



**THE RHETORIC OF CHILDREN'S IMAGES IN CHINESE  
NEW-GENERATION ANIMATION FILMS**

**BY  
LINGXI ZHANG**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF COMMUNICATION ARTS  
IN FILM AND TELEVISION WRITING AND DIRECTING  
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION ARTS**

**GRADUATE SCHOOL, RANGSIT UNIVERSITY**

**ACADEMIC YEAR 2023**

Thesis entitled

**THE RHETORIC OF CHILDREN'S IMAGES IN CHINESE  
NEW-GENERATION ANIMATION FILMS**

by

LINGXI ZHANG

was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Communication Arts  
in Film and Television Writing and Directing

Rangsit University  
Academic Year 2023

---

Asst.Prof.Chalongrat Chermanchonlamark, Ph.D.  
Examination Committee Chairperson

Assoc.Prof.Paiboon Kachentaraphan  
Member

---

Asst.Prof.Sorapong Wongtheerathorn, Ph.D.  
Member and Advisor

Approved by Graduate School

(Asst.Prof.Plt.Off. Vanee Sooksatra, D.Eng.)

Dean of Graduate School

March 18, 2024

## Acknowledgements

Two years have flown by like a white horse, like the snap of a finger. I never imagined that graduate school would be so fulfilling, and I am grateful for every good experience at Rangsit University, but the end of my dissertation also represents the end of my education.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my thesis advisor, Assistant Professor Dr. Sorapong Wongtheerathorn, for the honor of being your student, which is the most fortunate thing in my postgraduate career, and your rigorous teaching attitude has left a deep impression on us. Thank you for your careful guidance of my thesis, but also for our thesis to pay a lot of time and effort, always in my confusion when I guide me out of the maze, so that I have a clearer direction.

Finally, I most gratefully acknowledge my parents and my friends for all their support throughout the period of this research

Lingxi Zhang

Researcher

6407032 : Lingxi Zhang  
 Thesis Title : The Rhetoric of Children's Images in Chinese New-generation Animation Films  
 Program : Master of Communication Arts in Film and Television Writing and Directing  
 Thesis Advisor : Asst.Prof.Sorapong Wongtheerathorn, Ph.D.

### Abstract

This study aims to 1) explore the portrayal of children in Chinese new-generation animation films and 2) analyze the rhetorical elements employed in these films. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research employs textual analysis to examine six Chinese animation films released between 2015 and 2023, each surpassing 500 million RMB in box office revenue. The selected films include 1) Monkey King Hero Back, 2) Big Fish and Begonia, 3) Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, 4) Legend of Deification, 5) New Gods: Yang Jian, and 6) Deep Sea.

Examining children's images in Chinese new-generation animation films reveals distinct characteristics. Firstly, the external image design prioritizes highlighting each character's personality. This is achieved through careful consideration of details such as clothing, hairstyle, and accessories. Secondly, the study observes the head-to-body ratio and the design of the five senses, creating a contrast that enhances the perception of the external image. Finally, the external image design places a significant focus on Chinese elements. By incorporating traditional aspects such as clothing, hairstyle, and accessories, children's images seamlessly integrate with and reflect the rich tapestry of Chinese culture.

Examining the internal portrayal of children in new-generation Chinese animation films reveals some distinct aspects. Firstly, there is a deliberate emphasis on character defects in the internal image setting of the children. Secondly, the internal image depicts children in conflict with adults. Thirdly, the internal image captures the transformative journey of children in their growth.

In terms of the rhetoric elements employed in the films, the study shows that 1) The film language effectively portrays children in the new generation of Chinese animation films through the strategic utilization of image language, sound language, and editing language. 2) The film narrative structures employed for depicting children in new-generation Chinese animation films showcase a sophisticated use of various editing techniques and rhythms. These films adeptly incorporate both traditional linear structures and intricate three-act structures, enhancing the depth and complexity of the portrayal of children's stories.

(Total 106 pages)

Keywords: Chinese Animation Films, Children's Images, Rhetoric Elements

Student's Signature.....Thesis Advisor's Signature.....

## Table of Contents

|                          |                                      | <b>Page</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>  |                                      | <b>i</b>    |
| <b>Abstracts</b>         |                                      | <b>ii</b>   |
| <b>Table of Contents</b> |                                      | <b>iii</b>  |
| <b>List of Tables</b>    |                                      | <b>v</b>    |
| <b>List of Figures</b>   |                                      | <b>vi</b>   |
| <br>                     |                                      |             |
| <b>Chapter 1</b>         | <b>Introduction</b>                  | <b>1</b>    |
|                          | 1.1 Background of The Study          | 1           |
|                          | 1.2 Research Questions               | 3           |
|                          | 1.3 Research Objectives              | 3           |
|                          | 1.4 Scope of The Research            | 4           |
|                          | 1.5 Definition of Terms              | 5           |
| <br>                     |                                      |             |
| <b>Chapter 2</b>         | <b>Literature Review</b>             | <b>7</b>    |
|                          | 2.1 The Concept of Children's Images | 7           |
|                          | 2.2 The Rhetoric of Film             | 12          |
|                          | 2.3 The Concept of Animation Film    | 20          |
|                          | 2.4 Related Research Literature      | 22          |
| <br>                     |                                      |             |
| <b>Chapter 3</b>         | <b>Research Methodology</b>          | <b>28</b>   |
|                          | 3.1 Population and Samples           | 28          |
|                          | 3.2 Research Instruments             | 29          |
|                          | 3.3 Data Collection                  | 29          |
|                          | 3.4 Data Analysis                    | 30          |

## Table of Contents (continued)

|                   |  | <b>Page</b> |
|-------------------|--|-------------|
| <b>Chapter 4</b>  | <b>Children's Images In Chinese New Generation</b>                                     | <b>31</b>   |
|                   | <b>Animation Films</b>   |             |
|                   | 4.1 The external image of children in the new generation<br>of Chinese animation films | 31          |
|                   | 4.2 The internal image of children in the new generation<br>of Chinese animation films | 43          |
|                   | 4.3 Summary of the chapter   | 56          |
| <b>Chapter 5</b>  | <b>Analysis of the Rhetoric of Chinese New Generation</b>                              | <b>59</b>   |
|                   | <b>Animation Films</b>   |             |
|                   | 5.1 Film language of portraying children in Chinese new<br>generation animation films  | 59          |
|                   | 5.2 Film narrative   | 77          |
|                   | 5.3 Summary of the chapter   | 92          |
| <b>Chapter 6</b>  | <b>Conclusion And Recommendations</b>  | <b>94</b>   |
|                   | 6.1 Conclusion   | 94          |
|                   | 6.2 Discussion   | 97          |
|                   | 6.3 Recommendations  | 99          |
|                   | 6.4 Recommendations for Future Research  | 99          |
| <b>References</b> |  | <b>100</b>  |
| <b>Biography</b>  |  | <b>106</b>  |

## List of Tables

| <b>Tables</b> |  | <b>Page</b> |
|---------------|--|-------------|
| 1.1           | Chinese animation films                                    | 4           |
| 3.1           | The Chinese animation films between the period 2015 -2023  | 28          |
| 4.1           | Elements of Chinese Style in the Image of Children in film | 43          |
| 5.1           | Classical Chinese Musical Instruments in Sound Language    | 66          |



## List of Figures

|   | <b>Page</b> |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Figures</b>  |             |
| 1.1 Development history of Chinese animation film industry  | 6           |
| 4.1 Nezha's red hair styling as a baby  | 32          |
| 4.2 Nezha's hair design in Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child (left) and<br>Nezha's hair in the 90's animation film The Legend of Nezha<br>(right)                     | 32          |
| 4.3 The female protagonist Tsubaki's hair   | 33          |
| 4.4 Jiangliu Er's hair in Monkey king hero back   | 33          |
| 4.5 "Legend of Deification" the first appearance of small nine image<br>(left) and small nine hair (right)  | 34          |
| 4.6 Senjou's hair style changes   | 35          |
| 4.7 Schematic diagram of the head-to-body ratio of anime character<br>design  | 36          |
| 4.8 "Monkey king hero back" Jiangliu child's head-to-body ratio and<br>five senses design: infancy (left) childhood (right)   | 36          |
| 4.9 "Big Fish and Begonia" Tsubaki's eyebrow design (left) "Legend<br>of Deification" Xiaojiu's eyebrow design (right)  | 37          |
| 4.10 "Detective Conan" suspect little black man's four white eyes (left)<br>"Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" Nezha's four white eyes,<br>teeth, black eyes (right) | 38          |
| 4.11 Nezha's body movement  | 38          |
| 4.12 Characterization of Shen Xiang   | 39          |
| 4.13 Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child in Nezha's early childhood (left)<br>Nezha's teenage years (right)   | 40          |



## List of Figures (continued)

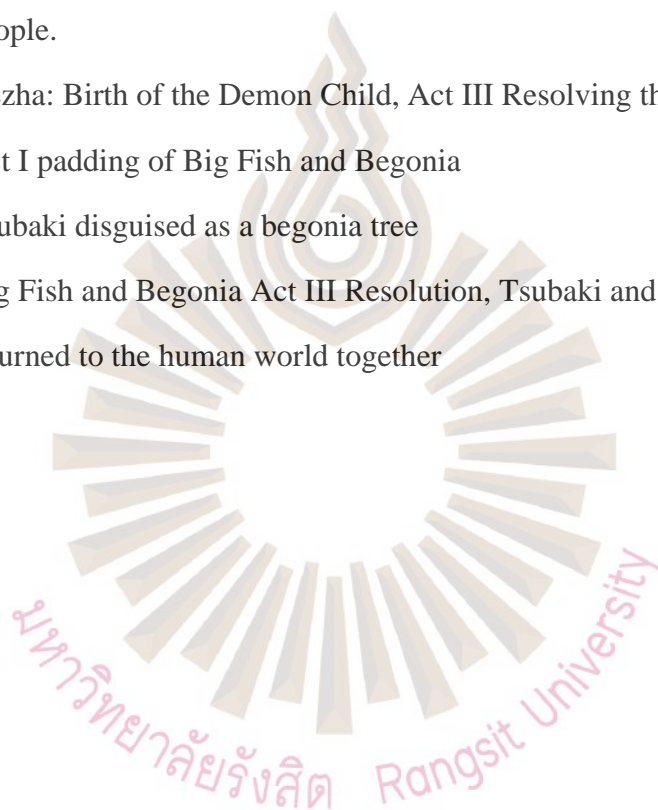
| <b>Figures</b>  | <b>Page</b> |
|---|-------------|
| 4.14 "Big Fish and Begonia" in Tsubaki's Clothing                             | 40          |
| 4.15 The appearance of the image of Shen Xiang                                | 41          |
| 4.16 Jiangliu Er's mischievousness and cowardice                              | 44          |
| 4.17 Nezha was resented by the villagers                                      | 45          |
| 4.18 Tsubaki's conflict before making a decision                              | 46          |
| 4.19 Xiao Jiu by the famine of human suppression                              | 47          |
| 4.20 Jiang Liuer confronts his master   | 48          |
| 4.21 Nezha's forlorn look as his mother goes forth to remove the demon        | 49          |
| 4.22 Chenxiang's holding her wrist with a red string representing her family. | 50          |
| 4.23 "Big Fish and Begonia" in which Tsubaki returns to earth                 | 51          |
| 4.24 Xiao Jiu walks into the Returning Ruins                                  | 52          |
| 4.25 The image of Shen Xiang's Yuan Shen changes                              | 53          |
| 4.26 "Deep Sea" Shensu rediscovered the smile                                 | 54          |
| 5.1 The central composition of the tulou in "Big Fish and Begonia             | 60          |
| 5.2 Red symbol in "Big Fish and Begonia                                       | 61          |
| 5.3 View of the mountains and rivers in "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child      | 62          |
| 5.4 Nezha (red) and Ao Beng (blue) in Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child         | 62          |

## List of Figures (continued)

| <b>Figures</b>   | <b>Page</b> |
|--|-------------|
| 5.5 " Top to bottom, left to right in order: diagonal composition S-curved composition Symmetrical composition, composition of the center of the subject | 63          |
| 5.6 Legend of Deification of Xiaojiu (left) and the nine-tailed demon fox (right)  | 64          |
| 5.7 Images of Jiang Liu'er (left) and the Monkey King (right)  | 65          |
| 5.8 The transport mirror of Nezha and Ao Bing playing shuttlecock  | 72          |
| 5.9 Shot of Chenxiang and battling with the Growing Heavenly King Mo Liqing  | 73          |
| 5.10 Two parallel montage spinoffs of Jiang Liu'er and the Monkey King   | 74          |
| 5.11 Beginning, Development, Climax and End of monkey king hero back   | 79          |
| 5.12 Beginning, Development, Climax and Ending of Legend of Deification  | 80          |
| 5.13 About the Chenxiang Branch in New Gods: Yang Jian   | 81          |
| 5.14 " The Beginning, Development, Climax and End of New Gods: Yang Jian   | 82          |
| 5.15 Plotline in "Deep Sea"  | 83          |
| 5.16 Beginning, Development, Climax, and End of Deep Sea   | 84          |
| 5.17 " Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, Act I Padding. The "dichotomy" setup of the blue "Spirit Pearl" Ao Beng and the red "Magic Pill" Nezha           | 86          |

## List of Figures (continued)

|  | <b>Page</b> |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Figures</b>   |             |
| 5.18 Conflict in Act II of Ne Zha's Descent of the Demon Child. Nezha comes to his senses and returns to Chentang Pass to save the people. | 87          |
| 5.19 Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, Act III Resolving the Conflict   | 88          |
| 5.20 Act I padding of Big Fish and Begonia   | 89          |
| 5.21 Tsubaki disguised as a begonia tree   | 90          |
| 5.22 Big Fish and Begonia Act III Resolution, Tsubaki and Kun returned to the human world together   | 91          |



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background of The Study

With the continuous development of media technology, the ways and content of human communication, as well as the entire media ecology, are undergoing earth-shaking changes. As a form of film and television art expression, animation films integrate various art categories such as painting, photography, music, and digital media, providing people with visual feasts and enriching their lives. Nowadays, the animation industry has increasingly received high attention from governments of various countries, becoming an important part of enhancing comprehensive national strength and an important means of exporting excellent national culture.

Although Chinese animation films started late, they have developed at an eye-catching speed in recent years. Particularly since 2015, with the box office exceeding 900 million RMB for "Monkey King: Hero is Back," in Chinese new-generation animation films have entered a new era, producing a series of excellent animation films with Chinese cultural characteristics. By 2019, the animation film "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" even created a box office record of over 5 billion RMB. The fact that Chinese animation films started late but developed rapidly in recent years has attracted widespread attention from the global film industry and academia. (Tang, 2022)

On the other hand, with the continuous development of internet technology, the popularity of TikTok and other audiovisual media worldwide has truly ushered in a new

"imageera." Rhetoric, as a theory and method for analyzing image-based communication content, has a long history, and its related research has been continuously enriched from language and images to dynamic image art. In particular, it can address the intuitiveness, vividness, and the polysemy and complexity of cross-cultural expressions in image works, becoming a unique way to analyze the elements and characteristics of film communication. As an artistic expression, animation has experienced the process from being aimed mainly at children to encompassing all ages. Compared with other film types, children's images in animation films have always been one of the most important components. The rhetorical strategies of children's images in animation films are even more crucial for artistic expression.

At the same time, although there is a rich body of research on Chinese new-generation animation films in academia, there are still significant differences in the positioning of animation films in different countries, especially in the design of children's images in the works. Many existing works advocate a "child-centered" approach, placing children at the center of the film's presentation, and measuring all aspects of the film's content, such as theme selection, story themes, plot settings, and character portrayals, based on the acceptance level of child audiences. This emphasizes the educational and edifying functions of film and television works for children's aesthetic and creative beauty, such as the "little hero" and "good child" images that appeared in early Chinese children's animation films. However, this has also led to a "simplification" and "infantilization" of children's images in animation films, which limits the audience and dissemination effects of these films. This thesis also hopes to provide a more comprehensive and reasonable analysis perspective for the design of children's images in films through the analysis of rhetoric characteristics and strategies in the new generation of Chinese animation films.

