

On the Receivers' Incentives and Senders' Myths of Nezha -- Reflections on the phenomenon of Chinese animation film after the Popularity of Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child

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Abstract. The IP craze of Nezha in Chinese animation movies reflects the shortcomings of the whole society's pursuit of pleasure in feeling-good novels and the short-sightedness of capital. When the wave of seeking sensory polarization surges, it is impossible to distinguish whether this charm comes from people's real desires or whether the society is covered by a fake curtain and immersed in fantasy. This paper analyzes this phenomenon from the perspectives of receivers and senders. From the receiver's perspective, this paper focuses on the anti-hero culture and the secret psychology of indulging in surplus pleasure. Regarding the sender's aspect, this study analyzes the current disadvantages of Chinese animation films from the perspective of accelerating McDonaldization production. Finally, this study tries to provide suggestions for Chinese animation films to get rid of the Nezha meme and achieve diversified development.

Keywords: Chinese animation film; Nezha; anti-hero; Surplus pleasure; McDonaldization.

1. The Receiver's Inducement: The Outbreak of Nezha -- The Secret of People

After the popularity of Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, Chinese animation ushered in the awakening of IP in Nezha, such as New Gods: Nezha Reborn, I am Nezha-The East China Sea II, and Legend of Nezha Dragon and Underground. In most adapted works of Chinese cartoons, Nezha shows a distinct and similar character. He is not afraid of power, dares to fight, and even has shortcomings that are not accepted by the mainstream of society, such as being stubborn and irritable. He is just like a rebellious teenager. Perhaps it was spurned by society, oppressed by others, and suffered tragedy in the early stage, but in the later stage, it will usher in self-growth and phoenix-like headwind overturns. It is this characteristic that makes Nezha widely sought after, and more and more Nezha characters and similar cool stories have sprung up.

1.1 The Pursuit of Anti-hero

1.1.1 Hero and Anti-hero

"Heroism exists forever and everywhere, and it extends from the sacred worship to the lowest real-life field." British humanist Carlyle once described the significance of hero worship in human society. Hero worship arouses people's deep yearning and desire and turns it into support for the role. In the past, traditional heroes generally had lofty moral thoughts, extraordinary abilities, a sense of responsibility to save the world, and a flawless appearance. They combined almost all the good qualities of human beings, and they were the embodiment of grand and lofty values. Traditional heroes are used for viewing, and there is a distance between them and the receiver. Anti-heroes break away from the tall and perfect image and narrow the distance between them and the receiver. Nowadays, the anti-hero image in Chinese animation movies makes people believe that the character is the receivers themselves and they can also be the character. The anti-hero is not equal to a villain, but an alternative hero opposite to the typical hero. Once the ordinary people's life enters the core of art and becomes the protagonist, it means the end of the traditional hero, the collapse of the grand and lofty collective ideal, and the dissipation of the concept of "tall, big, and perfect". Anti-hero not only has the shortcomings and confusion of ordinary people but also shows the bright parts that are loved by people. Contemporary anti-heroes have strong self-awareness and rebellion, and grow up slowly

in the confrontation between individuals and society, winning the spiritual recognition of the receiver. These characteristics make it easier for anti-heroes to enter the hearts of receivers.

1.1.2 The Nezha-style Anti-hero

The original image of Nezha was a magic child, a rebellious child depicted in ancient silk books. In ancient times, Nezha was not called a hero and was not widely sought after and believed in. Nowadays, the IP image of Nezha has become a spiritual example for contemporary young people to rebel against injustice, break through shackles and pursue personal destiny. The emergence of Nezha-style anti-hero is the stage characteristic of the development of Chinese cartoon films, which reflects the changes in society and human nature. The popularity of anti-heroes represents the collapse of traditional heroism and the decline of lofty values of human beings. The problems reflect the fierce contradiction of people's existence and the crisis of values in society and indicate the author's thinking and criticism of the real world. The development of anti-heroes implies profound social issues. All kinds of anti-heroes are sought after by Generation Z, and it is difficult for traditional heroes to get attention again.

