
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study on the Cross-Cultural Communication Effect of Ne Zha in Overseas Media and Audiences

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the cross-cultural communication effects of the Chinese animated film Ne Zha across various overseas media, social media platforms, and film review websites. The findings indicate that international media have, to some extent, shifted their stereotypical bias frameworks, providing positive evaluations of the film's audiovisual impact and narrative reconstruction. Although cultural discounts are evident in the reception of Ne Zha by overseas audiences, the film's universal values and shared aesthetic emotions have contributed to cultural resonance. Based on an assessment of Ne Zha's cross-cultural communication impact, this study, grounded in a case study approach, proposes three strategies to advance the "cultural export" of Chinese cinema: integrating cultural differences within a shared space of meaning, employing efficient translation and adaptation strategies to overcome language barriers between Chinese and foreign audiences, and exploring innovative combinations of indigenous and modern storytelling.

KEYWORDS

Ne Zha; cross-cultural communication; overseas media; communication strategies

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1. Introduction

As a vital medium for cross-cultural communication, films serve as vehicles for conveying the value propositions and cultural concepts intended by their creators. Through cinematic techniques and the design of audiovisual language, they establish a shared space of meaning that seeks to eliminate decoding barriers between different cultures by achieving consistent encoding. Research on the impact of films on cross-cultural communication has increasingly become a significant topic of discussion in both academic and industry circles in recent years.

Films, as a medium, inherently carry deep national cultural elements and distinct value orientations. Through their potent cross-border transmission capacity, they subtly shape international audiences' perceptions and attitudes toward the countries that produce them (Ren, 2020). Currently, Western films dominate the international market, actively promoting Western mainstream values while often disparaging the history and culture of developing countries, pushing them towards marginalization in the process of globalization. For a long time, Chinese films have faced unequal challenges in the realm of cultural dissemination, often having to passively adapt to the "othering" of Chinese culture by Western societies (Zhang, 2010). Some Chinese films that have entered the Western market have even resorted to "self-Orientalization" strategies to align with Western expectations of China, leaving films that genuinely represent Chinese local culture and national characteristics at a disadvantage in the landscape of cross-cultural communication.

In response to the challenges faced by Chinese films in cross-cultural communication, scholars have been actively seeking solutions. Analyzing from a research perspective, one significant issue in the field of cross-cultural communication research on Chinese films

is its “breadth without depth.” While there is ample discussion on grand issues, there is a lack of micro-level empirical studies and meso-level perspectives. Current academic discourse often revolves around macro-level themes such as “the perspective of world cinema,” “globalization versus localization,” “strategies for cross-border breakthroughs,” “methods of cultural integration,” and “survival and challenge environments.” However, the lack of in-depth research on specific contexts, target groups, and particular works has led to studies that seem hollow and lacking in substance, thereby reducing their practical applicability and guidance.

In light of these gaps, this study aims to adopt a case-based approach to evaluate and explore the cross-cultural communication effectiveness of Chinese films, considering the recent changes in their overseas dissemination and the evolving international perception of Chinese culture. The goal is to provide empirical support and strategic reference for the “going global” strategy of Chinese cinema in the new era.

2. Research Content

2.1 Research Object

Amidst the ongoing external challenges of Chinese films not being fully recognized by international markets and the internal imbalance in research on the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese cinema, the domestic animated film *Ne Zha* was released on July 26, 2019. In a short time, it sparked widespread attention and became a cultural phenomenon.

As a milestone in the history of domestic animated films, *Ne Zha* not only boldly reconstructs a classic Chinese myth but also retains strong Chinese cultural characteristics while incorporating Western narrative elements and production techniques. This dual emphasis on marketability and humanistic values demonstrates an open, inclusive, and confident creative approach, offering a strong reference significance for the study of cross-cultural communication in Chinese films.

2.2 Research Methodology

A research method is “a bridge that researchers must cross from the known to the unknown; it represents a possibility for expression” (Halliday, 1985). The standardization of research methods is a critical foundation for ensuring the scientific validity of research outcomes. Research on the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese films primarily employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches, with qualitative methods being dominant and quantitative research relatively limited. Qualitative research, a traditional method in the humanities and social sciences, inherently involves a degree of subjectivity due to varying perspectives, reference frames, and analytical tools. However, the introduction of quantitative methods can enhance the objectivity and scientific rigor of research findings. Therefore, this study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to assess the cross-cultural communication effects of *Ne Zha*.