Secondly, since 2015, with the release of "Monkey King: Hero is Back" as the starting point, the number of outstanding Chinese animation films has increased year by year, with a significant increase in box office revenue, rapid development of animation production and editing technology, and impressive animation character images with Chinese cultural characteristics and aesthetic styles. The research on children's images in these animation films is of great significance for developing countries, especially those in Asia, to break the monopoly of animation film industries in the United States, Japan, and South Korea, and develop their own characteristic animation films. (Tang, 2022)

In summary, this paper will take the children's images in the new generation of Chinese animation films since 2015 as the case study object, and analyze the rhetoric of animation films, including the features of rhetoric themes, elements, composition, configuration, narrative elements, and cultural contexts, as well as the relationships between them, to further of the analysis that refers to the children's images in Chinese new generation animation films and the rhetoric of Chinese new generation animation films. The study will offer ways for applying rhetoric in animation films and enhance their communication effects.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

1.2.1 What is the children's images in Chinese new generation animation films?

1.2.2 What is the rhetoric of Chinese new generation animation films?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

1.3.1 To study the children's images in Chinese new-generation animation films.

1.3.2 To study the rhetoric of Chinese new generation animation films.

## 1.4 Scope of The Research

This thesis studies the child images and the rhetoric of Chinese new generation animation films. As discussed above, this refers to the feature-length animation films that have been officially released in Chinese cinemas since 2015, which are "film-oriented" and aimed at all-age audiences, thus excluding films targeting only children. Meanwhile, considering factors such as the dissemination effect and influence of the films, box office revenue is used as one of the criteria for selecting research objects. six animation films that meet the research conditions are selected, with the shortest film running for 89 minutes and the longest for 127 minutes. The child figures available for analysis are chosen based on their importance to the film, such as non-lead characters, and the most influential or popular child supporting characters are selected. The Chinese animation films are summarized in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Chinese animation films

| Movie Title                      | Box Office<br>(Unit: billion yuan) | Year of release |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Monkey king hero back            | 9.54                               | 2015            |
| Big Fish and Begonia             | 5.73                               | 2016            |
| Ne zha: Birth of the Demon Child | 50.35                              | 2019            |
| Legend of Deification            | 16.02                              | 2020            |
| New Gods: Yang Jian              | 5.55                               | 2022            |
| Deep Sea                         | 9.19                               | 2023            |

Source: According to Maoyan real-time box office data collated,2023

## 1.5 Definition of Terms

**Children's Images:** The characters of children under the age of 18 years old into are represented on Chinese animation films. The image of children refers to the unique image in terms of personality, behaviors and psychological. It divides into 2 parts that are 1) The external image. 2) The internal image.

**The Rhetoric:** Rhetoric is an academic discipline that studies the effectiveness of expression and communication, originating in ancient Greece. It focuses on how to use symbolic expressions to influence the audience's cognition, emotion and behavior in order to achieve the purpose of communication. Visual rhetoric, as a research method applied to the study of movie symbols, contains two aspects: visual rhetorical elements and visual rhetorical strategies. Among them, rhetorical elements refer to visual elements, editing elements, etc., while rhetorical strategies refer to specific visual expression techniques, such as symbols, metaphors and similes. The two most important ways in film rhetoric are through film language and film narrative.

**Chinese New Generation:** Based on previous research by Chinese scholars, the development history of Chinese animation film industry can be divided into four stages. The first stage (before 1995) was the embryonic period of Chinese animation film industry; the second stage (1995-2008) was the climax of imported animation films, and a low period for Chinese animation film industry; the third stage (2009-2014) was a stage focused on animation films for young children, achieving certain victories; the fourth stage (2015-present) is the era of Chinese new generation of animation films, which is the focus of this paper, as shown in Figure 1.2.



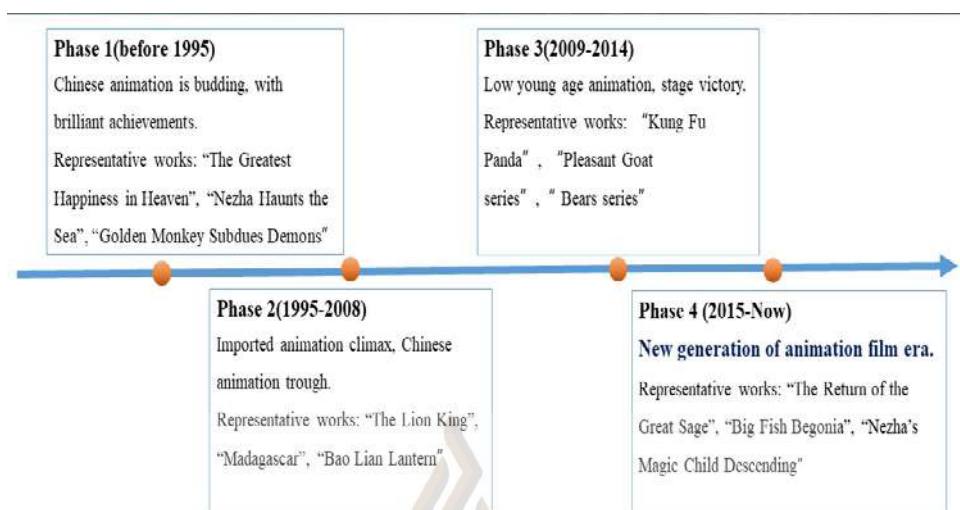


Figure 1.1 Development history of Chinese animation film industry  
Source: According to the previous research content of Chinese scholars,2023

**Animation Films:** Animation films studied in this paper belong to a branch of films or a type of film. Different from other live-action films, the background characters are all made by computer or hand-drawing techniques, which is a highly hypothetical film art. Animation films, as a type of film, can express the intentions of filmmaker with an unparalleled degree of precision that other types of films cannot surpass, as described by scholar Greenberg. This is also an important reason for choosing animation films as the research object in this paper.

## 1.6 Expected Benefit from The Research

Therefore, this paper takes Chinese new-generation animation films since 2015 as an example to analyze the application characteristics of children's images in rhetoric in Chinese animation films. It aims to discover the rhetorical strategies underlying the surface presentations and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the rhetoric of children's images in Chinese animation films. This study intends to provide valuable suggestions for the development and communication of animation films in Thailand and the Asian cultural circle.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The research is "The children's images in the New Generation of Chinese animation films" that aim to 1 to study the narrative film of studying the children's images in the new generation of Chinese animation films and the rhetoric in the new generation of Chinese animation films. The researcher uses the concept, theories, and research literature, They are follows:

#### 2.1 The concept of children's images

##### 2.1.1 The external image of the children

##### 2.2.1 The internal image of the children

#### 2.2 The rhetoric of film

##### 2.2.1 Film language

##### 2.2.2 Narrative of Film

#### 2.3 The concept of Animation film

#### 2.4 Related research literature

### 2.1 The Concept of Children's Images

Child study involves a variety of disciplinary fields such as biology, psychology, and sociology, and aims to explore the patterns and influences on children's development in terms of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social skills (Shaffer & Kipp, 2013). In general, children are human individuals who are immature in terms of physical, psychological, cognitive and social development. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), a child is defined as a group of

people under the age of 18 (United Nations, 1989). Therefore, this paper mainly focuses on characters under the age of 18 who appear as minors within the new generation of Chinese animation films; however, since the images in animation films are not restricted by the species of the performers, it is considered that all characters including the protagonists and supporting characters, regardless of gender and species, who are younger than 18 years old are considered to be children in this study.

Children's image refers to the unique image of children in terms of their appearance, behavior, personality and psychological characteristics. The study of children's image can be divided into two aspects in film studies: external image study and internal image study.

### **2.1.1 The external image of the children**

In film studies, the external image of a movie image usually refers to the visual expression elements that are directly presented in the movie such as character appearance design and action design. These external images are presented to convey the character's characteristics, emotions, and the context of the story through cinematography, costumes, make-up, props, and action design, etc. external image plays an important role in the movie, which helps the audience to better understand the characters and the story, and at the same time provides a means for the director to express his intentions and create specific visual effects (Bartsch & Schneider, 2018).

Costumes and make-up of movie characters are an important part of children's outward appearance that can reflect their identity, social status and personality traits. Through the design of costumes and make-up, the audience can visualize the background and personality of the characters more (Krcmar & Kean, 2019). In the

established research on the external image of children's images in films, it was found that the external image of children usually shows the characteristics of youth, tenderness and cuteness. These features are closely related to the stages of children's growth and development, such as rounded cheeks in infancy, tender expressions in early childhood, and lively cuteness in preschool (Lorenz, 1943). These appearance characteristics may trigger protective and caring tendencies in adults (Brosch, Sander, & Scherer, 2007).

Children's images in films may also be enhanced by elements such as costumes, hairstyles and props to reinforce their age and gender characteristics, as well as the characteristics of the time period and cultural background in which they live (Bazalgette & Staples, 1995). For example, children's images in classical Chinese themes are usually set in traditional children's hairstyles and costumes to show age characteristics (Li, 2021), and children's facial freckles and dress in western films with backpacks have become the design of typical children's outward appearance (Piotrowska, 2018).

The design of children's outer movements in films is usually characterized by curiosity, activity, exploratory spirit and good imitation. These behavioral characteristics help to create vivid and interesting children's characters, and at the same time, they may also become an important carrier for the development of the movie's plot and the expression of its theme. For example, child characters such as Harry, Ron and Hermione in the movie series Harry Potter demonstrate the challenges and achievements of growing up through acts of bravery, ingenuity and solidarity (Rowling, 2001).

The design of children's external image in films has an obvious role in children's image and can directly influence the communication effect of children's image, but at the same time, some studies have pointed out that the stereotypes of children's external

image set in films may affect the understanding of children's characters (Tamborini & Bowman, 2018).

### **2.1.2 The internal image of the children**

The internal image of movie image refers to the internal world, emotional state and personality traits of the character shown in the movie. It is expressed through various aspects of the character's personality traits, interaction with others, and character destiny. internal image can help the audience better understand the motivation, emotion, and development of the character, which makes the character more three-dimensional and have depth (Krcmar & Kean, 2019).

The internal image of children in films is usually expressed as children's character traits. In established studies and works, on the one hand, the internal image of children in films may present typical children's traits such as innocence, enthusiasm, kindness, sensitivity, and mischievousness; on the other hand, the internal image of children's roles in films may also show beyond-age qualities such as maturity, independence, resilience, and wisdom, in order to emphasize their specific situational growth and change (Buckingham, 1996). This internal image connects the story destiny of the child characters and usually reflects the director and screenwriter's deep thinking about social reality, cultural background and human concern.

The interaction of children's characters with other characters in the movie is also an important part of shaping children's internal image, which is usually characterized by curiosity and imitation of other characters, characteristics that are consistent with the needs of children's cognitive development and that help children to gradually refine their cognitive, emotional, and social skills in a process of continuous experimentation and

learning (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). At the same time, the characteristics of children's roles when interacting with others may also be influenced by the context of the chemicalization, showing some difference and diversity (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995).

These internal images of children can be presented through the character's psychological depiction, internal monologue, and emotional expression. It can include the character's thoughts, feelings, values, goals, fears, desires, and other aspects (Tamborini & Bowman, 2018). By showing the internal image of the character, the movie allows the audience to understand the character more deeply, empathize with him or her, and become better invested in the storyline. The filmmaking team creates an internal image of the character through the script, the director's direction, and the actor's performance. They consider factors such as the character's backstory, emotional transformation, and psychological conflict in order to make the character more realistic and fleshed out, creating a richer movie experience (Li, 2021).

Film as an important form of art and cultural communication, children's image is a multi-dimensional and diversified concept, covering children's unique performance in appearance, behavior, personality and psychological characteristics, etc. The study of children's image in film mainly focuses on children's external image, internal image shaping, and children's image characteristics can reflect the film directors and screenwriters on the development of society, history, culture and family relations, and so on. The characteristics of children's image can reflect the movie director and screenwriter's presentation of social development, history and culture, family relationship, etc. The presentation of children's image is often specific to the social and historical context, and also reflects the overall thinking of the director and screenwriter (Vander, 2000).

## **2.2 The Rhetoric of Film**

The rhetoric in film refers to the artistic techniques used by film directors and screenwriters to achieve specific goals and effects in the process of film creation and expression, through the conscious organization and processing of various audio-visual languages and skills. Film rhetoric enhances the expressive, persuasive, and infectious power of film works by consciously organizing and processing elements such as images, sounds, editing, and performance, providing audiences with rich aesthetic and cognitive experiences (Bordwell & Thompson, 2017). The two most important ways in film rhetoric are through film language and film narrative.

### **2.2.1 Film Language**

Film language refers to the series of audio-visual symbols and techniques used by film directors and screenwriters in the process of film creation and expression, in order to achieve artistic means of film narrative, emotional expression, and theme expression. Film language, through the conscious organization and processing of elements such as images, sounds, editing, and performance, constitutes the basic structure and characteristics of film works (Bordwell & Thompson, 2017). Based on previous literature research and compilation, this study categorizes film language into the following types.

#### **2.2.1.1 Image language**

Image language refers to communicating the director's creativity and storyline to the audience through visual elements and techniques. The image language of a film covers many aspects, including photography, color, set, light, angle and so on

(Wang, 2019). Together, these elements constitute the visual style of a movie, which makes each movie have unique artistic characteristics and expressive power.

The image language of film originated at the beginning of the birth of film, and with the continuous development of film technology, the expressive power of the image language has become increasingly rich. In the early era of silent films, the image language of films mainly relied on black and white images and expressive movements, as well as the composition and lighting effects of the images (Zhang, 2015). With the emergence of sound films, the image language of films began to incorporate sound, music and other elements, making the expressive power of films greatly expanded (Liu, 2017).

In the image language of the movie, photography skills are one of the most crucial elements. By using different lenses, angles, depth of field and other techniques, the cinematographer shapes a unique visual effect, thus strengthening the emotional expression and thematic ideas of the movie (Chen, 2018). In addition, editing is also an important part of the image language, which enhances the narrative of the movie and the audience's viewing experience by adjusting the rhythm and sequence of the images (Li, 2016). Color also has a pivotal position in the image language of film. Color can not only affect the audience's emotional response, but also strengthen the visual style and atmosphere of the film (Zhao, 2017). In addition, set and light are also elements in the image language that cannot be ignored, and they further enrich the expressive power of the movie by creating a specific scene and atmosphere (Sun, 2018). For example, a director can use different shooting techniques such as long shots, close-ups, high angles, low angles, etc., to express the characters' emotions, relationships and motivations; meanwhile, he or she can create a specific atmosphere and style by designing and adjusting the light, color and set (Misek, 2010).



### 2.2.1.2 Sound language

The sound language of a movie refers to the way in which storyline, emotion and meaning are conveyed through sound elements. It includes the use of sound effects, music and other elements, and in animation films, the voice performances of voice actors are also one of the important sound languages (Chion, 2018). Sound language in films is an important form of artistic expression, and it plays a vital role in filmmaking.

Sound effects in the language of sound can convey emotions and can enhance the emotional experience of the audience, creating scenes and atmospheres. For example, explosions and screams are used to create a tense and scary atmosphere. The use of sound effects is more prominent in animation films, and many animation films use typical sound effects to show the humorous or cute features of characters, and even add sound effects to the characters' movements to show the cute footsteps and clumsy movements (Ribeiro & Cardoso, 2019). Sound effects are also set to direct the audience's attention and help them better understand the plot and details of the movie, making them more focused on the key scenes and actions in the movie.