Ne Zha-style anti-hero in *New Gods: Nezha Reborn* is a typical anti-hero with Chinese characteristics in the new era cultivated by Chinese cartoons in recent years. Although the background is set in ancient times or different worlds, they have the values recognized by the receiver of Generation Z. With the advance of the plot, the receiver and the Nezha-style anti-hero jointly ushered in the sublimation and climax of collective emotion. Nezha was cynical, not understood by others, and bullied, while the young people of Generation Z wanted to get rid of the label made by others. At this time, Nezha became them, and they also became Nezha. As Nezha grew up to the end, he resisted injustice and was reborn in nirvana. He won the endorsement of the receiver. They were eager to tear the shackles and their desire to realize their ideals was already expressed. *New Gods: Nezha Reborn* is a great success, which not only gives the receiver the pleasure of feel-good novels but also conveys values that have a positive guiding role in the development of Chinese society and young people. Anti-heroes with unique Chinese characteristics shouted the slogan "I am commanded by myself, but not by God", which conveyed the combination of the Chinese people's self-improvement since ancient times and the young people's passionate indomitable spirit in the new era. Instead of making the receiver indulge in the romance and magnificence of the film forever, it reflected reality and provided people with the courage to face difficulties.

1.2 The Addiction to the Surplus Pleasure

1.2.1 The Nezha-style Surplus Pleasure

The receiver's addiction to the Nezha-style character image and the brilliant plot in the Chinese film market reflect the social receiver's addiction to surplus pleasure. The cultural market at present is full of straightforward addiction to surplus pleasure. Our examination and selection of cultural products have entered a moment that is more pleasing to ourselves, more straightforward, and enjoyable, and our life is also sinking into the silent package of surplus pleasure. Surplus pleasure is an important concept in Lacan's psychoanalysis. Obtaining surplus pleasure is a process in which people's inner desire to be repressed and expelled can be realized. Lacan believes that "the most secret beliefs of human beings, even the most secret emotions such as pity, wailing, grief, and happiness, can be transferred to others without losing their sincerity". Drawing on Marx's definition of surplus value, we can think that surplus pleasure is "the part of pleasure created by the other, occupied by the subject and exceeding the pleasure of others". Therefore, the surplus pleasure can be understood as the part of the pleasure that people themselves cannot achieve or are repressed, and rely on others to place their secret desires.

The Nezha-style protagonist in Chinese movies ushered in the climax of the movie from the initial tragic depression to the final explosive resistance in the gorgeous and shocking special effects, in which the erupting refreshing factors often made the receiver want to stop. And it was precisely in the dramatic climax that the receiver gained the greatest emotional expression and desire for

sustenance. Pursuing feel-good seems to be the mainstream of entertainment at present, and even feel-good has become an important factor for the receiver to measure whether a work is wonderful or not. In the copy-and-paste routine, with the shocking soundtrack and special effects pictures, the receiver experiences the double pleasure of spirit and body in the journey from low and humble to high tide with the Nezha-style anti-hero, and the hidden desire that is difficult to achieve in reality is released here. However, it has also become a dominant right factor, weaving sweet dreams to make the receiver deeply immersed in them and have a pure carnival.

1.2.2 The Reflection on Addiction

In the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) era at present, where efficiency and interests are paramount, the entertainment works roughly copy the feeling-good stories and the Nezha-style anti-hero character. The works often cover the receiver's sight by focusing on class contradictions and crises, and make the receiver sleep in the dream of information explosion and entertainment culture, and immerse themselves in pure enjoyment. As an important cultural industry, China's animation films should take certain responsibility to protect the social and cultural atmosphere, so we should be alert to the surplus pleasure and excessive entertainment tendency. At the same time, the aesthetic pursuit of anti-heroes is a reflection of the benefits of diseases discussed by Freud. Disease benefit means that psychopaths are obsessed with illness and do not want to wake up from it. They get a sense of belonging in the illness, which is their self-protection to avoid trauma. The wounds and shortcomings of the anti-hero draw closer to the receiver, and the receiver projects the early tragedy of the anti-hero to themselves internalizes it into their own diseases reasonably immerses themselves in the tragic situation and follows the protagonist to achieve the success of fate change, thus obtaining the infinite pleasure of realizing secret desires. The plot of "happy life, anti-reality" is very popular in Chinese animation films. A large number of rough copies of the Nezha model create a pure illusion for the receiver, which confuses them to indulge, but they are still surrounded by realistic contradictions. The life scenes, events, and characters' emotions in these works full of literary elements are all vivid. But we cannot grasp the real dilemma of China's social life today. These problems will lead the society into the danger of the prevalence of capital, and make the receiver indulge in the false and dreamy situation of capital description structure while ignoring the social reality that still needs attention.

2. The Myth of the Sender: Nezha Mythical Fast Food-- The Social Representation of McDonaldization Industry

Based on the instrumental rationality of Max Weber, George Ritzer described the trend of McDonaldization at present. McDonaldization is a process in which the principles of fast food restaurants gradually dominate the world, and it has four characteristics: high efficiency, measurable, predictable, and controllable. The social McDonaldization is vividly reflected in the ecology of China's animation and film industry, resulting in senders' continuous mass production and dissemination of the Nezha-style feel-good fast food supply market. Nezha-style mythical fast food seems to cater to the receiver's preference, but it actually limits the receiver's right to enjoy the richer literary works freely.

