

The Cultural Representation of Nezha's Animation Image in the Context of Aesthetic Education

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Abstract

In 2019, the Chinese animated film *Nezha's Descent of the Magic Child* achieved at the box office, and the character of "ugly Nezha" sparked a heated discussion in the community (Bi, 2021; Whyke & Mugica, 2022). Against the backdrop of China's vigorous development of aesthetic education, this study explores how the animated character of Nezha has been culturally represented in different periods of time. This qualitative study employs content analysis, using five Nezha animations and film and television reviews as samples, to construct categories and analyze the representation of the Nezha character within them. The Nezha animation characters consisted of two representations and were subject to audience participation. The results of the study show that the external representation of Nezha animation maintains national artistry, and the internal representation reflects changes in society and values over time, making it a suitable text for understanding Chinese art and culture in aesthetic education. This paper is part of the doctoral thesis.

Keywords: Aesthetic Education; Animation; Cultural Representation; Nezha

Introduction

Aesthetic education is education that promotes the full and harmonious development of the qualities of academics through the use of art as a form of expression (Schiller, 2016). China introduced and formed the ideological trend of aesthetic education in the 20th century, so that aesthetic education appeared for the first time in education policy (L. Dong & Zhou, 1997). After 2020, aesthetic education has been vigorously developed, and the Ministry of Education has proposed that schools must carry out aesthetic education courses. In December 2023, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the Circular on the Comprehensive Implementation of Aesthetic Education Immersion Action in Schools which re-emphasized "empowering aesthetic education with new technological changes to promote the inheritance and innovation of Chinese culture" (China, 2023).

With the popularization of mass media, film and television works are welcomed by the public as cultural products that carry a variety of cultures. "Film and television products must reflect the history, culture, social life, customs and sentiments of a specific period (Lilia, 2023)." Therefore, in The cultural imprint of society can be seen in film and television, and there is also the guidance of values. Herbert Blumer believes: "The creators arouse the passion of the audience through the visual illusions they construct, which has an impact on the audience's lifestyle and restricts the audience. A choice of values."

Meanwhile, film and television works have a subtle educational function; the visual impact, dramatic conflict, and emotional resonance of film and television works can make the audience immersed in them, and after watching the movie, they actively generate an interest

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in understanding and learning about the culture concerned. (Pandey & Ardichvili, 2015; Shefin, 2003). It also provides an easily accessible resource for educators and learners (Haigh, 2012). In film and television, characters are the key element that drives the storyline and expresses the theme, and the story presented in the movie would be meaningless without the presence of the characters in it (Salsabila, Simanjuntak, & Sutrisno, 2022). The audience also enjoys animated film and television characters for their exaggerated appearances and lively performances.

In 2019, the Chinese animated film "Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes into the World" achieved great success, Nezha's new frivolous and evil image in the film has aroused widespread attention and discussion. Nezha is a protector Yaksha who originated from Indian Buddhism. He has an angry personality and hates evil. He was introduced to China in the Song Dynasty and evolved into the son of General Li Jing and became a Taoist deity. In the Ming Dynasty novel "Journey to the West", Nezha is a young warrior who protects the Heavenly Palace and fights with Sun Wukong. In "The Romance of the Gods", Nezha is a free and rebellious child god. He learns from Taoist immortals and fights against tyrants. He becomes a Behind him are three heads and six arms, as well as fire-pointed spears, Hun Tianling and other weapons, which have become the familiar image of Nezha for later generations.

Wan Lai Ming, the founder of Chinese animation, pointed out that "animation serves education." (Wan, 1935). which laid the groundwork for the birth of Chinese animation. As a young god, Nezha has always been loved by children's audiences, and has also become the subject of continuous adaptations by animation creators. As shown in the chart below (Figure 1), there have been 14 Chinese animations featuring Nezha, which has surpassed the Monkey King as the Chinese mythological character with the most number of animation adaptations.

