¹ The animation is a "bubble-fan" animation that is difficult to match with other genres. As a kind of "bubble-fan" animation, "Not Human" shows a unique affinity that is hard to compare with other types of animation. It stands out for its fresh graphic style and brisk pace, avoiding clichéd internet segments and completely shunning gory and violent content. What's even more noteworthy is the innovative setting: the anime focuses on monsters living in modern society, an appealing collision of mythological characters with modern life. For anime fans, *Inhumanity*, while not an informative masterpiece, can be seen as a delicate little dish. Despite its attempts at plot innovation, *Inhumanity*'s loose narrative structure results in a lack of animation depth and shallow emotional connections between characters. This subtle expression of emotion makes it difficult for the audience to deeply empathize with the characters in the show.





Figure 23 Poster for the anime "Inhumanity"

Source: <https://movie.douban.com/photos/photo/2516725095/>, 2018

3.5 Postmodern period (2017-present)

Currently there are more studies on Chinese animation for the post-2017 period, but they have not yet reached a consensus in the academic community. After the success of *The Return of the Great Sage* and *Birth of the Demon Child*, Chinese animation has entered a new period of development, and many researchers have studied animation in this period in a postmodern context, as pointed out by Wu Zitian:

"Originating as a rebellion against modernism, a subversion, dissolution, and reconstruction of the established order, postmodernism is both a critical and reflexive stance as well as anti-traditional, anti-authoritarian, and elitist in its dissolution (Zitian, 2020)."

During this period, in addition to mythological animation, there were also the birth of animations including *100,000 Leagues in Chang'an* and other animations based on Chinese history with a distinctly national character, and animated works centered on mythological or national themes such as *Inhumanity* and *That Year That Rabbit* appeared in the Internet, achieving good box office and clicks, and gaining the recognition of the audience. Marking the beginning of this phase were two animated films, *Journey to the West's Return of the Great Sage*, released in 2017, and *Birth of the Demon Child*, released in 2019, which achieved phenomenal commercial success, directly contributing to the transformation of China's animation industry and renewed interest in China's mythological Legends.

A major watershed in contemporary Chinese animation, 2017's *Journey to the West's Return of the Great Sage* tells the story of Sun Wukong (the Great Sage), who regains his freedom after being sealed for 500 years and joins forces with a young boy, Jiang Liu'er, and a number of new friends, to fight against the forces of evil and

protect the innocent. The movie is inspired by the Monkey King from the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, but with an innovative and reinterpreted storyline and characterization. *The Return of the Great Sage* was widely acclaimed by audiences for its beautiful animation, profound emotional expression and modern interpretation of traditional culture. Audiences spontaneously recommended and publicized the animation on the Internet without its full publicity, which directly contributed to an increase in the filming rate of the animation, and ultimately resulted in a gratifying box office of RMB 956 million.

In 2019, *Birth of the Demon Child* (Figure 24) became a breakout animation movie with an unstoppable force, this animation is the commercial miracle of Chinese animation in recent years, the box office is as high as 5.2 billion RMB, ranking the top of the list of domestic animation movies, and the investment of the whole movie is only 60 million RMB, and the return on investment has reached an amazing nearly 30 times, from the perspective of business. The movie is undoubtedly a success, directly promoting the rapid development of China's animation industry again, and at the same time, this animation on behalf of the Chinese mainland was nominated for the Best International Film at the 92nd Academy Awards in 2020 (Mengyang, 2022). The film's positioning has realized a shift towards an all-ages audience. Nezha's animated reimagining defies the traditional image of a beautiful young man with a pair of "panda eyes" wearing heavy smoky makeup, hands in his pockets, and a dashing, uninhibited walk, all in the context of a film that has been nominated for the Best International Film at the 92nd Academy Awards in 2020 (Mengyang, 2022). He is a young man with thick smoky make-up and a pair of "panda eyes", hands in his pockets, walking with a bit of unrestrained style, showing a unique charm of unconventionality. The film's re-innovation of traditional culture has sublimated Nezha's image. In this movie, although Nezha seems to be closer to a villainous character in appearance, he is actually an ordinary man full of flesh and blood and rich in emotions. He sheds tears because of misunderstanding and appears stubborn because of others' lack of understanding, demonstrating a richer light of humanity. Growing up in the midst of challenges and resistance again and again, facing the misunderstandings and expectations of the outside world, he finally realizes his own metamorphosis in sacrificing himself and saving the people of Chentang Pass from danger. These profoundly depicted scenes of daily life are highly infectious and touching, establishing a closer emotional connection with the audience.

The plot of *Birth of the Demon Child* is a significant departure from the past, as the legend of Nezha is reimagined through the re-imagining of a traditional story. Centered on a three-year-old "bear child," the film is a journey of redemption for Nezha as he continues to grow up, defying his destiny and breaking prejudice. The film depicts two divine beads, the Spirit Pearl and the Demon Pill, which are very different in nature. Taiyi Zhenzha's intention is to assist the reincarnation of the Spirit Pearl and to guide its growth, but Shen Gongbao's conspiracy leads to the exchange of the Spirit Pearl and the Demon Pill, so that Nezha unwittingly becomes the reincarnation of the Demon Pill. This "ugly" Nezha, with his destructive behavior after his reincarnation, shows a kind of indifference to the people. Even with the resolute protection of Mrs. Yin and the firm commitment of Li Jing, the people of Chentang Pass reluctantly agreed to give Nezha a chance, but eventually he was imprisoned. In the local community, Nezha is both discriminated against and feared as

a magical child. In the drama, Nezha is confused and vulnerable. As a demonic child, he faces rejection from the people of Chentang Pass and grows up alone, with no real companions, only the alienation of others. In the long run, Nezha can only attract attention by playing pranks. After Li Jing tricks him into believing that he is the reincarnation of the Spirit Pearl, Nezha is delighted with his new identity and feels the excitement of "a great task coming from heaven". Nezha is brave enough to challenge his fate, saying goodbye to his parents, tearing up the talisman of life-changing, and leaving behind the bold words, "I will carry my own destiny, I will carry it myself". Birth of the Demon Child completely overturns the image of a well-behaved child and portrays Nezha as a rebellious, lonely boy who longs to be understood. He seeks attention through a series of mischievous pranks, revealing a new image of the hero.

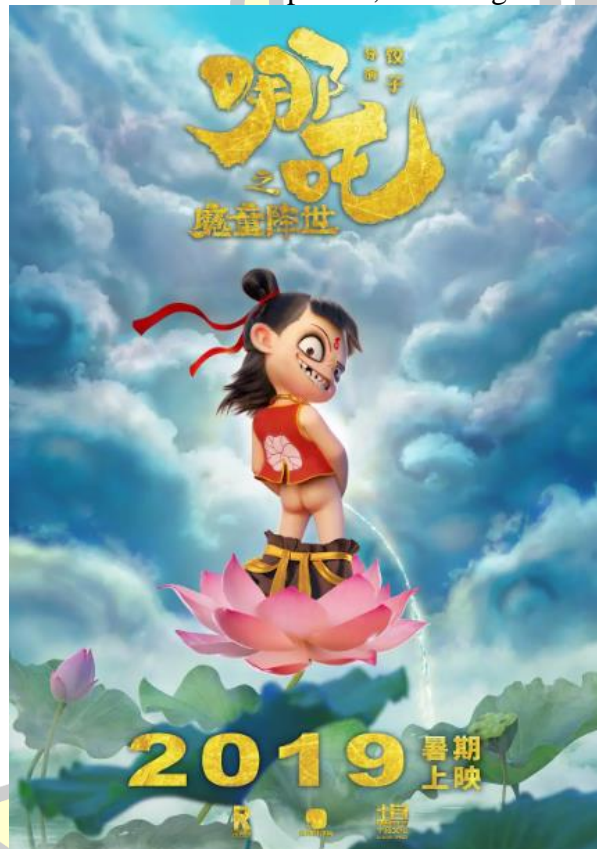


Figure 24 Poster for the anime Birth of the Demon Child

Source: <https://movie.douban.com/photos/photo/2546196389/>, 2019

In the wake of *Nezha Reborn*, Chinese animation has witnessed a "return of the myth" (D. Sun, 2021), in which mythological themes have been revived by both creators and audiences, and *White Snake: Fate* and *White Snake 2: Green Snake Robbery*, two animated films based on the text of the *Legend of the White Snake*, have expanded the narrative boundaries of mythological adaptations, focusing on the growth of the White Snake and Xiaoqing. *White Snake: Fate* and "White Snake 2: The Looting of the Green Snake", two animated films derived from the text of "The Legend of the White Snake", have also expanded the narrative boundaries of mythological adaptations, focusing on the growth of the White Snake and Xiaoqing. *New Gods: Yang Jian* and *Jiang Ziya* have all achieved good box office and word-of-mouth success, and *Nezha's Magic Boy Haunts the Sea*, the sequel to *The Magic Boy*,

is slated for release in 2024. Among them, *Nezha Reborn* builds a turbulent and legendary narrative world in a modern aesthetic style, transforming Nezha into the biker boy Li Yunxiang, and telling the story of his struggle against power and his quest to find himself.

The animated film *Nezha Reborn*, released in 2015, (hereinafter referred to as *Nezha Reborn*), tells the story of the Nezha 3000 years later, when the list of sealed gods is about to be rearranged and Li Yunxiang, the reincarnation of Nezha Reborn, fights to the death against the East China Sea Dragons (Figure 25). The movie blends the mythological elements of the East with the punk style of the West, creating a new world of Eastern punk where gods and humans coexist. Metal and biker elements clash in the movie, setting both unreal and real scenes, and combining the architectural styles of old Shanghai neighborhoods and Manhattan skyscrapers to provide an immersive experience of the world of "oriental punk". In *Nezha Reborn*, this combination with the punk spirit creates the character of Li Yunxiang, a biker boy who dares to stand up against social injustice. The film made 360 million RMB at the box office after its release, but audience reviews and comments were polarized.



Figure 25 Poster for the anime *New Gods: Nezha Reborn*
Source: <https://movie.douban.com/photos/photo/2631711326/>, 2023

A study of the historical development of Chinese animation shows that legendary Chinese characters are favored by animation creators. Nezha is an important character in mythological animation, and several phenomenal works about Nezha have directly influenced the course of Chinese animation, and have even become a key turning point for Chinese animation. As shown in the chart below, Nezha has appeared in the most animation productions as a protagonist or important character, surpassing the Monkey King as the most frequently adapted legendary character (Figure 26).

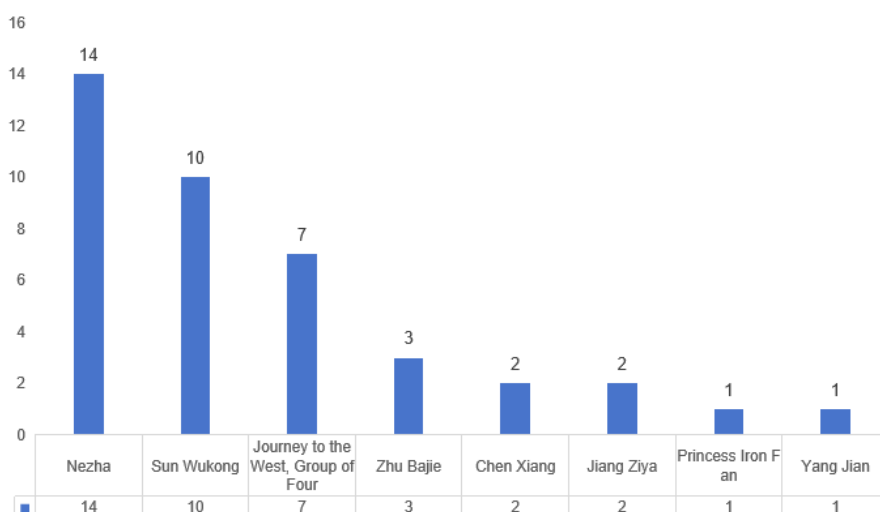


Figure 26 Number of animation adaptations of Chinese legends (main characters)
Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng, 2023

Summary of the chapter

This chapter focuses on the mythological origins and parent stories of the image of Nezha, as well as representative works about Nezha in Chinese animation, in order to understand the literary and animation history of Nezha.

The figure of Nezha was introduced to China with the spread of Buddhism in India, starting out as a three-headed, six-armed guardian deity and evolving into the son of the general Li Jing, who then became the orthodox god of Taoism and was Chineseized. The emergence of drama and novels about gods and demons enriched Nezha's image and stories. In *Journey to the West*, Nezha becomes a child god of valor and courage, with great skill and bravery, and his image is finally finalized in *Nezha*, where he becomes a child god of innocence and fearlessness, of freedom and rebellion, and of perseverance and bravery. "Nezha's stories of killing a dragon in the sea, being reborn in the lotus flower, and returning his father's bones to his father and his mother's flesh to his mother are well known to the world, and Nezha is a mythological hero who blends myth with history, with a high cultural connotation. Nezha is a mythological hero who blends mythology with history and has a high cultural connotation. The image of Nezha and the theme of the story have been widely disseminated over time, and have been elaborately interpreted in a variety of media.

As a representative of popular media, animation is characterized by a "high degree of hypotheticality". The strange and mysterious world depicted in the story of Nezha provides a rich and deep content base for the creation of animation based on mythological themes, and the mother-title of Nezha provides the original material for the creation of animation in China, and is also a continuation and presentation of the nation's inherent common psychological foundation and experience. The story of Nezha provides the original material for the creation of Chinese animation, and is also a continuation and presentation of the nation's inherent common psychological foundations and experiences. Mythological animation serves as an ideal vehicle for

the expression of Nezha's theme, allowing the story of Nezha to transcend space and time and take on a new luster in modern culture.

China's animation pioneers realized the advantages and feasibility of using mythology as a theme for animation at an early stage. Nezha was featured in the first animation after the founding of New China, "The Greatest Show on Earth", which established China's position as a world leader in fine art films, and the first animation after the Reform and Development of China, "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King", which won numerous accolades and became a screen classic in the new century. The image of Nezha, who cuts his own throat in a tragic manner, has become a screen classic. Facing the impact of globalization, "The Legend Of Nezha" after the new century portrayed the young hero Nezha, accompanying the growth of Chinese children in the 80's and 90's. In the period of industrial downturn, "One Hundred Thousand and BadJokes" created a frenzy on the Internet, exploring a new business model, in which the subversive image of Nezha is still circulating on the Internet. In 2019, Birth of the Demon Child achieved a staggering 5.2 billion RMB at the box office, and "Ugly Nezha" caused phenomenal discussions and became a Popular media Culture symbol of the postmodern period. In the history of Chinese animation, Nezha's works have appeared in almost every period and achieved outstanding success, which is enough to see the important position and influence of Nezha in Chinese animation.

Overall, the mythological Nezha has undergone a cross-border fusion of culture and art, as it has been secularized in "Nezha" and presented on the big screen in animation. The image of Nezha is not only deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, but also maintains its vitality in modern society. Through the modern medium of animation, the story of Nezha has been presented in a new form to a global audience, successfully transforming a traditional mythological story into a work of visual art that can touch the hearts and minds of modern people. The continued circulation and re-invention of the image and story of Nezha not only illustrates the vitality of traditional Chinese culture, but also demonstrates the possibilities of a dialogue between culture and the times.



CHAPTER III

Nezha's Image in Popular Media

Introduction

The powerful influence of the mass media has transformed the world and contributed to the ever-increasing expansion and popularization of culture. Through reproduction and dissemination, it has transformed culture into a product cognizable and consumable by the masses. This mass dissemination and consumption of culture has reshaped the means of communication and meaning of culture and its art forms, making them the result of mass communication labeling. Popular media Culture is the antithesis of high culture, characterized by its popular and commercial nature, with a major emphasis on entertainment. It is defined as a form of entertainment that is widely popular with thousands of people and includes artifacts such as movies, music, fashion and television programs. This culture is a product of the combination of commerce and mass media, is manipulable, and is transmitted through electronic media such as movies and television, creating a popular media culture. Audiences find meaning in it through decoding and interaction, creating new cultural experiences.

The media of popular culture include both traditional and electronic media, and at the intersection of the two, Nezha has undergone a transformation from text to image to film and television, with changes in his artistic form and characterization, especially in the medium of animation, where Nezha's form has inherited the aesthetic expression of traditional Chinese art on the one hand, and continues to innovate in response to aesthetic changes on the other. The value of this chapter aims to analyze and discuss in depth this process of change, from traditional opera and comic strips to the changes in visual images in electronic media such as movies, TV dramas, and especially animation. Each medium has reinterpreted the image and story of Nezha in its own unique way. It is worth mentioning that there is a wide range of popular media categories. In addition to the plays, comic strips, comics, movies and TV dramas, and animations mentioned in this study, Nezha's image has appeared in pop music, self-media, social games, and online games, and this study has only selected the media that have had the greatest impact on Nezha's animated image.

Part I first explores the portrayal of Nezha in traditional media, including opera and comic strips and cartoons, showing the trajectory of Nezha's image as it evolved through cultural inheritance and artistic development, which laid the foundation for the birth of Nezha's image in electronic media.

Part II discusses the electronic media and examines in detail the diverse representations of Nezha in film and television, from live-action movies and TV dramas to various animated forms of Nezha. After a detailed content analysis of the content of the film, it is documented in descriptive text and summarizes its regular features, from which the impact of technological advancement and aesthetic changes in the viewers' aesthetics on the portrayal of Nezha is reflected.

Part III focuses on the image of Nezha in animation, analyzing in-depth the artistic styling and characterization of the image of Nezha in animation, and exploring the transformation of Nezha's artistic style and characterization from art film to web

animation to film animation. These analyses reveal how the image of Nezha has adapted to the cultural needs and aesthetic preferences of different eras. From the fusion of national aesthetics and folk art, to the influence of the tendency towards beauty and Japan, to new interpretations in the context of network culture, the image and character of Nezha present a rich diversity and depth.

Part IV summarizes and analyzes the changing characteristics of Nezha's media image, including the strangeness of the media image, the diversification of the animation modeling, and the rounding of the character's personality. These changes not only show the dynamic process of Nezha's image evolving with the development of time and technology, but also reflect the vivid embodiment and innovative transformation of traditional Chinese culture in modern society. Through in-depth analysis of the image of Nezha in popular media, this chapter explores its regeneration and remodeling in contemporary popular media culture, providing new perspectives for understanding the intersection of Chinese national art and modern aesthetics.

Part I The Literary Image of Nezha in Traditional Media

The written word, as the original medium of communication, allowed the image of Nezha to take root in the soil of Chinese culture. With the widespread dissemination of *Journey to the West* and *Nezha*, the story of Nezha became an original model for theatrical creation. From the traditional plays of the Yuan Dynasty to the continuous dramas of the Qing Dynasty, theater has provided easy-to-understand visual representations of the abstract text, and the gradual modernization of sound, light and electronic special effects has allowed for Nezha's onstage appearance to satisfy the audience's aesthetic needs. Gradually, modernized sound and light effects have enabled the staging of Nezha to satisfy the aesthetic needs of the audience and to deepen people's understanding and memory of the image of Nezha.

The Nezha was already popular in the Republican era, with Zhou Yunfang's highly acclaimed *The List of the Sealed Gods* featuring Nezha on its cover. Shortly after the founding of New China, Chinese comic strips came into the public's business, and the image of Nezha in the comic strips was revitalized by the writings of the older generation of artists. Cheng Shifa's "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King" was widely loved for its exquisite traditional white drawing techniques and bright colors, showing Nezha's childlike and cute image and unique visual impact. In the following decades, the publication of Nezha comic strips reached a peak, especially between 1977 and 1985, when many publishers competed to publish them, with a huge circulation, including the People's Fine Arts Publishing House, whose Nezha comic strips had a large circulation and were most familiar to the general public, and through which Nezha's image was widely disseminated. The image of Nezha was widely disseminated through these comic strips and became an iconic character in Chinese culture. After the reform and development of China, out-of-print comic strips from the early days became collectors' items and attracted public attention. In the new century, although the publication of comic strips has declined in popularity, both comic strips and cartoons can still be seen as the origin of Nezha's mediated image in popular culture.

1.1 Nezha in Opera and Lian Tai Opera

Beginning in the Yuan Dynasty, the number of plays about Nezha began to increase, and one of the earliest to bring Nezha to the opera stage was the Yuan miscellaneous drama *Erlangshen Drunkenly Shoots at the Demon Locking Mirror*, written by an unknown writer in the Yuan Dynasty. The play is an excerpt from "The Three Princes' Trouble with Black Wind Mountain, Erlang Shen's Drunken Shot at the Demon Mirror", which tells the story of Erlang Shen and Nezha joining forces to subdue the Sheng Demon King and the White-Eyed Ghost. In "Erlangshen Drunkenly Shoots at the Demon Mirror", Nezha is depicted as "Nezha comes out with three heads and six arms, three heads and six arms, to show his powers and six arms to subdue the demons. Nezha's anger is so great that he has already changed his power, displaying his three heads and six arms, his six weapons, coming and going, going up and down, as if he were flying high. (Wangji, 1958)" demonstrates Nezha's mighty image of three heads and six arms and the use of six types of weapons. Although Nezha's appearance and abilities have changed somewhat in *Erlangshen Drunkenly Shooting at the Locking Demon Mirror*, his image has still not departed from the realm of Buddhism. Meanwhile, another Yuan dynasty play, *The Three Changes of Fierce Nezha*, portrays Nezha as a hero who subdues demons. In *The Three Changes of Fierce Nezha*, Nezha is described as: "The ghost with different scales can spit out ten miles of enchanting poisonous mist. The lion-headed ghost can whistle the wind and rain. The Blue Field Ghost can blow fire. The Hundred Eyes Ghost can drive away tigers and leopards. The Boundless Ghost can release wind and sand. In this way, all the gods are unwilling to come near him", depicting Nezha's subjugation of the demons with his outstanding martial arts skills and vast powers. Compared to "Erlangshen's Drunken Shot at the Demon Locking Mirror," the image of Nezha in "Three Changes of the Fierce Nezha" is fuller, more heroic, and more powerful, emphasizing his limitless power. In addition, other Yuan dynasty miscellaneous dramas about Nezha, such as *Na Qiao Shen Li Catching the Inspector*, are no longer available, but it is certain that the image of Nezha in the Buddhist scriptures has undergone a remarkable transformation, laying a solid foundation for the development of the image of Nezha.

Since the Qing Dynasty, the story of Nezha has occupied an important place in the Liantai Ben Opera, a new situation inherited from the development of traditional opera art, where each book forms a paragraph, leaving a suspense at the end of each book to attract the audience to come back to watch the next book, and where sets and props can be fully utilized to enhance its attraction to the audience, and where Nezha was spread from the inner court to the whole country to gain the popularity of the people at that time.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the serialized plays of "Fengshenbang" have become the signature plays of many troupes, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, and have been widely welcomed by major theatres. However, as the pace of life accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s, these plays gradually ceased to attract the attention of most audiences. Nevertheless, the continued popularity of the "Fengshenbang" serialized plays staged in Shanghai throughout the 20th century was mainly due to two factors: first, the economic and cultural prosperity of Shanghai, which attracted a large number of economically privileged audiences with leisure time; and second, the fact that the performances in Shanghai, with the help of novel

singing styles, creative sets, and modern technological means (e.g., special lighting effects), effectively met the audience's demands for contemporary aesthetics. Secondly, Shanghai's performances effectively satisfy the audience's demand for contemporary aesthetics through innovative singing, creative sets and modern technological means (such as special effects lighting).

With the rapid development of technology, people's ability to create scenes and special effects has increased dramatically. The exquisite organ sets with the ever-changing lighting effects have injected new vitality into the plays adapted from the *Nezha*. With their colorful, innovative and unique forms of expression, these theatrical works have taken on a new luster in major theatre companies, forming a spectacular "opera landscape" in which *Nezha* is undoubtedly the shining star that continues to captivate the audience's attention.

1.2 *Nezha* in Comic Strips and Cartoons

At the beginning of the 20th century, the popular pictorial reading materials that were formed and began to circulate widely in Shanghai were called comic strips, commonly known as "little people's books". After the founding of the People's Republic of China, as a popular art form for spreading culture, comic books developed rapidly, forming one of the main types of modern Chinese art. The process of creating comic books by Chinese painters is usually to write the subject matter into a literary script first, and then to paint it. Literary scripts both provide a creative basis for painting and are combined with the format of the painting. In some cases, the painting is completed and then illustrated with text; in others, no text is used, and only text such as character identities, dialogues or monologues are shown on the screen.

In the 1950s, 1980s and 1990s, the field of comic strips experienced three periods of prosperity with the *Nezha*, in which the figure of *Nezha* attracted a great deal of attention. 1957 saw the creation of *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King* by the master of Chinese painting, Cheng Shifa, which won widespread popularity for its beautifully detailed painting style and vibrant colors. Widely admired for its delicate style and vibrant colors, this work was created the year after Cheng Shifa's art had matured. The black-and-white draft adopts the traditional technique of white drawing, with smooth, straight and strong lines that follow the structure of the character's body and are consistent with the atmosphere; the brush strokes are all about variation, with lines of different thicknesses and lengths interspersed and changing at the right time, with a strong sense of rhythm. The modeling of *Na Zha* is inherited from the traditional Chinese modeling techniques, which captures the character's charm and is childish and cute. The composition and layout of the images are unique, with different techniques used according to the needs of the surface. Many pictures boldly adopt the traditional scattered perspective method, such as the depiction of the water mansion, the outline of the water pattern, the planarization of the expression of the picture has a strong sense of decorative, strong visual impact; some pictures and the use of Western painting focal point of perspective method, open the picture of the spatial distance, so that the picture has a deep sense of depth, the composition of this set of works of the unique is Cheng Shifa serial painting painting art is a major feature of the art of the high value of the research. It has a very high research value. The colorful manuscript adopts the technique of light coloring in white, and the expression, character modeling, and

picture layout are as wonderful as those of the black-and-white manuscript; its coloring is clear and brilliant, colorful without being vulgar and light without being thin, creating a warm and lively atmosphere in the picture, which is very much characteristic of the distinctive and friendly nature of children's serial paintings (Figure 27). Immediately following this, the story collection *Nezha*, published in 1958, provoked a strong reaction when it was released, with a sizable circulation.

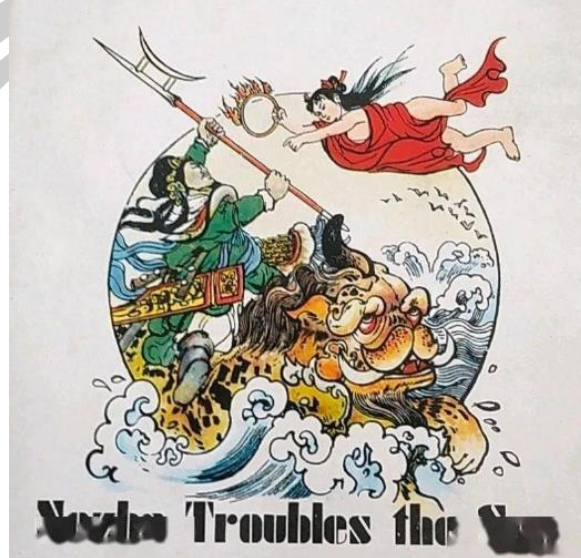


Figure 27 Cover of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King comic strip by Cheng Shifa

Source: Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King by Cheng Shifa, 1981.

Between 1977 and 1985, the comic strip industry reached its creative peak during a wave of cultural development. During this period, more than ten publishing houses competed to publish comic strips about the Nezha, including a large-size color version of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King in a foreign language. In the 1980s, the People's Publishing House published a series of Nezha that was so popular that demand exceeded supply, triggered an unprecedented craze, so much so that demand exceeded supply. In addition, the circulation of works such as *The Flying Tiger Against the Guards*, *Tu Xing Sun*, and *Nezha Haunts the East Sea* reached hundreds of thousands or even millions of copies. The series of related stories published by the Jiangxi People's Publishing House between 1982 and 1983 also enjoyed high sales, with each of the 15 volumes of Nezha published by the People's Fine Arts Publishing House between 1982 and 1985 having a circulation of between 400,000 and 500,000 copies. Zhejiang, Hebei People's Publishing House, and the China Theater Publishing House all joined in publishing Nezha comic strips (Figure 28).



Figure 28 Nezha Haunts the East Sea, a comic strip by People's Fine Arts Publishing House

Source: The comic book "Nezha's Troubles in the East China Sea" by People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 1982.

In the mid-to-late 1990s, although the comic strip industry experienced a downturn, the "Nezha" comic strips returned to people's attention with the help of the "collection fever". Hunan Children's Publishing House, Sanlian Books, Liaoning Children's and Teenagers' Publishing House, and other publishers issued a variety of Nezha comic strips and comics. In 2000, Jindun Publishing House issued "Reading <Nezha> with pictures", and Huayu Teaching Publishing House published "<Nezha> Annotated Story Paradise" and other works. In recent years, although the overall publishing momentum for comic strips has not been as strong as in the past, they continue to be published as a "national treasure" with special significance as a collector's item and for artistic appreciation, with the character of Nezha still being a shining star.

Comic strips and cartoons were a key part of the evolution of Nezha's visual image, and the mass printing and distribution of books left an initial impression of Nezha in the minds of the general public. With the rapid evolution of the media environment, electronic media such as film, television, and online animation have become an important channel for the dissemination of cultural symbols, and the traditional media status of the written word and the book have been undermined, with the electronic media taking up a greater role. However, the development of Nezha's animated image has not really broken the link between the two, but rather, through the renewal of media vehicles, Nezha's animated image has been given a new development and influence through the electronic media. Nezha's media image has evolved from a literal imaginary image to a static image stereotype to a vivid animated image, and the role of the electronic media in its development should not be underestimated. At the same time, the transformation of media presentation

techniques has also brought about a different impact on the transformation of Nezha's animated image, with the dynamic display of video animation playing an even more important role, making the originally imagined image real and palpable, and able to appear in front of the public in a vivid and vivid manner, thus making Nezha a truly important part of popular media culture and forming a unique cultural symbol.

Part II Nezha's Film and Television Images in the Electronic Media

Broadly speaking, electronic media refers to the electronic technology information carrier used in storing and transmitting information in modern communication activities, of which film and television are the typical representatives of electronic media, and its iconic media content includes movies and TV dramas, which is a special art with visual image as its core, and from the perspective of the creative level, the characters constitute the core subject of film and television works. In film and television production, the image presented by the characters plays a decisive influence on the success of the work. Due to the visual intuition of character modeling design, it becomes an indispensable part in the visual-oriented film and television art. Further, character modeling is not only an external expression of characterization, but it also shoulders the responsibility of presenting the inner richness of the character directly to the audience through visual images, so that the audience can understand and recognize the character through these concrete images. Therefore, a remarkable movie or television work must have well-designed characters behind it. Regarding the definition of "character modeling for film and television", Wang Zhan puts forward two points of view in his book "Costume Design for Film and Television":

"As a noun 'character modeling' (filmcharactermodeling), it refers to the sum total of the visual appearance of a character in a film or television work, including the character's appearance, state and atmosphere, i.e., the character's appearance of the 'form' + 'state'. 'Character modeling' (themodelingforacharacter), as a verb, refers to the process of visually presenting a character in a text. Its modeling encompasses all the elements that make up a character's appearance, including character costume styling, i.e., clothing and dress items, including make-up styling, i.e., facial make-up, body make-up, and hair styling; as well as accompanying props. (Wang, 2018)"

The two main forms of film and television dramas are television dramas and movies (Figures 29 and 30), and animated films are distinguished by medium as art films, television animation, network animation, and film animation. There are many similarities between the two mediums in the creation of film and television images, and in this study the film and television image of Nezha and its visually changing characteristics will be investigated through a content analysis of live-action film and animation of Nezha.



Figure 29 From left to right are the live-action film and television productions "The Seven Monsters of Plum Mountain", "The Heavenly Court Outreach", "Feudal Part 1", "The List of Gods", "Journey to the West", "Lotus Boy Nezha", "The List of Heroes of the Feudal Gods", "The Legend of the Feudal Gods", and "Nezha, the God of Wind and Fire".

Source: Related Movies and TV Shows



Figure 30 From left to right are the animated works Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, Birth of the Demon Child, The Legend Of Nezha, The Legend Of Nezha, I Am Nezha and Journey to the West.

Source: Related animation work footage

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2.1 Nezha in the live-action movie

Through the content analysis of the films about Nezha, eight real-life images of Nezha were summarized in chronological order and summarized in terms of facial structure, hairstyle, body shape, costumes, weapons and magic phases, as shown in the table below (Table 2):

Table 2 Nezha's image in live-action movies Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng,2024

name	Year	Reference source	presentation coiffure	clothing and personal adornment devise	Weapon Phantasms
The Seven Monsters of Plum Mountain	1973	Popularized Image of Nezha	With bangs on her forehead, a double bun on top of her head with a red hair tie, a strand of hair around each ear, and the rest of her hair down naturally	There are two sets of costumes. One set is a lavender centerpiece with a purple tunic, a purple sash around the waist, and a pair of purple cloth shoes. The other set is a golden scale-like armor coat with a green lotus leaf-like skirt, with a long purple cloth hanging from the neck and secured at the waist with a golden loincloth. The left hand wears a Qiankun ring and gold gauntlets at the wrists and ankles.	He can be transformed into (three heads) and eight arms, and holds a demon chopping sword, demon slashing sword, demon binding rope, demon lowering pestle and mortar, embroidered ball, fire wheel, and a small knife.
Nezha 1974 Nezha	1974	Nezha	With a mushroom head.	Before rebirth the upper body wore a red v-neck shirt with black and white print on the cuffs and the same type of belt around the waist. Underneath he wears red pants and a pair of black boots. Post-rebirth upper body wears a silver unbuttoned jacket covered in small spherical bumps. The	Holding a fire-tipped spear and a vajra circle in his hand, he stood on top of a wind and fire wheel.

				sleeves are red and silver gauntlets are worn at the wrists. Underneath, he wears red pants and a pair of black boots.	
Nezha 1983 Nezha	1983	Nezha	The hair in front of the forehead and by the cheeks is tied in a double bun at the top of the head and twisted with a hair tie, leaving a strand of long hair by each ear, and the rest of the hair naturally falling down.	Multiple costume changes depending on the plot.	Holding a fire-pointed spear in his hand, with the Mixed Sky Aya bound to his body and the Qiankun Circle over his shoulder, he stood on top of the Wind and Fire Wheel.
Apocrypha	1997	Popularized Image of Nezha	This version of Nezha has a red dot mark between his forehead. Only two pigtails are left on the left and right sides of the head and are wrapped with a red hair band	The upper body wears a red belly-band embroidered with lotus flower motifs, a yellow outer robe, a silver cloud-patterned girdle around the waist, and red gauntlets at the wrists. The lower body wears plum-red pants and a pair of red Luo Han shoes with red cloth bands around the ankles.	He holds a fire-tipped spear in his hand, wears a mixed heavenly damask, and carries a Qiankun circle on his shoulder.
The Legend of Fengshi, legendary figure of the Warring States	2015	Nezha	This version of Nezha has a vertical scar mark between his forehead. The hair on his temples is shaved short, and the hair on his forehead and the back of his head is tied	Dressed in a waistless red sleeveless top, a white lotus-shaped shawl and a green petal-shaped skirt with gold floral prints on both the top and the skirt.	Holding the Qiankun Circle (as a hand holding a ring-like double blade), standing on top of the Wind and Fire Wheel, he can change into (three heads)

Period (475-221 BC)			upwards into a bun and secured with a silver stick-on hair ornament.		and six arms.
the Indian subcontinent (esp. in Tang or Song dynasty)	2017	Popularized Image of Nezha	The facial makeup of this version of Nezha is modeled after the animated makeup of Hulan, with the eyebrows and eye contours exaggerated. The forehead is left with bangs, and the rest of the hair is combed upwards into a double bun, with a pigtail by each ear.	Dressed in a waistless red sleeveless top, a white lotus-shaped shawl and a green petal-shaped skirt with gold floral prints on both the top and the skirt.	Holding a fire-pointed spear in his hand, with the Mixed Sky Aya bound to his body and the Qiankun Circle over his shoulder, he stood on top of the Wind and Fire Wheel.
Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King	2019	Nezha	Before rebirth, the head is tied in a bun and secured with a hair band, leaving two strands of hair on the forehead. After rebirth, the head is tied in a bun and secured with a metal hair ornament. A long strand of hair is left at each sideburn and a long whip is coiled at the back of the head	Before rebirth, he wore a black midriff and navy blue tunic with a double layer spiral at the bottom of the robe. It is wrapped with cloth bands around the waist and wrists, and is equipped with a gauntlet at the right shoulder. After rebirth, he wears copper-colored armor with a beast pattern engraved on the shoulder gauntlet, copper-colored gauntlets at the wrists, a lotus pattern engraved at the neck joint, and a golden belt around his waist. The lower body armor is	Standing on top of a wind and fire wheel, he holds a Qiankun circle and a fire-pointed spear, and hides a mixed sky damask in his sleeve, which can change into three heads and six arms.

				scale patterned, with a lotus petal shaped gauntlet attached to the connection with the waist, and a pair of leather boots.	
Seal of the Gods Part 1	2023	Nezha	The rest of the hair of a typical ancient child's "double bun" falls naturally over the shoulders, with a tuft of broken hair in front of the forehead.	A traditional Chinese dress featuring a white button-down Chinese jacket with pastel colors and floral designs over a pale yellow tunic. It has a decorative flower at the waist, as well as a belt that	Standing on top of a wind and fire wheel, he holds a Qiankun circle, which allows him to fly, and the Mixed Sky Aya is bound to his body.

2.2 Nezha in Live Action TV Series

By analyzing the contents of the live-action TV dramas about Nezha, 25 live-action portrayals of Nezha were summarized chronologically and summarized in terms of facial structure, hairstyle, body shape, costumes, weapons and magic phases, as shown in the table below (Table 3:

Table 3 Nezha in Live Action TV Series Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng, 2024

name	Year	Reference source	Appearance and hairstyle	Costume design	Weapon Phantasms
list of Gods and Immortals	1981	Nezha	With fine bangs in front of her forehead, the hair in front of her forehead and beside her cheeks is brushed upwards into a double bun and tied with a pink hair tie, two strands of hair are left at each sideburn and the hair at the back of her head is left naturally loose.	Before being reborn, the upper body wore a red bib with golden decorations, and a Qiankun circle hung around the neck. The lower body wore a red skirt with colorful decorations, and the waist was tied with a mixed sky damask. After rebirth, the upper body was wearing a red sleeveless jacket with a green lotus leaf shawl with pink lotus petal-like ornaments, and a Qiankun ring hanging from the neck.	Holding the Mixed Sky Aya in his hand, the Qiankun Circle on his shoulder, and the Fire Pointed Gun in his hand, he stood on top of the Wind and Fire Wheel, with the Golden Brick in his pocket.

				Lower body wearing red shorts, jacket green ruffled skirt, feet on red boots.	
Nezha	1986	Nezha	<p>She has thin bangs in front of her forehead, hair in front of her forehead and beside her cheeks is combed upwards into a double bun and tied with a red hair tie, two strands of hair are left at each sideburn, and the hair at the back of her head is naturally loose. A red costume design color dot print is stamped on the forehead.</p>	<p>Before rebirth, the upper body was wearing a red costume design sleeveless shirt, shoulders with a red lotus-shaped shawl with a bow tie in the center, and a costume design left arm wearing a Qiankun circle. Lower body wearing white seven-minute pants, waist costume design wrapped with mixed sky damask. After the rebirth, the upper body wearing red sleeveless clothes, shoulder costume design with silver lotus-shaped shawl, left arm wearing Qiankun circle, wrist costume design at the silver armor. Lower body wearing white seven-minute pants, waist wearing green costume design color lotus leaf decoration and mixed sky damask.</p>	<p>He wears a Qiankun circle on his hand and a mixed heavenly damask around his waist.</p>
Journey to the West	1986	Journey to the West	<p>Thin bangs are left on the forehead and a gold hair band is worn. The rest of the hair is combed upwards into a double bun and tied with a blue hair band, and the costume</p>	<p>Dressed in a blue-green short-sleeve and skirt, the bodice has golden square shapes spread regularly across it, with a golden circular seal attached to the center of the blouse, making the whole outfit armor-like. A red silk scarf is</p>	<p>Holding the Mixed Sky Aya in his hand, the Qiankun Circle on his shoulder, and the Fire Tip Gun in his hand, he stands on top of the</p>

			is designed with a bunch of pigtails at each sideburn. Nezha has a red dot mark between his eyebrows.	tied around her neck, the neck and cuffs are embellished with lotus petals, emerald green ornaments are worn around her wrists, a green lotus leaf shaped sash is tied around her waist, and a red band of cloth is wrapped around the outer costume design of the sash.	Wind and Fire Wheel and can transform into three heads and six arms.
list of Gods and Immortals	1990	Nezha	The younger Nezha has broken hair and the older Nezha has broken hair and wears a golden hair band with a golden lotus flower and ruby in the center of his costume.	Little Nezha is wearing a red bib with a golden lotus pattern, a Qiankun ring around his neck, and golden bangles on his arms and wrists. Costume design big Nezha wearing a one-piece dress, upper body for the red and silver color sleeveless undershirt, costume design cuffs for jagged, wrist armor. The lower body is a silver skirt with a flame-like pattern on the skirt and boots of the same color and pattern.	Holding a fire-tipped spear and a mixed heavenly damask in his hand and a Qiankun circle on his shoulder, he stood on top of the wind and fire wheel.
Nezha, God of Wind and Fire	1994	Nezha	The forehead is left with fine bangs, the hair on the forehead and beside the cheeks is combed upwards into a double bun, and the hair on the back of the head is naturally put down. After the rebirth of the	Nezha has a crystal-like ornament between his forehead after rebirth. Before his rebirth, he wore a red bib, white pants and a white robe. At his waist, he wore a belt with a lotus petal ornament, and on his neck, he wore a silk necklace and a qiankun ring on his hand. After being	Holding a fire-pointed gun in his hand, the Mixed Sky Aya is bound to his body, his arm carries the Qiankun Circle, and his costume is designed to stand on top of a wind and fire wheel.

			overall hairstyle remains unchanged, double buns on the hair band costume design changed to silver, costume design behind the ear each tie a small costume design braid. Nezha has a crystal-like ornament on his forehead after his rebirth.	reborn, the upper body wears a white midriff, jacket glazed color sleeveless gauntlets, shoulders with shawls of the same color, waist girded with golden belts, wrists with gauntlets of the same color. Underneath, she wears white long dress design pants, jacketed with a white armor skirt, and glazed colored boots.	
Qi Tian Da Shen g (Journey to the West)	1996	Journey to the West	Her hair was coiled into two buns, with a small braid at each side of her temples, and a red cloth costume design band was wrapped around her hair.	Dressed in a lotus leaf shawl, a brick red long-sleeved undershirt, a sleeveless jacket printed with different floral prints and dark green shorts with a brick red cummerbund around her waist.	With the Qiankun Circle on his shoulder and the fire-tipped spear in his hand, he stood on top of the wind and fire wheel.
Monkey King of Heaven and Earth (Journey to the West Costume Design 2)	1998	Journey to the West	Her hair was coiled into two buns, with a small braid at each side of her temples, and a red cloth costume design band was wrapped around her hair.	Dressed in a lotus leaf shawl, a brick red long-sleeved undershirt, a sleeveless jacket printed with different floral prints and dark green shorts, she wore a belt with a brick red costume design around her waist.	With the Qiankun Circle on his shoulder and the fire-tipped spear in his hand, he stood on top of the wind and fire wheel.
Nezha, the Lotus	1999	Nezha	Before the rebirth (for Nezha when) all	On top, she wears a brick red sleeveless top with a green	Mixed sky damask bound to the body,

s Boy			the hair on the right side of the head to tie a high ponytail, sideburns each left a bunch of pigtails. After rebirth, the hair in front of the forehead and next to the cheeks is combed upwards into a double bun and tied with a yellow hair tie, leaving a bunch of pigtails on each sideburn, and the hair at the back of the head is naturally scattered in the costume design.	ruffled shawl on her shoulders and gauntlets on her lower arms. Underneath, she wears yellow shorts, a yellow and red fringed skirt, and a pair of brick red costume design boots.	shoulder Qiankun circle, hand holding the fire point gun, costume design feet on the wind and fire wheel, can be changed into three heads and six arms.
Journey to the West (sequel)	2000	Journey to the West	The forehead is left with thin bangs and a blonde hair band. The rest of her hair is brushed upwards into a double bun and tied with a blue hairband, with a small braid at each sideburn and the hair at the back of her head falling naturally. There is a red costume design dot print between her eyebrows.	Dressed in a blue-green short-sleeved jacket and skirt, clothing and pants on the regular spread of the golden square shape, costume design jacket is also attached to the center of the golden circle mark, the whole set of clothes shape costume design like armor. Neck and cuffs with lotus petals to embellish, hand costume design wrist wearing emerald green ornaments, the waist tied with a green lotus leaf costume design belt, the belt wrapped around the outside of the red cloth belt.	Holding the Mixed Sky Aya in his hand, the Qiankun Circle on his shoulder, and the Fire Tip Gun in his hand, he stands on top of the Wind and Fire Wheel and can transform into three heads and six arms.

Journey to the West	2000	Journey to the West	There is a small amount of bangs in front of the forehead, a strand of long hair behind each ear, the rest of the hair on both sides of the cheeks and in front of the forehead are tied back into two buns, the hair behind the costume design head naturally hanging down, the forehead costume design heart left with a red dot costume design print.	Dressed in a beige bottomed long dress pants costume design and green lotus leaf skirt with green straps on the shoulders, she wore pink lotus flower petal-like decorations around her neck and waist.	Holding a fire-tipped spear in his hand and standing on top of a wind and fire wheel, he can transform into three heads and six arms.
list of Gods and Immortals	2001	Nezha	He has a double bun hairstyle that represents Nezha.	The costumes and hairstyles in the play vary according to the needs of the plot. The costumes and hairstyles in the play vary according to the needs of the plot, but the same double bun hairstyle that represents Nezha is also worn.	Shoulder Qiankun circle, mixed sky damask bound to the body, holding a fire-tipped gun, costume design stands on top of the wind and fire wheel.
Monkey King, the Great Sage of Qi Tian Da Sheng (refer	2002	Journey to the West	Before the rebirth, the hair in front of the forehead and next to the cheeks was coiled into two buns behind the ears and secured with red hair bands, and the wicked hair at	Before rebirth, she wore a white Chinese jacket with a red bib embroidered with a golden lotus pattern, a red tasseled armor skirt around her waist, a beige silk scarf tied around her neck, red gauntlets wrapped around her wrists and ankles, and a pair of	Shoulder the Qiankun circle, hand holding the fire point gun, standing on the wind and fire wheel. Costume design which, Qiankun circle for holding a round half

s to the Mon key King of Chin a)			the back of the head was naturally loose. After rebirth, the hairstyle remains unchanged, and the red hairband is replaced with a silver metallic hair design accessory.	white boots. After rebirth, she wears a white midriff coat with a white gauntlet with an armor skirt hem. She wears cocked shoulder pads, white armor around her wrists and ankles, and a pair of white boots.	blade model, wind and fire wheel for the combination of round and star-shaped model.
Legendary-Fantasy Yin Shuang	2005	Nezha	There were two main hairstyles before the rebirth. One is to tie the hair in front of the forehead and next to the cheeks into a high ponytail on the right side of the head, with the hair behind the head naturally falling, and the other is to tie the hair in front of the forehead and next to the cheeks into a double bun on the top of the head, with the hair behind the head naturally falling. After the rebirth of the hair is tied upwards into a bun, costume design and fixed with hair accessories, costume design sideburns and the	Multiple costumes before rebirth. Post-rebirth upper body has a black midriff and silver sleeveless gauntlets with a round ornament in the center, a red ribbon around the neck, and silver gauntlets at the wrists. Underneath, she wears white bottoms and silver armor with a silver belt tied around her waist costume design and white boots.	Holding a red tasseled spear in his hand, he stands on top of a wind and fire wheel and can change into three heads and six arms.

			back of the head each costume design disk a pigtail.		
Lotus Light	2005	Popularized Image of Nezha	A small amount of bangs in front of the forehead, a strand of long hair on each side of the temples, the rest of the hair on the sides of the cheeks and forehead are tied upwards into a double bun and designed with a golden hairband wrapped around the costume, the hair on the back of the head falls naturally.	The upper body is clad in silver armor, with a cape attached to the back costume design and gauntlets rising upwards at the shoulders. The lower half of the body has a silver petal skirt with a silver sash tied around the waist.	With the Qiankun Circle on his shoulder and the fire-tipped spear in his hand, he stood on top of the wind and fire wheel.
Feng Ming Qishan	2006	Nezha	Before his rebirth, Nezha had a handful of hair in front of his forehead, a pigtail at each end of his head, and the rest of his hair was shaved. After his rebirth, he keeps bangs in front of his forehead, and the rest of his hair is coiled into a costume-designed double bun and secured with golden ornaments.	Before rebirth, he wore a sleeveless martial arts uniform in a brick red hue with a brick red belt around his waist. After rebirth, he wears a red midriff covered in black undertones and a black armor jacket.	Its arms with gold bricks, mixed sky damask tied to the body, shoulder Qiankun circle, costume design hand holding fire point gun, standing on top of the wind and fire wheel.
Prequel to the Po	2009	Popularized Image of Nezha	The hair in front of the forehead and along the cheeks was tied	Before rebirth, he wore a light yellow midriff with red armor, a red cape attached to	He carries a Qiankun circle on his shoulder and a fire-

Lin Lant ern			into a double bun and secured with a hair accessory, leaving a few strands of long hair behind the ears and the hair on the back of the head hanging down in a natural costume design.	his back, and red gauntlets at his wrists and knees. After rebirth, she wears blue-green armor with a cape attached to her back. The skirt is in the shape of a lotus flower petal, with a costume design girdle around the waist. Armor of the same color is worn at the wrists and knees.	tipped spear in his hand.
Feng Shen Ban's King Wu Wu Zhou (11th century)	2009	Nezha	The bangs are left in front of the forehead and are brushed from side to side down the center, the hair at the temples is tied into a double bun and wrapped up with a hair tie, and the hair at the back of the head hangs down naturally.	Dressed in a red midriff covered in black underlining and black armor.	Pockets of gold bricks and the Nine Dragons divine fire cover, mixed sky damask bound to the body, shoulder costume design sat Qiankun circle, hand holding a fire-tipped gun, standing on top of the wind and fire wheel, can be transformed into three heads and six arms.
Journey to the West	2010	Journey to the West	The hair on the temples and forehead was brushed back into a double bun and secured with a blonde hair accessory and a red hair band, while the hair on the back of the head fell in a	The upper body with pink lotus flower petal-like shawl, the lower body with lotus flower petal-like skirt, jacket golden dragon scale armor, waist tied with a green belt with metal ornaments, feet on golden boots. Its wrist wearing a metal ring, hanging between	

			natural loose costume design.	the neck costume design an ornament, shaped like concentric locks.	
Journey to the West	2011	Journey to the West	Hair at the temples and forehead is brushed back into a double bun and secured with a blonde hair accessory. A strand of head dress design hair is left at each sideburn and the hair at the back of the head is left naturally loose.	The plain midriff is covered with metal armor that is attached to a plain cape. The lower half of the costume is designed with a grass-green skirt accented with pink lotus petal decorations at the neck, cuffs and waist, and gauntlets at the wrists.	He carries a Qiankun circle on his shoulder and a fire-tipped gun in his hand, standing on top of a wind and fire wheel. When the costume design is transformed into three heads and six arms, he holds five weapons: gun, circle, sword, pestle and ball.
The Ultimate Seal of the Gods	2011	Nezha	Modernized hairstyles.	The costumes are not fixed, and the exterior styling is completely modern.	The costumes are not fixed, and the exterior styling is completely modern.
Feng Shen Heroes List (1+2)	2014	Nezha	Little Nezha's hair is parted in front of his forehead with left and right bangs, while the rest of his hair is tied into a double bun. Big Nezha's hair in front of his forehead and beside his cheeks is tied into two high ponytails at the top of his head, with a small braid	Little Nezha wears a lotus-printed belly-band, a white sleeveless silk vest with a qiankun ring around its neck, and orange silk pants underneath. Big Nezha wears a red bib with a golden pattern and a pink lotus petal shawl with a qiankun ring around his neck and a golden cape attached to the back of the shawl. At the wrist, there is a gauntlet, one	Mixed sky damask bound to the body, shoulder Qiankun circle, holding a fire-tipped gun, costume design stands on top of the wind and fire wheel, can be transformed into three heads and six arms.

			behind each ear, and the hair at the back of his head falling naturally.	end of which is in the shape of a pink lotus flower petal. Lower body wearing red seven-point wide-legged pants, jacket armor, armor left and right sides with pink lotus costume design petal-like armor piece, feet on red single shoes.	
Stone Daredevil's Heroes Face the Sky East	2015	Nezha	With bangs in front of the forehead, the rest of the hair is combed upwards into a double bun and secured with a lotus-shaped hairpiece costume design.	The upper body wears a blue midriff with a silver armor jacket with three-dimensional motifs carved into the shoulders and tassels hanging from them, silver gauntlets out of the wrists, and a crystalline blue costume design scale-like armor on the abdomen. Lower body wearing blue scale pants, jacket silver armor, costume design waist tied with a silver belt, feet on a pair of silver boots.	Carrying the Qiankun Circle on his shoulder and holding the Mixed Sky Aya and the Fire Pointed Gun, he stood on top of the Wind and Fire Wheel, which could be transformed into three heads and six arms.
University Library	2018	Popularized Image of Nezha	With bangs in front of the forehead, the rest of the hair is combed upwards into a double bun and secured with a lotus-shaped hairpiece costume design.	Wearing a red midriff with a blue costume design color petal-like skirt underneath. Wearing green pendants in her ears, an ethnic shawl over her shoulders, a leather girdle around her costume design waist, and red cloth costume design bands (possibly mixed silk) wrapped around her wrists and waist.	Mixed sky damask bound to the body, shoulder Qiankun circle, holding a fire-tipped gun, costume design stands on top of the wind and fire wheel, can be transformed into three heads and six arms.

Nezha's story of lowering demons	2020	Popularized Image of Nezha	Hair is brushed upwards into a double bun and tied with a red hair tie.	Wearing a red midriff with a blue costume design color petal-like skirt underneath. Wearing green pendants in her ears, an ethnic shawl on her shoulders, a leather girdle around her costume design waist, and red cloth costume design bands (possibly mixed silk) wrapped around her wrists and waist.	He carries a Qiankun circle on his shoulder and a fire-tipped spear in his hand.
The Great Fairy	2022	Nezha	Modernized hairstyles.	The costumes are not fixed, and the exterior styling is completely modern.	The costumes are not fixed, and the exterior styling is completely modern.

2.3 Nezha in Art Films

By analyzing the contents of the art films about Nezha, 2 animated images about Nezha were summarized chronologically and summarized in terms of facial structure, hairstyle, body shape, costumes, weapons and magic phases, as shown in the table below (Table 4):

Table 4 Nezha in Art Films Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng, 2024

name	Year	Reference source	Appearance and hairstyle	Costume design	Weapon Phantasms
lit. smash the Heavenly Palace	1961	Journey to the West	Presented a short standing horizontal costume design eyebrows, triangular eyes hanging upside down, costume design the corner of the mouth down the kind of costume design appearance, let a person feel Yin costume design cold treacherous. Costume design head at both ends of the tie costume design a bun. For the childishness is not yet free of the costume design child image. The head costume design is big and small,	She wears a national costume, a belly-band, and a shawl designed from the simple costume of a lotus leaf, using the more somber colors of blue, green, and white.	Holding the Fire Tip Gun and the Qiankun Circle, standing on top of the Wind and Fire Wheel, he will change his costume design into three heads and six arms.

			the body costume design is round and full, and the costume design is similar to the big head costume design Fuwa in the traditional Chinese folk costume design New Year's paintings.		
Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King.	1979	Nezha	A child image designed for a few years old child in a big costume. Thick eyebrows and big eyes, the corner of the mouth, costume design eyebrow end, corner of the eye are on the costume design pick, between the eyebrows there is a touch of costume design red, give people a bright and lively costume design lively feeling. The dress design forehead combed Qi Liu dress design sea, head top tie double dress design bun.	She wore a red bib in the early period, added a white tunic, blue pants and black shoes to the bib in the middle period, and wore a pink lotus petal-type shawl and a lime green ruffled skirt in the later period.	Holding a fire-tipped spear and a Qiankun circle in his hand, with the Mixed Sky Aya bound to his body, he stands on top of a costume-designed wind and fire wheel, which will transform into three heads and six arms.

2.4 Nezha in TV Animation

Through content analysis of live-action TV dramas about Nezha, five animated images of Nezha were summarized in chronological order and summarized in terms of facial structure, hairstyle, body shape, costumes, weapons and magic phases, as shown in the table below (Table 25):

Table 5 Table 1 Nezha in TV Animation Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng, 2024

name	Year	Reference source	Appearance and hairstyle	Costume design	Weapon Phantasms
Journey to the West	1999	Journey to the West	The appearance of a teenage boy. His skin is dark, with high raised sword eyebrows, slender phoenix eyes, slightly thick lips, and red dot marks on the center of his eyebrows. The bangs are symmetrically hooked on the left and right, and a	She is wearing a blue-green shawl, a pink one-piece dress, and a lotus petal-shaped sash around her waist.	In his hands, he holds the Qiankun Circle and the Fire Tip Gun, and his feet step on the Wind and Fire Wheel. When he transforms into three heads and six arms, he has three more weapons: a sword, a pestle and mortar, and a demon-binding rope.

			double bun is tied on the top of his head.		
Legend of the Fengs	1999	Nezha	The appearance of a teenager. Thick eyebrows and big eyes, with a clear appearance. It made people feel less of a trace of childishness and more of a sense of maturity. With slightly messy, broken hair, a strand of long hair on each side of his temples, and a small lotus flower worn on top of his head.	The overall color palette is dominated by red. The red jumpsuit is paired with yellow gauntlets over the red dress, and the same series of gauntlets are worn on the wrists and lower legs.	The Mixed Heaven Aya is bound to his body, holding the Qiankun Circle and the Fire Tip Gun, with his feet on the Wind Fire Wheel. However, the overall color tone of the weapons is on the golden side, showing more of a metallic texture. (This version of the styling draws on many Japanese anime elements)
The Legend Of Nezha	2003	Nezha	For the look of a young boy of a few years old. Before rebirth, the point eyebrows and big eyes were full of childishness. After being reborn, it changed into sword eyebrows and phoenix eyes, with a few more points of maturity. Bangs in front of the forehead tied into a small handful, the top of the head tie double bun.	Before rebirth she wore a red gauntlet and blue pants. After rebirth, she wears red gauntlets, blue pants, a pink lotus flower petal-like girdle around her waist, and green beads with pink suspenders in her earlobes.	He is bound by the Mixed Heavenly Aya and wears the Qiankun Circle in his hand, which attacks in a similar way to the missile attack launched by the twin cannons. He also has a fire-tipped spear in his hand and a wind and fire wheel in his foot, which allows him to transform into a three-headed, six-armed character. This version of Nezha is also accompanied by a personal pet, Piggy Bear.
Fantasy Dragon Treasure	2009	Popularized Image of Nezha	In the shape of a child of about ten years of age. Thick eyebrows and large eyes with red dot marks between them, flaming ends, and triangular cat whisker markings on either side of the cheeks. Red hair stands upwards with	The top half of her body is wearing a blue belly band with a floral print, the bottom half of her body is wearing wide dark green pants with two ties and a pair of green sneakers. Green hoops were worn around her	No special weapons or spells.

			a separate yellow center strand, a long strand of hair at each sideburn, and a ponytail pigtail at the back of the head.	neck and wrists.	
Monkey King	2010	Journey to the West	In the mold of a young boy of a few years old. Pointed eyebrows and large eyes with red dot marks between them. The bangs are tied into a small tuft in front of the forehead, and a double bun is tied at the top of the head.	Overall consistent with The Legend Of Nezha image. Dressed in a red bib and green pants. Pink lotus flower petal-like girdle around waist.	He carries a Qiankun circle on his shoulder, holds a fire-tipped spear in his hand, and steps on a wind and fire wheel.

2.5 Nezha in Web Animation

By analyzing the content of web animations about Nezha, five animated images of Nezha were summarized chronologically and summarized in terms of facial structure, hairstyle, body shape, costumes, weapons and magic phases, as shown in the table below (Table 6):

Table 6 Table Nezha in Web Animation

name	Year	Reference source	Appearance and hairstyle	Costume design	Weapon Phantasms
BadJokes	2012	Popularized Image of Nezha	The body type is tall and lanky and strong, with a body of robust muscles. After the rebirth and resurrection, the flesh was transformed into a female with a slim figure by Tai Yi Zhen. Before rebirth is uncle face, after rebirth is loli face. Possesses dark blue hair color and wears a	Born with a red bib and red headband. Tall and strong, with an older man's face, voice and muscles. After the reset, her appearance has changed to a cute loli, but her body is still a muscular man. He is also wearing a V-shaped purple undergarment. After Nezha's newborn resurrection, his physical body was transformed into a woman by Tai Yi	Spoofing skills: coupling.

			double bun.	Zhen, with a slim, gentle and beautiful figure, and pure white skin. Dressed in a pink dress and boots, emerald green ruffled small short skirt.	
lit. mouth-watering seal of deity	2016	Popularized Image of Nezha	The forehead is combed with Qi bangs, keeping a student's head, and the top of the head is tied with a double bun. He has the appearance of a teenager. He has comic-style thin eyebrows and large semi-circular eyes.	She wore a sleeveless collared t-shirt on top and a lotus petal shaped dress on the bottom half.	Mixed sky damask bound to the body, shoulder Qiankun circle, hand holding the fire tip gun, feet on the wind and fire wheel, can be transformed into a three-headed six-armed.
Virgil's age (770-420 BC), astronomical period of pre-Cambrian geological era	2016	Nezha	For about ten years of age of the teenager look thin eyebrows, high, phoenix eyes parallelogram, nose small, high, the corners of the mouth down, giving people the feeling of cold-blooded thin emotion. The bangs are in the shape of "V", and the top of the head is tied with double buns.	In terms of clothing, he wears a red vest with a white collar with gold trim on the top, and dark green pants with gauntlets on his wrists on the bottom half of his body.	Alchemy: Cyclone Flying Wheel, Secret Technique of Heavenly Clothes - Stone Man Buster, City of Weapons.
The king is not happy.	2016	Popularized Image of Nezha	For youthful appearance. Fine eyebrows and big eyes, with a high nose. In front of his forehead, he	With a predominantly red color scheme, he wears a red robe with gold trim, a white collar that	Bound by the Heavenly Aya, with the Qiankun Circle on his shoulder and the Fire

			has fine bangs, and the hair on both sides of his cheeks is combed back into a bun and tied with a red ribbon. There is a bunch of long hair on each side of the temples, and the hair on the back of the head is naturally loose.	stands high, and a sash with lotus flower ornaments around his waist.	Tip Gun in his hand.
not human	2022	Popularized Image of Nezha	About ten years old teenager appearance, fine short hair, forehead bangs sea up, expressionless face, extended lightless, sword eyebrow big eyes	Blue and white elementary school sports uniform with red scarf.	He is bound by the Mixed Heavenly Aya, with his feet on the Wind and Fire Wheel, his shoulder on the Qiankun Circle, and his hand on the Fire Tip Lance.

2.6 Nezha in Movie Animation

Through the content analysis of the animated films about Nezha, seven animated images of Nezha were summarized in chronological order and summarized in terms of facial structure, hairstyle, body shape, costumes, weapons and magic phases, as shown in the table below (Table 7):



Table 7 Nezha in Movie Animation Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng,2024

name	Year	Reference source	Appearance and hairstyle	Costume design	Weapon Phantasms
BadJokes blockbuster movie	2014	Popularized Image of Nezha	for an adult look with toned muscles.	In the costume, a tight blue jumpsuit was worn.	Spoofing skills: coupling.
Journey to the West - The Return of the Great Sage	2015	Journey to the West	A teenager with slender limbs and a well-proportioned body. Ears wearing golden rings, a touch of red between the eyebrows, eyebrows, eyes are high amplitude upward, the area of the white of the eyes is about three times the size of the pupil, the corner of the eye to the cheekbones have red marks, giving people a fierce and vicious feeling. Inverted triangular bangs are kept in front of the forehead, and double buns are tied at the top of the head.	It has a red silk scarf-like cloth-like thing tied around its neck, a green girdle wrapped around its waist, a lotus-shaped skirt, and red flame-like protectors on its arms and calves.	The Mixed Sky Aya was bound to his body, the Qiankun Circle was carried on his shoulder, the fire-tipped spear was held in his hand, and his feet stepped on the wind and fire wheels.
I am Nezha 1+2	2016	Nezha	It is the size of a child of a few years old, and after transforming, it is in the form of a teenager. He has	It wears a maroon barracks armor suit, which is changed to blue and red tones after the transformation.	The Mixed Sky Aya was bound to his body, the Qiankun Circle was carried on his shoulder, the fire-tipped

			thick eyebrows and big eyes, with a red floral print between his eyebrows, giving him a naive and innocent look. The bangs are tied into a small pinch in front of his forehead, and there is a bun at each end of his head.		spear was held in his hand, the feet stepped on the wind and fire wheels, and he could turn out six arms.
The Legend of Shepherd's Field, novel by William Shakespeare	2017	Nezha	He is the size of a child of a few years old. There is also a red dot mark between the eyebrows, presenting a thin eyebrow and big eyes, with a smile at the corner of the mouth, making people feel approachable. Her bangs are tied into a small bunch in front of her forehead, and she wears a double bun on top of her head.	She wears a pink lotus leaf petal-like shawl, a green one-piece dress, and red gauntlets on her feet.	The Mixed Sky Aya was bound to his body, the Qiankun Circle was carried on his shoulder, the fire-tipped spear was held in his hand, and his feet stepped on the wind and fire wheels.
Birth of the Demon Child	2019	Nezha	Before his transformation, Nezha was the size of a child of a few years old, and after his transformation, he looks like a teenager. Before his transformation, Nezha had a red konjac seal	Before the transformation, Nezha wore a qiankun ring around his neck, a sleeveless cardigan with a picture of a seductive lotus flower, wide brown seven-quarter pants, and a yellow belt. After the transformation,	The Mixed Sky Aya was bound to his body, the Qiankun Circle was carried on his shoulder, the fire-tipped spear was held in his hand, the feet stepped on the wind and fire wheels, and he could

			between his eyebrows, thin black eyebrows, and large eyes with heavy eyeliner, giving him a dead look. After the transformation, Nezha's eyebrows are furrowed and his eyes are pointed upwards, with a torch-like gaze. Before his transformation, he wore bangs on his forehead and a double bun on top of his head. After the transformation, Nezha's hair stands upwards and flows.	Nezha wears no shirt but only pants.	turn out six arms.
Lo Siu Hei Battle Movie	2019	Popularized Image of Nezha	The appearance of a young boy of about ten years of age. Showing the appearance of maru eyebrows and lower three white eyes, giving off a sense of carelessness. He wears bangs in front of his forehead and a double bun on top of his head.	Totally on the modern side, the top half is a t shirt with an aviator jacket and a collar around the neck. The bottom half is camouflage shorts paired with athletic skinny nine-minute pants and a pair of sneakers.	While the Mixed Sky Aya becomes the form of a sleeve badge hanging on the arm, the Qiankun Circle and the Wind and Fire Wheel have the exact same appearance of a golden circle-shaped object.
Freshman list: Nezha Reborn	2021	Popularized Image of Nezha	A young man in his twenties, airplane head, a few bangs in front of his forehead, long hair tied in a bun at the back of	Punk costume, driving a motorcycle, wearing a brown stand-up jacket with tight gray short sleeves before transforming,	Before transforming, he uses a gun, and after transforming, he uses a fire-breathing

			his head, with a thin face, long face and sharp chin, dashing and handsome.	and red mechanical armor that is modular and detachable and automatically attaches to the body after transforming, with the Chinese character for "cloud" printed on the breastplate.	metal lance that can be detached and used, and after transforming, he merges with Nezha's reincarnated genjutsu, with the Mixed Sky Aya surrounding him.
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2.7 Visual Changes in Nezha's Film and Television Image

2.7.1 Changes in appearance and hairstyles

In the Nezha, Nezha's image is described very vividly: when he was born, his "face was like powder", and at the age of seven, his body length reached "six feet". "His face was like powder, his lips were like vermilion, his eyes were shining, and his body length was oNezhang six feet. In order to accurately understand the actual lengths of the "zhang" and "shaku" mentioned here, it is necessary to refer to the historical background of the period in which the work was created. The Nezha was written in the Ming Dynasty, and Zhu Zaiyu of the Ming Dynasty made a detailed record of the scale standards of that time in his work "The Complete Book of Music and Laws - New Sayings on Laws". The rulers for daily use in the Ming Dynasty were divided into three kinds, namely, the construction ruler, the clothing ruler and the land measuring ruler, in which the length of the construction ruler was flush with the ink edge of the Da Ming Baoji, and the length of the clothing ruler was flush with the paper edge. The construction ruler of the Ming Dynasty was similar in length to the cloth and silk ruler of the Song Dynasty, and was usually used for the construction of fields and acres, cloth and silk, and buildings; the curved ruler, or the right-angled ruler as we understand it in modern times, was mainly used in the field of construction; and the court basically adopted the small ruler in the tailoring of the official uniforms, in which one foot of the large ruler was equal to one foot and two inches of the small ruler. According to the Ming standard of measurement, the construction ruler was 32 centimeters long, the land measuring ruler was 32.6 centimeters long, and the clothing ruler was 34 centimeters long. Therefore, according to this standard of measurement, Nezha was at least 1.9 meters tall at the age of seven, and after his Lotus incarnation, he was a staggering 5.1 meters tall.