2.1 The Market Profit-seeking and Prosperous Bubble Phantom

After the popularity of New Gods: Nezha Reborn, for the certainty of production results and profits, the market pursued a predictable and measurable McDonald's model and increased its investment in the mythical universe project of the Chinese cartoons. Perhaps there are many excellent works that have stimulated the rejuvenation of the country, but most of them are only for efficient profit. China's animation industry is short-sighted in its lack of awareness of the difference between the commercial nature of cultural industries and the commercial nature of traditional industries. The emergence of the mythical universe leads to the receiver's aesthetic fatigue and confusion about brand image, which is not conducive to the overall development of the national universe. In 2021, many Nezha-style

animation films were released, such as Monkey King Reborn, Jigong's Dragon Descending to the World, and White Snake II: Green Snake Robbed. The mythical films planned to be released in 2022 include The Lower Bound of Bajie's Canopy, Erlang God's Deep Sea Dragon, and New God List: Yang Jian from the series of the universe of Granting Titles to Gods of Zhuiguang Company. Chinese animation films are constantly accelerating mass production, and the rapid industrial production is competing for profit, pursuing the increase of quantity rather than the improvement of quality, thus creating a model of rapid reproduction following globalization. Following the trend cannot promote the real prosperity of Chinese animation films, and eventually, they will turn into bubble phantoms and become commercial games blowing in the wind.

2.2 The Difficulty to Cultivate the Professionals in the Accelerated Society

In the accelerated society, the society is addicted to the pursuit of efficient, predictable, and measurable quick benefits. Practitioners lack humanistic perception sensitive to the real world, creativity, and innovative thinking, which leads to the fact that practitioners in this field have skills but no ideas, bodies but no souls, or artistic creation ability but no technology, which makes it difficult to sensitively perceive social texture for artistic creation, lack of speculation on the development of the whole national film industry, and lack of professional all-round talents. Nezha emerges one after another, but national innovation is lacking. The important factor lies in the lack of creative talents in the upstream content creation stage. The lack of creative talents in the Chinese film industry is rooted in the problems existing in basic education. From the perspective of the animation industry, high-end original animation talents include scriptwriters, cartoonists, animation producers, animation directors, animation product designers, and other professionals. And the cultivation of professional talents requires time and money investment, which can only become a luxury in the accelerated society of seeking benefits and measuring costs.

2.3 The Instrumental Rationality and Charmless Copies

In the dimension of creative content, in order to pursue the maximum benefit, Chinese cartoon films fall into the trap of instrumental rationality, losing their creative charm, being tied to the Nezha-style mythical routine, and lacking the creation and polishing of original scripts with multiple themes. The templated script routine is actually rational or irrational, which loses its uniqueness. The proliferation of the Nezha-style anti-hero mythical model is not only reflected in the artistic style and character modeling of the ancient mythical universe, but also in the subversive adaptation of Chinese traditional myths, which favors the anti-hero protagonist's character and the adjustment of modern popular network elements. For a time, many Nezha-style mythical fast food appeared on the screen, such as the Monkey King, Yang Jian, Tianpeng, Hong Haier, lady white snake, and Chang'e, which are commonly reproduced in batches, constantly emerged. It seems to be a brand-new attempt, but its essence is mechanical reproduction without artistic charm. At present, the mainstream tone of our country is myth adaptation, and the original excellent scripts are lacking. Japanese and American animation films are mainly adapted from comics, and successful comic writers have provided the films with a good script and receiver base. The comic-adapted works themselves have many pumps and detailed and complete world views, which greatly reduces the difficulty of production. At the present stage, Chinese cartoon movies are generally lacking in good stories and the ability to tell good stories. The market pursues efficient and predictable return on investment, squeezes the polishing time of plays, and pays less attention to plots but more attention to visual effects of technology stacking. The content of a play has lost its originality.