The music in the language of sound is an important means to show the plot changes and character in the work, and the music can express the theme and emotion of the movie through the melody, rhythm and timbre and other elements, so that the audience can feel the emotional changes in the movie more deeply. The composition of musical instruments in the expression of musical language is also an important language to show the elements of the movie, and musical instruments can reflect a strong cultural background, which plays an important role in enhancing the expression of the movie and the characters, and can make the audience better integrate into the world of the

movie and enhance the immersion of the audience (Sito, 2018), for example, in the Japanese animation movie "The Thousand and One", a large number of symphonies are used to show the Honda scenes, and instruments rich in Japanese characteristics were used to show part of the situational environment (Chion, 2018).

### 2.2.1.3 Editing language

Editing language refers to the creative splicing and adjustment of visual and audio materials to achieve specific narrative structures, a sense of rhythm, and audiovisual effects (Bordwell & Thompson, 2017). Editing language not only concerns the narrative logic and rhythm of a film but also influences the emotional response and viewing experience of the audience. During the film editing process, editors employ various editing techniques and methods based on the director's intentions and the film's requirements. For instance, fast-paced editing can enhance tension and dynamism through rapid shot changes and rhythm, as seen in action scenes in the "Mission: Impossible" series (Rascaroli, 2009). On the other hand, slow-paced editing can create suspense and emotional atmosphere through slow shot changes and rhythm, as exemplified in the psychological drama scenes in "A Beautiful Mind".

In addition, editing language encompasses various techniques such as continuity editing, jump cuts, fade transitions, and reverse editing (Dmytryk, 2016). Among these techniques, continuity editing is a filmmaking technique that seamlessly connects different shots and scenes to create a coherent and smooth narrative. It is achieved by editing different shots together, ensuring a seamless transition from one shot to the next, thus maintaining the continuity of time and space for the audience. The purpose of continuity editing is to enhance the narrative power of the film and engage the audience, immersing them in the story. By skillfully employing continuity editing

techniques, directors can guide the audience's emotions and attention, creating tension, suspense, or other specific emotional effects. Continuity editing plays a crucial role in filmmaking and is an integral component of film language (Nolan, 2010).

Montage editing is a film editing technique that combines multiple different shots or scenes to create new meanings and emotional effects (Sito, 2018). It is a non-linear editing approach that reorganizes time, space, and meaning to provide the audience with different visual and emotional experiences. For example, in the famous horror film "The Shining," the use of intercutting different scenes and images showcases the gradual descent into madness of the protagonist within the hotel. This editing technique allows the audience to feel the fear and chaos within the protagonist's mind (Nelson, 2011).

In conclusion, the language of film is a multidimensional and diverse concept that encompasses various aspects such as visuals, sound, editing, and performance. Paying attention to and studying the language of film helps us better understand the creative intentions, artistic techniques, and aesthetic values of film works, providing strong theoretical support for film appreciation and evaluation.

### **2.2.2 Narrative of Film**

Film narration refers to the process of presenting the plot and character relationships in a story through visual and auditory means in a film (Bordwell, 2006). The study of film narration involves multiple fields, including film theory, psychology, cognitive science, and linguistics, aiming to explore how films tell stories and how audiences understand and interpret these stories (Currie, 1995).

The study of film narrative employs various research methods, including structuralism, psychology, and cognitive science. Structuralist approaches focus on the structure and patterns of film narrative, such as the temporal and spatial relationships of the story, the perspective of the narrator, and audience expectations (Chatman, 1978). Psychological approaches, on the other hand, examine how audiences understand and interpret film narratives, including aspects such as attention, memory, and emotions (Zacks, 2015). Cognitive science approaches treat film narrative as a cognitive activity and explore how audiences decode film narratives through mental models and knowledge structures (Branigan, 1992).

Indeed, the narrative structure of a film refers to the organization and presentation of the story plot. It involves the development and unfolding of the story, including its beginning, middle, and end, as well as the relationships and conflicts between characters. The narrative structure of a film can be demonstrated through the timeline, plot clues, character development, and more (Field, 2005). These studies provide theoretical guidance and practical references for film production, helping to enhance the narrative quality and audience experience. Narrative research in this article primarily focuses on analyzing the linear narrative structure and the three-act narrative structure commonly employed in films.

#### 2.2.2.1 Linear Narrative Structures

Linear structure refers to a narrative structure that presents the story events in chronological order. The story unfolds from the beginning to the end, allowing the audience to clearly perceive the development of the story and the progression of the plot (Bernstein, 2002). Most films employ a linear structure as it better satisfies the audience's need for coherence and logical progression in the narrative. This article

provides a comprehensive review of the research and theories on linear narrative structure, as well as its application in the field of film and visual arts.

Research and theories on linear narrative structure can be traced back to ancient Greece. Aristotle, in his work "Poetics," proposed theories about drama, including the concept of linear narrative structure. He believed that a complete drama should have a clear beginning, middle, and end, presenting the story events in chronological order.

Over time, there has been increased attention and exploration of the research on linear narrative structure. For instance, Bremond (1964) introduced the concept of a "plot model" that describes the different plot elements in linear narrative structure and their relationships. He argued that the development of the plot should be coherent and logical to maintain the audience's interest and engagement.

Propp (Propp, 1928) studied the structure and elements of the folktale in his book Folk Tales. Although his research focused primarily on folktales, his theories remain important for understanding the fundamentals and components of linear narrative structure.

In addition to theoretical research, numerous empirical studies have explored the application of linear narrative structure in films and literary works. For instance, Baxter (2008) conducted an analysis of a large number of film scripts and found that linear narrative structure is widely employed in various types of films. He argued that this structure helps screenwriters and directors better organize the story events, making it easier for the audience to comprehend and follow along.

### 2.2.2.2 Three-act narrative structure

In addition to linear and non-linear structures, the narrative structure of a film can also be classified based on the development of the story and the organization of the plot. One commonly used method in film analysis is the Three-Act Structure, which divides the narrative structure of a film into three main parts: exposition, conflict, and resolution. This analytical approach examines the narrative structure of a film to reveal the progression of the plot and the evolution of storylines (Sternberg, 1992).

Propp (1928) proposed a narrative model based on Russian folktales, which includes three stages: build-up, conflict and resolution. He believed that this structure could help the audience to better understand and experience the story. Campbell (1949), in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, introduced the concept of the "hero's journey", which is also based on a three-act narrative structure. According to him, the hero's journey can be divided into three stages: leaving home, facing challenges and returning home, a structure that is reflected in many ancient myths and legends.

In addition to these classic studies, numerous scholars have conducted empirical research on the Three-Act Structure. For instance, Smith (2008) conducted an analysis of a large number of film scripts and found that the Three-Act Structure is widely applied in different types of films. He argued that this structure can assist screenwriters and directors in effectively organizing the plot and enhancing emotional resonance with the audience.

### 2.3 The Concept of Animation Film

With the innovation of technology and the development of the times, animation as an artistic expression has been widely used. However, in fact, there have been many discussions on the definition of animation and animation films since its inception. In 2023, the world-renowned director James Cameron's film "Avatar 2: The Way of Water" will be released globally, and the dazzling animation effects make the audience feel like they are in that magical planet. However, this film does not belong to the category of animation films discussed in this article.

The World Film Encyclopedia defines animated film as a comprehensive art that uses frame-by-frame filming to capture special paintings or three-dimensional shapes on film, which can be displayed on the screen as a continuous image of these "living" images (Park & Kim, 2019). The earliest animation film was created by the French artist Émile Cohl, who incorporated the principles of comic book production into film. The earliest animator, Émile Reynaud, also made progress in the development of animation films. Animation films and films share similar characteristics, as they are both made on film and shown in cinemas.

The definition of animation films must be distinguished from cartoons. In terms of creative mode, animation films generally appear independently in the form of a separate script, with relatively independent plots. Although they are only 1-2 hours long, they tell a complete story. From the perspective of the purpose expressed by the entire animation, cartoons are simple and childlike stories, while animation films use animation techniques to tell complete stories based on creative themes and goals, and combine corresponding artistic techniques to present artistic effects. The visual presentation is more exquisite, the content is deeper, and the audience is not only

targeted at children. At the same time, the pre-production and post-production processes of animation films are carried out in accordance with the mode of film production. In terms of length and playback medium, they are consistent with ordinary films, with a length generally around 80 to 120 minutes, and are screened in movie theaters. It must be clarified that films that use animation techniques in films are not within the scope of this article's research.

As described by scholar Greenberg (2011), animation films are a type of film that can express the intentions of filmmaker with almost "perfect" precision, surpassing other types of films. They have unparalleled effects. This is also an important reason why animation films are selected as the research object in this article.

In recent years, the animation film industry has been flourishing globally, with countries increasing their investment and support for the industry, gradually forming a pattern dominated by the United States, Japan, and South Korea. With its huge market size, Chinese animation film industry is also developing into the fourth pole of the world's animation film industry (Zhang, 2022).

In 2015, "Monkey King: Hero is Back" broke the long-standing silence of Chinese animation films, reigniting the passion of Chinese audiences for domestic animation films and opening up a new path for the resurgence of Chinese animation films. Since 2015, Chinese animation films have gained more recognition internationally, with "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" being nominated for Best Animation Feature at the 92nd Academy Awards, and "White Snake" winning Best Animation Feature at the 13th Asia Pacific Screen Awards. As Chinese animation films continue to garner more attention and recognition globally, they are increasingly seen as an important cultural export of China (Li & Wu, 2020).



In addition to the improvement in the quality and technical level of the films themselves, the Chinese animation film industry has also received strong support from the government. In 2016, the Chinese government issued the "Several Opinions on Accelerating the Innovative Development of the Cultural Industry," which clearly stated the need to strengthen support and guidance for the animation film industry. With the gradual implementation of policies, the overall strength of the Chinese animation film industry has also been significantly improved. Furthermore, the Chinese animation film industry has also benefited from the rapid development of internet and mobile internet technologies. With the rise of new media and online platforms, Chinese animation films have not only been able to spread and promote more widely, but also have more business opportunities (Chen, 2021).

Overall, since 2015, the Chinese animation film industry has entered a new era, with significant improvements in its development speed and strength. The strong support from the government, continuous technological advancements, and the development of new media and online platforms have all provided broader space and more opportunities for the future development of the Chinese animation film industry. This is also why this article chooses the Chinese animation films during this period as the research object.

## **2.4 Related Research Literature**

Jiang and Huang (2018) do the topic "Analysis and Insights into Children's Perspectives in Chinese Domestic Animation: A Case Study of the "Seventeen Years" animation Film" In the paper, it is pointed out that during the "seventeen years" period after the founding of the country, domestic animation films were mainly oriented towards children and teenagers, with "education and fun" as their creative orientation.

These works won many awards in the international arena and created the reputation of "Chinese animation school", which became a very important stage in the development history of domestic animation. However, although many scholars have studied the external aesthetic characteristics of national symbols and artistic forms of cartoons in this period, few have explored the "children's animation " embedded in them from the perspective of children. In the past century, although the academic circles have constantly criticized the cartoons of this period for "emphasizing education over music", they often only stay on the surface and do not put them in the special historical and cultural context of the "Seventeen Years" period, resulting in a one-sided interpretation of these cartoons. The interpretation of these cartoons is one-sided. This paper takes the domestic cartoons of the "seventeen years" period of the founding of the country as the research object, combines its special historical and cultural context, analyzes the problems of children's view contained in them, and combines them with the similar problems existing in the current domestic TV cartoons, examines them with a historical perspective, and tries to analyze and solve these problems with the contemporary advanced view of children. In order to provide reference and reference for the creation of children's television cartoons in the new era.

You (2021) do the topic” Evolution of the Visual Representation of "Wukong" in Chinese animation Films from the Perspective of Technological Aesthetics”. This paper analyzes the visual image of "Wukong" in the Chinese classic novel "Journey to the West", focusing on the transmutation of the visual image of "Wukong" in national animation films. The purpose of this study is to provide a theoretical reference for the innovative development of the technical aesthetics of domestic animation films. We analyze the course and tendency of the transmutation of the visual image of "Wukong" in Chinese animation films from the perspective of technical aesthetics, and explore the motives of the transmutation of the visual image of "Wukong" in Chinese animation

films by combining six works, namely, "Princess Iron Fan", "The Great Haunting of Heaven", "The Golden Monkey Subdues the Demon", "The Great Haunting of Heaven 3D", "The Return of the Great Sage" and "Nezha Reborn". The visual image of "Wukong" has undergone the process of concretization, nationalization, Stereoscopic and digitalization with the development of animation film production technology, from "aesthetic" to "rough". "rough", from "flat" to "three-dimensional", from "nationalized" to "global". From "nationalization" to "globalization".

Wang, Chen, and Li (2023) do the topic "Aesthetic characteristics for the female figure in Chinese animation films". The thesis points out that the development of Chinese animation industry has lasted for a century, and the attention to female image, subject matter and theme has never stopped. Chinese animation films present unique Chinese female image, female character traits, female styling design and special cultural value orientation and consciousness, revealing important aspects of female image shape and consciousness in Chinese animation. The design of female image in Chinese animation films is an important aspect of animation production that cannot be ignored. In recent years, Chinese animation film industry has shown a high and prosperous development momentum, but not many systematic studies have been conducted on the aesthetic characteristics of female image in Chinese animation, and it is crucial to reveal the aesthetic characteristics of female image in Chinese animation from the historical and cultural level, which can provide an important reference for the development and creation of Chinese animation films.

Wang (2019) do the topic "Children's images in Chinese animation films: A case study of Ne Zha" Taking the popular 2019 animation film Nezha the Magic Child Descends as an example, the characteristics of children's images in Chinese animation films are discussed. The article analyzes the innovation and breakthrough of Nezha's

image, as well as the excavation and use of traditional cultural symbols in the film. The author argues that through the reinvention of Nezha's image, the film demonstrates the brave spirit of children fighting against fate and pursuing their self-worth, injecting new vitality into the image of children in Chinese animation films.

Zhang (2020) do the topic” The portrayal of children in Chinese animation films: A case study of Ne Zha” Again using Nezha's Demon Child Descending as a case study, the author explores the methods and characteristics of children's portrayal in Chinese animation films. The author first points out that the film's image of Nezha is personalized, three-dimensional and realistic, which makes the children's image more relatable and infectious. The article goes on to analyze the film's innovative interpretation of traditional culture. The author argues that Nezha's adaptation of traditional mythology makes Nezha more relevant to the psychological characteristics and developmental needs of modern children. The film's Nezha bravely confronts fate, demonstrating children's courage and determination to pursue their self-worth. In addition, the article points out the film's mining and use of traditional cultural symbols. For example, the film's elements of Tai Chi and Bagua both reflect the heritage of traditional Chinese culture and add a unique charm to the portrayal of children. The author argues that Nezha's Demon Child Comes to Life successfully combines traditional culture with modern aesthetics, providing a useful reference for the portrayal of children in Chinese animation films. This kind of children's image shaping is of great significance for enhancing the international competitiveness of Chinese animation films.

Chen and Liu (2019) do the topic” Chinese Animation Films: A Case Study of Big Fish and Begonia.” The rhetorical characteristics of Chinese animation films are explored, taking the 2016 animation film Big Fish Begonia as an example. The authors first analyze the rhetorical techniques used in the film, such as symbolism, metaphor,

and counterpoint, and point out that these techniques play a positive role in shaping the characters, enriching the storyline, and conveying thematic ideas. The article goes on to discuss how to show the charm of traditional Chinese culture through rhetorical strategies. The author argues that "Big Fish Begonia" skillfully combines rhetoric and narrative to successfully demonstrate the heritage and flavor of traditional Chinese culture. For example, the begonia flower in the film symbolizes the continuity of life, while the big fish symbolizes the impermanence of fate, and these symbolic elements enrich the connotation of the story. The article also points out that the rhetorical techniques in Big Fish Begonia help highlight the film's artistic value and market competitiveness. Through its innovative interpretation of traditional culture, the film successfully captures the audience's attention and enhances the status of Chinese animation films in the international market. The authors argue that the success of Big Fish Begonia lies in its clever combination of rhetoric and narrative, which shows the unique flavor of Chinese animation films. Future Chinese animation film creations should continue to explore traditional cultural resources and use appropriate rhetorical strategies to enhance the artistic value and market competitiveness of their works.