The communicative power of a film refers to its ability to reach and engage audiences within a specific space, region, or scope through its content and the cultural values it conveys via particular channels and methods. This encompasses both domestic dissemination within a country, ethnic group, or region and international dissemination across countries, regions, and ethnicities (Hu & Yang, 2018). Today, digital-era communication methods characterized by mass self-communication have become the dominant mode of cultural dissemination (Castells, 2013). Audiences now tend to review and discuss films through short videos, social media, and professional websites.

Based on this logic, the primary focus of this study will be on the online dissemination of Chinese films overseas. The study will employ genre analysis and narrative research paradigms to analyze the current state and characteristics of *Ne Zha*'s online dissemination abroad. Specifically, it will involve a content analysis of reports and reviews by international mainstream media and social media users to evaluate the cross-cultural communication effects of *Ne Zha*. This analysis aims to provide insights into the real-world overseas dissemination of Chinese films and offer recommendations for enhancing their competitiveness in international markets.

2.3 Research Process

2.3.1 Data Sources

This study conducts a big data analysis and content analysis of the online dissemination of the Chinese film *Ne Zha* overseas. Six major international news websites, social media platforms, and specialized websites have been selected to evaluate the cross-cultural communication effects of *Ne Zha*. Relevant reports and review texts from these platforms were gathered as the basis for content analysis. The categories, names, and selection criteria for the platforms are detailed in Table 1.

2.3.2 Data Collection

The study collected reports and reviews of the film *Ne Zha* from the six selected platforms, covering the period from July 26, 2019, to August 15, 2024. For news websites, the keyword “*Ne Zha*” (the film's official English title) was used to extract 66 relevant articles from Google News. For social media, the same keyword was searched on Twitter, yielding 12,113 text entries. After removing

irrelevant and duplicate items, the dataset was refined. On YouTube, the same keyword was used to search for related videos, and the top ten videos based on view count were selected. The total number of comments from these videos' comment sections amounted to 11,330. Given the large volume of comments and based on the common user behavior patterns on social media platforms, comments with a higher number of likes are considered more representative of user opinion. Therefore, comments unrelated to the video content were excluded, and 939 user comments with likes above the median value (MD=81) were retained.

For specialized websites, the study examined three platforms hosting pages dedicated to the film Ne Zha. On IMDb, 102 reviews were gathered; on Rotten Tomatoes, 18 reviews were collected; and on Metacritic (MTC), five media reviews and nine user reviews were obtained.

This comprehensive data collection strategy ensures a robust analysis of the cross-cultural communication effectiveness of Ne Zha across multiple platforms, encompassing both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights.

Table 1: Data crawling platforms and selection basis

Platform category	Platform name	Selection basis
news site	Google News	Google News employs an automated aggregation algorithm to filter the most popular and latest news from thousands of information websites, covering reports from multiple mainstream media outlets. Therefore, using this platform as a basis for analyzing the coverage of Ne Zha offers high research value and credibility.
social media	Twitter	Twitter is a highly representative global social media platform featuring diverse topic discussions. The spread of films on this platform can reflect, to a certain extent, the depth and breadth of the overseas dissemination of Ne Zha.
	YouTube	YouTube, currently the world's most influential video website, provides high-level video uploading, distribution, presentation, and viewing services to hundreds of millions of global users. The film's dissemination data and comments on YouTube can reflect its cross-cultural impact.
Specialized Sites	IMDb	IMDb not only stores comprehensive film information such as genre, year, director, cast, and plot summary but also allows global users to rate and review films. The large-scale user data mitigates biases caused by individual preferences or cultural backgrounds, providing film evaluations that are more aligned with market perspectives from a broader audience perspective.
	Rotten Tomatoes	Rotten Tomatoes is a well-known foreign movie review website, incorporating reviews from both professional critics and amateur movie enthusiasts. Professional critics on Rotten Tomatoes are either contributors to professional media outlets or registered members of film critics' associations, and they are subject to strict review standards, ensuring high authority and traceability.
	MTC [Metacritic]	Metacritic (MTC) primarily collects ratings from professional critics or well-known media, offering a high degree of professionalism. Due to the often distinct differences in film ratings between MTC and other review sites, it provides a strong basis for comparative analysis.

2.3.3 Data Cleaning

The data cleaning process involves several steps to ensure the purity and usability of text data:

Removal of Special Characters: Eliminate unwanted symbols and characters, including punctuation, symbols, and HTML tags, to ensure the data is in plain text format.

Stopword Removal: Remove stopwords such as "a," "the," and other words that do not contribute meaningful value to text analysis.

Word Standardization: Normalize words by converting them to a standard form, such as unifying different cases, tenses, or forms of the same word.