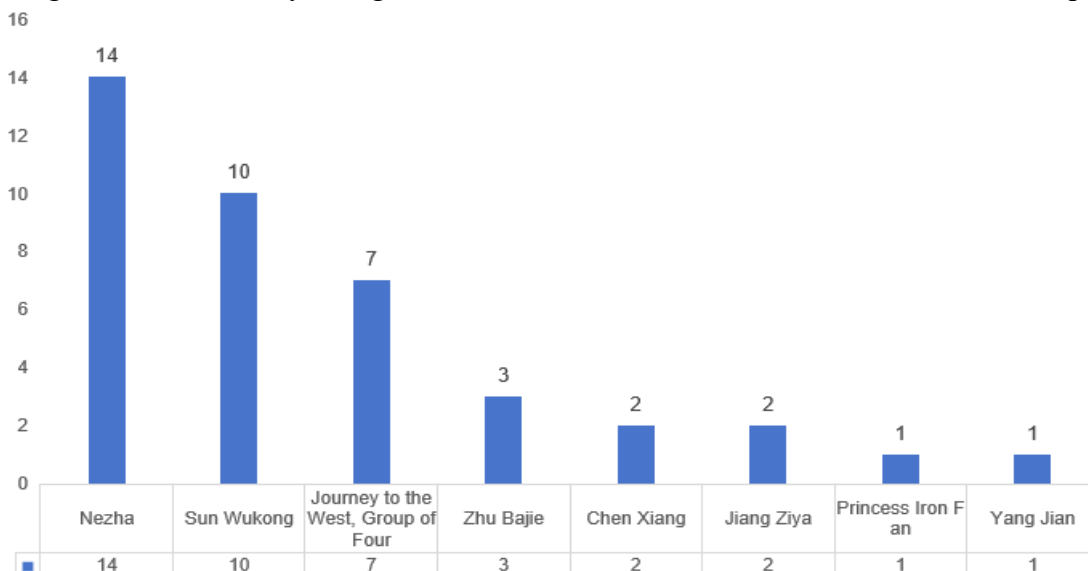


Figure 1: The number of anime adaptations of Chinese mythological characters (protagonists)

Source: Scanned by researcher,2023

Research Objectives

- 1.To study the cultural representation of Nezha's animated image and the reasons for its changes
- 2.To explore the role of Nezha animated images in aesthetic education

Literature Review

As an image that has long attracted attention in the animation field, Nezha has also been receiving attention in academic circles. Since the successful release of "Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World" in 2019, the study of Nezha's image has become a hot topic in media image research.

1.Related research on Nezha's artistic image

There are currently many studies on Nezha's art, mainly focusing on the evolution of artistic images and the case analysis of single animations. Wang Tingting analyzed the evolution and production mechanism of the image of "Nezha" in Chinese films since the reform and opening up, pointing out that Nezha As an important cultural resource, it is widely used not only in the literary world, but also in the film industry, but the artistic evaluation and market response of Nezha movies are mixed, (Wang & Li, 2020). Liu Wengang (2009) examined the gradual evolution of Nezha's image since the Southern Song Dynasty from a religious perspective, and believed that the transformation of Nezha's image from a Buddhist image to a Taoist image was a process of dissemination and acceptance of artistic images. (W. Liu, 2009). Liu Juan discussed the characteristics of Nezha's image in domestic animated films in different periods and the rules of its development and evolution (J. Liu, 2022). Xiaoou took "The Legend of Nezha" as an example to analyze the development of Chinese animation art style (Ou, 2007). Cui Yunlan analyzed the use and inheritance of traditional art forms in "Nezha Conquers the Dragon King" (Cui, 2001).

2. Research on cultural representation and animation

There are relatively few studies on the theory of "cultural representation" in the field of animation. Zhang Jin studied the landscape imagery and its cultural representation in Makoto Shinkai's animated film "Your Name" (Zhang, 2017) and discussed the cultural connotation of animated films and practical significance. Peng Guichang studied the representation of Internet youth subculture in the postmodern context of "One Hundred Thousand Cold Jokes" (Peng, 2018). It is one of the few studies on Nezha from the aspect of representation, but it is a single animation case. Unable to reflect changes in representation, TW Whyke's research mentioned Nezha's inheritance of traditional Chinese culture (Whyke, Mugica, & Brown, 2021). This study recognizes and follows the relevant views.