Zhao (2020) do the topic "Rhetorical strategies in Chinese animation films and their impact: A case study of White Snake". Taking the 2019 animation film White Snake: The Origin as an example, the rhetorical strategies and their impact in Chinese animation films are explored. The article analyzes the rhetorical techniques used in the film, such as symbolism, metaphor, and personification, and points out that these techniques play a positive role in shaping the characters, enriching the storyline, and conveying the thematic ideas. The textual analysis method is adopted to explore the role of rhetorical techniques in the film and their influence on Chinese animation films through an in-depth analysis of the rhetorical techniques in White Snake: The Origin of the Snake. Through specific case studies, the article reveals the use of rhetorical

strategies in Chinese animation films and their impact on the artistic value and market competitiveness of the films, which helps to improve the creation of Chinese animation films.

Therefore, although scholars have paid attention to the children's images in Chinese animation films and the rhetoric of Chinese animation films, most of the articles have conducted in-depth analysis on specific cases, and the research scope is relatively limited, only analyzing one work, which may not fully reflect the rhetorical characteristics of Chinese animation films. In addition, there is still a lack of authors using rhetorical analysis to conduct in-depth research on the children's images in Chinese animation films.



## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology

The research aims to explore " 1) To study the children's images in Chinese new-generation animation films. 2) To study the rhetoric of Chinese new generation animation films.", This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing textual analysis to interpret the research objectives.

#### 3.1 Population and Samples

This research examines child images and rhetoric in Chinese new generation animation films. The purposive sampling method was utilized to select six Chinese animation films released between 2015 - 2023, with box office revenues exceeding 500 million RMB. The selected films are as follows:

Table 3.1 The Chinese animation films between the period 2015 -2023

| Movie Title                      | Box Office<br>(Unit: billion yuan) | Year of release |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Monkey king hero back            | 9.54                               | 2015            |
| Big Fish and Begonia             | 5.73                               | 2016            |
| Ne zha: Birth of the Demon Child | 50.35                              | 2019            |
| Legend of Deification            | 16.02                              | 2020            |

Table 3.1 The Chinese animation films between the period 2015 -2023 (Continued).

| Movie Title         | Box Office<br>(Unit: billion yuan) | Year of release |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| New Gods: Yang Jian | 5.55                               | 2022            |
| Deep Sea            | 9.19                               | 2023            |

Source: According to Maoyan real-time box office data collated,2023

### 3.2 Research Instruments

The research is divided into two parts of analysis:

Part One: children's images

This research employs the concept of children's images to investigate (Krcmar & Kean, 2019) and identify child images portrayed in Chinese new generation animation films.

Part Two: the rhetoric of Chinese new generation animation films

This research utilizes the concept of film language and film narrative (Bordwell & Thompson, 2017) to interpret the use of rhetoric in Chinese new generation animation films.

### 3.3 Data Collection

This research collected data on representative Chinese new generation animation films from the following website:

[https://www.iqiyi.com/?vfm=f\\_588\\_wrbandfv=ac30238882b84c8c](https://www.iqiyi.com/?vfm=f_588_wrbandfv=ac30238882b84c8c)



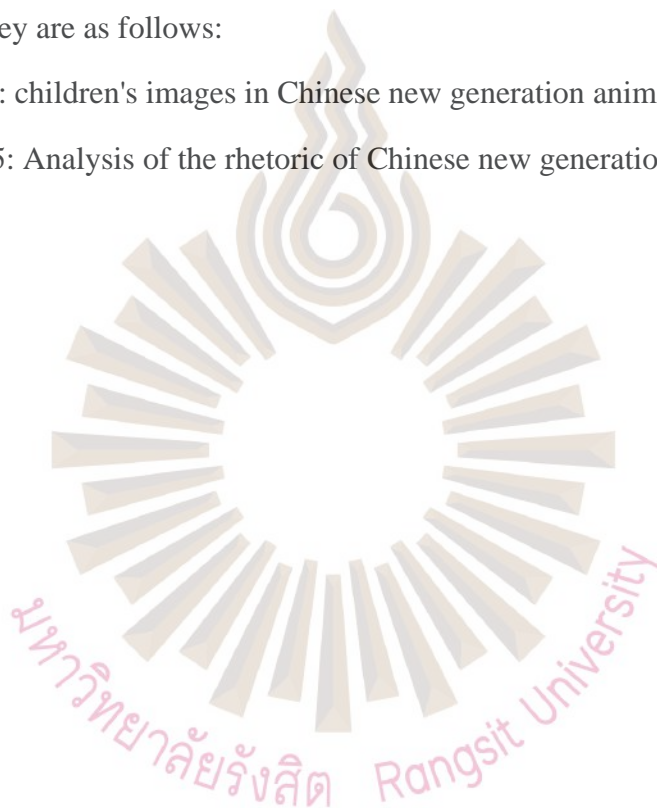
The website was used to select and download Chinese new generation animation films for analysis.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

This research describes the data analysis conducted in accordance with the research objectives. They are as follows:

Chapter4: children's images in Chinese new generation animation films.

Chapter 5: Analysis of the rhetoric of Chinese new generation animation films.



## Chapter 4

### Children's Images in Chinese New Generation Animation Films

This research aims to study the children image in Chinese new generation animation films. They are 2 type of the image that is:

4.1 The external image

4.2 The internal image

#### 4.1 The external image of children in the new generation of Chinese animation films

##### 4.1.1 External image design that highlights the character's personality

The new generation of Chinese cinema still features a large number of characters set in ancient China, but the design of the characters' outward appearance has weakened the attributes of their age and is mainly used to help reveal their personality traits. In Ne Zha's *Descent of the Demon Child*, for example, Ne Zha's birth form is a continuation of the mythological "meatball" form, but unlike traditional babies with bald heads, Ne Zha's baby hairstyle is an upright red hairstyle, which symbolizes his unruly character and his unruly nature. Ne Zha's hairstyle as a baby is red and upright, which is indicative of his unruly character (Figure 4.1). As the plot of the movie develops, Ne Zha removes the Qiankun ring to release the seal of the magic pill, and transforms it into a golden bracelet on his wrist to retain his sanity, and his body stretches out from a child to a teenager, still with a sky-high style that is out of the norms of ancient hairstyles, and with his hair flying in anger, like red fire, which is unruly, arrogant, and even more wantonly, a very stark contrast to the earlier animation in which Ne Zha's hair was styled

in a bun in accordance with the haircuts of ancient Chinese children (Figure 4-2.). It can be seen that in the design of children's external image in the new generation of Chinese animation films, the character styling mainly serves the character's personality.



Figure 4.1 Nezha's red hair styling as a baby

Source: Yang, 2019



Figure 4.2 Nezha's hair design in *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* (left) and Nezha's hair in the 90's animation films *The Legend of Nezha* (right)

Source: Yang, 2019

Similarly, in new-generation Chinese animation works set in modern or virtual time, hairstyles are detached from the everyday imagery of children. For example, in *Big Fish Begonia*, the female protagonist Tsubaki has a playful short black hair, as shown in Figure 4.3, with a hairstyle that is not indicative of any child or age.



Figure 4.3 The female protagonist Tsubaki's hair in Big Fish and Begonia

Source: Liang & Zhang, 2016

In *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, Jiang Liuel's hairstyle is close to bald to rounded (Figure 4.4), which mainly serves the character's identity as a "monk" and does not intentionally show his childish age. At the end of the film, in order to protect the immobile Great Sage, Jiang Liu'er steps forward to challenge the chaotic demon king who has transformed into a monster. At this moment, Jiang Liu'er's appearance outside the town has not changed significantly, but his hair has secretly grown longer through the adventures he has experienced with the Great Sage, indicating character growth.



Figure 4.4 Jiangliu Er's hair in Monkey king hero back

Source: Tian, 2015

Characters with heavy fantasy virtual colors are mainly focused on portraying the character's fantastical attributes and showcasing their mystical or non-human properties.

For example, in "Legend of Deification", Xiao Jiu first appeared in a tavern in the North Sea realm, with a red hood covering most of their face and holding a lightweight curved blade dagger, standing guard among the monsters. Their appearance was unclear, making it difficult to determine their gender. After traveling with Jiang Ziya, Xiao Jiu revealed their face, with bangs on their forehead, short brown hair, and two fox ears on top of their head(Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5 "Legend of Deification" the first appearance of small nine image (left) and small nine hair (right)

Source: Cheng & Li, 2020

In contrast, the child images in works with a more realistic color palette, such as "Deep Sea", focus primarily on realism, emphasizing the messy and flowing nature of the hair. This messy feeling is particularly prominent during the protagonist's childhood, showcasing the hardships she has faced in life. As the plot progresses, the protagonist grows into a teenage girl, and her hair becomes a longer ponytail, symbolizing her growth and the changes in her mindset and environment.



Figure 4.6 Senjou's hair style changes in Deep Sea

Source: Tian, 2023

#### 4.1.2 Head-to-body ratio and five senses design contrast sense of the external image

Head-to-body ratio refers to the proportion between the height of a character's head and their overall body height (Figure 4.7). The difference in head-to-body ratio is one of the most noticeable physical differences between adults and children, with children typically having a higher ratio due to their larger heads in proportion to their bodies. Therefore, many anime characters are depicted with large heads to showcase their cute and childlike appearance. In Chinese new generation animation films, child characters are almost always designed with this head-to-body ratio. The increase in head size also means an increase in facial features, with cute anime characters often having larger eyes and less prominent eyebrows, nose, and mouth. However, in the design of child characters in Chinese new generation of animation films, there is a contrast between the head-to-body ratio and the facial features, with the former being closer to that of a child and the latter emphasizing their personality traits.

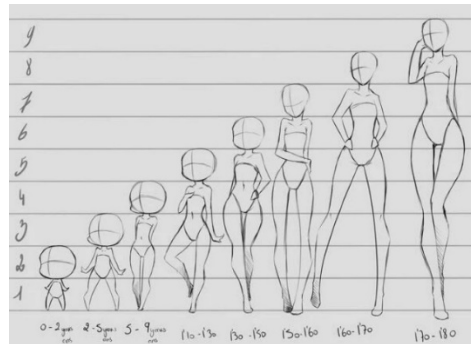


Figure 4.7 Schematic diagram of the head-to-body ratio of anime character design

Source: Baidu Photos,2023

When Jiang Liu'er first appeared in "Monkey king hero back", he was a two-headed baby with black and white eyes that showed innocence and naivety (Figure 4.8). It can be seen that if not for the attack of the mountain demon, Jiang Liu'er would have grown up happily in the love of his parents. After being adopted by the monk master, Jiang Liu'er reappeared as a six or seven-year-old child with a three-head height. He had a round head and bright, clear eyes, giving the impression of being "intelligent and kind-hearted". He was very approachable. It can be seen that during the period when he lost his parents and was adopted by Master Faming, although Jiang Liu'er's life was not wealthy, he received the full love and careful teaching of his master.

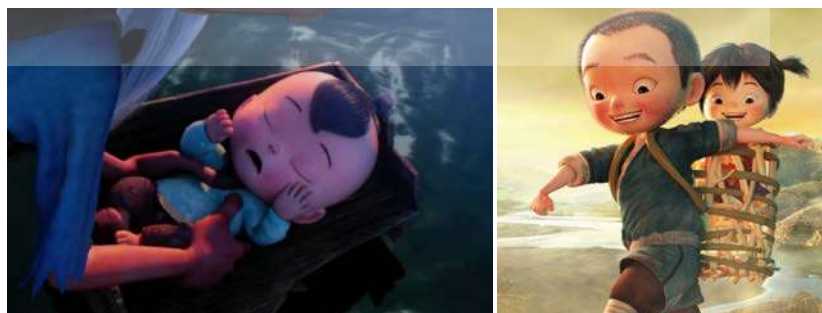


Figure 4.8 "Monkey king hero back" Jiangliu child's head-to-body ratio and five senses design: infancy (left) childhood (right)

Source: Tian, 2015

In "Big Fish and Begonia", the body proportions of Tsubaki are close to five-heads, and the facial features are designed to be relatively balanced, without emphasizing the enlargement of the eyes, but rather emphasizing the thickening of the eyebrows, weakening the feminine and delicate feeling. On the one hand, this shows that Tsubaki is young, and on the other hand, it also implies the character's personality of rebellion against authority and pursuit of freedom. Similarly, in "Legend of Deification", Xiao Jiu also uses the same method to highlight the depiction of the eyebrows, showing its mischievous characteristics (Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.9 "Big Fish and Begonia" Tsubaki's eyebrow design (left) "Legend of Deification" Xiaojiu's eyebrow design (right)

Source: Liang & Zhang, 2016 (left); Cheng & Li, 2020 (right)

In "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child", the author intentionally accentuates Nezha's head and reduces the proportion of his body from childhood to adolescence. Nezha's face features long eyebrows and a pair of oversized "four-white" eyes, where the white part of the eye is about three times larger than the black pupil. This eye design is commonly used to represent an "evil" image (Figure 4.10), such as the well-known character "Little Black" in "Detective Conan", who has typical "four-white" eyes. This design differs from the typical children's character design. Nezha has dark circles under his eyes, freckles all over his face, a flat nose, and sharp protruding teeth, often revealing a mischievous smirk, showcasing the character's rebellious and unruly personality traits.



This creates a distinct contrast between the character's facial features and body proportions.



Figure 4.10 "Detective Conan" suspect little black man's four white eyes (left) "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" Nezha's four white eyes, teeth, black eyes (right)

Source: Aoyama, 1996; Yang, 2019

In "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child", Nezha's behavior is imbued with a modern sensibility, devoid of the stiffness and fragility associated with children, and instead incorporates a sense of "laziness" and "delinquency" typically associated with contemporary youth. He is often seen with a blade of grass in his mouth, a gesture that evokes the smoking posture of a delinquent teenager. Additionally, he is always barefoot, with his hands in his pockets, walking in a slouching and carefree manner, creating a stark contrast with the traditional image of a child (Figure 4.11).



Figure 4.11 Nezha's body movement in Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child

Source: Yang, 2019

In portraying the image of a teenager in "New Gods: YangJian", when Chen Xiang first appears, he is depicted as a 15 or 16-year-old boy who is robbing the Hunyuan Qi Station with his wolf demon companion. He has a stern and resolute face, with a relatively smaller head and body, reflecting a sharp and heroic feeling. The distance between his eyes is noticeably widened to showcase the features of an East Asian person, while at the same time emphasizing the high bridge of his nose to enhance the character's handsome appearance (Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.12 Characterization of Shen Xiang in New Gods: Yang Jian

Source: Zhao, 2022

#### 4.1.3 External image design focuses on Chinese elements

In "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child", Nezha's childhood attire primarily consists of a red lotus-embroidered bellyband, while his grown-up form as a demon orb is depicted as a mischievous child wearing a vest and lantern pants, with bare feet. His chest is exposed, and he wears a red jacket with yellow borders, embroidered with lotus patterns on the front and lotus leaf patterns on the back. The cuffs of his brown elastic-waist lantern pants are decorated with flame-shaped patterns, and he wears a bright yellow belt around his waist. In the later part of the film, when he saves Chentang Pass, Nezha removes the Qiankun Circle to release the seal on the demon orb, transforming

it into a wrist bracelet to retain his sanity. His figure stretches from a child to a teenager, with his hair standing on end in anger and his body engulfed in red flames. He wields the Hun Tian Ling, Fire-tipped Spear, and Wind-fire Wheels, displaying his six-armed divine power. All costume elements are derived from myths and legends (Figure 4.13).