In Journey to the West, Nezha's image is portrayed in an extremely vivid and specific way: "The horns of his head only cover his fontanel, and his cloak of hair is not yet bitter on his shoulders. Nezha's magic is sensitive, and his bones are beautiful. Nezha is the son of a lynx in the sky, a phoenix immortal of color and smoke. The dragon's seed is naturally not commonplace, and his wonderful age is not similar to that of the mortal world" and "The little boy was born with a marvelous appearance and his forehead is broad and his hair is in a bun. The embroidered belt dances in the wind and flies with colorful flames, and the brocade robe reflects the sun and

releases golden flowers..... His body is small and his voice is magnificent, and he protects the evil Nezha of the Church for three days." These descriptions show the image of a young man with a handsome demeanor and a clear face. The description of his hairstyle, in particular, points out that Nezha adopts a scrunchy bun, an ancient hairstyle in which the hair is tied upwards into a bun, usually seen on women and girls, but also more commonly seen on children. In modern film and television portrayals of Nezha, the double bun design is more common (Chengen Wu, 2018).

The presentation of Nezha's appearance and body shape in film and television follows a certain evolutionary pattern:

In animation, Nezha is usually portrayed as a boy of about 10 years of age, which is significantly different from the casting of the character in live-action films and TV dramas. Films that are faithful to the source material often use child actors or actresses with delicate appearances to portray Nezha, in order to fit the character's "small size," "delicate face," and "vermillion lips. In those works that add personal emotional clues to Nezha based on the original story, adult male actors are often cast. This pattern of choice suggests that the portrayal of Nezha in films and TV dramas is mainly based on the children's portrayal of Nezha in *Journey to the West*, which is not only more in line with the description of the original text, but also closer to reality, and at the same time highlights the special identity of Nezha as a child god.

In animated works, most of those films that have made major changes to the plot and character settings do not feature the red dot between the eyebrows. In live-action films and TV productions, on the other hand, almost all of the productions that display the red dot between Nezha's eyebrows are adaptations of the *Journey to the West* series. Regarding the origin of the red dot between the eyebrows, there is a tradition of red dots in Indian culture, and many bodhisattvas and statues of Buddha are also marked with red dots on their eyebrows. These red dots are not an acquired addition, but rather a natural formation or an outgrowth of energy after cultivation. Considering Nezha's archetype is the guardian deity of Buddhism, the red dot set on his brow is a design that is in keeping with his sacred status.

Nezha's hairstyle has remained largely unchanged in film and television. Although a few productions have experimented with more contemporary hairstyles, most still follow the "bun hair" hairstyle depicted in the original.

2.7.2 Clothing and accessory changes

Before we analyze Nezha's costumes in film and television, let's first refer to the specific descriptions of Nezha's costumes in the original novels. In *Nezha*, Nezha is born wearing a gold bracelet and red silk, and when he is reborn and meets Jiang Ziya, he is described as having "a brilliant light on his top, and his water-clad robes are bound with tiger and dragon stripes". These descriptions reflect the influence of Taoist culture, which favors the image of Nezha as a Taoist child. In *Journey to the West*, Nezha's costume is depicted as "fully armored," "embroidered," "brocaded" and "brocade robes, "ringed tapestries", "combat boots", and "clothes made of lotus leaves", showing more of his identity as a valiant general of heaven.

The descriptions of Nezha's costumes in *Journey to the West* and *Nezha* show that there are not many details of Nezha's costumes in the original novels, so the costume designs in film and television are often based on the needs of the plot and the

character's personality, and the designers are often creative. The evolution of Nezha's costumes in movies and TV shows the following pattern:

① With the passage of time, Nezha's costume design has shown a tendency to become more elaborate and diversified in terms of patterns and motifs. The costume design in early animation works was mainly based on simple color blocking and lacked complex patterns and motifs. However, with the development of technology and aesthetics, the costume design of Nezha's animated characters in the later stages of the animation process included more elaborate details, and the patterns and motifs became more vivid and rich. In the early years of live-action film and television, patterns and motifs were usually only partially decorated on belts, shawls, etc. In the later years, patterns and motifs were only partially decorated on tops and shawls. In the later stages, patterns are incorporated into clothing such as tops, and even metal clothing is engraved with corresponding patterns, demonstrating the progress and innovation of costume design.

② The dressing of Nezha in animation works is gradually modernized, while the live-action film and television productions show Nezha in a more powerful image of a heavenly general. Influenced by the animation cultures of Japan and the United States, the concept of animation creation in mainland China has increasingly followed contemporary values. Many modern elements were added to Nezha's costume in later animation productions, such as the tight blue jumpsuit in *Bad Jokes*, the seven-minute pants in *Birth of the Demon Child*, the aviator jacket and nine-minute pants in *Luo Xiaohe War Journal*, the sweatpants and sneakers in *Fantasy Dragon Treasure*, and the sleeveless T-shirt in *Spit and Seal*. In contrast, live-action film and television productions have evolved from early designs of partial armor, such as wrist, shoulder, and waist protectors, to the more common image of Nezha wearing a full suit of armor in the later years, thus highlighting his shift toward a heroic image.

③ In terms of color schemes, animation works and live-action film and television works show different trends. In animation, the main colors of Nezha's costumes are usually red and green, supplemented by blue; while in live-action film and television productions, there is a gradual shift from the early main colors of red and green to a color scheme that is dominated by red and metallic colors, supplemented by black, a change that not only reflects the progress of the color design, but also the efforts of the film and television productions to dig deeper into the image of Nezha and to interpret it.

2.7.3 Weapons and phallic changes

In Nezha, Nezha is portrayed and equipped in a variety of ways, and is born with a golden bracelet (Qian Kun Circle) and a red damask (Mixed Sky Aya) that symbolize his power. After being resurrected and empowered by Tai Yi Zhen, Nezha is given a fire-pointed spear and a wheel of wind and fire, as well as a leopard-skin pouch containing the Qian Kun Circle, the Mixed Heavenly Aya, and a gold brick. When Nezha demonstrates the power of his three heads and eight arms, Tai Yi immortal further imparts to him the Nine Dragons Divine Fire Shield and the Yin-Yang Sword. Thus, in Nezha, Nezha's weapons include the Mixed Heavenly Aya, the Qiankun Circle, the Fire Pointed Lance, the Wind and Fire Wheel, the Yin-Yang Sword, the Nine Dragons' Divine Fire Shield, the Golden Brick, and the Leopard Skin Pouch.

In *Journey to the West*, Nezha is portrayed in an equally powerful manner. When he transforms into a three-headed, six-armed man, he fights with six types of weapons, including the Demon Chopper Sword, Demon Slasher Sword, Demon Binding Rope, Demon Sinking Pestle, Embroidery Ball, and Fire Wheel, demonstrating his prowess and ability as a general of the heavenly realm.

By comparing the descriptions in these two classic literary works, it can be seen that Nezha's evolutionary pattern in the styling of his weapons and spells is mainly reflected in the following aspects:

① Within the field of animation, Nezha's weapon and spell styling has taken on an increasingly entertaining and modernized character. Early animation works tended to be faithful to the original story, with more traditional weapon styles. However, as "entertainment culture, as a typical representative of mass culture, naturally emerged and rapidly grew into a widespread consumer industry." Chinese animation began to borrow ideas from Japanese and American animation, innovating Nezha's weapons and spells, including adding nonsensical, childlike or modernized elements. For example, "The Legend of Nezha" features weapons in the style of "Saint Seiya"; "The Legend Of Nezha" employs cannonball attacks; "booger attack" and "lotus root break" skills in "BadJokes"; and "The Chronicles of Wu Geng" features the "lotus root break" skill in "The Chronicles of Wu Geng". The art of qi refining in *Wu Geng Ji*; and weapons in the form of modern objects in *Luo Xiao He Ji*.

② The frequency of "three heads, six arms (eight arms)" spells has increased significantly in live-action movies and television productions in post-production. Thanks to advances in film and television production, make-up and post-production techniques, these looks, which require a high degree of production skill, have been rendered more realistically and vividly.

Most of the works do not follow the original story completely in terms of weapon settings. For example, Nezha in *Journey to the West* is not equipped with a fire-tipped spear or a Qiankun circle, while in *Nezha*, Nezha appears with three heads and eight arms. From our observations, we found that, with the exception of *The Seven Monsters of Plum Mountain*, the 2010 version of *Journey to the West*, the 2011 version of *Journey to the West*, and some adaptations, the formulation of Nezha's weaponry is based more on the general public's understanding of Nezha's image.

Part III Artistic Modeling and Characterization of Nezha in Animation

3.1 The image of Nezha in Art Films

Fine art film is a special form of movie. Art film is a Chinese term for animated films, puppet films, paper-cutting films, or films that utilize traditional Chinese folk art with national artistic characteristics. In the early days, they were mainly produced by the state-owned Shanghai Art Film Studio, with a wide variety of themes and forms, and occupied an important position in the world film industry.

Chinese art films have drawn rich nourishment from their own people's traditional paintings, murals, New Year's paintings, carvings, folk crafts and local operas, etc., and have gradually formed an artistic style known as the Chinese animation school. Chinese art film workers believe that although art film is a worldwide art with its common characteristics, they should find resources from their

own national art tradition in terms of art style and create their own national art film art. In their long-term creative practice, they have produced many excellent art films with Chinese style and international influence.

The character of Nezha made his debut in the history of Chinese animation as a supporting character in the 1961-1964 art film *The Great Trouble in Heaven*. However, Nezha's debut as a main character was in the 1979 art film *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*. *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King* was not only highly acclaimed for its artistic merit, but also won numerous national and international awards. Nezha also appeared in the 1995 version of *The Monkey King*, albeit in a relatively small role and without a significant breakthrough. During this period, the most representative images of Nezha undoubtedly belonged to *The Palace of Heaven* and *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, which not only represented the top level of Chinese cinematic creation at the time, but also had their own distinctive performances in terms of Nezha's artistic styling, characterization, and cultural connotations, etc., which are worth analyzing and exploring in depth. They are worthy of in-depth analysis and discussion.

3.1.1 Artistic modeling: the fusion of national aesthetics and folk art

Nezha's artistic styling notably carried a deep national cultural imprint during this period. As Mr. Wan Lai Ming said, "In order for Chinese animation to be vibrant, it must be deeply rooted in the soil of the nation's traditions (Wan, 1936)." The character of Nezha is a masterpiece nurtured in the fertile soil of traditional culture. Although Nezha is portrayed as a child and a Taoist deity in both *The Great Pandemonium of Heaven* and *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, there are significant differences in their stylization in terms of body shape, costume and weaponry. This is mainly due to the fact that the two works, inspired by *Journey to the West* and Nezha respectively, are different interpretations of Nezha's character, resulting in their own distinctive portrayals. Despite these differences, both *The Greatest Showman* and *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King* have succeeded in portraying Nezha as a classic character.

3.1.1.1 White-faced New Year's Eve dolls from Peking Opera face paintings

As the pinnacle of Chinese animation creation at the time, *The Palace of Heaven* is centered around the story of the *Monkey King*. The modeling design and coloring of the animated film is a masterpiece of art, successfully integrating national art elements, such as paper-cutting, New Year's paintings, face painting, etc., into it, showing a profound aesthetic thought. The French newspaper *Le Monde* has highly praised this film, saying that "*The Palace of Heaven*" not only possesses a sense of beauty similar to that of Disney's works in the United States, but also realizes what Disney has failed to achieve in terms of plastic arts, that is, it perfectly expresses the style of traditional Chinese art (Wan & Wan, 1986). In this film, although Nezha appears as a supporting character, his stylistic design is equally distinctive, displaying strong characteristics of national style.

In the movie, Nezha's role follows that of the Third Prince of the Heavenly King of Tota in the Ming Dynasty novel *Journey to the West*, while acting as Li Jing's assistant. In the movie, when Li Jing waves his flag, Nezha follows his orders and engages in a tussle with the *Monkey King*. In the original novel, when the *Monkey King* first meets Nezha, he says, "Little Prince, your milk teeth have not yet retreated, and your fetus hair has not yet dried up, how dare you say such big words", and there

is a similar line in the movie: "You're not yet dried up, so what big words are you talking about, I, the Great Sage of Qi Tian, can't be bothered to beat you up. "

In terms of stylistic image, Nezha in *The Great Destruction of Heavenly Palace* was created by borrowing from Peking Opera face painting and folklore New Year's paintings, then incorporating Dunhuang, Yongle Palace murals, and door god paintings into the character's image as references, and finally integrating elements of decorative paintings by adopting the color styles often used in folk paintings, such as green, green, red, white, black, and pink. Drawing on the image of Chinese New Year dolls, Nezha was designed as a chubby little child with a double bun, bracelets, a belly-band, and short limbs. In *Talking about the Aesthetic Creation of Art Films* (Yong & Cong, 2013), Zhang Guangyu writes, "Dramatic techniques should also be used to create a character for the character while moving the brush. The first step is to open the face, paying attention to the eyes and the goodness or evilness of the eyebrows, and the outline of the beauty or ugliness of the nose and the mouth can also shape the character. The next step is to create the shape of the whole body, roughly fat, thin, long and short. However, it is possible to show the character of integrity and cunning in the change of lines, and with the addition of movement it can be a living thing." . Nezha's head is tied in a double bun, he wears a belly-band, and his thick, short limbs appear round and powerful. The bracelets and anklets worn on his hands and feet signify ancient auspiciousness, peace and joy, and good fortune in distress. Although the overall image tends to be childish, the design of the facial details is very different from the naive big head and short body, showing short vertical eyebrows, a pair of upside-down triangular eyes and downward-slanting corners of the mouth, with a ferocious look, similar to the characteristics of the white face in the Peking Opera³, which creates the image of arrogance and domineering.

Nezha's facial color design incorporates elements of Peking Opera face painting, in which different colors symbolize different characters' personalities. For example, red represents loyalty and chivalry, yellow represents bravery and ferocity, black symbolizes boldness and righteousness, blue is an extension of black and represents strength and boldness, while white symbolizes sinister and treacherous. The image of Nezha is mainly dominated by large areas of white, presenting a strong characteristic of derogatory colors, which highlights his villainous character and also incorporates rich Chinese elements (Figure 31 32).



Figure 31 White-faced Nezha in "The Greatest Showman" (left)

³ In Peking Opera, white-faced roles denote deviousness and treachery, and good use of schemes.

Source: Movie and television footage of *The Greatest Showman*, 1964.

In the fight scene with the Monkey King, Nezha displays the three-headed, six-armed image from Legends. He grows several times in size, holding a Qiankun Circle and a fire-tipped spear, and stepping on a wheel of wind and fire, as he fiercely fights the Monkey King. Nezha's transformation process presents a sense of joy and stylization by shaking his head from side to side and puffing his mouth to hold his breath, among other moves. He also raises the soles of his feet to look at them when he is burned on his feet by the Monkey King's phantom using the wind and fire wheel, adding a touch of clumsy but cute character (Figure 33 34).



Figure 32 Nezha with Three Heads and Six Arms in *The Palace of Heavenly Creatures*

Source: Movie and TV footage of *The Greatest Showman*, 1964.

Although Nezha only appears in one scene in *The Palace of Heaven*, this brief appearance shows the care and attention that the creators put into his portrayal. Nezha's portrayal in the movie is not simply a copy of folk legends or literary depictions, but is uniquely designed to meet the specific needs of the character. In the movie, Nezha acts as the villain who suppresses the Monkey King, and based on this characteristic, the creators cleverly designed the image of a white-faced New Year's Eve doll.

In addition, the image of Nezha in the movie incorporates a wealth of traditional Chinese cultural elements, reflecting a deep understanding of and high regard for national art. These designs not only strengthened the characterization of Nezha, but also made his image stand out and unique on screen. Through this exquisite stylistic design, the creators have succeeded in portraying a classic villainous Nezha, making him one of the unforgettable classic characters in the history of Chinese animation.

3.1.1.2 Ancient children with clear eyebrows and two buns

Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King is the first animated work featuring Nezha, and the first large-scale, color, widescreen animated feature film in China. It is widely regarded as the pinnacle of Chinese animation, following the feud between Nezha, the son of Li Jing of the Chen Tang Pass, and the Dragon Palace of the East China Sea. The portrayal of Nezha in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King* is a model of excellence.

The film is based on the story of the Nezha, and through processing, blending and embellishing the original text, the image of Nezha is created in different stages. The evolution of Nezha's image in the movie is divided into three main stages: the birth and water play stage, the self-slaughter stage, and the rebirth stage. In these stages, the design of Nezha's figure draws on elements from Dunhuang murals and New Year's paintings, and is a profound re-creation of Nezha's image based on a blend of national styles.

The depiction of Nezha's birth in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King* is full of mythological and artistic imagery. According to the *Nezha*, Nezha's mother was pregnant for three years and six months, and was born as a ball of flesh. The book describes: "A ball of red gas appeared in the room, filling the room with a strange aroma, and a ball of flesh was spinning around like a wheel. Li Jing was so frightened that he used his sword to cut at the meatball, which parted and a child jumped out, surrounded by red light (Xu & Zhong, 1980)".

In the movie, this description is artistically presented on screen, satisfying the audience's aesthetic expectations while filling in the gaps of detail in the original text. Nezha is depicted as a slightly transparent pink ball of flesh when he is born. When Li Jing swings his sword, the flesh ball emits a warm yellow lotus-shaped golden light, creating a cozy atmosphere. The meatball then transforms into a lotus flower that unfolds layer by layer to reveal little Nezha crouched on a lotus seedpod and crouching on his knees. He skillfully uses a lotus leaf to create a belly-band, cutting off Li Jing's sword and playing with his maids and housekeeper, revealing a lively and lovable image of Little Nezha (Figure 34).



Figure 33 Nezha's birth in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*
Source: Film and video footage of *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, 1979.

In the episode in which Nezha is taken under the tutelage of Taiyi Zhenzhen, he is fed a "golden elixir". In Taoist culture, alchemy is seen as a way to achieve immortality, and the lotus flower is a Taoist holy relic, with its seeds having a high medicinal value. Therefore, the "golden elixir" in the movie can be interpreted as lotus seeds, symbolizing Nezha's deep connection with the lotus flower. After eating the lotus seed, Nezha's body becomes the size of a normal child, with gold rings in his ears, a double bun on his head, bangs on his forehead, and part of his hair draped over his shoulders, showing the typical image of an ancient child between the ages of three and eight.

Nezha's facial design is significantly different from his portrayal in *The Palace of Heaven*. He has slanting upward eyebrows and big, soulful eyes, showing him as a strong and resolute decent person. A red vertical line between his eyebrows, known as

the Hanging Needle Line in Chinese physiognomy, symbolizes righteousness, dominance, and fortitude, which matches Nezha's character and life experience. Na Cha is thus portrayed as a typical ancient child, full of vigor and a sense of justice. In this phase of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King's styling, the weapons Nezha carries with him - the Qiankun Circle and the Mixed Heavenly Aya - are a significant element. These two treasures symbolize the "squareness of heaven and earth" and the "chaos of the universe", and possess infinite divine power. The original Nezha mentions that Nezha was born with these two treasures, a golden bracelet in his right hand (the Qiankun Circle) and a red damask around his belly (the Mixed Sky Damask). The original text does not describe the details of these two treasures, but simply mentions their color and power. In the movie, these two magic treasures were adapted to be given by Taiyi Zhenzhen, whose appearance was visualized in the film and television images.

And the design of the Mixed Sky Damask is full of rich ethnic flavor. Its slender shape, with lines that are both hard and soft, was inspired mainly by Dunhuang murals. When dancing, the Mixed Sky Damask appears to be dynamic and profound. As Mr. Yang Zhi said, "The meaning of line is not only in modeling, but it also has an independent function of expression in itself. The extension of lines implicitly imports spatial modeling into the course of time, presenting a sense of flow; the undulation and change of lines conveys rich rhythmic rhythms (Yang, 2011)." During the fight, the Mixed Heavenly Damask is either gently fluttering or as hard as iron, and the softness and hardness of the lines change with a certain emotional color. It is also painted with patterns of the sun, moon, and clouds, echoing the ancient Chinese worship of totems. The sun painted on the Mixed Sky damask is the three-legged Golden Crow Sun Bird, symbolizing the sun chariot bird in the ancient myth of Legends, which could also save Nezha from danger at critical moments.

In terms of color scheme, the dominant color of Nezha's look is red. The only clothing he wears - his belly-band and the silk of the mixed sky - are both in red, the largest color block on his body. The color red is a symbol of good fortune and festivity in traditional Chinese culture, and is often worn in ancient marriages and by officials of the fifth rank and above in the imperial court, reflecting the Chinese preference for the color red. As mentioned earlier, the color red represents loyalty, bravery, and chivalry in Peking Opera face painting, which also reflects Nezha's righteous character (Figure 35).



Figure 34 Nezha, who has been given a magic weapon in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King.

Source: Film and video footage of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, 1979.

In Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, Nezha's image changes dramatically during the self-sacrifice phase, demonstrating a profound transformation of his character. Returning home after defeating the Night Fury and Ao Beng, Nezha changes his costume: he wears a knee-length white coat with light blue trim and a belly-band, and a pair of blue pants with a pair of black cloth shoes. His waist was wrapped with a mixed heavenly damask, and his overall appearance was simple and atmospheric, exuding a dusty and ethereal air, with a distinctly Taoist style of immortal child, in keeping with his identity as a Taoist spirit beadle.

At this stage, the dominant color of Nezha's form is white, a color choice that highlights Nezha's just and simple nature in its multiple meanings. At the same time, white is often associated with mourning in Chinese culture and carries with it a certain sense of taboo. Its five elements, gold, symbolize the West and the passing of life, paving the way for the unfortunate foreshadowing of Nezha's fate.

When Aoguang, the Dragon King, joins forces with the other three dragon kings to take revenge on Nezha, using the people of the Chentang Pass to force him to submit, Nezha is dressed in white and flutters with the wind in the midst of a raging storm, creating an atmosphere of pathos. Subsequently, in the scene in which Nezha kills himself, blood stains his white clothes red, creating a sharp contrast of white and red colors, creating a strong visual impact, profoundly mobilizing the audience's emotions, and sublimating the spirit of tragedy (Figure 36). Therefore, costume styling plays an extremely important role in this stage, not only reflecting the transformation of Nezha's character, but also deepening the emotion and theme of the movie.



Figure 35 Nezha in Taoist robes cutting his own throat in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King

Source: Film and video footage of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, 1979.

During the rebirth phase of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, Nezha's image changes significantly. After Nezha's physical death, Tai Yi Zhen's mount, the Immortal Crane, brings his body, the Spirit Bead, back to the Cave of Golden Light, where the lotus flower is used to reshape Nezha's body. The description of this process in Nezha is quite complex, involving a variety of elements and steps, including the use of lotus leaves, lotus flowers, and so on. It is recorded in Nezha:

"The real person will flower le down petals, spread into three, and the lotus leaf stalks will be folded into three hundred bones, three lotus leaves, according to the top, middle and bottom, according to the sky, earth and people. The real man put a golden elixir in the center of the house, the law with the first heaven, the nine

revolutions of qi, separating the dragon, kan and tiger, nicked Nezha's soul, looking at the lotus, and pushed it, drinking: 'Nezha is not in human form, what to wait for! A loud bang was heard, and a man jumped up, with a face like powder, lips like vermillion, eyes shining brightly, and a body length of one foot six feet.

The movie simplifies this process by fusing the lotus root, lotus leaf, lotus seedpod and lotus flower into one, thus transforming the newborn Nezha. In this image, Nezha sits in the center of a lotus flower, using the lotus flower as a shawl and the lotus leaf as a half-skirt, and the anklets on his feet are even more elaborate than before, symbolizing Nezha's increased magical power after his Reborn. Elements of Buddhism are revealed in a series of movements during Nezha's Reborn, which is followed by the gradual growth of his six arms. Nezha's three heads and six arms are complete when he receives the new weapons, the Fire Tip Lance and the Wind Fire Wheel, from Tai Yi immortal (Figure 37).

During this period, Nezha's overall form was based on the theme of the lotus flower, as Nezha belongs to the Taoist deities, which have a deep cultural connection with the lotus flower. The color scheme is lotus leaf green and lotus pink, with the green symbolizing vitality and rebirth, and the pink conveying innocence. This color scheme looks fresh and natural, presenting a unique beauty like a Chinese painting. Through these meticulous designs, the movie not only visually shows the rebirth and transformation of Nezha, but also deeply reflects the unique beauty of Chinese paintings.



Figure 36 Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King Nezha's three-headed, six-armed figure after his Reborn

Source: Film and video footage of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, 1979.

3.1.2 Characterization: the transformation of the god of war into a human god

In Nezha, the character of Nezha is portrayed in considerable detail. The Nezha of the novel possesses exuberant vitality, and his way of acting reveals arrogance and wantonness. For example, he kills the Nightjar and Ao Beng, wounds the Dragon King and pulls out his scales, shoots Shiji's protégé Caiyun, and even kills his own father. Deep down in his heart, he believes that "it's no big deal even if I beat him to death", showing the violence and obstinacy in his nature. However, the novel attributes these behaviors to "heavenly fortune," suggesting that Nezha's behavior is due to the fact that he was born at an unlucky time.

In his role as Jiang Ziya's advance officer and in his participation in the war against Zhou, Nezha demonstrates bravery and courage. At this point in the story, Nezha is placed in the context of the story of the gods and immortals, and his behavior and self-perception fully reflect the qualities of a god. He claims to be "not a mortal, but a disciple of Taiyi Zhenzhen of the Jinguangdong cave in Qianyuan Mountain," but in the details of his behavior and style, he reveals some magical characteristics.

In response, animated film and television productions have adapted and portrayed Nezha at different times. In *The Palace of Heaven*, Nezha is portrayed as a villainous god of war, whose mission is to suppress the Monkey King, who has rebelled against the authority of the Heavenly Court, and is shown mainly after he has become a god. In contrast, Nezha in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King* adds more distinctive human characteristics, transforming him into a complex character who is both divine and human. In this version, Nezha is not only a disciple of Taiyi Zhenzhen and a spirit jewel himself, but he is also given a richer humanity and becomes a flesh-and-blood human god. Through this adaptation, the animated work successfully presents the versatility and depth of the classic character of Nezha.

3.1.2.1 Mischievous innocence and unworldliness

Although Nezha is portrayed with a vicious facial expression in "The Palace of Heaven", it is not difficult to detect a sense of mischief and humor when he laughs triumphantly at the Monkey King after his transformation into a larger body, combining his big round head and doll-like figure with stubby limbs. Particularly striking is Nezha's resigned demeanor and intentionally awkward movement design when he is defeated. One of his wind and fire wheels is taken away by the Monkey King, and the other foot is burned by the Monkey King's illusory wind and fire wheels, causing Nezha to walk with a limp and look back frequently, making him look both clumsy and ridiculous, a design that skillfully highlights the innocence of the god of war, Nezha.

Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King, however, is based on the Nezha, but the characterization of Nezha is very different from the violent nature of the original. The creators have created rational and righteous motives for each of Nezha's actions - whether it be injuring the Nightjar, the Dragon King, or killing Ao Beng - and have portrayed Nezha as an innocent, kind-hearted, mischievous child who has yet to be introduced to the world. As a newborn, Nezha plays and chases with his father and servants, showing his playful and affectionate side. Nezha's subsequent apprenticeship with Tai Yi immortal, and his acquisition of the Qian Kun Circle and the Mixed Heavenly Aya as weapons, as well as his freedom to run and

play in nature on the back of the Sika Deer, give him a childlike purity, as if he were an elf swimming in an ink and watercolor painting. As Nezha's mount, the Plum Blossom Deer not only brings him endless joy and freedom, but also reflects his innocent personality. In Taoist culture, the plum blossom deer is often regarded as an immortal animal, symbolizing good fortune and gentleness. The creator's choice of the plum blossom deer as Nezha's mount aptly reflects his purity and goodness of character.

In Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King, Nezha's reaction and behavior when confronted with the situation where his little sister is captured by Nightcrawler shows his childlike nature. When Nezha asks Nightcrawler to return his little sister and Nightcrawler arrogantly refuses, Nezha splashes Nightcrawler with water like an urchin in a childish and adorable scene. Nezha's attempts to persuade Nightcrawler with his words, and his insistence that "That won't do, you have to give it back, you have to give it back," resemble a child's argument with an adult, revealing his ignorance of Nightcrawler's evil nature and his inexperience in the world.

When Nezha is attacked by the Night Fork, Nezha fights back and injures the Night Fork, but then complains that "the gold ring is dirty and I still have to wash it", showing his ignorance and naivety about the value of life, and that he values his own treasures more than his own, and when he confronts Ao B, the third son of the Dragon King, he says that he will "peel off your skins, and draw your tendons". "Later, he fulfills his own warning by pulling out Ao B's tendons and cheerfully saying, "Tie my father's armor". Children are usually incapable of judging the seriousness of their own mistakes, and this is the case with Nezha. His words and actions lack reverence and understanding of life.

Nezha's behavior when the Dragon King comes to his door to demand an explanation shows his childishness and immaturity. His behavior in the Baode Hall is also impulsive and ill-considered, acting purely on emotion without considering the consequences of his actions. Nezha's naivety and ignorance are especially evident when he returns home and expects praise from his father, in stark contrast to the reaction of his father, Li Jing.

All these episodes reveal the character traits of Nezha: he is an innocent, childlike child, undisturbed by the world and still maintaining the laws of survival of a child. Although his words and actions emphasize commitment and frankness, he appears naïve and ignorant when confronted with the complexity of human relationships and social reality. It is not until he experiences the Dragon King's revenge and pays the price for it that Nezha grows from an uninitiated child to a hero who takes up the mantle of righteousness and accomplishes a major transformation in his character.

3.1.2.2 Righteousness in the face of power

In Nezha, Nezha is portrayed as rebellious and violent. The story describes how, due to the heat of the day, Nezha inadvertently shook the Crystal Palace when he went down to the East China Sea to take a bath. The Night Fighter, who patrols the sea, shows up and asks, "What monster has that boy taken that makes the river water turn red and the palace shake?" But he was rudely responded to by Nezha: "You beast, how dare you speak?" Nezha not only physically assaulted the Night Fork, but also beat him to death on the bank. Later, when Ao Bing confronted Nezha, Nezha showed contempt for his status as the third prince of the Dragon King of the East

China Sea, taunting, "You turn out to be the son of Ao Guang. If you are so arrogant, if you annoy me, I will deal with even your old loach of a father, even skinning him." Nezha shows his brutal side by killing people at will just because he is in a bad mood and belittling the lives of others.

And while the storyline of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King follows the framework of Nezha, it rationalizes Nezha's actions. Nezha injures Li Liang, the Night Stalker, because Li Liang has robbed the children and taken away his little sister. Nezha, on the other hand, beats Ao Bian to death because Ao Bian declares that he has already eaten his little sister and threatens to skin Nezha and eat his boy flesh. Because of Nezha's righteousness, he could not tolerate this evil and got rid of it. In this version, Nezha's actions are motivated by justice and righteousness, and he breaks away from the harsh and tyrannical image of the original and becomes a true hero who works for the good of the people and is loved by them.

Ao Guang, the Dragon King, is extremely eager to get rid of Nezha in order to vent his hatred due to his unquenchable anger. In the original Nezha, the Dragon King's status is actually not very high, despite the unexpected disaster that befell him. The story depicts a friendship between Ao Guang and Li Jing when they were studying in the Kunlun Mountains, which should have led Nezha to address Ao Guang as his uncle. However, Nezha does not take Ao Guang seriously. When Nezha's master, Tai Yi immortal, learns that Ao Guang has filed a complaint with the Heavenly Court, he comments, "Even though Nezha was ignorant and hurt Ao Bian by mistake, this was an arrangement of Heaven's will. Now although Ao Guang is the head of the dragons and is only responsible for rainfall and cloud rolls, yet can the manifestation of heavenly phenomena be attributed to ignorance! To take this trivial matter to the Heavenly Court and complain about it is really ignorant of the rules! (Xu & Zhong, 1980) "Tai Yi immortal blamed everything on fate and accused Ao Guang of not understanding the big picture, while Nezha, with the support of his master, told his father unapologetically, "I asked my master for help, and he said that I was reborn on the order of the Jade Palace to protect the Ming Emperor. Even if all the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas are destroyed, there will be no harm done." Nezha's statement can be described as unselfconscious and self-important.

The movie Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King deliberately downplays the treatment of Taiyae's attitude towards the Dragon King. In the movie, the Dragon King is portrayed as a symbol of power, controlling the weather and relied upon by many of the people. He threatens the people, demands boys and girls, and acts in a tyrannical and overbearing manner. Nezha, as the incarnation of Lingzhu Zi and supported by Taiyi Zhenzhen, still challenges the entire Dragon Palace with his personal power, becoming a typical representative of the individual against the powerful.

In the climax of the movie, the Dragon King of the East Sea joins the other three Dragon Kings at Chentang Pass to put pressure on Li Jing to capture Nezha and bring him to justice on the spot. They threaten to kill Li Jing's entire family and flood Chentang Pass, using the entire city's population as bargaining chips. Faced with this threat, Li Jing wants to pull out his sword and kill his son, but in the end he is unable to do so because of his intolerance. Nezha's heart aches when he sees his parents in such a difficult situation. He does not want to see his parents in such a difficult situation, nor can he bear to see the people of the city suffer because of him.

In this moment of life and death, Nezha bravely shouted to the Dragon King, "Old demon dragon, I'll do it alone, and I won't allow you to harm the innocent!" He then turns to his father and, with tears in his eyes, calls out "Master" in grief, and finally cuts his own throat with his sword. This scene is filled with a depressing and poignant atmosphere, but at the same time demonstrates Nezha's spirit of loyalty, filial piety and righteousness. He cares for the people and embraces a sense of duty to his country and nation. Nezha originally thought that sacrificing himself would save the greater good, but when he swings his sword and kills himself, the Dragon King goes back on his word, declaring that he wants to sacrifice the Crown Prince at the New Year Festival, and still asking for boys and girls. Nezha's eyes were filled with tears, anger and disbelief, but there was nothing he could do to save his life, and he eventually collapsed on top of the city wall, his lapel stained with blood.

This stage of the story demonstrates the cruelty and capriciousness of the Dragon King, which not only leads to tragedy for Nezha, but also pushes him to grow from an innocent boy to a hero who fights for the people. Nezha's self-sacrifice is not only a sublimation of his own humanity, but also a boost to his personal growth and a demonstration of his righteousness.

3.2 The image of Nezha in TV Animation

Since the reform and opening up, with the deepening of the openness, a large number of animated films have been introduced into China, especially Japanese and American animations, which are very popular among viewers, and the evening TV programs are filled with Japanese and American animations such as Saint Seiya, Detective Conan, and Cat and Mouse, etc. A survey conducted by the Institute of Journalism of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) showed that in 1991, the TV broadcast in Beijing 66.7% of the animated films were foreign-produced, of which 50% were from Disney (Gao, 2001). American and Japanese animations have had a strong impact on the Chinese animation industry. They have not only occupied the Chinese market and diverted the audience of local animation, but also had a profound impact on the field of animation creation in China. Chinese domestic animation has borrowed and fused the style and mode of American and Japanese animation to a certain extent in the process of creation.

This influence is particularly evident in the portrayal of Nezha. In animation works such as *Journey to the West* (1999), *The Legend of Feng Shen Bang* (1999) and *The Legend Of Nezha* (2003), Nezha's artistic form is more or less Americanized. This is not only reflected in the design of the appearance, but also in the transformation of the character's personality, in which Nezha's image tends to be heroized. In addition, the traditional cultural connotations embedded in the image of Nezha in these animated works have also been affected by the impact and collision of American and Japanese culture.

3.2.1 Artistic Styling: Nezha's Image of American-Japanese Tendency

In 1999, Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio released a 100-episode animated film, *The Legend of the Feudal Gods* (also known as *King Kong Nezha*), which was inspired by the Nezha and skillfully combines legendary elements with a historical setting. Set during the reign of King Wu of Zhou, the story shows a grand time war between gods, demons and humans, and conveys the theme of the ultimate triumph of good over evil. In this work, Nezha, as one of the main characters, is stylized with a clear influence of Japanese manga style.

In the animated film *Journey to the West*, released in the same year, Nezha, though a supporting character, is portrayed with the same notable influence of Japanese manga, and is visually rendered in a Japanese manga style.

By 2003, *The Legend Of Nezha*, produced by China International Television Corporation (CITVC), was largely influenced by American Disney animation. However, unlike the previous animations, the exterior image of Nezha in this work was relatively less influenced, and more borrowed and innovated in terms of internal structure and story narrative. All of these works reflect, to varying degrees, the exchange and fusion of Chinese and foreign animation cultures, and at the same time demonstrate the adaptation and development of the Chinese animation industry in the face of international influences.

3.2.1.1 Beautiful Boys in the Japanese Manga Mode

The Legend of the Seal of the Gods is a grand-scale, 100-episode animated series set in the historical period of King Wu's conquest of the Zhou Dynasty. It has a large number of characters and a rich plot, which can be divided into several sub-chapters, namely: King Kong Nezha's chapter, Jiang Ziya's descent from the mountain, Huang Feihu's fight against the merchants, the ice and snow sealing the Qishan Mountain, Wen Taishi's expedition, the battlefield tie-up chapter, and the burning of the star-picking building chapter. The whole episode maintains coherence in progression and constitutes a complete story.

The Legend of the Feudal Saints was significantly influenced by Japanese manga in its creative style, and the entire cartoon is filled with a strong Japanese style. The presentation of this style was mainly influenced by the Japanese animation "Saint Seiya" which was introduced at that time. Upon its release in China, *Saint Seiya* was warmly received by the audience and caused a strong reaction. This influence prompted the creators of *The Legend of the Seal of the Gods* to borrow this style and eventually create a "Saint Seiya"-style animation with Chinese characteristics. This kind of creation, combining Chinese and Japanese cultural elements, not only enriches the expression of Chinese animation, but also demonstrates the far-reaching influence of cultural exchanges.

The portrayal of Nezha in *The Legend of the Seal* has been significantly influenced by the Japanese animation *Saint Seiya*. The show makes a significant adaptation of Nezha's image, transforming him from the traditional childlike figure into a slender, handsome teenage hero. This change reflects the characteristics of Japanese animation culture, which is characterized by the fact that animated works are not only exclusive to children, but are cultural products suitable for audiences of all ages to share. As a result, Japanese animation has a wide range of themes covering history, literature, geography, sports and other fields, attracting a wider audience base. *The Legend of Nezha* draws on this concept, expanding Nezha's portrayal and audience base to include the youth sector.

Judging from the image of Nezha in *The Legend of the Seal*, his body proportions, facial features and hairstyle are all inclined to the style of Japanese anime. Nezha's body is long and muscular, with a head-to-shoulder ratio of about 1:1.5, making him both powerful and sharp. His facial design is small and delicate, with large eyes, a small nose, and a small mouth, all typical features of early Japanese anime. In terms of hairstyle, Nezha's long blue-purple hair and metallic hair ornaments resemble the design of the constellation headdresses in *Saint Seiya*.

Nezha's costume is based on a modified version of the ancient costume, but its overall form is very similar to the design of the Saint's Cloth from Saint Seiya, with expanded shoulders and a waist cinching design that reflects dynamism and sharpness. In addition, Nezha's wrist guards and knee-high boots enhance his realism in battle. Nezha's image does not change much before and after he kills himself. The only change is in his headdress, which has changed from a metal headdress to a lotus flower headdress, in keeping with the traditional setting of Nezha's lotus flower incarnation. The forceful moves he uses, such as the Lingzhu Storm Fist, are inspired by the "Pegasus Meteor Fist" move from Saint Seiya. The colors in the animation are predominantly yellow and orange-red, which symbolize pleasure and good fortune in Chinese tradition, and match Nezha's positive personality. Overall, the image of Nezha in *The Legend of the Goddess of the Seals* draws heavily on *The Saints' Arrow*, with a few Chinese elements, to make him an aesthetically pleasing hero in line with the Japanese anime style (Figure . 38 and 39).



Figure 37 Nezha in *The Legend of the Seal of the Gods*
Source: Film and TV footage of "The Legend of Feng Shen Bang", 1998.

3.2.1.2 Disney Partners in American Comic Book Style

The Legend Of Nezha, as a mythological animation film, took three years to integrate the legend, childlike innocence and mythological stories, produced by China International Television Corporation (CITVC), synthesized and transformed the mythological stories from the folk Legends and the Nezha, which not only showed strong national characteristics, but also added some fashionable elements. Fashion elements to learn the advanced production concepts and technical elements of foreign animation, the traditional cultural elements into the new creation, won a number of awards, loved by the audience⁴.

The Legend Of Nezha shows the growth story of the young hero Nezha through his adventures. Although the show is deeply rooted in traditional culture, the plot setting and framework are inevitably influenced by Western animation, especially the Disney style. This influence is mainly reflected in the process of Nezha's becoming a hero, which bears a remarkable resemblance to the growth trajectory of

⁴In 2004, The Legend Of Nezha won the 22nd Golden Eagle Award for Television Art Films; in 2005, it won the Best Children's Storytelling Program Award at the 1st Beijing Asia-Pacific Youth Television Festival; and in August 2019, it was honored as the main program of the "Celebration of Chinese Birthday on the Screen in the Seventy Years of Magnificence" - the "Audiovisual China Global Broadcasting" event, among other awards. In August 2019, it became the main program of the "Audiovisual China Global Broadcasting" activity.

heroes in Western Disney animation. In terms of image design, traces of the Disney style can also be seen in Nezha's presentation and action design. For example, in the dialogues and movements, Nezha's body movements are large and exaggerated, which are common in Disney animation.

In terms of color design, the image of Nezha also draws on Disney's creative style. Disney is known for its bold color schemes and innovative color schemes, which are reflected in the image of Nezha. The image of Nezha uses three distinct colors: red, yellow and blue. Red symbolizes heroism and courage, yellow conveys exuberant vitality, intelligence and energy, while blue represents loyalty, confidence and stability. The combination of these colors not only adds visual appeal to the overall image of Nezha, but also subtly conveys his character traits and inner qualities (Figure 40).

Although The Legend Of Nezha is rooted in traditional Chinese culture, its narrative style, character design and use of color have been significantly influenced by Western, particularly Disney, animation styles. This fusion of cultures gives the character of Nezha a richer and more diverse expression, and allows the show to appeal to a wider audience.



Figure 38 Nezha as a child in "The Legend Of Nezha".
Source: The Legend Of Nezha movie and television footage. 2003.

In this animated film, Nezha's birth is depicted in the form of a distinctive "meatball", the most striking feature of which is the red bib that covers it. The bib, hand-embroidered by Nezha's mother, Yin Yi, not only expresses the mother's deep love for her child, but also showcases strong elements of traditional Chinese culture. The "amulet" embroidered on the bib symbolizes peace and good fortune, and is a unique Chinese costume with a long history and deep cultural meaning. In ancient times, the bibs were not only used to cover up and protect the abdomen, but also to convey good wishes, with common motifs such as "Lunar New Year" and "Unicorn Giving Children", which symbolize good fortune and happiness.

Nezha's skin tone in this animation has changed significantly from the previous one, from fair to wheatish, giving him a healthier and livelier look, in keeping with his behavioral traits of fighting demons and fighting evil on the outside. The design of his face presents a typical Chinese doll face, with a pair of upturned dark eyebrows, soulful eyes, and a characteristic punchy hairstyle, all of which

vividly depict the character of Nezha. In particular, the hair on his forehead changes to reflect Nezha's inner mood swings.

The red cinnabar on Nezha's brow is derived from the ancient ritual of opening a brush, "Cinnabar Opens Wisdom", which signifies wisdom and good fortune, reflecting the deeper meaning of traditional Chinese culture. Nezha's image undergoes three major transformations in the animation, from the original "meatball" to the image of a child in ancient times, and then to his reborn form, with each change carrying a profound cultural symbol.

In terms of weapons, Nezha initially uses the Mixed Sky Aya and the Qiankun Circle, and later adds the Wind Fire Wheel and the Fire Pointed Gun. The piggy bear beside Nezha in the animation is an anthropomorphic feature common in Western animation, showing a borrowing of Western animation styles. Overall, however, the image of Nezha is still deeply rooted in Chinese culture, displaying a unique national tradition and cultural spirit, and is a popular image of a young hero (Figure 41).



Figure 39 Nezha as a teenager in The Legend Of Nezha
Source: The Legend Of Nezha video footage, 2003.

3.2.2 Characterization: presentation of juvenile hero traits

During this period, the animation industry developed innovative interpretations of the mythological story of Nezha, incorporating its plot into the grandiose epic of King Wu's conquest of the Zhou Empire in the Shang Dynasty. These works not only featured unique designs for Nezha's image, but also for his characterization. In these animations, Nezha is portrayed as the face of justice against the forces of evil. Whether it's the Japanese manga-inspired teenager Nezha in "The Legend of the Seal of Gods" or the baby-faced Nezha with oriental features in "The Legend Of Nezha", they all go through difficulties and challenges, riding the waves, and ultimately growing up to become the heroes of Legends- the "Little Nezha Heroes". "The hero of Legends, Little Nezha. This hero not only has an extraordinary image, but also shoulders the noble mission of challenging authority and resisting hegemony. He embodies all the exemplary qualities of a hero: righteousness, kindness, hatred of evil, intelligence and bravery, and is the embodiment of truth, goodness and beauty. What is more worth mentioning is that these works have innovated in the shaping of the hero's image, not only making the hero's image more civilian, but also "a civilianization turn of the hero's image has appeared, with an

increase in the portrayal of the hero's psychological activities, which draws the psychological distance between the hero and the civilians closer. (Yu & Ya, 2021)"

3.2.2.1 Hot-blooded controversy cynicism

In this phase of the animation, Nezha's characterization and behavior are examples of justice. Although the Legend of the Seal of the Gods draws on Japanese manga imagery, Nezha's soul and spirit are still deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture. The first 15 episodes of the anime focus on Nezha's confrontation with his arch-enemy, Shi Ji. Shi Ji covets Nezha's spirit pearl, which he uses to gain world domination. He is ruthless and will stop at nothing to achieve his goal, constantly putting Nezha and his companions in extreme danger by kidnapping Peach Blossom and Lady Li. In the face of all these difficulties, Nezha is undaunted and courageous, displaying a youthful fervor and bravery. At the same time, Nezha is also able to fight back against Shi Ji's evil deeds, and ultimately subdues Shi Ji to stand up for what is right.

Ao Bing initially appears as an antagonist and is at loggerheads with Nezha, even leading to Nezha being persecuted by the Dragon King of the Four Seas to the point of self-immolation. However, under Nezha's influence, Ao B finally resolves to turn over a new leaf. In the face of such a change, Nezha shows his magnanimity by forgetting his past mistakes with Ao Bian, and smiling at him to clear the air of his former enmity. This kind of chivalry and generosity shows another side of Nezha's juvenile nature. In the second half of the animation, Nezha resolutely goes down to the mountains to fight alongside other heroes, assisting the wise ruler, and fighting against the forces of evil on many occasions, dedicated to punishing evil and promoting the good, and serving the country. All of this is just as the theme song in the anime sings, "They are a group of true heroes, their story shakes the heart" .

In "The Legend Of Nezha", Nezha's image is imbued with rich and vivid details, making him a three-dimensional and profound character. The animation focuses on Nezha's development and the historical events of the fight to destroy the Shang Dynasty, skillfully setting off Nezha's character of goodness, integrity and cynicism, leaving a deep and moving impression on the viewers. Nezha grows up in a caring environment, and the play intentionally downplays his tragedy. Even when faced with the strong-armed force of the Dragon King of the Four Seas, Nezha chooses to cut his own throat in order to save the overall situation, and his image as a great little hero is established at this moment, showing his grandiose pattern of having the world in mind.

In stark contrast to Nezha's bright image is the great demon Shiji, who is portrayed in the animation as extremely sinister, malicious and unscrupulous. In order to take control of the world, she goes out of her way to assist the tyrannical King Zhou and pushes her behind the scenes. She takes a series of extreme moves, such as resurrecting the Stone Mountain Spirit, kidnapping the sun, disrupting the order of the universe, and even sucking the veins of the earth in an attempt to take full control of the world, resulting in the devastation of the living. Each of these moves is a test for Nezha. Time and again, Nezha defeats Shiji and other evil forces, and while defending justice, he never forgets to protect the people of the world. When Nezha faces Shiji's threats, he never fights back, even when he is in extreme danger, because he is afraid of the natural disasters and the suffering of the people that may result from

the damage to the earth's veins. He would rather sacrifice himself than see the people harmed.

Shiji's devious tricks are endless. In the face of his various tactics, Nezha demonstrates deep friendship and selfless devotion. He rushes into danger without hesitation and pulls his friend back from the brink of death again and again, demonstrating his deep love for his friend and his sense of justice. This steadfastness of Nezha's was finally rewarded when his friends lent a helping hand when he was faced with a difficult situation, just as the saying goes: "Those who have the right to help have a lot of help, but those who don't have much help".

Shi Shi's blows to Nezha come in waves, but Nezha's resolve grows stronger. The climax of the animation shows Nezha's determination and spirit of sacrifice. When he realizes that he has become dangerous and may even endanger others as a result of Shiji's plot, he chooses to leave alone to avoid bringing harm to others. In extreme pain, he asks his father to use the Linglong Pagoda to seal himself away. In order to ensure that the pagoda is never opened again, he even steals the key to the pagoda and volunteers to be sealed in it forever, preferring to sacrifice himself rather than harm the innocent. Nezha's dedication to justice and goodness, and his insistence on cynicism, won him the witness of heaven and earth. It was this righteousness that moved the world, and the people of the city prayed for him, ultimately leading to his salvation. The story of Nezha is not only a heroic journey, but also a profound celebration of justice and sacrifice.

3.2.2.2 Free Rebel Intelligent and Bold

In The Legend of the Feudal God, Nezha is a young hero from the moment he appears, displaying his natural quest for freedom. He possesses extraordinary force and is not bound by powers such as Shiji. He pursues freedom and justice, and after his descent from the mountain, he fights with the people for the sake of the Emperor, whether it's against the Wind Forest, the Bean Soldiers, or defeating Molishou and Molishou, he has been through hundreds of battles, and he never backs down from his enemies, demonstrating his courageous teenage heroism and fully proving his strength as the "Advance Officer" of Jiang Ziya.

In The Legend Of Nezha, Nezha blends the character traits of traditional Chinese culture with a modern sense of the times, with ethnic and classical undertones, but also incorporates the characteristics of a modern child, such as team spirit, adventurousness, love and occasional mischievous rebelliousness. His portrayal sheds the weight of history and becomes a more realistic character with a sound personality. Nezha, who has shown remarkable abilities and a lively nature from an early age, displays a strong sense of curiosity and rebellion in the chapters of Regulus, ignoring his father's warnings and infiltrating the Regulus Pavilion, triggering a series of events. After cutting his own throat and being reborn, he is taken by Tai Yi Zhen to the island of Immortality to learn the arts in order to hone his heart. Although Nezha loves freedom and does not want to be tied down, after his training on the island, he becomes more calm and learns to concentrate fully. Upon his release from the mountain, Nezha is challenged by the "Sun that Never Sets", and is transformed into a hero with a heart of love and compassion. The selflessness of Kua Fu and the teachings of Ji Fa have helped Nezha to grow and become a household name.

Nezha revealed his intelligence and mischievous nature from an early age. As Yin says, "I have to admit that Nezha is no ordinary child." As a child, Nezha was able to utilize his cleverness, whether it was teasing his older brother during hide-and-seek or disturbing his family late at night by imitating the crowing of a rooster, he showed his resourcefulness and lively nature. However, as he grew older and his mind matured, he began to turn this cleverness into a strategy against his enemies.

In his battle with Yang Poke, Nezha matches his opponent's strength. At first, Nezha is perplexed by Yang Poke's changes, but after repeated confrontations and careful deliberation, Nezha discovers his opponent's flaws with his keen insights and succeeds in recognizing Yang Poke's true form. The duel between the two is not only a contest of strength, but also a battle of wits, demonstrating Nezha's superior intelligence and precise grasp of the core of the problem.

When confronted by the demons, Nezha lures his enemies into the Echo Valley, skillfully utilizing the environment so that their tricks not only fail, but also backfire on them. This battle proves Nezha's resourcefulness once again. No matter what the enemy, Nezha never flinches. His determination and boldness are his trademark, and his only concern is the harm the evil forces will do to the people. The story of Nezha symbolizes the spiritual strength of human beings in the process of growing up, and has become an idealized symbol of the state of life. Through the image of Nezha, the animation celebrates the truth, goodness and beauty of human nature, passes on the traditional virtues in the bloodline of the Chinese nation, and highlights a heroic temperament that transcends the ordinary and a deep cultural heritage.

3.3 The image of Nezha in Network Animation

Since 2004, the state and the government began to pay attention to the development of cultural industry animation industry has been greatly encouraged, began to gradually recover and entered a period of creative prosperity, after the impact of the wave of globalization in the 90's, animation creators began to take into account both commercial and cultural, not only the number of animation works in this period has increased significantly, but also created a lot of high-quality animation, under the cultural context of the revival of the national cartoon, the artistic expression of national character has become the aesthetic consensus of many domestic animation works in recent years. Under the cultural context of national cartoon revival, the artistic expression of national character has become the aesthetic consensus of many domestic animation works in recent years.

With the rise of the Internet, the dominant position of traditional mass media has been shaken, and the Internet has quickly taken over the "absolute" position of traditional media in terms of influence by virtue of its technological advantage of providing voice to the general audience. David Harold compares China's Internet society to the carnival described by Bakhtin, emphasizing the shaping of a new order to challenge the original serious order (Herold & Marolt, 2010). The Internet, with its technological features, provides opportunities for a wide range of audiences to express themselves and share their views, rapidly challenging the "absolute" influence of traditional media. The audience has changed its role from a passive recipient of information to an active participant on the open sharing platform of the Internet, enjoying unprecedented initiative in discourse, information and culture. In this period, China's Internet presents a diverse image of Nezha.

3.3.1 Artistic modeling: the dissolution and reconstruction of traditional images

In the Internet era, a variety of animation works have been created with Nezha as the protagonist, among which several works with wide dissemination have appeared, such as the web animation and the movie of the same name "BadJokes", "Mizuki Theater Journey to the West", "Spit Seals the God", "Wu Geng Ji", "Inhumanity", and "The King is Unhappy", which have a strong reaction on the Internet and among young people, although they have a limited impact in the mainstream media. Although their influence in the mainstream media is limited, the films have caused a strong reaction on the Internet and among young people. They deconstruct the image of Nezha in literature, and in the presentation of their visual images, they all show a fusion of traditional literary images and modern styling design, giving the character the trappings of a new era, and each version of Nezha is highly character-driven, resulting in subversive and innovative changes in its color portrayal.

3.3.1.1 Rebel Aesthetic King Kong Barbie Nezha

The webtoon BadJokes, which has been airing for two seasons since 2012, consists of a number of short episodes, which on the surface do not seem to have a lot of connections with each other, but in reality, the relationships between them are intricate and complex. The main episodes include Huluwa, World's End, Nezha, and Light Country, as well as a series of miscellaneous episodes, such as Ghost, Yaki, and Kirou. The anime is positioned for an adult audience and has been well received. In 2014, BadJokes, a major film of the same name adapted from the series, was released and performed outstandingly at the box office, reaching \$120 million and \$130 million, respectively, earning it recognition and critical acclaim from the audience. The movie breaks away from traditional ideas by mixing characters from different time periods to create new imaginary worlds, while playfully reinventing the characters to provide audiences with unique and innovative perspectives (Figure 42).

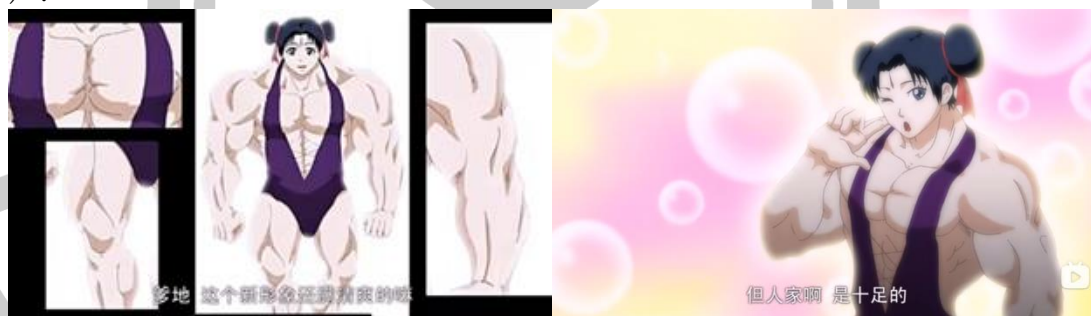


Figure 40 Image of Nezha from BadJokes
Source: BadJokes movie and television footage, 2012.

The opening chapter of the webtoon "BadJokes" is the Nezha chapter, which is a radical and unique reimagining of the character (Figure 48). While viewers are familiar with the image of Nezha as an ancient child holding a qiankun ring, wrapped around a silk rope, with a wind and fire wheel, and wearing a double bun on his head, in the animation, Nezha is born with the body of an adult male. He wears a huge belly-band and is solidly muscled. Although he retains his double-bun hairstyle, his face appears to have changed and his voice is gruff, more like that of a middle-aged male. This portrayal of Nezha, who was questioned by Li Jing as a "demon" and a "reckless man of the mountains," greatly impacted the audience's traditional aesthetic expectations and challenged their acceptance of the character. However, in Li Jing's moment of anger, Nezha reveals that he has another chance to reset his image. During the image-setting process, Li Jing chooses Nezha's head shape and costume to his liking, and the result is that Nezha's reappearance is still unexpected. He has a delicate loli face, a muscular body with fair skin, and wears a strapless purple one-piece bathing suit that shows off his muscles to the fullest. When he calls himself a man in a loli voice, the paradoxical combination of contrasts is enough to make Li Jing marvel again. Nezha's new "Barbie"-style image still packs a punch, and could be described as a typical example of "rebellious aesthetics" (pictured).

In the big movie of the same name, Nezha's portrayal maintains the look of King Kong Barbie, still retaining his burly physique and delicate qualities, although his costume is slightly toned down, wearing an undershirt and boxer-briefs-like attire, with little change in overall style. Matching Nezha's size, he was born with immense divine power, easily slapping Li Jing into a wall, and even taking on the Megalodon beasts with ease; his fighting prowess is amazing, and his own divine power is enough to intimidate his foes, even without the aid of traditional weapons such as the Mixed Heavenly Aya and the Qiankun Circle.

In addition, the work subversively reconstructs the image of Nezha, while also breaking with the traditional perception of the serious King of Heaven, Li Jing, by giving him a more playful and quirky character. Pinocchio and Snow White, two seemingly unrelated characters, are cleverly combined as a couple. Pinocchio's nose is so flexible and retractable that it can even be used as a weapon against his enemies. Characters from the classic animation Gourdough have also been reconstructed, with the relationship between the villainous Snake Spirit and Vajra Gourdough depicted as marriage and children. The deconstruction and reconstruction of these characters are not only rebellious and quirky, but also cater to the aesthetic preferences of the new age youth groups. As Susan Langer, a scholar of semiotics, said, "Art is a special form of logic, and the process of creating art is essentially the process of abstracting art." In fact, the charm of animated characters does not lie in the reproduction of reality, but in their infinite plasticity and the possibility of re-creation. Eventually, they transcend the programmed cognitive patterns in the viewers' brains and sublimate and reconstruct entirely new meanings (Mi & Zhang, 2015).

3.3.1.2 Arrogant and dark secondary school children

In the process of integrating classical Chinese mythology with modernity, "The Inhuman" serves as a model whose distinctive feature is the decentering of divinity. The work places the ancient gods in the context of modern society, treating them as ordinary members of society and endowing them with a modern demeanor, values, and way of thinking. Nezha in "Not Human" breaks away from the usual template of the "good boy" by being disruptive in class, getting bad grades, playing pranks on people around him, and even acting coldly and uncaringly in some scenes, just like the "bear child" that makes people laugh and cry, and is consistent with the traditional animation image of Nezha. The only thing consistent with the traditional animation image is its cute appearance.

In the film, Nezha is portrayed as an elementary school student, whose appearance is frequently mistaken for that of a cute girl due to his childish and adorable qualities - coupled with his characteristic double-bun hairstyle. This setting not only echoes the ambiguous portrayal of Nezha's gender in the original novel, but also reveals the fluidity and plurality of the character's gender identity. In the play, Nezha shows a preference for water, manifests lotus flowers when he is associated with water, and enjoys teasing Lie Lie and Yang Jian, showing his mischievous side. What's more interesting is that Nezha will return to his lotus root form after drinking coffee, and can freely cut his wrist into lotus root pieces for consumption. In addition to being an elementary school student, Nezha also has a second identity: a popular webcast anchor. In order to adapt to the lifestyle and aesthetics of modern society, Nezha's traditional wind and fire wheels have been redesigned as skateboards, while the red scarf on his chest symbolizes the Mixed Heavenly Threads (Figure 43). This characterization fully embodies the modern image of Nezha in a pluralistic fusion, reflecting the adaptation and evolution of traditional cultural symbols in contemporary society.



Figure 41 Image of Nezha in "The Inhuman"
Source: 'Inhumanity' movie and TV footage, 2018

3.3.2 Characterization: close to the emotional resonance of the audience

In the context of the Internet era, Nezha, represented by BadJokes and Inhuman, is a concrete manifestation of the changes in the media environment and the evolution of the cultural environment, a modern interpretation of traditional myths, and a manifestation of the culture and spirit of the Internet. By subverting and reconstructing the traditional image of Nezha, these two works express the characteristics of mass cultural production in the Internet era: decentralization,

individualization, and pluralism (Yu & Ya, 2021). The image of Nezha is no longer fixed within the framework of traditional mythology, but is innovatively reconstructed according to the aesthetic preferences and cultural identity of modern audiences. This innovation is not only reflected in the changes in the character's appearance and personality, but also in the character's behavior and values, making the image of Nezha closer to the reality and emotional experience of modern audiences.

At the same time, this re-creation and deconstruction of traditional cultural symbols is also a concrete manifestation of the Internet spirit. The spirit of the Internet encourages the values of freedom, equality and autonomy, challenging authority and deconstructing traditional rules. The reinvention of Nezha's image on the Internet embodies this spirit, challenging the authority of traditional culture through creativity and humor, and making cultural expression more diversified and vivid. This approach to cultural production not only breaks the monopoly of elite culture, but also brings cultural content closer to the masses, better reflecting real social sentiments and expectations. In this way, the traditional image of Nezha has been given a new meaning for a new era, creating a new resonance with modern audiences.

3.3.2.1 Witty humor Self-identification

Due to the youthfulness of Internet users, the educational nature of animation has been weakened, and the entertainment nature of the Internet has predetermined that animation creation tends to become more adult, with more diverse styles. Against this backdrop, the story of Nezha not only focuses on conveying the contemporary spirit of the times and cultural values, but its stylistic expression also tends to be significantly more playful. The character of Nezha in *BadJokes* is amusing in his appearance and demeanor. In particular, his pouting in a loli voice adds to the humor of the piece. When Li Jing creates a new image for Nezha, Nezha says in a shy tone, "Daddy, this new image is quite refreshing," demonstrating the character's tongue-in-cheek tone and making Li Jing laugh and cry. When Li Jing mistakenly thinks Nezha is a girl, Nezha's exaggerated body movements and staccato tone retorts, "Daddy, I hate you. Although you look a bit cuter in person, I'm a full-fledged man," a contrasting personality with his robust physique that hits the audience's funny bone. In the portrayal of Nezha in animation, the awakening of self-consciousness and the prominence of subjectivity are particularly evident, mainly in the profound expression of self-identity. Nezha in *BadJokes* never feels inferior to himself, even though his appearance resembles that of King Kong Barbie. On the contrary, he very naturally pouts and whines, a behavior that stems from a firm inner affirmation of his self-worth, living in a world of his own construction, unaffected by outside perspectives. It is this attitude that makes him a source of delivering joy, bringing endless delight to the audience.

3.3.2.2 Fade to divinity Contrast cuteness

Nezha appeared as a child in "Nezha", and "Inhumanity" follows this setting, except that in the anime's setting, the gods live on earth like ordinary people, and have to assume a social identity, so Nezha as a child inevitably needs to complete his tasks - going to school, which makes sense for his status as a primary school student. This rationalizes Nezha's status as an elementary school student. In the work, Nezha is a

third-grade student at Nantianmen Primary School, and like all elementary school students, he has to go to and from school, do his homework, and be called by his teacher when he fails to get good grades. Through the work's reconstruction of Nezha's "self-cutting and rebirth" and his family relationships, the character is portrayed as a contrasting character with a naïve outward appearance, an aloof demeanor, and a quirky inner life. Netizens have used the term "dark-hearted schoolboy" to describe Nezha, which refers to a person who appears to be gentle and kind on the surface, but in reality has a sinister or cunning trait hidden deep inside. This type of character usually adds some complexity and depth to a story because their true thoughts and motives aren't always obvious, and viewers or readers need to be able to see their true qualities through their behavior and the development of the story. Nezha's cold attitude towards everything, and whether or not he does perverse and mischievous behavior highlights his childish nature. In "Inhumanity" 122-124, the Dragon Lady criticizes the behavior of the Haunted Sea from the victim's point of view, accusing it of cruelty and cold-bloodedness, and saying, "Emotionless monsters deserve to never grow up," which shows, from a different perspective, how violent behavior harms others and the responsibility that Nezha must bear for it. In another way, it shows the harm that violent behavior can do to others and the consequences that Nezha must bear for it, which prevents Nezha from being completely reduced to a nonsensical laughing stock like in *Bad Jokes*.