It can be seen that the current research on Nezha's image is concentrated in the field of art. Although most of the literature involves the social background environment when the animation was created, there is a lack of using sociological concepts to explore Nezha's mapping effect on society. Regarding Nezha animation, There is only one study on the significance of education, which explains parent-child education from the conflicting relationship between Nezha and his father (Guo & Li, 2023). Therefore, this study is based on the cultural representation theory proposed by Stuart Hall and uses content analysis to analyze multiple Conduct research on the animated image of Nezha to explore the cultural representation and educational value of the image of Nezha.

Research concept

Cultural representation

Stuart Hall introduced semiotics to communication studies to analyze how mainstream media can more skillfully make audiences accept their culture or viewpoints, 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). "While the portrayal of a child in a film or television production points to the same representational physical object regardless of differences in language or speech, the advantage of an animated character is that the viewer is able to understand the meaning of the first level of representation on a material level directly through the image, even if there is no language or translation. According to Hall, culture is the practice of representation and meaning, i.e., the second layer of representation. "No cultural vehicle or representational practice has any real original meaning" (Hall, 1997). " The meaning of film and television characters is realized by creators through encoding various symbols, such as backstory, family relationships, body language, etc., and the various symbols are finally assembled into a film and television character that carries cultural meanings and transmits representational meanings and cultural concepts to the audience. The two layers of representation in this case allow us to study the animated characters from both the shallow and the deep aspects.

Stuart Hall argues that events don't have inherent meanings outside their representations; these representations shape and become part of the events, influencing their interpretation. This perspective highlights the audience's role in cultural production through the interpretation of information. Despite diverse cultural backgrounds, a universal coding system allows for a shared understanding of narratives portrayed by characters. This understanding extends to character appearances, language, and actions, and the animated characters are once again Simplify them to suit the younger audience. From the level of the character's outward communication, only by being attracted to the character's external characteristics first can we talk about the empathy and cultural understanding of the character.

The resonance between the characters and the audience is achieved by accepting the deeper meaning of the characters, i.e., the second level of cultural representation, which is related to ideology and values, on the premise that the first level of cultural representation has no barriers to understanding the characters' appearances and performances. The cultural meaning changes with the character because the audience interprets the second level of representation in terms of their own cultural concepts. Although there are differences in the interpretation of deeper meanings, characters that are popular with the audience show that they embrace both layers of cultural meanings. Widely popular characters in popular culture show decoding consistency, where the audience fully understands the film and television meanings, accepts the culture in question, and empathizes with the creators.

Research Methodology

In this study, the content analysis method is used as one of the main research methods in order to understand the creator's intention and the relationship between the receiver and the message. According to Berelson, "content analysis is a research method that provides an objective, systematic, and quantitative description of media content (KARAMETI, 2023). Siegfried Kracauer proposes a qualitative aspect of the content analysis method that focuses on shallow versus deep understanding of the text, emphasizing the importance of explaining the meaning and cultural context behind the text (Morelock, 2021). The study analyzes the character of Nezha in five animated films through content analysis and analyzes the texts of the reviews based on the comments on the Chinese social media platform "Douban" in order to explore the cultural representations in the texts. According to the research objectives, the following steps were followed to design the study: sample extraction → definition of analyzing units → category construction → coding reliability test → content coding → checking of coding results → interpretation and analysis of conclusions.

1. Sampling

This study sorted out a total of 17 Nezha animations produced in China in which the Nezha character appeared. Based on Yang Mingmo's (2023) research on the evolution of Chinese national animation characters, using time as a clue, in TV animations, the Internet Five works were selected from the animation and film animations. Among them, the online and series animations were selected with the number of episodes in which Nezha appeared, namely: "Nezha Conquers the Dragon King 1979", "The Legend of Nezha 2003", "One Hundred Thousand Bad Jokes 2012", "Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World 2019", "New God List: Nezha Reborn 2021", including 675 minutes of animation content (Table 1).