Stemming and Lemmatization: Apply stemming and lemmatization to reduce redundancy in the text data by converting words to their root forms.

Manual Filtering: Considering the presence of social bots and other noise, the data was manually filtered. After filtering, the final dataset includes 45 articles from Google News, 3,567 text samples from Twitter, 656 comments from YouTube, and the text counts from IMDb, Rotten Tomatoes, and Metacritic (MTC) remained unchanged.

2.3.4 Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis is the process of analyzing, processing, summarizing, and reasoning about subjectivity in text with emotional color. It is one of the most important branches of natural language processing (NLP) (Wang et al., 2022), mainly used to determine the sentiment polarity of a given text (positive, negative, or neutral).

This study uses the Sentiment Intensity Analyzer module from NLTK (Natural Language Toolkit) to analyze both media reports and user comments. The Sentiment Intensity Analyzer is a supervised learning model based on the VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and Sentiment Reasoner) algorithm, designed to recognize and handle sentiment in informal text, such as social media, online reviews, and news articles. VADER is trained on common sentiment terms, emoticons, and emojis to capture subtle emotional nuances in different texts.

The process for calculating sentiment scores involves using the `polarity_scores()` method, which returns a dictionary containing positive (pos), negative (neg), neutral (neu) sentiment scores, and a compound score. The compound score is a single value that aggregates all sentiment scores and can be used to determine overall sentiment polarity.

Collect audience comments and feedback on *Ne Zha* through social media, movie review websites, and other channels, and use sentiment analysis tools to classify the collected comments into positive, negative, and neutral emotions. Through the method of sentiment analysis, we conducted data analysis on the movie *Ne Zha* and found that it triggered strong positive emotional resonance among the audience, especially in themes such as family, friendship, growth and transformation, and rebellion against fate. Meanwhile, a few comments also mentioned dissatisfaction with the pace and some plot of the movie. Overall, the film has achieved significant success in emotional expression and is a masterpiece that can deeply touch the hearts of the audience.

2.3.5 Feature Extraction and Discourse Classification.

Discourse classification is mainly achieved through lexical choice. Analyzing high-frequency nouns and adjectives with substantive meanings helps to understand the main content and focal points of the discourse, allowing for a more accurate grasp of the speaker's viewpoints and attitudes.

This study utilizes Python to build a dictionary for counting the occurrences of high-frequency words in reports and comments, sorting them in descending order. The sorted data is saved in CSV format, and a word cloud is generated using the Stylecloud tool. Finally, the frequency of sentiment categories is recorded and presented visually.

3. Research Findings and Discussion

3.1 Evaluation of the Film *Ne Zha* by Overseas Media

Intercultural communication refers to the interpersonal interactions and information exchanges between members of societies with different cultural backgrounds (Samovar, 2010). In general, studies on the impact of intercultural communication in Chinese films primarily assess this impact by examining audience feedback, box office data, and international awards. However, it is important to note that both the establishment of an audience reputation and the accumulation of box office success largely depend on media exposure and promotion.

For a long time, many outstanding Chinese films have struggled to gain attention from overseas media, and even when they do receive coverage, it is often accompanied by negative evaluations. Therefore, the evaluation by overseas media should be considered an essential indicator for assessing the impact of Chinese films on cross-cultural communication.

The sentiment analysis results indicate that overseas media's perception and evaluation of *Ne Zha* tend toward positive and neutral sentiments, with only a small portion showing negative attitudes, accounting for 89.47% of the total (see Figure 1). The word cloud of high-frequency terms (see Figure 2) includes positive or highly relevant words to the film's themes, such as "animated," "character," "burst," and "fate." This demonstrates that overseas media mainly hold a positive and rational attitude towards the Chinese film *Ne Zha*, expressing expectations and an objective understanding of the development of Chinese animated films.

Taking the high-frequency word "animated" appearing in the word cloud as an example, its importance in movie content or themes can be interpreted. Firstly, this term directly reflects the technological innovation and visual impact of the film: the film adopts advanced animation production technology, with vivid characters and scenes, providing the audience with an immersive experience. Next is cultural inheritance and innovation: movies creatively interpret traditional Chinese mythological stories,

and directly symbolize imagined worlds. This virtual imagery frees creators from the limitations of original media, expanding the freedom and creativity of visual symbols and easily materializing imaginative worlds without the constraints of reality or physical space (Ma & Wu, 2016). Ne Zha successfully created a visual and auditory feast with its organic combination of visual and auditory symbols, providing overseas audiences with an immersive experience. Within specific cultural contexts, these audiovisual symbols formed meaningful relationships and were interpreted by overseas recipients, ultimately achieving significant intercultural communication effects.