Figure 4.13 Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child in Nezha's early childhood (left) Nezha's teenage years (right)

Source: Yang, 2019

In the film "Big Fish and Begonia", Tsubaki is dressed in a red blouse with a stand-up collar of left-over-right construction and a long black skirt; her costume is similar to that of a schoolgirl dressed up in the Republican era, with a single earring worn in accordance with the custom of a man's left earring and a woman's right earring (Figure 4.14).



Figure 4.14 "Big Fish and Begonia" in Tsubaki's Clothing

Source: Liang & Zhang, 2016

In "Monkey king hero back", Jiang Liu'er makes her debut wearing a blue brocade dress with embroidered patterns and brown lantern pants. After being adopted by a monk master, Jiang Liu'er wears a gray-blue patched monk's robe, showcasing the appearance of Buddhist attire. In "New Gods: Yang Jian", Chen Xiang wears a hat and a neat black short ponytail can be vaguely seen. She wears a dark green cloak made of several fabrics, with a tattered hemline, and tied leggings on her lower body. She wears a pair of toe sandals on her feet. The whole person appears agile but also portrays a neglected appearance, lacking the knowledge of self-care.



Figure 4.15 The appearance of the image of Shen Xiang in New Gods: Yang Jian

Source: Zhao, 2022

#### 4.1.4 A Summary of external image of children in the new generation of Chinese animation films

1) External image design that highlights the character's personality:  
When it comes to the character design of children in Chinese new generation animation films, taking the hairstyle design of child characters as an example, it showcases a fresh approach that deviates from the traditional hairstyles typically associated with Chinese children. Age is no longer a limiting factor in the external design of child characters. Instead, the personality of the child characters and their growth trajectory, as well as the

progression of the story, have become decisive factors in the external design of these characters. This results in a greater variety of child characters in the films, with the age-specific traits of their external appearance being downplayed. It also creates a sense of companionship and shared growth between the characters and viewers of different age groups, thereby expanding the range of empathetic audiences.

2) Head-to-body ratio and five senses design contrast sense of the external image: In the character design of children in Chinese new generation animation films, there is a greater emphasis on highlighting the contrast between the proportions of the head and body, as well as the facial features, to showcase the personality of the characters. The facial design focuses on amplifying the character traits. When portraying children at different stages, the external appearance and behavior also change accordingly, making the child characters more recognizable and memorable. This approach enhances the visual impact of the characters.

3) External image design focuses on Chinese elements: The costume design for children in Chinese new generation animation films emphasizes Chinese elements. For example, Nezha's flame pattern on his lantern pants, Tsubaki's school uniform from the Ming Dynasty era, and Chen Xiang's short martial arts outfit all feature strong Chinese elements rather than international or Western modern designs. This approach allows Chinese audiences to feel a sense of familiarity and enables foreign audiences to appreciate the traditional beauty of Chinese attire, reflecting the increased cultural confidence in China. The Chinese elements in the film can be summarized as shown in Table 4.1:

Table 4.1 Elements of Chinese Style in the Image of Children in film

| Films Title                                 | Child image          | Clothing with Chinese elements                     |
|---|----------------------|--|
| Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child             | Nezha                | Red vest with lotus flower pattern                 |
|   |                      | Bloomers with a flame print                        |
| Big Fish and Begonia                        | Tsubaki              | Students Qipao during the Republic of China period |
| Big Fish and Begonia<br>New Gods: Yang Jian | Tsubaki<br>Chenxiang | Emerald earrings                                   |
|   |                      | Bamboo hat   |
| New Gods: Yang Jian                         | Chenxiang            | Straw toe shoes                                    |
|   |                      | Straw toe shoes                                    |

Source: Mapped in this study, 2023

## 4.2 The internal image of children in the new generation of Chinese animation films

### 4.2.1 Internal image setting of the children with emphasis on character defects

The internal image of children in Chinese animation films is mainly reflected in the portrayal of their personalities, which differs from the traditional imagination of children as kind, beautiful, simple, and pure. In many cases, the initial setting of the internal image of children in Chinese new-generation animation films often includes certain flaws. For example, in "Monkey king hero back", Jiang Liu'er is an imperfect child who comes from an unfortunate family background. As an orphan, he is adopted and his mischievous and cowardly personality is emphasized (Figure 4.16). For instance,

at the beginning of the film, when the shadow puppet troupe is performing the scene where Sun Wukong is suppressed by the Four Heavenly Kings, Jiang Liu'er mischievously sneaks in and disrupts the performance, speaking up for his hero by saying "Sun Wukong won't die". The troupe leader's response of "Why is it you again?" indicates that Jiang Liu'er has done this before. However, when the troupe leader tries to find Fa Ming, the master who adopted Jiang Liu'er, to discipline him, Jiang Liu'er shows cowardice and struggles to run away. Jiang Liu'er's actions in the first part of the film demonstrate that he is a child who knows how to protect himself and survive in troubled times. He is even somewhat self-preserving and cunning, such as when the mountain god captures the children, he understands his own weakness and does not confront the situation directly. Instead, he saves the last child who he can help with a higher success rate. When he first meets the protagonist, Sun Wukong, he also shows timidity and testing.



Figure 4.16 Jiangliu Er's mischievousness and cowardice

Source: Tian, 2015

The internal image setting of Nezha in "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" is even more pronounced. Nezha's original form is a demon pill, which corresponds to his rebellious personality, combining characteristics of being rascally and nihilistic with a good family education. His "bad" behavior does not harm the audience's affection for him, but instead adds to their love and fondness for the character. Nezha displays

characteristics of bravery, tenacity, intelligence, and rebellion in the film. He is not afraid of authority and bravely fights against his fate, demonstrating a strong personality. At the same time, Nezha also has a certain degree of mischievous and unruly traits. In the film, Nezha is initially seen as a demon child and is rejected by the people of Chentang Pass, displaying a rebellious and negative image of a child. Because of his immature mind, he cannot see through human nature and is very emotional in his approach to things, without much thought. As the villagers avoid him and ignore him, Nezha wants everyone to fear him and constantly plays pranks to show his presence (Figure 4.17).



Figure 4.17 Nezha was resented by the villagers

Source: Yang, 2019

In "Big Fish and Begonia," as the deity in charge of the growth of the Begonia flowers, Tsubaki's daily life is not particularly complex in terms of events and emotions. During her journey to the human world at the age of 16, she accepts the help of a human boy and chooses to repay him in kind. Tsubaki does not explore or inquire about the concept of "repaying kindness," but simply moves forward in the direction she wants to go. Perhaps the expression of emotions requires experience to be obtained. When Tsubaki sees the human boy's sister crying in pain, she makes up her mind to "repay kindness" without considering any consequences. However, Tsubaki's mentality is not mature enough, and she is more emotional than rational, with a rebellious side that is



somewhat blind and self-centered. Tsubaki's love is both selfless and selfish. She is kind, so she wants to atone for her mistakes. When choosing to revive the Kun, Tsubaki also struggled with internal conflicts at home (Figure 4.18). However, she ultimately chose to see the Ling Po, making a sacrifice that not only put herself in dire straits but also indirectly affected others. As the only heir to the family, Tsubaki is somewhat capricious and irresponsible. She concealed her actions from her parents, gave half of her lifespan to the human boy Kun, and abandoned her responsibilities, secretly violating the family's prohibition and indirectly causing the world to fall into danger. Tsubaki's mentality is not mature enough, and although she knows she is going against the natural order, she does not rigorously inquire about the disasters that reviving Kun may bring (to the point where she is almost at a loss when the flood engulfs the village).

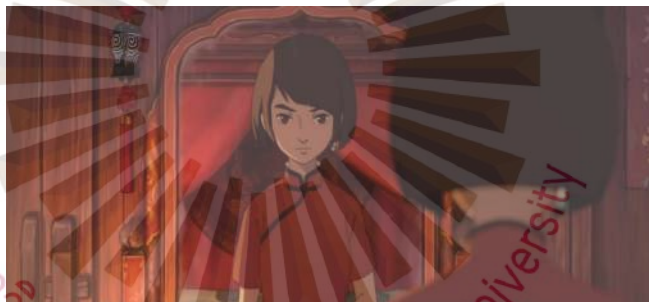


Figure 4.18 Tsubaki's conflict before making a decision

Source: Liang & Zhang, 2016

In "Legend of Deification," Xiao Jiu, while searching for her father alone, encounters a greedy and vicious fox hunter and is mistaken for a fox demon. Therefore, before meeting Jiang Ziya, she is full of hatred and acts ruthlessly. For example, on the way to Youdu Mountain with Jiang Ziya, they encounter a famine-stricken man who goes crazy when he sees Xiao Jiu's fox ears and tries to capture her (Figure 4.19). Xiao Jiu angrily retaliates and wants to kill the old man, while Jiang Ziya feels great pity for the thin and weak old man and constantly tries to stop Xiao Jiu. Xiao Jiu says bitterly, "When they cut off my ears, who came to save me?"



Figure 4.19 Xiao Jiu by the famine of human suppression

Source: Cheng & Li, 2020

#### 4.2.2 The internal image of children in conflict with adults

The conflict between Jiang Liu'er and Master Faming in "Monkey king hero back" resembles a clash of ideas between a child and parents. Jiang Liu'er idolizes the hero Sun Wukong, and his words and deeds are all modeled after him. He will stand up for Sun Wukong in front of the theater, protect the little girl in his arms during the invasion of mountain monsters, and choose to go alone to the monster's lair when everyone else gives up on rescuing the girl, even though he knows it is impossible. These actions are undoubtedly dangerous, and a mature adult would learn to avoid danger, but Jiang Liu'er chooses to be a hero. On the other hand, Master Faming hopes that Jiang Liu'er can live safely, saying, "I hope you can live a stable life. I can't take care of you forever." Jiang Liu'er, however, thinks, "Learn good martial arts and fight the mountain monsters" (Figure 4.20). Therefore, when Master Faming sees Jiang Liu'er rescue the little girl, his first reaction is to fear for his safety, even though he is a monk, and he advises him not to interfere in other people's business, fearing that Jiang Liu'er will be harmed by the mountain monsters.



Figure 4.20 Jiang Liuer confronts his master

Source: Tian, 2015

In "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child," Nezha, his parents, and the world around him are all filled with a sense of alienation. Nezha had just been born when his father, Li Jing, went to the heavenly court with Taiyi Zhenren to unravel Nezha's heavenly curse. However, time moves differently in heaven and on earth, and by the time Li Jing returned, Nezha had grown into a three-year-old child. Nezha's mother, Lady Yin, who remained in the mortal world, often went out to vanquish demons and pacify the people to accumulate merit for Nezha, who was born as a demon pill. She also took on the responsibility of guarding Chen Tang Pass, where Li Jing had gone, leaving little time to spend with Nezha. At the same time, Lady Yin used a boundary beast to confine Nezha to the mansion to avoid conflicts between Nezha and the people. For these reasons, Nezha grew up alone without any peers to play with, and the people feared and disliked him. His parents were also seldom around to accompany him, and even occasional playtime with his mother was interrupted by sudden demon-slaying missions (Figure 4.21). Therefore, Nezha's image is always rebellious and decadent. As a one-year-old in his heart, Nezha did not understand why no one liked him, and he was filled with intense aggression and loneliness.



Figure 4.21 Nezha's forlorn look as his mother goes forth to remove the demon

Source: Yang, 2019

In "New Gods: YangJian," Chen Xiang suffered from bullying by his fellow disciples and neglect from his master in the Golden Glow Cave before fleeing. As a result, he became extremely cold and ruthless towards strangers. When he first met Yang Jian, he was being chased by a pack of wolf demons and, outnumbered, he pulled Yang Jian into the water to fight together. When they gained the upper hand, Chen Xiang did not hesitate to kill the wolf demons who were pursuing him. However, Chen Xiang also lacked love and affection, and he relied heavily on trust when faced with even a little kindness from Shen Gongbao and Wanluo. When he learned about his identity from Shen Gongbao and found out that he had an uncle, Yang Jian, in addition to his mother, he was surprised and happy at first. However, Chenxiang instantly darkens her face, her eyes are fierce, and her left hand grips the red rope given by her mother on her wrist (Figure 4.22). This explains why Chenxiang, when facing her uncle Yang Jian, is as fierce and cold as a wolf cub betrayed by its only relative.



Figure 4.22 Chenxiang's holding her wrist with a red string representing her family.

Source: Zhao, 2022

#### 4.2.3 The internal image of the children transformed in growth

"Big Fish and Begonia" tells a fantasy story about life, love, and growth, in which Tsubaki demonstrates qualities such as kindness, innocence, sensitivity, and resilience. She has a deep reverence for life and shows love for the creatures around her. Over the course of seven days, Tsubaki gains an understanding of various human emotions before leaving the human world. When the young Kun sacrifices himself to save her, Tsubaki chooses to exchange her own life to save his. However, this act of selflessness leads to a disaster that Tsubaki could not have foreseen. The entire world is destroyed, and all of her fellow beings who grew up with her are submerged in water. Tsubaki is willing to sacrifice everything for one person, but after experiencing the disaster, she grows and realizes her mistake. She bravely takes responsibility and is willing to transform into a Begonia tree to repair the sky and make up for her mistake. Throughout the film, Tsubaki undergoes a process of growth from ignorance of life to understanding, from longing for love to giving love. In this process, she learns to face setbacks and difficulties in life and gradually becomes a responsible and accountable young woman. At the end of the film, Tsubaki, who has lost her divine power, comes to the human world without any worries, which showcases the meaning of "rebirth" (Figure 4.23).



Figure 4.23 "Big Fish and Begonia" in which Tsubaki returns to earth

Source: Liang & Zhang, 2016

In "Legend of Deification," Xiao Jiu is a strong-willed, brave, stubborn, independent, quick-witted, and kind-hearted character who longs to prove that she is not a fox demon. Despite experiencing the ups and downs of the world, she never gives up on finding her father and remains steadfast in her belief in the "light" within her. Beneath her stubborn exterior, she has a heart that believes in warmth and tenderness, and no matter what hardships she faces, she always believes in love and gentleness. Xiao Jiu was originally a human girl named Su Daji, but after being possessed by the nine-tailed fox demon, her soul was also damaged. Her memory loss indicates the plot of her later search for her father in Youdu Mountain. The destiny lock ties her life to that of the nine-tailed fox, making her a half-human, half-fox existence. However, after meeting Jiang Ziya, they work together to find the truth and help each other in times of danger. Jiang Ziya gives her the warmth and protection of a father figure and awakens her innocence and kindness as a human being. Due to carrying too much burden in her past life as a nobleman's daughter, she hopes to be an ordinary girl in her next life with a loving father and the freedom to live as she pleases. Therefore, whether one is human or demon ultimately depends on "who you meet and who you want to become." At the end of the films, Xiao Jiu breaks free from the bond of fate with the Nine-Tailed Fox. Her fox ears disappear, and she regains her human form as a young girl. She embarks

on a journey towards the ruins, symbolizing her path towards self-discovery and finding her true identity (Figure 4.24).