Table 1: Information about sample animations

Video name	release time	media type	Film duration
Nezha Conquers the Dragon King	1979	Art Animation	65 minutes
The Legend of Nezha	2003	TV animation	210 minutes (Episodes 1-10)
One Hundred Thousand Bad Jokes	2012	web animation	21 minutes (Episodes 1-3)
Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World	2019	movie animation	110 minutes
New God List: Nezha Reborn	2021	movie animation	116 minutes

Source: Scanned by researcher, 2023

The above animation works all feature Nezha as the protagonist, are comparable in terms of the different manifestations, characteristics, and interpretations of the character of Nezha, possess the characteristic of highlighting diversity, are representative of Nezha's roles in various time periods, have certain contemporary meanings, and have been widely noticed and discussed, reflecting the audience's values and aesthetic interests. It is worth noting that there may be other Nezha works of the same significance, and the selection of these works was made to reflect animation of different periods, mediums, and styles and thus provide insights into the cultural representations of Nezha's animated character. A sample of selected Nezha animations is shown in the table below.

Meanwhile, in order to deeply analyze the evaluation of Nezha by audiences with different cultural backgrounds, this study used Douban as the data source and screened the comments related to the above animation and "Nezha character" as the analysis object, so as to understand the audience's interpretation of Nezha. tendency. The study used computer crawler technology to crawl film reviews of Nezha-related animation works, generated a sample database, and eliminated irrelevant and duplicate samples. Then, random sampling was used to screen the film review samples, and a total of 963 valid film review samples were obtained.

2. Category construction

Class construction is to convert the symbols, themes, and concepts in the Nezha character into quantifiable data. The classes in this study take the research question as the starting point, and the content analysis of five Nezha animations and related movie reviews on Douban.com is used to obtain a representative sample of the cultural representations of the Nezha character. Based on the proposal of Stuart Hall on the process of the two representations of culture and the role of the audience's participation in the construction of culture, and combined with the actual situation of the study, three basic levels of construction are identified through different levels of analysis: external image (shallow representation), internal image (deep representation), and audience interpretation. The three levels of indicators were further developed to be independent of each other and to fully cover the research questions, as shown in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2: Coding Table for Content Analysis of Nezha's Animated Character Movie Content and Comments

Level 1 indicators	Level 2 indicators	Level 3 indicators
External image (shallow representation)	Character appearance	Clothing, physical features
	behavior	Actions, words, interactions
inner image (deep representation)	Themes and symbols	Thematic expression, symbolism
	Creative Background	Political context, cultural context, social context
	ideology	Power concepts, individual and collective, values
Audience Interpretation	interpretative tendency	Positive, negative, neutral

Source: Scanned by researcher,2023

3. Credibility testing

In this study, reliability was tested using Hosty's formula by randomly and without duplication drawing 10% of the test sample from the total sample pool. Coding was done separately by two coders after reading the coding rules in detail. Since the formula for mutual agreement K is: $K = \frac{2M}{N1+N2}$, where M is the number of categories for which the two coders coded exactly the same result, N1 and N2 are the number of categories analyzed by each of the coders. The reliability was obtained through the number of mutual agreements: $\text{reliability} = \frac{n \times \text{evaluation mutual agreement}}{1 + [(n-1) \times \text{average agreement}]}$, n is the number of coders, and the test is generally considered to be qualified when the reliability is greater than 0.9. The resultant data of the reliability calculation in this study was approximately 0.94, indicating that the content analysis consistency of the two coders was strong enough to analyze the entire sample

Research Findings

In the descriptive and subjective coding index, through no less than five viewings of the 675-minute film, relevant content was collected according to the coding table, and frequently occurring content was coded, focusing on the combination of quantitative and qualitative. In the audience decoding index, the high-frequency words in the text of the film reviews were classified and organized through the collation of keywords in 963 film reviews, and the lexical nature of the words, the frequency of occurrence, and the audience's tendency to interpret the words were integrated, and the descriptive analysis was conducted at last.

1. Nezha's external image representation

The content coding information of Nezha character appearance is shown in the table below (Table 3).