Many Chinese films exhibit a tendency toward “self-orientalism,” excessively piling on Oriental elements and failing to transcend this self-imposed barrier. Ne Zha adopts an unconventional style, reimagining the traditional image of Ne Zha as a cute “little hero” and instead presenting him as a rebellious and quirky young character, which is refreshingly new.

In terms of visual construction, Ne Zha employs 3D animation technology to achieve a three-dimensional simulacra effect on the visual level and visually embellishes the image information conveyed to the audience. Additionally, the film uses traditional ethnic, artistic languages to interpret character traits and further embellish the visual atmosphere. By leveraging the overseas audience's curiosity about Oriental fantasy aesthetics, the film appropriately incorporates Eastern cultural elements and creates an organic combination that reflects the ancient and elegant essence of Eastern aesthetics. The film draws on artistic styles from early Chinese animations such as *The Monkey King*, *Ne Zha Conquers the Dragon King*, and *The Nine-Colored Deer*, skillfully using traditional painting elements to craft fantastical scenes rich in Eastern aesthetic meaning, including the celestial realm, dragon palace, human world, and landscapes. The film creatively integrates various traditional cultural elements to depict the beauty of characters and actions in an Eastern fantasy world, presenting a vivid and cohesive Chinese mythological tableau. The Los Angeles Times describes Ne Zha as a “CG animated movie with bright colors, dazzling movements, and infinite charm.”

In terms of auditory construction, Ne Zha skillfully uses multi-track audio, stereo, and mixed sound effects. Beyond character voiceovers, theme songs, and end credits, the film integrates various incidental and original sound effects that match the scenes. The musical score flexibly transitions between dramatic and soothing tones according to the plot, aiming to break down the audience's psychological barriers and achieve an empathetic artistic effect (Kang, 2020). For example, on the day of Ne Zha's birth, the lively melody played by the Li family expresses anticipation for the new life. Conversely, when the crowd advises Li Jing and his wife to abandon the reincarnated child with the magic pellet, the music gradually shifts to a long, melancholic string composition, reflecting the couple's internal despair and sorrow. The gradual coordination of the vocal music, along with Li Jing and his wife's reasoning and emotional appeal, not only successfully persuades the on-screen crowd but also elicits strong psychological resonance from the viewers. Screen International observes that Ne Zha “retains strong Chinese-style ethnic music while integrating Western expressive elements and production models, making the film music open and inclusive.” Music in intercultural communication has a unique impact; beautiful melodies can evoke primal physiological responses. In Ne Zha, the effective use of sound enhances emotional expression, constructing a bridge of emotional communication between the film text and the audience.

In the context of globalization, an animated film adapted from Chinese mythology inevitably involves a sharing of cultural traditions and visual experiences between its own culture and Western culture. Today's audience's visual habits and aesthetic experiences do not differentiate between Eastern and Western preferences for images and films (Peng, 2020). It is evident that Ne Zha incorporates elements of Japanese manga and Hollywood animation styles. The successful integration of Chinese and Western audiovisual symbols in Ne Zha has become a significant aesthetic resource for overseas audiences to view and appreciate advancements in Chinese film and animation technology.

3.1.2 Ne Zha's Tragic Narrative Reconstruction Resonates with Overseas Media's Values

Ne Zha endows its titular character with vibrant vitality by reconstructing the narrative to place Ne Zha's rebellious spirit in the context of deeper fate and human struggle.

The film undertakes two significant narrative subversions. Firstly, in the original text *Fengshen Yanyi* (*Investiture of the Gods*), Ne Zha is a hero with positive attributes, born from the Spirit Pearl. In contrast, in Ne Zha, the narrative is reversed: Ne Zha mistakenly becomes the reincarnation of the Magic Pearl, while the antagonist, Dragon Prince Ao Bing, from the original text, is reborn as the Spirit Pearl. This twist in destiny becomes the driving force behind Ne Zha's quest to defy fate. Secondly, Ao Bing, who is merely a minor character quickly eliminated in the original, becomes Ne Zha's “mirror” in the film. Ne Zha and Ao Bing (Magic Pearl/Spirit Pearl) are two sides of the same coin, both seeking self-acceptance due to their origins. The concept of the “mirror” is rooted in Western scholar Jacques Lacan's theory, which includes ideas about self-recognition and the construction of subjectivity (Liu, 2006). In the mirrored structure, Ne Zha and Ao Bing's struggles with their identities and destinies become more layered and complex, enhancing the narrative's conflict.