Figure 4.24 Xiao Jiu walks into the Returning Ruins

Source: Cheng & Li, 2020

In "New Gods: Yang Jian," the period spent in Chen Xiang Jin Xia Dong was not easy for Chen Xiang. Under the instruction of Yu Ding Zhen Ren, the sect did not teach him any spells, and his master often verbally and physically abused him. He frequently went hungry, and his fellow disciples looked down on him, which greatly influenced his later ruthless and gloomy personality. Later, Chen Xiang teamed up with Shen Gong Bao and escaped from Jin Xia Dong. All of his spells were taught by Shen Gong Bao, and he even cultivated his own soul, demonstrating that Chen Xiang was not foolish, but rather very intelligent, hardworking, and brave. However, at the same time, Chen Xiang was lacking in love. Compared to his peers, he was more rational and emotional. His personality was a bit awkward, but he was also impulsive and rash. In the films, the satisfaction and joy he felt when he stole the Chaos Qi, as well as the sentence he said to Yang Jian, "But you have never really seen me. You are my uncle!" showed that he was actually a child who was very eager for love and had some innocence in him. The scene at the end of the film where Chen Xiang and Yang Jian both split the mountain to save their mothers was a contrast. Chen Xiang showed more of the sadness of an ordinary child, rather than the determination to not give up like Yang Jian. Chen Xiang's collapse was almost instantaneous, probably because he had never felt motherly love

since he was a child. He was willing to pay any price to split Huashan, but the result was that his mother, Yang Chan, disappeared before his eyes. In the films, there is another detail regarding the transformation of Chen Xiang's divine form. In the earlier stages, during his intense battle alongside Shen Gongbao against the demon Mo Liqing, his divine form appears as a greenish color with a hint of gray shadow, matching the gray shadow of Shen Gongbao's doppelganger. However, towards the end of the film, when he splits the mountain to rescue his mother, his released divine form resembles his uncle Yang Jian, a young figure adorned in golden robes and armor. This transformation may symbolize a shift in his spiritual beliefs and signify his growth in abilities after studying the Nine Transformation Profound Art (Figure 4.25).



Figure 4.25 The image of Shen Xiang's Yuan Shen changes

Source: Zhao, 2022

In the films "Deep Sea," the parents of Shensu are divorced, and her mother abandoned her and left alone. Her father and stepmother are not attentive enough to Shensu, and only have eyes for her younger brother, Tangdouer. They even forget Shensu's birthday and shoe size. Shensu is neglected at home, which undoubtedly is an important reason for the formation of her people-pleasing personality. Shensu is a sad, sensitive, lonely, and forced-to-smile little girl (Figure 4.26). Her personality is "understanding," which means that she constantly sacrifices and compromises to gain a little recognition and care from her family, even if it means smiling for others' needs. "I



am not good enough!" "It's all my fault!" "I don't deserve these things!" "My feelings don't matter!"... The gloomy ghosts in the films occasionally make such sounds, which deeply immerse Shensu in negative emotions. In the joint adventure with the clown (Nanhe), Shensu learned to face life with optimism and cheerfulness, or else she would be entangled by the gloomy ghosts. She also learned to face difficulties bravely and pursue light and hope. Finally, when she bravely entered the Eye of the Deep Sea, she returned to reality.

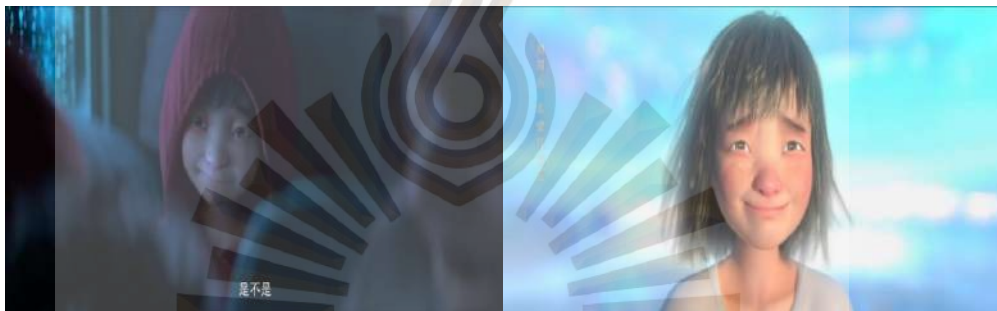


Figure 4.26 "Deep Sea" Shensu rediscovered the smile

Source: Tian, 2023

#### 4.2.4 A Summary of the internal image of children in the new generation of Chinese animation films

1) Internal image setting of the children with emphasis on character defects: When shaping the internal image of children, the new generation of Chinese animation films pay more attention to emphasize the three-dimensionality of the character, focusing on shaping the image of children is not perfect and obedient, but there are some shortcomings and defects, some of these defects are shown in the inferiority, timidity or arrogance, disobedience and other aspects of the children's character, and these characters are closer to the real-life children than the traditional hero image. In addition, the character flaws of the children's characters in the new

generation of Chinese animation films also bring comedic effects to the audience. Their imperfections and hilarious behaviors make the audience feel the innocence and cuteness of children in their laughter. This comedic effect not only increases the fun of films watching, but also makes it easier for the audience to accept and love these characters.

2) The internal image of children in conflict with adults: The relationship between children and adults in Chinese new generation animation films presents a new pattern, no longer solely relying on attachment but also involving conflicts and contradictions. These conflicts often arise from the circumstances and personality traits of both parties. Children are typically in a stage of growth where they desire independence and autonomy but face limitations and constraints imposed by adults. Adults, on the other hand, play the roles of protectors and guides for children but may sometimes fail to understand and meet their needs due to their own limitations. The presence of these conflict points makes the story more realistic, interesting, and relatable to the audience. Chinese new generation animation films employ a first-person narrative approach, allowing the audience to have a deeper understanding of the conflict points between children and adults. Through the perspective of children, the audience can experience their inner world and emotional experiences. Simultaneously, through the perspective of adults, the audience can comprehend their confusion and struggles. This narrative approach brings the audience closer to the characters, allowing them to authentically experience their internal traits. It makes the film more genuine, engaging, and increases the audience's resonance and involvement.

3) The internal image of the children transformed in growth: The child characters in Chinese new generation animation films exhibit a transformative process of growth. This transformation is manifested in two aspects: the physical growth of the

children's appearances and the internal growth of their characters. Firstly, the child characters in Chinese new generation animation films undergo physical growth. In these films, they often evolve from a tender and innocent image to a more mature and confident one. They may experience a series of adventures and challenges, overcoming difficulties and achieving their goals through effort and courage. This physical growth makes the child characters stronger and more composed, allowing the audience to witness their trajectory of growth and progress. Secondly, the child characters in Chinese new generation animation films undergo internal growth and transformation. They may transition from being introverted and timid to becoming brave and resilient. This internal growth is often achieved by facing difficulties and challenges, gradually overcoming their fears and anxieties, and discovering their potential and worth. This growth and transformation of their characters make them internally stronger, enabling them to confront various obstacles and challenges. It also allows the audience to witness their internal growth and progress. This transformative process makes the child characters more authentic and multidimensional, enabling the audience to resonate with them and experience the power of growth.

#### **4.3 Summary of the chapter**

The children's images in Chinese new generation animation films show a rich variety of characteristics in terms of both external and internal images.

The external image of children in the new generation of Chinese animation films:

- 1) External image design that highlights the character's personality: In terms of external image design, through the external image design that highlights the character's personality, each image of a child has unique external features and clothing

styles, so that visually it can be immediately recognized and remembered by the audience.

2) Head-to-body ratio and five senses design contrast sense of the external image: It is a major feature of children's images in Chinese new generation animation films. Through exaggerated head-to-body ratios and rich and varied facial expressions, the personalities and emotions of children's images are vividly displayed.

3) External image design focuses on Chinese elements: Chinese elements are also a highlight of children's images in new generation Chinese animation films. Through the treatment of clothing, hairstyle, accessories and other details, the children's images are integrated with traditional Chinese culture, showing unique national characteristics and cultural heritage.

The internal image of children in the new generation of Chinese animation films:

1) Internal image setting of the children with emphasis on character defects: The setting of children with character flaws makes the characters more three-dimensional and interesting. Each child character has his or her own unique personality traits, some are innocent and cute, some are witty and smart, some are timid and cowardly, and some are brave and strong. These character flaws make the children more realistic and believable, and the audience can better empathize with them.

2) The internal image of children in conflict with adults: Children's images often face pressures and challenges from the adult world, they need to face all kinds of difficulties and trials, and through conflicts and confrontations with adults, children's images gradually grow and mature.

3) The internal image of the children transformed in growth: The children's image undergoes various changes and transformations in the process of growing up, from innocence to understanding and maturity, from confusion and uneasiness to firmness and self-confidence, and this metamorphosis makes the children's image more contagious and malleable, which is a major highlight in Chinese new generation of animation films.

In summary, the portrayal of child characters in Chinese new generation animation films showcases a diverse range of characteristics through both their external and internal attributes. Firstly, in terms of the "external image" and "internal image" of child characters, the analysis focuses on the connotation and expressive features of their "child image." The external image design highlights the traits of the characters' personalities, emphasizing the use of contrasts and Chinese elements to make the child characters visually distinct and memorable. The internal image design emphasizes character flaws, conflicts with adults, and the transformative nature of their growth, making the child characters more multidimensional and story-driven. These combined efforts shape a group of child characters with vivid and distinct external appearances, varied internal traits, and compelling stories. They inject new vitality and creativity into the development of Chinese new generation animation films.

## Chapter 5

### **Analysis of the Rhetoric of Chinese New Generation Animation Films**

The purpose of this study is to examine the rhetorical analysis of children's images in Chinese new generation animation films. This includes two aspects.

5.1 Film language

5.2 Narrative structure

#### **5.1 Film language of portraying children in Chinese new generation animation films**

##### **5.1.1 Image language: highlighting the combination of red "Chinese-style" aesthetics and the Children Images**

The film "Big Fish and Begonia" employs a variety of visually captivating composition techniques that significantly enrich the narrative's cohesiveness. Horizontal composition is used to depict panoramic and distant views, effectively creating a vast and fantastical world within the film. For instance, the film employs a straight division between the sky and the ocean, portraying a seamless merging of these elements. The horizontal expansion of the frame allows for the portrayal of distant scenes with a smaller upper portion, while closer scenes feature a larger upper portion. This manipulation of the vertical proportions of the frame enables the depiction of distinct spatial images.

Moreover, the film employs different compositional orientations, such as center composition, left-right composition, and top-bottom composition, to immerse the audience in various dynamic experiences. Objects ranging from small props like porcelain bowls to large-scale structures like earthen buildings are strategically positioned using center composition (Figure 5.1). When depicting dynamic scenes involving character movements and jumps, the film predominantly utilizes left-right composition, with a particular emphasis on the left side. This choice is rooted in the psychological impact it has on the audience, as the left side tends to evoke a sense of anticipation and progression. Additionally, it aligns with the natural direction of the audience's visual movement. To convey a sense of spatial depth, the film often employs bottom composition, where the main subject is positioned lower in the frame, creating a visual effect that simulates an upward gaze.



Figure 5.1 The central composition of the tulou in "Big Fish and Begonia"

Source: Liang & Zhang, 2016

In "Big Fish and Begonia," the predominant use of red as the main color palette in the visual presentation serves to differentiate brightness and saturation levels, creating a sense of depth. Red, symbolizing youth, passion, and vitality, is extensively employed throughout the film. From the costumes of the female protagonist, Tsubaki, and the male protagonist, Qiu, to the lanterns in the scenes featuring the earthen buildings, the red dolphins, the red begonia flowers, the red phoenix, and the red lights of countless households, red is present in almost every frame (Figure 5.2). By employing different

combinations of red, the film showcases various visual elements, providing the audience with a strong sensory experience. It can be said that these red elements imbue the entire film with a rich cultural ambiance.



Figure 5.2 Red symbol in "Big Fish and Begonia

Source: Liang & Zhang, 2016

"Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" utilizes the perspective composition found in classical Chinese paintings, leaving endless room for the audience's imagination. Scenes such as the ever-changing fairyland in the painting "Shanhe Sheji Tu," the Dragon Palace in the deep abyss of the dragon clan, and the Li family's mansion all depict a sense of "distance." (Figure 5.3) They convey the vastness of mountains beyond mountains, the unfathomable depths of water, and the infinite visual beauty of endless horizons. The use of perspective composition magnifies the entire frame infinitely, creating a space that sparks boundless imagination. In the animation film, the filmmaker employ the technique of long shots to lead the audience's attention to the characters' destinies and their pursuit of a better life. This not only piques the audience's curiosity about the plot but also immerses them in the story, stimulating their visual imagination.



It often leaves a lingering impression and aesthetic enjoyment, like an echo that lingers in one's mind.



Figure 5.3 View of the mountains and rivers in "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child"

Source: Yang, 2019

In terms of color, the red "magic pill" Nezha is impulsive, while the blue "spirit pearl" Ao Beng is calm and introverted (Figure 5.4), thus conveying the opposite character traits of the two actors and making the combination more story-oriented. Nezha mistakenly eats the magic pill, which is red in color, representing the "evil" side of the force, and is integrated with Nezha's red costume, red weapon, the mixed sky damask, the wind and fire wheel, and the flaming red battle scene. The red color deepens Nezha's character as a demon king, while the confrontation between the two characters creates a "red and blue game" effect, expressing their opposing destinies and providing a great contrast to Nezha's heroic ending.



Figure 5.4 Nezha (red) and Ao Beng (blue) in Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child

Source: Yang, 2019

The majority of the plot in "Legend of Deification" revolves around Jiang Ziya and Xiao Jiu's adventurous journey to find the Ghost City in the Phantom Mountain. The film employs diagonal and S-shaped compositions when depicting the natural environments, which not only extends the spatial perception of the entire frame but also enhances the dynamic effect of the visuals. In terms of visual presentation, the heavenly realms, such as the Kunlun Peak and the Demon-Slaying Platform, as well as the earthly settings like the North Sea town and the Sunset Ruins, are characterized by perfectly symmetrical compositions. When portraying the main characters, the film often utilizes a centered composition, placing the subjects in the middle of the screen. This instantly captivates the audience's attention on the protagonists, with their expressions, gestures, and every move becoming the focal point of the entire frame. This technique effectively etches the images of Jiang Ziya and Xiao Jiu into the viewers' minds.



Figure 5.5 Top to bottom, left to right in order: diagonal composition S-curved composition Symmetrical composition, composition of the center of the subject

Source: Cheng & Li, 2020

In terms of color presentation, each realm (human, divine, and demonic) and even individual characters in "Legend of Deification" are associated with distinct colors,

corresponding to the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth) in traditional Chinese culture. For instance, when Xiao Jiu is still a human as Su Daji, she is adorned in a red wedding dress (Figure 5.6), and even after losing her memory, she wears a red cloak, both highlighting her passionate and lively personality. The Nine-Tailed Fox, who is intertwined with Xiao Jiu's destiny, is also assigned the color red, symbolizing both its role as a harbinger of calamity and its dual nature of being both righteous and wicked. On the other hand, Jiang Ziya is represented by the color blue, reflecting his melancholic, repressed, yet calm and composed demeanor. When these two characters clash, the contrasting colors in the visuals provide the audience with a unique visual experience rooted in Eastern aesthetics.

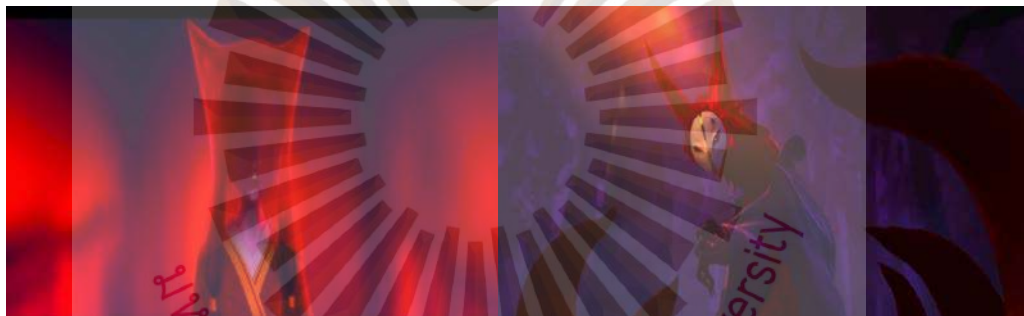


Figure 5.6 Legend of Deification of Xiaojiu (left) and the nine-tailed demon fox (right)

Source: Cheng & Li, 2020

In the film "Monkey King: Hero Is Back," the use of colors in the visual presentation is significant. The blue-colored Jiang Liuer represents freedom, rationality, and loyalty. He unwaveringly trusts Sun Wukong but also remains firm in his own beliefs, fearlessly facing challenges and never giving up on rescuing the little girl from the Chaos Demon King. In the early stages of the film, although Sun Wukong gains freedom after Jiang Liuer releases him from his seal, his powers are still sealed, leading to a moody and irritable temperament. At this point, the color red represents anger and restlessness. Towards the end of the film, Sun Wukong regains his powers and

confidence, returning with a red cape that shines brightly amidst a yellow sandstorm. The red cape extends from the left one-third of the frame to the rightmost edge, gradually approaching and occupying a large area of the frame. At this moment, the color red represents protection and resistance. It is evident that the extensive use of color blocks in the film not only visually highlights the main subject but also follows the development of the plot, pushing the film towards its climax.