Table 3 : Nezha character appearance list

Name	Clothing style	Color Themes	special symbol	Physical Characterization	Number of visual changes
Nezha Conquers the Dragon King	legacy	Red, yellow	Mixed Heavenly Aya, Qiankun Circle, Fire Tip Lance.	Healthy and valiant	Low (2 times)
The Legend of Nezha	legacy	Red, Gold	Mixed Heavenly Aya, Qiankun Circle, Fire Tip Lance.	Lively and youthful	Low (2 times)
One Hundred Thousand Bad Jokes	legacy	Purple, red	miniskirt	Teenage face, muscular body	Medium (3 times)
Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World	legacy	Black, Red	Mixed Heavenly Aya, Qiankun Circle, Fire Tip Lance.	Dark Eye Circles, Ghost Teeth	High (6 times)
New God List: Nezha Reborn	Modern/Punk	Metallic, dark tones	The Mixed Heavenly Aya, the Qiankun Circle, and the motorcycle.	Punk youth, mechanical armor	High (5 times)

Source: Scanned by researcher, 2023

The analysis found that although the styles and color themes of Nezha's clothing are different, they all draw design inspiration from traditional clothing, and the colors are mainly red and yellow, which allows Nezha's character to maintain the most basic recognition. In terms of special symbols and physical features, the Mixed Sky Aya, the Qiankun Circle, and the Fire Pointed Gun are the recurring iconic symbols, but there are also modern elements added to the mix. And as Nezha's plot complicates, the number of visual changes in Nezha increases, including age changes and physical evolution.

The content coding information of Nezha behavior is shown in the table below (Table 4):

Table 4: Nezha behavior list

Name	Combat frequency	Combat description	interaction frequency	interaction description	self-expression frequency	self-expression description
Nezha Conquers the Dragon King	Low (5 times)	Elegant, traditional martial arts style	Low (11 times)	Less verbal communication, more body language	Low (6 times)	Emotional expression is suppressed
The Legend of Nezha	Medium (13 times)	Combination of skill demonstration and individuality	Medium (16 times)	More dialog and conflict with friends and adversaries	Medium (11 times)	More emotional expression of self-reflection and growth
One Hundred Thousand Bad Jokes	Medium (10 times)	one blow and you're dead (idiom); kill with a single blow	Low (8 times)	No-nonsense show	Medium (14 times)	Contrastingly sappy and cute
Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World	High (12 times)	Extremely visual and dynamic	High (34 times)	In-depth inner monologues and interactions with family members	High (27 times)	Emotionally complex, reflecting personal struggles and growth
New God List: Nezha Reborn	High (14 times)	Futuristic tech style, innovative	High (32 times)	Interaction with New Age Characters	High (28 times)	Emphasis on individual heroism

Source: Scanned by researcher,2023

After analysis, it was found that over time, Nezha's fighting behavior gradually shifted from traditional martial arts to technology and visual effects, with more frequent and futuristic battles. The increased frequency of Nezha's interactions with the other characters also reflected a shift in the story's focus, from in-depth communication with family and master and disciple to an emphasis on interactions with friends and teamwork, and that Nezha's self-expressive behaviors became more frequent and diverse. Nezha's self-expressive behaviors

become more frequent and diverse, and he expresses his personal ideas more boldly and positively.

2. Nezha’s internal image representation

The content coding information of Nezha’s themes and symbols is shown in the table below (Table 5).

Table 5: Nezha themes and symbols list

Name	Theme frequency	Theme Description	Frequency of symbols	Symbolic Description	Total number of incidents
Nezha Conquers the Dragon King	High (8 times)	Justice, Sacrifice, Growth	High (9 times)	The dry circle and red silk represent strength and justice	17
The Legend of Nezha	High (12 times)	Heroes, Duty, Family	Low (3 times)	Constant adventures to gain magic treasures symbolize growth	15
One Hundred Thousand Cold Jokes	Medium (6 times)	Anti-traditional, nonsensical, mocking	High (3 times)	King Kong Barbie character's parody of mainstream culture	9
Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World	Medium (9 times)	Resistance to fate, personal values	High (8 times)	Rogue characters subvert convention and counter stereotypes	16
New God List: Nezha Reborn	Medium (6 times)	Anti-monopoly, anti-capital, heroism	Medium (6 times)	Mechanical elements symbolize power and punk spirit	12

