

# *Cultural Exchange and Cross-Cultural Communication in Chinese and Foreign Films: A Case Study of "Nezha 2: The Devil's Child Makes Trouble in the Sea"*

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**Abstract.** The paper is a multidimensional analysis of an animated film, Ne Zha 2. In contrast to its predecessor, which focused on the heroic figure of Ne Zha, the movie takes the form of an ensemble characterization and creates the great worldview through the images of broussonetia papyrifera. It breaks the stereotypes by portraying the good and the evil and the right and the wrong. The movie combines the traditional elements of Chinese culture (ink wash painting, traditional coloration, Taoist themes and object-inspired designs) with cyberpunk visual effects and symphonic music in terms of creative expression, thereby achieving the synthesis of the Chinese and Western cultures and the introduction of the ancient aesthetics and new technologies. Although it has a low percentage of its total box office, the film earned 67.43 million dollars in foreign markets, making history in several nations, boosting the global image of Chinese animation and piercing the Western prejudices that people have towards the Chinese films. Moreover, this paper categorizes the patterns of the cultural exchange between Chinese and Western films during the last five years, discusses their variations in the visuality, symbolic images and characterization, and presents the specific optimization recommendations to the cross-cultural communication processes, which may be useful in the spread of the Chinese cinema around the world.

**Keywords:** Sino-foreign films, cultural exchanges, cross-cultural communication

## **1. Introduction**

The writ on the cultural exchange and cross-cultural communication behind the Chinese and foreign film is the subject matter of this work of study, which has great implications to the future outward dissemination and exchange of the Chinese culture. The discussed research is a case study based on the blockbuster film "Ne Zha 2" where the literature analysis method will be used to search and review the relevant materials and documents. The presentation of this approach is based on the fact that the cultural dissemination of films is analyzed well, and thus, this aspect simplifies the research process [1]. The final aim of this paper is to find improved approaches to the cross-cultural exchange and communication in the future Chinese movies. In order to reach this objective, the research of literature and analysis of data were performed.

## 2. Chinese and Western civilization at work in Nezha 2

### 2.1. Background

Ne Zha 2 is a continuation of the storyline of Ne Zha 1 which interlocks with the post-credits of the first movie. The main distinction between the Ne Zha 2 and Ne Zha 1 is the emphasis: the former was focused on the heroic image of Ne Zha, whereas the latter is more focused on the character development of multiple characters, which makes the plot of the movie more tangible and realistic [2].

Simply stated, the storyline of the movie Ne Zha 2: After the heavenly tribulation goes on to explain both how the souls of the long-deceased Nezha and Ao Bing managed to live through yet the bodies were almost falling apart. Taiyi (*Phoxinus phoxinus* subsp. *phoxinus* *Homo sapiens*) tried to employ the seven-colored treasure (*Nelumbo nucifera*) in assistance of them to reprocess their forms, but encountered very hard challenges. Chentang Pass was besieged and forced by Ao Guang who was allied with Shen Gong (*Panthera pardus*). In order to protect Ao Bing, Nezha took part in the ascension examination and heard about the danger of the dragon clan and his parents revealed the false scheme of the immortal in framing the dragon clan. Eventually, Nezha and Ao Bing came to a mutual agreement, and they united to destroy the wicked immortal using the fire of Samadhi (*phoxinus phoxinus* subsp.) *phoxinus phoxinus*, and the demon pill of the spirit pearl.

The second sequel has a bigger world perspective and does not only concentrate on the personal journey by Ne Zha to defy wisdom but also questions the wisdom. It dismantles the Polar views that all gods are good and all evil are the Demons. In this world, whether an item is an animal or an idea there are two sides to it. We should not stereotype groups of people, individuals, or events by adopting categorical stereotypes. The real insight must be considered with a great deal of thought and not just empty guessing [3].

### 2.2. Chinese and Western cultural elements in Nezha 2

In Ne Zha 2 the ink painting style of China is used, combining and clashing with the Chinese traditional colors, an example of this is that the main character Ne Zha is red, and as it is seen by the Chinese culture depicts exuberance, passion and liveliness. Ao Bing, in its turn, is mainly blue, a color that, according to the Chinese culture, usually symbolizes restraint and calmness. Ao Bing is being played as a cool, rational, tender gentleman. Red and blue tend to be opposite but they are brought together excellently, showcasing their personalities in opposition with each other but also showing their complementing aspect. The color picture of red-blue reflects the theory of the yin-yang in the Chinese culture which is opposite and independent at the same time. The Taoist aspects of Ne Zha 2 can be observed, too, the architecture of the Heavenly Palace was created around the Bagua, and the impact of the Taoist culture is very strong. Additionally, the special effects of the Ne Zha 2 have the cyberpunk style, which can be observed through the technical aspects of the action scenes. Although the Ne Zha 2 soundtrack features the use of traditional Chinese instruments such as erhu, it follows the concept of combining the Chinese and Western cultures by incorporating a symphonic music [4]. Most designs in Ne Zha 2 were influenced by the Chinese cultural relics. As an example, the seven-colored treasure *nelumbo nucifera* of the film has the form of a Boshan incense burner. The boundary guardian beasts in Ne Zha 2 also took the designs of the ancient bronze items. Ne Zha 2 is a hybrid of the Chinese traditional culture and modern technology incorporating both Chinese aesthetics and Western processes. This is not just a display of the

international outlook of Chinese animation, but is also ideal in popularizing traditional Chinese culture, which contributes to the evolution of the Chinese culture of foreign markets.