3. Shaking off Nezha and Lighting the Dawn

3.1 The Systematic Forward-looking Planning

With a large number of elements of Nezha in films, more and more mythical universes lead to confusion of receivers' brands, resulting in resistance. At present, Chinese cartoon movies are

showing a wave of imitation and follow-up, which requires the industry to make an overall unified plan. South Korea is the third largest animation industry power, and its rising road is that animation processing gradually turns to originality, which is very similar to the initial stage of China's animation industry and shows more reference significance. South Korea attaches great importance to the long-term planning of the cultural industry and has been developing the cultural industry with the efforts of the whole country for a long time. In 1998, South Korea set the cultural industry including the animation industry as the strategic pillar industry of the national economy in the 21st century and set up professional guiding institutions such as the Comic Image Promotion Institute at the specific production and dissemination level to provide assistance and support projects for enterprises and talents. In addition, South Korea has implemented preferential tax policies for the animation industry and set up special funds to support universities and related enterprises to engage in animation creation [10]. It is not that the national film cannot develop the Nezha-style literary myth, but that it should be reasonable and moderate. Therefore, it is necessary to guide the senders to rationally invest in production, and nurture a creative and national film team with a forward-looking vision and international vision, so as to improve the systematization of the development of the national film.

3.2 The Excavation of the Real Soil

In the dimension of communication content, the theme of Chinese animation films is confined to the frame of myths and legends, biased towards the magnificent background of dreams, lacking the outline and criticism of reality, which constitutes a vain castle in the air, unable to dig deeply into the psychological impact of great social changes on the receiver. *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* was not confined to a narrow position, saw the broad social soil, and sensitively captured people's inner desires, thus successfully establishing the image of Nezha in a new era that met people's expectations. Blindly pouring into myths and legends to duplicate and copy will lose the imagination space that should have been broader, and the adaptation of myths needs to be moderate. The adaptation of traditional myths in *Legend of Deification* is too large, and only the vague background and characters' names are kept, which causes netizens to complain about the plot and characters' modeling. When making use of mythical themes with high receiver familiarity, we should be prepared to face too many adaptations, which will break the communication chain, and cause communication errors and doubts. In order to promote the establishment of a mythical universe, Chinese animation films need to explore different themes, not only dig deeply into Chinese traditional myths, but also explore realistic themes, and refuse to stay at the superficial level, so as to avoid the influence of tendency of low age hinder long-term communication.

3.3 The Reconstruction of the Chinese School

The key breakthrough of the Chinese animation film industry is the revival of Chinese school if it wants to get rid of Nezha, McDonald's growth in society, and go to the post-growth stage of pursuing quality. And how to develop the real Chinese School is worthy of further study. There are two imitation periods in the development of Chinese animation films: the first one is in the mid-1950s, imitating the Soviet Union, and the second one is after 2004, imitating Japan and the United States [11]. At that time, many practitioners came from companies that had been processing Japanese and American animation for a long time. Because of the early and wide spread, a large number of Chinese audiences were accustomed to Japanese and American animation styles. At present, the narrative mode of Chinese animation film creation style cannot avoid the penetration of Japanese and American styles. The development of China's animation industry must learn from Japan and the United States at the top, but if it wants to survive for a long time, it still needs to form a unique style of the Chinese nation. In 2019, *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* has taken a relatively successful step in the reconstruction of the Chinese school, that is, 3D combines with Chinese ink painting, the magnificent and gorgeous mythical background carries the thinking of young people in the new era of China, and the design of characters has the unique characteristics of Chinese face, and the bright and grand style has been affirmed. A large number of Chinese animation movies imitate this, but few succeed. The

inferior similarity arouses the receiver's aesthetic fatigue and weakens the receiver's trust. The development of Chinese school should not follow the trend. The rough and inferior imitation of mythical IP is not conducive to the establishment of the mythical universe in China. It is advisable to learn from experience, and blind copying will only be left behind by the trend of the times.

4. Conclusion

The influx of Nezha implies the popularity of anti-heroes in social and cultural production and the proliferation of the feeling-good mode, which reflects the pursuit of surplus pleasure in society, and is also the psychological comfort for the receiver to benefit from diseases. However, indulging in surplus pleasure is actually a kind of mental paralysis, which makes the receiver immersed in imaginary dreams and unable to face directly at various social realities. Is this the essential desire of the receiver? Just like Rosa's so-called new alienation, people voluntarily do things that they do not really want to do [12]. When people run endlessly in McDonaldization, shoddy and extremely similar money-circling products are rampant, and the sender guides the receivers to taste the demand to form a closed loop with the market supply, the society cannot tell whether this is the true intention of the receivers. According to this development, it is not a long-term plan. Chinese animation films need to reflect on the trend of McDonaldization, expand their boundaries, dig out the theme content that deeply cares for social reality, and rebuild the Chinese school in systematic planning. Otherwise, the establishment of the Chinese mythical universe and the revival of the Chinese school will become empty talk.

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