Figure 5.7 Images of Jiang Liu'er (left) and the Monkey King (right)

Source: Tian, 2015

### **5.1.2 Sound language: multiple soundscapes combining reality and complexity in the portrayal of children**

In the visual narrative of anime works, sound and imagery complement each other, and relying solely on visual storytelling can be challenging to accurately convey to the audience. Therefore, sound often assists in the smooth narration of the visuals in animation films, reflecting the filmmaker's intended visual expression. Music, as an indispensable element in film and television art, plays a crucial role in the development of the plot, character shaping, establishing the tone, presenting the style, and expressing emotions in films. As a carrier of film meaning, music liberates visual elements, expanding the range of visual representation and diversifying the ways of emotional

expression. The following analysis will use representative musical instruments as examples for reconstruction.

Table 5.1 Classical Chinese Musical Instruments in Sound Language

| Films Title                     | Usage Scenarios                       | Music Title      | Use of Chinese musical instruments |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|
| Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child | Nezha's Childhood                     | background noise | suona                              |
|                                 | Nezha and Ao Bian playing shuttlecock | background noise | erhu                               |
| monkey king hero back           | The Growth of Jiang Liu'er            | Tomorrow         | yueqin                             |
| Big Fish and Begonia            | Tsubaki's Dream                       | Tsubaki no Yume  | guzheng                            |
|                                 | Tsubaki and Kun's Token               | background noise | ocarina                            |

Source: Mapped in this study, 2023

In the film "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child," with a total duration of 110 minutes, the music score appears for approximately 100 minutes. This highlights the significant role of the music in the visual narrative, including the thematic development, pacing, and character portrayal. To enhance the thematic elements, the background music incorporates a combination of traditional and Western instruments, creating a fusion of Eastern and Western styles. Instruments such as the xiao, suona, erhu, orchestral instruments, and electric guitar intertwine, creating a melodic tapestry with nuanced emotional nuances. The music complements and enhances the depiction of characters, actions, and dialogue, showcasing a unique and innovative approach. The music composition demonstrates a creative blend of Eastern traditional and Western contemporary elements, reflecting the rebellious spirit conveyed in the film. The

director skillfully arranges the scene music, using the rhythm to reflect Ne Zha's dramatic experiences. This integration of music and the film's narrative allows the audience to perceive Ne Zha's emotional changes more authentically, guided by the rhythm of the music.

For example, the erhu, with its simple construction, possesses an incredibly lyrical and expressive sound that can be varied and tension-filled. It is often used in many emotional scenes. In "Ne Zha," during the scene where Ao Bing and Ne Zha play jianzi (a traditional Chinese game), the background music changes to a melody primarily featuring the erhu. This musical choice serves to highlight the transformation of their relationship from strangers to friends. Set against the backdrop of a sunset, this scene conveys the protagonist's emotional release and the touching moment of finding a kindred spirit, evoking sympathy and resonance from the audience. Similarly, the suona is one of the most distinctive and expressive instruments in China, known for its high and varied range and penetrating power. It has been given the nickname "the hooligan of the music world." In the film, the mischievous and impulsive nature of the young Ne Zha is represented by the suona as the main instrument, reflecting his dual nature of being both righteous and mischievous. After his transformation, Ne Zha becomes purely demonic, and the deep electric guitar replaces the suona, portraying his dark side. The innocent and lively image suddenly transforms into a domineering demon, effectively conveying the instantaneous shift in emotions. By using music to enhance the narrative space, the film progresses layer by layer, deepening the emotional impact. The unique melodies, accompanied by well-timed rhythms, resonate with the audience as the story unfolds. This approach infuses the narrative with vitality, propelling the story's development and showcasing the depth and charm of the film's connection to traditional art forms. It evokes a sense of longing and admiration.

The theme song "Tomorrow" in the film "Monkey King: Hero Is Back" is intricately woven throughout the animation, complementing the characters, scenes, and plot developments. The theme song revolves around the two main characters in the film, Jiang Liu'er and Sun Wukong, narrating their journey and companionship. It vividly shapes the characters of the two protagonists while conveying the core thematic ideas of "bravery," "staying true to oneself," and "growth" that the animation aims to convey to the audience. As the theme song of the animation film "Monkey King: Hero Is Back," "Tomorrow" is closely integrated with the development of the animation story. Through different musical arrangements, it traverses the entire film, expressing emotions that are either lyrical and gentle, grand and majestic, or light-hearted and lively. The theme song appears in various forms throughout the film, with approximately 11 segments, often in the form of melodic themes and motif-based themes.

The following analysis focuses on several representative animation scenes where the theme song appears in the film: After the film's prologue, the theme song "Tomorrow" first appears in its entirety at 5 minutes and 24 seconds into the animation when the protagonist, Jiang Liu'er, makes her entrance. In this scene, Fa Ming and the monk find Jiang Liu'er, who lost her parents due to an attack by a mountain demon and fell into the river. The theme song accompanies this serene moment with its gentle melody and soothing rhythm, immersing the audience in the tranquil forest scene where Fa Ming and the innocent baby Jiang Liu'er meet for the first time. The second significant appearance of the theme song occurs at 22 minutes and 44 seconds when Jiang Liu'er accidentally frees Sun Wukong, who was trapped under the Five Elements Mountain. Jiang Liu'er and Sun Wukong engage in their first conversation in the woods, accompanied by the theme song. The music appears in a variation form, serving as a motif-based theme. The lively and humorous musical rhythm vividly portrays Jiang Liu'er's excitement upon meeting the Great Sage for the first time. It wonderfully

captures the image of the clever and mischievous child while also humorously depicting Sun Wukong's impatience and helplessness, eliciting laughter from the audience. The final significant appearance of the theme song takes place during the climax of the film when Jiang Liu'er, in an attempt to save the Great Sage, becomes trapped under a pile of rocks. At 1 hour, 16 minutes, and 22 seconds into the film, the theme song "Tomorrow" is introduced with a deep male vocal humming. The music becomes slow and heavy, expressing the Great Sage's sorrow and anger as he closes his eyes and, with a heavy heart, picks up the "Great Sage doll" and hands it to Jiang Liu'er. These selected scenes demonstrate how the theme song "Tomorrow" is intricately woven into the film, enhancing the emotional impact and effectively conveying the characters' feelings and the progression of the story.

The film "Big Fish and Begonia" utilizes the variation of melody and rhythm to connect the development of the story, while the use of ethnic music adds a touch of ancient charm to the work. The film opens with the overture "Tsubaki's Dream," which is primarily performed on the guzheng (a traditional Chinese zither). With the introduction of flowing water sounds, the guzheng gradually enters, accompanied by other instruments such as the violin and piano. This enriches the rhythmic layers of the entire scene and creates a more distant artistic conception. Additionally, the combination of Chinese and Western ethnic instruments infuses the work with fresh vitality. When Tsubaki's dreams that Kun has finally grown up and they dance together, the "Tsubaki's Dream" resurfaces. In this scene, the guzheng remains the main instrument with orchestral accompaniment. Through the use of scene music, the piece expresses Tsubaki's affection for Kun and conveys the beauty and hope she places in him. As the scene music for the female protagonist, the "Tsubaki's Dream" not only endows Tsubaki's with a kind-hearted character through music but also shapes her gentle and beautiful persona.



The xun is the oldest closed-end wind instrument in China. It appears as a human artifact in "Big Fish and Begonia," serving not only as an important symbol representing pure emotions and reminiscence but also playing a significant role in the film's soundtrack through solo performances. In the animation, there are four scenes featuring the xun being played. The first scene shows the human Kun playing the xun while playing with his sister, creating a lively and cheerful atmosphere. The second scene depicts Tsubaki transforming into a fish and traveling to the human world. At night, Kun, now a human, plays the xun on a small boat, complementing the turbulent sea to evoke a sense of distant simplicity. The third scene occurs when Kun sacrifices himself to save Tsubaki from being trapped in a net and falls into a whirlpool. After Tsubaki finds Kun's lifeless body at the bottom of the sea and brings the xun back to her world, she plays it near a stone lion, intensifying the portrayal of her Internal nostalgia and sadness. The fourth scene shows Tsubaki and Qiu finding the unconscious Kun after being abandoned by Tsubaki's mother. In an attempt to wake him up, Tsubaki plays the xun, and the emotions seamlessly transition and connect through the sound of the instrument. The xun's natural and harmonious tones create a profound and mournful atmosphere. The sound resonates on a small boat on the river, accompanied by moonlight, creating a mysterious and elegant ambiance. Especially after the owner of the xun passes away, when the simple melody resurfaces, the faint sense of sorrow quickly resonates with the audience, evoking a deep emotional response.

### **5.1.3 Editing language: complex and varied techniques to satisfy an all-ages audience**

Editing is based on the main idea of the film, the lens for organic articulation, combination, adjustment and modification, prompting the entire film to achieve a fast-paced, structured, vivid and fluent language, and to deepen the theme, highlighting the

character has a positive role. In the animation films studied in this paper, the complexity of the editing language makes the films picture and plot development produce a unique charm.

Continuity editing is the technique of seamlessly combining multiple related visual elements to create a coherent narrative or scene. In the film "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" the cinematography design during the scene where Ne Zha and Ao Bing play shuttlecock utilizes continuity editing. The filmmakers emphasize the "shuttlecock" being passed between the two characters, which, although a game object, represents trust for Ne Zha. At the beginning of the film, the unfinished shuttlecock game between Ne Zha and Lady Yin and the regret of not playing shuttlecock with Li Jing at the end express the significance of the shuttlecock. The filmmakers employ slow-motion and progressive elevation in the camera movement to depict the shuttlecock's movement during its transmission. This technique is commonly used to slow down the motion of fast-moving objects, creating a relative stillness when compared to other objects in the frame. Through this cinematographic design, the film portrays the shuttlecock kicked by Ne Zha as extremely fast and powerful, rarely caught by others, but Ao Bing manages to catch it using a gentle approach to overcome strength. Furthermore, the shuttlecock, as depicted through the camera movement, becomes a tangible representation of trust, friendship, and destiny, symbolizing the delivery of these elements. The swift movement also signifies that their story will unfold intensely thereafter.



Figure 5.8 The transport mirror of Nezha and Ao Bing playing shuttlecock

Source: Yang, 2019

Fast-paced editing involves rapidly switching between different visual elements to create a tense, intense, or dramatic effect, providing viewers with a visually overwhelming experience in animation films. In "New Gods: Yang Jian," during the scene where Chen Xiang and his master Shen Gongbao attempt to steal the lotus lampshade from the Fanghu Lighthouse and engage in a battle with the Great Sage, Mo Liqing, the filmmakers employ fast-paced editing techniques. Behind the close-up shots of each character's moves, the filmmakers insert panoramic shots of the surrounding scene being destroyed, allowing the audience to directly perceive the immense power and destructive force of their respective techniques on a visual level. In "Legend of Deification" when Xiao Jiu ventures to the Youdu Mountain and encounters the God of Marriage, King Zhou, and releases the Nine-Tailed Fox within her, an intense chase ensues. The filmmakers create a sense of escalating pressure by rapidly switching

between scenes of the surrounding forest, mountains, and rocks, along with the relentless pursuit of the Nine-Tailed Fox. Towards the climax of the battle, when Xiao Jiu is captured by the Nine-Tailed Fox, a montage is incorporated. Xiao Jiu is shown wearing a red wedding dress, reaching up to remove her red headscarf, symbolizing her regaining the memories of her human form as Su Daji.

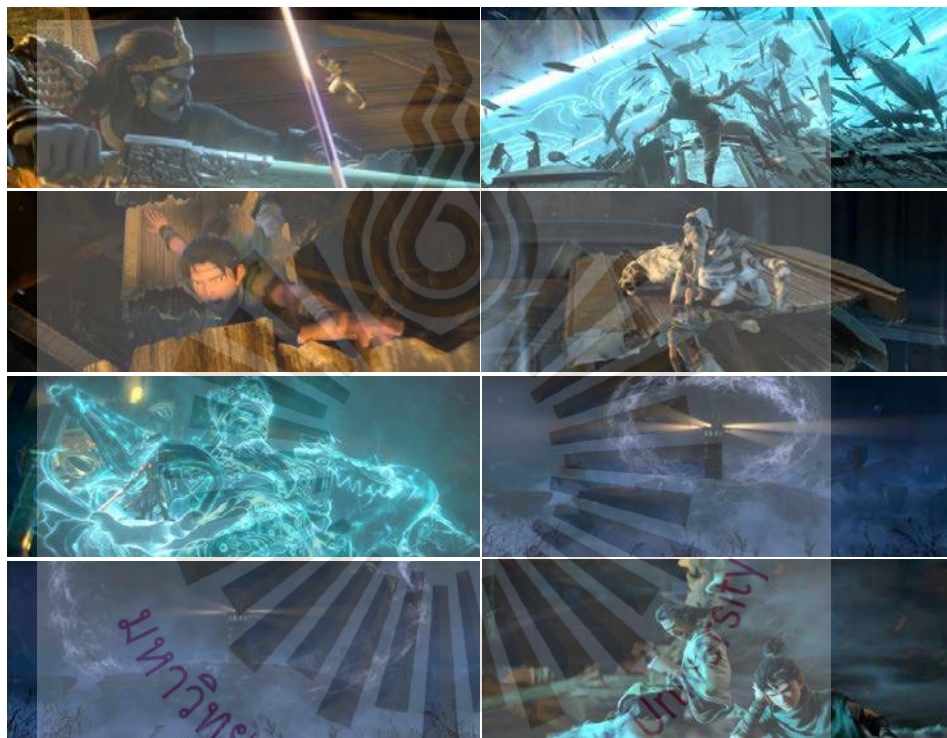


Figure 5.9 Shot of Chenxiang and battling with the Growing Heavenly King Mo

Liqing

Source: Zhao, 2022

Furthermore, the use of parallel montage editing adds a unique expressive power to the unfolding of the film's plot. In "Monkey King: Hero Is Back," from 58:50 to 61:10, when the Chaotic Demon King kidnaps a little girl, parallel montage is employed. While the camera shows Sun Wukong falling into the water, the focus shifts to Jiang Liu'er, who is searching desperately for the little girl. These two storylines are presented simultaneously to the audience, creating a meaningful and contrasting effect. On one

hand, there is the frustrated and disheartened Sun Wukong, unable to break free from the constraints of the magic seal. On the other hand, there is the brave and fearless Jiang Liu'er, undeterred by hardships. In this scene, the film once again utilizes the combination of parallel and contrasting elements in montage storytelling to depict the plot. In "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" the filmmakers employ parallel montage to divide the main storyline into two parts. On one side, there is Ne Zha's rebellious journey from childhood to maturity, and on the other side, there is Ao Bing's story of shouldering the heavy responsibility of his family and becoming an enemy of the demonic forces. These two characters arcs unfold simultaneously, providing a coherent and comprehensive description of the film.