Featuring the short and quick characteristics of network animation, the character and plot design of "Inhuman Ja" combines Japanese "moe" culture, secondary culture, and Chinese mythology Legends. The construction of Nezha's image in the later stages of the movie is divided into two main ways of thinking. One is to deconstruct Nezha from a subcultural perspective. For example, "The Inhuman" deconstructs the phrase "cutting his own throat and being reborn" as "Lotus root incarnation can be used to make soup", and the phrase "peeling his skin and pulling out his tendons" as "wishing to collect all the dragons in the world", as well as "collecting all the dragons in the world". In this daily animation, Nezha's image has been transformed from a traditional mythological hero into an ordinary schoolboy living in modern society. In this daily animation, Nezha is transformed from a traditional mythological hero into an ordinary elementary school student living in modern society. This transformation brings the story closer to reality, and viewers can see the combination of traditional Chinese culture and modern life in Nezha's daily life. Nezha's daily chores, such as going to school, doing his homework, and interacting with his teachers and parents, greatly enrich his characterization, making him not just a mythological figure, but an individual with flesh and blood, emotions and a story.

3.4 The image of Nezha in Movie Animation

In 2015, China's animated film *The Return of the Great Sage* achieved phenomenal success, and capital began to refocus on the potential value of animation as a cultural commodity. 2019 saw the phenomenal animated film *Birth of the Demon Child* take Chinese mythological animation to new heights. The phenomenal 2019 animated film "Birth of the Demon Child" grossed a staggering 5.2 billion yuan at the box office, with Nezha's struggle against fate at the center of the narrative, and his portrayal of the "ugly Nezha" triggered a great deal of discussion. Since then, mythological animation has produced a number of mythological works, including

Nezha Reborn and Jiang Ziya. The images of Nezha in movies are shown in the table below:

3.4.1 Artistic styling: a trend icon of diverse fusion

With the release of *Birth of the Demon Child* in 2019 and its success, the image of the "ugly" Nezha has attracted widespread discussion, and animation works featuring Nezha as a protagonist have also produced a number of high quality works, such as *Nezha Reborn*, which is set in a wasteland punk setting and portrays a biker boy, Li Yunxiang, as the avatar of Nezha in the next thousand years. These works have deconstructed the image of Nezha in literary works, and in their visual presentation, they show a fusion of traditional literary images and modern styling, giving the character the trappings of a new era. Nezha has become one of the symbols of trendy culture.

3.4.1.1 Ugly and lovable problem children

Released in 2019, the animated film "*Birth of the Demon Child*" stars Nezha, a demonic child who was born to be a demon and fights against destiny to the end, which not only won multiple awards and hit a new high at the box office, but also created a furor in the industry and sparked widespread discussion about its character image and story content. It also broke the long-standing monopoly of the Monkey King IP in Chinese animation, which has inspired creators to draw on Chinese mythology and traditional culture to explore new stories and characters, allowing the Chinese animation industry to blossom. The movie is an innovative portrayal of the character of Nezha, retaining the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture while incorporating contemporary elements, both of which complement each other to create a modern-day version of the ugly and cute problem child on the screen.

In the movie, Nezha was originally reincarnated as a spirit pearl, but due to the negligence of Tai Yi Zhen and the trickery of Shen Gongbao, the spirit pearl was replaced by the evil Mogwan. Nezha bears a striking resemblance to Mowgli from birth: his red hair rises to the sky like the purple-red flames behind Mowgli; the red mark in the center of his forehead mirrors the ice-blue mark on Ao Bi's forehead, and the combination of the two resembles the Taoist yin-yang baguazhang diagram, which is a metaphor for the complex relationship between the two, which is both mutually exclusive and complementary; his round eyes are surrounded by heavy black circles, and his face is dotted with freckles, adding an extra touch of smoke to the smoky look. The round eyes are surrounded by heavy black circles, freckles dotting his face, and a smoky look adds a touch of decadence and evil to Nezha's appearance. In addition, the rows of jagged teeth in conjunction with his sinister smile expresses the sense of a "magical child" in the best possible way, completely subverting the "jade face with a delicate face like a full moon, vermilion lips and a square mouth revealing silver teeth" in *Journey to the West* (Chenen Wu, 1992). (Chenen Wu, 1992)" in *Journey to the West* (Figure 44). All the elements of Nezha's appearance at the time of his birth deeply reflect his special identity as a magic pill.



Figure 42 Characterization of Nezha in Birth of the Demon Child

Source: 'Birth of the Demon Child' movie and TV footage, 2019

As a young boy, Nezha is portrayed as a doll in traditional New Year's paintings, wearing a red bib embroidered with lotus flowers, a Qiankun ring around his neck, and the karma hair from Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, with chubby limbs and an innocent expression on his face. Nezha's hair is styled as the karma hair from Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, and his limbs are white and chubby, with a look of innocence. Nezha was still in a state of ignorance at the time, unaware of his identity as a Mokomaru and unable to understand the hostility of others, and it was this lack of understanding that paved the way for his later unruly behavior.

As Nezha grew up, his style of dress underwent significant changes. He wears a small open-breasted vest with a lotus flower embroidered on his chest, symbolizing the seven-colored lotus that protects his Yuan Shen; underneath are loose-fitting turnip pants, with his hands often tucked into the waistband of his pants, making his gait easy and relaxed. The flame pattern embroidered on the leg of the pants expresses his hot-blooded temperament of the fire attribute and also gives the character a modern sense of gameplay. A yellow sash tied around his waist, combined with his loose posture and exaggerated expression, highlights the character's uninhibited and mischievous qualities, which completely subverts the public's perception of Nezha's traditional image, and has been jokingly dubbed by viewers as "the ugliest Nezha in history" (Figure 45). As the audience gradually adapts to this "ugliness", the creators of the film not only break the traditional perception of Nezha, but also elevate the theme to the level of breaking stereotypes.



Figure 43 Nezha's child form in Birth of the Demon Child

Source: 'Birth of the Demon Child' movie and TV footage, 2019

Nezha's greatest transformation occurs during his confrontation with Ao Bing, when he transforms into a handsome young man, with a long, slender figure, slender limbs, red flower patterns on his shoulders, and wearing a silk robe, a fire-pointed spear, and a wheel of wind and fire, with a qiankun circle used to limit his magic power and magical attributes (Figure 46). In the course of saving the people of Qiantang Pass, he displays a six-armed form, with long black fingernails suggesting his demonic attributes, yet his actions are righteous, deeply embodying the theme of "Breaking down stereotypes, destiny is mine but not God's." The image of the nine-headed Nezha is a perfect fit for modern aesthetics, and is a stark contrast to the previous ugly and cute Nezha, bringing an aesthetic surprise to the audience. The contrast between the two forms creates a strong visual impact on the audience, with the ugly Nezha providing the aesthetic foundation for the handsome Nezha in his new form.



Figure 44 Nezha's teenage look in Birth of the Demon Child
Source: 'Birth of the Demon Child' movie and TV footage, 2019

3.4.4.2 Motorcycle Boys in Cyber City

Based on the story of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, "Nezha Reborn" places the core characters of Nezha, Ao Beng, the Dragon King, Li Geng, and the Colorful Cloud Child in a new era 3,000 years after the Feudal War and builds a brand new worldview for them. This setting not only infuses traditional Chinese mythology with the spirit and popularity of the new era, but also creates a unique "oriental punk" world by fusing cyberpunk style with new trends in Chinese fashion (Chunzhou, 2021).

Cyberpunk, this concept originated from the 1960s to 1980s in Western science fiction literature, in which "cyber" originated from cybernetics, which involves the control of animals and machines and the science of communication; and "punk" initially referred to a music style, with the passage of time, it evolved into a cultural attitude or behavior with a rebellious spirit. With the passage of time, it has evolved into a cultural attitude or behavior with a rebellious spirit. In short, "cyberpunk" represents a contrasting worldview of "high technology and low life," depicting a society in which the state is controlled by powerful groups instead of the state in terms of science, technology, and economy, and in stark contrast, people struggling to survive under "low life" conditions. In contrast, ordinary people struggle to survive in "low-life" conditions (Bednjanec, 2023).

The world of *Nezha Reborn* is based on this cyberpunk setting, where the upper class is represented by the family of the Dragon King, Ao Guangde, who live in neon, luxurious skyscrapers and undersea dragons' palaces, all of which are cyberpunk-inspired, while exposing the Dexing Group's greed for control over water, the lifeblood of the citizens of the East China Sea. The movie also exposes the Dexing Group's greedy control over the lifeblood of the people of the East China Sea - the "water" resource. In contrast, the movie's narrative focuses on the civilian areas, where the background draws on the old Shanghai of the 1920s and 1930s, blending the traditional Shanghai alleyways with the foreign concessions, and the people are dressed in Chinese cheongsams and Zhongshan suits, as well as Western suits, demonstrating the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures, thus creating the unique punk atmosphere of the entire movie.

Although "*Nezha Reborn*" displays a distinctive punk style, its creative roots are still deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, and the movie significantly embodies the style characteristics of "National Wave New Style". The "National Wave" represents a social trend based on traditional Chinese culture, which is not simply an amalgamation of traditional and modern trends, but rather an in-depth and comprehensive fusion of the two to find a point of exchange and resonance, and then to form a brand new style. Nezha in the movie is a typical representative of this Cybernetic style. Compared to the image in previous animated movies, Nezha's look in this movie is more realistic and blends ancient and modern elements. Nezha is not only the traditional Nezha, but also a modern-day Li Yun-Xie, dressed in a short leather jacket and Martin boots, with a motorcycle as his signature accessory, presenting a modern and cool image of a leather-clad biker boy. The film's creative team put a great deal of effort into the design of Nezha's look, and after dozens of versions of the biker boy Nezha, the final image of Nezha was chosen to break away from the traditional classical double bun hairstyle, and instead adopt a more contemporary single bun design in a modern setting (Figure 47). Nezha's hairstyle is loose and textured, and the whole is raised upwards as if flames are dancing, a detail that not only lends vividness to the image, but also fits the original setting of Nezha's attribute of "fire," demonstrating a fine grasp of detail (Juan, 2022).



Figure 45 Li Yunxiang in Urban Costume in '*Nezha Reborn*'

Source: '*Nezha Reborn*' footage, 2023

In *Nezha Reborn*, Li Yunxiang's face is very much characterized by traditional Chinese aesthetics, presenting a distinctly oriental countenance. His eyebrows are slanted upwards, with the ends of his eyebrows clearly upturned, and his eyes have the Chinese aesthetic trait of danfeng eyes, an eye shape that was more common in

ancient Chinese paintings and was often used to depict the appearance of important figures. Nezha's phoenix eyes give him a more classical Chinese look. In keeping with Nezha's fiery character, the creators deliberately lowered Nezha's eyebrows to give him a more imposing appearance when he is angry, and combined with his phoenix eyes and hairstyle, he is portrayed as a biker boy who is both heroic and cool. Later in the film, in order to control the fire inside his body, Nezha, under the guidance of the Monkey King, creates a suit of steel armor to channel the internal flames to the outside. The armor, although made with modern technology, also incorporates elements of traditional Chinese culture, with its design inspired by the Chinese Mingguang armor that was popular during the Wei Jin to Tang dynasties. The film is extremely metallic and mechanical, not only in Nezha's armor, but also in Ao Guang's mechanical arm and Ao C's steel dragon tendons, which are the embodiment of the combination of flesh and machinery, one of the key features of the cyberpunk genre (Figure48). When Li Yunxian merges with Nezha's genesis, Nezha's huge image is revealed above, and the audience's familiar traditional image of Nezha is vividly displayed on screen, which not only enriches Nezha's image, but also proves that Nezha's image is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, and that it is the image of a leather-clad biker boy created by the fusion of cyberpunk style and the new style of the national trend.



Figure 46 Li Yunxiang in armor costume in "Shin Megami Tensei: Nezha Reborn"
Source: 'Nezha Reborn' footage, 2023

3.4.2 Characterization: diverse "anti-hero" qualities

As history evolves, the character of Nezha is constantly being explored, revealing richer spiritual qualities and cultural connotations. Social changes have led to the constant deconstruction and reconstruction of the Nezha story, with each era's reinterpretation reflecting the spiritual quest of that period. In ancient times, the story of Nezha mainly focused on resistance against feudal oppression and social hierarchy. In modern times, the story of Nezha focuses more on Nezha as an individual, exploring the psychological aspects of the character, reflecting the problems of modern society, and striking a chord with the viewer's emotions. As a result, in contemporary interpretations, Nezha's divinity is relatively weakened, his demonic nature is slightly revealed, and his humanity is more prominently portrayed. Nezha's character traits have become more diverse, and the animation industry's presentation of Nezha has changed from imitation to innovation, from targeting children to adults, and its spiritual connotation has shifted from the traditional spirit of heroic sacrifice to

a greater emphasis on the individual's humanistic choices, resulting in a typical "anti-hero" image. "Anti-hero" does not refer to the role of the antagonist or the role with negative meaning, but a specific role typical. In the early American animated movies, the main character is often flawless, representing the typical hero image of truth, goodness and beauty, often carrying the burden of saving the world, with some mysterious superpowers, representing the ideal image beyond the ordinary people; while the "anti-hero" character is more grounded, reflecting the image of ordinary people closer to the actual life. These characters are often characterized by the flaws and imperfections of ordinary people, such as Nezha, the unruly and unruly teenager in *Birth of the Demon Child*, and Li Yunxian, the impulsive and irritable biker boy in *Nezha Reborn*. The strong rebellious spirit of these characters, and their courage to break the boundaries of tradition and pursue themselves, effectively minimizes the distance between them and the audience, making it easier for the audience to empathize with them.

It should be pointed out that "anti-hero" does not mean the disappearance of heroic characters, in fact, "anti-hero" and "hero" are complementary to each other. In fact, "anti-hero" and "hero" are complementary to each other. This kind of setting makes the hero image closer to the earth, and gives the audience a more real and close-to-life feeling. In this way, the animation not only shows the multi-faceted nature of the characters, but also enriches the layers of the story, so that the audience can see another charm different from the traditional heroes in the process of watching.

3.4.2.1 Unbridled and spontaneous

During this period, Nezha's character has an "anti-heroic" quality to it, and unlike the traditional image of the hero as a towering figure, he displays more of the common man's traits and flaws, becoming a member of the crowd. In *Birth of the Demon Child*, Nezha, a troubled young man whose behavior is not bound by tradition, is confined to the Li Mansion since childhood due to his status as a Demon Pill, but he attempts to escape on several occasions, showing his unwillingness to be confined as well as his childlike mischievousness and courage. Under the tutelage of Tai Yi Zhen, Nezha displays a disdainful attitude and teases Tai Yi Zhen, but when he learns that he is a "spirit pearl", he begins his journey to subdue the demons. Even in the midst of his training, Nezha continues to act in his own way, ignoring the safety of the people, which leads to the people of Chentang Pass being victimized. The people of Chentang Pass represent a group mentality of conformity and conformity, and it is in this environment that Nezha realizes what Sartre describes in *The Confinement* as "the other is hell". As a result, Nezha is desperate to break through the limitations and try to prove himself, thus building a sense of self-worth in the reflections of others. When Ao Beng saves the little girl, Nezha, unwilling to take the credit, returns the girl to the demon, which is both humorous and slightly heartbreaking.

In *New Gods: Nezha Reborn*, Nezha (Li Yunxian) appears as an adult, but he retains his childlike nature of unwillingness to be bound and refusing to bow down to the forces of power. As Donghai City faces a shortage of fresh water under the control of four major syndicates, including the Tak family, Li Yunxian engages in fresh water smuggling, reflecting a challenge and rebellion against the existing hierarchical order of society. His love for locomotives and the scenes in the movie where he gallops

along not only provide a visual impact to the audience, but also demonstrate Li Yun-Xin's desire to try to break the rules and pursue freedom.

Nezha's behavior is one of the most distinctive features of his character during this period. In *Birth of the Demon Child*, when Mrs. Yin returns home and wants to accompany Nezha, although Nezha's tone seems indifferent, saying "Since you're so bored, I'll play with you", and he seems to be indifferent on the surface, when he hears his mother's suggestion to play shuttlecock together, his hard-to-conceal joy is instantly apparent! No doubt, his eyes instantly brightened. When he turns around to face his mother, Nezha still looks embarrassed. His arrogance is not only adorable, but also softens his image as a "magical child," and reflects his deep longing for affection, especially his mother's love. The shuttlecock scene occurs twice in the play, once when Nezha shares a bonding moment with his mother, and again when he spends a joyous moment with Ao Beng on the beach. Ao Ping is the first person to show Nezha his social identity, which touches Nezha's heartstrings, and his long-standing emotions finally explode as he turns away and wipes his tears with the excuse, "It's okay, it's just sand in my eyes. This seemingly stubborn but arrogant statement conceals Nezha's longing for family, friendship and social acceptance, but it is actually Nezha's innermost disguise.

It is because of Ao B's understanding and proximity that he becomes Nezha's only friend. Therefore, in the climax of the movie, when Ao B goes astray for the benefit of the dragon family and Nezha defeats Ao B in a half-enlightened state, he chooses to show mercy. Faced with Ao B's question, "Why didn't you stab him?", Nezha replies, "I told you, you are my only friend", showing his sincerity, love and honesty, which ultimately touches Ao B's conscience, and the two of them work together to overcome the thunderbolt and overcome the obstacles. Together, they overcame the tribulation.

3.4.4.2 Witty humor Self-identification

With the advent of the new century, animation creations have gradually tended to become more adult-oriented, showing a richer diversity of styles. Against this backdrop, the story of Nezha not only focuses on conveying the contemporary spirit and cultural values of the times, but its style of expression has also become more playful. In *Birth of the Demon Child*, Nezha's jingles leave a deep impression, such as when he is lying on his side on a wall: "I have nothing to do in my house, I climb over the walls and smash tiles and drop bottles and cans, and I have been back and forth a thousand times, but I am also very tired. This not only highlights Nezha's helplessness about his current state of life, but also shows his inner world. When Mrs. Yin asks him what kind of view he is enjoying from the wall, Nezha responds wittily, "Mountains, trees, flowers, grass, it's hard to watch people run around naked," and humorously rejects his mother's offer of companionship, suggesting that his desire for her company has turned into a lack of anticipation, but that his mother's sudden appearance still surprises and excites him.

Nezha's life is often surrounded by popular prejudice, and even when he rescues a little girl, he still faces misunderstanding and fear. This prompts him to recite a limerick: "I am a small demon, I am free and easy, I kill without blinking an eye, I eat people without salt, I eat seven or eight of them in one mouthful, my stomach is bursting, when I go to the toilet to take a dump, I remember that I forgot to

bring some paper with me". Despite his self-depreciation, Nezha has never really hurt the people. In the face of the hardships of real life, he laments: "Life is full of tears, the more you toss and turn, the more unlucky you are, are you tired of struggling for your life, why don't you just lie down on the bed? This modern and witty expression is in fact a disguise for Nezha's sincere feelings, which coincides with the self-deprecating "mourning culture" commonly adopted by contemporary youth groups, and reflects a way of relieving oneself of stress.

Part IV The Changing Characteristics of Nezha's Media Image

Animated films and television productions based on Nezha have undergone development and change over a period of six decades. Nezha is portrayed as a fat-headed villain in "The Palace of Heaven", and as a tragic hero in "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King". In Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, Nezha is a tragic hero. In The Legend Of Nezha, a 52-episode animated series featuring Nezha, a young hero with a trendy hairstyle influenced by fashion culture, the muscular Barbie Nezha in BadJokes is a sight to behold. The muscular Barbie Nezha in "BadJokes" is a sight to behold, while his evil sense of justice in "Birth of the Demon Child" is distinctive. The above detailed analysis of Nezha's outward appearance and the symbolic meanings he carries provides a good preparation for the summary of the changing characteristics of Nezha's image in this section. This section summarizes the distinctive features of Nezha's changing image in animated films and television productions from the perspectives of the artistic styling of Nezha's image and the character's personality.

4.1 Strangeness of media image

The theory of strangeness is the basic principle of a series of theatrical reforms made by Bertolt Brecht in terms of "dramatic structure, stage structure, and performance method" in order to implement a new type of drama "not in the Aristotelian tradition". Drama writers use the dual structure strategy of the play to see the speed, repetition, reversal and cessation of changes in the world from the micro dimension of time, and to create the sequence of the development of the drama story from the macro dimension of time, so as to show the micro strength of the narrative power and create the infectious power of light and shadow.

Sheklowski once proposed: "Wherever there is a visual image, there is the phenomenon of strangeness". The first and foremost point of the technique of "strangeness" is that the creator consciously applies artistic means and methods such as deformation and distortion to the image of Nezha, which is familiar to the general public, and carries out an exaggerated treatment. The "strangeness" technique is, first and foremost, the creator's conscious use of artistic means and methods such as deformation and distortion to exaggerate the image of Nezha, change its external image, and add different symbolic meanings, thus giving the audience a sense of novelty and enhancing the texture of the work.

As times change and cultures merge, the image of Nezha and its connotations inevitably undergo unfamiliar changes. Looking back at film and television productions since the 1920s, different historical processes have given Nezha new cultural symbols, and the changes reflect the unfamiliar treatment of the image, i.e., through artistic techniques such as flipping and distortion, the familiar image of

Nezha is given new aesthetic concepts, creative thinking and aesthetic values. The image of Nezha, from its appearance to its character, from its language to its behavior, is a reflection of the strangeness of the image. The artistic charm and value brought about by the unfamiliar evolution of Nezha's image has given it cultural vitality in the new era. This not only reflects the change in the mainstream aesthetic tendency of the audience, but also conforms to the trend of the times and satisfies the aesthetic needs of the audience. In recent years, with the rapid development of film and television technology and the continuous improvement of people's aesthetic level, the portrayal of classic artistic images in film and television is no longer confined to the traditional ways of expression, but is constantly innovated on the basis of "faithfulness to the original", presenting audiences with new audiovisual enjoyment.

4.2 Diversification of animation modeling

In classical Chinese aesthetics, concepts such as "Dao," "Qi," and "Wonder" are emphasized more than mere "beauty" (Suhuai, 1986). (Suhuai, 1986). Thus, Nezha in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King is not only handsome, but also wears a white robe symbolizing Taoism. In the age of the Internet, animation culture has become more inclusive and open. The shift in aesthetics is not simply the pursuit of the alternative, but shows a broader aesthetic perspective of the audience, a unique aesthetic perception in creation (Zhisheng, 2017). This perceptual ability is able to map the needs of the audience as part of popular culture, demonstrating its popular, approachable and simplified characteristics. From Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King to The Legend Of Nezha to the new version of Birth of the Demon Child, the latter retains Nezha's iconic image, such as the marble head and red costume, but also adds new elements, such as smoky eye makeup, crooked The latter retains Nezha's iconic image, such as the pill head and red costume, but adds new elements, such as smoky eye make-up, crooked teeth and tattered clothes, to break the stereotype of the traditional hero. In terms of character, Nezha has transformed from a good-natured, obedient boy to a mischievous, evil spirit. Together, this change in character and image has created a unique and recognizable character that has successfully captured the attention of a wider audience.

The narrative content of animation film and television is carried by animation image, and the success or otherwise of animation image is an important criterion for judging a movie. From the perspective of image science, the animation image in film and television works is the generation of the whole social and cultural context, which can become the "collective imagination". Therefore, a successful animation image can inspire the audience's strong sense of identity, from the handsome and beautiful to the demoralizing and ugly, from the image changes, reflecting the different periods, the public aesthetic needs of the changes.

4.3 Character rounding

The reason why animation and movie and television works deeply attract viewers and inspire people's empathy is that they can reflect and reproduce the diversity of real life. The complexity of the real society leads to the multi-dimensional presentation of characters, in which the characters show noble qualities as well as expose ugly sides, and beauty and ugliness, good and evil coexist in them. In the traditional categorization of character images, we usually encounter diverse portrayals of positive characters, negative characters, minor characters and neutral characters,

etc. Such categorization often makes it difficult for us to accurately grasp the complexity of the character's characteristics, and we can't simply define each character's image with the logic of either black or white.

In the definition of characterization, flat characters are opposed to round characters, which often have only one or very few characteristics, represent a certain idea, and can be summarized by applying the traditional simple character classification. Whether there are round characters in a work, how many round characters there are, and whether they are successfully portrayed or not have become important criteria for evaluating the success of a work. In modern society, animation film and television audiences generally believe that flat characters belong to the lower level of character creation, while round characters have more attractive and infectious power. Among Nezha-related animated film and television works, the Nezha in "The Great Pandemonium" is a flat and negative character, while the Nezha in "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King" and "The Legend Of Nezha" is a positive and active animated image.

Birth of the Demon Child favors the creation of rounded characters, with Nezha no longer being a one-dimensional villain or a completely positive figure, but rather a diverse character who is both good and evil, a god and a devil. Ao Bian, also the protagonist, no longer appears as a villain as before, but is born with a spirit pearl and has to choose to fight against the people for the sake of his entire family, and then, under the influence of his friend Nezha, turns into a hero who works with Nezha to save the world. The many transformations of the two main characters, Nezha and Ao Bian, demonstrate the versatility of the round character. In the context of the recent consumer culture, more round animated characters are presented in film and television works. From a positive point of view, round character images can create characters with a three-dimensional sense, add space and affinity for artistic expression, enrich artistic expression, and therefore express the thoughts and feelings of the general public from multiple perspectives. The portrayal and transformation of Nezha's animated image is very much in line with the needs of audiences in the current cultural context, and as a result, the new version of Nezha has created a phenomenal high box office.

Summary of the chapter

This chapter focuses on the artistic styling and characterization of Nezha in traditional media and television media, especially in animation, so as to analyze the changing characteristics of Nezha's media image.

In the traditional media, Nezha first appeared on stage in a play during the Yuan Dynasty, and continued to this day with the Liantai Opera of the Qing Dynasty, which has become a figurative embodiment of the literary image of Nezha, and to a certain extent influenced the creation of Nezha's comic strips, which, as a major type of modern art in China, have been welcomed by the masses as a popular form of art for the dissemination of culture. The original book of Nezha, *Nezha*, has been widely disseminated in this process, and the image of Nezha in the comic strips is deeply rooted in people's hearts, with the mythological motif of "haunting the sea to capture the dragon," the unique hairstyle and decorations becoming the basis for the changes in the electronic media. By exploring the heroic and divine qualities of the opera and the diverse interpretations of Nezha in the comic strips, it is revealed that the image of

Nezha has gradually come closer to the people and has become a cultural symbol that is deeply rooted in their hearts.

In the electronic medium, the styling of Nezha in live-action films, television dramas, and various types of animation was introduced by content analysis, describing in detail the visual changes in the image of Nezha, including the evolution of his appearance, hairstyle, costume accessories, and weapons, and finding that animation favors a childlike styling of Nezha, while film and television productions are more varied; in animation, the red dots in between Na Zha's eyebrows, which are commonly seen in films and television dramas and represent a weakening of the divinity, were removed, but all maintained the iconic hairstyle; the patterns of Nezha's costumes are becoming more elaborate and complex, with Nezha's costumes in the animation becoming more and more in line with modern aesthetics, while the live-action film and television productions are shaping up to be more heroic, but with little change in the iconic colors; in terms of weapons and phallic forms, both are showing more and more entertaining and modernized features, with innovations and additions based on the originals.

In view of Nezha's unique animated image, this study pays special attention to both artistic styling and characterization. From the fusion of national aesthetics in art animation, to the modern interpretation of television and online animation, to the trendy iconography of film animation, this study demonstrates the evolution of Nezha's image in response to changes in the artistic medium. The transformation of Nezha's character from a war god to a human god and the "anti-heroic" quality of his modern interpretation deeply reveals the deep connection between Nezha's image and the emotional resonance of contemporary audiences.

This chapter thus summarizes and analyzes the main changing features of Nezha's media image: the strangeness of the media image, the diversity of animation shapes, and the rounding of the character's personality. These changes not only demonstrate the richness and transformative power of Nezha's image, but also reflect the dynamism of culture and social progress. Through a comprehensive and in-depth analysis, this chapter not only deepens the understanding of the evolution of the classic character of Nezha in the popular media, but also provides valuable perspectives and profound insights into the study of the reshaping and application of traditional Chinese cultural symbols in modern society.



CHAPTER IV

The Cultural Representation of Nezha's Animated Image

Introduction

A set of frameworks on how to understand and analyze cultural symbols and meanings, Hall's proposed theory of cultural representation focuses on how cultural products are created, transmitted and interpreted. This theory suggests that cultural representations are more than simple reflections or descriptions of reality; they are processes that construct reality through language and symbol systems. Representation involves the production of meanings, which are created and communicated through sign systems in specific cultural and social contexts. Regarding the operation of cultural representations, Hall suggests that "there is a 'system' by which all kinds of things, people, and events are linked in our minds to possess a set of concepts or mental representations without which we cannot explain the world (Hall, 1997). " According to Hall, culture is the practice of representation and meaning, i.e., the second level of representation "There is no real original meaning in any of the carriers and representational practices of culture (Hall, 1997)". The meaning of Nezha is realized by the creator through encoding various symbols, which are eventually assembled into a film and television character that carries cultural meanings and transmits representational meanings and cultural concepts to the audience.

The story of Nezha originates from the ancient Chinese myth of Legends, and through centuries of oral and literary transmission, the image and story have been constantly remodeled and reinvented. This kind of creation based on China's native soil inevitably reflects to a certain extent the culture and spirit of the Chinese nation's traditions, and Nezha's animated image carries on the legacy of these iconic national cultures to the present day. In different periods of history, the image of Nezha reflected the cultural needs and values of the society at that time. In the early era of reform and opening up, Nezha was portrayed as a hero who rebelled against authority, reflecting the people's desire for justice and freedom; while in today's society, Nezha's image is portrayed as a motorcycle-riding urban teenager, reflecting the public's quest for entertainment in consumer culture. This reflects the intermingling and change of national and social cultures. This chapter focuses on the inheritance of the traditional Chinese cultural spirit by the animated image of Nezha, taking into account the cultural representations in the societies of different eras and the underlying logic behind them.

Part I focuses on the cultural cycle in Nezha animation, analyzing its cyclical process in modern cultural production and how this process influences and shapes the cultural meaning of Nezha's image. This is followed by an in-depth study of the operational mechanisms of Nezha's representations, including the selection, combination, and dissemination of symbols, and an exploration of how these symbols generate meanings in specific cultural and social contexts. In addition, this section explores the relationship between representations of Nezha and broad ideologies, analyzing how this animated image embodies and conveys specific social concepts and values.

Part II delves into how the animated image of Nezha demonstrates China's national cultural traits, including resistance to external oppression, interpretation of

traditional morality, and the conflict between Nezha and the laws of heaven. By analyzing the spiritual and cultural qualities of Nezha, the paper reveals how the image of Nezha has become a symbol of Chinese cultural resistance, moral exploration, and natural philosophizing. At the same time, this section also explores Nezha's eulogy of the concept of the spirit in all things, as well as his manifestation of the concepts of the immortality of the soul and reincarnation, reflecting deep-seated Taoist thought and the ancient Chinese concept of the universe.

Part III focuses on the cultural representations of the animated image of Nezha in different periods of history, from the political self-awareness of the planned economy, to the cultural dilemma of the globalization era, to the pluralistic aesthetics of the post-modern era. By analyzing the policy context, cultural environment, and cultural characteristics of Nezha's image in different periods, the paper shows how Nezha's image has evolved in response to social changes, and how these changes have reflected Chinese society's profound understanding of politics, economy, and culture.

Part IV summarizes the causes of change in the cultural representation of Nezha's image, and analyzes the transformation from national culture to popular culture, and how this transformation reflects the multifaceted challenges of the real society, including resistance to the feudal system, resistance to evil forces, and rebellion against individual destiny. By analyzing the causes of these changes, this chapter aims to reveal how the animated image of Nezha inherits and innovates the spirit of national culture, reflects the changes in social culture, and meets the cultural demands of different times.

Part I The Relationship between Nezha's Animated Image and Cultural Icons

1.1 The Cultural Cycle of Nezha Animation

At the practical level of the theory of representation, Hall proposes a methodology that is "a model of sociological research based on the study of the conjunction of different processes that analyze the experience of a cultural artifact. The interplay of these different processes can lead to variable and unexpected outcomes. (Du Gay et al., 2013)", based on this methodology, it is possible to discover how Nezha, as a cultural phenomenon, is produced, represented in culture - especially mediated culture - and gained a general cultural identity and acceptance through consumption, while being qualified and regulated by social rules.

In media culture, Nezha has been divorced from religion and myth, and has gradually become a commercial product as well as a cultural product in popular media such as novels and movies, and this is contained within the various aspects of the cultural cycle (Figure 49). Since culture does not generate meaning naturally, but rather constructs it continuously in a representational way like language, the cultural meaning of Nezha is continuously represented through the activities of cultural practices. First, it is described or represented through a familiar language, which is one of the ways in which meaning is constructed - i.e., "describing something new using vocabulary derived or analogized from what is already known". (Du Gay et al., 2013) Following this, the constructed meaning of Nezha gradually encompasses different semantic networks in its continuous development, giving it its own, culturally specific significance through associations, distinctions, and differences in discursive relationships, and continuously acquiring richer and richer connotations and new representations of meaning. In addition, Nezha is given importance, meaning

and value in social practice, through the way people use it, and thus in their lives. And people's use of it becomes a meaningful practice associated with it.

However, Nezha is not a self-contained cultural circle, but is connected to our lives on a larger scale. Nezha becomes part of a larger cultural representation, such as that of the popular media age. As Nezha is situated in different cultures, its meaning changes and a new set of associations and differences are created depending on its place in the culture, thus constructing meaning in relation to that culture.

In the study of Nezha it is important to examine not only the ways in which Nezha is represented, but also how the processes of production that make Nezha a cultural artifact are represented, and how the various different processes of production are understood and given meaning through a variety of different labels and categorizations. Production is predicated on demand, which requires producers to constantly consider the needs of multiple parties (which may be those of the consumer or the ruling class), both at the outset of production and in the process of production, and to appeal to them in the process of production. The examination of demand is fundamentally an examination of the cultural identity of the society at that time.

The characterization of the production process is, in fact, the process by which different group cultures come to produce meaning. It should also be noted that an examination of the production process of a product cannot be separated from an examination of the various stages of production as producers, as well as their unique modes of production and production cultures. Nezha acquires a meaning through its creators before it is designed and produced in a unique production method and enters the communication channel. In fact, the oft-quoted accidental creative inspiration is not the root cause of Nezha's creation. This also suggests that any kind of commercial or word-of-mouth success of Nezha is not necessarily determined by chance. In fact, in the production of mediated culture, the multitude of production stages has complicated the process of producing any kind of cultural product to include a multitude of factors.

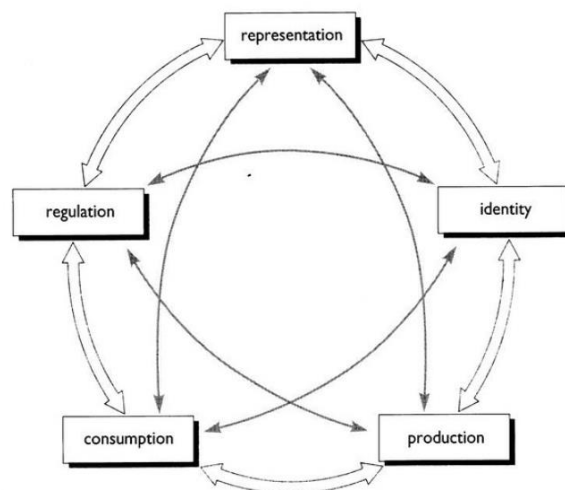


Figure 47 The Cycle of Cultural Representations

Source: Stuart Hall's "Representation and Meaning Practice", 2013

1.2 Operation of the Nezha Representation

Most of the cultural artifacts about Nezha consist of words, images, and sounds, and can be viewed as a vast linguistic/symbolic/discursive system. It is from this system that one enters to analyze the media culture embedded in it. In fact, the simplest process of characterization of this system may be as follows: the mythological Nezha, as an "existing object", enters the brain of the writer and creator through the first system of characterization, forming a set of "conceptual icons" according to a certain logic and rules, and these "conceptual icons" are then transferred to the brain of the writer and creator. These "conceptual illustrations" are transformed into a language/symbol/discourse system (i.e., literary, film and television works) using words, images and sounds as the main tools of expression through the second representation system in the appropriate operational contexts (certain political conditions, economic security, equipment and facilities, creative teams, recognition by the right authorities, and the information media, etc.).

At the same time, when studying Nezha and the culture it reflects, it is important to consider the path of representation.

From a reflective point of view, works about Nezha are clearly a reinterpretation of the mythological story, reflecting not only traditional cultural elements, but also the re-examination and re-interpretation of traditional values in different eras. For example, the image of Nezha in the movie has evolved from that of an "urchin" in traditional culture to that of a hero who is deeply challenged by destiny and ultimately overcomes it through his own personal efforts. This adaptation reflects the importance that modern society places on individuality, self-realization and rebellion against traditional destiny, and is a creative reflection of traditional stories.

Under the intentional path, the influence of the author's personal will on the work is more emphasized, as director Dumpling said, "In the end, I decided to make a film that has some relationship with my experience... The reason why I made this theme is that, on the one hand, it is the release of my own suppression for many years; and more importantly, I hope to give encouragement to those who are running on the path of their own ideals, hope, warmth, and strength. (Jiao, 2019) "This can reflect how creators consciously choose and reshape traditional stories, incorporating their own emotions and perceptions into them, while adapting them to the aesthetics and values of their audiences. The creators' continuous reinvention of Nezha's image is, on the one hand, a choice from a personal point of view, but also a reaction to audience expectations and social trends.

From a constructivist perspective, it is possible to consider how works from different eras construct a new image of Nezha in the minds of the audience, and how this image in turn affects the audience's understanding of culture. Nezha is usually portrayed as a character with a spirit of defiance and courage, but the objects of his defiance and challenge are different, echoing the audience's real-life experience and social environment, thus triggering the audience's reflection on their personal destiny, social norms, and traditional values, and thus allowing Nezha to detach itself from mere words and images and become an independent cultural phenomenon.

Depending on the rules of the code, it can be "decoded" through various channels and in various ways. Interpretation of the representational process of Nezha's works on the basis of media culture is only one of the ways of decoding, which may

"release" some of its meanings (these meanings are still floating, and there is no reason for anyone to fix them arbitrarily), while more meanings on the level of implied meanings are still to be "unleashed" in a more valuable way by more researchers. More meaning at the level of implicit meaning remains to be "released" by more researchers. In any case, Nezha, as a typical representative of Chinese mythology, has already secured for itself a larger space for meaning in the midst of cultural diversity and a certain amount of discourse through the power of its cultural representations.

1.3 Representation and Ideology of Nezha

It is worth noting that the meanings embedded in the words, images, sounds and colors of Nezha's works are diverse and complex. Exploring the image of Nezha in different eras and literary works allows us to observe how audiences/consumers construct an understanding and identification with the character in changing cultural and social contexts, and how different eras and social groups interpret and understand Nezha's image in light of their own cultural backgrounds and values. Nezha's image. For example, in ancient times, Nezha's loyalty and bravery may have been emphasized, while modern society may be more concerned with Nezha's rebellious and independent character. Thus, these meanings and their associated interpretations are not fixed, but slide historically and are influenced by ideology.

Different eras and social groups may reinforce or change some of Nezha's qualities according to their specific cultural values and ideological needs. For example, in primitive Buddhist narratives, Nezha is depicted as a vicious guardian deity who maintains social order and moral norms; in Chinese novels about gods and demons, he becomes a juvenile god who rebels against feudal moral norms; in modern animation reinterpretations, Nezha's rebellious and individualistic characteristics are amplified to echo contemporary society's pursuit of the values of freedom of individuality and resistance to authority. This shows that the symbol of Nezha is not a meaning fixed in the natural process of perception, but can be utilized and transformed by different ideologies. The story and image of Nezha can be seen as a cultural-political practice whose representational process is influenced by social relations and ideologies. This means that Nezha is not only part of the cultural heritage, but also a field of struggle between different political and social forces. The image and story of Nezha are constantly reconstructed and reinterpreted in different social changes and cultural contexts. This constant change and reconstruction reflects the dynamism and plurality of society, and at the same time reveals the dominant ideologies of different times and cultural contexts.

Part II The Ethnic Cultural Representation of Nezha's Animated Image

As the bearer and embodiment of culture, art profoundly reflects the truest and deepest emotions of human beings, and as a record that transcends time and space, creators have always been committed to exploring how to incorporate the unique and indelible cultural significance of their nation into their works, so that artistic creations not only portray the unique spiritual characteristics of the nation, but also show the essence of a nation's culture. As Hegel stated, "Inner vitality, emotion, soul, style and spirit constitute the meaning conveyed by a work of art (Lukács, 2002)." Excellent works of art carry rich cultural connotations, and each of their components fully expresses the spiritual meaning that their creators want to convey, thus contributing to

an immersive art experience. The image of Nezha, as a classic character in mythological art, is not only an animated expression of the cultural values of the Chinese nation, but also carries fundamental elements of Chinese culture.

The in-depth analysis of the characteristics and patterns of the adapted elements in Nezha animation, combined with the origins of the myth of Nezha and the evolution of its image in literature and animation, provides us with a powerful support for exploring the essence of the Chinese culture represented by Nezha. This exploration not only penetrates deep into the traditional Chinese cultural system and explores the cultural and spiritual symbols of Nezha from the concept of divine power in feudal society, but also explores the ancient belief in rebirth through the reincarnation of Nezha's destiny, and provides a rich path of reflection for exploring the intrinsic connection between Chinese mythology and culture across time and space. The image of Nezha is an important way for people with the same cultural background to recognize Nezha, and it is a common understanding of the national culture behind Nezha.

2.1 Nezha's Spiritual and Cultural Qualities

The construction of archetypal characters is a key factor in the artistry and audience acceptance of a work of art. In order to meet the diverse aesthetic needs of a wide range of audiences, an excellent work of art must achieve this goal as much as possible. This poses a more serious challenge to art creators, who must gradually mold distinctive prototypes of artistic images in the vast world of imagination. These archetypes must not only have excellent expressive power, but also usually contain specific spiritual qualities, which is the key to characterization. For animators, animation, as a kind of graphic art woven by lines and colors, becomes an ideal medium for shaping characters with unique imagery. In order to realize the seamless connection between the characters and the national spirit, the artist needs to rely on his/her own "sensory structure" to transform the flowing social experience into specific visual expression and create a brand new image language. The so-called social experience refers to the spiritual values accumulated by a nation through the historical experience of national integration and division in the course of its growth and development (Williams, 1977). Therefore, the mission of animation producers is to build the spiritual core of animation works by portraying characters with different personalities, and to endow classic animation characters with profound connotations of national spirit, so as to inspire a sense of national identity originating from common roots.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the characterization of Nezha in Chinese animation. If we put aside the context of the era and the creative ideas of the adapters for a moment, and focus on the character of Nezha, we can see that behind his independent behavior lies a clear love-hate relationship with the world. Nezha, who is full of goodwill by nature, is a typical representative of the courageous expression of emotions in animation. In every animation, Nezha always fights against unjust external forces, and when he returns to his family, he consciously practices filial piety, embodying the concept of filial piety, which is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and tradition. When faced with the choice between upholding the greater good and insisting on his own self, Nezha demonstrates a fearless sense of the "greater self," as well as an awakening of his own destiny and self-consciousness. Therefore, to analyze Nezha's spiritual qualities, the following three core aspects can be discussed in depth.

2.1.1 Resistance to external oppression

The figure of Nezha, which originated in folk mythology, carries an important sense of mission and is seen as a hero capable of holding up the sky and the earth. Myths, as popular folktales in ancient times, tell of the behavior of spirits beyond the realm of human ability. Myths were able to penetrate the hearts of people precisely because of their built-in folkloric coloring and the refinement and processing of archetypes of worldly characters, which endowed these archetypes with a divine mission (Jianqing, 1990). In the intertwining of humanity and divinity, Nezha represents the common people and assumes responsibilities beyond those of mortals. In this process, the mythological theme needs to incorporate elements of human emotion to trigger the complication of the plot and the emergence of conflicts, which ultimately lead to dramatic contradictions and conflicts.

The central conflict in the story of Nezha centers on the confrontation between Nezha and the Dragon King of the East China Sea and his clan. The reason behind this conflict is rooted in the fact that the overbearing behavior of the Dragon Clan inspires Nezha's sense of justice and drives him not to stand idly by. However, when Nezha overcomes this evil force, he is instead seen as overly aggressive by the dragons. Why is the pursuit of justice interpreted as an insult to the gods? The answer to the question lies in the strict hierarchy of class society. In the story of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, Li Jing once chided Nezha, "How dare you harm the dragon's seed in the sky! (Figure 50)" Li Jing, who apparently ignores the truth, is the defender of hierarchical differences. Being in a high position at Chentang Pass, he may have feared that his own child would cause trouble. However, this does not mean that Nezha would yield to the hierarchy of status; as a young child, he pursues the idea of equality in life. This drives him to strive to be a righteous warrior against oppression in a feudal society, sparing no effort to fight for justice for the common people. Nezha's behavior, therefore, is the goodness of his nature, "acting on behalf of heaven".



Figure 48 Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King

Source: Film and video footage of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, 1979.

Against the backdrop of a feudal society, there are great differences in the lives and status of the people. In response to this phenomenon, the creative teams of animations such as *The Legend Of Nezha*, *Birth of the Demon Child* and *Nezha Reborn* have carried out a thoughtful reconstruction of narrative logic, significantly weakening and adjusting the class differences left behind by history, with the aim of presenting character motivations and positional shifts. As a result, in the final

presentation of these animated works, Nezha is portrayed as a symbol of integrity and bravery. No matter how many challenges he goes through or how many times he is reborn, Nezha always adheres to his ideals of pursuing truth and undying faith. His power does not stem from his status as a human or a god, but rather from his own tireless efforts and struggles, a process that has shaped the "God of Nezha" and added a touching meaning to the end of each work.

In order to fundamentally eliminate the portrayal of class hostility in previous works, the animation team, driven by the concept of "Good and Evil", has evolved the villains into the ill-intentioned and conniving Shiji Niangniang and Shen Gongbao, as well as the selfish and tyrannical East Sea Dragons. These antagonists are sinister and cunning in appearance, always trying to suppress justice and accumulate more evil forces for themselves, and all of their actions are aimed at ruling the world for their own selfish desires.

It is thus clear that the eradication of evil forces has become the common pursuit and life aspiration of every generation of Chinese people. People deeply realize that to eradicate tyranny, there must be righteous people's heroes. Animation, as a medium, is able to quickly realize the goal of creating ordinary heroes who uphold social justice beyond the considerations of practical limitations and technical conditions, and accurately depicts the greedy social pests through the art of animation. The climactic scene in the animation of the duel between good and evil demonstrates the noble qualities and righteousness of the heroes, and through the support of endurance and determination, it makes the mythological hero Nezha an iconic figure in the world of images.

2.1.2 Interpretation of traditional ethics

Mr. Mao Dun made an in-depth analysis of the nature of myths, which he considered to be "stories created by primitive people based on their own living conditions, cosmology, ethical thinking and religious beliefs, combined with rich imagination (Dun, 2021)". Underneath the fantastic and mysterious appearance of myths lies the most precious spiritual wealth of a society. Whether it is creation myth or flood myth, whether it is Pangu opening up the sky and earth, or Jiu Ji Yu healing the water and Nuwa mending the sky to save the living beings, myths symbolize human's understanding of the nature, formation of values, national identity, and transmission of culture. Myths are like a "magic mirror" reflecting social life, always showing the progress of human civilization, adding bricks and mortar to the enhancement of human spiritual values, and guiding the formation and development of national values.

Myths form the deep foundation of a people's history. The Finnish folklorist Lauri Hangeke summarized the modern theory of myth into twelve dimensions, covering such aspects as "myths as the basis of worldview and philosophy of life" and "myths as cultural reflections and social structures (Johnson, 1998)". This shows that myths are closely connected to society and its members, not only as an artistic platform for reflecting social problems, but also as an important vehicle for recording the changes in human society and people's observations and reflections on the world. Therefore, Nezha, a character from ancient mythology, needs to transcend his mortal destiny and take on the burden of a divine mission, which means that Nezha with its mythological overtones contains symbols of the national spirit. As a mythological

character, Nezha's words and actions in mythological texts are expected to deeply reflect the spirituality of the Chinese people and their traditional ethical paradigms. Thus, Nezha is not only a mythological character, but also a navigator of the spiritual quest of the Chinese people.

When we look at the animated works featuring Nezha throughout the ages, we can easily find that the plot of "Nezha returning his father's flesh and mother's bones" is deeply rooted in the hearts of viewers, and has become the essence of the climax of the entire plot. In terms of cause and effect, Nezha's act of self-sacrifice directly led to his extraordinary transformation and his journey to godhood. However, when one looks deeper into Nezha's decision at the time, it is the innocence of a child and the unknown of the world that lies behind it, the regret of not being able to consider the situation in its entirety, and more than anything else, it is the fact that when the Dragon King demands that Nezha's life be sacrificed, the morality and ethics in his heart become the only criterion for judging what is right and what is wrong. Nezha longs to protect the safety of his family and townspeople. In *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, his insistence that "I'm a man of one mind" demonstrates his deep sense of family and nationhood, a sentiment that has always been at the forefront of his mind. Faced with the remorse of not offending his enemies, Nezha can only respond by apologizing to his parents for raising him. As the old saying goes, "The skin of the body is the skin of the parents." By sacrificing himself, Nezha explains to his biological parents and townspeople in a moral and ethical way, thus seeking the best solution to a dilemma in the midst of complex interpersonal relationships, and exchanging his righteousness for the peace and harmony of the Chentang Pass, which is reportedly the most important part of the movie, *The Legend Of Nezha*, which was broadcasted on TV. *The Legend Of Nezha* has been recognized by many students and parents after its broadcast. I have watched and discussed the film in depth with students, some of whom laughed when they saw Quafu's bold declaration and Nuwa's statement that "Quafu will never leave us Quafu will always be with us! "The students laughed when they saw the movie and Nuwa Nyunta's declaration that "Kwafu will never leave us Kwafu will always be with us":

"Watching the reimagined image of Quafu and his myth of saving and chasing the sun reminded me of Huang Jiguang, Qiu Shaoyun, Lei Feng, and Jiao Yulu They are all portrayed in mainstream discourse as heroes of public service, selflessness, and dedication, who sacrificed their own lives for the sake of others, and are role models for us to follow."

1.1.3 Control over one's own destiny

In the three animated productions leading up to 2019, the character of Nezha is centered around two themes that symbolize the power of class antagonisms in feudal society, as well as "sacrificing one's life for righteousness" and "filial piety" in the context of traditional Chinese culture. These spiritual elements inherent in the character's personality are not only a reflection of Nezha's role as a key point of cultural memory, but are also in line with the values reflected in the work and represent a dynamic pictorial expression of spiritual values. Thus, the character of Nezha in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, *The Legend of the Feng*

Shen Bang, and *I Am Nezha* symbolizes the spiritual quest for survival of the Chinese people in the context of the ancient Chinese era. Nezha is transformed into a symbol of national spirit in the animated narratives, demonstrating the cultural mission carried by Chinese mythology.

People's understanding of Nezha's role seems to have created a "statue" of Nezha, and behind this "statue" is the long-lasting interpretation of the legend of Nezha's fate, which has created a solid image and stereotype of Nezha. This "filter" of cultural memory is gradually deconstructed and melted in *Birth of the Demon Child*, and in *Nezha Reborn*, it is further transformed and reconstructed to fit the contemporary social context.

If there is a philosophical dimension that is closely linked to the core of Chinese culture in the three previous animations, it is the "harmony between man and nature" and "harmony between man and nature" in the idea of "harmony" and "harmony between man and nature" in the idea of "harmony". Harmony between man and nature" and "harmony between man and man" in the idea of "harmony".

On a spiritual level, Nezha has reconciled with his blood ties, and through his act of "sacrificing his life for the protection of the people", he exemplifies the core values of the Chinese community, accepting his destiny with open arms. In *Birth of the Demon Child* and *Nezha Reborn*, the character of Nezha is further explored at the level of "individual self-harmony", focusing more on Nezha himself and highlighting his psychological growth and awakening of self-consciousness. The character of Nezha is not only viewed as an independent individual, but is also depicted as a natural rebel with an awakened sense of self. Lines such as "My destiny is mine, not God's" and "This destiny is mine, I don't need you to tell me who I am, I'll show you who I am" demonstrate Nezha's personal liberation and rebirth of his soul as he inquires about his identity under the constraints of his destiny. At the same time, the fusion of the forces of weakening divinity and emphasizing humanity has led to a "human-centered" subjective sense of control over one's own destiny and a desire for "social identity" in the game of personal behavior and complex social relations.

Scholar Tajfel defines "social identity" as an individual's realization that he or she belongs to a particular social group and the emotional and value significance it brings (Tajfel, 1978), which explains Nezha's longing to escape from the shadow of his fate as a "demonic pill" in *Birth of the Demon Child*. "In *Birth of the Demon Child*, Nezha's desire to escape from the shadow of his destiny and become a member of the society and to win the people's recognition that he can rewrite his own destiny is illustrated. This kind of emotional identity fulfills the individual's psychosocial needs and is the key to growing into a complete and independent "social being". In *Nezha Reborn*, Li Yunxiang, the reincarnation of Nezha's spirit, awakens his fighting spirit in his past life, while at the same time searching for his own identity amidst the vicissitudes of life. This transformation and harmonization from divinity to humanity is in line with the theme of "rebirth" - breaking free from the bonds of destiny in the rebirth of the body and self-consciousness - and demonstrates the true significance of myths being re-presented to the general public in modern animation (Figure 51 52).



Figure 49 Cutting your own throat in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King

Source: Film and video footage of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, 1979.

2.2 Nezha's Conflict with the Laws of Heaven

In the literary setting, Nezha lives in the Yin Shang era. This era setting is also followed in animated works such as *The Legend of Feng Shen Bang* and *The Legend Of Nezha*. The concept of divine power in the Shang Dynasty reached the highest level of worship in history, which seems to have amplified the sacrificial traditions of the ancient times to all aspects of social life. In the mindset of the ruling class, all human behaviors must be subject to the will of the gods and they cannot do anything contrary to the will of the heavens, thus creating a social trend of believing in the will of the heavens and worshipping the ghosts and the gods, and the people firmly believe that all the ethical and moral systematization and the self-creating nature of man are based on the laws of the heavens. And people firmly believe that the systematization of all ethics and morality and human self-creating are in accordance with the order of the laws of heaven, and that this kind of conscious thought constraints of human society are all due to the existence of the heavenly way. In the view of the ancients, heaven is the universe, and the Way of Heaven is the overall law of the universe under the guidance of which people must form unified standards of behavior and rules of action, that is to say, human beings need to reach a unanimous attitude towards truth, justice, good and evil, morality, the concept of the state and other spiritual beings in order to ensure the stability of the social order and the day-to-day functioning of the society.

2.2.1 The Laws of Heaven from time immemorial

The Chinese idea of following the Way of Heaven is deeply rooted. The concept of regulating human behavior according to the laws of nature is described in the *Hong Fan*, and this understanding of the laws of nature constrained people's behavioral patterns at an early stage, establishing a system of concepts that linked heaven and man - the unchanging laws of nature became the initial consensus of human society. With the deeper exploration of the natural world, human beings developed their own social concepts. Sacrifices were common in ancient China, from ancient jade to Shang and Zhou bronzes, sacrifices had become the primitive form of communication between man and the natural world, "especially sacrifices to the heavens, which represent the universe in infinite space and time. Taking heaven as a criterion, i.e., following the heavenly and cosmic laws as the source of life." Consequently, phenomena that cannot be explained by existing knowledge have been attributed to sacrificial traditions, i.e., the origin of religious rituals. Rituals reflected

the basic level of knowledge of ancient ancestors about the heavenly ways, and through complex rituals, people hoped to actively communicate with and worship those unknown and uncontrollable heavenly ways. At a time when science had not yet intervened in the system of human knowledge, the culture of divine witches, which claimed to be able to communicate with the gods of heaven, was born. "The culture of divine witches, or the style of witchcraft, as the basis and background for the emergence and dissemination of myths, has a long history and was once prevalent in the Yin and Shang periods."

This explains why the story of Nezha is set in the Shang Dynasty, more than 3,000 years ago, and it was the deep worship and reverence for divine power in society at that time that led to the creation of the many mythological characters of the Feudal God list. Driven by this concept of divine power, people's reverence for and obedience to the Way of Heaven became the starting point for the dramatic conflicts that permeated the stories of many mythological characters. It is in this belief in the supremacy of heaven and its inviolability that the archetypal character of Nezha was born, who not only represents a challenge to heaven and the pursuit of reason and justice, but also reflects the subconscious desire of human beings to break free from ideological constraints and aspire to justice in the social psyche. This notion of the inviolability of the Way of Heaven is reflected in the animated movie *Birth of the Demon Child*. The Mixed Spirit Pearl refined by the First Heavenly Father contains the indestructible Demon Pills, "I cast the heavenly calamity spell, and after three years, I will lead the heavenly thunderbolt down to the earth to destroy the Demon Pills (Figure 53)", and it seems that the destiny of Demon Pills has been sealed by the "Way of Heaven". It seems that the fate of the demonic pill is predetermined by the "Way of Heaven", and it can only destroy itself in a set trajectory. At the same time, it is mentioned that "Li Jing is a man of Heaven's destiny", implying that everything he has to go through is irresistibly "Heaven's destiny", as if it were a metaphor for the "Way of Heaven", which, in Li Jing's ignorance, sets the rules for Nezha's life. It is like a metaphor for the "Way of Heaven", which, in Li Jing's ignorance, sets the rules for Nezha's life, forcing him to conform to the order set by Heaven and to welcome Nezha's arrival.



Figure 50 Nezha facing the apocalypse in Birth of the Demon Child

Source: 'Birth of the Demon Child' movie and TV credits

2.2.2 The Ethics of the Birth of the Divine Principle

The Tao of Heaven is summarized in the Zhouyi: "There is heaven and earth, and then there are all things; there are all things, and then there are men and women; there are men and women, and then there are couples; there are couples, and then there are fathers and sons; there are fathers and sons, and then there are rulers and ministers; there are rulers, and then there is the top and bottom; and the top and bottom, and then there is a mistake in the rites of propriety and righteousness (Huisun, 1994)". This recognition and adherence to the supremacy of heaven and earth reflects the notion that "the way of heaven" is the highest law in people's minds. The laws of heaven and earth guide human behavior, and people are endowed by heaven and earth to conform to the established principles of heaven and earth, which are not only the laws for human survival in nature, but also the moral principles for maintaining social stability. Therefore, in the animated story about Nezha, the core issue of Nezha's involvement in the conflict between good and evil is not only his dissatisfaction with social hierarchies and his impulsive challenge to class boundaries, but also the fact that he has touched the very essence of social ethics - the principle of Heaven's Way, which makes it possible for all irrationality to be eliminated at once. The figure who represents the ethical order, Li Jing, exerts invisible pressure on Nezha's behavior within the patriarchal social structure. Under the influence of traditional Chinese culture, Nezha will not disobey his father's orders or openly confront the forces of society, because following the ethical principles is a prerequisite for being a member of society, and violating them is to be an enemy of the social and moral system. As an immature child, Nezha's rebelliousness is not motivated by a subversive mindset, but rather by his understanding of good and evil as a way of judging what is right and what is wrong. When his behavior is pointed out as wrong, the father's moral education takes precedence over his sense of personal independence, and when the two clash, the subject's consciousness chooses to back down, which is seen as "returning to the right path," but is contrary to his personal values. Under pressure, Nezha chooses to sacrifice himself and obey the Way of Heaven, which is the root cause of his tragic hero image. The significance of upholding the Way of Heaven is not only reflected in the cause of Nezha's death at the hands of an evil force, but also in the fact that Nezha is forced to make a sacrifice in the conflict between good and evil.

1.2.3 Heaven and Nature

The close connection between the principles of heaven and the natural world emphasizes the subjectivity of nature, which is reflected in the incorporation of natural elements in the figure of Nezha. In Nezha, he symbolizes the spirit of fire, which is reflected not only in the text's depiction of his magic wheel of fire and wind, capable of igniting eternal fire and enabling Nezha to fly freely through the air as if he were walking on the earth, but also in the fact that the element of fire provides Nezha with the freedom to travel between the heavens and the earth, and to explore freely. - This is not only reflected in the text of the novel through the depiction of his magic weapon, the Wind Fire Wheel, which can ignite eternal fire and enable Nezha to fly freely through the air as if he were walking on the earth, but also in the fact that the element of fire provides Nezha with the ability to travel between heaven and earth and

explore freely. The Chinese doctrine of the Five Elements (Figure 54), one of the ways in which the ancients reconceptualized the world, considers fire to be one of the basic elements. The symbolism of fire is that it represents not only light and heat, but also the progress of mankind from a primitive life to a civilized society, just as the use of fire brought about a revolution in culinary techniques and enabled mankind to make better use of its natural resources. The use of fire brought about a revolution in cooking techniques, enabling mankind to better utilize natural resources. In the creation of the Nezha animation, red was chosen as the main color of Nezha's image through the symbolism of the fire element, which not only highlights the vitality of the flames, but also symbolizes Nezha's continuous vitality. This design implies that Nezha is able to rekindle the flame of life with the support of fire, realizing the continuity and rebirth of life, and reflecting his energy and vitality as part of the natural world.

In traditional Chinese culture, beings with the ability to fly to the sky and dive to the sea are usually regarded as the embodiment of "dragons". According to the *Shanhaijing* (Classic of Mountains and Seas), Candle Yin "sees the day, closes in on the night, blows in the winter, and calls out in the summer. He does not drink, does not eat, does not rest, and his rest is the wind (Pu, Ke, & Yixing, 1997)" and Yinglong, who is capable of bringing heavy rain, demonstrate the natural power of controlling the weather and calling the wind and rain, which is echoed by the image of the Dragon King of the East China Sea in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King. This echoes the image of the East Sea Dragon King in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King. The Dragon King of the East China Sea uses his divine power to cause natural disasters that threaten the creatures of nature, ultimately forcing Nezha to choose the tragic end of cutting his own throat. The deep reverence for dragons in folklore stems from longstanding cultural traditions. The gods of the four directions described in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* - Zhu Rong in the south, Yujian in the north, Matou in the west, and Jumang in the east - all used dragons or snakes as their mounts, reflecting the exalted status of dragons in mythology. The Xia culture regarded the scaly animal as an object of veneration, and the kui dragons on Shang and Zhou period bronzes also reflected the cultural totem status of the dragon as a sacred guardian (Aidong, 2011). Therefore, the image of the dragon not only occupies an important position in myths and stories, but also plays the role of a guardian in national culture, symbolizing the maintenance of the safety of the people and the harmony of nature, which perfectly matches with the vocation of the dragons in the text to guard the East China Sea and to protect the people of the Chentangguan Pass from the wind and rain.

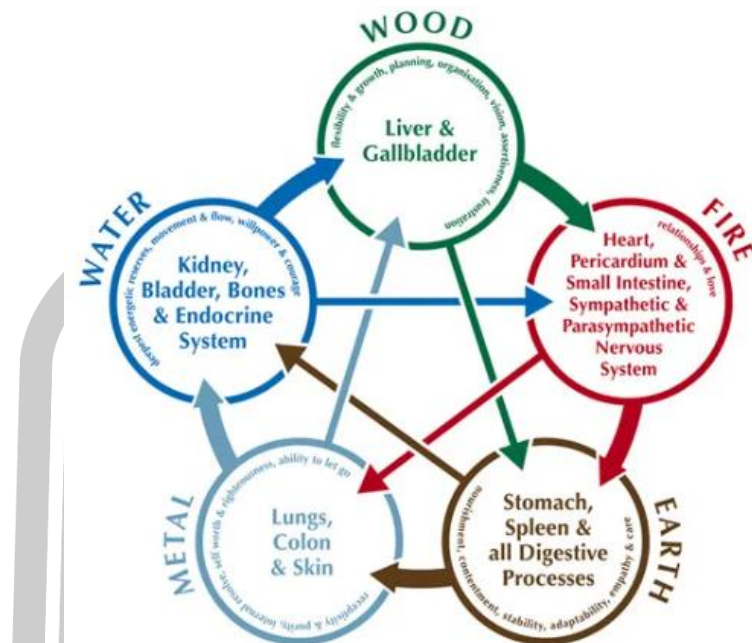


Figure 51 The Chinese Doctrine of the Relationship of the Five Elements

Source: <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/32266765>, 2017

2.3 Nezha's eulogy of the spirit of all living things

The search for the origin of life has been a central theme of human civilization since ancient times. In the ancient Legends, "Jiangluoxiang, the first consort of Emperor Çaiçu, was young and infertile, but she followed God's footsteps, and the heavens made it possible for her to be born (Haibin & Hongyuan, 2003)," which demonstrates the original explanation of the mystery of fertility by our ancestors. This is not only a figurative expression of the origin of life, but also reflects a preliminary awareness of tracing the origin of individual organisms. Human understanding of the world began with astronomical observations and geographical expeditions, making everything in nature a symbol of cultural identity and social organization. The organizational structure of early societies, such as matrilineal clan societies, is considered to be the basis for the emergence of forms of cultural symbolism. Freud, the founder of the psychoanalytic school, interpreted this symbol as a pattern embedded in abstract thought, while sociologist Durkheim saw it as a symbol for the physical expression of various things, which suggests that early societies had used this symbol as a key part of the sense of community and group identity (Durkheim, 2016). The form of this symbol is mysterious because of the belief in the protective power it brings to provide protection for humans in their natural explorations, and this notion of objective idealism played an irreplaceable role as a spiritual support for our ancestors in their long journey of searching for the path of survival.

2.3.1 Jade, the spiritual pearl of the origin of life

If we simplify the complexity of Nezha's story and focus on the characterization of Nezha as an individual, we can explore the symbolism of the origin of life. In Nezha's Legends, the theme of the origin of life is symbolized. According to Legends, Nezha's origins can be traced back to his reincarnation as a "spirit bead" from the Jin Guang Cave in Qian Yuan Mountain, which, as a physical incarnation of Nezha's divine energy, is a precursor to his future godhood and his

inclusion in the list of the Gods of the Seal, and as a bridge connecting him to supernatural forces, it foreshadows the future of Nezha. As a bridge between Nezha and the supernatural forces, the Spirit Beads foreshadow his destined extraordinary mission and path to godhood.

In Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, Nezha is transformed into the Spirit Bead after his death and is reborn again through the Lotus Flower, further reinforcing the theme of the cycle of life and rebirth; in The Legend Of Nezha, the Spirit Bead is reinterpreted as the Dragon Bead of the Zhenhai Sea, a change which albeit alters the properties of the item but still retains the connection between life and supernatural forces; and in Birth of the Demon Child, the concept of the Spirit Bead returns and spawns the new concept of the Mixed Spirit Bead, which once again emphasizes the combination of the origin of life and mystical forces.