### **3. The foreign market penetration of Nezha 2**

#### **3.1. The box office and Nezha 2 analysis in foreign countries**

By November this year, more than 3 percent of the total box office, the overseas box office of Ne Zha 2 has gained around 67.43 million. The overseas box office share is not very high but has recorded historic breakthroughs in various regions. Of the lot, North America contributed the most percentage of the overseas box office of Ne Zha 2. Although the overseas box office share was relatively low, Ne Zha 2 has also induced a number of miracles, as well as broken several records, as a flourishing initiative in the international proliferation of the Chinese culture. The foreign viewers have developed numerous personal attitudes and perceptions regarding Ne Zha 2.

The reviews of Ne Zha 2 by foreign audiences can be approximately executed as three types: 1. The power and growth of animation industry in China; 2. A variety of interpretations of Ne Zha 2; 3. Themes and characters that are reflected on the film. These three types of assessments testify to the knowledge of the overseas audiences about the film and their support of the progress of the animation business in China. They also disclose that audiences of Ne Zha 2 abroad have differing opinions on the film and the story telling, as each makes use of this film to interpret it through their values. Also, they possess their interpretation of the characterization in Ne Zha 2 and their degree of acceptance of the movie themes. These reviews are an unbiased response to how well Ne Zha 2 was received overseas. International release of Ne Zha 2 is not merely an external promotion of the movie but also an external promotion of the animation sector in China. This film has greatly improved and changed the image of animation in China in the minds of foreign viewers. The successful reception of Ne Zha 2 by the overseas audience and their compliments regarding the development of Chinese animation will act as the impetus encouraging us to sell more suitably high-quality productions in other countries. In addition, the material and the values of this movie, which do not coincide with the traditional interpretations of overseas viewers, have acted as encouragement to domestic producers how to make Chinese culture easier to comprehend by both domestic and foreign viewers. This is a challenge to the Chinese film industry.

#### **3.2. The foreign effect of Nezha 2**

To a certain degree, Ne Zha 2 has overcome western bias toward Chinese movies. Through the deception of the conventional view of Chinese cinema, Ne Zha 2 has transformed the traditional conception of the Chinese film by the Western audience. Instead of receiving the content of the story passively, Ne Zha 2 captivates the audience on the basis of character evolution, plot development, and human ordeal to give them a chance to create their own impressions regarding the movie itself. It has enabled the Eastern culture to be enjoyed by the foreign audience. In the way, the international release of Ne Zha 2 has broken the Eastern cultural stereotypes presented in the Western movies, as well as allowed foreign viewers to learn more about the Chinese traditional culture. It has also brought the increasing number of foreign audiences to the cinema whose interest was aroused not only by the Internet knowledge about the Chinese culture but their cinematic experience [5].

## 4. The ways of cultural transmission between China and the West

### 4.1. The trajectory of the film communication between Chinasian and Western culture in the last five years

The belt and road movie tour is an offering by Chinese movies in European, Central and Eastern Europe and other regions in Europe. Chinese films such as *The Legend of Deification: Part 1* and *Ne Zha 2* have been screened in two directions in festivals like Cannes, Berlin, Venice and Shanghai International Film Festival and the western masterpieces have also entered china in festivals like the Shanghai international film festival. Such events like Chinese-EU Film Festival, the Golden Rooster International Roundtable and the Belt and Road Film Week are devoted to the empathetic content and youthful images with their cross cultural units, such as the Meet China. Chinese and Western directors are in partnership to combine their efforts in coming up with projects that resonate Eastern and Western cultures. Cultural exchange and cooperation are also strongly supported in the countries. Movies by both the Chinese and western cultures are no longer exclusively export or imports but rather enjoy making movies together, accomplishing something jointly or even working together. Popular media are also used to disseminate outside of an exhibition. A film does not only concern the dissemination of content but also dissemination of IP image. The hype Lidars of the movie release of "Ne Zha" has formed a new IP image, and this attracts the character fans. The positive exchanges of culture between China and the West through the medium of films have transcended the tendency of both to isolate their creations and rather present and talk about them, finding areas where their creations have fallen short and how they can improve on each other. This strategy is capable of generating a virtuous cycle [6].

### 4.2. Channels of film distribution of the Chinese and Western cultures

The Chinese and the western cultures have very great differences on the films with marked differences on the visual effects. As an example, Chinese movies appeal more towards warm color but western movies are more inclined to cool color. The other example is the strong contrast in composition styles. Chinese movies largely make use of balanced horizontal and vertical forms and in western movies, they mostly take into consideration imbalanced forms. In the graphic gray-green shades of *Dodge the Dragon*, in the natural landscape with loess soil, wet forests and the sunset rapeseed in *Life*. As an example, in the film *Schindler-s-List*, Spielberg uses very contrasting colors, e.g., red, black, and white, as the one of the numerous instances when he aims at directly displaying the unfathomable atrocities of the Nazi regime against the Jewish Homo sapiens before the viewers, establishing the horrors in front of their eyes in a very visceral way, making it impossible that the Homo sapiens does not notice [1].