Chinese literary scholar Zhu Guangqian noted that Chinese literature has not produced a true Greek tragedy (Li, 2019). The original Ne Zha's conflict with the Dragon Clan is a simple binary opposition of good and evil, lacking the stark contradictions and confrontations due to the severe imbalance of power (Ne Zha pulling out Ao Bing's dragon tendons as a belt). In contrast, Ne Zha transforms the antagonistic relationship into a dual protagonist growth story and resolves the core conflict between Ne Zha and his father, presenting it as a Western-style question of subjectivity: "My fate is not controlled by heaven but by me." This mirrored narrative structure aligns with Western literary theories and the essence of Greek tragedy, connecting with Western cultural values.

According to the analysis of overseas media reports, Ne Zha has, to some extent, transcended the "Western-centric" interpretative framework often applied to Chinese films and achieved resonance in the fusion of film cultures. Screen International notes that "Ne Zha is endowed with modern significance by depicting a mischievous boy who must choose between good and evil and break free from the chains of fate to become a hero" (Wang & Wang, 2019).

Fate is a central theme throughout the film, and the three narrative reversals are closely related to this theme. The first reversal involves the switch between the Spirit Pearl and the Magic Pearl, which inverts the nature of Ne Zha and Ao Bing. Ne Zha is rejected by the people of Chentang Pass and forms a friendship with Ao Bing, reconstructing the narrative into what The New York Times describes as a "standard Hollywood growth narrative model." The second reversal occurs when Li Jing and his wife initially fabricate a lie about Ne Zha being the reincarnation of the Spirit Pearl to comfort him. However, Ne Zha discovers his true identity due to the words of Shen Gongbao, leading to intense inner conflict and confusion, reflecting core elements of Greek tragedy such as peripeteia (reversal), anagnorisis (recognition), and hamartia (tragic flaw). The third reversal sees Ao Bing ultimately abandoning his family's mission to reclaim his true nature (spirit/good) and choosing to fight against destiny alongside Ne Zha, completing the film's adaptation into a Western genre framework.

Facing his own "Magic Pearl" origins, Ne Zha rises in rebellion and passionately follows his sense of self and existence. This is powerfully articulated when Ne Zha declares in the film: "Damn it, my fate is up to me, not to heaven! Whether I am a demon or a deity, I decide!" This assertion of "my fate is my own, not heaven's" imbues Ne Zha with a spirit of resolute resistance against destiny, aligning with Western rebellious notions of fate.

Variety magazine offers a candid review: "Although Western audiences are not familiar with mythology, this theme can still resonate with them... The theme of Ne Zha is to break the world's prejudices and restrictions on you, you don't have to follow your own destiny; you can become your own hero. This is the film's common struggle with us." This feedback highlights how Ne Zha has indeed found common ground between Eastern and Western cultures, overcoming the typical issues of "ideological loss" and "self-Orientalism" that often plague Chinese cross-cultural films and setting a narrative benchmark for future domestic animated films.

In summary, Ne Zha transforms the conflict between the individual and power in Chinese ethical tragedies (e.g., stripping bones to return to the father) into a conflict between the individual and destiny in Western tragic fate (e.g., "my fate is my own, not heaven's"). This modern adaptation of Greek tragedy integrates the Western perspective while remaining rooted in Eastern cultural archetypes. In the realm of cross-cultural communication, this fusion has achieved a harmonious convergence of Chinese and Western cultures, earning significant support and acclaim from international media.

3.2 Overseas Audience Evaluation of Ne Zha

As an experiential product, the quality of a film can only be fully assessed post-purchase, meaning that consumers bear a higher and more unpredictable risk compared to search-based products (Yang, 2020). In the traditional print media era, consumers relied heavily on newspapers, journals, or word-of-mouth for evaluations of newly released films. However, in the digital age, the internet has become a key influencing factor.

On one hand, international social media platforms have become the primary space for global audiences to access information and express opinions, providing a new media environment and expanded space for Chinese films in the international market. Therefore, the evaluation of Ne Zha by international social media users should be considered an important criterion for assessing its cross-cultural dissemination impact.