Spirit beads not only reflect the ancient people's primitive thinking about the concept of "inductive reproduction", but also reflect the psychological projection of jade culture. China's jade culture has a long history, as early as 7,000 to 8,000 years ago, the prototype of jade appeared, especially in the Longshan era, when witchcraft was prevalent. As the division of labor in society became clearer and clearer, people specializing in sorcery and rituals appeared in the tribes of the clans. The witchcraft activities they organized made the use of jade more frequent and widespread. The ancients believed that jade was "warm and moist and zephyr, clean and not 600", i.e., jade is warm in color and lustre, even if it has edges and corners, it will not hurt anyone, and this material characteristic is used as a metaphor for the spiritual pursuit and noble behavior of a gentleman. Therefore, Nezha has the qualities of loyalty and chastity, cleanliness, but also reflects his extraordinary identity and the pursuit of values.

Nezha's birth has been described as "a ball of flesh, spinning round and round like a wheel (Xu & Zhong, 1980)," and has also been portrayed in animations such as Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, Legend of the Feng Shen Bang, and The Legend Of Nezha" and other animations (Figure . 61, 62, 63). These works depict the meatball as an object that emanates a spiritual light, possesses spirituality, and is able to move freely, lending more mystery and transcendence to Nezha's birth plot. In essence, this depiction is still based on the prototype of the spirit bead, and adopts an enlarged form of the bead, creating a special sensory experience of Nezha's mysterious birth through the depiction of "a red aura in the room, filled with a strange fragrance".

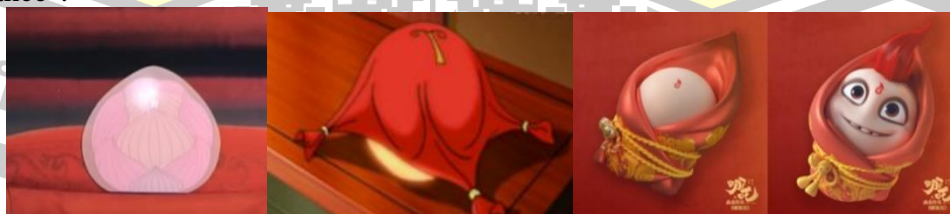


Figure 52 Nezha reincarnated as Spirit Pearl in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King (left)

Source: Film and video footage of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, 1979.

2.3.2 Physical rebirth carried by the lotus flower

Ancient humans understood the world through an anthropomorphic perspective, reflecting their profound perception of the nature of life. This panpsychism was widely applied and unfolded during the Oracle period, when "the oracle bones recorded that every phenomenon in nature, from the sun, moon and stars to the mountains, rivers and lakes to climate change, as well as all plants and animals, was regarded as possessing a spirit and as being under the jurisdiction of a specific deity". This view originated from the ancient people's realization that all things in the world possessed life as well as human beings, and that they were beings that possessed souls or the essence of nature. In the Chinese myth of Legends, Nuwa molded clay figures and blew in the breath of life, which led to the birth and reproduction of human beings. This not only heralds the beginning of the "soul + body = life" ideology, but also symbolizes the soul's ability to awaken the sleeping body and light the fire of life. Kuafu chased the sun relentlessly until his death, and his body united with the earth to become Kwafu Mountain, and his walking stick was transformed into a lush peach forest, benefiting his descendants, reflecting the inseparable bond between human and natural life in Chinese mythology. The death of Kuafu is not only the end of his individual life, but also marks a new beginning for the lives of other creatures. This concept of the transmission of life builds up the idea of a community of life, insisting on the fundamental idea that "everything has a soul" under the reflection of myth. The British anthropologist Edward B. Taylor first proposed "animism," which is linked to the development of religion and is considered to be the core of the spiritual origin of all religions, because primitive human beings' extreme dependence on nature, coupled with a lack of scientific and comprehensive understanding, made them feel powerless in the face of unavoidable natural disasters. This state of ignorance began to produce in our ancestors a sense of awe and worship of the world around them, thus making religion an important spiritual pillar. The existence of religion fulfills the need to understand and control the world order, allowing people to follow the laws of nature while achieving spiritual purification and elevation through religious practices.

Nezha's Legends of rebirth through matter fully demonstrates the religious concept that everything has a soul. The ancient Chinese believed that everything is a combination of soul and form, and that the soul can still exist even if the form fades away. This belief provides the theoretical basis for the myth of Nezha's regeneration of his physical body with the help of external forces and the remodeling of his body structure for his soul, thus realizing the continuity of his life. After Nezha cut his own throat, "Cuiping Mountain manifested itself as a holy place, and residents from all directions flocked to the mountain to offer incense, gathering like ants (Xu & Zhong, 1980)," reflecting the fact that Nezha's soul had not been dispersed and was able to manifest itself, creating a scene similar to that of a religious event in which people prayed to the gods for blessings. Nezha's rebirth is the result of a divine process in which Taiyi Zhenzi orders the Jinxia children to pick lotus flowers and leaves and arrange them in the form of Nezha's body, and through the use of Taoist elixirs and magical powers, to remake Nezha's body and recall his soul, thus realizing the divine process of his resurrection. This rebirth scene has been reenacted in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, *The Legend of the Feudal God*, *The Legend Of*

Nezha, and many other productions: Tai Yi immortal utilizes the lotus flower, lotus root, and lotus leaf as the foundation of Nezha's new body, and at the moment of casting the spell, the mystical manifestation of the life force and the divine light shines through, instantly In the moment of casting the spell, the mystical manifestation of the life force and the divine light shines through, instantly molding Nezha into a new body that can carry his soul. In this way, the life force of the lotus flower and the lotus leaf became the material for remodeling Nezha's body, providing a source of life for his new life, and demonstrating the magical power of the spirit of all living things in the process of Nezha's regeneration (Figure . 56 and 57, 58).

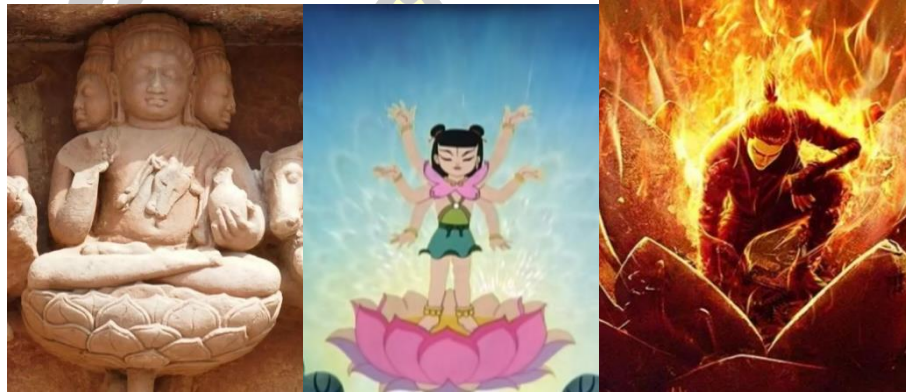


Figure 53 Brahma Buddha statue from the late 5th century (left)

Source:<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1756980511268488169&wfr=spider&for=pc>, 2023

2.4 The Immortality and Reincarnation of Nezha's Soul

Ancient Chinese conceptualization of the "soul" can be traced back to the earliest Yangshao culture, of which the "Fish Basin with Human Face" unearthed at the Half Slope site is a key piece of evidence. This ancient colored pottery not only carries traces of primitive burial practices, but was designed as a container for the remains of young children, and the double holes in the bottom of the basin are interpreted as facilitating the free movement of children's souls. This discovery proves that early mankind had already formed a preliminary understanding of the concept of "immortality of the soul", which provided the ideological basis for the later idea of the return of the soul and rebirth. Further archaeological research, especially by scholar Yang Xuezheng on the primitive religious beliefs of the Pumi, Mosuo and Qiang in the Yunnan-Chuan area, reveals that these ethnic groups held deep beliefs in the stone gods (i.e., the deified forms of stones), which were believed to possess enduring and powerful divine power "The stone gods not only sheltered people, but also blessed the souls of the dead (Huiying, 2008). "The understanding of life and death in primitive societies is deeply rooted in the belief in the immortality of the soul. According to the burial discoveries of the Chinese Shanting Cavemen, the ancients often decorated their tombs with red minerals in order to comfort the dead and bring them back to life. "The primitive people decorated their tombs with red minerals, fantasizing that the red color, which is full of mysterious vitality, would bless the dead and bring them back to life."

Thus, burial is only a formality, while the eternal existence of the soul is the common belief of primitive mankind. In order to maintain the continuity of the soul, people, guided by the concept of the immortality of the soul, created soul-centered

funerary objects. Whether it is the red pottery products, sculptures of domestic animals, models of warehouses in the Han Dynasty or the three-color le camel figurines in the Tang Dynasty, these are the epitome of simulated human social life in the agricultural era. They reflect the expectations of the living for the dead, hoping that they would continue to enjoy the lifestyle of the living in the other world. The existence of funerary objects thus attests to the belief that the departed are not really gone, but continue to exist in another form. This idea of resurrection, which grew out of the belief in the soul, implied that although someone's life in this world had ended, they might be given a chance for a new life in another place. Ancestors who carried this idea of resurrection did everything they could to create a resurrection "environment" for the dead. According to the British anthropologist Frazer, before being used as decorations or amulets, stones were long used as protective objects designed to safeguard people from death and resurrection after death (Frazer & Frazer, 1922). Thus, adherence to the idea of resurrection reflects the deep desire of humans to reach the ideal state of the cycle of life.

2.4.1 The Immortality of the Soul Concept of Life and Death

The story of Nezha's rebirth is essentially about a concept of life and death that is about the immortality of the soul. When Nezha kills himself in full public view, his body loses its life, but his soul survives. This is evidenced by the fact that "Nezha's soul drifted to Qianyuan Mountain in the wind", and by Nezha's statement in a dream, "Now my soul has no place to live". The animated adaptation also carries on this tradition - in *The Descent of the Devil's Pill*, Nezha and Ao Bian face the test of heavenly lightning together, and although it is difficult to preserve their physical bodies, Tai Yi Zhen uses the seven-colored precious lotus to "barely save their souls". The animation uses a lighter coloring for the soul, reduces its transparency, and shrinks it to a visible humanoid form. The people of Chentang Pass, who witnessed Nezha's act of sacrificing his life for the greater good, knelt down to express their misunderstanding of and admiration for Nezha. Thus, the concept of rebirth in the animation is actually an attempt to match the cultural tradition of the eternal soul that has developed in the character of Nezha since his birth, and to create an image of a soul that is "inherently good". This sacrifice of the body to preserve the soul symbolizes Nezha's dedication to the laws of nature, his struggle against fate supported by the concept of the soul, and further highlights the resilience of Nezha's soul. In fact, the idea of giving independence to the soul is also mentioned in Nezha: "Nezha's soul was captured and pushed to Lotus, saying, 'Nezha is not in human form, so when will he be ready?' (Xu & Zhong, 1980). As a result, Nezha's soul remains a mysterious gas floating in the air, not easily controlled, but able to return to his physical body under the guidance of Taiyi Zhenzhen, once again verifying the mythic truth of Nezha's soul's indestructibility. This reaffirms the truth of the myth of Nezha's indestructible soul," said Yim Ting-hsien, director of *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, in an interview:

"At the time, we divided the play into four segments: "Birth, Death, Resurrection, and Counterattack." We changed the main conflict to Nezha's struggle with nature and with the Dragon King; there is still a shadow of the father-son conflict, but we weakened it to a minimum. (Wang, Yan, & Xu)" (Figure 59).



Figure 54 Nezha's "Birth, Death and Resurrection" in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*.

Source: Film and video footage of *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, 1979.

2.4.2 The Taoist concept of reincarnation

The image of Nezha was established as the reincarnation of a generation of tragic heroes under the guidance of Taoist thought. The core of Taoist thought lies in the cycle and reincarnation of life. The "true man" and "divine man" described in Zhuang Zi's "Treatise on Things" embodied a state of being that transcended the ordinary, able to withstand extreme weather conditions, unaffected by natural changes, and essentially a personification of the soul. "Tao" or "heaven" is essentially a synonym for "soul", which is considered to be eternal and indestructible, the true essence of life, and therefore the existence of the physical body is comparatively inauthentic (Yiduo, 2009). Yiduo, 2009). "Mythological thinking abstracts from this the oppositions and transformations of life and death, light and darkness, and yin and yang (Mingjun & Shuxian, 2010)," and treats the soul as an independent material being and rebirth as the centerpiece of Daoist doctrine, reinforcing the notion that the cycle of life is underpinned by an indestructible soul, suggesting that Nezha's soul is separable from his physical body, and that the true body is not real by comparison (Yiduo, 2009). is separable from the physical body, and that it is his soul that truly carries his personality. The essence of the soul remains unchanged, while the body "deteriorates" over time and in different situations. This idea is reflected in the design of Nezha's animated lines, such as those in *Birth of the Demon Child*: "My destiny is mine but not God's" and "Nezha's destiny is to refuse to accept his fate", where "destiny" means the fate of Nezha. In this case, "fate" means destiny, which is determined by heaven, while "I", as expressed by Nezha, symbolizes the self-conscious soul, which is capable of transcending the constraints of the physical body and realizing the freedom of the soul to transcend itself. In fact, in the animation, Nezha's body is shattered when he experiences a thunderbolt in the sky, leaving behind his indestructible soul, which receives the collective worship of the people of Chentang Pass.

To be a Nezha in the present life without the mythological coloring, his so-called "death" is a succession of souls in the sense of self-metamorphosis, not an abandonment of the physical body, so in terms of the belonging of souls, it is still the soul of Nezha from the previous life that has made the Li Yunxiang of the present life.

Yuan Shen is the key to Taoist reincarnation, and it has no name or form. The cultivated Yuan Shen can leave the physical body and travel between heaven and earth (Yuan Shen out of body), or even leave the physical body and exist alone, either to ascend or to reincarnate, with the Yuan Shen representing the identity of the person's past life (Figure 68). The concept of the Yuan Shen is also reflected at the

end of Nezha Reborn, in Nezha's soliloquy: "I got back my magic weapon, I am Nezha. At that moment, I died and I became Nezha (Figure 69)," demonstrates Li Yunxiang's relentless pursuit of Nezha's soul return. Debuting as an ordinary man, fate arranges for him to go through a challenging and difficult path of soul-seeking. In fact, in the process of shaping his personality, he went through many trials and tribulations, but with his strong will and perseverance, he became a present-day Nezha who does not need mythological coloring. His so-called "death" is an inheritance of the soul in the sense of self-metamorphosis, not an abandonment of the physical body, and so, in terms of the belonging of the soul, it is still the soul of Nezha in his previous life that belongs to him. Therefore, in terms of the belonging of the soul, it is still the soul of Nezha in his previous life that has created Li Yunxiang in this life.

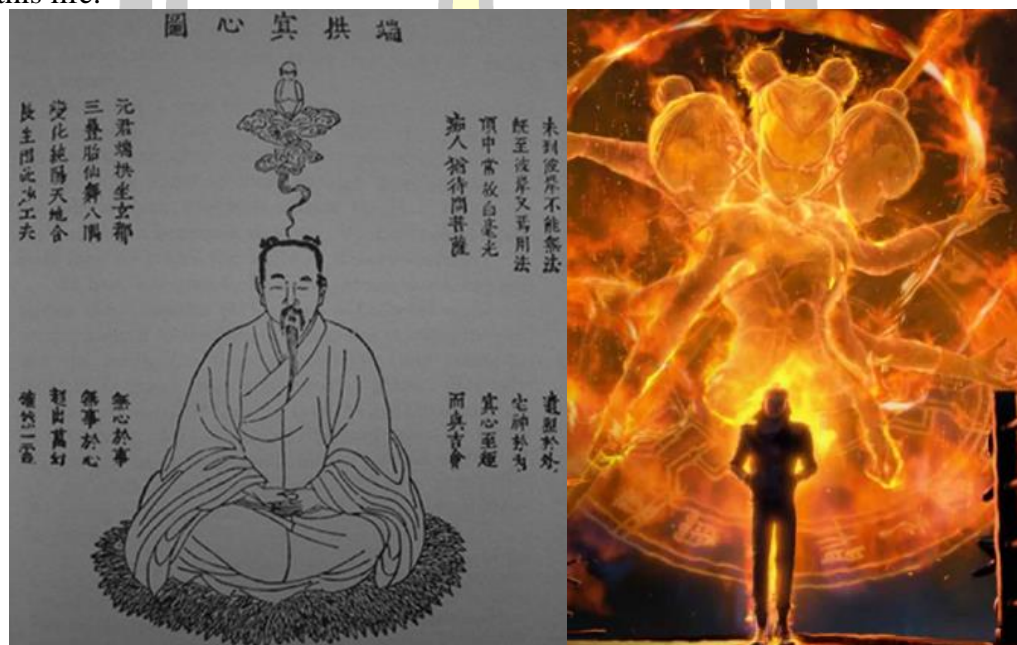


Figure 55 The Third Stage of Alchemy in the Purpose of Taiyi Jinhua: The Dharma Body as an Independent Being

Source:

<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1707113786961042821&wfr=spider&for=pc>, 2021

Part III The Cultural Representation of Nezha's Image in the Times

"Meaning is not built into things. It is constructed, produced. It is the product of a referential practice, that is, a practice that produces meaning, that makes sense of things...Meaning is established by relations. (hell, Xu, & LU, 2003)" This means that the practice of meaning-making is not just the production of language, it is also the practical activity of meaning production. Animation is not only an artistic act, it is also a meaning practice because it produces and conveys meaning. The images of Nezha from different periods of time all contain different meanings of the times. The image of Nezha in Chinese animation spans a period of nearly one hundred years, and different times have shaped different Nezhas. Nezha seems to be like a mirror witnessing China's transition from conservatism to openness, from political self-consciousness to national self-confidence, and mapping out the cultural characteristics of different eras.

3.1 Political Consciousness in a Planned Economy

After the founding of New China in 1949, China as a whole was under the planned economy model, and the animation industry was subordinate to the film industry under the responsibility of state-owned film studios. Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio was established in 1957, and during the period of 1957-1980, as the only studio, it was included in the "planned economy" system of the central government. Within the planned economy, the studio's filming assignments were determined by the state, the state provided sufficient and stable material resources for production, and it assembled outstanding, professional creators in China to promote socialist values and spirit in accordance with the principle that "literature and art are for the people, and the content of their creations meets the needs of the country's development. Its creative content is in line with the needs of national development. Its output works are purchased and sold by the state, so that the creators do not have to consider the issue of income at a later stage, and the unified distribution also makes the films widely broadcast around the world to a certain extent. Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio undertakes the task of producing key animation. It can be said that under the system of planned economy, Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio is a dominant player and holds most of the resources for domestic animation film production. Under the relatively stable and emancipated creative environment, the special planned economy system provided an unparalleled opportunity for animation creation.

In this period, animation production as a state-allocated filming tasks, the integration of the most powerful production team, with sufficient financial, material and human resources, without regard to the cost of the work and box office, in the planned economic model of the unified purchasing and marketing only need to be animation creators to concentrate on the artistic creation (Figure 70). Under the specific background of the era, the works of Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio represented the level of Chinese animation production at that time in an absolute sense. Through the efforts of generations of animators, the first decade after the establishment of the studio ushered in the first climax of China's animation creation and production, and the famous four animation business cards all came out of this period. From 1978, with the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy, literary and artistic creation was once again revitalized after the "Cultural Revolution"⁵. Although China's animation creation still followed the mode of planned economy, there were continuous technological breakthroughs, and the animation creation entered into the first climax of the prosperity, *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King*. *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King* is one of the representative works of this period. The studio portrayed national animation heroes, such as the Monkey King and Nezha, who left deep memories in the hearts of a generation.

3.1.1 Policy context: ideologization of literary works

With the victory of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the War of Liberation, literature and art works full of policy metaphors accompanied the mainstream ideology into the public's field of vision national consciousness, class

⁵ The Cultural Revolution, known as the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution", which took place from May 1966 to October 1976, was a civil strife mistakenly initiated by the leaders and exploited by counter-revolutionary groups, which brought serious disasters to the Party, the State and the people of all ethnic groups, and left behind extremely painful lessons.

antagonisms, policy metaphors, and other factors in the conveyance of the main theme of the strong sense of responsibility of the times, animation, a unique style of art, in the conveyance of the policy slogans, the expression of the spiritual connotations of this unique subliminal value and role. Therefore, the Nezha animation of this period is not only a reflection of reality, but also a concrete presentation of ideology.

With the birth of New China, which officially ended the New Democratic Revolution and began the process of socialist construction, animation creation was incorporated into the government and film management organs, with the mission of stimulating production enthusiasm and enhancing social responsibility. In the early years of the founding of China, the state provided material and spiritual support for animation creation, providing a stable political and artistic environment while enabling many domestic creators to create animation works with heart, passion and creativity. Films are the products of closely linked socio-political concepts, economic concepts, and cultural consciousness, and the system of film design and production usually plays a decisive role in determining the form, overall appearance, and characteristics of films in a particular context (Chen, 2014). This institutionalized development environment has provided solid external conditions for the animation industry, leading to the birth of a large number of animation works rich in political slogans and class struggle themes, which have actively responded to national policies, effectively disseminated socialist ideology and collectivist values, and at the same time made a powerful attack on the anti-feudal ethic, making an indelible contribution to the construction of socialism.

The modern reconstruction of traditional cultural symbols is not only reflected in the unfamiliar exploration of their value connotations, but also profoundly reflects the strong political atmosphere and the guiding political consciousness of animation creation in that era. 1942, Mao Zedong emphasized in his Speech at the Yan'an Symposium on Literature and Art that literature and art must "serve the broadest masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers". in 1942, Mao emphasized that literature and art must "serve the greatest number of workers, peasants and soldiers. In 1949, at the First Literature and Art Conference, the general direction that literature and art should serve the national ideology of the new China was clearly stated. 1956, under the encouragement of the policy of "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend for supremacy", the Shanghai Art Studio created the animation work "Dahuangtiangong" (Figure 62), which was full of Chinese national characteristics. The animation works of this period fully demonstrated the rich charm of Chinese traditional culture. After the storms of the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward, the "Great Discussion on the Question of Truth" broke through the ideological constraints of the past, and Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King (Figure 63) was the first animation work of this period. Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King" is not only a successful conclusion to the "Chinese School" of animation, but also symbolizes the end of the "Cultural Revolution Movie" era and the beginning of a new chapter in history.



Figure 56 Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio director Wan Lai Ming gives a lecture to the creators of the movie

Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/749917042_121391542, 2024



Figure 57 Work site for the animated film

Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/749917042_121391542, 2024

Under the guidance of national policies, animation naturally shoulders the important task of educating and enlightening the public, which not only requires that the content of animation works closely follow the real life and satisfy the people's demand for diversity in cultural life, but also guides the development of socialist art and morality. Therefore, the works of art films skillfully integrated traditional moral concepts into mythological stories, which not only embodied the guiding principle of "giving priority to education", but also carried out the aesthetic principle of "educating and entertaining". Obviously, during this period, the close connection between literature and art works and policies was remarkable, and the literary and

artistic nature of the works was to a large extent constrained by the ideology of the policies, making them the megaphone and spokesperson of socialism.

3.1.2 Cultural environment: literary trends and national characteristics

After the founding of New China, literary and artistic creation was quite closely linked to politics. Influenced by the state's planned economy of unification and ideology, the essence of literary and artistic works was to serve the emerging state ideology, which was reflected in the socialist realism literary and artistic trend advocated by the state, and animation, as an emerging art form, assumed the mission of serving and educating the public. At the same time, early Chinese animation creators had a strong sense of self-consciousness. From 1955 to 1965, the development of Chinese animation ushered in the first "golden period" due to the fact that the veteran director of the Meiji Film Studio, Te Wei, put forward the production guideline of "exploring the road of national style and knocking on the door of comedy style" (Han, 1966), and the development of animation in China was also a "golden period". The development of Chinese animation ushered in the first "golden period" (Han, 2019). Animation creators consciously absorbed the essence of national culture, spirit, and art, and in response to the national policy, animation works with people's and national character became the prominent cultural characteristics of this period.

The creative method of socialist realism originated in the Soviet Union, and its origins can be traced back to the Soviet literary world's self-reflection and summary of its own development in 1931. This approach emphasized the need for works to "truthfully and concretely reflect the reality of the revolutionary process" and required that "artistic truthfulness and historical concreteness be combined with the task of transforming and educating socialist ideology (Xing, 2009)". Its core feature was to emphasize the portrayal of typical characters in typical environments, highlighting the people's nature and educational nature. Before the founding of New China, this method of creation was already recognized in the country and became an officially promoted way of artistic creation after the founding of New China. In fact, Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King was planned to be a joint production between China and the Soviet Union, and the Soviet director Atmanov had already come to China to study the project, which was eventually abandoned because of the United Nations' lack of understanding of the culture of the Nezha, and, more importantly, for political reasons (Figure 64). Artistic creations during this period were oriented towards depicting the contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat from a realistic perspective, displaying the spirit of socialism, and propagating proletarian virtues as core values.

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Figure 58 Meeting of the Sino-Soviet co-production Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King

Source: "The Legend of Movie", "Nezha in 1979", 2008.

On the one hand, animation, as an emerging art style, contains the expression of the discourse of rights in the tide of socialist construction as a matter of course, and this thematic expression is built on the artistic treatment of the foundation of reality. Whether it is "The Palace of Heaven" or "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King", in terms of aesthetic pursuit and narrative expression, both animations have a distinctive commonality of the times, and the two animations reflect the contradictions in real life in the most realistic and concrete way through the portrayal of the typical characters of Sun Wukong and Nezha, which are distinctive and realistic, and historically and concretely reflect the conflicts in the real life. These conflicts have a distinctive sense of the times and reality, and historically and concretely convey the political-centered teachings to the people through artistic treatment. Due to the emphasis on the edifying function of animation, the creative spirit of highlighting "people's nature" and focusing on "typicality" requires the portrayal of heroes' lofty images and the false, ugly and evil features of the negative characters, and shows a strong sense of responsibility for the times and a sense of worry in the subject matter and thematic connotations, warmly praising socialism. In terms of subject matter and thematic connotations, it showed a strong sense of responsibility and anxiety of the times, and warmly glorified the national heroes in the process of socialist construction, reflecting the distinctive political orientation and value conveyed in the artistic creation of this period.

3.1.3 Nezha's Image: Reactionary and Revolutionary

As the antagonist of the revolutionaries who are in league with Heaven, Nezha's role in The Palace of Heaven, from the moment he appears in the movie to his defeat by the Monkey King, focuses on the ugly face of Nezha as a reactionary force. Compared to the spirit of resistance represented by the powerful Monkey King, Nezha's comical, arrogant and weak character largely reflects the image of the reactionaries as "paper tigers" and "cow ghosts and serpents," and the movie tells the story of the Monkey King's overthrowing of the Dragon Palace and causing havoc in the Heavenly Palace in the form of a myth, reflecting the "myth of the time" and the "myth of the time. The film reflects the ideology of "class struggle" at the time, and

conveys the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed. The transformation of the Monkey King from a stone monkey who does not care about world affairs and is ignorant of the hierarchy of power to a man who rises up to fight against it demonstrates the Monkey King's spirit of defiance against authority and the pursuit of freedom and his fearless character, while Nezha appears as the antagonist and is portrayed as a "paper tiger" and a "cow, ghost, snake and god". Nezha, as the negative character, is portrayed as an angry, hateful, arrogant and domineering figure to emphasize his character, forming a sharp contrast with the positive character. It is this cultural psychology and pursuit of good and evil, and the dichotomy between beauty and ugliness, that has shaped the image of Nezha into one that stands in complete opposition to justice, and that implies the very image of the villain that is criticized and rejected in the class struggle (Figure 64-66).

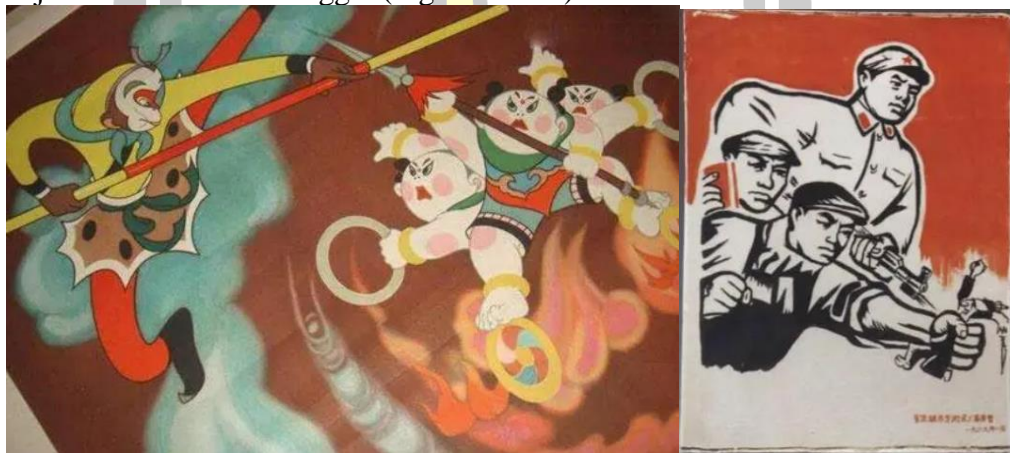


Figure 59 Nezha's Battle with the Monkey King in "The Palace of Heaven"
Source: Animation footage of "The Palace of Heaven", 1964.

Preparations for Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King began in 1978 and the film was completed in 1979, an extremely special turning point for Chinese cinema as a whole. 1979 coincided with the 30th anniversary of the founding of the new China, and a number of creations rich in the spirit of the times were released as part of the "National Day Offering", marking the end of the Cultural Revolution. In 1979, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the founding of New China, a number of creations rich in the spirit of the times and arousing strong social repercussions were launched under the "National Day Tribute", and "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King" marked the end of the "Cultural Revolution", and the curtain of the historic change of the Chinese movie was opened. Based on the principle that "literature and art serve the people", the works had the significance of educating the people and the responsibility and mission of showcasing and promoting Chinese culture to the outside world. Nezha has also become a representative image of the new spirit of the times, highlighting the inheritance and reconstruction of traditional culture and national spirit. As a tribute to the 30th anniversary of the motherland, and in the context of the downfall of the Gang of Four, the film establishes a negative image of the Dragon Palace as an oppressor of the people, while Nezha's courageous sacrifice and his behavioral traits of eliminating the tyrannical and pacifying the good show the people's expectation of a hero. In a clear transformation from the young and uninvolved to the righteous, the image of Prince

Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King is just like the proletarian revolutionaries who set things right in real life and get rid of the evils of the people, in which the people's desire for a better life is embodied (Figure . 67 68).



Figure 60 Nezha's battle with the Dragon King in "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King".

Source: Film and video footage of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, 1979.

3.1.4 Cultural identity: classical presentation of ideology

3.1.4.1 Collectivist narratives emphasizing indoctrination

"Cultural changes are colored by the world's feelings, and the rise and fall of the world depends on the order of the times." ¹ Animation, as the art of dream-making, also contains a vivid portrayal of the richness of the times, and is the result of the interaction and integration of politics, culture, and the animation industry. As two of the early works of Chinese animation, the distinctive characteristics of the era have given animation creation a strong "ideological" atmosphere, and it can be said that the two Nezha animations of the Chinese School period are the result of the "ideological" atmosphere of the era. It can be said that the two Nezha animations of the Chinese School period are the concrete manifestation of "ideology". Therefore, emphasizing the concept of collectivism, promoting socialist ideology, and taking "uniting the people, educating the people, and fighting the enemy" as the theme of the collectivist narrative connotation became one of the prominent features of this period. At the same time, while weakening entertainment and emphasizing edification, the creators of domestic animation in the period of "Chinese School" also did not give up the excavation and inheritance of classical aesthetics. The animation works made great exploration in the inheritance of traditional humanistic spirit and classical aesthetics, which was also the root of the fame of the "Chinese School" at that time.

"Literature and art serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, and socialism. Adopting cultural forms that are pleasing to the common people serves the purpose of educating the people, thereby raising their political consciousness." This was the program of action for literary and artistic creation in the period of the "Chinese School". Animation, as an emerging art style, bore the brunt of this mission under the guidance of the policy. The collectivist narrative function that emphasizes indoctrination set the tone for the creation of Nezha's animation, and became one of the outstanding features of Nezha's image creation.

As an animation work after China ended its long history of incomplete sovereignty and semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, "The Great Fighter" played a strong political propaganda function in reinforcing the function of film to educate and organize the masses. During this period, due to the state's full support and control

over the movie business, promoting the spirit of revolution and expressing a strong sense of nationalism as a victor became the main spiritual connotation conveyed by the movie. In *The Palace of Heaven*, the movie opens with "Boys, drill!" to show the victor's windy spirit, the Jade Emperor as the head of the feudal rulers twice recruited to suppress the Monkey King, while the Monkey King successfully broke the two recruited fraud, in the "enemy big and small, the enemy into my retreat" after a struggle was not like the original as the pressure under the Five Elements Mountain, but with a victorious posture back to the The animated film was created by Mr. Mao Zedong, who was deeply impressed by the animation. The creators of the cartoon were deeply influenced by Mao Zedong's idea of "never forgetting the class struggle", and the Monkey King's posture of "struggle" is precisely the victor's posture of an advanced revolutionary potentialist who has succeeded in a revolution (Figure . 69).



Figure 61 Sun Wukong's Victory and Nezha's Defeat in "The Great Pandemonium of Heaven"

Source: Movie and television footage of *The Greatest Showman*, 1964.

Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King, as a tribute to the 30th anniversary of the founding of New China, coincided with the end of the "Cultural Revolution", which led to the ideological reformation of the people's resistance to class oppression and the pursuit of freedom as a distinctive theme of the period. Theme expression. Hayao Miyazaki has also interpreted it in this way: "It records the end of a chaotic era and the beginning of a brand new era" (Zhen, 2021). (Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King opens with the Four Seas Dragon King's demand that the people of Chentangguan make offerings of boys and girls to him as a mapping of the Gang of Four as a hostile force of the counter-revolutionary group, and Nezha's demand that the people of Chentangguan make offerings of boys and girls. Nezha's fearless resistance to brutal power represents the people's heroes' struggle against class oppression (Figure70).



Figure 62 "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King" in which the Dragon King demands a child girl.

Source: Film and video footage of *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, 1979.

At the same time, in order to highlight the main line of class struggle, in "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King", Li Jing changes his image of a strict father from the original, and takes on the important task of protecting the people on one side, while at the same time, he is in a dilemma between his flesh and blood and the toiling masses, and in the cry of "Daddy! In the cry of "Dad", the image of Li Jing is more delicate and full, which not only highlights the class antagonism, but also strongly rebels against the feudal rites of "the ruler is the rule of the subject, and the father is the rule of the son" (Figure 71). At the same time, in the animation, Taiyi Zhenzhen and the people on one side are on Nezha's side, and the main conflict is between the exploiting class of the Dragon King, or even the entire Dragon Palace, and the hard-working proletariat, making for a single, distinctive theme and a strong collectivist narrative.



Figure 63 "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" Li Jing vs Dragon King
Source: Film and video footage of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, 1979.

Under the influence of the flagrant political ideology and the planned economy model of unified purchase and sale in the period of the Chinese school, the creators of animation, while displaying the fantastic imagination and national aesthetic expression that animation possesses, also bear the responsibility of educating the public and serving the public of the times. The cultural gene of "family, country and world" shows the value pursuit of Chinese tradition, which has more realistic significance in this historical period after the founding of new China, providing spiritual products for the society, satisfying the people's various demands for cultural life, and promoting the socialist collective concept in "edutainment" with distinctive collectivist era. It also promotes the collective concept of socialism in "teaching for fun" and bears the distinctive mark of the collectivist era.

3.1.4.2 Pursuing the aesthetic interest of national aesthetics

The early stage of Chinese animation, known as the "Chinese School" and represented by "art films", was a period of in-depth exploration in which animation works inherited and carried forward the spirit of traditional culture and classical aesthetics. With the rise of modern visual culture, visual communication breaks the limitations of oral transmission and written records, and transforms traditional literary imagery into intuitive visual experience. As a modern art that synthesizes various art forms such as literature, film, music, fine arts and drama, animation in the "Chinese School" period particularly emphasized the exquisite spiritual pursuit and profound beauty of meaning, showing a strong Chinese flavor. From Peking Opera's face painting, dance and singing to folk art's New Year's paintings and bright colors, as well as the traditional aesthetics of "writing God in shape" and "emphasizing meaning

over image", these classical aesthetic elements full of national characteristics were skillfully integrated into animation creation, shaping the "Chinese School" of animation. These classical aesthetic elements full of national characteristics have been skillfully integrated into the creation of animation, resulting in domestic animation masterpieces with the unique style of "Chinese School".

Since its release, *The Greatest Show on Earth* has been widely acclaimed. This masterpiece of animation, which took four years to complete and was made up of more than 15,400 images by dozens of painters, has won five major awards both at home and abroad. The reason for its high appraisal is largely attributed to its strong national characteristics and aesthetic artistic expression. The background of the film, designed by the famous painter Mr. Zhang Zhengyu, was evaluated by the French newspaper *Le Monde* as "not only possessing the aesthetic qualities of American Disney's works, but also more profoundly embodying the style of traditional Chinese art." with its strong colors and spectacular scenes. In the character modeling design, the artists focused on capturing the personality traits of each character, such as Nezha's condescending attributes, and drew inspiration from folk art, using the image of dolls in New Year's Paintings as a prototype for Nezha's pink and rounded image (Figure . 72 73). Meanwhile, other characters, such as the Jade Emperor, were borrowed from the folk images of the God of Zao and the God of Wealth, and the design of the Monkey King was inspired by opera faces and folk prints, giving the work a unique artistic appeal. This not only inherits the essence of traditional culture, but also shows the innovation and free expression of contemporary artists.



Figure 64 Chinese New Year dolls

Source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1726987624866382862&wfr=spider&for=pc>

"Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" is heavily influenced by traditional Chinese art forms such as paintings, murals, paper cuttings and shadow puppets in the design of its animation scenes, which incorporate a rich variety of traditional elements through the clever combination of color, mood and layout. The flatness of the patterns and the matching of traditional Chinese colors give the images a strong sense of color decoration, effectively conveying the emotions and connotations of different scenes. The animation scene is not only the presentation of the environment, it also critically reflects the subjective emotions of the characters. The deep heritage of ancient Chinese paintings in the use of lines, such as the "Six Methods of Xiehe" and "Eighteen Strokes" (Figure 74), is vividly reflected in the initial part of the animation. Whether it is the exaggerated outlining of mountains and rocks, the figurative representation of wind and drums, or the creation of a sense of space in the change of color shades, all of them make clever use of lines, showing a

unique Chinese style. In addition, the design of the animation scenes echoes the subtle handling of composition, white space, and sparse and dense arrangement in Chinese paintings, presenting the artistic characteristics of a very literal style (Figure 75). In particular, the use of color in the animation reflects strong national characteristics, especially the expression of color under the Chinese five-element color theory, where changes in mood and atmosphere transform with color. For example, the scene of Nezha frolicking on the seashore after defeating the Dragon King uses the red and yellow sunrise against the blue mountains and rocks to convey the joy of victory; and when the Dragon King of the Four Seas takes his revenge, the color of the scene shifts to blue and black, creating a tense atmosphere, and the strong contrast between red and yellow and blue and black intensifies the tension and intensity of the battle. In contrast, "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" not only displays a strong ethnic flavor, but also significantly reflects traditional Chinese painting techniques in its scene design, based on the application of traditional Chinese folk colors, creating an animation work full of Chinese flavor.



Figure 65 Classical Chinese Painting Technique "Eighteen Strokes"

Source: Zou Dezhong, "Paintings and Matters", 1959.

It was under the influence of the policy of unified purchasing and marketing under the planned economic system that animation creators were able to carry out artistic creation in a stable environment without being influenced by the market. Nezha animation during the period of the "Chinese School" made in-depth explorations in the areas of drawing on the symbols of traditional Chinese folklore and folk culture, decorative art styles and color expressions in ethnic art. During the period of "Chinese School", Nezha's animation made in-depth explorations in the areas of traditional Chinese folk culture symbols, decorative art styles and color expression methods in national art, and drew nutrients from 5,000 years of traditional culture, making it one of the most colorful pieces of Chinese animation history.

3.2 Cultural dilemmas in the age of globalization

During the wave of reform and opening up in 1978, China's animation industry welcomed unprecedented development opportunities and challenges. The opening-up policy not only introduced capital and technology, but also promoted the prosperity of the animation field. With the improvement of people's living standard, the public's demand for entertainment and leisure is increasing. However, under the long-term planned economic system, state-owned animation production units, such as the Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio, appear to be unable to meet the market demand. Since the 1980s, a large number of high-quality foreign animation works began to enter the Chinese market, gradually occupying a dominant position. By 1995, the original pattern dominated by Shanghai Film Studio was broken, and Chinese animation began to explore the path of marketization, with a sharp increase in the number of domestic animation production teams and production units, and a significant increase in animation output, marking the beginning of the market-oriented transformation of China's animation industry.

Since the reform and opening up of China in 1978, the Chinese animation market has gradually transformed into a "foundry" for animation products with the introduction of a large number of American, Japanese and European animations, causing the "Chinese school" of animation to gradually fade out of the historical stage. During this period, *Nezha* animation was heavily influenced by foreign animation styles, especially Japanese and American animation culture. 1999 saw the release of *The Legend of the Fengs*, produced by the Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio, which was the first batch of animated films in China to use digital technology, and whose style was clearly influenced by Japan's *The Saints' Arrow*. In order to adapt to the aesthetic preferences and cultural policies of the time, *Nezha*'s image was transformed into an adult, while new elements and innovations were introduced into the styling and scene design. 2003's *The Legend Of Nezha*, produced by CCTV Animation and distributed by China International Television Corporation (CITVC), was a work intended to pass on and promote traditional Chinese culture and national spirit amidst the wave of globalization. Its animation design is based on the elements of Japanese and American animation, and carries out innovative explorations, reflecting the arduous process of domestic animation in exploring its own development path.

3.2.1 Policy context: self-protection from global shocks

Since the reform and opening up of China in 1978, China has witnessed a rapid process of globalization. In the following three decades, China's economy grew at a high rate of 9.8% per annum, significantly outpacing the global economy's annual growth rate of about 3% during the same period. Especially after joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the pace of China's integration with the world has accelerated significantly. However, behind the booming economy, China's animation market has experienced a development bottleneck for more than two decades. Between 1978 and 1998, American and Japanese animation works dominated China's youth animation consumer market for a long time. The high salary attraction of foreign animation production led to a serious exodus of domestic animation talents, and local animation works were difficult to meet the market

demand, which in turn led to a large number of foreign animation works occupying Chinese TV screens. Especially after 1985, China's animation industry encountered unprecedented challenges to its survival. In order to reverse this situation, the state has launched a series of policies and measures aimed at supporting the transformation of domestic animation into a market-oriented industry.

With the deepening of market-oriented reform, the reform of the economic system of the animation industry has become a top priority. In the early stage of reform and opening up, the state's directive organization of creation and the policy of unified purchase and sale provided protection for domestic animation, but also limited its pace of international integration. With the advancement of globalization and market economy, since 1995, China's film distribution and projection system has put an end to the policy of unified purchase and sale of animation films, and replaced it with a new model of independent production and self-financing. Domestic animation faced the pressure of competition from foreign animation, but a series of protection measures launched by the state provided solid support for its development. In August 1996, the Central Propaganda Department and the Press and Publication Administration launched the China Children's Animation Publishing Project (Project 5155) to focus on the whole chain of cooperation from creation to sales. In March 2001, the "Tenth Five-Year Plan" included the animation industry in the national development plan for the first time, and in April 2002, the "Development Plan for Film, Television and Animation Industry during the Tenth Five-Year Plan" was introduced as the first policy document for the animation industry, which promoted the development of animation creation and related industries. In November of the same year, the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China upgraded "cultural industry" to a national strategy, proposing to improve industrial and cultural policies and enhance the overall strength and competitiveness of the cultural industry, which opened up a new space for animation movies to develop.

Policy support and the creation of a favorable environment for animation creation are important safeguards for the development of domestic animation. As the animation industry is getting more and more attention from the government and all walks of life, the strengthening of the environment for the development of domestic animation and the management measures for the introduction of foreign animation provide strong support for domestic animation. In September 1995, the Central Propaganda Department for the first time organized the animation thematic investigation group to conduct a comprehensive research on the domestic animation production situation. In 2000, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television promulgated the Notice on Strengthening the Introduction and Broadcasting Management of Animation Films. Notice on Strengthening the Management of the Introduction and Broadcasting of Animated Films", which required that the proportion of domestic animation broadcast by TV stations should not be less than 60%, and implemented an approval and licensing system for imported animated films. By strengthening the approval procedure for the introduction of animated films, encouraging the establishment of specialized channels for children's animation, and setting up a special fund to support the development of the animation industry, etc., with the support and guidance of the national policy, the number of domestic TV animation and the length of its broadcasting even surpassed the number of Japanese

animation and even ranked first in the world in terms of the number and length of domestic TV animation; at the same time, a large number of shoddy and poorly-made, cobbled together and plagiarized "Base Animation" At the same time, a large number of crude, copied and assembled "base animation" and "toy animation" flooded into the market (Figure 76).

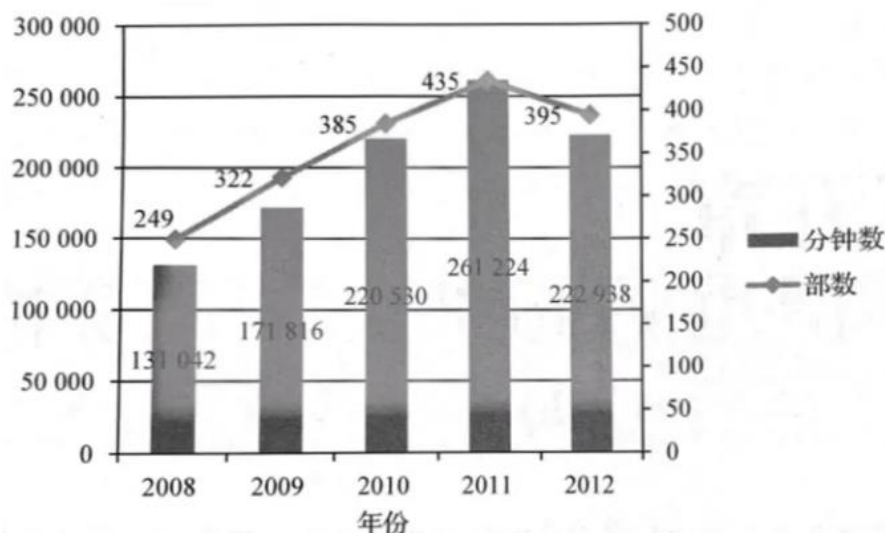


Figure 66 Completion of domestic TV animation production, 2008-2012
Source: China Animation Industry and Consumption Survey Report, 2013

3.2.2 Cultural environment: cultural difficulties in a market economy

After reform and opening up, China has rapidly integrated into the wave of globalization. In this process, the mass media, as a prominent symbol and driving force of globalization, has also experienced rapid globalization. Along with the prosperity of the market economy, mass culture has gradually become part of daily life, subtly shaping people's aesthetic orientation. The "high" elite culture has gradually left the altar, replaced by cultural products governed by the objective laws of the market economy. The vigorous development of mass media, especially the widespread popularity of TV dramas, marked the shift of the focus of China's animation production to the production of TV animation series. Relying on industrialized production and driven by widespread consumer demand, mass culture pursues the maximization of commercial interests, and its products are easy to reproduce on a large scale and spread rapidly, often forming popular trends and attracting a large number of followers.

In the 1990s, China's animation industry was integrated into the television system (which was not yet integrated into the market economy) due to the lack of independent profitability (no specialized animation broadcasting mechanism had been established in China). Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio, as the main animation production base, could only produce lower quality TV animation according to the demand of Shanghai TV. The reason behind this phenomenon was that in order to enter the Chinese market, commercial enterprises from Japan and the United States purchased the rights to many animations and offered them to TV stations for "free" (on the condition that they would broadcast commercial advertisements), which led to the TV stations' lack of awareness of the importance of high-cost, high-quality animation production. Animation production units are forced to produce animation at

the lowest possible cost, while TV stations buy and broadcast at a very low price, causing the once brilliant Chinese animation industry to regress in quality and make it difficult for it to gain international recognition. As a result, China's animation market has become a "processing factory" for overseas animation (Figure 77), and there has been a serious loss of animation talent. More critically, animation not only conveys culture, values and foreign policy, but also contains intangible elements such as ideology, aesthetic concepts and cultural beliefs.



Figure 67 Animation Processing Companies in China in the 1990s
Source: China Service Outsourcing Magazine Issue 4, 2013

In addition to the traditional mythological characters, the animation works have a strong influence of other countries in character modeling, speech and action, scene design, as well as the spiritual connotation and aesthetic culture conveyed, etc. At the end of the 80's, a popular Beijing ballad vividly depicted the challenge of foreign animation to the domestic animation industry and its influence on the daily life of young people: "The head of the Kesai hat is held in the arms of the King Kong, and at night the mouse is sleeping with him. A popular Beijing folk song in the late 1980s vividly depicted the challenge posed by foreign animation to the domestic animation industry and its impact on the daily lives of young people: "Wearing a Kesai hat, holding King Kong in his arms, watching rats at night, and sleeping with Yixiu as his companion." These foreign animation characters have become children's idols, and it has become a trend for young people to imitate their appearance and behavior, and the peripheral products of these animations have even become collectors' items (Figure 78).



Figure 68 Anime Peripheral Stationery from the 90s
Source:: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng,2023

As a result of the widespread popularity of these animations, Chinese youth, especially the Post-80s and Post-90s, are perceived to be heavily "westernized" (Figure 79). They pursue Western fashions, but have little understanding of their own long and rich national traditions. As a result, a kind of national nihilism and opposition to the nationalization of Chinese animation has emerged, and this attitude of self-forgetfulness and total Westernization is particularly prominent in the wave of globalization, making the blind pursuit of Western culture a cause for reflection.



Figure 69 Newspaper Criticism of Foreign Animation
<https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/522970019>, 2022

China's senior animation artists have won glory for domestic animation and pushed it into the hall of high art. Although this temple is exquisite, but it is difficult to find its market value. Although the tower is exquisite, it is priceless and unmarketable; although it is brilliant, it is inevitably shelved; although it is lofty, it has few followers (Jian & Guangyao, 2011). Zhou Zongkai mentions in "Farewell, Chinese School of Animation":

" The development of Chinese animation needs to be expected first of all, but also needs to be put down, especially needs to be tolerated. Put down some shackles, first of all, the shackles of the concept, the nationalization, China and other heavy topics put aside. Today we can only to have stood in the art of the temple of the masters salute, and then resolutely run to their own should walk the road of snow and wind. In short, today's animation is not necessarily inferior to the classics of the past, and there is no need to revel in the memories of history to be presumptuous, the dress of the ancients is indeed classic and gorgeous, but today we still wear suits more often." (Zongkai, 2013)

Against the background of the rupture between traditional and modern culture, the challenges facing animation creation are self-evident. How to resist cultural imperialism in the wave of globalization, maintain cultural self-confidence, occupy a favorable position in the soft power competition dominated by mass media, and enhance domestic unity and external attraction has become an important task to show the national image. Although *The Legend Of Nezha* is mainly aimed at children and teenagers, it shoulders the important task of transmitting traditional Chinese culture, and at the same time, in order to adapt to the market demand, it has to borrow the popular Japanese and American animation images and models to win the audience's favor. The theme of Chinese animation still continues to be nationalistic and collectivistic, but its animation image and visual design are no longer as distinctly nationalistic as they were in the 1960s. The rise of a nation is ultimately the rise of its spirit (Lexiong, 2004).

The success of "*The Legend Of Nezha*" lies in the fact that Nezha's tortuous and resilient journey of growth contains the aesthetic ideal of realism, which is a kind of externalization of the inner culture of life. While fully absorbing the best elements of Western animation and applying them in a nationalized way, the work uses Nezha as the main character to link up mythological figures such as Nuwa, Pangu, Zhu Rong and Gong Gong, achieving the effect of spreading folk culture and promoting traditional culture. The image of Nezha not only conveys the message of justice in eliminating demons and punishing evil and promoting good, but also serves as a subtle guide for young people to uphold justice and take the world's safety and security as their own. It is in the series of continuous improvement, reform, revision and reform that Chinese animation has been revitalized at the beginning of the new century, and cultural and national confidence has inspired Chinese animation to embark on a magnificent journey of rejuvenation.

3.2.3 Nezha's Image: From Catering to the Market to Integrating East and West

Although Nezha is the reincarnation of a spirit bead, he is still full of emotion and flesh and blood while manifesting his divinity. Through the battle of wits and courage with the evil forces, the story ends with Peach Blossom and Nezha living in seclusion in a mountainous area, curing the poor and teaching children to practice

marital arts to strengthen their bodies, with the traditional function of "edutainment for fun" and the concept of "collectivism". While the traditional "edutainment" and "collectivism" concepts of Nezha have been strengthened, family ethics, love and youth, and identity have also been strengthened in line with the trend of the times. Nezha not only represents the dissemination of mainstream values, but also caters to the new aesthetic needs of the market and the general public through the use of highly combustible and passionate character fight scenes, character dubbing by professional voice actors, progressive story progression, and the use of a variety of different characters in the story. In order to meet the new aesthetic demands of the market and the general public, the animation is characterized by highly combustible and hot-blooded fight scenes, character voice-overs by professional dubbing actors, progressive storytelling, and the youthful love scenes between the hero and heroine, all of which add a distinctive contemporary style to the animation, and Nezha is gradually fleshed out from a single, flat character. However, due to the early days of reform and opening up, domestic animation faced problems such as the loss of talent, economic shortages, insufficient policies, and the strong squeeze from American and Japanese animation, animation was obviously weak in passing on national aesthetics and traditional culture.

The Legend Of Nezha has become an example of art in popular culture. The animation is targeted at young viewers between the ages of 5 and 20. Against the backdrop of economic globalization and aesthetic diversification, Nezha's adventurous spirit, sense of rebellion, and innovative thinking provide a spiritual role model and inspiration for the general audience. While remaining entertaining, the animation portrays positive values and leads the spirit of the times, reflecting its modernized creative significance. At the same time, animation works incorporate international elements in character design and scene construction, adding to the vividness and characteristics of the works. For example, the design of Nezha's partner, Little Brown Bear, and the demoness, Nyonya Shiqi, was inspired by Disney, and their exaggerated movements and color designs were clearly influenced by Disney's style (Figures 80 81). "Although the whole play, in general, borrows more from foreign factors, it is permeated with relatively strong traditional national characteristics of our country from the beginning to the end, which gives people a sense of belonging when they watch it. (Ou, 2007) "In terms of background design, street buildings with Qin-Han architectural style and daily necessities of unique ethnic style are integrated into the plot, showing rich elements of traditional Chinese culture. In particular, the iconic scene designs such as the undersea garden of the Dragon Palace and the Crystal Palace are highly distinctive, based on national aesthetics fused with foreign advanced technology, which not only enriches the traditional culture, but also provides novel cultural perspectives for modern teenagers.



Figure 70 Piggy Bear from "The Legend Of Nezha".

Source: The Legend Of Nezha video footage, 2003.

3.2.4 Cultural identity: cultural awakening after a breakthrough

3.2.4.1 Excess from Divinity to Humanity

With the acceleration of reform and opening up and the process of marketization, animation creation has evolved from a tool for class struggle to a key medium for ideological enlightenment, cultural education and even economic value-added. The in-depth promotion of market economy has prompted the art works to be closer to "living" and "popularization", and the emerging aesthetic trend has led the transformation of consumption concepts and aesthetic demands to modernization under the impetus of diversified mass media. Faced with the infusion of fresh aesthetic styles from abroad, the once monolithic artistic creation in China has begun to transform itself in the direction of being closer to the lives of the masses, a change that is particularly noticeable in the image of Nezha, which has transformed from an exalted deity to a humanized expression that blends into the lives of the masses, marking a conscious transition from divinity to humanity.

If the Nezha animation of the "Chinese School" period reflected the heroes of a particular era, the "Legend of the Fen Shen Bang" animated film can be seen as the beginning of the introduction of a globalized aesthetic style. The film adopts a distinctly "Japanese" style in characterization and set design, while the creative team also explores themes of love, affection, individuality and human nature, which had previously been less explored, in keeping with the aesthetic tendencies and popular preferences of the time. Nezha's new image incorporates a richer set of values, influenced by both foreign animation culture and the consumer economy, and carries the traditional function of indoctrination, while also incorporating elements close to the public into the framework of the classic story of the Nezha. Through the narrative from the perspective of human nature, it not only makes the characters more three-dimensional, but also makes the content of the story more grounded. Episodes such as Nezha's youthful love for Peach Blossom, Li Jing's rescue of his son, and Nezha's growth on the battlefield enrich Nezha's intrinsic qualities (Figure 82). The interaction between the awakening of "humanity" and animation creativity has provided the ideological basis and spiritual guidance for the transformation of aesthetics in the new era, as a result of a vibrant social trend that encourages the public to "look inward," shifting from a concern for society to a concern for the inner world of the individual.



Figure 71 Nezha and Peach Blossom in the Legend of the Seal of the Gods
Source: The Legend of the Feng Shen Ban animation footage, 1998.

Based on the story structure of The Legend of Nezha, The Legend Of Nezha explores the production techniques, narrative content and thematic connotations with in-depth Chinese specialties to create a new era classic animation full of contemporary charm. Nezha's image has evolved from a traditional political, social and mythological character to a more intimate family character, while retaining his divinity and showing a lively, kind, wise and brave Nezha who also makes mistakes and needs to grow up. In addition, the animation modernizes and transforms family ethics. The change in Li Jing's character demonstrates a warmer paternal love, and in particular, Li Jing's willingness to take responsibility for Nezha demonstrates the modern notion of family intimacy. The animation also introduces the character of Piggy Bear, a common companion for children in Western animation, which adds comedic color to the story and serves as an important companion for Nezha on his journey. Little Dragon Girl, who is always by Nezha's side, often protects him as if he were her younger brother, and also blushes shyly when she says goodbye to him. Nezha also blushes when she says goodbye to her brother, but this friendship does not formally develop into a relationship between a man and a woman because of the young age of the two (Figure 83). Nezha's transformation of darkness into light, after his challenges against King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty and Lady Shiji, symbolizes the hero's growth from childishness to maturity.



Figure 72 Nezha and Little Dragon Girl in The Legend Of Nezha
Source: The Legend Of Nezha video footage, 2003.

In the era of globalization, while retaining Nezha's "divinity", Nezha animation is moving in the direction of "humanity" in its portrayal of the character. The image of Nezha has become more modern and full of value connotations, from flat and single to round and diverse, from propaganda and indoctrination to trendy individuality. In the course of economic, political and cultural exchanges between the East and the West, modern literature and art have shifted their attention from politics to society, and catering to the aesthetic trend of modernism and popular culture has made the image of Nezha move towards the modern trend of diversified individuality and the realities of life.

3.2.4.2 Integration from technology to culture

Animation is not only a modern art form, but has also become an important medium in the consumer society, integrating politics, culture, aesthetics, consumption, technology and entertainment. The modernization and transformation of China's animation industry, faced with the competitive pressure of foreign animation, cannot be achieved by internal efforts alone, and the process relies on borrowing and absorbing foreign animation technology and culture. The cultural pluralism brought about by the reform and opening up and the modernization of the consumer economy have provided a new environment for the creation of domestic animation. By consciously integrating foreign technologies and cultures, animation creation has complemented social development, not only promoting the modernization and transformation of the animation industry, but also giving new stylistic features and deeper values to classic images such as Nezha.

With the massive introduction of Japanese and American animation, domestic animation is facing the loss of talents and market challenges, and there is an urgent need to absorb foreign creative techniques in order to seek a breakthrough. Animation, as an artistic fusion of vision and hearing, cannot be created without careful design of images, scenes and sound effects. Since the 1980s, American animation with technological innovation and imagination and Japanese animation rich in national cultural characteristics have become popular in the domestic market. The Legend of the Seal of the Gods was created against this backdrop, using the character modeling and scene design of Saint Seiya as a reference, and reconstructing the story by integrating Chinese traditional culture (Figure . 84 85). The innovation of this work is that it combines Japanese animation techniques with Chinese national spirit, realizing a double breakthrough in culture and technology. The Legend Of Nezha further explores the combination of national aesthetics and modern aesthetics. Although it borrows from foreign animation in terms of technology, it optimizes the movement of characters, image styling, and scene layout, blending Chinese cultural elements with Western animation styles. This kind of open creative attitude makes domestic animation gain new vitality in the transition period, producing works that cater to contemporary aesthetics without losing national characteristics. It is in the active integration that domestic animation creativity has been revitalized and energized, creating a series of domestic animation works that cater to the aesthetic trend of the times.



Figure 73 Nezha's "Dragon Ball Storm Fist" in "The Legend of the Seal of the Gods".
Source: The Legend of the Feng Shen Ban animation footage, 1998.

Aesthetic forms are not born and remain unchanged, but are constantly generated and developed along with the enrichment of life styles, the increase of art varieties, the development of aesthetic experience and the improvement of life realm (Jianjiang, 2007). In the tide of reform and opening up, with the influx of other cultures and the evolution of our own culture, the modernization of Chinese animation is then reflected in the conscious integration with other cultures. The two animated works of Nezha during the reform and opening-up period can show that the Chinese animation industry, after a long period of wandering and groping as an "OEM", has gradually integrated Japanese and American aesthetics under the impact of Japanese and American comics. Under the impact of "Japanese comics" and "American comics", the industry has taken the initiative to integrate the aesthetic culture of Japan and the U.S. Although "Legend of Fengshenbang" bears heavy traces of "plagiarism", as an animation work that has taken the initiative to break the stalemate and cater to the aesthetics of the times, it has successfully "broken through the barriers and made its debut" in the midst of the market economy and the national culture, and the characteristics of the times and the needs of the public. However, as an animation work that takes the initiative to break the deadlock and cater to the aesthetics of the times, it successfully "breaks through" in the market economy and national culture, the characteristics of the times and the needs of the public, and shows the elements of love and blood in front of the public. At the same time, "The Legend Of Nezha", as an excellent work created by understanding the situation of the domestic market and adding modern aesthetic demands, inheriting traditional Chinese culture and learning from the connotation of foreign excellent culture, is precisely the work of integrating Western cultural patterns such as Shiji Niangniang's Disney Witch modeling and Nezha's pointy bangs, also seen in Japanese animation styling. It is worth mentioning that although "The Legend Of Nezha" is tasked with telling traditional Chinese stories and resisting the invasion of cultural hegemony, the active integration of Chinese and Western cultures is still one of the intrinsic qualities needed by the times, and the integration of cultures under the trend of economic globalization is more in line with the requirements of the times.

3.3 Multiple Aesthetics in the Postmodern Period

Since entering the new century, China's animation industry in the reform and opening up after a long period of "survival in difficulty, and finally in the national policy and industrial development on the basis, embarked on the road of consciously creating a unique national aesthetic charm of domestic animation works. With the innovation of animation works in theme, plot and special effects, the industry shows a more mature and energetic trend. Under the background of mass culture, aesthetic acceptance has changed from individualization to collectivization, and the interactivity and openness of modern aesthetic culture have become increasingly obvious. Consumer society and the pursuit of pluralistic values, coupled with the updating of media technology, have together bred a pan-aesthetic trend that satisfies the aesthetic needs of the modern public. Our society is experiencing a kind of aesthetic expansion, and nowadays aesthetic activities have gone beyond the scope of pure art/literature and gradually penetrated into the daily life of the masses (Yun, 2011). The tug-of-war between popular culture and traditional culture has created a rich cultural atmosphere for "pan-aesthetics"; the consumer economy and modern media have provided a powerful material carrier for "pan-aesthetics"; and differentiation and fusion have constituted the internal driving force for the emergence of aesthetic generalization. It is in the process of aesthetic generalization that the image of Nezha has ushered in a new value connotation and theme expression.

During this period, influenced by the consumer economy and post-modern culture, Nezha's animated works were rich in variety and connotation. In developing Nezha's "IP", diversified explorations have been carried out, represented by 2010's Fantasy Dragon Treasure, 2012's BadJokes, 2016's Spit Seal and I Am Nezha, 2017's Inhumanity, 2019's Birth of the Demon Child and Luo Xiaohe Battle Story, and 2021's Nezha. Demon Child and Luo Xiaohe Battle Story in 2019 and Nezha Reborn in 2021. Over time, Nezha's portrayal has demonstrated a diverse range of styles that are no longer confined to traditional frameworks, and creators continue to incorporate traditional cultural elements on the basis of freely exercising their creativity, creating masterpieces that are both aesthetically pleasing to the contemporary world and rich in traditional cultural connotations. From the perspective of aesthetic change, the image of Nezha during the period of pan-aestheticization has shown an evolution of aesthetic concepts, fuelled by social culture, film and television contexts, and Internet culture. Nezha animation in this period is highlighted for its aesthetic interest in ugliness, and through the exploration of beauty and ugliness, it blends the national spirit with everyday aesthetics, presenting the characteristics of unique styling and the spirit of realism.

3.3.1 Policy context: positive guidance from national policies

Entering the 21st century, with the comprehensive promotion of the development strategy of cultural industry, animation industry, as an important part of cultural industry, began to be highly valued by the government at all levels, and China's animation industry has thus ushered in a new spring of development and quickly stepped into the third boom period. In particular, China's accession to the World Trade Organization in December 2001 and the successful hosting of the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 not only demonstrated the country's strength and

cultural confidence, but also provided a broader stage for the development of China's animation industry. State leaders' emphasis on cultural self-confidence and the implementation of a series of policies to support the cultural industry have injected a strong impetus for the rapid development of the domestic animation industry. Since 2004, a series of industrial support policies have provided strong support for the innovation and growth of domestic animation, and the domestic animation market has opened a brilliant chapter in the new century under the impetus of policies and funds. China's animation industry has made remarkable achievements and progress in the aspects of marketization, all-age orientation and industrial chain perfection. The following is a brief table summarizing the development of policies to support the animation industry (Table 8).