Source: Scanned by researcher, 2023

In terms of theme and symbolism, the theme of Nezha in different works has gradually evolved from traditional justice and sacrifice to modern self-identity and heroism, and most of them are characterized by the spirit of resistance, the content of which varies according to the development of time. The symbolic elements of Nezha have changed over time and in the context of the stories. In "Nezha Follies the Sea" and "The Legend of Nezha," the traditional weapon and magic weapon symbolize power and justice, to which popular symbols such as smoky make-up and junkyard machinery have been added to differentiate Nezha from the traditional Nezha symbols.

The content coding information of Nezha’s creative background is shown in the table below (Table 6).

Table 6: Nezha breative background list

Name	Description of the political context	Description of the cultural context	Description of the social context
Nezha Conquers the Dragon King	Relatively conservative political environment in the early years of reform and opening up	Valuing traditional culture and emphasizing national spirit	The Cultural Revolution is over and the economy is just starting to develop
The Legend of Nezha	After joining the WTO, opening up to the outside world has been strengthened	Diversity of Chinese and Foreign Cultures	Rapid economic development, people have higher spiritual needs
One Hundred Thousand Bad Jokes	In the age of the Internet, speech is relatively open	The rise of cyberculture as young people go wild on the Internet	The internet has become a major social and entertainment venue
Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World	Social stability, cultural confidence	Emphasis on innovation and individual expression, with a renewed focus on national culture	The new generation of young people is under pressure from many sources and longs for recognition.
New God List: Nezha Reborn	Expanded international perspective and increased capital power	Niche fictional culture, represented by cyberpunk and wasteland, is prevalent	Consumption upgrades, people pursue novel experiences

Source: Scanned by researcher, 2023

Changes in the political environment have had a profound effect on the interpretation of the character of Nezha. While early works were more constrained by political conservatism, as time progressed, works began to enjoy more freedom, reflecting a gradually liberalizing political climate and encouragement of cultural creativity. From emphasizing traditional culture and national spirit to exploring more diversified and innovative ways of expression with globalization, the reinterpretation of national culture to date reflects cultural confidence and a vision for the future. Meanwhile, the works of each period reflect different social conditions and public concerns, revealing the growing cultural needs of the public in the midst of economic development.

The content coding information of Nezha ideology is shown in the table below (Table 7).

Table 7 Nezha ideology list

Name	concept of power	Individual and collective	healthy attitude
Nezha Conquers the Dragon King	Respect for authority and justice above all else	Individuals are subordinate to the collective, emphasizing dedication to the collective	anti-imperialist and anti-feudalist
The Legend of Nezha	Pluralism of power, challenges and reflections	Individuals are valued and the family is important	Family values and personal responsibility

One Hundred Thousand Cold Jokes	Power is mocked and deconstructed in a nonsensical way	Individual freedoms are prominent and social norms are lax	Anti-Tradition and Free Spirit
Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World	Complexity within power, self-challenge	Individual growth and social responsibility go hand in hand	Resisting fatalism.
New God List: Nezha Reborn	Power held hostage by capital	individual heroism	Resistance to the exploitation of capital

Source: Scanned by researcher, 2023

By coding and analyzing ideologies, we can see a shift from respect for authority and an emphasis on tradition to challenging power structures and emphasizing individual freedom and creative thinking. More respect for traditional power and social structures is reflected in Nezha's Fear of the Sea and the Legend of Nezha. In the 21st century, especially in Hundred Thousand Cold Jokes and subsequent works, the value of the individual is emphasized more, demonstrating a reinterpretation of tradition and an embrace of modern concepts. Nezha's Descent of the Devil Child and New Seal of the Gods: Rebirth of Nezha, on the other hand, explore more the complexity of inherent power, the importance of individual growth, and a positive outlook on the future, all of which are reflections of changing times and social development.

3. Audience's perception of Nezha's image

The content coding information of Nezha's interpretation tendency is shown in the table below (Table 8).