### 4.3. Analysis on the performance of Chinese and Western cultural differences in film

The costumes and styling in both cultures are also deeply rooted in their respective traditions. For example, when filming historical dramas, Chinese filmmakers use attire from different periods documented in cultural records, while Western costumes are often associated with early societies. There are also differences in character portrayal. Chinese culture tends to depict characters as reserved, rarely showcasing outgoing personalities, whereas Western films often portray characters in bold and straightforward ways, emphasizing individual heroism. Thus, the adaptation of Nezhah's character in *Nezha 2* carries a similar heroic hue to Western narratives. Additionally, there are

differences in narrative styles. Chinese films typically tell stories in an implicit and restrained manner, while Western films focus on maintaining narrative coherence and completeness [7].

## **5. Comparison of the Chinese and the Western cultural differences with regards to performance in film**

The traditional cinema chains are used as the disseminators of Chinese and Western cultural movies. To some degree, China will also introduce foreign movies, but of limited amounts. The majority of foreign movies will be distributed in venues much later in China after international release. The Chinese movies are also sold and viewed via foreign movie ranges. Chinese and western film are both exhibited and marketed in the international film festivals including Cannes. The Belt and Road Initiative also exposes Chinese movies to the outside world. Chinese films are more competitive, as far as dissemination is concerned, under the Belt and Road Initiative.

### **5.1. How effectively Chinese films can perform international communication**

Besides conventional distribution approaches, the Chinese and Western cultural movies also promote via social media on the social platforms of the actors. Such a strategy is effective to attract audiences of various backgrounds where every viewer can selectively access the content using promotional material. Large domestic streaming platforms such as iQiyi and Tencent have opened up their business divisions abroad and now more or less anyone both local and foreign can view the imported films through these systems.

### **5.2. Cross-cultural communication between China and the West**

Chinese and western cultures still encounter numerous obstacles to be distributed through films in this time era. The question of how to adapt these cultures into films and make them understandable to the foreign audience is a big problem. To illustrate, the Ne Zha 2 has a few scenes of the dialects typical of the Chinese [8]. The use of proper translations that ensure the original meaning is not lost and also enabling the foreign parties to understand the hidden meaning is a pressing issue that has to be overcome. In this case it is the exportation of the Chinese culture and the aspect of language adaptation in the new cultural conditions. The Ne Zha 2 has numerous scenes of the Chinese Taoist culture and it cannot be found in other foreign cultural backgrounds. What about foreign viewers, how can they unravel the cultural specifics in the film? The question that arises is whether the provision of the knowledge about the cultural backgrounds to the foreign audiences in the course of promotion to improve their understanding of the culture connotations of the movie is justified? [3].

Both Chinese and Western cultures are able to choose the common themes to narrate the key plot in movies that can appeal to viewers back home or in different parts of the world. The narrations of such themes will amplify the resonance on the global viewers and allow the perception of the story more easily. There is no necessity to intentionally introduce the aspects of Eastern culture that are hard to understand, including some cultural symbols specific to China and the foreign viewers might struggle to interpret within a film [9]. Rather, cultural promotion can take place more in an accessible manner to the international audience. Authors of both nationalities could enhance the cooperation and share to produce high-quality movies that reflect the beauty of the Eastern region without avoiding the western motives but embracing the multi-view cultures. Simultaneously with the release of the film, it is possible to publish behind-the-scenes content about the film on dominant

media, with an approach of a documentary style to make the audience abroad see the logic of the creativity and culture, which underlies the construction of the film [10].

## 6. Conclusion

The paper will use the animated film *Nezha 2* as the subject of the research, where a multidimensional analysis will be conducted based on the theme of the story, integration into the culture, internationalizing overseas, and the interaction of the Chinese culture and the Western cinematic world. The continuation of the plot of its predecessor, the film goes beyond the formula of a single hero representation by developing in ensemble cast, focusing on the main theme of stereotype destruction to support the dialectical idea that good and evil are not in themselves, and the narrative is intertwined with philosophy. The film also ingeniously unites such classical features of Chinese culture as ink-wash aesthetics, Taoist culture, and artifact-related designs with the West cultural and modern technological innovations as cyberpunk effects and symphonic style, and a new artistic paradigm is formed, which is both a reference to national reference and a glimpse into the future world. Its international release was a phenomenal box office performance that defied Western stereotypes of Chinese filmmaking and proposed a standard concerning the global reconnection of domestic-produced animation to the outside world. The dissemination practices of the film show that over the last few years, the Sino-Western movie cultures have been experiencing intercultural exchange between each other via different avenues. Topicalization of universal subjects, strengthening global cooperation, and perfecting cultural translation can be effective intercultural language barriers and, therefore, can serve as a good experience in improving the international power of Chinese cinema and learning reciprocity between Chinese and Western culture.

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