Table 8 Policies related to China's animation industry

Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng

timing	sectoral	Policy documents
April 2004	PRC film censorship bureau	Several Opinions on the Development of China's Film, Television and Animation Industry
May 2004	PRC film censorship bureau	Circular on the Implementation of Subject Matter Planning for Domestic Television Animation Films
April 2006	State Council (PRC)	Several Opinions on Promoting the Development of China's Animation and Comic Industry
August 2006	PRC film censorship bureau	The "ban on broadcasting" was implemented, requiring that foreign animated films be banned from 17 to 20 o'clock.
December 2006	General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, etc	Outline of the National Plan for Cultural Development in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan Period
August 2008	Ministry of Culture	Opinions of the Ministry of Culture on Supporting the Development of China's Animation and Comic Industry
September 2008	Ministry of Culture	Launched the Original Animation Support Program.
September 2009	Ministry of Culture	Guidance Catalog for Investment in Cultural Industries of the Ministry of Culture
September 2009	State Council (PRC)	Revitalization Plan for Cultural Industries
May 2011	Ministry of Finance, etc.	Circular on the Issuance of the Interim Provisions on the Exemption of Import Taxes on Supplies Imported by Animation Enterprises for the Development and Production of Animation.
July 2012	Ministry of Culture	National Development Plan for the Animation and Comic Industry in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan Period
July 2013	PRC film censorship bureau	Nine Measures to Promote the Development of Domestic Animation and Movies
July 2014	PRC film censorship bureau	Notice on Organizing and Doing a Good Job in Declaring the 2014 Original Power China Original Animation and Cartoon Publication Support Projects.
May 2015	Ministry of Culture	Work Program for Supporting Growing Small and Micro Cultural Enterprises in 2015

August 2016	State Council (PRC)	Circular on Tax Policies for Animation Development Supplies Imported by Animation Enterprises
November 2016	The Central Committee's Comprehensive Deepening Reform Leading Group of the Central Committee for Deepening Reform (CCDR)	The Guiding Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving the Work of Chinese Culture Going Global.
January 2017	National Film Development Special Funds for the Development of the National Film Industry	Opinions on the Implementation of the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture
February 2017	Ministry of Culture	Ministry of Culture's Cultural Development and Reform Plan for the 13th Five-Year Plan Period
May 2017	General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, etc	Outline of the National Plan for Cultural Development and Reform in the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan Period
January 2019	State Council (PRC)	Provisions for Further Supporting the Development of Cultural Enterprises
August 2019	PRC film censorship bureau	Opinions on Promoting the High-Quality Development of the Radio, Television and Internet Audiovisual Industries
November 2020	PRC film censorship bureau	Opinions of the State Administration of Radio and Television on Promoting the Strengthening and Excellence of Radio and Television Broadcasters in the New Era
June 2021	Ministry of Culture and Tourism	The Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for the Development of Cultural Industries

The development of animation industry cannot be separated from the guidance and support of policies, especially for domestic animation which is "starting again" in the process of globalization, the protective and norm-inducing policy support and supporting measures have pointed out the direction for the development of domestic animation, and fully guaranteed the modernization and development of domestic animation market in terms of industrial chain, capital, talents and development environment. At the same time of giving policy support, the state also actively creates domestic animation industry base and teaching and research base construction (Figure 86), since 2005, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television has recognized the national animation industry base in four batches, and the base construction has played a positive role in scientifically guiding the production and broadcasting of domestic animation and game works, forming the animation and game industrialization, intensification, and internationalization of the business mode of operation, and cultivating the talents of animation and comics and online games. The construction of the bases plays an active role in promoting the production and broadcasting of domestic animation and game works, forming an intensive and internationalized business operation mode of animation and game industry, and cultivating animation and animation game talents.



Figure 74 Animation Base in Shenyang, China

Source: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng, 2010

3.3.2 Cultural environment: cultural pluralism broadens artistic space

In recent years, in the creation of domestic animated films, works that promote the excellent traditional Chinese culture have occupied the mainstream. These works are of great significance in telling a good Chinese story, displaying the Chinese style, promoting the "going out" of Chinese outstanding culture, and enhancing the influence of Chinese culture (Wenning & Laite, 2019). As a carrier of culture, animation can better reflect the complexity and contradiction of culture in the period of aesthetic pan-entertainment, which is not only the cultural complexity of the whole society, but also the cultural complexity of animation works themselves. In the new era, the prosperity of Nezha's animation creativity is manifested in a variety of ways, including themes, subjects, connotations and forms, and behind it lies the cultural prosperity of the consumer economy and the wave of globalization. Entering the 21st century, cultural exchanges have become more frequent and in-depth in the wave of globalization, and cultural trends have swept through China in every aspect, including politics, economy, culture and many other fields, which have brought China not only exchanges and collisions, but also practical issues such as how to achieve creative transformation and innovative development of its own culture in the process of globalization, and how to build a value system that is both Chinese and global. This has brought China not only exchanges and collisions, but also the exploration of how to realize the creative transformation and innovative development of its own culture in the process of globalization, and how to build both a Chinese and a global value system in the process of globalization.

First of all, postmodernist literary thinking has profoundly changed the expression of modern art by mixing the aesthetic orientations of beauty and ugliness, goodness and evil, and cute and cool, and this mixture not only challenges and deconstructs the pursuit of traditional aesthetics, but also pushes modern aesthetics to shift towards pan-aestheticization, entertaining and kitschy. With a playful and cynical attitude toward the public, it advocates common culture to eliminate the gap between elegance and vulgarity, elite culture and popular culture, so that it can be integrated into public life with a relaxed attitude (Jianping & cady, 2006). The infiltration of postmodernism makes modern animation art no longer pursue aesthetics alone, but cater to the public's aesthetic demand for personality liberation and self-expression, and become an anti-authoritarian medium that seeks spiritual comfort and stimulation. In such a background, the effectiveness of external constraints is weakened, and the subjectivity and individuality of the masses are emphasized and displayed. Postmodernism pursues the critique and deconstruction of the products of modernization that deprive individuals of subjectivity, homogeneity and centrality, symbolizing the blurring of boundaries and the transformation of historical concepts. Embodied in animation creation is the pursuit of spectacle, strangeness and uncertainty. The postmodern concept of entertainment supremacy dilutes the boundaries between high and low culture, promotes the diversification of modern animation creation concepts and the broadening of styles, and provides a broader aesthetic space for modern animation.

Secondly, driven by the national and cultural identity of the new century, animation creation inevitably involves the innovative transformation of national styles. This transformation is firstly based on the inheritance and identification of national culture and style. Nezha, as a cultural symbol full of Taoist cultural flavor, also carries the function and responsibility of conveying patriotic education in the Chinese cultural context. Even in some of Nezha's animated works, which focus more on entertainment, the identification of national identity and emotional belonging can be subtly touched upon, which is both a reflection of the tradition of "teaching for fun" and of China's cultural self-confidence in the face of the wave of globalization. National and cultural identity is reflected in the use of the cultural symbol of Nezha, traditional ideology, and the connotation of artistic images. By drawing on the essence of traditional culture, the charm of national culture is demonstrated in the images, costume design, spatial construction, ritual behavior, and ideological content. In the context of globalization, the first step to realize the innovative development of culture is to build up cultural self-confidence, which is the key to promoting cultural prosperity and national rejuvenation. Xi Jinping pointed out that "a nation thrives on culture, and a nation is strong on culture." Without firm cultural self-confidence, it is impossible to realize cultural prosperity and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Cultural self-confidence is not only a cultural proposition from a political perspective, but also plays an important guiding and inspiring role in promoting the innovative transformation and development of national culture.

Ultimately, the trends of consumer culture lead to new aesthetic habits and cultural tastes. In a consumer society centered on commodities and symbols, cultural significance is attached to every item (Goodwin, Ackerman, & Kiron, 2013). In such a context, all objects appear as a kind of commercial consumer product, and animation works are rich in symbolic meanings embedded in the characters' images,

costume designs, scene settings, and props used. These elements not only exist as the basic symbols of animation, but also cross the boundaries of consumer fields such as clothing, fashion trends, catering and derivative products, realizing the complete coherence of the animation industry chain under the powerful impetus of the mass media. The fusion of consumer culture and mass culture has successfully prompted the development of culture towards fragmentation, instantaneousness and diversification, and the transfer and decentralization of discourse power has given the masses more creative dominance. The traditional elite aesthetic narrative and single aesthetic expression can no longer meet the needs of modern society under the pressure of fast pace and competition, and people seek to alleviate the emptiness, pain and pressure of life through animation works full of "wonders", and pursue the emotional experience of novelty, excitement and entertainment. The myth and fantasy kingdom constructed by animation works precisely meets the demand for individualization and free expression advocated by the modern consumer economy and mass culture, and the China-Hangzhou International Animation Festival, which has been held for nineteen consecutive sessions, attracts countless visitors from home and abroad every year (Figure 87).



Figure 75 The 18th China International Cartoon & Animation Festival
Source: https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao_23240110, 2022

3.3.3 The Image of Nezha: A Postmodern Pop Symbol

In the current postmodern cultural context, the popularity of post-structuralism is reflected in the principle of "uncertainty" in creative work, which covers the diversity and ambiguity of theme, image, plot and language. Along with the deepening of postmodernism and consumer culture, the wide application of network media has provided a broad field for the development of popular culture, and the personalized aesthetic demand has led to a new trend of the aesthetic preference of the general audience. The image of Nezha in *BadJokes* combines elements of satire, parody, nonsense, spoof and carnival. In the fast-developing modern society, the lofty and serious grand narratives are deconstructed by banter and mockery, the image of the tall and perfect hero is replaced by casualness and flirtation, and the boundaries between the real and the fictional, the mainstream and the fringe, and the collective and the individual are freely switched in the midst of blurring and uncertainty.

Nezha's image has been reconstructed in this uncertainty, and modern cultural elements such as lolita, Barbie, and ugliness have added multi-dimensional space for its interpretation. The popular culture nurtured by Internet culture is fully demonstrated in this animation (Figure 88), especially the emphasis on personalized and entertaining expressions, in which the expression of self-personalized revelry is the abstract embodiment of self-identity under mass culture.



Figure 76 《BadJokes》 Nezha Internet Emoticon Bag
Source: Sogou Input Method, 2012

Birth of the Demon Child is an innovative interpretation and deconstruction based on the essence of traditional culture. The animated film is not only deeply rooted in the fertile soil of traditional culture, but also skillfully blends with modern spiritual concepts. Nezha reflects the independent will of adults to challenge fate and rebel against authority, the thoughts of teenagers searching for the right path in life in the dilemma of choosing between good and evil, as well as the troubles of youth in the face of the lack of family upbringing and the confusion that accompanies growing up. The film incorporates the traditional Chinese philosophical idea of "man's determination is better than heaven's", and touches on the core issues of personality expression and self-realization in modern society, showing a cultural dialogue and spiritual pursuit that transcends the times. It is in the grand value delivery that the analysis and revelation of real problems are included, and modern irony and deconstruction are borrowed to integrate traditional values with modern value pursuits. On the other hand, it is mainly reflected in the modernized artistic creation of painting, music, architecture and traditional symbols. The perspective space and dreamy fairyland expressed in Jiangshan Sheji Tu, the landscape painting created in such marvelous scenes as snowy mountains, deserts, cliffs and waterfalls has a unique artistic charm (Figures 89 90); the incorporation of ethnic musical instruments, such as the soaring suona, the low and lingering erhu, the mellow and powerful pendulum hu, and the smooth and soothing pipes not only pushes forward the revelation of the character's emotion and the unfolding of the storyline, but also the integration of

ethnic instruments in traditional Chinese musical art, which is a great opportunity to promote the development of the characters' emotions and storylines. At the same time, the integration of traditional Chinese music elements with western music has high artistic value and artistic influence.



Figure 77 A picture of the river and mountains in Birth of the Demon Child
Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and television footage

In terms of its cultural image, *Nezha Reborn* demonstrates the innovative heritage of Eastern culture and Western style with its fusion of cyberpunk style and CG technology. Its art style and scene design are full of the perfect combination of reality and fantasy, glamor and punk. The use of leather-clad locomotives, cabarets, street scenes of old Shanghai, and mechanical metals not only deepens the modern interpretation of Nezha's traditional elements, but also creates an atmosphere of the era that blends reality and tradition. Through the use of modern digital technology, especially in physical movement and scene design, the film displays a unique digital 3D effect, bravely exploring the "oriental punk" style in the field of domestic animation (Figure . 91 92). Chinese architectural elements such as the "Hanging Temple" and the "Leshan Giant Buddha", which are rich in Chinese characteristics, show a unique artistic attraction under the integration of new styles. This innovative integration of styles not only breaks through the limitations of traditional Chinese animation styles, but also creates a new way of combining traditional Chinese animation elements with Western punk styles. This innovative integration of styles not only breaks through the limitations of traditional Chinese animation styles, but also creates a new example of combining traditional Chinese animation elements with Western punk styles.



Figure 78 Li Yunxiang's Trendy Chinese Outfits in 'Nezha Reborn'
Source:Nezha Reborn movie and TV footage

3.3.4 Cultural identity: postmodern adaptation of mythological symbols

3.3.4.1 Carnival Narratives of Multiple Aesthetic Interests

In the context of the open, inclusive and sharing era of digital economy, postmodernism has profoundly influenced the aesthetic consciousness of the public, promoting the development of aesthetics in the direction of daily life, living and entertainment. The rise of consumerism has made all kinds of cultural consumption become the main way to satisfy spiritual needs, among which, animation has become an important art form for modern aesthetic pursuit with its unique hypothetical and imaginative nature. The rapid development of diversified media technology provides an effective platform to satisfy the public's desire for diversified and novel visual experiences. As a result, Nezha's animated works, which are characterized by distinctive personalities, diverse values and rich visual expressions, have gained new vitality through innovative adaptations. After the success of Birth of the Demon Child, many discussions and interpretations of the two protagonists have been generated on the Internet, as well as many secondary creations. The audience's interpretation of Nezha has already exceeded the original meaning of the film, and the construction of personalized meanings has not only enabled animation to transcend the traditional role of the creator in contemporary consumer culture, but has also enabled the audience to take part in the production of the content, constructing their own content independently. In contemporary consumer culture, the construction of personalized meaning not only allows animation to transcend the traditional role of the creator, but also enables viewers to participate in the production of animation content and independently construct their own world of meaning (Figure 93). Driven by the Internet media, animation art carrying the aesthetics of modern mass culture is filled with elements such as consumption, ugliness, carnival, uncertainty, violence and spectacle, which not only provides animation creators with broad creative space, but

also opens up new horizons for catering to the public's aesthetic interests, shaping a new modern picture of animation creation.



Figure 79 Birth of the Demon Child homage posted by netizens under the social media platform topic

Source: https://weibo.com/p/100808f36a6a9cbe173fb2cb0a5103d4c64edb/super_index#_rnd1708256631762, 2022

First, with the wave of globalization, consumerism has profoundly influenced the domestic political and cultural ecology, driving a shift from basic needs to the search for existential meaning. In this process, consumption has not only become a means of validating personal values, but has also prompted literary production to adapt to this change in demand. Animation, as a form of literature and art, has become an important channel to validate and satisfy personal values. Through its deep content rich in realistic metaphors, human nature and moral competition, as well as its adherence to fashionable cultural trends, animation works satisfy the public's demand for the construction of self-meaning in the context of modern culture. *Nezha in BadJokes*, with its unique "ugly" image, and *Birth of the Demon Child*, demonstrate a precise grasp of the aesthetic interests of the public in the contemporary aesthetic environment. Behind these subversive animation images are the creators' sensitivity to and exploration of youth culture, spoofs and self-deprecating aesthetics, aiming to meet the aesthetic demands of the cultural consumer market.

Secondly, in the context of a consumer society, aesthetic interests and ways of perception have changed significantly with the evolution of modern technology and media. The discussion of aesthetics is no longer the exclusive domain of the cultural elites, and ugliness has gradually moved from its marginal position to the center of aesthetic discussion. As Zong Baihua said, "Art is of course based on beauty, but its connotation is much more than that. Sometimes, the so-called 'ugliness' can show a deeper meaning, and there is a different kind of beauty in sorrow and grief." With the advancement of animation technology and the deepening of cultural awareness, the strong demand for individualized expression has prompted people to appreciate and

scrutinize objects with ugly gestures and unfamiliar features. With its unique inclusiveness and entertainment, animation effectively absorbs various cultural elements, while virtual cyberspace and media communication provide a platform for these images with playful, scandalous and alienating aesthetic features. As a result, the image of diverse characters with heavy and dark styles has become a unique symbol of anti-traditional aesthetics in postmodernism. Ugliness not only plays an important role in the aesthetic experience of self-expression and the pursuit of individuality, whether it is "King Kong Barbie", "Ugly Nezha" or "Motorcycle Nezha", these free individualistic expressions challenge and deconstruct the aesthetics of postmodernism. Whether it is "King Kong Barbie", "Ugly Nezha" or "Motorcycle Nezha", these free and individual expressions challenge and deconstruct the traditional aesthetic concepts, and contain profound practical significance and value pursuits, which effectively broaden the aesthetic horizons of the modern public and leave a deep impression on them (Figure . 94 95 96).

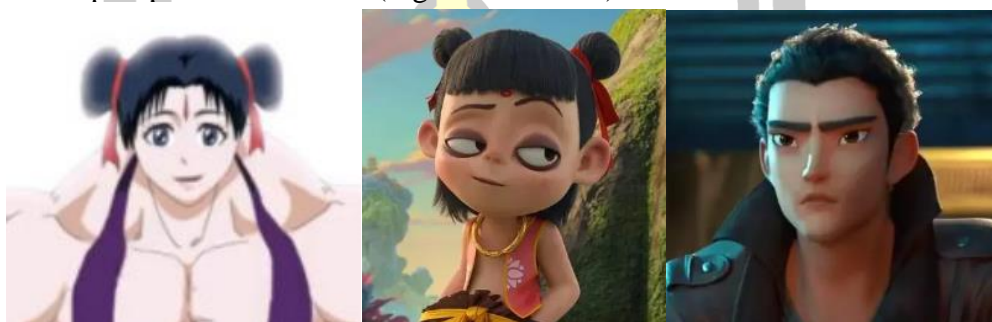


Figure 80 "King Kong Barbie" Nezha (left)
Source: BadJokes video footage, 2012.

Finally, the connotation contained in animation works not only reflects the personal value realization of the creators, but also, more significantly, the social value and significance assumed in their artistic activities, which constitutes the core soul of creation. This artistic concept and its expression form construct the cornerstone of the work. Against the diversified background of consumerism and post-modernism, the image of Nezha, which takes everyday life, entertainment and revelry as its aesthetic pursuit, is neither a traditional "myth" of perfection nor a pure and flawless "hero". Rather, it is an expression of uncertainty and humanity that explores how individuals can express their self-worth, or at least explore the meaning of their existence, in an "imperfect" world. In an entertaining and relaxing atmosphere, the animation deeply explores profound philosophical issues such as "the existence and value of human beings", and demonstrates the free and innovative exploration of the ways to confirm and realize individual subjectivity in a modern society with fragmented and fast-paced information.

3.3.4.2 Strangeness Reconstruction of Traditional Cultural Symbols

Compared with traditional animation technology, the initial shortcomings of digital technology once limited the "dream-drawing" innovation of animation creators and the pace of development of the animation industry. However, with the rapid progress of digital technology, various aesthetic concepts and cultural connotations can be widely conveyed through animation. Free creativity, bold innovation and rich imagination have given modern animation unlimited possibilities. Combined with

modern technology and aesthetic trends, traditional cultural symbols in animation present a new significance of the times, and this modernization and reshaping is not only rooted in the evolution of aesthetic culture to meet the aesthetic needs of the modern public, but also adds diversity to the style and style of animation. The innovation of digital technology has brought far-reaching influence on animation creation, providing creators with a broader space for free creation, and at the same time, the enhancement of production means and efficiency has provided strong technical support for animation contents and forms that adapt to the modern aesthetic connotation and the pursuit of values. Animation works are filled with various symbols, which are utilized to construct character images, object characteristics and storylines (Yiwei, 2021). The unfamiliar adaptation with the help of digital technology not only adapts to the aesthetic shift of the times, but also explores a brand new path in character modeling, plot layout and traditional cultural style.

First of all, the modernization and reshaping of traditional cultural symbols is significantly reflected in the unfamiliar design of animation character images. Character images in animation, as the key elements to stimulate the audience's first impression, break the expectation vision and trigger empathy, not only need to be coordinated with the overall style, but also profoundly affect the characterization and story development direction. These images, as concrete and abstract symbols, provide a solid foundation for the integrity and innovation of animation. For example, in *BadJokes*, characters such as Nezha, Li Jing, and Snow White appear in the form of absurd banter, representing an exploration of modern aesthetic change and satisfying the popular culture demand for — Popular media Culture and deconstruction of authority (Figures 97 98). *Birth of the Demon Child* breaks traditional aesthetic expectations by providing audiences with a new visual and auditory experience through unique character features such as smoky makeup and beer bellies. At the same time, the "unfamiliar" presentation of traditional cultural symbols such as the Junction Beast and the Wind and Fire Wheel greatly enriches the atmosphere of the movie. In *Nezha Reborn*, Li Yunxiang, the Six-Eared Kiwi, and "punk elements" are combined to create a wonderful fusion of tradition and modernity in a "Chinese cyberpunk" setting. With the evolution of aesthetic diversification, modern animation has become more daring and innovative in visual design, and the juxtaposition of beauty and ugliness is particularly prominent.



Figure 81 Li Jing (left) and Nezha (left) in "Nezha".
Source:Nezha movie and television footage, 2001.

Secondly, in the modern remodeling of traditional cultural symbols, the unfamiliar adaptation of the storyline occupies an important position. With the deep development of globalization and consumerism, the context of the new era has prompted the public to form brand-new aesthetic demands, and the pursuit of diversified sensory experiences and aesthetic interests has become the focus of the mass media. In recent years, animation, literature, film and television works based on widely recognized materials have become more and more popular, and the innovative adaptation of Nezha, a classic "IP", is inseparable from the unfamiliar treatment of the storyline of the cultural symbols behind it. The structure of the myth presents a certain degree of stability over time, but an adaptation based on the preservation of the classic elements and framework of the myth can quickly establish an emotional connection between the animation and the viewer, thus transforming a familiar story into a novelty that is full of contemporary significance. The strangeness treatment proposed by Bertolt Brecht has the unique effect of "disassociation", which makes the familiar storyline show new changes under the original framework, creating the effect of novelty and familiarity at the same time (Xiaoxu, 2018). Through the unfamiliar adaptation of mythological storylines, classic "IPs" such as Nezha, Jiang Ziya, the Monkey King, and the White Snake in the "Feudal Universe" are revitalized, exploring the sense of novelty within the framework of familiar stories.

Finally, the modern reinvention of traditional cultural symbols is particularly distinctive in exploring the strangeness of value connotations. From explicit political declaration to in-depth self-exploration, the value connotation of the classic symbol of Nezha has undergone a new interpretation in the new century's wave of globalization and consumerism. In the context of contemporary society, the symbolism of Nezha is no longer limited to fighting against class oppression or portraying the coming-of-age story of a young hero. With a new narrative style and perspective, BadJokes portrays Nezha's image and connotations in a playful, carnivalesque and collage manner, creating an adorable character, which reflects the modern youth's deconstruction of traditional values and pursuit of individuality, as well as the lack of human subjectivity in modern society. Nezha in *Birth of the Demon Child*, though born as a demonic pill, feels the lack of love and recognition in his family and society, and his quest for a sense of existence contains profound social connotations. Nezha's exploration of his sense of existence has profound social implications. With a cry of "My destiny is mine, not heaven's", Nezha realizes his self-affirmation (Figure . 99 100). In *Nezha Reborn*, Li Yunxiang, a man at the bottom of the social ladder and full of a sense of justice, experiences the confusion of identity and the dilemma of reality as he explores the dual identities of himself and Nezha, and through continuous search and confirmation, he completes his self-recognition of "who am I" and realizes the meaning of the phrase "this life belongs to me, it is mine" (Figure . 108 and 109). Through continuous search and confirmation, he accomplishes the self-knowledge of "who I am", and in "this life belongs to me, it is mine", he has firmly established his self-identity.

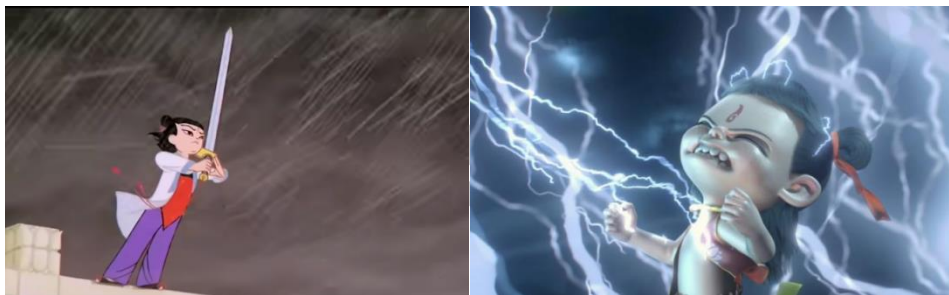


Figure 82 Resistance to Feudal Patriarchy in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King (left)

Source: Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King footage, 1979.

Part IV The Causes of Changes in the Representation of Nezha's Image

Throughout the characters and content of Nezha-related animation and film productions, the external image of Nezha has been gradually uglified, and the expression of values tends to be individualized. Nezha sacrifices himself for the people in "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" and "The Legend Of Nezha", while the new version of Nezha takes into account his personal struggles and resistance, which is no longer against social oppression and external evils, but against his individual destiny and efforts. It is no longer about social oppression and external evils, but about the struggle and endeavor of the individual's destiny. Therefore, in the different contexts in which the four animated films and TV productions were produced, the causes of the change in Nezha's image are explored from two aspects. First, in the context of cultural development, the changing image of Nezha is analyzed in terms of the presentation of popular culture and the culture of ugliness. First, in the context of cultural development, we analyze the influence of popular culture and aesthetic culture in the change of Nezha's image.

4.1 Cultural change

Under the influence of the widespread spread of popular culture, China's animation film and television industry lagged behind at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Against this backdrop and in order to further develop domestic animation works, The Legend Of Nezha was born. Targeted at school-age children, this animated work has undergone significant changes compared to previous Nezha films. For example, in The Legend Of Nezha, Nezha wears earrings inlaid with emeralds and pink ribbons, and two small locks of bangs in front of his forehead, which is similar to the hairstyle of the Nezha character in the Japanese cartoon "The Most Traveled Journey". To a certain extent, this reflects the deconstruction of traditional culture by the development of popular culture. A typical example of further deconstruction of traditional culture is the appearance of the movie Birth of the Demon Child.

First, the development of the Internet has further promoted the development of popular culture, which, as an important carrier of information dissemination, influences social and cultural changes. In order to adapt to the social and cultural changes, it is especially important to re-create the image of classic works. The idea of deconstructionism is very much in line with this. Deconstructionism is the re-creation of the original work, using new values to infuse the original work with the re-

creationist's own understanding, and to express it in a different way. By analyzing the subversive change in Nezha's image and comparing it to the previous image of Nezha, it is easy to see how the development of popular culture has influenced the creation of art works.

Second, the expression of individualism is enhanced. Individualism is a value orientation, and changes in culture can be inferred by exploring changes in its value orientation (Zihang et al., 2018). The movie *Birth of the Demon Child* presents a clear tendency of individualistic expression compared to *The Greatest Showman*, *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King* and *The Legend Of Nezha*. This is due to the fact that in today's society, many cultures coexist. However, the increase of individualistic expression does not mean the dissolution of traditional culture and values. Individualism and the expression of traditional collectivism are both relatively independent and do not affect the continuation and development of traditional values and customs. The social and cultural reasons for the evolution of Nezha's image lie in society's emphasis on the individual, as well as the trauma and grief caused to the individual by the collectivist sentiments in traditional Nezha films and videos, which are obviously no longer in line with the pursuit of cultural expression in film and television nowadays. *Birth of the Demon Child* strikes a good balance between preserving the traditional concept of collectivity and expressing individualism, including the design of a master who loves and protects Nezha, parents who protect Nezha, friends who protect Nezha, and the people of Chentangguan who pray for the rebirth of Nezha at the end of the film in order to thank Nezha for his life.

4.2 Reflection on reality

Art comes from life, and to a certain extent, any work of art can reflect the realities of the time in which it is created. Nezha-related film and television productions are no exception, as they carry a certain ideological expression. Nezha was created in 1961, during the Great Leap Forward and the People's Communalization Movement, when the country was in the midst of a period of blind advancement. Coupled with the three years of natural disasters, the country was in a very difficult state of development and was in dire need of a work that could inspire the people's spirit and fighting spirit. Nezha was portrayed in a comical and embarrassing way in *The Palace of Heaven*, which emphasized the righteousness of the Monkey King and conveyed to the audience the spirit of "resistance". The 1979 film *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King*, based on the plot of Nezha, was a contemporary adaptation of the 1979 Chinese Enlightenment, in which the Chinese people gradually established the concept of the Way of Heaven, i.e., the good that represents the interests of the people, and the evil that goes against the interests of the people. Analyzing its textual construction in the context of the whole society, we can see its cultural expression. The Dragon King, as a member of the Heavenly Court, becomes disobedient to the rules of Heaven and oppresses the people. Nezha, on the other hand, is the embodiment of justice who cares about the people's plight and dares to make sacrifices. Nezha's father, Li Jing, on the other hand, is filled with distrust of his son and is completely submissive to the power of the king, with no love of father and son at all. When Nezha fights with the Dragon King, his father makes him kneel and apologize, ties him up, uses his power as a father to suppress him, and even points his sword at Nezha in an attempt to kill him. In this film, Nezha can be said to represent the youth who dares to revolutionize, while Li Jing is the defender of the old

order, using a modern revolutionary narrative to express the need for the individual to be free from the old view of the family order in order to fight against oppression and establish freedom and peace. Entering the twenty-first century, the development of China's animation market has been severely challenged in the face of the influx of foreign film and television productions. In order to develop its own market for domestic animation, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) imposed restrictions on imported animation on the one hand, and prompted the accelerated development of domestic self-produced animation on the other. Under the policy at that time, although the quality of domestic animation has improved, due to the domestic mainstream broadcasting platforms and the government's tendency to support animation products, the animation industry has formed a positioning for children aged 0-6 to watch. Against this backdrop, *The Legend Of Nezha* was first broadcast on the CCTV channel in 2003. From the point of view of the presentation of female characters, the role of the mother in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King* is almost non-existent and is not presented separately as a three-dimensional character. In *The Legend Of Nezha*, the woman appears as a loving mother within the family. In *Birth of the Demon Child*, the mother is more equal to the man in the family and is no longer dispensable, no longer an auxiliary role within the family, but one who can fight in the battlefield. It is a mother who can fight in the battlefield, eliminate demons, and be both strong and soft. This undoubtedly reflects the changing status of women over time and the emergence of gender equality in the culture. The new version of *Nezha* presents a fuller picture of women's gender roles. *Birth of the Demon Child* clearly expresses the spiritual confusion of modern people, such as the lines: "My destiny is mine but not heaven's." and "I'll decide whether I'm a demon or a fairy." These words clearly construct the character in the animation and embody *Nezha's* spirit of not accepting fate, which is consistent with the concept of individuals in today's society who wish to change their destiny through their own efforts.

With the development of trendy culture, contemporary young people pay more and more attention to their own growth and the development of personal destiny. Individuals in the collective are not only heroes who can sacrifice for the collective interests, but also individuals who can struggle to change their own destinies. The ugliness of *Birth of the Demon Child* contrasts sharply with the chubby dolls and handsome teenagers in previous films such as *Pandemonium*, *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King*, and *The Legend Of Nezha*. *Nezha's* overall image changes in the movie's plot. External beauty and ugliness do not represent a person's intrinsic value, but rather the expression of intrinsic value in self-struggle and hard work. The reality of *Nezha's* animated films and movies, from fighting against feudalism to fighting against evil to fighting against destiny, reflects the different social problems of different times. In the new era of the 21st century, the generation that grew up watching "*Pandemonium in Heaven*", "*Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*", and "*The Legend Of Nezha*" are now about to reach adulthood, and even become parents. Under the tremendous pressure of today's society, this generation of adults is facing more pressure, especially most of the ordinary people from the small town all the way out of the struggle in the city, facing the pressure of life, work, family and other aspects of life, "*Birth of the Demon Child*" to personal struggle as

the tone, and the theater audience closer to the distance, its sense of empathy can be imagined.

Summary of the chapter

Through an in-depth exploration of the cultural representations of Nezha's animated image, this chapter shows the multiple faces and deep cultural meanings of this traditional mythological character in modern society. From the relationship between the animated image of Nezha and cultural representations, to its presentation of the spirit of national culture, to the changes in cultural representations of the times, the image of Nezha is analyzed as it has transcended time and space, evolving to adapt to and reflect different cultural and social contexts.

By examining the cyclical and representational operations of culture, it is elaborated that Nezha, as a cultural product, is capable of generating different meanings in different cultural environments, and that these meanings are sliding rather than fixed, and are influenced by ideology. The evolution of Nezha's image is not only the result of artistic creation, but also part of the process of cultural symbolic exchange and meaning construction, capable of echoing real-life experiences and social environments.

Nezha's cultural representations can be divided into two parts: the national culture and the culture of the times, corresponding to cultural inheritance and innovation, respectively. By exploring the presentation of Nezha's animated image in the national culture, it is revealed that Nezha is not just a character in a story, but carries deep cultural significance and spiritual values. Nezha is a spiritual role model who defies oppression and controls his destiny, always confronting the laws of heaven and the constraints of feudal ethics. He acts as the embodiment of fire and fights against the Dragon King, the symbol of water; the spirit beads and lotus flower that correspond to Nezha's birth and rebirth are also the simple imagination of ancient China's conception of life, and Nezha's flexibility and immortality and the cycle of reincarnation are the concentration of Taoist thought, and all of these fixations on the national culture are presented by Nezha's animated image in a way that is a reflection of Chinese national culture to a greater or lesser degree. These fixed national cultures are more or less presented in the image of Nezha, which is the inheritance of the spirit of Chinese national culture and the cultural consensus of the Chinese nation.

By analyzing in detail how the image of Nezha has changed in the cultural representations of different eras, we see that Nezha has transformed from a classical mythological figure into a modern symbol that reflects and responds to social changes, cultural dilemmas, and diverse aesthetics. From the "revolutionary hero who fights against imperialism and feudalism" during the planned economy to the "young hero who fights against cultural invasion" in the era of globalization, to the "King Kong Barbie" who teases tradition and reflects subcultures in the post-modern context, Nezha has been transformed from a classical mythological figure into a modern symbol that reflects and responds to social change and cultural dilemmas and aesthetic diversity. In the post-modern era, Nezha has been portrayed as "King Kong Barbie," "Ugly Nezha," reflecting subculture, and "Motorcycle Nezha," embodied in the punk culture. The evolution of Nezha's image reflects the dynamism and adaptability of Chinese society and culture.

Through the discussion in this chapter, it can be seen that the cultural representation of Nezha's animated image not only reflects the richness and depth of

traditional Chinese culture, but also shows the adaptability and innovative power of cultural symbols in different cultural contexts. The story and image of Nezha proves that cultural inheritance and innovation can coexist, and that tradition and modernity, local and global, can be dialogued and integrated through the process of cultural representation.



CHAPTER V

Symbolic Interaction of Nezha's Animated Image

Introduction

Herbert Blumer, the master of "symbolic interactionism", puts forward three basic ideas: there is no objective meaning in the thing itself, which is given by human beings in the process of social interaction; human beings respond to the thing according to their own understanding of the meaning of the thing in the process of social interaction; human beings' understanding of the meaning of the thing can be changed in the process of social interaction (Blumer, 1986), not absolutely unchanging (Blumer, 1986). process and is not absolutely constant (Blumer, 1986). Based on these views, this chapter examines the relationship between Nezha and symbolic interaction, and finds out how the meaning of Nezha is constructed in three modes of interaction: Nezha and creator, Nezha and viewer, and viewer and viewer, so as to analyze the complex relationship between different groups of people and Nezha.

Part I explores the relationship between Nezha and symbolic interactions, revealing the impact of social interactions on Nezha's meanings, as well as how these meanings are interpreted by creators and viewers, and how Nezha's meanings change through various modes of interaction.

Part II analyzes the interaction between creators and Nezha, including how the masters of the art world created the image of Nezha in their efforts to preserve and innovate, how CCTV turned Nezha into a cartoon star, the self-indulgent reimagining of Nezha by Internet flash mobs, and the ingenuity of the fusion of the ancient and the modern in the design of the Na Zha, which demonstrates how creators have reimagined the image of Nezha through various means, and how they have retained the original meaning of Nezha, while at the same time adding their own thoughts and expectations of the audience to make it more relevant to modern aesthetic and cultural needs. How the creators retained the original meaning of Nezha while adding their own thoughts and audience expectations to make it more in tune with modern aesthetics and cultural needs.

Part III focuses on the interaction between the audience and Nezha, and collects the audience's perception and evaluation of Nezha's external image and character core through the use of software to capture Internet movie reviews, in order to objectively understand the audience's attitudes towards Nezha and conduct descriptive analyses. In addition, it also delves into the reasons for the change in the audience's emotions, including the process from recognition to controversy, providing a window into the evolution of how cultural symbols evolve in the minds of the audience. This provides a window on how cultural symbols evolve in the minds of audiences.

Part IV explores interactions between audiences through both real-life and Internet dimensions, from the logos of rock bands to the Nezha-themed cultural plazas and the Nezha heads at the Asian Games, revealing how the image of Nezha facilitates exchanges and empathy between people in the real world. Interactions in the Internet, such as video pop-ups and exchanges on external platforms, further

exemplify how the image of Nezha has become a hotspot for online cultural exchanges in the digital age, fostering cross-cultural and inter-generational dialogues. By synthesizing and analyzing the symbolic interactions of the animated image of Nezha among its creators, viewers, and audiences, this chapter aims to show how the meaning of the image of Nezha is constructed by both creators and viewers, how both parties understand Nezha's significance, and how Nezha's significance changes as a result of social interactions.

Part I Nezha's Relationship with Symbolic Interaction

Mythological stories have always assumed the role of transmitting national culture, and the spirit of the times has been adapted and reshaped in cross-media presentations through the symbols of myth. Nezha, as a dramatic character in traditional Chinese mythology, has been adapted in numerous Buddhist, Taoist and folkloric versions, and has gradually been molded into the framework of a story that the public is familiar with and accepts. The depth of the historical background and social relationships of the character is evident in this story, and the Nezha has carefully constructed the world in which Nezha lives, including his image, status, relationships, magical powers, and biography. This rich worldview not only provides a narrative foundation for the adaptation of Nezha, but also opens up a wide space for symbolic interaction.

Unlike movie characters portrayed by real people, Nezha in animated films is based on literary descriptions and people's imagination. The nature of animation art - hypothetical - also gives the Nezha character in animated films a more distinctive and unique "pictorial symbol" attribute. The immediacy, stability and creativity of the animated character in the process of symbolization are all features that allow for the deeper spiritual core of the creator's intention to be attached to the image of Nezha in an appropriate manner. As a result, Nezha in animated films, after being symbolized, becomes a medium for the expression of consciousness and the emotional connection between the audience and the character.

Blumer states that "people make meaning of things through social interaction (Blumer, 2013)" Meaning is not inherent, but is created through the process of communication and interpretation in human interactions. These things include material objects, behaviors, others, and even the users themselves. The image of Nezha has different meanings in different cultural and historical contexts; in traditional Chinese stories, Nezha is usually depicted as a brave, rebellious child with supernatural powers, and these traits have shaped the commonly recognized image of Nezha through social interactions such as oral and written Legends, movies, animations, and narratives in other media.

"People process and interpret based on these meanings before they act (Blumer, 2013)" When animation producers decide how to depict Nezha, they not only create based on existing cultural meanings, but they may also add new elements to suit the tastes and values of contemporary audiences. This means that the animated portrayal of Nezha is the producer's interpretation and re-creation of the traditional meaning of the story. In *Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkins explores communities of television fans and how they interact with their favorite shows in various ways (including frenzied discussions, creation of spin-offs, formation of communities, etc.) (Jenkins, 2012). More than just an animated figure, Nezha may become the centerpiece of a community around which various forms of

participatory culture are formed, a culture that may profoundly affect viewers' lives and perceptions. Viewers embrace Nezha and participate in the construction of meaning in the image of Nezha through watching, discussing and sharing.

At the same time, "these meanings are used and modified in social interactions: meanings are not set in stone, but are modified and adapted in ongoing social interactions. As people communicate and share their experiences, they may change their understanding of things (Blumer, 2013)." As time passes and society changes, the image and story of Nezha will also change. New animations may emphasize different themes such as justice, individualism, and family relationships, which reflect the changing values of society. The continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of Nezha's story by society demonstrates the dynamic and adaptive nature of the meaning of cultural symbols.

Part II Creator's Interaction with Nezha

2.1 Conservation and Innovation of Fine Arts Masters

After the founding of New China, the ideas that dominated the world of literature and art were the highest artistic principles set forth in Mao Zedong's Speech at the Yan'an Literary and Artistic Symposium. The speech put two issues at the forefront, which then led to the formation of the famous concepts of literature and art - "Literature and art serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers" and "Literature and art serve politics" - which emphasized the importance of the "leadership of literature and art". This emphasized the attribution of "literary and artistic leadership" (Honghuan, 2011). Since then, China's literary and artistic circles have been using this classic code, which consists of modern political discourse and traditional national culture. In the spring of 1955, Te Wei, the then director of the Shanghai Motion Picture Studio, put forward the idea of "exploring the path of national style". The slogan "Explore the road of national style" was put forward by Te Wei, the then director of Shanghai Mei Film Studio, marking the opening of the road of exploring the nationalized style of Chinese animation. This direction has been influencing Chinese animation for nearly 40 years, resulting in a series of animation works with Chinese characteristics, said director Wang Shuchen when talking about why he chose "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" as the subject of his animation:

"During the period when the 'Gang of Four' ruled the stage of literature and art, even 'The Greatest Showman' was banned, and many children were unaware of the existence of mythological stories. Some people, however, said that they were 'big poisonous weeds' whenever they heard of mythological stories. To solve this problem, we have to let them watch plays with better mythological stories and tell them that there are many wonderful things to see in our rich cultural heritage, thus it can serve to educate them. (Shuchen, 2019)"

In the 1970s, heroes were often portrayed as "big and tall", and Nezha's image had to fit the expectations of the public at the time. In the original movie, Nezha's provocation to kill the Night Stalker was changed to a scene in which he saves a young girl from being killed by the Night Stalker. The image of Nezha in the movie is a composite of a moral hero and a chivalrous hero, perfectly combining the idol worshipped by Chinese folklore with the image of a heroic figure from the Red Classics. Speaking about Nezha, Ma Hua said that he had the color of a tragic figure, standing up to the Dragon King to protect the people, representing the very people's

tenacious struggle against the forces of reaction, and that this spirit of defiance underscored the depth of the film at the time.

Nezha's revolt is a reflection of the return of the heroes who were expected by the people after the end of the Cultural Revolution to do away with the evils of the people. Like *The Palace of Heaven*, it not only embodies the national character of artistic creation in its presentation and story content, but also expresses the values and spirituality of the people of China at that time in its spiritual core. As Yan Dingxian said in his self-report on *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King*, "The reason why *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King* is successful is that its story is a national tradition, and its artistic expression is also a national tradition. The success of 'Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King' is because its story is a national tradition, its artistic expression is also a national tradition, and the spirit it expresses is also a national tradition. (Figure 101) "The planned economy of the time provided a relatively pure creative environment for creators, with no need to consider the commercialization and marketing of their works, which was the objective reason why Nezha became a national symbol that could be explored and experimented with. Yan Dingxian, the director of *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, said in an interview in *Film Life*, "It is difficult for a country, a nation, no matter what the variety of art is, to have a place in the world of animation if it doesn't have its own characteristics. (Figure 102)"



Figure 83 Yim Ting-Hsien on the set of "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King".

Source: Shanghai Fine Arts Film Museum, 1979.



Figure 84 Yim Ting-hsien's interview with Film Legends
Source: "The Legend of Movie", "Nezha in 1979", 2003.

Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King is both conservative and innovative in its choice of character archetypes. Traditional Chinese children's images are mostly white, fat and pink. According to researcher Bunwen, "Since the late Qing Dynasty, the artistic images of children in paintings or decorations on daily necessities are often fat, round, sweet, dull, vulgar and charming. The roots of this trend may lie in the chubby dolls on the old commercial Chinese New Year's Paintings, abstract drawings in old novels, and foreign old toys, abstract drawings on old novels, and the foreign girls in old toys (Buwen, 1980)." However, Nezha's styling was considered inappropriate to follow this traditional Chinese doll image, "Because these doll images were created to appeal to the hobbies of the feudal landlord class, and because they were commodities they had a broad base among the masses, and nowadays we think that it is this kind of image that the people like... ..not realizing that such fat-headed, snow-white, pink dolls will grow up to be big, shiny businessmen and bureaucrats This image has nothing to do with the working people, and if it does, it is the relationship between the exploiting and the exploited (Buwen, 1980)." This was seen at the time as an aesthetic confusion that needed to be "set right."

Zhang Ding, the image designer of Nezha, is a famous contemporary Chinese painter, cartoonist, muralist, calligrapher, arts and crafts artist, art educator, theorist, and founder of the design art of new China. As a great artist, Zhang Ding's life through the turbulent social changes, the liberation war, Zhang Ding through the current affairs cartoons with propaganda, with his brush in and out of the front line and the streets. After the establishment of new China, he completed a series of major design projects representing the national image such as the national emblem and the Chinese pavilion of the world exposition. In more than 70 years of artistic career, Zhang Ding has crossed many categories such as cartoons, Chinese New Year paintings, art design, animation films, decorative paintings, murals, Chinese paintings, calligraphy, art criticism, art education, etc., and with his abundant artistic passion and extraordinary artistic energy, Zhang Ding has spanned across the tensions between the classical and the modern (Figure 103) , the Oriental and the Occidental,

and the academy and the civil society, and has become a classic text for interpreting the history of Chinese art in the twentieth century (Ding, 1999).

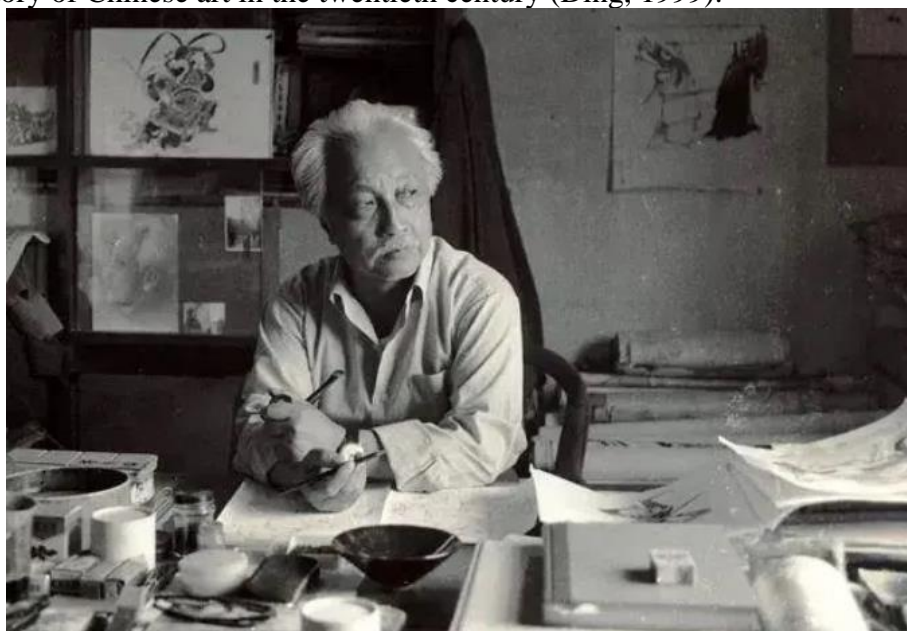


Figure 85 Zhang Ding designed the styling for the animated film Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King.
Source:Shanghai Fine Arts Film Museum, 1979.

In the spring of 1978, Zhang Ding was invited by the Shanghai art film studio, assumed China's first large-scale color widescreen animation film "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" of the art of the general design of the heavy responsibility. The then 61-year-old Zhang Ding accepted without hesitation (Figure 104).

However, time is very tight, this long one hour and two minutes of animation movie, must be completed in just two months. Zhang Ding carefully studied the script and the director's intention, set two character design principles: one is to respect the style of the animation script itself, the second is must have national characteristics. In the next stage of preparation, Zhang Ding not only in-depth study of Dunhuang, Yongle Palace and other places of mural paintings and rich folk painting resources, but also went to Qingdao coastal villages, personal experience of life by the sea, so as to blend the elements of ancient Chinese myths, to create a vivid sketching draft. After completing these meticulous preparations, Zhang Ding, despite the summer heat, worked with members of the filming team to polish the details of the character's modeling, injecting the character of Nezha with vivid vitality.

When Zhang Ding created his image of Nezha, he was reminded of the children of a seaside fishing village. He was so impressed by the children growing up amidst the waves and the wind that he described them as being like dark, skinny little elves. He hoped that Nezha would be a "robust, lively, witty, courageous, handsome, intelligent, thoughtful, emotional, and dignified image of a modern Chinese child." Although Zhang Ding's original vision of Nezha was not reflected in the final film, the image of the dark, skinny boy, influenced by the children of the seaside, can be

seen in his mural Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, created for the Capital Airport (Figure 113).



Figure 86 Zhang Ding (center) in the Capital International Airport mural "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" painting site
Source: The People's Artist Magazine Public, 2023

It is clear that artists of that period were still more or less controlled by political ideology. Director Yan Dingxian suggested that as the son of a military general, Nezha's family was well off, and there was nothing wrong with him being fat and white," and that the look of traditional New Year's Paintings could be used to show Nezha's whiteness and translucence, as well as his sparkling spirit, which would also meet the audience's aesthetic needs. Nezha's final form was no longer subject to ideological constraints, and the image of Nezha as a white, chubby man with sparkling eyes was born (Figure 105).



Figure 87 The first version of Nezha designed by Zhang Ding (left) and the final version of Nezha (right)
Source: The People's Artist Magazine Public, 2023

From the image of Nezha in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, it can be seen that whichever form of Nezha is used, it is either a continuation of a traditional visual image or a reproduction of an archetype of the surrounding life. They are all based on local expressions of China. The basis of their stylization is a visualization rooted in the local context. In terms of ethnicity of expression, "Nezha no longer has a Peking Opera face. Animation creators have been able to remove the "direct grafting of ethnic forms" and create the character's image through consideration of tradition and modernity, including the aesthetic expectations of the audience. In this sense, the ethnicity of Chinese animation can be inherited, can break the shackles of the initial form of reproduction of a new path different from the Disney or Japanese animation modeling, the formation of China's unique national symbols.

Mr. Chen Guangming thinks that over-emphasis on "nationalization" will put "shackles" on animation creation, and make the vision of animators become narrow and the selection of topics too limited. But what is "nationalization"? With the so-called "Chinese elements" or from the "traditional culture" is nationalization? In fact, there is no consensus on the definition of "nationalization" in the industry, and everyone is basically talking to themselves (Fu, 2017).

"Nationalization is a subject, nowadays many people don't study this thing enough," Mr. Pu Jiexiang thinks, "not only works like *The Greatest Harmony* are nationalized, not only ink paintings are nationalized, all things can serve me, nationalization is progressing with the times, now there is now nationalization." Mr. Pu Jiexiang, who is past his 80s and 90s, is not "old-fashioned", in his opinion, skyscrapers, computers and cell phones can also be the carrier of "nationalization" (Fu, 2017).

Some scholars have pointed out that the older generation of animators tend to be overly "attached" to the old creative concepts and methods, and adopt many "anachronistic" practices in the creation and teaching of the new era. Such a situation does exist, and is not uncommon even in foreign countries. Chang Guangxi was one of the old American filmmakers who first began to reflect on the concept of creation and actively faced commercialization, and in 1998, he wrote in an article: "Today, the situation of animation itself, as well as the audience's level, mentality, and appreciation habits, are very different from the glory days of the American Film Studio. In terms of creative concepts, we should not only inherit the innovative spirit of our predecessors in the pursuit of artistic elegance and dedication to the cause of Chinese animation, but also explore the new features and trends of today's animation market, so as to update our creative concepts. not only innovate on the concepts, he also has no problem with the ever-changing technical means. He is not only determined to innovate in his concept, but also has no fear of the ever-changing technical means. In the author's study with Chang Guangxi, he once said, "Although technology can never replace art, it must be recognized that the present technology is leading the development of animation and the market of animation. (Figure 106)" Yao Guanghua, director of Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio, said in the interview that "I think animation, a highly condensed expression of story, picture, and aesthetics, is like a poem in literature. (Figure 107)"



Figure 88 Study and interview between the author (right) and Chang Guangxi (left), original art designer of "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King" and director of Shanghai Film Studio.

Source: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng, 2022



Figure 89 Study and interview between the author (left) and Yao Guanghua, director of Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio (right)

Source: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng, 2022

2.2 Cartoon stars created by CCTV

Deng Xiaoping made great contributions to the development of socialist theories of literature and art with Chinese characteristics. He pointed out: "Literary and artistic work is to do everything in the interests of the people and to eulogize the entrepreneurs of the four modernizations (Kunyu, 1994)". This made animation creators start to think again about why animation is created and for whom it is created. With the advent of globalization, creators have to face the impact of foreign cultures, and it was in this socio-economic and cultural-political context that "The Legend Of Nezha" was produced in 2002. The production of the series was prompted by the fact that "in recent years, the famous Chinese folk myth Legends have been frequently adapted into animated films by Japan, but the Chinese, as the owners, have not allowed their folk culture to take root in the hearts of the next generation", which is why CCTV has "spent a great deal of effort to promote traditional Chinese myths in the scope of children's films and television. That's why CCTV is "putting a lot of effort into promoting traditional Chinese myths in children's movies and television, and changing the monopoly of Japanese animation on young people." The production of the film has a clear purpose: to strive to make a "nationalistic" "domestic animation excellence" "in the interpretation of the plot to the children and teenagers about the fine traditions of the Chinese nation, to promote the spirit of nationalism in the hearts of children and teenagers to help them establish the necessary justice. Children and teenagers to help them establish the belief that justice will prevail over evil and confidence. CCTV Youth Center Cai Zhijun said:

"Nezha" serves as a big background to enrich the relationship of the characters, designing a big space for Nezha's historical and mythological activities, and fully demonstrating the charisma of Nezha's character with a modern aesthetic perspective. It also injects some modern children's character into the traditional image of Nezha, so as to make the traditional myth reappear with a new splendor, and to portray Nezha as Nezha is a Chinese cartoon star with a combination of traditional Chinese culture and modern character.

In our creation, we realized that cartoonization is a powerful means to modernize the character. Whether it is historical characters, or mythical characters, after entering the cartoon, their character must be transformed into cartoonization, their character should be transformed from mythological character, historical character to cartoon character, which will bring pleasure to the children. In the past, some cartoons did not pay attention to the study of the nature of the cartoon itself, do not respect its unique expression of logic and language features, characterization is too realistic, lack of cartoon humor, wisdom, not give full play to the cartoon "a high degree of hypothetical" this feature, resulting in cartoon characters too monotonous, pale. (Zhijun, 2003)"

In the creation of The Legend Of Nezha, the creators have already begun to shape Nezha's image around the goal of "creating a cartoon star" rather than "a revolutionary hero of the people", and at the same time, using the "Nezha" as a rich backdrop not only provides Nezha with a wide space for historical and mythological activities, but also effectively presents Nezha's charisma through a modern aesthetic perspective. The Nezha" as a rich background not only provides Nezha with a wide space for historical and mythological activities, but also effectively demonstrates

Nezha's charisma through a modern aesthetic perspective. In order to bring a new luster to traditional myths, the creative team has injected modern children's character traits into the traditional image of Nezha, aiming to portray the character as a cartoon star with a blend of traditional Chinese culture and modern character traits. The aim is to portray Nezha as a cartoon star that blends traditional Chinese culture with modern character traits.

During the creative process, the creators emphasized cartooning as an effective means to modernize and give characterization to characters, whether they are historical or mythological, and once they are included in an animated film, their personalities have to be cartoonishly transformed to fit the character of the animated film and to bring pleasure to children. Creators criticized some previous cartoons for being overly realistic in characterization, lacking cartoonish humor and intelligence, and not taking full advantage of cartoons' "high degree of hypotheticality (Peipei, 2016)," which resulted in cartoon characters appearing monotonous and pale. It is firstly a spiritual product and secondly a material commodity, and he will make children, consciously or unconsciously, accept its lifestyle and ideology (Ou, 2007). As the three directors of the movie, Cai Zhijun, Chen Jiaqi, and Zhang Zhiqian, mentioned in their interviews:

Reporter: I've read that some of you think that "The Legend Of Nezha" is not as good as the movie version of "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King" that was made years ago, what do you guys think?

DIRECTOR: The theatrical version of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King was indeed an excellent production. In that film, two words were emphasized - "Resistance", whereas in our current production, "The Legend Of Nezha", we have added the "human touch" and made "The Legend Of Nezha" more entertaining. The Legend of Nezha" is entertaining.

Reporter: Since the "legend" is emphasized, has the character of Nezha changed compared to the past?

Director: The positioning of Nezha is very clear, that is, to create a cartoon hero with both traditional Chinese cultural character traits and a modern sense of the times, a cartoon idol that grows up with a group of children. The power of an idol is usually huge, and this is emphasized in foreign cartoons, while Chinese cartoons also have classic images, but there is still a great distance between them and idols.

Reporter: So as an iconic character, does Nezha also embody the characteristics of the times?

Directed by: Nezha is a household name and a young hero in folk Legends. In addition to maintaining Nezha's original ethnicity and classical nature, we have added many characteristics of modern children, such as the spirit of adventure, creativity, a strong sense of curiosity, teamwork, love, mutual assistance, and other things that reflect the glory of human nature.

Reporter: Is "The Legend Of Nezha" an animated film made purely for children?

DIRECTOR: We wanted the audience for The Legend Of Nezha to be a little more flexible, i.e. both primary and secondary school students will find something to appreciate in this movie. But it's really made for kids, which is directly related to the viewing needs of our 370 million children and teenagers.

Reporter: At present, there are many countries in the world have produced a lot of "adult animation", while in this area is still basically a blank, how do you see the difference between "children's animation" and "adult animation"? How do you see the difference between "children's animation" and "adult animation"?

Director: The most important difference between "children's animation" and "adult animation" is that, functionally speaking, "children's animation" emphasizes more on aesthetic guidance on the basis of entertainment and appreciation. In the creation of "The Legend Of Nezha", we have always followed the two principles insisted by CCTV, one is that the work should serve the audience, and the other is that the work should have certain aesthetic guidance.

Reporter: Has The Legend Of Nezha borrowed from overseas excellent animation works in terms of character modeling and scene design? What is the principle of such borrowing?

DIRECTOR: Effective borrowing is one of the methods in art creation, and domestic animation is in the stage of learning. However, we still keep many things of our own nation in the art design of this film, such as the facialized style of the national art of Beijing opera (Chen, 2004)."

It can be seen that in portraying the character of Nezha, the creators were deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture, as well as by the values and aesthetics of modern society. By positioning Nezha as a cartoon hero with both traditional Chinese cultural traits and a modern sense of the times, the creators are actually interacting with society and culture in an attempt to find a characterization that is both traditional and resonant with modern audiences. In this process, the re-creation of Nezha's image is not only a modern interpretation of a traditional myth, but also a reflection of modern social values and children's needs.

By incorporating the attributes of modern children - such as adventurousness, creativity, curiosity, teamwork, love and mutual support - into the character of Nezha, the creators have modernized and reinvented the traditional mythological character. This process reflects how the creators have redefined the symbol of Nezha through the process of "meaning construction" in the theory of symbolic interaction, so that it not only retains its original ethnicity and classical character, but also adds new elements that resonate with modern audiences. The principles of "serving the audience" and "aesthetic guidance" mentioned by the director reflect the process of negotiating meaning in the theory of symbolic interaction. Through the re-creation of Nezha's image and story, the creators not only responded to the audience's expectations and needs, but also attempted to guide the formation of the public's aesthetics and values. In this process, animation works become a field of interaction between creators and viewers, in which each reinvention of Nezha's image is a renegotiation and co-creation of symbolic meaning.

2.3 Self-indulgence of cyberflashers

Around 2010, network animation began to rise, Japan's animation culture has had a profound impact on China, "content first", "audience first" concept above all, this period of animation creators have long since broken away from the constraints of the Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio, CCTV, as a generation growing up in ACG culture, network era creators began to challenge the tradition in their own way, free to create, "BadJokes" director Lu Hengyu is one of the representatives, and many early

well-known network animation, Lu Hengyu was also a "flash", that is, the use of flash animation software. Like many famous web animators in the early days, Lu Hengyu was also a "flashcaster", i.e. an independent animator who used flash animation software to create animations and publish them on the internet. In an interview with the self-publishing media "Animation Academic Party", Lu Hengyu mentioned how they felt when they first saw the cartoon of "BadJokes" (Figure 108):

"We (Lu Hengyu and Li Shujie) read the (BadJokes) manga before we did the animation, and our reaction was 'Hahahahahahaha, psycho manga! It's a good thing we didn't turn it into an anime, otherwise the director would be dead.' I didn't realize that a year later someone would approach us and say should we adapt this into an anime ah?" (Academic, 2022)"



Figure 90 Interview with BadJokes directors Lu Hengyu (left) and Li Shujie (right) by self-published "Anime Academic Party".

Source: https://acg.sohu.com/a/612845611_482993, 2022

The success of BadJokes did not come from careful planning, but was a decision with great implementation possibilities made by the animation platform "Yumeki" after examining its own resources and conditions. Faced with a lack of funds and the challenge of being unable to afford the production costs of a full-length drama, the platform chose to adapt BadJokes, a cartoon that is short in length, has a light-hearted spoof style, and has gained wide popularity on the site. Yang Lu, the founder of Arigatou, recalls: "We were unable to produce sophisticated animation works lacked a professional team and budgetary support, and our boss did not have confidence in us. Faced with this situation, we decided to produce a low-cost, small-scale and streamlined project, so I thought of utilizing the Flash animation technology I had learned." With a budget of tens of thousands of dollars, the animation project BadJokes was launched with the attitude of "try to make an episode and see", bringing together creative forces from the three major subcultures of web comics, web animation and web dubbing, who eventually "played" to produce a landmark project. In an interview, Huang Jung-ji, the voice of Nezha's father Li Jing, said that the movie was a landmark work:

"That's like what Lou said, 'playing'. Because at that time did not expect to be able to do what kind of, how the future market can be. I think it's easy to run into an interesting thing everyone is holding 'play a little bit' (mentality) even 'try a little' mentality is not I don't even think I'm going to try it out. Because I couldn't even think of a second episode at that point. (Academic, 2022)"

After the animation aired, the "BadJokes" microblogging three hours retweeted more than 10,000, two weeks the whole network hit more than 100 million, in many portals, social media and video platforms of the topic rankings in the forefront, in the animation, manga lovers circle sparked a wide range of discussions, and soon attracted the major Internet companies to cooperate with the invitation, Taiwan singer Jay Chou also participated in the voice of the "BadJokes" (Figure 109).



Figure 91 Jay Chou Involved in 'BadJokes' Voice-Over

Source: BadJokes Movie and TV Clips

The animation of BadJokes is not refined, but the depth of fandom and cyberculture that Lu Hengyu and Li Shujie have brought to the forefront has firmly captured the psyche of young viewers: there is no matronly background padding, no stereotypical characterization - instead, there are fast-paced lines and reversals, high-intensity spoofs of classics and relentless trolling segments. Instead, there are fast-paced lines and reversals, high-intensity spoofs of the classics, and relentless gags.

"BadJokes" does not convey any profound ideas, it is more of a kind of flirtation and entertainment, collecting countless funny moments in life, and deconstructing and re-constructing the independent spiritual realm of young netizens through the method of "trolling". In an interview with an academic party in 2017, Lu Hengyu described his creative philosophy in this way:

"We don't have particularly great suffering in our lives, nor do we feel that the world is so bad. Our expression might be like, I've got a funny thing, or a particularly hooky story to tell you, and if it makes you laugh, or daydream about hearing the back story, we feel particularly satisfied. (Academic, 2022) (Figure 110)"



Figure 92 [Bilibili Interview] Episode 6: Exclusive Interview with director Lu Hengyu and Li Shujie of the animated version of "Town Soul Street"

Source: https://www.bilibili.com/video/av8394498/?vd_source=2c8bf1a9bc75c54afc0ef161c59fb193, 2017

"BadJokes" cartoon editor-in-chief and animation supervisor Yang Lu told in an interview, ten years later and then look back, that grassroots era, although the lack of standard processes and experience, but around the "BadJokes" project, the kind of smell between the team members, the goal of a high degree of unanimity, full of freedom and creative passion for the state of her so far is unforgettable: "that There were no rules at that time, and even they didn't want to make rules, they just wanted to make BadJokes the best Old Lu wasn't afraid, and we weren't afraid, and the boss said he could get the funds to do it." In Yang Lu's opinion, the company's up and down that year, "dare to think, dare to do" "self-indulgence" and fast and efficient state of achievement of the film.

2.4 Young attitudes of contemporary directors

In *Nezha Reborn*, Li Yunxiang is a mortal who is reborn as Nezha's spirit 3,000 years after he killed himself, and is no longer Nezha's child spirit body with its innate powers and magic treasures, but a young man from the lower class living in the city of East China Sea who has lost his mythological aura. The character's form, manner of speaking, and clothing all have a strong modern flavor, but his character image design incorporates traditional Chinese aesthetic features, with classical temperament of the Danfeng eyes, wearing a metallic mecha suit before the battle, which is designed based on ancient armor, and the choice of Nezha's representative color, red, with the combination of classical and modern design ingenuity. Zhao Ji, director of the film, said in an interview:

" The first thing to consider is that he is both an ancient Nezha and a modern-day biker boy. How to find a combination of both attributes in one person at the same time without making people feel weird was a very important direction of thinking

when we set out to polish the character. First of all, it seemed easier to be a modern man and a cool biker boy, so we made dozens of different versions of the handsome and cool biker boy. The traditional Nezha look has two buns on the head, which is a more classical look, but you can't have a modern biker boy with two buns on his head, that would be too weird. However, we wanted to keep a visual point, so we decided to go for an upgrade and chose the Nezha look with one bun. Nowadays, young people wear pigtails on their heads, so we used the bun as a starting point for the design... When we think of classic Chinese style, we think of flowing sashes and loose hair, so we thought of making the bun at the back of Nezha look like a flame, a bit loose and flowing upwards. You can see that Nezha's hair buns are not straight or collapsed, but rather flaming and flowing. Many viewers won't find this style very Chinese at first glance, but it's because of this little detail that will increase the audience's connection to traditional culture.

The next step was to think about how to add other classical Chinese elements to Nezha, and how to make people feel that this element is related to Nezha. I mentioned the phoenix eyes earlier, and we've tried many different kinds of phoenix eyes, such as whether they should be upward or flat. In terms of Nezha's personality, the character is very outspoken and even a little bit violent, which is an attribute of Nezha's characterization. This is an attribute of Nezha's original characterization. As the character has a fiery temper, we wanted him to have an angry look, so we made his eyebrows and eyes a bit more downward, and added the phoenix eyes to give him a more heroic appearance. (Evonne, water, & Xin, 2021)"

It can be seen that Zhao Ji first realized the need for a deeper understanding of Nezha's traditional symbolism and potential significance in contemporary culture when creating his work. This process involved a great deal of symbolic unraveling and reinterpretation, as the creator modernized the image of Nezha through the study of classical texts, works of art, and the cultural preferences of modern audiences. This in-depth understanding of the character is in fact a "dialogue" with Nezha, through which the creators were able to explore and enhance the character's multidimensional qualities, preserving its traditional flavor while incorporating modern elements.

During the design process, the interaction between the creator and Nezha is reflected in the constant experimentation and adaptation of the symbols. For example, the redesign of the bun on Nezha's head is both a respect for traditional symbols and an adaptation to modern aesthetics. This design process is in fact a silent dialog between the creator and the character of Nezha, through which the creator continuously adjusts and refines the expression of the symbols in order to achieve the goal of conveying traditional culture and echoing modern aesthetics at the same time. This interaction is not only reflected in the visual symbols, but also in the characterization of the character, such as the design of the Danfeng eyes to emphasize Nezha's heroism and character traits.

The interaction between the creators and Nezha is virtually open-ended, not just within the creative team, but also with potential viewers. Through the presentation of designs, proof of concepts, or social media interactions, creators are able to gather audience feedback on the new image of Nezha, which in turn is reinterpreted and utilized to further tweak and refine the character's design. Interaction in this context refers to how the design team selects and adapts symbols based on their understanding of the target audience, and how the audience interprets and reacts to

these symbols. The many attempts and adjustments made to the shape of Nezha's eyes (Danfeng Eyes) during the design process, as well as the lowering of his eyebrows to show the character's anger, were all based on an in-depth understanding of the character's personality traits and how to make these traits resonate with the audience through visual elements.