Table 8: Nezha's interpretation tendency list

Name	interpretative tendency	Movie Review High Frequency Words
Nezha Conquers the Dragon King	positively the negative side unisex	Fighting for the people, anti-feudalism, valor, chivalry, defiance of power, self-sacrifice, filial piety, resistance, traditional arts feudalistic Child, Teenager, Parent, Neutral, Li Jing, Role Heroic, Growing Up, Classic, Hot Blooded, Tear Jerker, Rise Above, Mighty, Childhood, Favorite, Brave
The Legend of Nezha	positively the negative side unisex	Disney style Windjammer, Little Buddy, Generations, Maharaja, Picturesque, Passing, Buddy, Myths
One Hundred Thousand Cold Jokes	positively the negative side unisex	Funny, creative, cool, amazing, cute girl Not funny, parody, spoof, boring, superficial. Festivus, Trolling, Respect, Satire, Demonic, Internet
Nezha: The Devil Boy Comes to the World	positively the negative side unisex	Adorable, Heroic, Defying Fate, Friendship, Reconciliation, Delightful, Stunning, Family, Mythic, Recognition, Returning Prejudice, zombies, mojo, problems, parody, ugliness, selfishness relationship, dark circles, punk, spirit, core, destiny, values, father-son relationship
New God List: Nezha Reborn	positively the negative side unisex	Heroic Rescue, Subversive, Soul, Special Effects Dark, stereotyped, gangster, bad man, objectifying women, destroying tradition Punk, dialect, class, youth, protagonist, father, wasteland, capital

Source: Scanned by researcher,2023

In terms of the lexical distribution of high-frequency reviews, audiences are more neutral in their interpretations of Nezha. From the perspective of ephemerality, the earlier the release, the more positive interpretations there are, with few negative interpretations, and the later the release, the more negative interpretations there are, and there is a bifurcation of the two levels of reviews, but on the whole, audiences are more positive than negative about these works, and audiences' interpretations of Nezha fluctuate across different works. Different works fluctuated but still tended to be favorable.

An analysis of the high-frequency words for the character of Nezha in each work shows that "Nezha Conquers 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 characterization. Hundred Thousand Cold Jokes" received mixed reviews due to its subversive look and nonsensical plot. Nezha: The Descent of the Magical Child" demonstrates the audience's agreement with the animated text, shifting from anti-feudalism to the pursuit of one's own destiny, centered on the idea that "my destiny is up to me and not to God." Nezha's new role in New God List: Nezha Reborn has been revamped, with viewers focusing on the characterization of the character, but there are conflicting perceptions, with a rise in derogatory terms and a fall in positive ones, reflecting disapproval of Nezha's new role, possibly due to the story's setting and the character's break with the traditional Nezha character.

Discussion

According to existing research, which animated character forms the core of a film has many meanings. First of all, Nezha's unique artistic style carries national culture. As Wu Kai pointed out, the reason why Nezha's character is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people is due to the nationalized art style (Wu, 2020). Wang Xinxin believes that the artistic styles of different periods have increased Nezha's appeal (Wang, 2020), which is consistent with the results of this study on Nezha's external image.

Secondly, the Nezha characters created in different eras also reflect the changes in social environment and political background. Whyke pointed out that the intertextuality of Nezha expresses the call for traditional heroic roles in a specific era (Whyke & Mugica, 2022), Jin Jing's research It shows that Nezha's transformation reflects the changing social and political background of China's socialist and post-socialist periods (Jin & Wang, 2021). Chen Wenhui pointed out that Nezha's role is changeable in the process of cultural inheritance; Role changes reflect contemporary social and cultural patterns (Chen, 2020). Although these studies involve Nezha's creative background, they do not explicitly use the concept of cultural representation.

Meanwhile, the character of Nezha has played a positive role in the spread of Chinese culture. A survey by Lin Xiao showed that different audiences' nationalities, professional backgrounds, and animation experiences have consistent descriptions of the emotional character of Nezha (Xiao & Lee, 2020), which shows that the emotional characters of animation can generate consensus among different cultures. Wulandari talks in the book that digital technology allows the rich connotations of Chinese mythological characters to present modern elements, making them easier to be accepted globally (Wulandari, 2021).