On the other hand, online film reviews have increasingly overshadowed traditional media reviews, with audiences focusing more on various new media forms such as news exchange websites, forums, and blogs (Wang, 2011). As an online film review website open to the public, its influence on publishing and presenting opinions cannot be ignored naturally. Moreover, online film review websites are more interactive and convenient to express opinions, which has a good communication effect. Thus, examining audience reviews on overseas film review sites can reveal the true reception and feedback of Ne Zha abroad.

can lead to “distortion” and “misunderstanding,” resulting in oppositional decoding or ineffective decoding (Huang, 2016). In the context of cross-cultural communication, differences in cultural backgrounds can hinder the flow of information across regions, leading to a devaluation of cultural products—a phenomenon known as “cultural discount” (Yu, 2020). The cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese films inherently involves the exchange and collision between different cultures, causing deviations in cultural decoding and, thus, cultural discount.

In the case of Ne Zha, the cultural discount phenomenon is primarily reflected in three aspects: language barriers, cultural background, and cognitive structures.

3.2.1.1 Language Barriers

Language barriers are a significant factor contributing to cultural discount for Ne Zha. In the context of cross-cultural communication, language plays a dual role as both a crucial bridge for cultural exchange and a key aspect prone to cultural discount. Due to language differences, most films opt for dubbing and subtitle translation when entering foreign markets. Although translators strive to maintain fidelity to the original language, the conveyed meaning and emotion often fail to match the original expression. For instance, on Rotten Tomatoes, some viewers have noted that “English voicing, often shaky in Asian films,” and on Twitter, users have commented that subtitles are “a little bit hard to make out.” These translation issues become significant obstacles to understanding the cultural implications of Ne Zha.

The film contains numerous lines with culturally specific vocabulary unique to the Chinese context. While domestic audiences easily understand these lines due to their familiarity with the cultural context, foreign audiences may find them challenging to grasp. Terms that are well-known and culturally rich within China might be unfamiliar to international audiences. Transliteration might not allow for quick and clear understanding, while free translation might lose the original linguistic charm.

3.2.1.2 Cultural Background Differences Leading to Cultural Discount for Ne Zha

a. Cultural Background Differences

Cultural background differences are another major cause of cultural discount. Variations in cultural attributes can lead to misunderstandings when audiences from different regions engage with cultural products produced in a foreign context. China is a high-context culture with a rich and complex cultural system. The characters in Ne Zha are rooted in Chinese mythology, but overseas audiences may lack a deep understanding of the character relationships and the story's background.

For example, overseas film sites may not provide adequate explanations of the mythological origins of Ne Zha. Instead, they might simply present the film's worldview: “This boy has been prophesied by the gods from birth to destroy the world. He faced a choice between good and evil, and in the end, he broke his prejudices and became a hero.” Without a comprehensive understanding of Ne Zha's background and story, such brief introductions may fail to fully convey the cultural significance of the character, leading some overseas viewers to perceive the film's beginning as somewhat disjointed (e.g., “some shaky storytelling to begin with”).

Additionally, Ne Zha draws from Fengshen Bang (The Investiture of the Gods), a story familiar to domestic audiences. For them, the narrative innovations in the film are seen as fresh and creative. However, for international viewers, the film's narrative might seem relatively thin. Despite overseas media identifying the narrative's cross-cultural resonance, some foreign audiences may still struggle to grasp the full context.

3.2.1.3 Cognitive Structure Differences

Differences in cognitive structures due to cultural background also contribute to cultural discount. Western audiences often emphasize individualism, personal freedom, and heroism, which contrasts sharply with the collectivist values of Chinese culture. In Ne Zha, Li Jing's self-sacrificing spirit to save Ne Zha and the Dragon King's deep familial commitment to Ao Bing reflect traditional Chinese values. Such themes may be difficult for Western audiences to understand. For instance, on IMDb, some viewers questioned why there would be a desire to sacrifice Ne Zha's life for the safety of Chen Tang Pass when he was just born (e.g., “Why would someone want to sacrifice Nezha's life for the safety of everyone when Nezha was just born in the movie”). This cultural logic rooted in Chinese traditional values may not resonate deeply with audiences holding different values.

In summary, cultural discount in Ne Zha arises from language barriers, differences in cultural background, and cognitive structures. These factors can result in a less nuanced appreciation of the film's cultural significance by international audiences.

3.2.2 Ne Zha's Use of Universal Values to Bridge Cultural Gaps and Achieve Emotional Resonance with International Audiences

Despite some cultural discount phenomena in the cross-cultural dissemination of Ne Zha, the film has succeeded in eliciting emotional resonance and aesthetic appreciation from international audiences. This is achieved through the portrayal of universal values and common aesthetic designs, which bridge cultural differences and align with global audience preferences.