In addition, Li Yunxiang's armor and locomotive into the steampunk elements, armor borrowed from the Marvel Iron Man and classical Chinese armor to create, the weapons for the fire point gun and finally recovered the mixed sky damask, the fire point gun is also changed into a modern tool for the manufacture of the weapons, presenting a fusion of multi-cultural visual image of the character, the archetypal myths into the modernity of the sci-fi elements, the protagonist of this character portrayal of the character must be to face the contemporary development of Internet technology with the youth audience. the development of the youth audience with the development of network technology, Nezha's armor Zhao Ji said:

"In the movie, Nezha has a suit of steel armor, and Marvel's Iron Man also wears a suit of armor. Although they are all modern things, how can we add some traditional aesthetic elements to Nezha's armor? We researched the armor of various ancient dynasties, and we also frequently looked up information on armor when working on other characters. Li Yunxiang's armor was built according to classical Chinese armor, with all the details of classical armor structure, and the means of production adopting modern construction techniques. This is our attempt to make the Chinese elements modern when doing the character of Nezha (Evonne et al., 2021)."

In the process of designing Nezha's armor, Zhao Ji referred to Marvel's Iron Man, and we can see that Li Yunxiang's armor borrows from it in terms of visual expression, but all of the details and structures are derived from classical armor, and the production methods use modern technology and techniques. This design strategy reflects a deep symbolic interaction, in which the creator does not merely "blend" traditional and modern elements on a superficial level, but rather understands and reshapes them on a deeper level, so that they retain their cultural roots and demonstrate innovation. Nezha's armor design reflects the dynamic recreation of symbols and multifaceted interaction. Not only did the creators incorporate traditional cultural symbols into modern character design by studying and reinventing them, they also engaged in a broader process of cultural interaction by anticipating and responding to audience feedback. This process not only promotes the transmission and innovation of cultural traditions, but also deepens the audience's understanding and recognition of the connection between tradition and modernity. In an interview with the founder of Jiafeng Animation Group, who participated in Nezha Reborn, the author said, "We do what the audience likes to see, and we do what is popular in the society, and successful people are always like this (Figure 111). In an interview with the author, the screenwriter, who had been involved in the design of Nezha's script, said, "In fact, the audience is only familiar with a few episodes, and the audience is not fully aware of how these episodes are connected, which gives the animation room for play (Figure 112)." To summarize the director's approach to Nezha's creation, "The punk of the new Nezha represents the attitudes of our young people (Figure 120). attitude of our young people (Figure 113)" (Zhao, 2002).



Figure 93 'Nezha Reborn' Director Zhao Ji Interviewed by Himalaya
Source: <https://www.ximalaya.com/sound/382259026>, 2023



Figure 94 Interview with the founder of Dandong Jiafeng Animation Group ("Nezha Reborn" special effects production)
Source: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng, 2023



Figure 95 Interview with the writer who wrote the script for Nezha's animation.
Source: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng, 2023

Part III Audience Interaction with Nezha

George Herbert Mead proposed that "the meaning of symbols is formed in social interaction, and the meaning of symbols is dynamic and can be modified and adjusted in different interactions (Mead, 2018)", which means that the meaning of the symbol of Nezha (including its image, character kernel, and its relationship with other characters, etc.) is not fixed and unchanging, but rather it is formed and developed in the constant interaction between the creator and the audience. The audience participates in this interactive process through viewing, discussing, commenting, and other behaviors, which together construct and reshape the social meaning of the symbol of Nezha.

The image of Nezha has been meticulously reimagined and innovatively interpreted in the world of animation, and has succeeded in inspiring widespread interest and deep affection among contemporary young people. With its unique design style, the animated character of Nezha skillfully blends the spirit of ancient oriental myths with modern cultural elements, giving it a stronger sense of modernity and affinity. More notably, the challenges and extraordinary destiny of Nezha in the animation triggered deep emotional resonance among viewers.

A number of scholars have already explored the field of movie review text sentiment analysis in depth, including Zhang Qilin, who used sentiment analysis in reviews to reveal user preferences by combining movie reviews with personalized recommendations (Lin & Qilin, 2017). Shangqian Zhang and Zhiyi Liu, in their study "Fine-grained Sentiment Analysis of Movie Reviews Based on Key Features", started from two dimensions, ontological features and sentiment features, and conducted an in-depth analysis of movie reviews (Shangqian & Zhiyi, 2022). Based on the inheritance of the results of previous researchers, this study further refined the categories of "ontological features" into "external image" and "character core", and combined emotional features with movie review ratings, aiming at the analysis of movie reviews from two dimensions. The combination of emotional characteristics and movie review ratings aims to deepen the audience's common construction of Nezha's animated image. Through the construction of such categories, this chapter will analyze the audience's perception of Nezha's animated image from three perspectives: external image, character core, and emotional tendency, in order to reveal the complex interactions and multi-level meanings of Nezha's symbols in the modern society, and to show the potential of the theory of symbolic interactions in analyzing modern media and cultural phenomena.

3.1 Analysis of the Audience's Perception of Nezha's External Image

Given the inherently subjective nature of film review texts, it is often impossible for a single review to comprehensively cover all evaluation indicators. Therefore, when applying film review texts to analyze the communication effects of Nezha's image in this study, manual screening was necessary to ensure the high relevance of the selected samples. When exploring the external image of Nezha, the study carefully divided the scope of analysis into three dimensions: appearance, voice and gender. The total number of movie review texts collected for this study is 914. Of these, 549 were devoted to the perception of Nezha's appearance, 58 to the perception of Nezha's voice, and 44 to the perception of Nezha's gender. It is worth noting that there is a

certain amount of crossover between these categories, so these numbers cannot be viewed as simply cumulative.

Table 9 List of movie review text shape perceptions

Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng, 2024

Shape Movie Review Characteristics	Number (articles)	percentage
child	87	15.80%
juvenile	72	13.10%
youthful years	5	0.90%
pony head	53	9.60%
lit. have three heads and six arms	58	10.50%
Red rifle, wind and fire wheel	44	8.00%
dark circle	29	5.30%
undergarment covering the chest and abdomen	22	4.00%
King Kong Barbie	15	2.70%
model	21	3.80%
have a strong affection for (slang)	116	21.10%
Snake Charmer (Netflix face)	24	4.30%
(sth. or sb) else	5	0.90%

According to the table above (Table 9), a total of 549 audience reviews dealt with Nezha's appearance. Among them, the audience's perceptions of Nezha's appearance still favored his traditional image, especially focusing on the characteristics of "child", "young" and "cute". The audience's perception of Nezha's appearance still favors his traditional image, especially focusing on the characteristics of "child", "teenager" and "cute". With 21.1% of the total, "cute" has become a persistent and central theme in Nezha's image, while "child" and "teenager" reflect the audience's perception of Nezha, with 15.8% and 13.1% of the total respectively. The proportions of "children" and "teenagers", at 15.8% and 13.1% respectively, reflect the fact that viewers' perceptions of Nezha are dominated by the image of a child, while the image of Nezha as a teenager is gradually being opened up, signaling a transition to maturity. In addition, the classic elements of Nezha's image, such as the "pill head", the "three heads and six arms" and the "red tasseled spear and wind and fire wheels", continue to form an important part of viewers' perceptions of Nezha. Emerging features such as "black eye circles" and "red bib" accounted for 5.3% and 4.0% respectively, indicating that new symbols introduced by modern works such as Birth of the Demon Child have gradually become part of the audience's perception of Nezha's external image. This indicates that new symbols introduced by modern works such as Birth of the Demon Child have gradually become an important part of the audience's perception of Nezha's external image. These emerging image labels reflect the fact that the image of Nezha has evolved over time, enriching the connotation of Nezha as a traditional cultural symbol.

Table 10 List of sound perceptions of movie review texts Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng,2023

sound characterization	Number (articles)	percentage
children's voice	38	65.50%
mellifluous sound	7	12.10%
juvenile tone	13	22.40%
(grand) total	58	100%

As can be seen from the table above (Table 10), there were 58 reviews related to Nezha's voice, a relatively small number, reflecting the relatively small influence of voice in the audience's perception of Nezha's image. Audiences' perception of Nezha's voice was not greatly divided, with children's voices still predominating, with "children's voices" accounting for 65.5% of the total, and "teenage voices" accounting for 22.4%. "Juvenile voices" accounted for 22.4%. Viewers' perception of Nezha's image is still dominated by children's voices, but they have gradually begun to accept juvenile images of Nezha, while "cute girls" accounted for 12.1%, mainly due to the impression of the modern image of Nezha.

Table 11 List of Gender Perceptions of Movie Review Texts Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng,2024

distinguishing between the sexes	Number of movie reviews (articles)	percentage
a male	7	15.90%
females	11	25.00%
unisex	26	59.10%
(grand) total	44	100%

As seen in the above data (Table 11), there were 44 movie reviews that dealt with Nezha's gender, and although the sample size was relatively small, 26 of these reviews, or 59.1%, were from a "neutral" perspective, which accounted for the majority of the reviews. This blurring of gender perceptions with a predominantly neutral perspective not only demonstrates the audience's open understanding of Nezha's gender identity, but also reflects the fact that there is still room for exploration in the perception of Nezha's image. Overall, viewers' perceptions of Nezha's external image focused mainly on his physical appearance, with relatively little attention paid to his voice and gender. In terms of overall external image perception, viewers still preferred the traditional image of Nezha, with limited conflict with the image presented in the animation work. Although emerging image perception characteristics have had a certain impact on the image perception of Nezha, they have not yet formed the mainstream.

Viewers' perceptions of the image of Nezha are mainly centered on the traditional images of "children" and "teenagers", which reflects the audience's wide recognition of and familiarity with the image of Nezha presented in animation works. This tendency shows the audience's positive attitude towards the preservation and transmission of traditional culture. Although traditional images continue to dominate, viewers were observed to embrace emerging image features, such as "black eyes" and

"red belly pockets," reflecting a growing acceptance of image innovation and diversity. The acceptance of these new images demonstrates the audience's openness to innovation and change. The classic elements of Nezha's image, such as the "pill head", "three heads and six arms", and "red spear and wind and fire wheels", still form the core of the audience's perception of Nezha's image, suggesting that the persistence of the classic image is important to the audience. This shows that the persistence of the classic image has a profound influence on the audience's perception. The audience's perception of classical elements reflects their recognition and importance of cultural memory and traditional symbols.

Taken together, the audience's perception of the image of Nezha reflects their identification with traditional culture, their acceptance of innovation and change, and the importance they place on classical elements. Audiences' identification with the traditional image indicates their emotional connection to traditional culture and their sense of cultural identity. Meanwhile, the acceptance of emerging images and the emphasis on classical elements indicate the audience's concern for diversity and cultural heritage. These situations reflect the audience's pluralistic understanding and aesthetic demand for image symbols, as well as their openness to cultural creativity.

3.2 Analysis of the Audience's Perception of Nezha's Character Kernel

Within the framework of Zhang Shangqian and Liu Zhiyi's research, movie review texts are meticulously categorized into two main categories: ontological features and emotional features. Drawing on this approach, this study further refines the scope of analysis into the two main dimensions of external image and character core, taking into account the actual observed characteristics of Nezha's image. In exploring the core perception of the character, this study has successfully constructed a set of three-level indicator system by screening and refining the keywords that appear more frequently in the movie reviews. Based on the specific content and attributes of these tertiary indicators, secondary indicators were further categorized: character identity, character personality, character relationship and values. This categorization method allows for a more refined and in-depth analysis of audience perceptions of Nezha's animated image, thus permitting us to interpret and understand audience perceptions in greater detail.

Eventually, these secondary indicators were synthesized and summarized to form a comprehensive perception of the characters' cores. By finely organizing and analyzing the frequently occurring vocabulary in the film reviews, we obtained character kernels covering character identity (e.g., hero, magic child, chivalrous, student, goblin), character traits (including hot-bloodedness, truthfulness, darkness, righteousness, arrogance, naiveté, sensitivity, and bravery, etc.), character relationships (family, friendship, and mentor and disciple, respectively), and values (e.g., antipatriarchalism, anti-destiny, and self-identity) Perceptual Indicators. In the case of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, for example, the positive evaluation keywords covered anti-feudalism, rebellion, valor, chivalry, defiance of authority, and self-sacrifice, while the negative evaluation included terms such as feudalism, authority, and aggression. In addition, neutral terms such as Nezha, child, children, adolescents and parents were used in the movie reviews, which formed the basis of the analysis, thus refining the secondary indicators of character identity, characterization, character relationships and values, and comprehensively constructing a deep kernel perception of Nezha's animated image.

In summary, this study summarizes the high-frequency words in the audience's movie reviews, forms a three-level index system, and captures the key words in the audience's comments using word frequency analysis. Based on the classification and organization of these high-frequency words in relation to the perception of the character's kernel, this study reveals the audience's deeper understanding and cognition of the animated image of Nezha. High-frequency words, i.e. words that appear more frequently in a particular text or context, in this study refer specifically to those key words that appear repeatedly in audience comments on the character of Nezha, and these words have an indispensable analytical value in analyzing how the audience perceives the core attributes of the character of Nezha. By carefully categorizing and sorting out the nature and frequency of these high-frequency words, as well as the emotional tendencies they imply, this study provides a detailed window of observation for exploring the perception of Nezha's character. Through this method, the most frequently used and important words in audience comments can be identified, providing an important basis for an in-depth understanding of the public's views and feelings towards the core attributes of the Nezha character. Therefore, high-frequency vocabulary analysis plays a key role in grasping viewers' core perceptions and attitudes towards the character of Nezha. By comprehensively analyzing the nature, frequency, and affective tendencies of these vocabulary words, this study provides insight into viewers' perceptions and evaluations of the core of the character of Nezha from a microcosmic perspective.

Table 12 High-frequency Vocabulary for Movie Reviews of Nezha's Animation Works Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng,2023

Name of the work	interpretative tendency	Movie Review High Frequency Words
Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King (1979)	positively	Fighting for the people, anti-feudalism, bravery, chivalry, defiance of power, self-sacrifice, filial piety, resistance, traditional arts
	the negative side	feudalistic
	unisex	Child, Teenager, Parent, Neutral, Li Jing, Role
The Legend Of Nezha (2003)	positively	Heroic, Growing Up, Classic, Hot Blooded, Tear Jerker, Rise Above, Mighty, Childhood, Favorite, Brave
	the negative side	Disney style
	unisex	Windjammer, Little Buddy, Generations, Maharaja, Picturesque, Passing, Buddy, Myths
BadJokes (2013)	positively	Funny, creative, cool, amazing, cute girl
	the negative side	Not funny, parody, spoof, boring, superficial.
	unisex	Festivus, Trolling, Respect, Satire, Demonic, Internet
Birth of the Demon Child (2019)	positively	Adorable, Heroic, Defying Fate, Friendship, Reconciliation, Delightful, Stunning, Family, Mythic, Recognition, Returning
	the negative side	Prejudice, zombies, mojo, problems, parody, ugliness, selfishness
	unisex	Relationships, Black Eyes, Punk, Spirit, Kernel, Destiny, Parents, Values, Kernel, Shape, Paternity
Nezha Reborn	positively	Heroic Rescue, Subversive, Soul, Special Effects
	the negative side	Darkness, Netflix, Facebook, punks, low quality, Netflix,

(2021).		scumbags, objectifying women
	unisex	Punk, dialect, class, youth, protagonist, father, wasteland, capital

From the above table (Table 12), it can be seen that from the lexical distribution of high-frequency reviews, viewers' interpretation of Nezha is more neutral. From the perspective of ephemerality, the earlier the release time, the more positive interpretations of the works, with few negative interpretations, and the later the release time, the more negative interpretations of the works, and the two levels of reviews appear to have a two-tiered split, but on the whole, the viewers' interpretations of the works are more positive than negative, but still tend to be good. But in general, audiences were more positive than negative about these works, and audiences' interpretations of Nezha fluctuated from work to work, but still tended to be favorable.

An analysis of the high-frequency words for the character of Nezha in each work shows that Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King focuses on anti-feudalism and father-son relationships, with his father, Li Jing, and affection as central themes. The Legend Of Nezha depicts a sunny, childlike Nezha, emphasizing character. BadJokes received mixed reviews for its subversive look and nonsensical plot. In Birth of the Demon Child, the audience's perception of Nezha's story is consistent with the animated text, and there is a clear shift in the transmission of values, with the discussion of the main conflict shifting from patriarchal feudalism to the pursuit of one's own destiny, and the phrase "my destiny is up to me, not to God" becoming a recurring keyword in the text, attributed to Nezha's character. "My destiny is my own" has become a recurring keyword in the texts of movie reviews, which is categorized under the category of anti-destiny theory of values. In Nezha Reborn, the audience's perception of Nezha's character core is less, and their attention is mainly focused on the revolutionary image of Nezha. It is worth noting that in Nezha Reborn, the frequency of derogatory words increases and that of positive words decreases, so the audience's perception of Nezha's character core is contradictory, and there are many pairs of words that constitute a contrast between positive and negative meanings. The author believes that this may be due to the fact that in Nezha Reborn, there is a major breakthrough in the construction of Nezha's image, and the background of the story is completely different from that of past Nezha works, which is not recognized by the audience.

3.2.1 Popular classic symbols

By distributing keywords about Nezha's image in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, it can be clearly seen that the audience's description of Nezha's image is highly consistent with the portrayal of Nezha in the film, and there is little controversy, focusing mainly on anti-feudal and anti-patriarchal discussions, which notably recognizes the film's interpretation of Nezha's image. Keywords such as "culture", "filial piety", "suicide" and "authority" appeared frequently in the comments, "patricide" and "fine art", reflecting the audience's deep understanding of and focus on the core of the story and its themes in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King. In particular, the terms "culture", "filial piety", "authority" and "patricide", which are all categorized under the values category, indicate that the viewers have a deep understanding of the film's message. These terms are all categorized as values, indicating that the audience pays great attention to the values

conveyed by the film. In particular, the positive comments on the film's challenge to the traditional patriarchal structure suggest that Nezha's behavior of confronting patriarchal authority is still appreciated even today, and that his values are not outdated. Audience comments reflected that the film not only demonstrates the importance of filial piety in traditional Chinese culture, but also that Nezha's love and filial piety to his father, Li Jing, exemplifies traditional virtues and family values. However, when faced with the choice between following his father's orders and following his own personal beliefs, Nezha chooses the latter and kills himself to save his father, a symbolic act of "spiritual patricide" that stimulates the audience to discuss and reflect on whether or not one should obey authority and tradition, or pursue one's own personal beliefs and freedoms. The art design and visual presentation of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King were also highly praised by the audience, especially the in-depth portrayal of Nezha, which revealed a more realistic, three-dimensional and human image of Nezha. Overall, "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" has won the hearts of a wide range of viewers for its artistry and depth in portraying Nezha and exploring his culture and values.

Recalling that when the film was first produced, many people internationally saw "Nezha's defeat of the four evil dragon kings" as a symbol of China's crushing of the counter-revolutionary "Gang of Four"⁶, Fu Guangchao said in an interview with Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King's Yan Dingxian that "Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" is the first film of its kind in China. Against Dragon King" by Yan Dingxian:

"FU Guangchao: From the documents that remain at that time, they (Miyazaki Hayao, Takahata and Tezuka Osamu) admired Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King. But they associated the Dragon King in Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King with the Gang of Four.

Yan Dingxian: A lot of people feel that the Four Dragons of the Sea is the "Gang of Four," but actually we don't have that idea in our heads at all."

In fact, Hayao Miyazaki's and Takahata's interpretation of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King is the best example of the audience's interaction with Nezha, as their commentary and understanding of the film goes completely beyond the creator's intention, which makes the meaning of Nezha "slide" (Figure 127). and also the construction and change of the meaning of Nezha through the audience's interaction with Nezha.

⁶ The "Gang of Four" refers to the gang formed by Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, Jiang Qing and Yao Wen yuan during the Cultural Revolution. The crushing of the Gang of Four was a historic victory, and the decade of the Cultural Revolution came to an end.



Figure 96 Man Lai Ming (left) with Osamu Tezuka (right)

Source: <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/523146700>, 1985

3.2.2 Widely sung childhood memories

By distributing the keywords about Nezha's image in *The Legend Of Nezha*, we can clearly see that viewers frequently use positive words such as "hero", "blood", "growth", "memories", "myth", "tear-jerker", etc., while at the same time, the audience's evaluation of *The Legend Of Nezha* is also very positive and emotional. We can clearly see that viewers frequently use positive words such as "hero", "hot blooded", "growth", "memories", "myth" and "tear-jerking" when evaluating "The Legend Of Nezha". At the same time, neutral words such as "buddy" and "firecracker" are also widely mentioned. Among them, "hero" and "wind turbine" are categorized as character identities, and "hot-blooded" and "growing up" are reflected as character traits. "hot-blooded" and "growing up" reflect the character's personality, while "sidekick" relates to the relationship between the characters; this suggests that the audience's interpretation of *The Legend Of Nezha* focuses on the character's qualities, and sees Nezha as a heroic sidekick full of hot-bloodedness in the process of growing up. The popularity of *The Legend Of Nezha*'s theme song "Little Nezha, the Hero of Youth" has also contributed to the spread of Nezha's image and memory to a large extent.

These keywords not only express the audience's wide recognition and affection for the image of Nezha in the film, but also the majority of the audience's view that Nezha is a growing hero with courage, a sense of justice and a sense of responsibility to save the world. At the same time, by associating Nezha with the myth of Legends, viewers further emphasized the deep historical and cultural heritage of Nezha's image. The frequent occurrence of the word "memories" also reflects the fact that many viewers associate *The Legend Of Nezha* with their own emotional experiences and fond memories, and consider the film to be a symbol of an unforgettable experience in their lives, reflecting the special status and far-reaching impact of the film in the hearts of viewers.

Through its positive portrayal of Nezha's animated image and strong audience recognition, "The Legend Of Nezha" demonstrates its remarkable achievements in cultural communication and social impact.

3.2.3 Humorous Deconstruction of the Web in Miniature

By analyzing the high-frequency words in the reviews of BadJokes, it is possible to reveal the audience's overall feelings and evaluations of the work. Positive words such as "funny", "creative", "cool", "amazing" and "cute girl" express positive audience evaluations of the series, emphasizing the success of the work in terms of humor, innovation, visual presentation, and character appeal. These terms reflect the fact that the work has won viewers' love and recognition for its unique sense of humor, innovative plot ideas, appealing visual style and character designs.

Negative terms include "unfunny", "parody", "spoof", "boring" and "superficial", revealing a critical perspective of some viewers who believe that certain content may lack originality, rely too much on parody or spoof, or fail to explore deeper themes. "superficial", revealing the critical perspective of some viewers, who believe that certain content may lack originality, rely too much on parodies or spoofs, or be shallow and fail to explore deeper themes. This suggests that despite the popularity of BadJokes amongst the general public, there is a certain amount of controversy, particularly in terms of the originality and depth of the content.

Neutral words such as "modesty", "troll", "respect" and "irony", show another perspective on the character of the work and its acceptance by the audience. These terms point to the unique ways in which the works deal with their themes and contents, such as reflecting social phenomena through satire and trolling, as well as attempts to innovate while respecting the original works. Meanwhile, the terms highlight the rootedness of the work in network culture and network humor, indicating that BadJokes captures and reflects the cultural characteristics of the network era and the preferences of young viewers.

Taken together, BadJokes has succeeded in attracting the attention and affection of a wide audience through its humorous and witty content, creative presentation and clever integration of contemporary network culture. Although the work has faced some negative evaluations, mainly focusing on originality and depth of content, the positive reactions and the use of neutral terms reveal its wide recognition in terms of cultural communication and entertainment value. In addition, the analysis of these high-frequency words also reveals the audience's complex views on the balance between innovation and tradition, humor and criticism, reflecting the modern audience's diversified needs and aesthetic standards for content.

3.2.4 Social parables to break down prejudices

Among the high-frequency words in the reviews of BadJokes, "black eyes", "spirit", "rebellion" and "subversion" emerged as the most frequent words. "Black Eyes", "Spirit", "Rebellion" and "Subversion" surfaced as high-frequency words, highlighting the audience's notable interest in the theme of Nezha's refreshed image and challenging destiny. In addition, "new era", "prejudice" and "friendship" emerged as sub-high-frequency words, further mapping the audience's in-depth exploration of the film's values when analyzing the character's core. In particular, "spirituality", "rebellion", "subversion" and "prejudice" are included in the values category, revealing the audience's deep understanding of the movie's values in describing the characters. These terms, especially "spirituality", "rebellion", "subversion" and "prejudice", are all included in the category of values, revealing that the audience pays

close attention to the social realities and values explored in the movie when describing Nezha's perceptions in *Birth of the Demon Child*. Meanwhile, terms such as "relationship" and "family" emphasize that character relationship is a key aspect of the audience's perception of Nezha's image, while "new era" reflects the audience's expectation that the film reflects contemporary characteristics and spiritual pursuits. The term "new era" reflects the audience's expectation for the movie to reflect contemporary characteristics and spiritual pursuits. The term "friendship" highlights the audience's recognition of the film's emotional ties, while "prejudice" points to the audience's desire for the film to discuss and criticize specific social issues in depth. These words together constitute the audience's perception and evaluation of the ideological content and values conveyed by *Birth of the Demon Child*, reflecting the sensitivity and aesthetic awareness of the audience when receiving cultural and artistic works.

In the narrative of *Birth of the Demon Child*, the inhabitants of Chentangguan keep Nezha at a distance due to deeply embedded stereotypes, and even when children show a desire to get close to him, they are immediately pulled away by adults. This episode reveals the director's intention to use the film to criticize the biased view of others. The movie shows the indifference and prejudice of the people towards Nezha, and these negative feelings continue to intensify Nezha's inner conflict and pain. In the eyes of the villagers, Nezha is nothing more than a troublemaker, or even a demon, and is thus feared and ostracized, and kept at a distance. Some viewers felt that the portrayal of the people of Chentangguan as a group of stubborn "fools" was a bit stereotypical, and given all the trouble that Nezha has caused since he was a young boy, their negative view of him seems justified.

However, the climax of the movie is when Nezha finally saves Chentang Pass and all the people from the flood. The people's prejudice against Nezha is dispelled by this feat, and they even kneel down to show their gratitude to Nezha. Here, in order to emphasize Nezha's heroic image, the sudden change in the people's attitude was too abrupt, causing some viewers to be dissatisfied. They felt that this rapid emotional shift lacked logic and emotional transition, making it hard and unbelievable, and that this treatment weakened the realism of the story and the audience's empathy to a certain extent.

3.2.5 Controversial punk impressions

By analyzing the word cloud of audience comments on *Nezha Reborn* (see Figure 4-4), it can be seen that the audience's negative feedback mainly focuses on dissatisfaction with the aesthetic style of the film, with frequent references to words such as "Netflix" and "plastic". Frequent mention of terms such as "Netflix", "plastic", and "face painting" reflect the audience's criticism of the character image design. In terms of character kernel perception, words such as "punk", "youth", "netroots", etc. attributed to character identity are more frequently mentioned, and "heroism", "plastic", "face painting", "plastic", etc. are criticized by the audience for the character design. Words such as "heroism" and "face painting", which are attributed to the secondary indicator of values, were mentioned more often, indicating that viewers' perception of Nezha's character core is mainly focused on character identity and values. It can also be seen that the audience's perceptions of Nezha's character are quite divided. Some viewers recognized the adaptation and thought that it was subversive, creating a steampunk Nezha, and that the spirit of Nezha was still

preserved, while some viewers thought that the adaptation was too clichéd, that the portrayal of the female character was too instrumental, and that Nezha's core attributes were not reflected in the film, and did not approve of the film's portrayal of Nezha.

Through word frequency analysis, we find that audiences have positive confidence in the development of domestic animation films. Although viewers are familiar with the characters of traditional Chinese mythological stories, the innovative interpretation of those animated works still stirs up deep emotional resonance among viewers. In recent years, Chinese animated films have achieved remarkable progress, but still face a series of challenges and problems. In addition to the works analyzed in this article, there are numerous animated films that incorporate elements of traditional Chinese culture that have not yet attracted enough public attention.

3.3 Analysis of Audience's Emotional Tendency towards Nezha

3.3.1 Changes in viewers' emotions: from recognition to controversy

In the analysis of the audience's emotional tendency, this paper is mainly based on the rating scale of the film review and combined with the emotional color shown in the text of the review, which is generally divided into three categories: positive, negative and neutral. Specifically, the audience's ratings are divided into three tiers, with 1-2 categorized as negative, 3 categorized as neutral, and 4-5 categorized as positive.

Table 13 Sample data for "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King" movie review ratings Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng, 2023

Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King Review Ratings			
level	frequency	percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	3	2.30%	2.30%
2	5	3.84%	6.14%
3	11	8.46%	14.60%
4	47	36.15%	50.75%
5	64	49.25%	100.00%

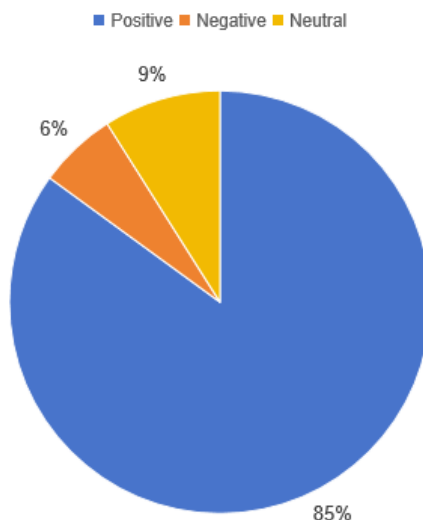


Figure 97

Distribution of Audience Emotional Tendencies for Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King

Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng,2023

From the above table (Table 13)(Figure 114), we can see that 130 usable samples were screened from the movie review texts of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King, and it can be found that positive evaluations accounted for 85.4% of the total evaluations, and the audience had a better view of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King. It can be found that positive ratings accounted for 85.4% of the total ratings, and that the audience has a good impression of Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King, and there is almost no controversy over Nezha's portrayal.

The Legend Of Nezha Movie Review Ratings			
level	frequency	percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	6	2.58%	2.58%
2	12	5.17%	7.75%
3	34	14.65%	22.40%
4	93	44.10%	62.50%
5	87	37.50%	100.00%

Table. 14 Sample data on movie review ratings for The Legend Of Nezha

Source:Statistics by Shi Xuefeng,2023

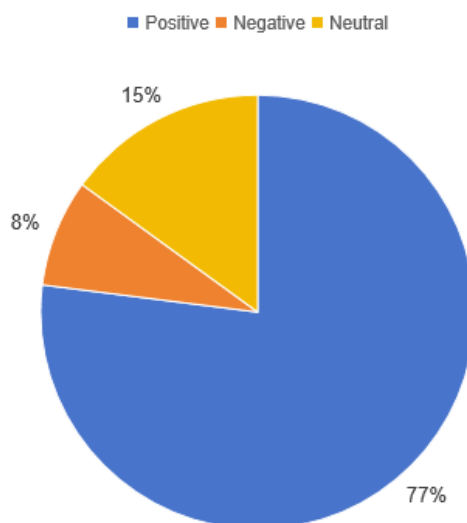


Figure 98 Distribution of Emotional Tendencies of Viewers of 'The Legend Of Nezha'

Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng, 2023

As can be seen from the above table (Table 14) (Figure 115), among the selected movie review samples of *The Legend Of Nezha*, a total of 34 reviews with neutral attitudes, accounting for 15%, and as many as 180 reviews with positive attitudes, accounting for 77%, while the number of reviews with negative attitudes is only 18, accounting for 8%. This indicates that most viewers gave *The Legend Of Nezha* a positive evaluation, expressing broad recognition of the construction and adaptation of Nezha's image in the film, with relatively few negative evaluations.

According to the audience sentiment analysis, it is evident that *The Legend Of Nezha* has earned high ratings among the audience. The high 77% of positive ratings indicates that the audience is generally positive about the movie, with appreciation covering the movie's exquisite production, beautiful graphics and tight storyline. In addition, the movie's modern interpretation of traditional culture was also well received by the audience. About 15% of viewers gave neutral ratings, and this group of viewers may not have formed a strong emotional inclination towards the movie, and they may have regarded it as an ordinary entertainment movie. These viewers may hold different opinions on certain aspects, neither accepting nor rejecting it completely. While a small number of viewers expressed negative opinions about the movie, this percentage was only 8%, which is not significant overall. This segment of the audience may have been dissatisfied with certain aspects of the movie's style, plot or characterization, but this did not significantly affect their overall rating.

To sum up, *The Legend Of Nezha* has been widely recognized and praised among the audience. Though there are still some viewers who differ in their reviews, overall, the quality of this cinematic work has been recognized and supported by the majority of the audience.

Table 15 Sample Data for BadJokes Movie Critic Scores
Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng,2023

BadJokes Movie Review Ratings			
level	frequency	percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	12	4.1%	4.1%
2	6	2.4%	6.5%
3	17	17.3%	23.8%
4	49	42.7%	66.5%
5	38	33.6%	100.00%

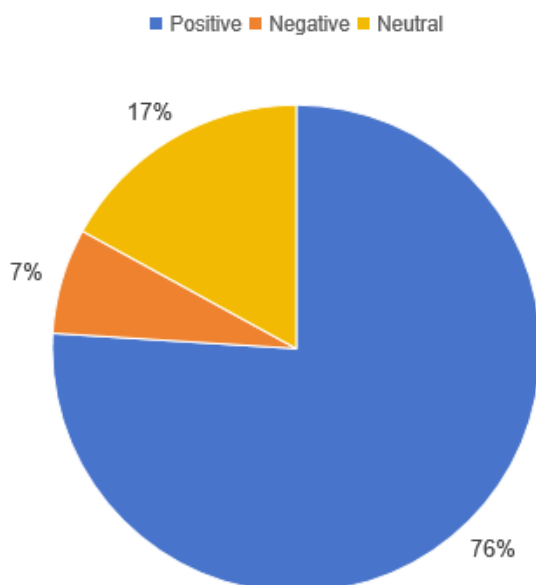


Figure 99 Distribution of Viewers' Emotional Tendencies for BadJokes
Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng,2023

From the data analysis (Table 15)(Figure 116), we can see that the evaluation of BadJokes among the audience mainly focuses on the positive, with 87 reviews with positive attitudes, accounting for 76% of the total, and the two rating scales of four and five together accounted for the majority of the audience's evaluation. This shows that the majority of the audience held positive evaluations of the animated film, appreciating its humor style and creative content. Although a small proportion of viewers gave low scores (1 and 2 ratings totaled only 7%) and may have been dissatisfied with certain aspects, which may have been caused by the overly subversive nature of the movie review to tradition, overall, viewers' emotional tendencies were positive, recognizing its entertainment value and innovativeness.

The cumulative percentages show that the positive responses from the audience gradually increase as the ratings increase until an overwhelming consensus is reached in the highest rating ranges (4 and 5), highlighting the general popularity of the work among the audience. This distribution trend reflects that BadJokes, with its unique artistic approach and content design, has succeeded in attracting the interest of

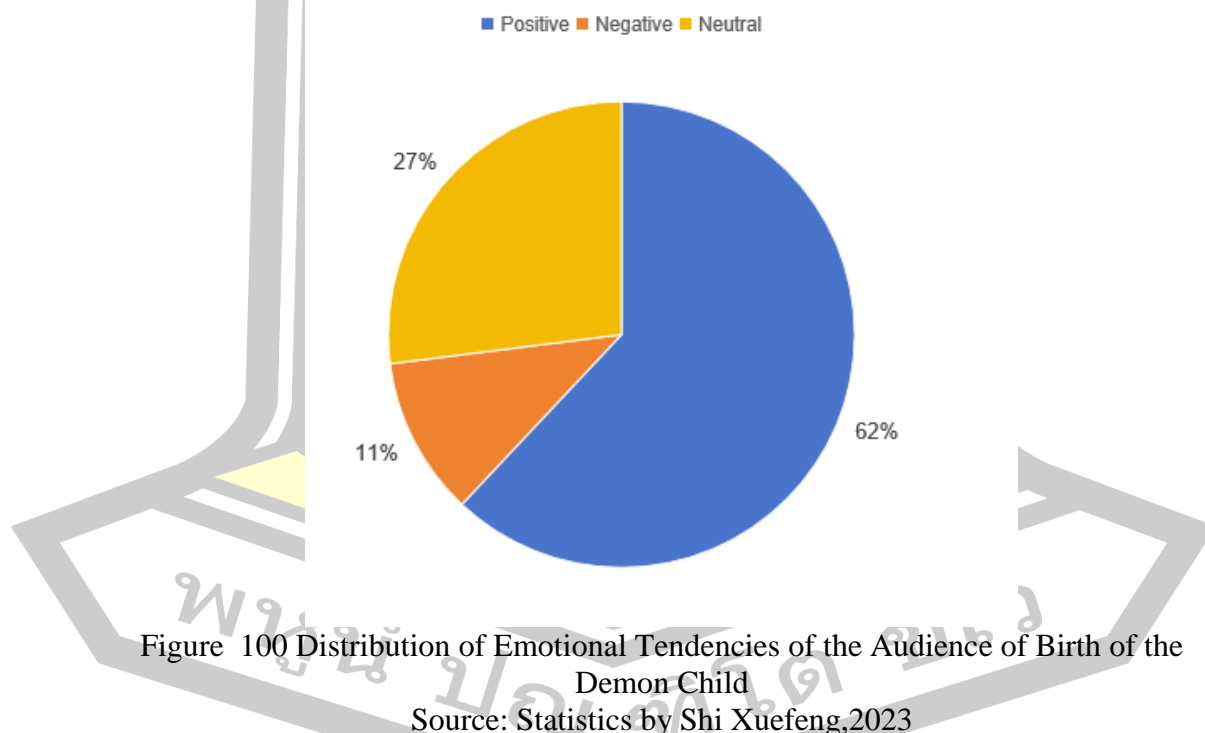
a wide range of viewers, although there are some individual differences in the acceptance of the work.

To sum up, through the analysis of the movie review ratings of BadJokes, we can learn that the animation work has gained high ratings among the audience, and its humor and creativity have been widely recognized. Comparing with the previous Nezha animation, the neutral ratings of BadJokes have become more frequent, and despite the existence of a small amount of negative feedback, it is not enough to affect its positive image among the public.

Table 16 Sample data for "Birth of the Demon Child" movie review ratings

Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng,2023

Birth of the Demon Child Review Ratings			
level	frequency	percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	10	2.80%	2.80%
2	31	8.70%	11.50%
3	95	26.68%	38.18%
4	114	32.02%	70.20%
5	106	29.80%	100.00%



A total of 356 texts were collected on Nezha(Table 16)(Figure 117), the main mythological character in Birth of the Demon Child, which is the highest amount of evaluation data among Nezha-themed animated works, showing that the public's sentiment towards the character is mainly neutral, with mixed reviews. Among the positive comments, words that frequently appeared included "China", "image", "like", and "Chinese", "animation", "image", "characters", "like" and "plot". In previous works, Nezha has often been portrayed as a symbol of justice, however, in

Birth of the Demon Child, Nezha is set to be the reincarnation of the demon Maru, who mistakenly falls into the mortal world and is viewed as a demon by those around him. Even when he fights demons and saves people, the people of Chentang Pass often misunderstand that he harms children. Despite his heroic intentions, Nezha is not immune to the world's cold eyes and prejudice. As the film progresses, Nezha finally breaks free from the shackles of his destiny and realizes his own self-worth by adhering to his belief that "my destiny is my destiny, not God's". Although the movie is titled "Birth of the Demon Child", it is more about Nezha's growth than a simple "sea haunting" story. Negative reviews frequently mentioned the terms "people," "prejudice," "fate," and "Chentang Pass," which are often associated with the film's story. These terms are often associated with the controversial plot of the movie, and reflect the fact that the audience's evaluation of Nezha's image is heavily influenced by the plot and characterization of the movie.

The audience's emotional tendency towards Birth of the Demon Child is more complex, mainly presenting positive evaluations, but there is still some controversy over the exploration of its theme and unique shape design. On the one hand, Birth of the Demon Child reinterprets traditional cultural classics through a unique and vivid perspective, presenting an innovative and contagious storyline that brings freshness, shock and deep emotion to the audience. The movie highlights the theme of freedom of destiny and embodies the traditional values of Chinese culture, winning wide recognition and appreciation. On the other hand, some viewers expressed negative sentiments about the design of Nezha's image in Birth of the Demon Child, especially the change and break of the traditional image that sparked a big controversy. Many felt that the image of Nezha in the film was overly "adorable", losing the dignity and majesty of the traditional hero image and affecting the cultural heritage and aesthetic value of the film. Overall, the audience's evaluation of Birth of the Demon Child showed a complex emotional attitude, containing both praise and support, as well as criticism and reflection. This diversity of emotional tendencies also reflects the diversity of audience's personal experience, cultural background and aesthetic taste.

Table 17 Sample Data for Nezha Reborn Movie Review Ratings

Nezha Reborn Movie Review Ratings			
level	frequency	percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	12	6.20%	6.20%
2	51	26.30%	32.50%
3	47	24.22%	56.72%
4	60	30.91%	87.63%
5	24	12.37%	100.00%

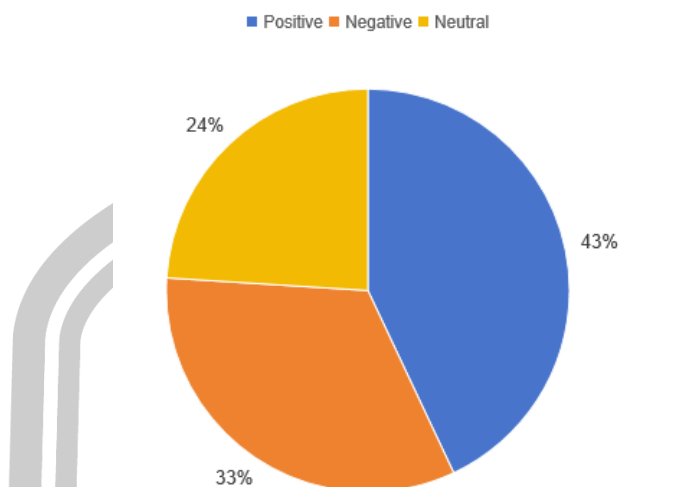


Figure 101 Distribution of Emotional Tendencies of Nezha Reborn Viewers

Source: Statistics by Shi Xuefeng, 2023

According to the table above (Table 17)(Figure 18), among the sample of Nezha Reborn reviews selected from the movie reviews, the total number of reviews with a neutral attitude is 47, accounting for about 24%, while the number of reviews with a positive attitude is 84, accounting for about 43%, and the number of reviews with a negative attitude is 63, accounting for 33%. This data reflects that there is a clear divide between the audience's views on the construction of Nezha's image in Nezha Reborn and the movie's adaptation. The adaptation of Nezha's image has triggered a wide-ranging discussion, suggesting that the image of Nezha needs to be handled with more careful consideration.

Based on the analysis of the emotional inclination on the movie reviews, it can be seen that Nezha Reborn is somewhat divided in terms of audience rating. Negative reviews accounted for a relatively large proportion of 33%, indicating that the movie somehow failed to fully meet the audience's expectations and demonstrated some problems and shortcomings. This part of the audience may have pointed out such problems as the plot layout not being compact enough, the characterization lacking depth, and the visual effects not being satisfactory. The proportion of positive comments is relatively low at 43%, indicating that the movie did not fully win the favor of the audience. Although the movie has gained some recognition for its characterization and scene design, there is still room for improvement in the production level and storytelling. Neutral ratings accounted for 24%, indicating that some viewers took a more objective stance, neither favoring the positive nor the negative, and holding a neutral view on the overall quality of the movie.

Overall, the reviews on the movie show a remarkable divide among the audience for Nezha Reborn. Despite the presence of a certain percentage of negative reviews, a number of viewers have also given positive feedback. This reflects a personalized difference in the quality of the film and the audience's viewing experience, as well as a diversity of evaluation criteria and preferences for the film among different viewers.

3.3.2 Analysis of the reasons for the change in the audience's emotional tendency

By analyzing the audience perception of Nezha's image, it is possible to explore the reasons for the change in its audience perception, to study the age range of today's audience, and to explore the appeal of some of the classic images to various age levels. By reflecting on and understanding the current state of China's animation market, it is also possible to continue to create animation images that meet market demand based on past experience, and to explore practical communication strategies to meet the needs of audiences of all ages. Taking *Birth of the Demon Child* as an example, its touch on the inner needs of all age groups is an important factor for its success. For young people and adults who are eager to explore and learn, animated images are as important for entertainment as they are for education.

Combined with the data analysis, it can be found that the audience's attitude towards the image of Nezha has gone through a change from recognition to controversy. Combined with the word frequency analysis of the audience's movie review texts, it is found that there are two main reasons:

First of all, the audience's attitude towards Nezha's image has gradually changed from being widely recognized at the beginning to being more controversial. By analyzing the word frequencies of film review texts, we find that this change is mainly caused by two factors: first, with the diversification of media forms, the audience groups have become more complex, and it has become more difficult to satisfy the needs of a large number of viewers. Taking Douban data as an example, *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, released in 1979, attracted 460,000 viewers, of whom 252,653 rated it; *The Legend Of Nezha*, which aired in 2003, had 730,000 people marking it as watched, and 601,034 people left a reviews; *Birth of the Demon Child*, which aired in 2019, had a whopping 3,433,000 people mark it as watched and 1,788,058 people rated it; and *Nezha Reborn*, which aired in 2021, had 308,000 people mark it as watched and 212,620 people made reviews. Over time, as the medium has become a richer form, audience expectations and needs have become more diverse. Some viewers regarded *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King* as a benchmark for Nezha's animated portrayal, arguing that the current animated portrayal of Nezha is more entertaining but lacks depth of characterization when compared to the portrayal in *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*. This, in their view, diminishes the artistic value of Nezha's image.

Secondly, with the development of technology, the production of Nezha's image has become more refined, which has also made the audience's aesthetic requirements for the work more demanding. Technological advances have not only made the images of Nezha's animation more exquisite, but also provided strong support for the realization of creativity. However, this also means that viewers have higher aesthetic expectations for the presentation of Nezha's image, and expect creators to present an image design that is more in line with Chinese aesthetics. In the case of *Birth of the Demon Child* and *Nezha Reborn*, for example, the positive emotional tendency of these two works declined compared to *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King*, partly because viewers felt that, despite the subtlety and delicacy of their animated images of Nezha, they lacked ethnic characterization to a certain extent. partly due to the audience's perception that, despite their delicate and exquisite Nezha animation, they lacked a certain degree of profound reflection of national characteristics. *Nezha Reborn*, in particular, was praised for its special effects

and beautiful graphics in the reviews, but at the same time there were many criticisms, such as "merely a pile-up of visual wonders" and "the aesthetics seem outdated".

With the increasing richness of communication media, the needs of the audience have become more and more complex and personalized. Viewers not only expect animation works to provide educational content and information, but also seek spiritual comfort and support. With the deepening of social mediatization, new media has become the main carrier of communication activities. Thanks to the openness of online media and the obvious boundaries of social circles, it is especially favored by the younger generation and has spawned numerous online cultures popular with young people. Compared with traditional one-way communication media, online media provide more free space for young people and promote the development of different identity cultures, forming the phenomenon of pluralism in postmodern society. Ouyang Qian suggests that postmodernism is based on replacing "grand narratives" with "mini-narratives", replacing the principle of unity with the principle of difference, and replacing the principle of subjectivity with the principle of "not-ness". The principle of difference replaces the principle of unity, and the principle of "non-self" replaces the principle of subjectivity (Qian, 1996). For the generation growing up in the new network environment, their focus has shifted to the realization of individual self-consciousness, thus giving rise to different social and cultural phenomena. These cultural and social changes have prompted the cultural industry to transform itself to meet the diverse needs of modern audiences. Take the animated construction of Nezha's image as an example. In early animation works, Nezha is a young hero who transcends the world; in *Birth of the Demon Child*, he turns into a problematic teenager plagued by prejudice. Despite his efforts to learn martial arts and his good intentions to save others, he still struggles to escape society's prejudices. However, the love and support of Tai Yi and his parent Li Jing make him a person willing to give and receive love. His joy when he learns that the people are going to celebrate his birthday and his determination to fight against the Heavenly Thunder in order to save all living beings show how much he has grown and changed. The portrayal of Nezha in *Birth of the Demon Child* is more realistic and captures the audience's attention. Although the story is fictional, the social prejudices Nezha experiences, the tolerance and love of his parents, the friendship of Ao Beng and his challenge to his destiny are all situations that viewers may encounter in real life. The transformation of Nezha's image from a small hero with divine power to a troubled teenager with dark circles under his eyes not only reflects the innovation in animated character design, but also demonstrates the influence of the Internet on characterization in animated films.

The fragmented online environment has brought a wider variety of aesthetics into the public eye, and it is only natural that young people like contrasting images and different styles. There are many works that have become hugely successful by riding the wave of popularity on the Internet. This is in stark contrast to the cuteness and obvious juvenile aesthetic of traditional animated works, as well as the heroic images of some mature cartoons. The culture pursued by young people is an anti-class and anti-mainstream culture, a situation that is gradually transforming from a phenomenon into a culture as young people become dissatisfied with their lives and critical of elite culture. This network culture has emerged due to the inclusive and communicative benefits of the Internet. On the one hand, cyberculture influences the

minds of creators and shapes the image of animation. On the other hand, for many viewers, it represents the development of a rapidly changing animation industry and influences the development of multiculturalism. The media play an extremely important role in the dissemination of Nezha's animated image. On the one hand, the emerging media's wide range of communication channels can bring in a wide audience base and provide a great deal of exposure for Nezha's animation, thus helping to increase the popularity and recognition of Nezha's animation. The media helps to build up the image of Nezha Animation. Through the wide dissemination of various media channels, Nezha Animation is able to build up its brand image, thus attracting the attention and fans of more viewers. On the other hand, the media has expanded Nezha Animation's influence through various reports. This allows more viewers to learn about the character settings, plot and special effects, and deepens their impression and knowledge of Nezha Animation.

Part IV Audience Interaction

As mentioned above, in the context of contemporary Popular media Culture, the creators of Nezha have not only begun to consider the audience target of Nezha's animation, but have even begun to consider what can be a topic of conversation, and have left ample room for subsequent audience interaction during character design, which has succeeded in involving the audience in the construction of the animated characters. At the beginning of every episode of BadJokes, as well as the two big movies, fans of all ages and from all over the country can be seen chanting slogans at Comic-Con, in schools, and on the side of the road, unabashedly and unashamedly expressing their passion. Looking back ten years later, this is one of the things that many of the parties involved are truly grateful for, and it is the enthusiastic support of the fans that made the subsequent commercial development of the anime possible, and the real data and consumption performance gave confidence to the creators, the enterprises, and the market. Birth of the Demon Child, as an animated film with considerable achievements in characterization, enjoys wide popularity and buzz within the secondary culture circle, which is a direct result of its profound character portrayal and rich plot construction. The film has not only captured the hearts of the general audience, but has also sparked a significant polarization within the fanbase (Figures 119 120). The formation and evolution of Nezha's fan base not only reflects the interactive mechanism between the film's content and its audience, but also reveals the complex dynamics of individual and collective identity in modern fan culture.



Figure 102 Fan support credits for the first two seasons of BadJokes



Figure 103 'BadJokes' Production Team Invites Fans to 'Act' and Record Movie Credits

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/read/cv20270255/>, 2014

4.1 Interaction in reality

4.1.1 Nezha Stamps

Philately is a collection, appreciation and study of stamps and other philatelic products. Stamps are known as "national business cards", and every country that issues stamps selects the best, the most beautiful, the most representative or commemorative things in their country, which are carefully designed and displayed on the stamps. The content involved is political, economic, cultural, military and other aspects of all walks of life, making the small stamps between the square inches of a comprehensive museum, a small encyclopedia to accommodate a wealth of knowledge.

As early as 1979, Nezha was featured in Chinese Classical Novels - Journey to the West, and the second stamp in this set, entitled "The Monkey King and Nezha", draws on some of the characteristics of Peking Opera and animated films. The design draws on features of Peking Opera and animated films, and employs the treatment of Chinese folk New Year's paintings, with single strokes of the brush and heavy coloring, to bring the character to life in a vivid manner (Figure 121).



Figure 104 Nezha in the stamp "Journey to the West".

Source: Special Stamps of Chinese Classical Literature--Journey to the West (IV), 1979.

The latest stamp issue is "Animation - Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King", which represents the six episodes of the animation, namely Nezha's birth, childhood fun, capturing Ao Beng, fighting against the Dragon King, Nezha's rebirth, and settling the sea and pacifying the people, and depicts Nezha's innocent and lovable character (Figure 122). The six stamps are in six different shades of color, which are distinctive and coherent, showing the character in different dynamics. The overall design draws on the montage presentation method in movies, reconstructing different times, scenes, and shots to present lifelike animated episodes in the still stamps, restoring a piece of childhood memory in the hearts of many people.

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Figure 105 Nezha in the stamp "Animation - Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King".

Source: "Animation - Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" Special Stamp 6-3T Tackling Ao Beng, 2021

Nezha stamps have also been issued abroad, and Gabon's 2019 Nezha stamp, of which Nezha is the first, features a selection of episodes from Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, with concise brushwork, bright lines, and a strong sense of all the charm of traditional Chinese culture (Figure 123). Stamps relating to Nezha were also included in St. Vincent's 1996 Ninth World Philatelic Exhibition of China-Asia (Figure 124).

As cultural symbols and works of art, stamps carry a wealth of meaning and value within them. The animated image of Nezha on stamps is not just a static image, but a symbolic interaction. They show the image of Nezha at different points in time, episodes and forms, making the stamps themselves a dynamic vehicle capable of presenting animated episodes, and the animated image of Nezha interacts with philatelists and stamp collectors as a cultural symbol on stamps. As the country's business card, stamps present the traditional culture of Chinese classical fiction and animation, and the image of Nezha, as one of the important characters, intertwines with other cultural symbols to build a rich cultural context. Collectors and viewers participate in the dissemination and presentation of the image of Nezha through the collection, appreciation and study of stamps. They interact with the image of Nezha through the stamps and feel the themes of justice, courage and growth conveyed by the image of Nezha, resulting in resonance and emotional connection.



Figure 106 Nezha in the "Nezha" stamp issued by Gabon.
Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/337160042_99958876, 2019



Figure 107 Nezha in St. Vincent's Stamp Exhibition
Source: China-Asia 9th World Philatelic Exhibition, 1996.

4.1.2 Rock band logos

Founded in 1999, the band's iconic logo is Nezha cutting his own throat, and it is intentional that the band chose to present themselves to their fans in the image of Nezha. Nezha, as a mythological character, represents rebellion, bravery and justice, and his spirit is similar to the rebellious spirit of rock, which is dedicated to breaking the rules of traditional music and pursuing the value of freedom. Nezha is the symbol of the band's rock music philosophy and spiritual values. The band uses the classic clip "Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" as a representation of the band's rock music philosophy and spiritual values, with Nezha as the spiritual totem. In the early days of Painkillers, the band was a typical underground rock band, and fans often chose to wear leather jackets with rivets and other classic decorations. This kind of interaction not only strengthened the spiritual connection between fans and the band, but also promoted cohesion and a sense of belonging within the fan community. The "Nezha cuts his own throat" logo has become the band's iconic symbol. It is not uncommon to see fans wearing Nezha's head at offline gatherings, or using Nezha's self-sacrifice as their avatar on online social media, demonstrating the social interactions and identity building that takes place through the sharing of Nezha's image as a cultural symbol amongst the audience. At this point, Nezha has become a new spiritual totem in the rock music medium.

The choice of the Nezha logo is not only a precise expression of the band's musical philosophy, but also a symbolic interaction between the band and its fans. Nezha, known in Chinese mythology for his spirit of resistance and rebellion, resonates deeply with rock music's rebellious spirit of breaking with tradition and pursuing freedom. By combining the image of Nezha's self-sacrifice with the band's rock music philosophy, Painful Belief has not only shaped the band's unique cultural identity, but has also given Nezha's image a new life in the cultural medium of rock music (Figure 125).



Figure 108 Painkiller fans hold up a banner with the logo at the festival

Source: Painkiller Kunming Strawberry Music Festival, 2019

In 2006, Painkillers released an EP called No, which also featured Nezha cutting his own throat on the cover, with the line, "Even suffering can't stop us from tilting our heads up". The album "Don't Stop My Music" (Figure 126) followed, and the cover featured Nezha with his hands folded, symbolizing his rebirth after cutting his own throat. The Nezha logo conveys the band's deeper thinking about music and the philosophy of life. This is not only the band's tribute to the spirit of Nezha, but also a spiritual guidance for their fans. Through these symbolic expressions, Painkiller not only conveys the musical theme of "Even suffering cannot stop us from lifting up our heads", but also explores and expresses with their fans a deeper understanding of struggle, rebirth and the pursuit of freedom under the spiritual totem of Nezha.



Figure 109 Nezha on the cover of a rock album
Source: The Painkillers album "Don't Stop My Music", 2008

4.1.3 Nezha Theme Cultural Plaza

"Birth of the Demon Child" in the Tai Yi Zhenzi speaks a mouthful of Sichuan dialect, this is because "Birth of the Demon Child" director and voice director Chen Hao is Sichuan, and the movie behind the scenes of the production company is also from Chengdu, Sichuan, so it can be said that this movie is a veritable "Made in Sichuan! It can be said that this movie is a real "Made in Sichuan".

After the animation achieved a wide impact, the 2023 Jiaotzu National Comic Culture Festival hosted by Chengdu Hi-Tech Zone of Sichuan Province was successfully held at the Music Square of Jiaotzu Avenue in Chengdu's Hi-Tech Zone on March 17, with the theme of "Nezha in the Mountains and the Sea, Wandering in

Jiaotzu," focusing on the offline debut of the IP image "Nezha". Under the theme of "Nezha Mountain and Sea, Wandering in Jiaosi", the festival focused on the offline debut of the "Nezha" IP image, synchronized with the Tianfu Twin Towers to showcase the classic national comics IP image, and combined with offline stage performances and a wealth of interactive experiences, to present a large-scale cultural show that integrates culture, technology and business. The festival not only showcased the 6-meter-high "Nezha" sculpture, but also sculptures of movie characters such as Ao Bi and Tai Yi Zhen (Figure 127), providing participants with an immersive experience of national comics. Through a review of classic clips from Birth of the Demon Child, as well as sculptures and themed activities related to Nezha, visitors were able to "interact" with these beloved animated characters in real life, further deepening their emotional connection to the IP.

The success of the Jiaotzu National Comic Culture Festival exemplifies the interaction between the audience of Nezha through shared cultural symbols. These cultural symbols not only foster emotional resonance among audience members, but also provide them with opportunities to participate and experience together, thereby strengthening a sense of community and belonging. Interactive experiences such as immersive games, cosplay parades and open-air movies allowed audience members to participate while co-constructing and sharing stories and interpretations of Nezha and other national comic characters, and this shared cultural experience further deepened the audience's identification with and love of national comic culture.

In addition, a national comic theme forum was held simultaneously during the event, with a number of senior industry guests launching professional discussions and sharing. The interaction between the audience and senior industry guests not only enhanced the understanding of the depth of the national comic industry, but also promoted the thinking of the creation and development of domestic cartoon films. After this, official Nezha-themed special exhibitions of "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" began to be held across the country, with the nation's first exhibition being the first Nezha-themed special exhibition created by Jinan Impression City in conjunction with the official organization (Figures 128 129). From intercepting the animated form to simulating the supervision, it was personally guided by director Dumpling and the movie's animation team, and attracted many tourists to visit and explore. This mode of interaction demonstrates the complexity and multidimensionality of the interaction between audience and viewer, and between audience and creator, and reveals how an event such as a cultural festival can serve as a platform for effective communication and co-creation of meaning based on shared cultural symbols among different participants.

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Figure 110 Statue in Nezha Square, Chengdu
Source:China Youth Daily, 2023



Figure 111 Setting for the Birth of the Demon Child exhibition in Jinan.
Source:Qilu Evening News, 2019

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Figure 112 Visitors to the Birth of the Demon Child exhibition in Jinan.
Source: Qilu Evening News, 2019

4.1.4 Nezha's COSPLAY

Cosplay generally refers to the activity of realistically restoring a certain character or a certain episode in anime, manga, or game works through costumes, props, make-up, modeling, etc., and with the help of photography, stage play, and video recording, etc. It is an important form of participation and interaction in which young people play the role of anime characters in order to reflect their identification with them.

Birth of the Demon Child has created a "Nezha craze" in the Chinese comic book industry, with countless cosplayers taking on the role of Nezha, and a wave of superbly recreated Nezha cosplayers appearing online. Through cosplay, participants do not simply play the role of Nezha, but through costumes, make-up, props, and other means, restore the image of the character in the animation to real life, and thus participate in the cultural reproduction and dissemination of the character (Figures 130 131). re-presented in real life. This kind of symbolic reproduction is not only a tribute to animation works, but also a reconstruction and re-creation of cultural symbols, which enables the character images of animation to have a deeper impact in real life. Cosplay activities usually take place in various exhibitions, events and offline gatherings, where participants share their cosplay creations, exchange experiences and skills, and build up a common community of interest. Cosplay activities are often held at various exhibitions, events and offline gatherings. Through this form of social and sharing interaction, cosplayers are able to share their love and passion for Nezha with other enthusiasts, strengthening their bonds and emotional resonance.



Figure 113 Birth of the Demon Child COSPLAYER cn:Meow Kotoshi Photo:Kitten Nezha

Source:<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1664853726772242693&wfr=spider&for=pc>, 2020



Figure 114 Birth of the Demon Child COSPLAY by Chinese Star Song Zuer

Source:<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1676614446883426106&wfr=spider&for=pc>, 2020

4.1.5 Nezha Hair at the Asian Games

The name "Nezha" is derived from the Chinese mythological story of Nezha, who is styled with a double bun. The story of Nezha is a household name in China, and both Journey to the West and Nezha have historically portrayed the god in a way that blends Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, making him a classic Chinese cultural symbol that is both inclusive and vibrant. With the release of the 2016 movie Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King and the 2019 animated film Birth of the Demon Child, a new generation of young people is beginning to become the new interpreters of Nezha.

In the final of the women's 4x100 meter relay at the Tokyo Olympics, the four Chinese athletes appeared collectively in the "Nezha" style, implying that the four female athletes "tread on the wind and fire wheels, and run well" (Figure 132), which aroused netizens' concern and heated discussions, and the official microblog of the animation "Birth of the Demon Child" also forwarded the posting to CCTV News and

commented, "My destiny is determined by me, not by Heaven. The official microblog of Birth of the Demon Child also forwarded the posting of CCTV News and commented: "My destiny is not determined by me, but by the sky, and what is ignited is the wind and fire under the feet, and even more so, the wind and fire in the heart! Miss awesome." Ge Manqi, who wore a "Nezha hairstyle" in the final of the women's 100-meter sprint at the 2023 Asian Games in Hangzhou, won the gold medal (Figure 133); the three Chinese athletes who also won the gold medal in women's track cycling at the Asian Games in Hangzhou wore "Nezha hairstyles" (Figure 134). Their unique hairstyles attracted media attention and their achievements were highly publicized.

As an interactive symbol of communication, the "Nezha head" shape is not only a representation of athletes' self-identity and group identity, but also a symbolic community for athletes to participate in the interaction and communication with other social groups in the mass communication, which gathers the emotional consensus and cultural memory of a specific group and participates in the construction of new symbolic meanings.

The "Nezha" look is not just an outward expression of form, it is deeply rooted in the fusion of tradition and modernity in Chinese culture. Nezha, as a heroic figure in Chinese mythology, symbolizes courage, resilience and defiance. Through this specific cultural symbol, the athletes silently convey a symbol of spiritual strength. The use of this symbol created a resonance in the interaction, triggering widespread social concern and discussion. The buzz among netizens and the interaction on the official microblog of the animation Birth of the Demon Child further amplified the social impact of this symbolism. By combining the image of Nezha with the spirit of the modern Olympics, this interaction of cultural symbols not only deepened the emotional connection between viewers and athletes, but also inspired a sense of national pride and collective identity.



Figure 115 China's Nezha head in the women's 4x100m relay at Tokyo Olympics
Source:Global Times News Report, 2021



Figure 116 Ge Manqi with "Nezha" hair wins gold in women's 100m final at Hangzhou Asian Games
Source: CCTV News Sina Weibo, 2023



Figure 117 Chinese athletes with "Nezha" in track cycling at 2023 Asian Games
Source: Xinhua news report, 2023

4.2 Interaction in the Internet

4.2.1 Communication and interaction in video pop-ups

In the wave of Internet culture, the interaction between viewers and animated characters has undergone an unprecedented transformation, a transformation that has been made possible by the liberation of discourse through the technological properties of the Internet. Instead of being passive recipients of content, viewers have become subjects capable of generating, sharing, disseminating and communicating content spontaneously. This transformation means that both the light-hearted topics of daily life and the serious topics of politics and history can become platforms for the public to express themselves and realize their individual right to speak. In this process, the public is more inclined to emphasize their sense of existence and unique value through emotional and subjective language.

viewers to describe Nezha, not only as a humorous interpretation of Nezha's image, but also as a way of recognizing and appreciating the creativity of the animation (Figure 136). These pop-ups express the viewers' collective interpretation of the character's specific form. Through such interactions, the image of Nezha transcends the original mythological framework and becomes a multidimensional cultural symbol, encompassing multiple meanings such as strength, gender perception, and visual impact, and at the same time, it is also engaging in a kind of negotiation and consensus building on a cultural level. These humorous depictions not only add fun to the viewing experience, but also inadvertently shape a shared cultural space around the image of Nezha, in which viewers are free to express, resonate and connect. The construction of symbolic meaning in this process is not only limited to the interpretation of Nezha's individual image, but also extends to a shared understanding of the cultural value and social significance of the animation as a whole.



Figure 2 King Kong Barbie Nezha's pop-up in BadJokes during his debut appearance
Source: BILIBILI Video Platform "BadJokes" Season 1, 2012

When Nezha accidentally hurts Li Jing with his brute force, the audience sends out "Danger", "High Energy", "Famous Scene", and "Don't watch it while eating" to remind other viewers. When Li Jing is watching, viewers send out "danger," "high energy ahead," "famous scene," and "don't watch while eating" to remind other viewers, creating an audience-to-audience interaction based on Nezha, which not only increases the fun of the viewing experience, but also inadvertently establishes a kind of community of viewers, in which the members of the audience share their emotions and expectations through such symbolic exchanges (Figure 137). This resonance based on specific episodes deepens viewers' emotional engagement with the animated content and facilitates social connections among viewers.

Baidu PostBar is a search engine-based thematic communication community, the world's largest Chinese language communication platform, which provides a relatively free space for people to express themselves online by building a platform based on "topics of interest" (Figure 138). Baidu's posting of the Nezha animation and its fans provides a rich space for communication and interaction. In this search engine-based thematic communication community, people interact symbolically around the common interest of Nezha, sharing information, opinions, and creations through postings and replies, thus building an active platform for cultural exchange. These postings not only contain discussions of the animation itself, but also extend to fans' interpretations of the work's unspoken intentions, such as homoerotic pairings that interpret Nezha's relationship with Ao Beng as a romantic one, as well as the creation and sharing of homoerotic works based on personal interests and specialties, such as emoticon making, drawing homoerotic works, and exchanges of animation peripheral products. Such communication activities based on personal interpretation and creation embody the core idea in symbolic interactionism—that social meaning is constructed through people's use and interpretation of symbols in interaction.