It can be seen that the current research on Nezha's role is concentrated in the fields of art and sociology, and there are few studies on its educational significance. Only a few studies elaborate on parent-child education from the contradictory relationship between Nezha and his father (Guo & Li, 2023). This study uses content analysis method to study Nezha animation and related film reviews in different periods, and explores the cultural representation in Nezha animation from the external image and dimensions, thereby demonstrating the aesthetic education value of Nezha animation image.

Conclusion

Through research on Nezha's external image, it was found that Nezha's clothing styles and color themes, although each has its own characteristics, are uniformly drawn from the design inspiration of traditional clothing, which reflects the respect and inheritance of national art (Jian-bo , 2021). The use of traditional symbols such as Huntian Ling, Qiankun Circle, and Fire-Pointed Spear, as well as the integration of modern elements, on the one hand show the intertextuality of animated images and mythical characters (You, 2022), on the other hand show the cultural tradition and A blend of modern aesthetics. These visual elements not only maintain the recognition of the characters, but also convey the national style of contemporary animation (Whyke, Mugica, & Brown, 2021), helping to enhance the audience's aesthetic appreciation. The transformation of Nezha's language and behavior from traditional martial arts to modern fighting not only demonstrates the charm of visual effects, but also reflects the development and future trends of film and television technology. It encourages learners to explore and appreciate the artistic styles of different eras, and cultivates their understanding of Awareness of the application of new technologies in innovative artistic expression improves media literacy. Nezha's diversified self-expression behaviors and bold expression of personal ideas provide learners with an example of self-awareness and self-expression. By imitating Nezha's bold and positive expression, learners can learn how to better understand their own emotions and thoughts, and how to express their opinions and needs effectively.

In terms of Nezha's inner image creation, Nezha's themes have evolved from traditional justice and sacrifice to modern self-identity and heroism, reflecting the changes in society's perception of individual value and heroic image. This change demonstrates the adaptability and modernization capabilities of Chinese culture, and also encourages the public, especially the younger generation, to explore and affirm their own personal value and identity. Judging from the symbolic elements of Nezha, the use of traditional weapons and magic weapons symbolizes strength and justice, while newly added elements such as smoky makeup and wasteland machinery represent the trend of the times and the diversity of culture. These changes not only enrich the character image of Nezha, but also guide the audience to understand and accept new values and virtues (Song & Zhang, 2008). As the political environment changes, Nezha's interpretations become more diverse and free, and Nezha's original education and discipline elements are gradually weakened (X. Dong, 2023), reflecting the gradually open political atmosphere and encouragement of cultural creation. The changes in Nezha's image and story content reflect the development of China's social economy and the growth of cultural needs, and embody the ideological change from respecting authority and tradition to challenging the power structure and emphasizing individual freedom and innovative thinking. This transformation guides the audience to think about traditional and

modern values, and promotes the diversification and development of social virtues.

As a result of the research, the audience can understand the art and culture behind Nezha by interpreting it, and gain subtle improvement and learning. As a unique film and television character, Nezha in the animation has both artistic charm and educational value, reflecting national aesthetics and value orientation. At the same time, the audience can understand China's social and cultural changes by interpreting Nezha's character. Nezha through traditional stories The beauty and meaning contained in national art can edify and infiltrate the audience, rather than forced indoctrination, which is in line with the "infiltration" characteristics of aesthetic education (Harper, 2008), and is a suitable sample of aesthetic education.

Recommendations

1. General Recommendations

Artists and researchers should start from the relationship between Nezha animation and society and change the research perspective of Nezha animation. This new perspective will help us re- Examine the relationship between Nezha, animation, and Chinese society, and then conceptually interpret the significance of the existence and development of Nezha animation.

2. Further Research Recommendations

In aesthetic education, should pay attention to the use of animation as a teaching resource. Actively using Nezha animation as a teaching case in teaching can allow learners to better understand the development of Chinese society and improve their aesthetic abilities and ideological and moral standards.

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