3.2.2.1 Emotional Resonance Through Universal Themes

One of the main focuses for international audiences has been the portrayal of family relationships in Ne Zha. Unlike previous adaptations where Ne Zha and his father, Li Jing, are often depicted in opposition, the film introduces a new, positive family dynamic. Although international viewers may not be fully acquainted with the original story due to cultural discounts, the film's portrayal of family bonds resonates universally.

In Ne Zha, Li Jing is depicted as gentle, and Ne Zha's mother is warm-hearted. The film features scenes such as the mother taking time out of her busy schedule to play with Ne Zha and Li Jing's desperate attempts to invite villagers to Ne Zha's birthday party despite their fear of him. At the party, Li Jing wishes for Ne Zha to live a safe and fulfilling life. When Ne Zha learns about his demonic origins, Li Jing advises him to ignore others' judgments and take control of his own destiny. This portrayal of parental love and support highlights the parents' role in nurturing Ne Zha's growth without restraining his freedom, ultimately helping him reclaim his destiny and save the people who once feared him.

International viewers have found these depictions of family affection compelling. A comment on Twitter reflects this sentiment: "Even seemingly wayward children are actually seeking inner recognition. The important thing is how parents get along with their children, which is something our families need to pay special attention to at present." This shows that Ne Zha effectively conveys themes of parental love and family warmth, creating emotional connections that transcend cultural boundaries. In addition, the friendship between Ne Zha and Ao Bing, and the mentoring relationship between Taiyi Zhen and Ne Zha in Ne Zha can stimulate the raw emotions of overseas audiences and maintain the cross-cultural emotional bond of the film.

3.2.2.2 Aesthetic Adaptation to Global Preferences

Ne Zha also adapts to global aesthetic preferences, influenced by the pervasive Western cultural wave. The film incorporates familiar visual and thematic elements that appeal to a broad audience. For example, Ne Zha's pocketed stance is reminiscent of Sakuragi Hanamichi from the Japanese anime Slam Dunk. The magical pocket of Taiyi Zhenren bears similarity to Doraemon's gadget-filled pocket. Additionally, the scene where the rescued villagers bow to Ne Zha echoes the concluding moments of Disney's Mulan, where the saved citizens bow to Mulan.

These references to globally recognized aesthetics contribute to the film's acceptance among international viewers. A Japanese audience member remarked, "Seeing Ne Zha walking with his hand in his pocket reminded me of my school days watching Hanamichi Sakuragi on TV." This feedback illustrates how Ne Zha's design elements align with diverse audience preferences, enhancing its appeal in cross-cultural contexts.

In summary, Ne Zha bridges cultural gaps by emphasizing universal values and integrating familiar aesthetic elements. This approach not only mitigates the impact of cultural discounts but also fosters emotional and aesthetic connections with global audiences, contributing to the film's international success.

4. Research Implications

The audiovisual design, narrative construction, cultural context, and emotional aesthetics of Ne Zha have significantly impacted the film's cross-cultural communication effectiveness. This study aims to summarize the successes and shortcomings of Ne Zha's cross-cultural dissemination, and to provide strategies for enhancing the cross-cultural communication of Chinese films. These insights offer valuable guidance for effectively "telling China's story" through film in the contemporary era.

4.1 Identifying Common Meaning Spaces and Integrating Cultural Differences

Ne Zha illustrates that cultural discount affects the cross-cultural communication of films, but it also demonstrates that identifying universally shared values can effectively enhance communication outcomes. Firstly, in cross-cultural communication, Chinese films should integrate cultural differences across regions, leveraging international contexts and global values to mitigate cultural discount and symbolic gaps. By focusing on universal concepts such as familial and friendly bonds and emphasizing common human values and emotions, films can create a shared meaning space in the cross-cultural communication process.

Secondly, in cross-cultural contexts, Chinese films need to consider the cultural backgrounds of international audiences. Information reliant on specific historical and cultural contexts should be simplified. Utilizing strategies such as constructing

communication matrices or adopting “Internet + IP” models to prioritize the dissemination of localized cultural content can enhance cultural understanding before viewing. This approach helps build cultural identity and understanding platforms for international audiences, bridging cultural distances.

Thirdly, the process of “going global” should leverage diverse cultural symbols to effectively overcome contextual barriers. It is crucial to explore and extract symbolic attributes from foreign cultures and widely circulated global cultural products, thereby aligning with the cultural memories and cinematic experiences of overseas audiences. Finally, Chinese films should prioritize regions with cultural proximity for promotion and distribution. “Cultural proximity,” as proposed by Gist and Lowenthal, refers to the tendency of audiences to accept content that aligns with their own cultural, linguistic, and customary backgrounds. Given the similarities in language, history, and geography, regions with significant cultural affinities face fewer barriers and lower cultural discounts, leading to smoother dissemination. Therefore, selecting appropriate cultural markets for the overseas distribution of Chinese films can facilitate more effective cross-cultural communication.