In this process, the role of the bar team embodies the maintenance of internal community norms and order. Through management activities such as reviewing, refining or topping postings, the team not only ensures the quality of community exchanges, but also promotes the dissemination of high-quality content, further stimulating interaction and creative enthusiasm among fans. Such management and incentive mechanisms deepen communication among members and promote the spread and diffusion of Nezha animation culture. Through the platform of Baidu Posting, fans of Nezha animation were able to engage in in-depth symbolic interactions based on common topics of interest in a free and open cyberspace, jointly constructing a cultural community around Nezha animation, demonstrating the practical application of the theory of symbolic interactions and the process of multidimensional construction of cultural significance in modern online social platforms.



Figure 4 《Birth of the Demon Child》 Baidu PostBar

Source: [https://tieba.baidu.com/f?ie=utf-](https://tieba.baidu.com/f?ie=utf-8&kw=%E5%93%AA%E5%90%92%E4%B9%8B%E9%AD%94%E7%AB%A5%E9%99%8D%E4%B8%96)

[8&kw=%E5%93%AA%E5%90%92%E4%B9%8B%E9%AD%94%E7%AB%A5%E9%99%8D%E4%B8%96](https://tieba.baidu.com/f?ie=utf-8&kw=%E5%93%AA%E5%90%92%E4%B9%8B%E9%AD%94%E7%AB%A5%E9%99%8D%E4%B8%96), 2018

With the rapid development of the mobile Internet in recent years, Sina Weibo has become the third largest mobile social software after WeChat and QQ. Each Nezha animation in the era of popular media has its own official account on Weibo, through which it releases information related to the anime and attracts the audience's communication and interaction. "Movie Birth of the Demon Child" is the official certified microblog of the Birth of the Demon Child anime, which now has 1,145,000

followers, and as of February 13, 2024, the microblog had 10,000 reads and 276 interactions on the same day (Figure 139).



Figure 5 Birth of the Demon Child's official twitter account

Source: <https://m.weibo.cn/u/6217939256>, 2018

Whenever there is an important holiday, anniversary, or an influential achievement in China, the microblog will tweet about it with a picture of Nezha, and at the beginning of the microblog text, it will add the hashtag "#Movie Birth of the Demon Child#" and "Movie Birth of the Demon Child Super Talk". Birth of the Demon Child" and "Birth of the Demon Child Super Talk" were added at the beginning of the Weibo post, allowing netizens to follow the super talk and post discussions to generate buzz for the movie. The content of the interaction is witty and adorable. On the fourth anniversary of the release of the animation, Birth of the Demon Child posted on its microblog:

"#Birth of the Demon Child 4th Anniversary of its release #Thank you all for being there for Zha'er and C.C. all the way from the ground up! When we meet again, we'll definitely grow up to be majestic. Didn't expect it, little master is still three years old this year oh (Figure 140)."



Figure 6 'Birth of the Demon Child' Tweets Celebrate Fourth Anniversary of Movie's Release

Source: <https://m.weibo.cn/u/6217939256>, 2023

The microblog received 12,000 likes, 652 replies and 711 retweets, while fans of the microblog actively interacted with it. Many of these comments were made using user IDs named after characters associated with Nezha, such as Nezha's master, "Taiyi Zhang Zhenren", and his mother, "Mrs. Li Na Cha, the Third Prince Consort of the Li House in Chentangguan", as if the family was celebrating his birthday (Figure 160). Mrs. Li Nezha, the third prince of the Li family in Chentangguan," as if the Nezha family had really come to celebrate his birthday, with both fans of the anime and practitioners (Figure 141):

"I miss Zha'er so much! When will the second installment come out?"

"Will always love Zha'er and C.C!!!! Got into it four years ago and have watched it a total of thirteen times combined throughout the spot release! Looking forward to the second installment!"

"Online Rush Part 2"

"Happy fourth anniversary! Zha'er will always be three."

按热度 按时间



一只猫_不戒掉熬夜不改名 :后面的龙王好像不太高兴的亚子😂



23-7-26 13:18 来自上海

2139

一只猫_不戒掉熬夜不改名 等人 共17条回复



枫桥下的蓝月儿 :好想吒儿啊! 啥时候出第二部? 🤔

23-7-26 13:12 来自广东

526

叶子不是Gay 等人 共15条回复



TsuenFeng :四周年快乐! 🎂 大银幕再相见! 🌟



23-7-26 13:24 来自广东

345



太乙张真人 :祝咱们生日快乐 🎂 感谢大家不离不弃一路陪伴! 我们期待相见! 😊😊😊



23-7-26 13:29 来自四川

179

逐鹤- 等人 共3条回复

Figure 7 Comments under the "Birth of the Demon Child" tweet celebrating Nezha's birthday

Source: <https://m.weibo.cn/u/6217939256>, 2023

Nezha Animation's official Weibo is not only a channel for information dissemination, but also an active space for symbolic interaction. By posting pictures related to Nezha on important holidays and anniversaries and posting in Nezha's voice, the official microblog creates an experience as if fans are communicating directly with Nezha himself. This type of communication goes beyond the traditional dissemination of information and transforms it into an emotional and symbolic dialog. Fans participated in this interaction through replies, likes, retweets, and other behaviors, not only expressing their love for the anime, but also building a cultural community centered on Birth of the Demon Child together on the microblogging platform. In particular, viewers spoke in the comments using user IDs named after characters associated with Nezha, adding to the realism and immersive experience of this exchange. Such interactions not only show the deep emotions of fans towards the animated characters, but also reflect the process of how social connections and cultural identities are formed through shared symbols and meanings, as emphasized in the theory of symbolic interaction. In this process, the interaction between the official microblog and the fans not only deepens the emotional connection between them, but also promotes the formation and development of a culture and community around Birth of the Demon Child.

Summary of the chapter

By analyzing in depth the symbolic interaction of the animated image of Nezha, this chapter explores the rebirth and transformation of traditional Chinese mythology in a modern cultural context. From the relationship between Nezha and symbolic interaction, to the innovative interaction between creators and Nezha, to the multi-dimensional perceptual exchange between viewers and Nezha, and the interaction between viewers based on the image of Nezha, each section deepens our understanding of how the classic image of Nezha adapts to and influences modern society.

Through an in-depth analysis of the symbolic interaction of Nezha's animated image, the new birth and transformation of traditional Chinese myths in a modern cultural context is explored. From the relationship between Nezha and symbolic interaction, to the innovative interaction between the creator and Nezha, to the multi-dimensional perceptual communication between the audience and Nezha, and the interaction between the audience based on the image of Nezha, each part embodies the adaptability of the image of Nezha to social change.

Most of the early designers of Nezha were Chinese master artists who drew inspiration from real life and traditional art, and were influenced by ideology and the social environment, creating a generation of on-screen classics while maintaining their ethnicity. Under the strategy of "creating China's own cartoon stars", the director of CCTV drew on Western animation technology and rethought the humor and wisdom of animation, so that Nezha could serve the young audience and provide good aesthetic guidance; creators in the Internet era paid more attention to the expression of their personal will, subverting the tradition of "King Kong and Barbie" to achieve success. The post-modern Nezha design is more about the author's thinking and integration of national art under the influence of trendy culture, with Nezha wearing a technological armor made from traditional craftsmanship. In short, the creators have reinterpreted and given new cultural meaning to Nezha through different means,

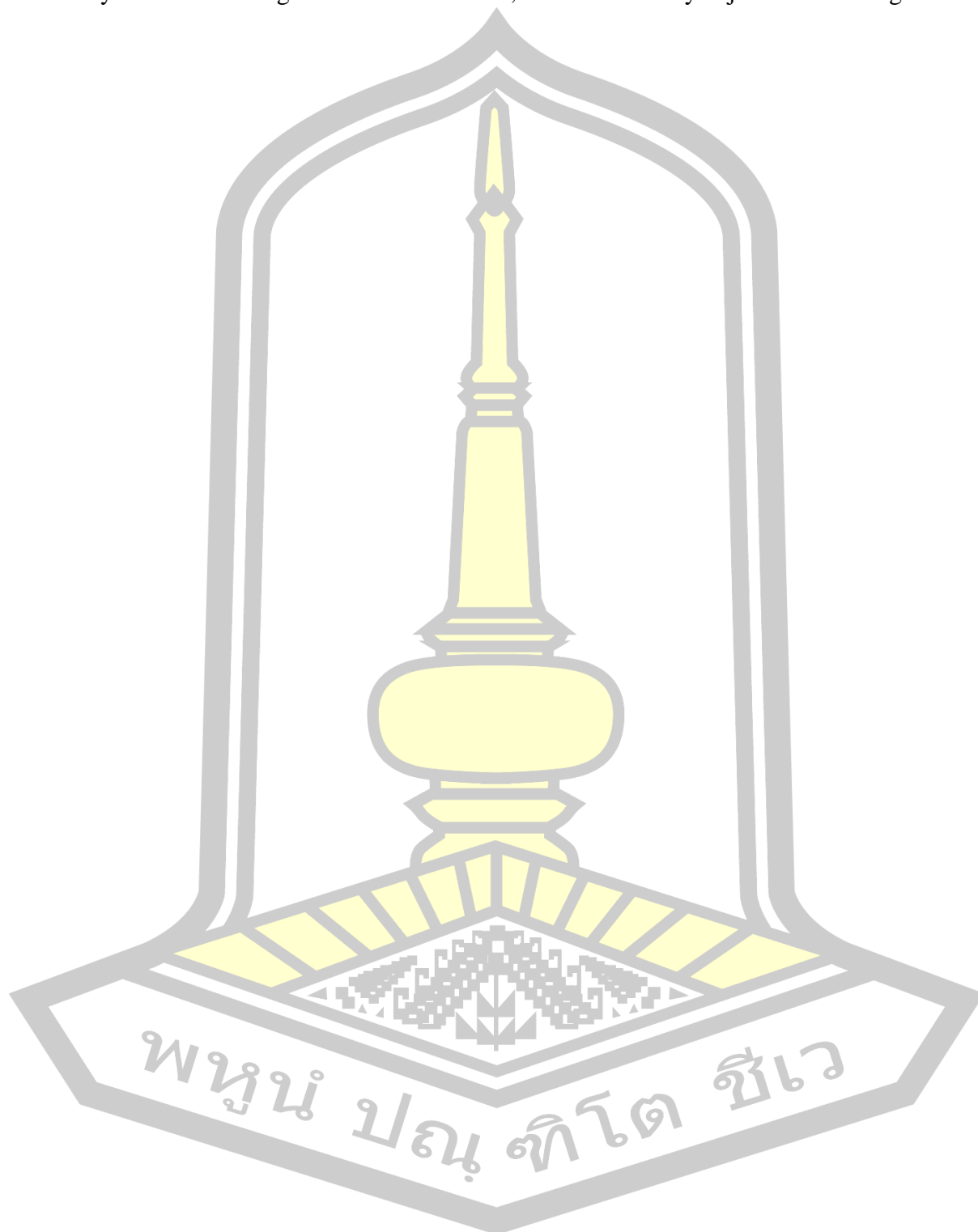
which not only demonstrates the creators' sense of creativity and artistic pursuit, but also reflects the adaptability and influence of Nezha's image in modern culture.

And viewers pass the symbol of Nezha between themselves offline in the form of popular logos, cultural activities, and imitations of Nezha, forming a cultural consensus, and constructing a new meaning for Nezha on the interconnection in the form of video pop-ups and posting and microblogging interactions, so that Nezha is never forgotten on the Internet, and on the contrary, it has become an important part of the Internet's popular culture. The interaction between reality and the Internet based on the image of Nezha has not only deepened the sharing and dissemination of Nezha's story, but also promoted social and cultural interaction and integration. These interactions span both physical and digital space, demonstrating the important role of Nezha's image as a cultural symbol in promoting cultural exchange and enhancing social cohesion. The interactive section between the audience and Nezha, which ranges from the external image to a deeper analysis of the character's inner core, as well as an analysis of the changes in emotional tendencies, demonstrates Nezha's ability to inspire empathy among different audience groups, and to provoke thought and discussion. The diverse interpretations and emotional resonance of Nezha's image reflect the public's different needs and expectations of traditional culture, and show the vitality and versatility of cultural symbols in modern society. The fact that Nezha has been interpreted and given new cultural meanings not only demonstrates the creators' sense of innovation and artistic pursuit, but also reflects the adaptability and influence of the image of Nezha in modern culture.

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The various modes of interaction between Nezha and the public have crossed physical and digital space, bringing Nezha, the audience, and the creators closer together. Early creators were more influenced by ideology and the social environment, while modern creators take into account their personal emotions and the audience's expectations, and the audience has changed from passive acceptance in the beginning to active participation, becoming more and more actively involved in the discussion and

interpretation of Nezha. To summarize, the meaning of Nezha's image is constructed by the audience together with the creator, and is constantly adjusted and changed.



CHAPTER VI

Case Study of the Animation "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child

Introduction

In the wave of contemporary Chinese animated films, *Birth of the Demon Child* has become a phenomenal work with its unique artistic charm and profound cultural connotations, triggering widespread social attention and cultural discussions. Through the case study of *Birth of the Demon Child*, this chapter aims to explore in depth how the animation demonstrates the fusion of traditional Chinese culture and modern values in terms of characterization, national cultural representations, cultural representations of the times, and symbolic interactions, and to further analyze how the work maps out the multiple facets of contemporary society.

Part I will look at Nezha's characterization, storytelling experiences and interpersonal relationships, exploring how the protagonist, through his unusual experiences and complex relationships, presents a distinctive and deeply compelling character.

Part II discusses in depth how *Birth of the Demon Child* skillfully integrates national cultural symbols, including dialects, images, props, mythological scenes and classical music, etc., and how traditional philosophical concepts, such as "yin and yang" and "the idea of harmony", are presented to represent contemporary culture, such as the pursuit of individualism, the breaking down of social stereotypes and the modern interpretation of family relationships. How the traditional philosophical concepts of "yin and yang" and "the idea of harmony" are used to present the cultural symbols of the times, such as the pursuit of individualism, the breaking down of social stereotypes and the modern interpretation of family relationships.

Part III will explore the symbolic interactions in *Birth of the Demon Child*, including the creative dialogues between the creator and Nezha, and the modes of interaction between the audience and the creator, Nezha, and other viewers. Paying particular attention to behaviors such as social media participation, data sharing, content creation, interpretation of character relationships, and consumption of cultural commodities, we will explore how these interactions enrich the cultural significance of the film and contribute to the discussion of cultural pluralism.

Part IV will analyze how *Birth of the Demon Child* maps the complexity and plurality of contemporary society through the dissolution of commercial discourse, the revelry of real society, and the projection of individual emotions. Through this comprehensive analysis, it aims to reveal how *Birth of the Demon Child*, not only as a successful animated film, but also as a cultural phenomenon, influences and reflects the cultural attitudes, values and social dynamics of contemporary Chinese society.

Part I The Characterization and Story of Nezha

Birth of the Demon Child tells the story of the birth of a pearl of mixed elements over the millennia, which is divided into two parts, the Spirit Pearl and the Demon Pill. The Spirit Pearl is an auspicious object, which is good in nature and can be used for the benefit of the people, and is given to Nezha, the soon-to-be-born son of Li Jing. The Demon Pill is evil and is under the Heavenly Thunder Curse. The Demon Pill will be destroyed after three years. However, the spirit pearl is snatched away by Shen Gongbao and obtained by Ao Bing, the third prince of the Dragon King of the East China Sea, and Nezha becomes the reincarnation of the demon pill. The dichotomy between demons and gods, good and evil, is repeated throughout the film, with Nezha's "My destiny is my destiny, not God's" portraying a character who breaks down prejudice in the current social environment.

Birth of the Demon Child is an animated movie based on Nezha Legends after forty years. Written and directed by Dumpling, the film is the first in a series of "God-fearing universe" films, and after its release in the summer of 2019, word-of-mouth has gotten better and better, with the box office exceeding 600 million yuan in the first week, and the final box office exceeding 5 billion yuan, making it the top animated film in China's history, surpassing Journey to the West and ranking first on the box office charts. The box office ranking first, also exceeded the "Wandering Earth" ranked second in the box office ranking of the history of Chinese movies, second only to the "Wolf War 2", which is a dark horse in the Chinese movie market. The movie has won domestic and international movie awards such as the Best Animated Feature Film Bonus Award, the Best Animated Director Award, the Best Animated Screenwriter Award, the Best Animated Dubbing Award of the 16th China Animation Golden Dragon Award 2019, the Best Asian Film of the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Award 2019, the Best Work of the Golden Crane Award of the 32nd Tokyo International Film Festival, the Best International Film Award of the 92nd Academy Awards and other domestic and international movie awards, and reaped a box office, awards, and word-of-mouth. At the same time, Birth of the Demon Child was released in North America, allowing many foreign audiences to watch Chinese animated movies and learn about Chinese culture. The success of Birth of the Demon Child has attracted many experts and scholars to study it. The success of Birth of the Demon Child is also due to the joint efforts of the creative staff behind the scenes. It took the behind-the-scenes production team five years to create the 110-minute-long movie. Yang Yu, the director and screenwriter of the movie, had strict control over the details, from the design of each character's image, lines and voice-overs, to the determination of the movie's theme, the transformation of the camera, and the characterization of the characters, the behind-the-scenes production team went through 66 versions of the script, and spent two years to finalize the movie. Birth of the Demon Child is an inheritance and innovation from Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King in terms of its theme, presentation techniques, color style, etc., making "Nezha Legends" the most popular film in the history of Nezha. "Nezha Legends" is an ancient folkloric legend that has evolved with the times.

1.1 The Characterization of Nezha

Background: The spirit of heaven and earth gave birth to a pearl of mixed elements, which was refined into a demonic pill and a spirit pearl. Tai Yi immortal was instructed to entrust the spirit pearl to Nezha, but the spirit pearl was switched, and the demonic pill was entrusted to Nezha, who thus became a demonic child reincarnated from the demonic pill. Nezha is the third son of Li Jing and Madam Yin, and is taken under the tutelage of Tai Yi immortal in an effort to bring him to goodness.

Normal form: forehead a head of Qi bangs, head tied double bun hairstyle, two very large panda eyes, heavy eye makeup coupled with slightly scary rows of slate teeth, often showing an evil smile, a slight hint of cute expression, the middle of the forehead there is a representative of the flame of the Taiji two yi one of the red seal (birthmark), neck set with a gold collar (Qiankun circle), wearing a lotus patterned red waistcoat vest, flaming patterned brown seven-minute pants, the tied with a yellow belt, a short bear-like figure, and bare feet. Nezha was portrayed as a child until 1 hour 11 minutes 25 seconds ago, with a 70% time share (Figure 142).

Demonized Form: After removing the Qiankun Circle, Nezha transforms into a tall young man with a flame-like hairstyle, light-colored near-white eyes (in the case of sanity) and red eyes (in the case of non-sanity), pointy ears, yellowish-white skin, flame tattoos at his temples behind his eyes, and two flame tattoos on each of his shoulders, and is barefoot. Nezha is transformed into a young man after breaking away from the Qiankun circle and appears for about 12 minutes (Figure 142).

Character traits: Because Nezha is the reincarnation of the Devil's Pill, he is discriminated against, rejected, ridiculed and hostile by the people of the Chentang Pass. As a result, he is withdrawn, egotistical, indifferent, rebellious, stifling and cynical, and he has to go out and cause havoc at the Chentang Pass every now and then, bullying and teasing the people with pranks to make them feel at peace; underneath the cynicism, Nezha is actually very affectionate, longing for family, friendship and the recognition of others. Underneath his cynical appearance, Nezha is in fact very affectionate and righteous, longing for family and friendship, as well as the recognition of others, and not resigning himself to his fate.

Qiankun Circle: In order to prevent Nezha's demonic nature from turning into a demon that doesn't recognize his relatives, Tai Yi immortal used the Qiankun Circle to seal half of Nezha's godly power. Even so, Nezha is still very powerful, and even though it is a treasure that confines Nezha's evil body, once he recites the unsealing incantation (Sun and Moon, Thousands of Spirits and Heavens and Earth, the Infinite Qiankun Circle), Nezha will lose his sanity and turn into a crazy, rampaging state, with his combat power instantly strengthened by several times, only knowing how to kill and destroy. In the later stages, Nezha gradually controls this power and does not go crazy after awakening, and his appearance and voice change to that of a teenager, and he can put it on again to restore his original form. But as long as Nezha has good intentions, after unsealing the Qiankun Circle once, he knew he would lose control, so he began to use the Qiankun Circle to control the evil power of the magic pill. Worn on the wrist, as long as the Qiankun Circle didn't leave his body completely, this way he could not only gain power, but also not turn into a demon.

Mixed Sky Aya: One of the magic treasures given to Nezha by Tai Yi Zhen's Hundred Treasures Pouch, a strip of red cloth that has the power to automatically bind the enemy, change its length, and make sweeping, impacting, destroying, and humanizing moves and functions, and was given to Nezha by Tai Yi Zhen at the banquet for Nezha's third birthday.

Fire Tip Gun: A weapon Nezha pulled out of Taiyi Zhengwo's bag of treasures. The mechanism at the end of the gun's head can be altered to become a lotus-shaped flower, which can be used to attack and spit fire. It has a variety of attacking moves, and can be used in close combat for defense, as well as thrown to injure the enemy. It is Nezha's main weapon, and was given to him by Taiyi Zhengrong at Nezha's third birthday banquet.

Wind and Fire Wheel: A flying magic weapon with two wheels that constantly spit fire and rotate to aid in battle, and can be used to fly at high speeds when stepped on underneath both feet, given to Nezha by Tai Yi immortal at his third birthday banquet.

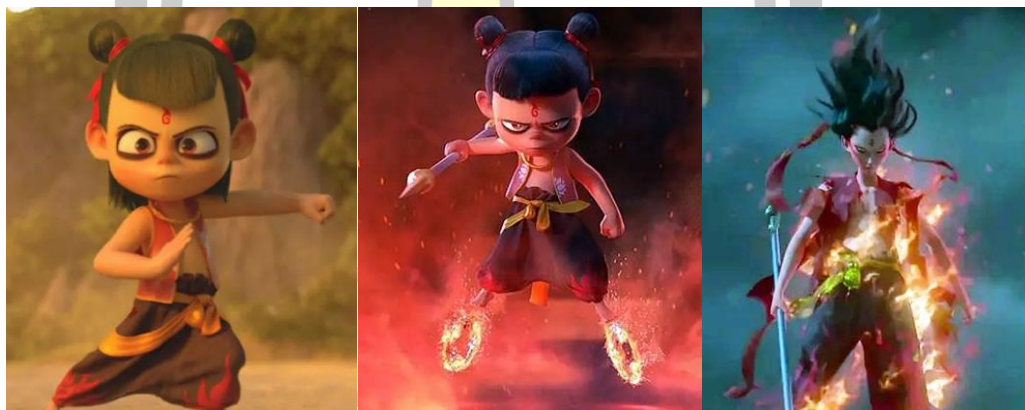


Figure 118 Nezha's normal form (left and center) and demonized form (right) from Birth of the Demon Child

Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and television footage, 2019

1.2 Nezha's Story Experience

Reincarnation of Nezha: Nezha is reincarnated as a demonic pill after his spiritual pearl is stolen by Shen Gongbao at the time of his birth. Nezha is born as a ball of flesh, and when he develops five senses, he becomes a demon and sets fire to the crowd that comes to celebrate. Afterwards, Tai Yi immortal tied him up with a qiankun circle and tried to beat Nezha to death with a whisk, but was stopped by Mrs. Yin. Because the magic pill had been put under a heavenly curse by the First Heavenly Father, Nezha only had three years to live. Li Jing followed Taiyi Zhenzhen to visit the First Heavenly Father for this reason and tried to undo the curse for Nezha, but he failed to meet the First Heavenly Father, so he had to give up. Nezha was forbidden to leave his house by the people of the Chentang Pass since he was born because of the fire he set to scare the crowds.

Learning from the Master: Nezha is taken under the tutelage of Master Tai Yi when he accidentally enters the world of the Mountain River and the Earth of Jigoku while he is planning to go out for "fun". Nezha is taken under the tutelage of Master

Taiyi, who takes him as his disciple. Nezha thinks that he will be locked up in the world of the Mountain River and the Jigoku, but is attracted by Master Taiyi's magic and decides to learn the art of immortality under his tutelage. Tai Yi immortal presented Nezha with a mixed sky damask, a fire-tipped spear and a wind and fire wheel at his third birthday banquet.

AoPing: After a fight with Nezha, AoPing was petrified by the spittle of the Sea Night Fork. Nezha then fought with the Sea Night Fork alone and succeeded in obtaining the antidote, which restored AoPing to normal, and the three of them played shuttlecock together on the beach. After playing shuttlecock on the beach, Nezha is touched by the thought that only his mother has played shuttlecock with him since he was a child, and after hearing this, Ao B gives Nezha a conch-style voice-carrying tool and becomes Nezha's only friend.

Three-Year-Old Birthday Banquet: After being falsely accused in a demon hunt with Lingzhu, Nezha is enraged. Li Jing realizes that Nezha saved a man's life and tells Nezha that he will help him to prove his innocence and clear his name at his third birthday banquet, Nezha excitedly invites Ao Beng, his only friend, to attend the banquet. In the midst of Shen Gongbao's planning, Nezha learns that he has been transformed into a demonic pellet and has been put under a heavenly calamity spell with a lifespan of only three years, which infuriates Nezha. When Nezha learns that Li Jing is trying to save his own life, Nezha takes up the responsibility of guarding the Chen Tang Pass, and Ao Beng intends to bury the pass in order to keep the news from leaking out, but Nezha stops him from doing so and saves the people of the pass.

The Apocalypse: After Nezha saves the people of Chentang Pass, the apocalypse comes, and Ao Bing uses his Dragon Armor to shield Nezha from some of the lightning, but his body is destroyed, and he is eventually protected by a lotus flower by Tai Yi immortal, and the two of them remain the best of friends. Because the heavenly tribulation was prepared for the Devil's Pill, Nezha's experience of the tribulation was originally insurmountable, only one death, but because of his good intentions, with the firm belief that "my destiny is up to me and not to heaven, whether I am a devil or an immortal, I decide for myself", he was helped by Ao Beng and Tai Yi immortal, and he not only survived the tribulation, but also preserved his soul to change his own destiny. The fate of the

1.3 Nezha's Interpersonal Relationships

Li Jing: Nezha's father, whose attitude towards Nezha is not repulsive or overbearing, but actively seeks a gentle and equal communication. Even when Nezha has caused a lot of trouble at the Chentang Pass, he does not hesitate to give up his own affections to help Nezha to be recognized by the world.

Mrs. Yin: Nezha's mother, who plays an important role in guiding Nezha's development. When Nezha is born, he is reincarnated as a demonic pill, and Tai Yi immortal wants to kill him, but Mrs. Yin stops him from doing so. She loves her son as much as her life, and despite her busy schedule, she tries her best to spend time with Nezha as he grows up.

Ao Beng: Nezha meets Ao Beng on the beach, and under Nezha's influence, he eventually learns to be himself and not to resign himself to fate, and joins forces with Nezha to fight against destiny, becoming each other's "only friend".

Taiyi Zheng: Nezha's master. The First Heavenly Father ordered his disciple Taiyi Zheng to entrust the Spirit Pearls to Nezha, the son of Li Jing, but by mistake, the Spirit Pearls and the magic pills were switched, and Taiyi Zheng took Nezha as a disciple and guided him to goodness (Figure 143).



Figure 119 Characters appearing in Birth of the Demon Child

Source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1772460275005741649&wfr=spider&for=pc>, 2020

Part II Cultural Representations in Birth of the Demon Child

In contemporary Chinese cinema, the animated film *Birth of the Demon Child* has undoubtedly become a cultural phenomenon, which not only reinterprets the traditional mythological story from an innovative perspective, but also demonstrates the depth of Chinese national culture through rich cultural representations. By exploring the cultural representations in *Birth of the Demon Child*, especially the ways of expression and presentation of national cultural symbols, and how these cultural elements are reinterpreted and innovatively used in the movie, it plays an important role in promoting the dissemination of national culture.

This part analyzes in depth how these symbols are used in *Birth of the Demon Child* for cultural communication from the dimensions of national culture and national spirit. Through the lens of Saussure's semiotic theory, we will explore how the movie demonstrates rich national cultural characteristics and regional cultural features through elements such as dialects, ethnic images, traditional props, mythological scenes, and classical music.

In terms of ethnic culture, the use of Sichuan dialect not only enriches the characters and adds to the comedy of the movie, but also shows the diversity of Chinese dialect and culture. At the same time, the portrayal of ethnic images, the selection of traditional props, and the setting of mythological scenes all tell traditional stories while giving them a new vitality and contemporary significance. In addition, the skillful integration of classical music not only enriches the audiovisual effect of the movie, but also strengthens its cultural connotation.

The movie also embodies the Chinese national spirit, which is reflected in the two core themes of the fatalistic duo of "Yin and Yang" and the happy ending under the idea of "Harmony". By exploring these cultural symbols and philosophical ideas, we can see that *Birth of the Demon Child* is not only a children's movie, but also a profound reflection of the combination of traditional Chinese culture and philosophy and modern social values.

Through an in-depth analysis of national culture and spirituality in *Birth of the Demon Child*, we aim to reveal how the movie can become a cultural bridge that transcends time and space and connects tradition and modernity, as well as how to disseminate and promote Chinese national culture through innovative ways, thus promoting cultural confidence and cultural diversity.

2.1 Ethnic Culture in *Birth of the Demon Child*

2.1.1 Expression of national cultural symbols

The movie text of *Birth of the Demon Child* contains rich elements of national culture, which is of great significance to promote the dissemination of national culture, and will be discussed in this chapter in terms of linguistic symbols and non-linguistic symbols. In Saussure's discussion of semiotics, symbols are divided into two categories: linguistic symbols and non-linguistic symbols, which have great flexibility and can break through the distance of time and space for communication. Linguistic symbols are the most basic form of symbols in human communication, including spoken and written words, which are less restrictive, dynamic and creative in expression. The communicator combines linguistic symbols with meaning to achieve the function of expression and communication. Non-verbal symbols are symbol systems that use other visual, auditory and other symbols as information carriers, including companion symbols of verbal symbols, somatic symbols, materialized and ritualized symbols, and so on. In movie texts, linguistic symbols are often combined with non-linguistic symbols to present movie contents and express movie ideas.

2.1.1.1 Sichuan dialect

Linguistic symbols have the characteristic of organization and structuring, formed in long-term social production and culture, expressing territoriality and cultural regionality. In the process of social and cultural communication, linguistic symbols have statute, symbolic forms and objects are built on social conventions, which is an important medium of communication. According to Saussure: "Language is a social convention, but it differs from other social conventions in that it is a system of symbols that expresses concepts." Dialects, also known as local languages, are words that are spoken in a certain area. China is a vast country, and the dialects of different regions vary significantly. Dialects are able to present regional characteristics and convey different linguistic habits and cultural practices of different places. There is no lack of reflection of dialect culture in cinema movies. Some movies use unique dialect characteristics to draw vivid characters and social life. The expression habit of dialect is more witty and humorous, which is in line with the viewing characteristics of the contemporary audience, and it is also a more lively quality for cultural expression in the dissemination of national culture.

In *Birth of the Demon Child*, Nezha is the fifth of the Twelve Immortals of the Jade Void in Kunlun, and is one of the disciples of the First Heavenly Father, Tai Yi immortal. As Nezha's teacher, he rebuilt Nezha's lotus body and taught him the Qiankun Circle, the Mixed Heavenly Aya, the Wind and Fire Wheel, the Fire Pointed Lance, and other magical weapons. According to records, the Jinguang Cave in Qianyuan Mountain, where Taiyi immortal lives, is now Jiangyou City in Sichuan Province, so the setting of "Sichuan dialect" in his character's language not only matches the background of the character, but also breaks the traditionally lofty image of "God", bringing him closer to the audience and increasing the distance between the

animation and the movie. This not only matches the background of the characters, but also breaks the traditional image of "God", which brings him closer to the audience and increases the comedy color of the animated movie. In the animated movie, Taiyi Zhenzhen said, "Aigoo, you bastard child," "You hit me," "Nervous," "How can this work?" "The Sichuan dialect not only realizes the oral transmission of regional culture, but also strengthens the regional identity of moviegoers.

2.1.1.2 National image

In the ancient myth of Legends, Nezha, the Buddhist god of protection, is described as a deity with three faces and eight arms, and is the god of medicine who defends the Buddha's kingdom with a trident in his hand. Nezha, as a mythological character, was recorded in the Yuan Dynasty religious and mythological textbook *The Complete Book of the Three Religions and the Search for Gods*, and has been adapted and portrayed in a number of classical literary works, including *Journey to the West* and *Nezha*, a book about a journey to the South. The Chinese animated film *Dahuangtiangong* (*The Palace of Heaven*) depicts Nezha in his classic face, with a red belly-bandana, double buns, and small stature, restoring the image of Nezha as recorded in the myths. In *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King*, the aesthetic is richer in Taoist aesthetics. In *Birth of the Demon Child*, the image of the "ugly Nezha" is a reversal of the common perception.

In the movie, there are two main versions of Nezha, one as a child and the other as a young man. As a child, Nezha continues to be portrayed with the classic elements of Nezha, such as the "New Year's Paintings" an element of Chinese culture that began with the "Door God Paintings" which include pictures of the Spring Cow the Happy Family lanterns, and the Fat Doll. In addition, as a child, Nezha wore modern clothing such as a "vest", but still retained the element of the "lotus flower" and was the embodiment of the lotus flower, realizing an aesthetic expression of the construction of the traditional character (Fanxin, 2021).

The youthful Nezha matches the image in the *Jingde Chuanluan Dengluo*, which states: "With three heads and six arms, Nezha is a wrathful man who attacks the emperor's bell." Nezha retains the image that is commonly perceived by the audience, but also more closely resembles the image of the Buddhist figure that is recorded in the historical records (Liangzhi, 2020).

Tai Yi immortal in the original text is the founder of the "Qing Wei Sect", and is a famous deity in the Qing Wei Sect of Taoism, "Tai Yi immortal Zhen Tian Zun". The image of Taibei Zhenzhen is not described in detail in the ancient books, but is portrayed as a typical Taoist character in the *Nezha*. In *Birth of the Demon Child*, Taiyizhen retains his old Taoist appearance, such as the "whisk", which is a common weapon used by Taoist priests to symbolize the holder's status and the meaning of transcendence. In addition, Tai Yi's mount is a beast, but in the movie it is set to be a pig, breaking the image of the supremacy of the gods. In the movie, Taiyi's wine pot is similar to the colored pottery pots from Majiayao, which belongs to the Yangshao culture and existed in the late Neolithic period, about 5,000 years ago (Wen, 1977) (Figure . 144 145). This setting allows the characters to jump out of the traditional text with a three-dimensional characterization.



Figure 120 Taiyi's wine jar in Birth of the Demon Child (left)
Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and television footage, 2019

In other characters, the fusion of national culture and modernization can also be seen. For example, in the original novel *Nezha*, the blue color of Ao Bing's costume and the red color of Nezha's costume maps the five elements of water and fire, and the image of the character as a gentle jade is more in line with modern aesthetics. The costumes of Mrs. Yin and Li Jing are decorated with taotie motifs, which first appeared on Liangzhu jade artifacts and are also known as animal-face motifs, a solemn pattern that expresses a certain level of social wealth and status. The bronze guards of Nezha in the movie, the Junction Beasts, which are popular for their fights and hilarious scenes, are based on the bronze masks with longitudinal eyes unearthed at Sanxingdui, which embody the bronze culture of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, and are a concrete expression of the Shu people's belief in the integration of their ancestors with the gods and spirits (Figure . 146 147).

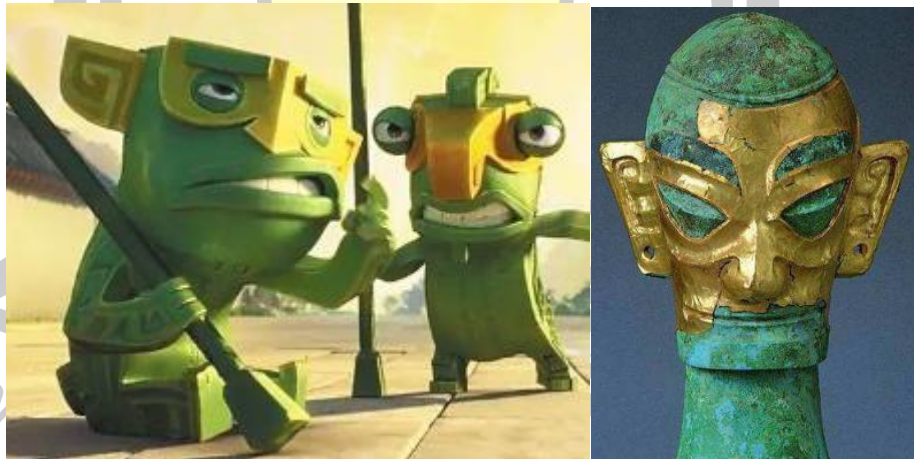


Figure 121 Junction Beast from Birth of the Demon Child (left)
Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and television footage, 2019

2.1.1.3 Traditional props

In the movie, the magic objects held by the characters and the props in the movie are also full of ethnic and cultural elements. Nezha's Qiankun Circle around his neck, the Mixed Sky Aya on his body, the fire-tipped spear in his hand, and the wind and fire wheels on his feet were all given to him by his master, Taiyi Zhenzhen. Qiankun circle is originally on the Kunlun Mountain Jade Palace treasure, and mixed sky damask pair, on behalf of heaven and earth and the universe chaos. The Fire Tip Gun, also known as the "Purple Flame Snake Spear Treasure," was used by Nezha to kill many of his enemies in the battle against the evil spirits, and was the weapon of choice for Nezha's three-faced, eight-armed form. In the "heavenly tribulation" that Nezha underwent, the symbol of the eight trigrams is Zhen Gua, representing thunder, implying that the tribulation was in the form of thunder (Figure . 148 149).



Figure 122 Na Zha in Birth of the Demon Child suffers a heavenly curse (left)
Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and TV footage, 2019

In the original novel, Ao Beng's weapon is the Fangtian Painted Halberd. This is an ancient cold weapon used in fighting. The halberd is decorated with colored paintings and has a "tic-tac-toe" shape at the top, which is popular among infantry and cavalry. In this movie, the double hammers from Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King are used as weapons, and this weapon is more familiar to the general public. In the film, during Nezha's birthday banquet, Mrs. Yin and Li Jing invite the villagers to attend the banquet, at which time the cups used to raise the cups to drink wine are "goblets" (Ming, 2020), which are both wine vessels and ceremonial vessels, and are traditional ancient vessels, prevalent in the Shang Dynasty and Western Zhou Dynasty, with the high-bodied and girdled shape prevalent in the middle of the Shang Dynasty". The cymbals were struck for ensemble playing in the music played by several people at the Birthday Banquet, and as one of the earliest percussion instruments in China, they were often used in military, ceremonial and banqueting ceremonies. Shaped like larger bronze bells, they are broad in cross-section and have short handles at the bottom for maneuvering (Figure .150 151) (Mingming & Mingming, 2013).



Figure 123 Wine vessel at Nezha's birthday party in Birth of the Demon Child (left)
Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and television footage, 2019

As an important supplement to the picture and story, props are full of ethnic cultural elements and details, which fit the background story kernel and also promote the spread of ethnic culture. The use of props, combined with Chinese martial arts culture, presents exciting fight scenes in the film, such as the fight between Nezha and Ao Beng on the beach, with red and blue colors and coherent and smooth movements.

2.1.1.4 Mythological scenarios

As an important part of the movie screen, scene symbols can articulate the screen, emphasize the atmosphere and explain the social background. In the construction of the movie landscape, the scene construction with national culture elements can present the traditional Chinese aesthetics, and it can also supplement the content narrative and guide the audience to interpret the movie. In Birth of the Demon Child, many Chinese cultural features are still examined, and the ink painting technique is used to depict the near, middle and far space, which has a unique beauty of the mood, and the expression of visual spectacle is used to create the typical scene image in an imaginative form.

In the movie, the "Mountain, River, and Jik Diagram", which is the scene where Nezha is closed off by Taiyi Zhenzhen to practice his magic, is also known as the "River, Mountain, and Jik Diagram", and is recorded to be Nuwa's magic treasure. The map is a record of the direction of the mountains and rivers that flowed during the Flood period, and it contains mountains, rivers, and the great expanse of the world, which nourishes the celestial beings and can produce all things. The construction of the scene in the film is characterized by strong Chinese idyllic colors and ink and whitewash, downplaying the carving of outlines, laying out the scene in soft tones, layering colors, and displaying oriental aesthetics. Lotus leaves are floating on the water instead of the earth as a carrier to build a temple with a waterfall. According to the director, this scene is inspired by the art of potted plants. In the picture, Taiyi and Nezha travel along the current, and in the movie they get into a boat and play surfing. The scene is borrowed from a common theme in ancient artwork, the "Immortal Ride". The term "Immortals Riding Crews" originates from Zhang Hua's "Museum Records - Volume 10" from the Jin Dynasty, which states that the Milky Way is

connected to the sea, and in August every year there are boats that travel to and from the river to find the Cowherd and the Weaving Maiden living in a fairyland of bliss.

In the movie, the people and Nezha's family live in the "Chentang Pass" is also the name of the place in the myth, Legends in the late Shang Dynasty, Chentang Pass affiliated with the King Zhou of Shang Dynasty, located in the entry of the Longmen Mountain and the river pass, Li Jing for the generals of this place. In addition, the scene of Nezha catching the civilians, the people show the lively and peaceful atmosphere in the street, the building presents the ancient Chinese architecture is the basic form, is the most common form of ancient Chinese architecture, and is more common in folk architecture (Bayue, 2011).

In addition to the extensive use of ink and landscape paintings, the movie also features some of the art of paper-cutting. For example, during Nezha's fight, one of the shots shows a close-up of the "Mixed Sky Aya", whose red color is naturally coupled with the red of Chinese paper-cut paintings, reflecting the completeness of the picture in the form of scattered dots, and the use of this form also makes the overall harmony of the picture more harmonious, reflecting the combination of static and dynamic images.

2.1.1.5 Classical music

As an audio-visual art, the combination of picture and sound can make the audience more immersed in the movie. In *Birth of the Demon Child*, a large number of traditional Chinese musical instruments are used, such as the erhu, suona, guqin, cymbals, chimes, etc. The use of Chinese folk music in the movie enriches the audio-visual elements of the movie and matches with the background of the era in the movie. In the movie, Chinese folk music is also presented in a more modernized form, such as the addition of Western orchestral music and musical special effects, which match the style of jazz, so that the music of Chinese animated movies presents a form of fusion.

In the beginning of the movie, the "Mixed Yuan Bead" is difficult to suppress, and Yuan Shi Tian Zun and the others split it into a magic pill and a spirit bead, in which the magic fighting scene is set to brass music, with a mixture of cymbals, drums, erhu, guqin, and chimes. The cymbals, as Chinese folk instruments, are often used in Buddhist and Taoist music, and the use of cymbals here also implies a mythological background. In addition, the chimes appeared in the Western Zhou Dynasty, and were often decorated with patterns of people, animals and dragons, and were used by the upper class in ancient China.

In the movie, Li Jing and Tai Yi Zhen went up to the sky to seek help from Yuan Shi Tian Zun, hoping to help Nezha to survive the heavenly calamity, but they were tricked by the "clouds". The music that emerges at this point in the film is upbeat and playful, using a lot of Chinese opera elements such as clappers, gongs and drums, three strings, and even ventriloquist sounds from traditional Chinese opera scores to create a strong sense of joy. The clappers originated from the accompanying instruments of Cantonese opera and were later used mostly in Peking opera, often used on strong beats to increase the dramatic atmosphere. The sanxian is one of the most commonly used accompanying instruments in ancient times, and was a necessary instrument for combination performances in ancient China. The suona is also often used in movies to set the mood, suona as a double reed woodwind instrument, high penetration, infectious, often used in folk weddings and funerals and

other ceremonies, suona art as China's intangible cultural heritage in the heritage of the national culture has characteristics and representativeness.

2.2 National Spirituality in Birth of the Demon Child

2.2.1 The Fated Duo of "Yin and Yang"

Chinese culture emphasizes on twin births and mutual restraints, and uses Yin and Yang as the core of philosophical thinking to explore the relationships between things and people, and to show the two sides of an event. "Birth of the Demon Child" contains the simple Chinese philosophy of yin and yang. At the beginning of the movie, the Bead of the Demon, which has been nurtured by the spirit of heaven and earth for thousands of years, keeps sucking the essence of the sun and the moon, and its energy is immense, but the energy absorbed by the Bead of the Demon is very mixed, and it is not clear whether it is good or evil. The First Heavenly Father sent Tai Yi Zhen and Shen Gong Bao to go and take over the Mixed Yuan Zhu. Because the Mixed Yuan Pearl was too strong, the First Emperor could only receive it into the alchemy furnace and divide it into Spirit Pearl and Magic Pill. The attribute of the Spirit Pearl is yang, and the attribute of the Magic Pill is yin. The yin and yang are separated from each other, and the good and evil are divided, which means that the Tai Chi gives birth to the two yi. The Taiji diagram, also known as the yin and yang fish, embodies the fundamental concepts of classical Chinese philosophy. Understanding the yin and yang fish from a social philosophical point of view reveals that the black fish and the white fish in the large circle represent the poles of yin and yang, with yang representing the good and yin representing the evil. A closer look at the yin and yang fish reveals that the yin fish has white pupils and the yang fish has black pupils, and that there is yang in yin and yin in yang, as if there is evil in good and good in evil.

"Birth of the Demon Child" does not continue the incompatible relationship between Nezha and Ao Bing. Ao Bing is a spirit bead, and should have been opposed to Nezha, who is a Demon Maru, but the two become friends without knowing each other's identities. "very excited", which shows that Ao Bing is the first person to recognize Nezha socially. The film opens up another new narrative point with a dual narrative, and the intertwining of their relationship is given significance (Qingqing, 2019). Ao Bing is good-natured by nature, but is helplessly tasked with revitalizing the Dragon Clan, and must eliminate the Mokumaru in order to gain the attention of the Celestial Court, which compels him to make enemies with Nezha. When he reveals his identity and prepares to flood Chentang Pass, he has already demonstrated the spirit of the movie, "Who you are is up to you" (Figure 152), and that even spirit beads may cause chaos in the sky and the earth. This is a reversal of the characters' relationship and deepens the theme of the movie.



Figure 124 Reconciliation between Nezha (right) and Ao Wei (left) in Birth of the Demon Child

Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and TV footage, 2019

Although Nezha is a magic pill, he has a good heart, and although Ao Beng is a spirit pearl, he will still do evil. In the Tai Chi diagram, the yin and yang fish are joined at the head and tail, with the head of the yin fish occupying a large area, representing the yin's extreme, and the head of the yin fish embracing the tail of the yang fish, representing the yin's extreme prosperity and the birth of the yang; on the other hand, the yang's extreme prosperity and the birth of the yin, yin and yang are in a dynamic situation, and can be transformed into each other to maintain a yin and yang balance. In the movie, Nezha is the reincarnation of the magic pill. When Shen Gongbao informs him of his true identity, he removes the Qiankun Circle and suppresses his evil nature, threatening to kill his own parents. This is the Tai Chi concept of evil giving rise to good, where yin and yang are born together.

The movie skillfully utilizes the "dual male narrative", changing the traditional narrative of "black or white", breaking the dichotomy of good and evil, and allowing the dynamic transformation of "positive" and "negative" roles. The "positive" and "negative" roles are dynamically transformed. Ao Bing, who belongs to the Dragon Clan, suffers from the prejudice of being called a "demon" by the people, and the prejudice links Ao Bing to Nezha, making it their common desire to break the prejudice and change their destinies. The "dual male narrative" drives the correlation between Nezha and Ao Beng's images. Nezha and Ao-pin share the same Mixed Yuan Pearl, and the design of their forehead marks echoes their relationship. The main inspiration for Nezha's forehead mark is the "Yang fish" pattern in Tai Chi, which corresponds to Ao-pin's forehead mark of the "Yin fish," a mark that enhances the recognizability of his image, which is also a symbol of the "Yin fish," a symbol of the "Yin fish. This mark enhances the recognizability of the image, and serves the plot of the two fighting against the heavenly thunder, echoing the relationship between the two as enemies and friends, and reflecting the philosophical idea of the unity of yin and yang.

Ao Beng was reborn as a spirit bead, so he was designed to be a handsome young man, which contrasted with Nezha's "ugliness". However, when Nezha broke free from the Qiankun Circle, he became a teenager of the same age as Aopin. The designers combined Aopin's image with Nezha's "beautification", incorporating Aopin's cool and handsome features, making his nose higher and weakening the

expression of his shark teeth, reflecting the connection between the two. The nose is made taller, and the expression of "shark's teeth" is weakened to reflect the connection between the two characters and to further serve the film's "dual male narrative" (Figure 153). This kind of character image not only conforms to the traditional Chinese idea of yin and yang, but also highlights the unique charm of animation art along with the dynamic change of the narrative development.

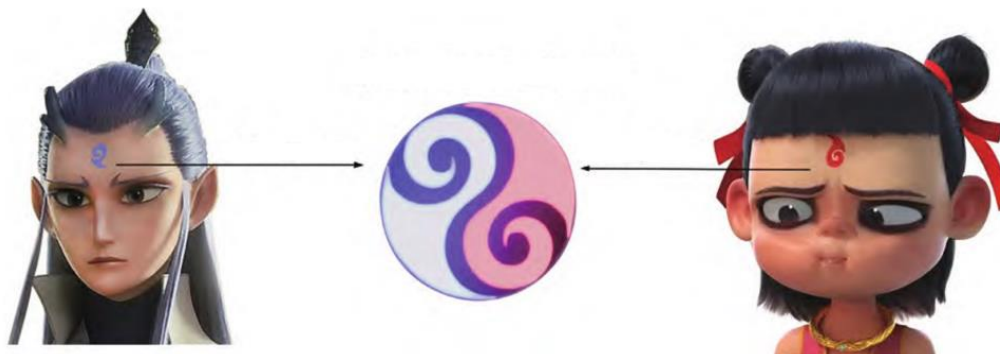


Figure 125 The marks on the foreheads of Nezha (right) and Ao Bing (left).

Source: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng, 2022

2.2.2 A happy ending under the idea of "peace"

Nezha's struggle with destiny can be seen as a reconciliation with himself and an acceptance of himself; his family relationships are a reflection of the traditional Chinese idea of "harmony". "Nezha was born into an atypical Chinese family, with a strict father who was the general of the Chentang Pass, and a loving mother who, in contrast to the ancient image of a woman who put her husband first, set him up as a female general who was brave and skilled in battle, the equivalent of a modern-day strong woman. In the movie, Nezha's mother plays a larger role, and is on a par with Li Jing in the defense of the Chentang Pass. The fact that women are no longer in a position to speak out of turn also implies that the status of contemporary women has risen, and that they have a higher voice, which is very much a modern woman's demeanor. The relationship between Nezha and his father is one of the main attractions of the movie. In the movie, Li Jing abandons the stereotypical image of a weak and selfish father and takes on the role of a strict father, giving Nezha a deep sense of fatherly love. When Nezha was born in the form of a demonic pill, Tai Yi was afraid that Nezha would become a demon and cause harm to the people and intended to get rid of him, but Li Jing defended him by saying, "I'm a man who is unlucky to have a son like this, but the child is innocent, and he's a victim, so it's hard for me to kill him", which demonstrated to the audience the responsibility of a father. When Li Jing learned that Nezha's life could be saved by using the method of transferring flowers to a tree, he did not hesitate to exchange his life for Nezha's. This is why he said to Nezha at his birthday banquet: "My son, you still have a long way to go in the future, so don't worry about what other people think, only you can say who you are. This kind of sacrificial fatherly love for his child is like a boulder hitting the audience's heart, and it has to make people tremble. He pays for his child in a silent, introverted, and implicit way, as the saying goes, "The gentleman's son, love but do not face it, make it but do not look like it, and guide it by the way, but do not force it" (philosopher, 2015). Only when Nezha learns the truth from the Qiankun circle does he come to his senses and realize the importance of his father's love, and that his

parents love and save him in different ways. It is his parents' recognition of Nezha and their dedication to him that guides Nezha to look at himself squarely, and to have the courage and determination to fight against his destiny and to say, "My destiny is mine, not Heaven's."

The word "harmony" in Chinese culture refers not only to unity in diversity, but also to unity in opposites, and in *Birth of the Demon Child*, Nezha and Ao Bing are in such a united relationship. The movie does not perpetuate the incompatible relationship between Nezha and Ao B. Ao B was born as a spirit pearl, and should have been in opposition to Nezha, who is a Demon Maru, but the two became friends without knowing each other's identities, with Nezha saying, "It's the first time since I was a kid that someone other than my mother has been willing to kick the shuttlecock with me, so I'm very excited". Ao Bing is the first person to give social recognition to Nezha. The movie opens up another brand new narrative point with a dual narrative, and the intertwining of their relationship is given great significance. Ao Bing is kind by nature, but is helplessly burdened with the mission of revitalizing the Dragon Clan, and must destroy the Devil Pill in order to gain the attention of the Celestial Court, which compels him to make an enemy out of Nezha, and when he reveals his identity and prepares to flood Chentang Pass, he has already demonstrated the spiritual kernel of the movie. When he reveals his identity and prepares to flood the Chentang Pass, the spirit of the movie is already revealed: "You are who you say you are", and even the Spirit Pill may cause chaos in the world. In the course of his battle with Nezha, Ao Bian awakens to the truth, and ultimately stands with Nezha on the same side to survive the thunderbolt, which creates a reversal in the relationship between the characters, and deepens the expression of the movie's theme. Under the influence of the idea of "peace", the movie ends in a "family-friendly" ending (Figure 154), with Nezha reconciling with himself, his parents, his destiny, and his friends, and the audience reconciling with themselves.



Figure 126 Birth of the Demon Child's happy ending
Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and TV footage, 2019

2.3 Cultural representations of the times

Birth of the Demon Child is significantly different from the myth of Nezha and various film and television portrayals such as Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, as it deconstructs the original spiritual core of the story and gives it a new spirit and value. It deconstructs the spiritual core of the original story and gives it a new spirit of the times and the pursuit of values, reshaping the whole story from a rebellion against feudal rule and patriarchal authority into a spirit of self-improvement, which is "my destiny is mine but not God's". If the spirit of the original myth is to rebel against feudal rule, the adapted Birth of the Demon Child has a strong sense of individualism; if the spirit of the original myth is to rebel against feudal patriarchy, the adapted Birth of the Demon Child has the emotional longing to return to the father's family and the ultimate conversion; furthermore, the adapted Birth of the Demon Child is still an expression of the spirit and value pursuit of the times, and the whole story is reshaped from rebelling against feudal rule and patriarchy to the spirit of "my destiny is my own". Birth of the Demon Child" is still creating a legendary story of a hero's growth, however, although it is the same hero, the adapted hero is no longer the same hero as the traditional hero, but a hero who is "my destiny is not up to heaven", "screw his bird's destiny! It is a hero with a very modern pursuit of individuality, with distinctive signs of the times and cultural characteristics of the times, "My destiny is not up to heaven", "Screw the life of a bird", "I'm a devil or a fairy, I'm the only one who can say so".

It can be said that Nezha in Birth of the Demon Child has turned from an anti-feudal fighter into a hero in pursuit of personal values; from rebelling against his father's authority and abandoning his family to valuing his family and returning to his family; and from a demonic child who rebelled against the feudal king's authority and his father's authority to a modern personal hero whose "life is up to me and not to God". This is the new cultural generation point and value of this movie. In the era of globalization, information network and networking, in the era of "everything has gone up in smoke before it has a chance to be fixed", the spirit of modern people is in a state of anxiety and desolation, therefore, the desire for family, the desire for human love and friendship, the desire for identity, the desire for cultural identity of the times are the most important factors for people in the contemporary world of diversified and disordered culture. The desire for family, for human love and friendship, for identity, and for the cultural identity of the times are the common emotional pursuits of people in the pluralistic and disordered culture of the present.

2.3.1 Individualistic pursuits

Birth of the Demon Child is more than a cartoon or a simple story of a three-year-old child growing up; it is a profound coming-of-age parable. Despite the young protagonist, the movie's message goes far beyond the typical "bear child" story. Many young parents find the emotion of parenthood in the father-son relationship in the movie. However, the theme song of Birth of the Demon Child states: "Life is full of tears, if you're not dead you'll have to live and suffer, the more you toss and turn the more unlucky you are, the more you pursue the more miserable you are, the more you're tired of struggling to die, you might as well be paralyzed and sleep in your bed. The song says: "Life is full of tears, the more you toss and turn, the more unlucky you

are, the more you pursue, the more miserable you are, are you tired of dying and struggling?

The most touching part of the movie is Nezha's self-awakening of his personality and ethics, "My destiny is mine but not God's", and he uses this as a concept to save Ao Bian, awakening Ao Bian to listen to his own inner will and not to believe in heaven's destiny. In saving Ao Beng, Nezha also accomplishes his own salvation; he is no longer a devil king, but a hero who stands up to the heavens and the earth. Following this, Ao Pi sacrifices his life for his friends, and while saving Nezha, he also accomplishes his own salvation, and is no longer the son of the Dragon King, who is burdened with a secret mission, but a kind, courageous, and righteous angel. Nezha and Ao Bian are a double rewriting of destiny and a double salvation. While saving each other, they save themselves; while rewriting their own destinies, they help rewrite the destinies of their friends. The Buddhist concept of "self-establishment of destiny" is better illustrated here. Although a person's destiny is predetermined by heaven, his or her subjective initiative can change his or her fortune and thus change his or her destiny. Nezha's parents undoubtedly played a key role in changing his destiny. His father told Nezha, "Dad has always been very strict with you, and I know that you have a lot of anger in your heart, so don't be concerned about what other people think. Nezha may not have understood the deep meaning of his father's words at the time, but when he learned the truth, everything became clear to him. It turned out that he was a Demon Pill, not a Spirit Pearl, and he felt that his parents had been lying to him, and for a moment, his demonic nature took over. But the help of the mounted pig made him truly realize the great love his father, who was willing to exchange his life for his own, had for him, and only then did he really know what he should do. Nezha knows that when the heavenly curse comes, he will die either way, so he chooses to fight fate to the end and become a hero who saves the world instead of being a demon king. "My destiny is mine but not heaven's, whether I am a devil or an immortal, only I can say so", showing the bravado and arrogance of daring to fight against heaven and earth.

The iconic lines in the play "My life is up to me, not to God" and "I decide whether I am a devil or a demon" directly reflect this self-declaration (Figure 155), and this spirit of relying on one's own ability to realize oneself is permeated by the critic's sentiment that "Through the movie, we see our own life". Through the movie, we see our own life". This declaration of individualism is fundamentally different from the distinctive personalities pursued by young people in the 1980s Re-enlightenment Movement. The individualism shown in the movie is mainly manifested through Nezha's efforts: no matter what fate has in store for him, no matter how isolated he is in society, Nezha insists on proving through his own abilities that he can and must determine his own destiny. This kind of individualism is not only a challenge to the external world, but also a profound exploration of the inner world, expressing an attitude of positive confrontation and self-affirmation no matter what kind of difficulties he encounters.



Figure 127 The line "My life is up to me" has become a catchphrase for young people.

Source: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/F1UATDN00512RRUR.html>, 2019

While the core of this individualistic narrative is not entirely new, it is novel in several key ways. First, Nezha's relationship with the small community of Chentangguan remains tense and antagonistic throughout the story. In the movie, Nezha is ostracized by the local people as a "small demon," but unlike the isolation-induced pathos of past movies, "The Ugliest Nezha Ever" deliberately adopts the society's "ugly" judgmental standards in order to make the movie more interesting. But unlike the sadness caused by the isolation of heroes in previous movies, "Nezha, the Ugliest of All Time" deliberately adopts society's "ugly" judgmental standards to express his disdain for society's evaluations, thus reflecting a kind of hatred and anger. The social relationship forged by this resentment and anger leads to the fact that even when Nezha eventually becomes the hero who saves the world at Chentang Pass, his motivation is not to reconcile with society, but rather to prove his own strength and to show his indomitable behavior in the face of life and death. Secondly, and closely related to the above, the support for Nezha in the film comes almost exclusively from his nuclear family, which seems to have quietly transformed the traditional Chinese story of Nezha's three sons into the film's only child, representing the one-child family model that characterizes contemporary China. Finally, the nature of the medium itself contributes to the freshness of animation. Because of the relative simplicity of the narrative, animated films do not need to delve into the complexity of the characters, and are thus able to push simple emotions to the limit. It is through this form of concise and focused expression that Birth of the Demon Child becomes a distinctive and profound local creation that expresses the individualistic emotions of contemporary youth.

The creative team of Birth of the Demon Child consists mainly of the post-80s, while its audience spans the post-80s, post-90s and even post-00s generations. These young people, as a group, have grown up in the logic of the market economy and the disparity between the rich and the poor, experiencing division and tearing; at the same time, they are also in an affluent society that has basically eliminated material deprivation, and are facing the severe challenges brought about by market

competition together. These generations, starting from the post-80s, grew up in a context where market competition gradually penetrated into all areas of life, education and career. Growing up in such a competitive environment, they can only rely on their own strength more often than not, in addition to relying on their family background. Therefore, *Birth of the Demon Child*, a coming-of-age story, touches the resonance and emotion of the entire generation growing up for those post-80s and post-90s young people. This experience of growing up in the midst of fierce competition, and the emotions accumulated from these experiences, are for the first time expressed so purely and directly in a movie, where the individual truly becomes the starting point for thinking about the relationship between human beings and society, and where the individualistic thinking of China's contemporary youth is a manifestation of the direct secular response to market competition against the backdrop of an increasingly deeper market economy.

2.3.2 Breaking the social stigma of labeling

The story of *Birth of the Demon Child* can be summed up by a line from the movie: "Stereotypes are a mountain in the mind, and no matter how hard you try, you can't move them". Nezha is the one who breaks the stereotypes and fights for his destiny, with many twists and turns in his heart and soul, and shows the beauty of human nature in its diversity. Nezha is supposed to be a spirit pearl, but by mistake he is replaced by a demonic pill. Fate has set up a barrier for Nezha from the very beginning, so Nezha is treated unfairly from birth, and as an ignorant child, he is shunned by everyone, and even punched and kicked, just because of his status as a demonic pill, and because of his demonic nature, which he has yet to reveal. "Nezha did not do anything wrong in the beginning, but it was the disapproval and fear of voices and other prejudices that caused him to embark on the path of the urchin who could not get the acceptance of the people and then played tricks on the people for fun, rebellious and withdrawn are his disguise, but in fact, deep in his heart, he is incredibly thirsty for the people's acceptance, and the surface seems to be tormenting the people, but in fact, it is also a way for him to look for playmates since his birth. From birth, he was imprisoned in the mansion, no friends and lack of family companionship, can only use this mischievous way to find a sense of existence, so that the people of the entire Chentang Pass to accompany him to play the game of "hide and seek", when he heard people call him "monster", this imposed on his body labels! When he hears people call him "demon," the label imposed on him is so intolerable that he even develops the mentality of being a demon and almost injures someone, causing a major disaster. At this point in his life, Nezha responds to the prejudice of the people with a childish mentality of indifference, obstinacy, and the intention of attracting attention to himself (Figure 156). Nezha's journey first changes when his father, Li Jing, can't bear to see him fall into such a state of degradation and lies to him that he is the reincarnation of a spirit pearl and that he is tasked with carrying out justice for the heavens. Nezha's look of disbelief changes to one of disbelief, which demonstrates his heartfelt desire to change his identity to one of righteousness, and is followed by two years of training to subdue the demons in the unique space of the Mountain, River, and Jiktu, in a desperate attempt to prove himself to break down people's prejudices. However, this is not to be, as Nezha is too impetuous and aggressive, and the people suffer while he fights demons, thus

deepening their fears and stereotypes of him. The second time Nezha's heart changes is when he learns that he is really a demon at his birthday party. His gloomy eyes and disheveled steps create a great misunderstanding of his father, leading to a full-on demonic outburst that leads to a complete overreaching of the devil. At this point, Nezha is caught in an identity crisis. The third change of heart comes when he learns the truth and understands his father's good intentions, Nezha comes to his senses, breaks through the constraints of social identity and accepts himself from the bottom of his heart, realizing the awakening of his self-consciousness, and truly realizes what he said, "If fate is unfair, fight it to the end! He also realizes his own self-consciousness and his words, "If fate is unjust, fight it to the end", and at the same time brings to the audience the thoughts of "life and death", "profit and righteousness" and other considerations (Figure 157).

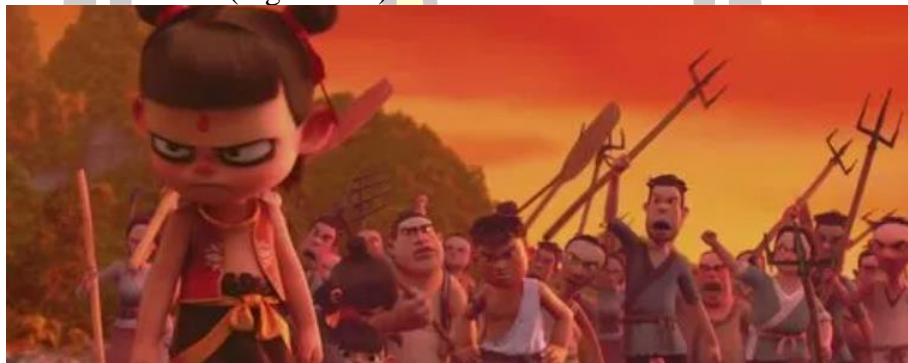


Figure 128 Nezha, who is discriminated against by the villagers at the beginning of the Birth of the Demon Child movie.

Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and TV footage, 2019



Figure 129 Villagers kneel to Nezha at the end of 'Birth of the Demon Child' movie

Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and TV footage, 2019

2.3.3 Projections of modern family relations

The Nezha portrays the conflict between Nezha and Li Jing, a father and son, which ends with a tragic suicide and rebirth in a lotus root body. The rich modern context creates a new story line for Nezha, and the adaptation of Birth of the Demon Child is a modern adaptation and reconstruction of traditional social issues such as parent-child relationships and self-awareness.

Birth of the Demon Child explores the ethical relationship between parents and children in the context of modern family relationships. Nezha, Li Jing and Madam Bon are all given different identities and conflicting responsibilities, with working parents and children growing up alone, and Nezha's conflict and reconciliation with his mother and father. Nezha's "My destiny is mine but not Heaven's" is a subject of struggle between himself and Heaven's destiny, whereas in the context of everyday life, the reconciliation of parent-child issues is a silent stream hidden beneath the dramatic struggle, and communication is a necessary bridge to build parent-child relationships in the new era.

Reset of motherhood. As the woman hidden behind the story, Mrs. Yin is a background character of the story in the earliest Buddhist scripture texts and secular fiction texts. But in Birth of the Demon Child, Mrs. Yin is no longer just a supporting role of a strict father and mother, she has her own story line, becoming a military general in armor, defending her home, and as a working mother with a career, responsibilities and family, her new identity allows Mrs. Yin to come out of her family, and this "Hua Mulan" has a very important role to play in the story of the family. This "Flower Mulan" struggles to find a balance between the conflicting parent-child relationship and the workplace (Figure 158). Mrs. Yin's "dilemma" is the epitome of countless modern-day mothers. The story of Mrs. Yin focuses on the independence and possibilities of women's roles and explores the social nature of women outside the family, rather than just the facial depiction of family members, and realizes the fusion of the mythological Legends and modern-day family relationships, which greatly enhances the sense of personal immersion for the audience. It also realizes the fusion of mythical Legends and modern family relationships, which greatly enhances the audience's sense of personal immersion.