4.2 Addressing Language Barriers and Exploring Efficient Translation Strategies

A significant challenge in the cross-cultural communication of Chinese films is language barriers. Insufficient translation can exacerbate viewer confusion and understanding difficulties. Given the unique characteristics and rich connotations of the Chinese language, the translation should go beyond literal conversion, incorporating the contextual and background nuances of Western languages. This approach can effectively reduce cognitive differences and communication barriers encountered in cross-cultural dissemination.

Film subtitle translation encompasses extensive national characteristics and cultural connotations, representing a collision and exchange of multiple cultures. As observed in *Ne Zha*, the primary goal of translation remains to make the film's content more comprehensible to international audiences. However, content with significant ethnic and cultural features, such as characters, locations, and distinctive items, often lacks sufficient research. Translators of Chinese films need to have a deep understanding of the film's themes and a nuanced grasp of character traits to create vibrant, high-quality translations, thereby promoting more excellent Chinese films and their underlying cultural narratives to the world.

Feedback from international audiences of *Ne Zha* has also provided constructive suggestions, such as capturing the original emotional tone and adapting Chinese humor for better comprehension by Western audiences. For instance, one viewer suggested: “The film should capture all the emotions of the original voices and adapt Chinese jokes to be more understandable to Western audiences. I would suggest everyone to give it a try.” This indicates that Chinese films should appropriately adapt the film language to enhance international outreach.

4.3 Exploring the Fusion of Ethnic and Modern Narratives

Ne Zha breaks from traditional narrative structures by employing a novel storytelling approach, incorporating numerous conflicts and twists, ultimately transforming binary oppositions into a unified whole. This bold innovation has achieved significant cross-cultural communication success. By integrating elements of Greek tragedy and Western theoretical concepts within its narrative reconstruction, *Ne Zha* maintains an awareness of the contemporary spirit while utilizing ethnic discourse to tell modern stories, blending classical and modern elements innovatively.

For example, *Ne Zha* reflects issues such as the challenges of raising only children and family education within a traditional mythological framework, addressing modern societal concerns in a manner that resonates deeply with contemporary parents and has garnered a positive response from international audiences. Therefore, Chinese cinema should focus on integrating tradition with innovation—transforming traditional narratives by incorporating modern elements, aligning with contemporary societal realities, and using ethnic language to tell new stories imbued with the spirit of the times (Ding, 2020).

In constructing audiovisual symbols, Chinese cinema should emphasize the harmonious use of traditional and modern elements, ensuring they serve the story cohesively. Beyond ethnic narratives, *Ne Zha* also explores modern narrative perspectives. For instance, the boundary beasts guarding *Ne Zha*, modeled after bronze figures from the Sanxingdui archaeological site, possess a distinct historical aesthetic. However, their characters contrast sharply with their classical appearance, as they are depicted with comedic and playful traits. This fusion of traditional form with modern comedic qualities not only introduces international audiences to ancient Chinese culture but also enhances their viewing experience through engaging and modern elements.

An open and inclusive perspective that emphasizes the organic integration of ethnic and modern elements is crucial for advancing the cross-cultural communication effectiveness of Chinese cinema. As noted by Xie Renmin and others, film, as a shared human art form, can bridge “national languages” and “global languages” to some extent, creating cross-cultural and cross-national appeal

(Xie & Si, 2020). Chinese cinema should uphold its excellent traditions while simultaneously aligning with contemporary global trends to establish a truly influential Chinese film IP.

5. Conclusion

In summary, Ne Zha stands as a representative example of cross-cultural communication, grounded in traditional aesthetic expression while engaging in mutual resource sharing and visual experience exchange with Western culture. With its rich visual symbols reflecting Chinese style and modern media technology, narrative disruption and character re-construction, and the creation of emotional resonance and common aesthetic significance, Ne Zha offers a vibrant cinematic experience to global audiences. Although Ne Zha does exhibit various instances of cultural discount, it provides valuable methodological insights into the international success of Chinese cinema. Leveraging Ne Zha's cross-cultural communication success, Chinese cinema can advance its "cultural export" strategy through three approaches: integrating cultural differences within shared meaning spaces, implementing efficient translation strategies to overcome language barriers, and exploring the fusion of ethnic and modern narratives.

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