Figure 130 Mrs. Yin, Nezha's mother in Birth of the Demon Child (center)

Source: Birth of the Demon Child movie and TV footage, 2019

Patriarchal Conflict and Reconciliation. In literary works such as *Nezha and Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King*, Li Jing does not have much of a fatherly heart, and even sees Nezha as a monster in several episodes. In *Birth of the Demon Child*, Li Jing is transformed into a fatherly figure, a man of few words, but a loving family man with a deep sense of love. Director Dumpling has also said that the family relationships in the movie have their own emotional projection, exploring the "Chinese style of parent-child relationship". The tolerance, support and love of the parents reverses Nezha's "destiny" and repairs the classical tragedy of father-son relationships. The object of Nezha's resistance is no longer Li Jing, the representative and beneficiary of "paternal authority", or the "divine authority" of the dragons, but rather, in the context of everyday life, the abstract "mandate of heaven" is materialized as *Instead, in the context of everyday life, the abstract "Mandate of Heaven" is visualized as "prejudice in everyday life", from which golden lines such as "Prejudice is a big mountain in the heart of a person, no matter how hard you try, you can't move it" are generated, which is highly communicative and persuasive, and widely disseminated in the market of the audience.*

For the three members of Li Jing's family, the film makes changes of different degrees, which are both dramatic and realistic, taking into account the context of the times and the audience's appetite. In line with the "abandonment of stereotypes" proposed in the movie, Li Jing and his wife break away from their original personas and become fuller and more positive images, with Li Jing losing his attitude towards family and Mrs. Yin becoming a template for women in the new era. Of course, the reason behind this may be that commercial movies are still trying to cater to the market. But on the whole, the audience has seen a different image of the characters, and these adaptations are towards a comedic color change, in the audience feel surprised at the same time, but will fall in love with a brand new image, but also in the characters behind the more "empathy" experience.

A family favorite, *Birth of the Demon Child* takes away Nezha's determined and powerless struggle to return his father's flesh and flesh, and once again explores the possibility of a new secular reconciliation of the father-son relationship between Nezha and Li Jing, reflecting social issues such as family relationships and parenting anxiety in today's society.

Part III Symbolic Interaction in Birth of the Demon Child

3.1 Creator's interaction with Nezha

After conducting in-depth interviews with character designers and downstream industry practitioners involved in *Birth of the Demon Child*, as well as collecting a large amount of behind-the-scenes information, this study found that the creative team had designed more than a hundred versions of Nezha's image, and that there were a number of pre-selected versions that were more in line with the public's aesthetics, but the director ultimately chose the "Ugly Nezha" image, which is very different from the classic image. The director ultimately chose the "Ugly Nezha" image, which was a very twisted process.

The first challenge faced by the designers was how to maintain the traditional symbolic meaning of Nezha while introducing new elements that would appeal to modern audiences. Nezha has been portrayed more often as a child in previous animation productions, and viewers have formed an image of Nezha as a child. If the

design is too much like the previous one, it will be seen as lacking in creativity. If the design is too much like the previous one, it will be regarded as lacking in innovation. If the design is changed too much, it will be criticized for "ruining childhood". Therefore, designers generally agreed that the design of the children's version of Nezha was more difficult than the juvenile version (Figure 159). The first phase of the project focused on designing the children's version of Nezha, and the character design was discussed in an interview with Shen Wei:

"Usually the main character of a story carries very much, so it's easy to lose character and become mediocre in terms of styling. People will find it easy to remember some supporting characters when watching an animated movie, instead the impression of the main character becomes blurred due to this reason.

I was also rather conservative when I started designing Nezha. Although Nezha is a rebellious demonic child, the first few versions of the look retained very much of the cuteness, considering the market acceptance. It can be said to be moderate, not colorful, but not deviating from the theme either...the protagonist can't be too out there, the risk is too great, and the feelings of the majority of the people have to be taken into account. (Variety, 2019)"

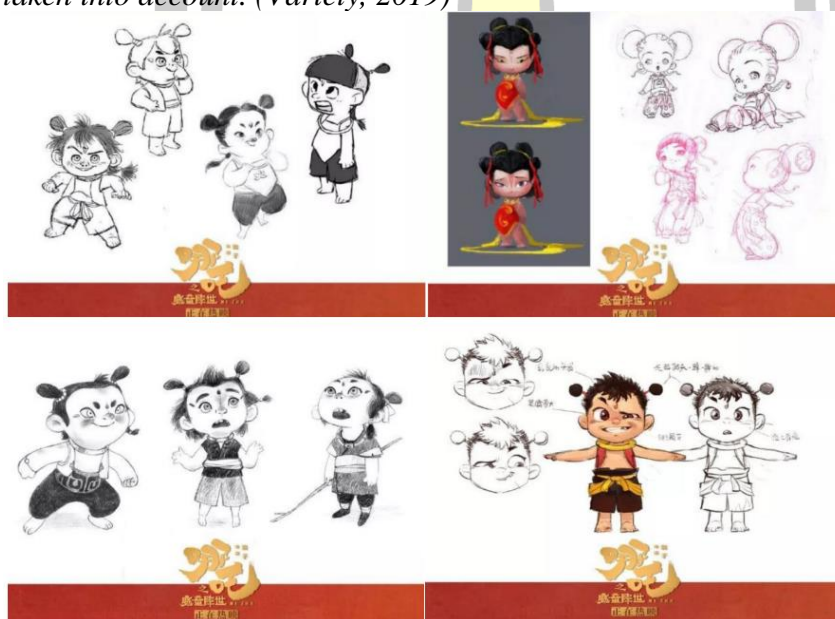


Figure 131 Unused design for Birth of the Demon Child

Source: Birth of the Demon Child Character Set Manuscript, 2018

After the conceptual design of the characters, all the designs were discussed and voted within the company. "Birth of the Demon Child" is a commercial movie, in order to take into account the needs of the market, the design team finally chose a cute design solution that better meets the market demand and audience's expectations after the internal discussion and voting. In this process, the designers are not only designing the appearance of a character, but also interacting with the audience on a symbolic level, to jointly construct and identify a character image that meets the spirit of the times and cultural expectations.

Towards the end of the character design process, director Dumpling traveled to Beijing to attend a meeting with Light Media and Colorful Stripes, where he had an in-depth discussion with producers and supervisors about the image of Nezha, with the children's version of the character being the focal point of the discussion. Reflecting on this, the director thought that the previous design had not yet fulfilled the requirements of the narrative, and lacked characterization, so he proposed to give up on the previous proposal, and to increase the contrast of the design in order to further highlight the qualities of the "magic child". "The meeting finally decided to change the design direction. In the end, the meeting decided to change the design direction and support the director to continue the new exploration. After the meeting, the director encouraged the designers to think out of the box and challenge the programmed design, said character designer Shen Wei in an interview:

"I have a very deep impression. At that time, Dumpling said to me, "Since we have spent so much effort to do it, we are not afraid to try, even if it is ugly or different, as long as it is what we want in our hearts, we will admit failure. Just let go of the painting, don't be bound by those rules and regulations."

I was shocked and admired the courage of the director and Light, and was touched that they trusted me and gave me the opportunity to do this. It was then that I really understood the significance of designing this Nezha, that he was not created for the sake of pandering and following the crowd, but for the sake of telling a good story... Later on, we designed dozens of Nezha avatars in different styles and slapped them on the table, forcing the director to choose at least one direction no matter what. The director asked all of his colleagues to vote, and some liked the cute one, while others chose the cooler version. Unexpectedly, after reading the results of the voting, he chose the most unappreciated and recognized as the ugliest one... Soon several versions of the very "non-mainstream" design were presented (Figure 160). I guess any other director would have fired me if he had seen the "flipped nostrils, black eyes and shark teeth". But Dumpling had the guts, and after some fine-tuning in the 3D department, it wasn't long before the final version of Nezha in smoky makeup that we see in the main movie was born (Variety, 2019)."





Figure 132 Birth of the Demon Child Nezha design

Source: Birth of the Demon Child Character Set Manuscript, 2018

The process of designing Nezha was not just an examination of the character's appearance, but a deeper interaction between symbolic meaning, social expectations and innovation. The challenge for the designers and director was how to maintain the core meaning of Nezha as a national cultural symbol while introducing new elements to appeal to modern audiences. This process was not just a technical and aesthetic challenge, but an interaction on a symbolic level aimed at co-constructing an image of the character that is both contemporary and culturally resonant. The shift between the design team's initial conservative attempts and later bold innovations reveals two key aspects of the symbolic interaction process: first, the creators' sensitive response to audience expectations and cultural acceptance, and second, how the tension between innovation and tradition can be resolved in creative practice. The exploration process of director Dumpling and designer Shen Wei, especially their decision to abandon the initial design in favor of a more contrasting design that highlights the qualities of the "magical boy," reflects a reinterpretation and innovation in the symbolic meaning of Nezha. In an interview with Shenyang Ruqiao Animation, the company that produced the special effects for Birth of the Demon Child, the founder of the company said, "Dumpling really cares about the audience's feelings, and he often mentions in meetings what the audience will think. (Figure 161)"



Figure 133 The author (right) interviews the founder of Birth of the Demon Child special effects production company (left)
Source: Illustrated by Shi Xuefeng, 2023

The director's reflection on the original design and decision to abandon it in pursuit of a more distinctive "magical child" character, in essence, is a visualization of the process of meaning construction in symbolic interactionism. The director's decision-making process and the design team's attempts at innovation. The explanatory power of symbolic interactionism for individual behavior is highlighted. The director's guiding principle that it is preferable to devise highly individualized and even Images that may not be accepted are not willing to fall into mediocrity, reflecting the fact that symbols not only carry the transmission of information, but also contain the creator's anticipation and dialog for social feedback. The embodiment of such anticipation and dialog in the design process reveals the complex process of communication and negotiation of meaning between individuals and society in the theory of symbolic interaction. By redesigning the image of Nezha, the design team is actually engaging in a face-to-face communication with the general public, attempting to maintain the traditional symbolic significance of the character while introducing elements that can trigger new social resonance. The design team's re-exploration of Nezha's image, such as the rocker's smoky makeup and the addition of "shark teeth", demonstrates the role of symbols in constructing social reality. These design details are not just visual changes, but also an attempt to modernize the interpretation of Nezha as a national cultural symbol. Through this interpretation, the designers not only challenged the traditional definition of the symbol, but more importantly, they redefined the meaning of "magic child" in the contemporary cultural context. This process of reconstruction of meaning is a typical example of the dynamic evolution of symbolic meaning in the theory of symbolic interaction, demonstrating the innovative use of symbols to reflect and shape changing social values.

Unlike *Birth of the Demon Child*, *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King* was produced by the Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio with state funding, and then purchased by the state at a price that was a product of the planned economy. Both works are the masterpieces of the "Chinese School of Animation", and the image of the protagonist represents the image of the country to a certain extent. In this way, nationally renowned artists were invited to design the image of Nezha. The Nezha in

Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King was designed by Mr. Zhang Ding, then president of the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts, and the Nezha in Pandemonium in Heavenly Palace was designed by Mr. Zhang Guangyu, who teaches at the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts, and the director adopted their designs directly, which is a creator-driven production. This is a creator-driven production mode. The production of Birth of the Demon Child, on the other hand, took into account the needs of the audience, the creators, and the investors, and this mode of production was a macro-factor that contributed to the change in Nezha's image design.

It can be seen that the differences in the design of Nezha's image in The Great Pandemonium of Heaven and Earth, Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King and Birth of the Demon Child are not only a change in artistic style, but also a direct manifestation of the impact of changes in the mode of production and the socio-economic system on the construction of symbolic meanings. Under the planned economy, the design of Nezha's image was mainly to serve the country's cultural export and image building, whereas under the market economy, the design of Nezha's image needs to find a balance between the creator, the audience, and the market, demonstrating the plasticity and diversity of symbolic meanings in the process of different social interactions. This analysis not only demonstrates the application of the theory of symbolic interaction in explaining the changes in image design of cultural products, but also reveals the profound impact of changes in social structure on the construction of cultural symbolic meaning.

3.2 Audience-creator interaction

After the success of Birth of the Demon Child, the audience praised Birth of the Demon Child as the "Light of Domestic Animation" from the angles of drawing style, story, characters, and details, which not only recognized the quality of the animation, but also affirmed the symbolic significance of the work. After the screening of Birth of the Demon Child in Kunming, Yunnan Province, director Dumpling was on hand to interact with fans, discussing and answering questions about the movie (Figure 162). A fan who was watching Nezha for the 10th time asked.

"Fans: Did Nezha tie his own hair every day?

Dumpling: the visitor is not good, this I have to think about how to make up, let me calm down. he has divine power, so you see ah, he is not after the storm will go to that kind of berserk state, no consciousness of the state, the body of the clothes burned into that kind of, even his pants are burned off that kind of feeling, why he set the full kunai circle after recovery and then become good again? This is the power of God!

Fan: What's the name of Ao's hammer?

Dumplings: This is so stressful! Waiting for me to think of a good name that really hasn't percolated to.

Fans present: (sea salt pearl mussels)

Dumpling: omg! That's brilliant! Sea salt pearl mussels

Fans: It's a done deal!

Dumpling: it's OK!

Third question: Who taught Nezha how to read and write?

Fans: Who taught Nezha how to read?

Dumplings: (Baby's heart is bitter) This audience has huge brains

Dumpling: do you want to eh, konmaru eh, gifted, watch and learn!

Fan: So no one is teaching is there?

Dumplings: Self-learning Self-learning

Host: as self-taught as the dumpling director." (Yanhe, 2019).



Figure 134 Director Dumpling's Meet and Greet with Media Fans
Source: Spring City Evening News - Open Screen News

The interaction between the *Nezha* animated film and its director Dumpling and fans demonstrates how symbolic interaction builds and deepens the cultural significance of the film. Fans ask questions about *Nezha*'s hair, the name of Ao B's hammer, and the way in which *Nezha* learns to read, and director Dumpling's answers go beyond simple explanations of these details to construct deeper meanings for the characters and story worlds of the film with the fans through humorous and creative interactions. For example, the director's answer to the question about *Nezha*'s hair emphasized *Nezha*'s divine power, while the process of naming Ao Beng's hammer turned into a creative conversation with the fans at the scene, which ultimately led to the adoption of the idea of the "sea-salt pearl mussel" provided by the fans. This interaction not only increased the depth of the movie's story, but also strengthened the fans' emotional commitment to the movie and their sense of belonging.

Through these interactions, the relationship between director and fan transcends the traditional creator-audience boundary and becomes a collaborative process of co-participation and co-creation of story worlds. This kind of interaction embodies the core idea in symbolic interactionism, which is that people constantly negotiate and construct social reality through the use and interpretation of symbols. In this process, seemingly trivial details such as *Nezha*'s hair, Ao C's hammer, and *Nezha*'s learning style are given new meanings through interactions with fans, meanings that not only enrich the story world of the movie, but also deepen the fans' emotional connection to the movie's characters and plot. This shows that a richer and more multidimensional space of cultural significance has been co-constructed between *Nezha*'s audience and his creators.

3.3 Audience interaction with Nezha

In the movie, there is very little concrete portrayal of the relationship between Nezha and Ao B. Ao B has become the only person in the world who is willing to play shuttlecock with Nezha besides his mother, and has also become Nezha's only friend. The scene where the two are playing shuttlecock together in the sunset leaves a lot of blank space for the creators to fill in, which has resulted in a lot of unexpected creations, and the characters that have high enthusiasm for secondary creations in the field of animation all have this characteristic. Characters with high enthusiasm for secondary creation in the animation field share this characteristic: they have distinctive characters and leave a lot of white space in the story. The CP of Lotus Root and Pancakes is a typical example of this.

"CP" is an abbreviation for Coupling, which refers to the pairing of characters in anime, movies and TV shows as same-sex or opposite-sex couples by the fans themselves. The term "Lotus Root Cake" comes from fan associations, with "Lotus Root" referring to Nezha, who uses lotus root to reshape his body, and "Cake" being a portmanteau of the name of the third prince of the Dragon King, Ao Bing, which means "C". The "cake" is a portmanteau of the name of Ao B, the third prince of the Dragon King. Nezha and Ao B are destined to have this kind of fateful attraction due to the Mixed Pearl, and after meeting and getting to know each other, they are bound to have all kinds of collisions. Some female viewers paired up Nezha and Ao B as a pair out of their love for the two male characters, and became addicted to this kind of incestuous romance that was not found in the movie, which gave rise to a lot of secondary creations based on the movie or even the movie (novels, pictures, etc.), and #Lotus Root Cake was once the second most popular CP list in the Weibo. Supertalk was once second on the CP list (Figure 163), with more than 340 million readers, and on the light blogging site LOFTER Nezha and Ao Bao made it into the top three of the popular character list on the Monthly List of Secondary Yuan Derivative Creations. The video of Nezha and Ao B's song, edited and created by netizens on the Clash of Clouds animation website⁷, has received nearly one million hits.

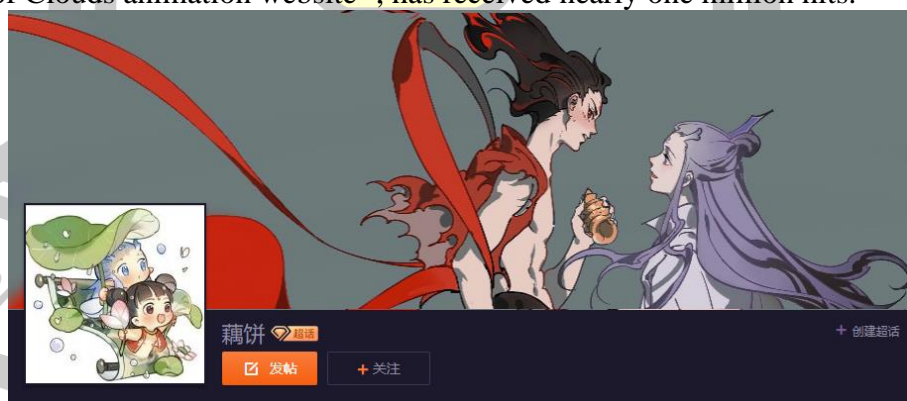


Figure 8 #The CP of Lotus Root and Pancakes #superlatives
Source:Sina Weibo Super Topics, 2019

⁷ China's leading youth culture community and video sharing website, loved by young people.

Young people who love homoeroticism find a lot of room to play in *Birth of the Demon Child*, and this may be a deliberate strategy of the movie's details. In terms of characterization, Ao B and Nezha appear as "twins" from the very beginning (the Mixed Bead splits into two - the Spirit Bead and the Demon Bead), with Ao B dressed in white immortal robes, gentle and kind, abiding by the rules and with a more feminine temperament, while Nezha is dressed in a fiery red shirt, unruly and uninhibited, disregarding the rules and with a more masculine temperament (Figure 164).



Figure 135 Birth of the Demon Child homages
Source: <https://huaban.com/pins/2649845665>, 2019

The opposing personalities and even gender traits of Nezha have sparked a strong desire for creativity among young people. In addition, Nezha's calling out to Ao Bian with his conch has provided the homoerotic hobbyist community with a wide range of imaginative possibilities. In the religious classics and the *Nezha*, Nezha has no love interest, and it is only in the animated series *The Legend Of Nezha* that Nezha has a suspected romantic friendship with Xiao Longnu. In *The Legend Of Nezha*, Little Dragon Lady tells Nezha that when he misses her, he can blow the conch and she will appear. The conch episode was also used in *Birth of the Demon Child*, so Nezha's call to the Goddess of Mercy also has a nostalgic connotation (Figure 165). Netizens even compared the shape of the conch in the two versions of *Nezha*. In *The Legend Of Nezha*, Nezha uses a common right-handed conch, while in *Birth of the Demon Child*, Nezha uses a rare left-handed conch. Because the left-handed conch is so precious, it is often used to represent a loved one (Figure 166). It is in details like these that the homoerotic community finds the pleasure of discovering "proof". Regardless of whether these details are intentional or unintentional on the part of the director, they objectively give the homoerotic community a wide scope for imagination and creativity, especially the group of corrupt women on the Internet,⁸ , who are particularly obsessed with fantasizing about Nezha's incestuous romance with Ao Bing, generating a large number of secondary creations with sexual innuendo (Figure . 167 168).

⁸ Originating from Japan, a rotund woman is a woman who enjoys male-to-male love (i.e., gay men).



Figure 136 Little Dragon Lady presents Nezha with a conch in "The Legend Of Nezha" (left)

Source: The Legend Of Nezha Movie Clips



Figure 137 "The CP of Lotus Root and Pancakes" COSPLAY (left)

Source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1645299524863040047&wfr=spider&for=pc>, 2019

The CP of Lotus Root and Pancakes" has aroused considerable controversy on the Internet, with some viewers arguing that "as moviegoers, we don't need the director's approval to understand the movie, nor do we need the director's approval to re-create the movie, and the relationship between the creator and the public's understanding is originally one of mutual tension. The relationship between the creator and the public's understanding of a movie is originally one of mutual tension and disagreement. There is no doubt that the public has the right to understand works of literature and art. (snack, 2019) "On the other hand, some viewers on the other side think that they should not make such a big adaptation of the plot that is not in the

movie, director Dumpling responded to the incident about the online CP fermentation by saying:

"Because I am a typical straight man ah, so when I first did this, is to think that the hybrid bead into two, after the split into two in the underworld is this destiny of attraction, and finally in the end to produce a variety of collision, the story. In fact, they produced a pure friendship, but after the work is done how the audience interpretation is the audience's freedom!"

From the perspective of symbolic interaction, the pairing of "lotus root" and "cake" is not only a language game, but also a process of creating new meanings through symbolic interaction through the audience's imaginative reconstruction of the roles of Nezha and Ao B. The interaction between the audience and Nezha transcends the simple viewing experience and develops into a complex process of symbolic exchange. The interaction between the audience and Nezha goes beyond a simple viewing experience and develops into a complex process of symbolic exchange. Fans interact with Nezha by interpreting and recreating his symbols (e.g., film images, character dialogues, plot developments), and these symbols become a medium of communication within the fan community and with the wider cultural dialog. This interaction not only reflects the way in which viewers understand and assign new meanings to Nezha through the exchange of symbols, but also demonstrates their internalization of these meanings as part of their own social identities.

3.4 Audience to audience interaction

As passive receivers at the end of the line, the audience's voice is hindered by the limitations of traditional media. With the popularization of the Internet, a new cultural consumption ecology has been formed, building a two-way communication relationship between creators and audiences, and audiences no longer passively accept resources and content, but have a higher willingness to participate, actively participate in their favorite culture, and gather together fan groups to form a circle culture.

Fan groups have stronger subjectivity, discussing and sharing the works in a wide range based on the audience's cognitive level and aesthetic preference, realizing story re-circulation. They are the voice of a new round of work dissemination, and the fan community has a stronger subjectivity in the interactive relationship, and its aesthetic preference even affects the subsequent content production.

The fan community is more participatory, and in terms of content production, under the trend of media convergence, creators encourage the audience to participate in the process of media consumption and media reproduction, and the subsequent creation of the work will take into account the audience's aesthetic preferences. Derivative homage works created by fans also reflect the audience's interpretation and exploration of the work, and the creators have ceded part of the sovereignty of the work to the audience, constructing a two-way content dissemination relationship, and the content reproduction and dissemination process of the work highlights the audience's participation and subjectivity.

Birth of the Demon Child has created a staggering number of fans on the Internet, who interact with each other through their own behaviors and fervently express their stance on Nezha, with Baidu posting user "Yuan Yanhe" mentioning that "Nezha undoubtedly has a circle of fans. There is no doubt that Nezha has a fan circle,

and Nezha's fans can be divided into distinct camps, so much so that it can be seen as a typical case (Yanhe, 2019)." This includes ordinary fans who only interact with Nezha by liking the movie, homoerotic viewers who are obsessed with "The CP of Lotus Root and Pancakes", and data experts who focus on Nezha's box office, etc. From the perspective of symbolic interaction theory to elaborate and analyze Nezha's fans' behaviors, Nezha's interactions among viewers can include the following types of behaviors. The interaction between audiences based on Nezha can include the following behaviors:

3.2.2.1 Social Media Engagement Behavior

Likes, retweets, and comments: Most viewers demonstrated basic support and positive feedback for the Nezha movie by engaging in likes, retweets, and comments on popular microblogs. This interactive behavior exemplifies how viewers share and confirm positive comments about Nezha through basic symbolic exchanges in their daily social media activities. This is the most basic mode of interaction and reflects the fact that Nezha's appeal as a universally popular cultural symbol is not limited to in-depth fans, but also reaches a wide range of viewers. This type of interaction is largely passive and superficial, with fans engaging in popular microblogging by liking, retweeting, and commenting on popular microblogs, and only fans with this type of behavior have more superficial symbolic interactions related to Birth of the Demon Child. These types of social interactions show general identification with and acceptance of the Birth of the Demon Child movie by the average fan, but lack deep emotional investment or meaning construction. Their patterns of interaction reflect a liminal engagement with a Popular media Culture phenomenon in which Birth of the Demon Child, as a social symbol, is imbued with general favor rather than deep personal meaning.

3.2.2.2 Data collection and sharing behavior

Concerns about box office and data collation: Some fans collect box office data on various platforms, go over the wall to collect overseas box office data, organize tables, track and broadcast Nezha's achievements in real time, and pay attention to public opinion unfavorable to Nezha. This group behavior focuses on Nezha's commercial success and his status in the film industry, demonstrating how fans jointly construct a perception of Nezha's value through social interactions (e.g., data sharing and discussion). By focusing on the box office success of Birth of the Demon Child and its status in the film industry, career fans demonstrate a mode of symbolic interaction based on achievement and recognition. By collecting and sharing box office data and participating in discussions, fans not only give significance to the economic and cultural achievements of Birth of the Demon Child, but also construct a sense of identity and belonging within the fan community that centers on career achievements. This type of interactive behavior exemplifies how individuals co-construct collective perceptions of the film's success and impact through the exchange of symbols in the process of social interaction.

3.2.2.3 Content creation and discussion behavior

Making emoticons and discovering movie stems: Some fans are in the position of simply loving the movie, swiping the movie a few times or even a dozen times, and knowing the details of the movie as if they knew it by heart. Not only that, they use their own actions to interpret their love for the movie, including making emoticons, artwork, and second-hand creations based on the animated characters, to excavate the

laughs within the movie. The in-depth knowledge and repeated viewings of Birth of the Demon Child by this type of fans show a deep symbolic interaction and meaning-giving. By discussing the movie's details, lines, and characters, they collectively build a community culture of deep understanding and appreciation about Birth of the Demon Child. This interaction not only reinforces fans' personal emotions and identification with the film's content, but also facilitates the formation of a collective identity based on film interpretation and cultural analysis.

3.2.2.4 Role Relationship Interpretation Behavior

Creation of homoerotic content: A small number of viewers (predominantly female) imagined and reconstructed the relationship between Nezha and Ao Beng based on the two male characters beyond the setting of the movie, i.e., "The CP of Lotus Root and Pancakes" mentioned above, and expressed their fervent fascination with "The CP of Lotus Root and Pancakes" by creating and sharing homoerotic content featuring Nezha and Ao Beng. By creating and sharing content featuring Nezha and Ao Beng, they express their fervent fascination with "The CP of Lotus Root and Pancakes". Most of the fans who identify with "The CP of Lotus Root and Pancakes" understand the movie plot and the relationship between the two male protagonists correctly, and participate in or enthusiastically discuss their homosexuality, while the heavy fans have completely reconstructed the relationship between Nezha and Ao Beng, and are unable to view the movie plot in a normal way. view the movie plot. Through the creation and sharing of homoerotic works, not only are the characters given new relationships and story lines, but also a sense of cultural significance and belonging based on the interpretation of a particular character's relationship is constructed within the fan community. This interaction exemplifies how individuals explore and expand the meaning of the original movie through symbolic exchange and shared cultural creation.

3.2.2.5 Cultural goods consumption behavior

Buying peripherals: Almost all fans demonstrated their support for the movie by purchasing Nezha-related peripherals, a behavior that reflects the audience's participation in the phenomenon of Nezha culture through the consumption of cultural commodities, and through this act of consumption they demonstrated their personal identity and sense of belonging to the group.

2.2.2.6 Cultural Discussion and Defensive Behavior

Fan controversies: The rebuttal of public opinion against the smearing of Nezha, the hostility towards other fan groups, and the controversies between different Nezha fan camps exemplify the concept of "defining contexts" in symbolic interactionism. Different fan groups assign different meanings to the cultural product Birth of the Demon Child, creating their own social phenomena. This difference not only comes from different interpretations of the movie's content, but also has to do with their respective social identities, values and emotional needs. Discussions, debates and even conflicts between fans are redefining and negotiating the meaning of the movie and its characters through interaction. Especially in the controversies and tears, fan groups are not only competing for the right to interpret movie symbols, but also confirming and consolidating their own group identity through this process. The cooperation and conflict in this interactive process not only reflects the multiple interpretations of movie culture, but also reveals how individuals and groups in social interaction construct social reality through symbols.

Part IV The Social Insinuation of Birth of the Demon Child

4.1 Dissolution of commercial discourse

With economic development, China has become the second largest economy in the world, which has greatly enriched the people's material needs, and at the same time bred consumerism and hedonism. People are lost in the materialistic state dominated by "symbolic consumption" and the carnival state represented by "entertainment to death". The development of the Internet has changed the form of communication, broken down the barriers of communication, changed the inherent paradigm of the recipients, and become a hotbed for the development of various subcultures. For example, "funeral culture", "Buddhist culture", "ugly culture" and so on. Behind the subculture is not only the epitome of the national carnival, but also the strategy to cope with the state of life and identity anxiety of people in the post-modern society. People enjoy and question at the same time, and begin to reflect on and criticize and deconstruct the inherent authority and hierarchy, moving from a sense of collectivism to a tendency of individualism. Nezha in smoky makeup and the vulgar Tai Yi Zhen, satisfy modern people's need for entertainment and sensory stimulation, and transform the meaning of traditional images through banter and splicing to satisfy the need for entertainment.

4.2 Real-world orgies

Benjamin viewed the movie as a photographic reflection of reality, allowing the audience to see the true nature of life, which has been numbed and covered up in their daily experience, thus giving the audience a shocking effect on their faculties. People have formed a collective memory of the story and image of Nezha, and it is shocking enough for the audience to see the image of Nezha shattered and in great contrast to what they have been used to. This shock is accompanied by the pleasure of ecstasy. In Bakhtin's theory of revelry, parody occupies an important place, and one is not only directed at oneself, oneself, but is filled with distortions and interpretations of the so-called sacred. In Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King and The Legend Of Nezha Nezha is portrayed as a positive, sacred hero, but when Nezha's heroic image is deconstructed and parodied, what is satisfied between this great contrast is the carnival behavior of the audience in the postmodern society.

4.3 Projection of Individual Emotions

Birth of the Demon Child is a postmodern narrative of the story of Nezha that breaks through ideologies and stereotypes, and expresses people's quest for self-meaning and self-identity. Borrowing from Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, the audience projects the animated symbolic meaning formed by the experience of being there emotionally, inwardly into the audience's psychological identity cognition, and outwardly into the fantasy of real life, and reconstructs their self-intentions in this way. The reason why Birth of the Demon Child is recognized and sought after by the audience is largely due to "immersion" and "empathy". In the modern world, with all the pressures of life, the ego needs an outlet to vent its spirit under the heavy blows of real life. Nezha is a stand-in for them to awaken their inner desires and needs. The audience becomes Nezha and uses the story of Nezha's resistance to fate to express their sense of self-resistance to the realities of life, to satisfy their own desires that

they are unable to vent in real life, and to help them spiritually realize their ideals of survival.

Summary of the chapter

Through an in-depth analysis of *Birth of the Demon Child*, a case study of a contemporary Chinese animated film, this chapter demonstrates its skillful fusion of traditional Chinese cultural elements and modern social values, which not only reshapes the image of the classic mythological character Nezha, but also reflects the complexities and cultural dynamics of contemporary society. By exploring the characterization of Nezha, analyzing the cultural representations of the nation and the times, and examining the rich symbolic interactions and social insinuations in the film, this chapter reveals that the animated work has been able to become a cultural phenomenon that has stimulated extensive public discussion and cultural reflection.

The case study in this chapter shows the extensive use of ethnic and cultural elements in the creation of film texts. In the presentation of linguistic symbols, the dialect reflects the regionalization of culture in oral expression and increases the closeness of expression. In the presentation of non-verbal symbols, the traditional character modeling reflects the Taoist construction of the image of man and god, showing the Chinese religious culture. Folk props are portrayed in accordance with the background of the story, integrating the culture of Chinese artifacts and science and technology. The mythological scenes illustrate the development of ancient Chinese architectural culture, and the differences in the appearance of houses reflect ancient hierarchies. The "Mountains and Rivers and Gods of Earth and Water" is an illustration of traditional Chinese aesthetics in the form of landscape paintings and ink drawings. In the movie, the story of Nezha's birth feast and the heavenly calamity is presented as a manifestation of folk cultural activities, wedding and funeral rituals. In the text of the movie, the symbols of national culture are widely used in characters, props, scenes, sounds and other aspects, presenting traditional Chinese national culture in the audiovisual language of animation. The complex bond between Nezha and Ao Bian, who are both enemies and friends, reflects the Chinese Taoist concept of "yin and yang". Meanwhile, the entire movie begins with Nezha's self-reconciliation, reconciliation with the villagers, and reconciliation with his arch-enemy, and ultimately reaches a happy ending, which makes the movie a representative "family-friendly" movie. This makes the movie a typical "family-friendly" movie, reflecting the Chinese concept of "harmony", which is also the key to the movie's success.

In terms of symbolic interaction, this chapter uses in-depth interviews and data collection to understand the story behind the creation of the Nezha film, and the issues that the creative team took into account when designing Nezha, which was in fact a silent dialog between the creators, Nezha and the audience. Fans interpreted Nezha in their own way, and many secondary creations were born from interpretations that went beyond the film's original meaning, such as "The CP of Lotus Root and Pancakes." The various forms of interaction, including social media content creation and cultural discussions, demonstrate the power of cultural dissemination and public participation in the digital age, as creators and fans work together to construct the meaning of Nezha.

The culture embedded in Nezha and the controversy it arouses is a mapping of the current society, a dissolution of commercial discourse, an orgy of postmodern society, and a projection of the audience's individual emotions. A comprehensive

analysis of Birth of the Demon Child shows how the film, as a form of cultural expression, finds a balance between inheritance and innovation, becomes an important bridge between tradition and modernity, and between the individual and the society, and also provides us with an important perspective to understand and analyze contemporary Chinese cultural phenomena.



CHAPTER VII

Conclusion , Discussion and Suggestions

Conclusion

The title of this paper is "Nezha in Chinese Animation: Representations and Symbolic Interaction of Legend in the Context of Popular Media Culture." This study is a qualitative one. "This study is qualitative in nature. During the research process, we collected and analyzed the contents of several Nezha animation films, the contents of the audience's reviews, and the information on the Internet, reviewed a large number of relevant historical documents and related literature, and conducted in-depth interviews with the relevant animation practitioners and the audience to collect first-hand information to carry out the research work of this paper, The following are the research conclusions.:

1. Conclusions on the historical origins of Nezha and the history of its animated adaptations.

The image of Nezha, first presented as a three-headed, six-armed god of protection and ferocity, was introduced to China with the spread of Buddhism from India, and began as a three-headed, six-armed god of protection and ferocity, before evolving into the son of the general Li Jing, and subsequently becoming an orthodox god of the Taoist religion. The image of Nezha and his stories were enriched and expanded with the growth of theater and novels about gods and demons, especially in Journey to the West, where he appears as a heroic child god and demonstrates his extraordinary skill and valor. In Nezha, Nezha's image was finalized and he was portrayed as a child god full of innocence, fearlessness, freedom and rebellion, with iconic stories such as "Killing the Dragon in the Haunted Sea", "Rebirth of the Lotus Flower" and "Returning Bones to Father". Its iconic stories, such as "Killing the Dragon in the Sea", "Rebirth of the Lotus Flower" and "Returning Bones to the Father and Flesh to the Mother", have been so deeply rooted in people's hearts that they have become indispensable mythological heroes in Chinese culture, demonstrating the unique position and high cultural value of the Nezha story in the fusion of myth and history. The image of Nezha and its parent story have been widely disseminated and elaborately interpreted in different media over time.

Nezha's image and motifs have been widely disseminated over time, and have been carefully interpreted in a variety of media. As a representative of popular media, animation is characterized by a high degree of hypothesis. The strange and mysterious world depicted in the story of Nezha provides a rich and deep content base for the creation of animation based on mythological themes, and Nezha's motifs provide the raw material for Chinese animation, as well as a continuation and presentation of the nation's inherent common psychological foundations and experiences. The story of Nezha provides the original material for the creation of Chinese animation, and is also a continuation and presentation of the nation's inherent common psychological foundations and experiences. Mythological animation serves as an ideal vehicle for the expression of Nezha's theme, allowing the story of Nezha to transcend space and time and take on a new luster in modern culture.

China's animation pioneers realized the advantages and feasibility of using mythology as a theme for animation at an early stage. Nezha was featured in the first animation after the founding of New China, "The Greatest Show on Earth", which established China's position as a world leader in fine art films, and the first animation after the Reform and Development of China, "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King", which won numerous accolades and became a screen classic in the new century. The image of Nezha, who cuts his own throat in a tragic manner, has become a screen classic. Facing the impact of globalization, "The Legend Of Nezha" after the new century portrayed the young hero Nezha, accompanying the growth of Chinese children in the 80's and 90's. In the period of industrial downturn, "One Hundred Thousand and BadJokes" created a frenzy on the Internet, exploring a new During the industry's downturn, One Hundred Thousand Thousand and BadJokes created a frenzy on the Internet, exploring a new business model, in which the subversive image of Nezha is still being circulated on the Internet. 2019's Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child achieved a staggering 5.2 billion yuan at the box office, and the "Ugly Nezha" caused phenomenal discussions and became a Popular media Culture symbol of the postmodern era. In the history of Chinese animation, Nezha's works have appeared in almost every period and have achieved outstanding success, which is enough to see the important position and influence of Nezha in Chinese animation. The mythological Nezha has undergone a cross-border fusion of culture and art, as it has been secularized in "Nezha" and animated on the big screen. The image of Nezha is not only deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, but also maintains its vitality in modern society. Through the modern medium of animation, the story of Nezha is presented to a global audience in a new form, successfully transforming a traditional mythological story into a work of visual art that touches the hearts of modern people.

2. Conclusions on the cross-media artistic image of Nezha.

In the traditional media, Nezha first appeared on stage in a play during the Yuan Dynasty, and continued to this day with the Liantai Opera of the Qing Dynasty, which has become a figurative embodiment of the literary image of Nezha, and to a certain extent influenced the creation of Nezha's comic strips, which, as a major type of modern art in China, have been welcomed by the masses as a popular form of art for the dissemination of culture. The original book of Nezha, Nezha, has been widely disseminated in this process, and the image of Nezha in the comic strips is deeply rooted in people's hearts. The mythological motif of "haunting the sea to capture the dragon," and the unique hairstyle and decorations of Nezha have become the basis of the change in the electronic media. Through the diverse interpretations of Nezha in opera and comic strips, the image of Nezha has gradually come closer to the people and has become a cultural symbol that is deeply rooted in their hearts.

In electronic media, Nezha has appeared in live-action films, television dramas, and various types of animation. Nezha's appearance has undergone a rich variety of visual changes, including the evolution of his appearance, hairstyle, costume accessories, and weaponry, with animation favoring Nezha's childlike appearance and film and television productions being more varied; animation has weakened the symbols of Nezha's divinity, but both have maintained the iconic hairstyle; the patterns of Nezha's costumes have become more elaborate and complex, with animation's Nezha's costumes are increasingly in line with modern aesthetics, while the live-action film and television productions are shaped towards heroism, with the

iconic colors retained; in terms of weapons and phallic symbols, both present increasingly entertaining and modernized features, with innovations and additions based on the originals.

This study focuses specifically on two aspects of Nezha's unique artistic styling and characterization in animation. From the fusion of ethnic aesthetics in fine art animation, to modern interpretations in television and online animation, to the trendy icon image in film animation, this series of changes demonstrates the evolution of Nezha's image as it evolves through the medium of art. The transformation of Nezha's character from god of war to god of man, and his "anti-heroic" character in modern interpretations, deeply reflect the deep connection between Nezha's image and the emotional resonance of contemporary audiences.

The main changing features of Nezha's media image include the strangeness of the media image, the diversification of the animation styling, and the rounding of the character's personality. These changes not only demonstrate the richness and transformative power of Nezha's image, but also reflect the dynamic nature of culture and social progress. Through a comprehensive and in-depth analysis, this chapter not only deepens the understanding of the evolution of the classic character of Nezha in popular media, but also provides valuable perspectives and profound insights for the study of the reshaping and application of traditional Chinese cultural symbols in modern society.

3. Conclusions on cultural representations of the animated image of Nezha in different periods of time

Through an in-depth exploration of the cultural representations of Nezha's animated image, the study reveals the multiple faces and deep cultural meanings of this traditional mythological character in modern society. From the relationship between the animated image of Nezha and cultural representations, to its presentation of the spirit of national culture, to the changing cultural representations of the times, the image of Nezha transcends time and space, constantly evolving to adapt to and reflect different cultural and social contexts.

Nezha as a cultural product is capable of generating different meanings in different cultural environments, and these meanings are sliding rather than fixed, influenced by ideology. The evolution of Nezha's image is not only the result of artistic creation, but also part of the process of cultural symbolic exchange and construction of meaning that can echo real experiences and social environments.

The cultural representation of Nezha can be divided into two parts: national culture and contemporary culture, corresponding to cultural inheritance and innovation respectively. By exploring the presentation of Nezha's animated image in national culture, it is revealed that Nezha is not only a character in a story, but also carries deep cultural significance and spiritual values. Nezha is a spiritual role model who defies oppression and controls his destiny. The Legend Of Nezha is full of edification, and Nezha is a role model for children and teenagers; Nezha is always confronted with the laws of heaven and the constraints of feudal ethics, and he has to fight against his destiny of being destined to receive heavenly tribulation in Birth of the Demon Child, and in Prince Nezha's Triumph. Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King, he is governed by Li Jing, who represents feudal patriarchy, and the Dragon King. Chinese nature worship is also reflected in Nezha's role as the

embodiment of fire in his struggle against the Dragon King, who symbolizes water; Nezha's birth and rebirth, which is accompanied by spirit beads and lotus flowers, is also an example of the simplicity of life as imagined in ancient China (Prince Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King), and in *Birth of the Demon Child*, the lotus root is used by the Taoist priest to remake Nezha's flesh. In *"Birth of the Demon Child"*, Nezha appears at the beginning of the play in the form of a pearl of mixed elements; Nezha's flexible immortality and reincarnation are the focus of Taoist thought; and in *"Nezha Reborn"*, Nezha's Yuan Shen can be reincarnated after 3,000 years. These fixed national cultures are more or less presented by the image of Nezha, an inheritance of the spirit of Chinese national culture and the cultural consensus of the Chinese people.

By analyzing in detail how the image of Nezha has changed in the cultural representations of different eras, we see that Nezha has transformed from a classical mythological figure into a modern symbol that reflects and responds to social changes, cultural dilemmas, and diverse aesthetics. From the "revolutionary hero who fights against imperialism and feudalism" during the planned economy to the "young hero who fights against cultural invasion" in the era of globalization, to the "King Kong Barbie" who teases tradition and reflects subcultures in the post-modern context, Nezha has been transformed from a classical mythological figure into a modern symbol that reflects and responds to social change and cultural dilemmas and aesthetic diversity. In the post-modern era, Nezha has been portrayed as "King Kong Barbie," "Ugly Nezha," reflecting subculture, and "Motorcycle Nezha," embodied in the punk culture. The evolution of Nezha's image reflects the dynamism and adaptability of Chinese society and culture.

The cultural representation of Nezha's animated image not only reflects the richness and depth of traditional Chinese culture, but also shows the adaptability and innovative power of cultural symbols in different cultural contexts. The story and image of Nezha proves that cultural inheritance and innovation can coexist, and that tradition and modernity, local and global, can be dialogued and integrated through the process of cultural representation.

4. Conclusions on mode of symbolic interactions between the animated image of Nezha and different groups of people.

Through an in-depth analysis of the symbolic interaction of Nezha's animated image, the new birth and transformation of traditional Chinese myths in a modern cultural context is explored. From the relationship between Nezha and symbolic interaction, to the innovative interaction between the creator and Nezha, to the multi-dimensional perceptual communication between the audience and Nezha, and the interaction between the audience based on the image of Nezha, each part embodies the adaptability of the image of Nezha to social change.

Most of the early designers of Nezha were Chinese master artists who drew inspiration from real life and traditional art, and were influenced by ideology and the social environment, creating a generation of on-screen classics while maintaining their ethnicity. Under the strategy of "creating China's own cartoon stars", the director of CCTV drew on Western animation technology and rethought the humor and wisdom of animation, so that Nezha could serve the young audience and provide good aesthetic guidance; creators in the Internet era paid more attention to the expression of

their personal will, subverting the tradition of "King Kong and Barbie" to achieve success. The post-modern Nezha design is more about the author's thinking and integration of national art under the influence of trendy culture, with Nezha wearing a technological armor made from traditional craftsmanship. In short, the creators have reinterpreted and given new cultural meaning to Nezha through different means, which not only demonstrates the creators' sense of creativity and artistic pursuit, but also reflects the adaptability and influence of Nezha's image in modern culture.

And viewers pass the symbol of Nezha between themselves offline in the form of popular logos, cultural activities, and imitations of Nezha, forming a cultural consensus, and constructing a new meaning for Nezha on the interconnection in the form of video pop-ups and posting and microblogging interactions, so that Nezha is never forgotten on the Internet, and on the contrary, it has become an important part of the Internet's popular culture. The interaction between reality and the Internet based on the image of Nezha has not only deepened the sharing and dissemination of Nezha's story, but also promoted social and cultural interaction and integration. These interactions transcend both physical and digital space, demonstrating the important role of Nezha's image as a cultural symbol in promoting cultural exchange and enhancing social cohesion. The section on the interaction between the audience and Nezha, which ranges from the external image to a deeper analysis of the character's inner core, as well as an analysis of the changes in emotional tendencies, demonstrates Nezha's ability to inspire empathy among different audience groups, and to provoke thought and discussion. The diverse interpretations and emotional resonance of Nezha's image reflect the public's different needs and expectations for traditional culture, and show the vitality and polysemy of cultural symbols in modern society.

The various modes of interaction between Nezha and the public have crossed physical and digital space, bringing Nezha, the audience, and the creator closer together. Early creators were more influenced by ideology and the social environment, while modern creators take into account their personal emotions and the audience's expectations, and the audience has changed from passive acceptance in the beginning to active participation, becoming more and more involved in the discussion and interpretation of the image of Nezha. The meaning of Nezha's image is constructed by the audience together with the creator, and is constantly adjusted and changed.

5. Conclusions on the animated film "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child".

By analyzing *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*, we can see that cultural representations are presented in many ways, and we can understand that the creators and the audience work together to construct meanings for Nezha. Among them, the use of dialect in the characters reflects the regionality of culture in oral expression and increases the intimacy of expression; the traditional character modeling reflects the construction of the image of humans and gods in Daoism; ethnic props, in the process of portrayal, are in line with the period of the story and integrate Chinese artifact culture and technological culture; and the traditional characters have the same characteristics. The traditional character modeling reflects the Taoist construction of the image of man and god; the ethnic props, in the process of portrayal, are in line with the background of the story, and integrate the Chinese culture of artifacts and science and technology. The mythological scenes illustrate the development of

ancient Chinese architectural culture; the "Mountains, Rivers and Jiks" are a reflection of traditional Chinese aesthetics in the form of landscape paintings and ink drawings; and the story of Nezha's birth feast and the heavenly tribulation is a representation of the folklore culture of folklore cultural and sports activities, wedding and funeral rituals. The complex bond between Nezha and Ao Bian, who are both enemies and friends, reflects the Chinese Taoist concept of "yin and yang". Meanwhile, the film's reconciliation of Nezha's self-reconciliation, his relationship with the villagers, and his arch-enemy, which ultimately leads to a happy ending, makes the film a representative "family-friendly" movie. This makes the movie a typical "family-friendly" movie, reflecting the Chinese concept of "harmony", which is also the key to the movie's success.

In terms of symbolic interaction, in-depth interviews and data collection were used to understand the story behind the creation of the Nezha film and the issues considered by the creative team in designing Nezha, which was in fact a silent dialog between the creators and Nezha as well as the viewers. After the success of the film, director Dumpling continued to interact with the viewers and together they enriched the connotations of Nezha. Fans interpreted Nezha in their own way, and many secondary creations were born from interpretations that went beyond the original intent of the movie, such as the "Lotus Root Cake CP. This has demonstrated the power of cultural dissemination and public participation in the digital age, with creators and fans working together to construct the meaning of Nezha.

The culture of Nezha and the buzz it generates is a reflection of contemporary society, a dissolution of commercial discourse, a post-modern social carnival, and a projection of the viewer's individual emotions. A comprehensive analysis of Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child demonstrates that the animated character of Nezha, as a form of cultural expression, has found a balance between inheritance and innovation, and has become an important bridge between tradition and modernity, and between the individual and the society, while at the same time providing us with an important perspective to understand and analyze the phenomenon of contemporary Chinese culture.

Discussion

This study "Nezha in Chinese Animation: Representations and Symbolic Interaction of Legend in the Context of Popular Media Culture." covers the changes in the image of Nezha in Chinese animation from mythical characters to animated characters, covering China from the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China to post-modern society 100 After more than ten years of development, in this study, the researcher started from the history of Nezha's animation, analyzed the image of Nezha in different media, and used the two concepts of cultural representation and symbolic interaction to study the social significance of Nezha's animated image.

First of all, from the perspective of the development and history of animation, most researchers' research results focus on the artistic research of film and television works and the historical changes of animation. Currently, most of the research documents on Chinese animation in China are chronicles. "History of Chinese Animation" published by the Commercial Press is widely used as a textbook for animation majors in Chinese universities. The author uses Chinese history as a reference to divide the development of Chinese animation into several periods

including before the founding of New China, after reform and opening up, and in the new century. Duan analyzed the artistic style and technical form of animation (Sun, 2018), which involves the description of the social environment. Based on its chronological division of animation history, this study extracted the important position of Nezha animation in it. , but the book only uses the social environment as the historical background of animation creation, and does not mention the cultural mapping of animation on society, and lacks research on the interaction and construction of audiences and animation, which to a certain extent ignores the cultural cycle and development of animation. social proof.

Secondly, in terms of research on the artistic image of Nezha, most studies focus on the performance of Nezha animation as an art form. For example, Xiaou analyzed the impact of "Legend of Nezha" on the development of Chinese animation art style. A valuable exploration (Xiao, 2007), Liu Jia mentioned the similarities and differences in the artistic image design of the two early Nezha animations, and discussed the design of Nezha from three aspects: following the script content requirements, absorbing the essence of national art, and integrating modern audio-visual art. Ideas and methods (Jia, 2019). Cui Yunlan talked about Chinese animation's reference to traditional art (Yunlan, 2001), which has certain reference value for this study, because the study of Nezha in this study is based on its external image and inner character, but these The research will only analyze its aesthetic performance from an artistic perspective, which is limited. At the same time, it also lacks a comparative analysis of Nezha's animated images in different media, and cannot see the past and present of its media images. Through the audience from traditional media to electronic media, this study points out that Nezha is not only a cartoon character, but also reflects the progress of mass media and is the epitome of social culture. We should pay attention to the relationship between Nezha, media and society. , rather than just conducting a single analysis through art style.

In addition, there is relatively little literature on the theory of "cultural representation" in animation research. Zhang Jin studied the landscape imagery and its cultural representation in Makoto Shinkai's animated film "Your Name" (Jin, 2017), which helps To deepen his understanding of the cultural connotation and practical significance of animated films, Peng Guichang discussed the representation of Internet youth subculture in the postmodern context of "One Hundred Thousand Bad Jokes 2" (Guichang, 2018). He is one of the very few to study Nezha from the perspective of representation. research, but a single animation case cannot reflect the changes in representation. TW Whyke's research mentioned Nezha's inheritance of traditional Chinese culture (Whyke, Mugica, & Brown, 2021). This research agrees with and follows the relevant views. In short, at present, In view of the fact that cultural research on Nezha focuses on a single case or traditional cultural connotation, and lacks two-way research on the inherent national culture and cultural changes of the times, this study conducted an in-depth cultural representation analysis of multiple Nezha animations to reveal the cultural representation of Nezha. With the diversity and changes, Nezha animation does not exist in isolation, but carries the national cultural spirit and continues to change in different social periods, becoming a cultural symbol of each era.

At the same time, animation research from the perspective of symbolic interaction is also rare. Guo Qi's research relies on the basic viewpoint of symbolic interactionism to deconstruct the animated film "Zootopia" and proposes that the film uses entertainment appeals to implicitly It is an allegory of stereotypes, political current situation, and the struggle between freedom and order (Qi, 2016). DAVIES pointed out the key connection between cartoon communication and symbolic interactionism (DAVIES, 1995). Zou Yuxuan's dissertation mentioned the identity construction of the main theme animation "Those Things That Rabbit That Year" under symbolic interactionism, which included Internet barrage , the audience's interpretation and interaction with animated images on the Internet platform have certain value for this study, but the study lacks the interaction between animation and reality. This study supplements this part and explores the audience's formation of culture through the transmission of Nezha symbols in reality and on the Internet. Consensus, and complete the construction of meaning with the creator through interpretation and communication. Compared with unilaterally analyzing the original meaning of Nezha, or analyzing the author's creative intention, using the concept of symbolic interaction better reflects the active role of the audience, and the audience's Interaction is an important reason for the changing meaning of Nezha.

In short, among animation studies, only one study uses Nezha animation as an object to study its cultural representation and symbolic interaction. Although other literature has covered it, they are not comprehensive enough. In this study, the researcher used the Nezha animated image as text, and used cultural representation and symbolic interaction as research concepts to complete the research, which enriched the research perspective on Nezha animated image.

Suggestions

1. Change the perspective of Nezha's research:

Artists and researchers should start from the relationship between Nezha animation and society and change the perspective of research on Nezha animation. This new perspective will help us to re-examine the relationship between Nezha, animation, and Chinese society, and to conceptualize the significance of the existence and development of Nezha animation. This study argues that the formation and development of the character Nezha is not a mere artistic creation, but a cultural and social phenomenon constructed through communication between the creator and the audience under the influence of Chinese culture and society. The researcher hopes to provide academics with a new direction for research on legendary characters and animation creation, and to apply research theories to the study of cultural representations and symbolic interactions of legendary animated characters.

2. Explore the influence of popular media on the image of Nezha:

With the rise of digital media and social networks, the way in which Nezha's image is disseminated and the mode of audience interaction have changed.

The study could focus on the re-creation and communication strategies of Nezha's image in the new media environment, and the impact of these strategies in terms of the audience's understanding and acceptance of Nezha.

3. Examine the function of Nezha in society:

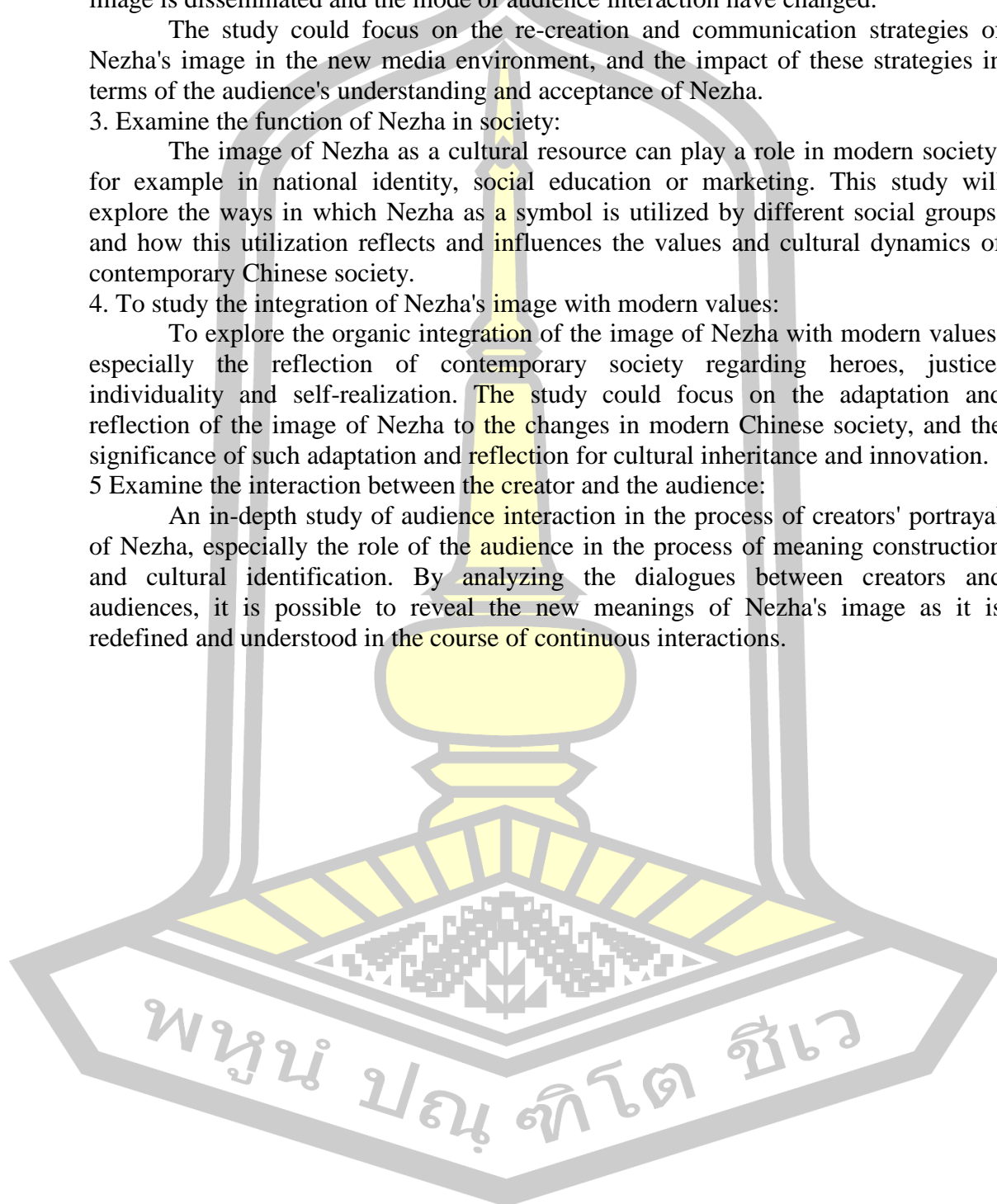
The image of Nezha as a cultural resource can play a role in modern society, for example in national identity, social education or marketing. This study will explore the ways in which Nezha as a symbol is utilized by different social groups, and how this utilization reflects and influences the values and cultural dynamics of contemporary Chinese society.

4. To study the integration of Nezha's image with modern values:

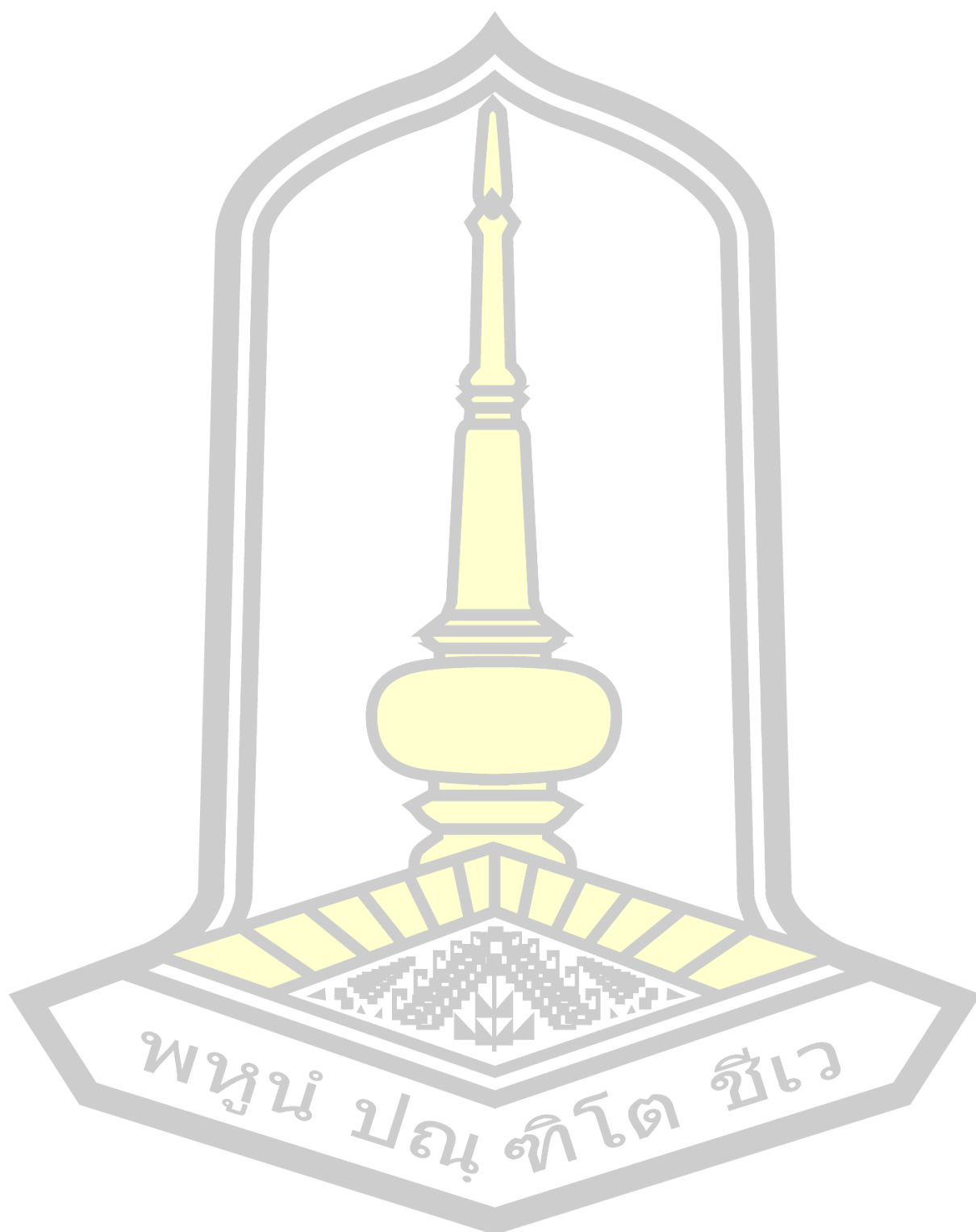
To explore the organic integration of the image of Nezha with modern values, especially the reflection of contemporary society regarding heroes, justice, individuality and self-realization. The study could focus on the adaptation and reflection of the image of Nezha to the changes in modern Chinese society, and the significance of such adaptation and reflection for cultural inheritance and innovation.

5 Examine the interaction between the creator and the audience:

An in-depth study of audience interaction in the process of creators' portrayal of Nezha, especially the role of the audience in the process of meaning construction and cultural identification. By analyzing the dialogues between creators and audiences, it is possible to reveal the new meanings of Nezha's image as it is redefined and understood in the course of continuous interactions.



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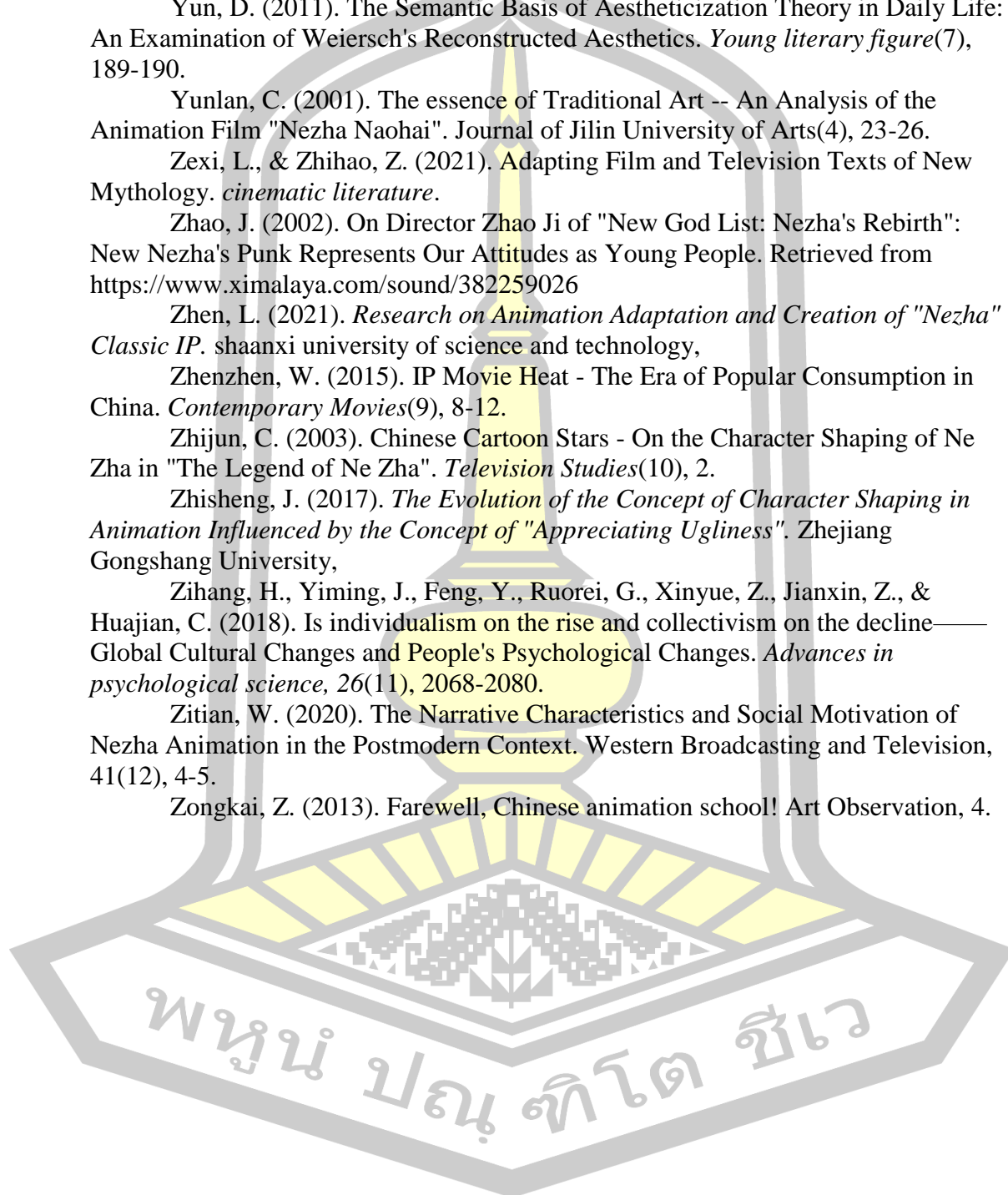
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