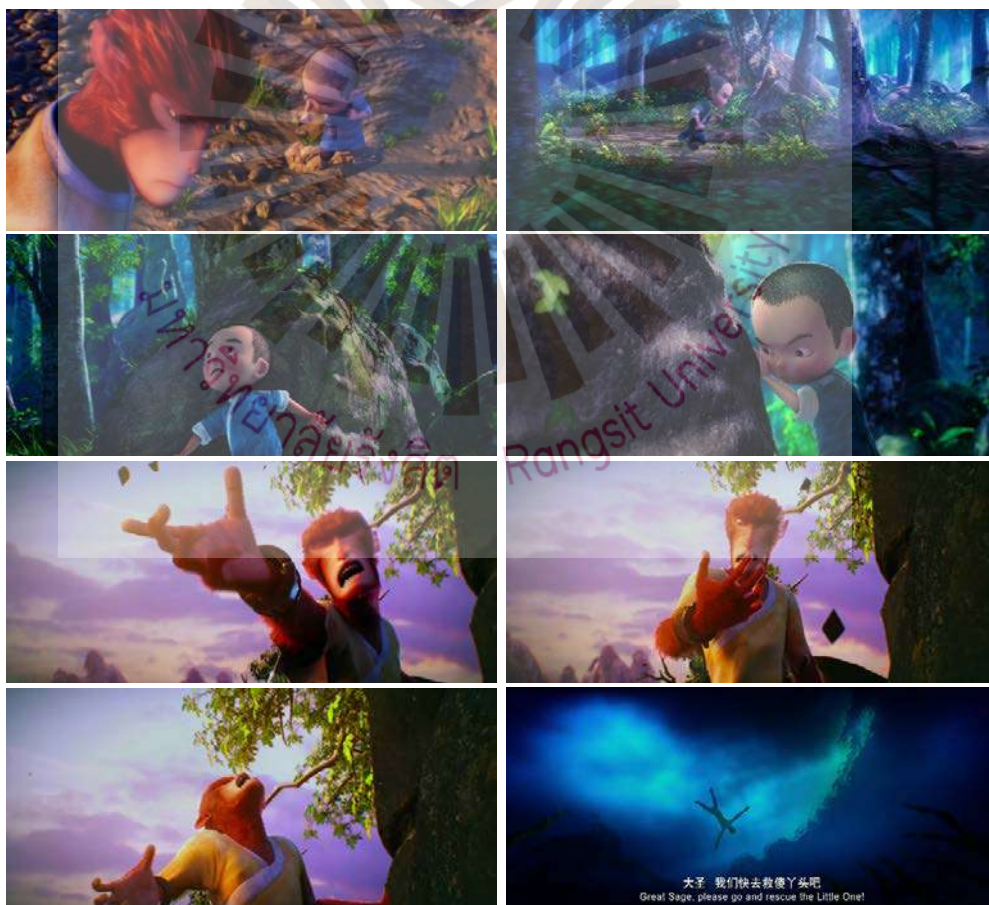


Figure 5.10 Two parallel montage spinoffs of Jiang Liu'er and the Monkey King

Source: Tian, 2015

#### 5.1.4 Film Language Summary

1) Image language: highlighting the combination of red "Chinese-style" aesthetics and the Children Images, In Chinese new generation animation films, the use of red as a key color has become one of the characteristics of the "Chinese style". The main characters of *Big Fish and Begonia* and *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* are dressed in red, symbolizing the "vitality of life", "resistance and protection", and "justice". The main character of both works is dressed in red, symbolizing "vitality of life" and "resistance and protection". In *Monkey King Hero Back*, the red cloak of the Great Sage, Sun Wukong, who awakens the magic power of Jiang Liuel, also has the connotation of "guardianship". In *Legend of Deification*, the color red is also applied to the evil side - the nine-tailed fox demon, fully embodying the dual attributes of red, both good and evil. Therefore, the prosperity of the color red comes from the fact that the color itself has countless possibilities of interpretation. In Chinese new generation animation films, through the use of the Chinese red color and Chinese elemental motifs, it highlights the cultural qualities of the nation and the country. This kind of expression not only lets the audience feel the unique charm of Chinese culture, but also integrates with the destiny of the children's characters, using color to highlight the changes in their character and fate. Such image language makes the children's images more distinctive and characteristic, and increases the audience's sense of identification with the characters.

2) Sound language: multiple soundscapes combining reality and complexity in the portrayal of children, Chinese new generation animation films utilize multiple sound effects combining reality and reality, using traditional Chinese instruments such as the erhu and pipa to highlight the complexity of the Internal world of the children's characters. Different music creates different atmospheres and shows

the transformation of the characters' psychological states, which together with the images provide the audience with the best visual and audio effects of the films. The use of sound effects makes the characters more three-dimensional, increases the emotional level of the characters, and allows the audience to better understand and feel the Internal world of the characters. In addition, through the use of Chinese style music lyricism, these films integrate the audience into the Internal world of the children's characters, enhancing emotional resonance and making the audience more engaged and feel the emotions of the story.

3) Editing language: complex and varied techniques to satisfy an all-ages audience, Chinese new generation animation films use continuous editing and montage editing to make the overall picture smooth and gorgeous, and at the same time give full play to the dreamy scenes of animation films. The variety of editing techniques used in animation films makes the story line even bigger. Even the supporting characters have enough subplots in the films to support the background of the characters' stories, and are no longer the single tool people. The supporting characters' subplots, instead of overpowering the main characters, complement the main characters' plots, making the characterization more realistic and flesh-and-blood. And, editing by alternating reality and fiction, these films show the complex and changing environment, plot, and changes in the fate and character of the characters. This editing technique increases the complexity of the story and the watchability of the picture, and satisfies the viewing needs of an all-age audience.

## 5.2 Film narrative

### 5.2.1 Narrative structure

Narrative structure is the backbone and framework of animation film production, as well as the sequence and techniques used to tell the story. Through the analysis of the narrative structure of a film, viewers can clearly identify the general patterns and storytelling methods employed. This aids in a better understanding of the creative approach and overall patterns of Chinese new generation of animation films. The narrative structure of a film can be categorized into dramatic, novelistic, and prose types. Among these, the majority of animation films exhibit a dramatic structure, which includes linear structure, non-linear structure, and three-act structure.

#### 5.2.1.1 Showing the fate of characters in a linear narrative

A linear narrative is a type of storytelling that unfolds chronologically and causally, presenting a coherent story line from beginning to end (Smith & Johnson, 2019).

In linear narration, the story unfolds in chronological order, with each event or plot having a clear beginning and end. The progression of the story is logical and coherent. Linear narration typically includes elements such as exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, and resolution (Brown & Davis, 2020). The exposition serves to capture the audience's interest and initiate the story's development. The inciting incident is the trigger point of the story, leading to the main conflict and problem. The rising action constitutes the main part of the story, showcasing the progression of events and the growth of characters. The climax represents the highest point of tension,



where the conflict reaches its most intense moment. The resolution is the concluding part of the story, where the conflict is resolved and the story's conclusion is provided (Johnson & Thompson, 2021). Linear narration is the most common and traditional narrative approach, applicable to various story formats, including novels, films, and plays. It effectively presents the development of the story and the transformation of characters, enabling the audience to better comprehend and follow the plot. Linear narration also aids in constructing a compact story structure, making the narrative more engaging and captivating.

In the film "Monkey King Hero Back," the narrative follows a linear structure with a clear cause-and-effect progression. The story begins with a storyteller introducing the tale of the Monkey King's rebellion in Heaven, and then proceeds to depict the upbringing of Jiang Liu'er by the wandering monk in chronological order. The turning point of the story occurs when the village is attacked by demons who kidnap young girls. After rescuing a foolish girl, Jiang Liu'er coincidentally saves the imprisoned Monkey King while on a journey to find his master. As the story unfolds, the foolish girl is once again captured by the demons, leading to the climax of the film. Jiang Liu'er, disregarding his own safety, bravely rescues the girl, and in the process, helps the Monkey King regain his lost self-awareness. This culminates in the Monkey King's rebirth in flames, where he uses his own power to break free from the seal and subdue the demons, ultimately rescuing the children. The linear narrative structure of the film effectively presents a clear cause-and-effect progression, providing a simple and coherent storytelling framework. Additionally, the plot development incorporates intricate and emotionally engaging elements to portray the characters, enhancing the narrative tension. For instance, the initial coldness and aversion of the Monkey King towards Jiang Liu'er gradually soften, leading to a sense of benevolence. Through Jiang Liu'er's persistent questioning, the Monkey King recalls his past glory and his original

intentions. In a midnight conversation, Jiang Liu'er's statement, "The Monkey King is just asleep," prompts the Monkey King to search for his true self, evoking vivid illusions in the water and reigniting his former bravery. The progression of the plot unfolds step by step, with a clear and coherent structure that is easily comprehensible and relatable, evoking a strong emotional resonance and connection with the audience.



Figure 5.11 Beginning, Development, Climax and End of monkey king hero back

Source: Tian, 2015

The narrative text of the animation film "Legend of Deification" clearly demonstrates the application of a linear cause-and-effect narrative structure. In the first act, Jiang Ziya leads an army to overthrow King Zhou but discovers the innocent soul of Xiao Jiu within the Nine-Tailed Fox when attempting to kill it. Due to Xiao Jiu's inherent kindness, she escapes unharmed but loses her memory and is banished to the mortal realm, thereby being separated from her original habitat and living environment.

During her exile, Xiao Jiu faces rejection and persecution from humans and fox hunters, leading her to constantly doubt her past actions and choices. In the second act, Xiao Jiu encounters Jiang Ziya at a tavern and, in order to obtain a map to Mount Youdu, embarks on a journey with him to uncover the truth. Throughout their quest, they encounter obstacles from King Zhou, spirits, and the Nine-Tailed Fox, among others, who try to impede their progress. In the third act, with the help of Jiang Ziya, Xiao Jiu learns the truth and confronts their master, challenging him by utilizing her own powers to destroy the Void Palace. In this process, Jiang Ziya's hair turns white, symbolizing his own divine transformation. The arrangement of these narrative texts clearly illustrates the specific application of a linear cause-and-effect narrative structure in the film.



Figure 5.12 Beginning, Development, Climax and Ending of Legend of Deification

Source: Cheng & Li, 2020

The linear narrative structure of the Sandalwood subplot in "New Gods: Yang Jian" is even simpler. It primarily follows the sequence of events: growing up in the Jinxia Cave (beginning) → meeting Wanluo and Shengongbao (development) → "killing the master and escaping" (development) → reuniting with Yang Jian and resolving misunderstandings (development) → splitting the mountain to save her mother (climax) → rescuing her mother (ending).



Figure 5.13 About the Chenxiang Branch in New Gods: Yang Jian

Source: Zhao, 2022

The story begins with Sandalwood being sent by her brother, Yang Jian, to their master, Yuding Zhenren, who seals Sandalwood's sister, Yang Chan, beneath Mount Hua. Due to Yuding Zhenren's prohibition on Yang Jian visiting Sandalwood before she reaches adulthood, Sandalwood faces a difficult situation in the Jinxia Cave, where her master's teachings involve constant scolding and no opportunity for cultivation (beginning). With the help of Shengongbao, Sandalwood escapes from the

Jinxia Cave and follows his instructions to repair the Lotus Lamp and save their mother trapped beneath Mount Hua (development). While repairing the Lotus Lamp, she meets her uncle, Yang Jian. Later, at Granny Wanluo's place, Sandalwood learns about her true identity and resolves the misunderstandings with her uncle. She then travels with her uncle, Yang Jian, exploring the mortal realm and learning magic, while preparing to rescue their mother at Mount Hua (development). At Mount Hua, Yang Jian and Sandalwood are ambushed and trapped in the Taiji Diagram. Within the diagram, they realize that their master, Yuding Zhenren, sealed the mountain for his own selfish desires and that the Xuan Niao cannot be suppressed any longer. Together, they defeat the three brothers of the Mo family and Yuding Zhenren (climax). Finally, Sandalwood takes up the Opening Heaven Axe and splits Mount Hua, releasing the Xuan Niao. She catches a glimpse of her mother for the first and last time before the film ends in flickering flames (ending).

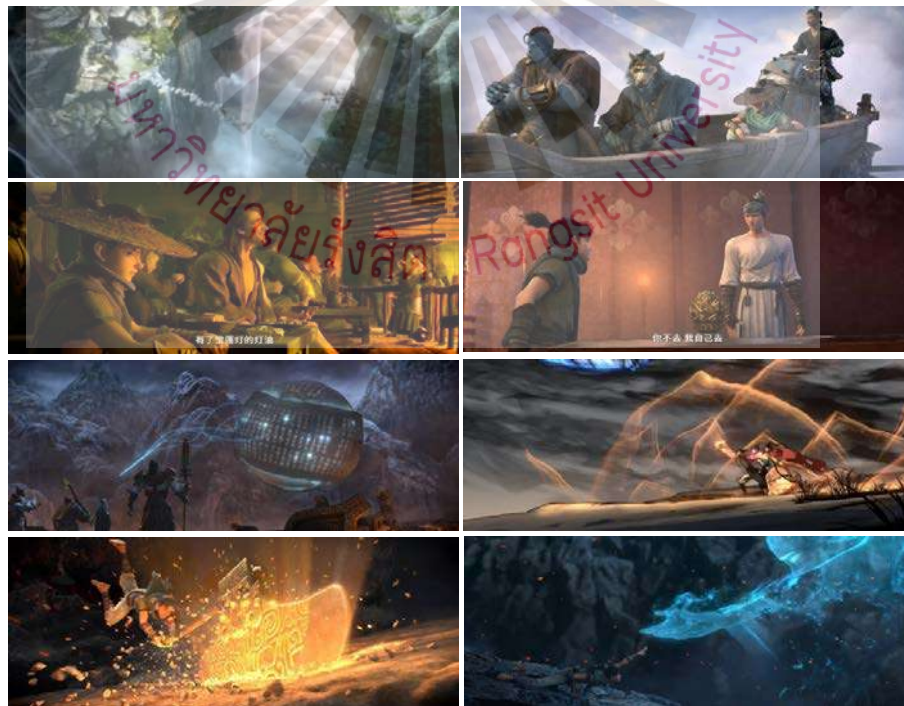


Figure 5.14 The Beginning, Development, Climax and End of New Gods: Yang Jian

Source: Zhao, 2022

In the animation film "Deep Sea," the filmmakers chose a linear narrative approach, which can be divided into: dream (beginning), reality (development), between dream and reality (climax), and reality (ending).



Figure 5.15 Plotline in "Deep Sea"

Source: Tian, 2023

In the film "Deep Sea," the narrative structure is constructed around the dream thread, which supplements and supports the reality thread, showcasing the complexity and multi-dimensional storytelling of the films. In the opening scene, the protagonist, Shenxiu, chases after a sea nymph in a dream, attempting to capture the image of his mother. Subsequently, in reality, Shenxiu, along with his father, stepmother, and younger brother, embark on a vacation cruise. While leaning over the ship's railing, Shenxiu sees a sea nymph in the ocean and mistakenly believes it to be his mother, leading to an accidental fall into the sea. In the second act, Shenxiu ventures with the clown Nanhe in the dream world of the Deep Sea Hotel, where he regains his smile with Nanhe's assistance. The climax occurs in the third act when Shenxiu breaks through the

Eye of the Deep Sea, reaching the boundary between the dream and reality. Floating upward represents awakening to reality, while sinking downward symbolizes slipping into the depths of unconsciousness and death. Finally, in the concluding part of the film, Shenxiu opens his eyes on a hospital bed in reality. The utilization of this narrative structure enhances the development of the story, injecting freshness and a sense of conflicting emotions, and intensifying the story's tension, making it more "dreamlike" in nature.

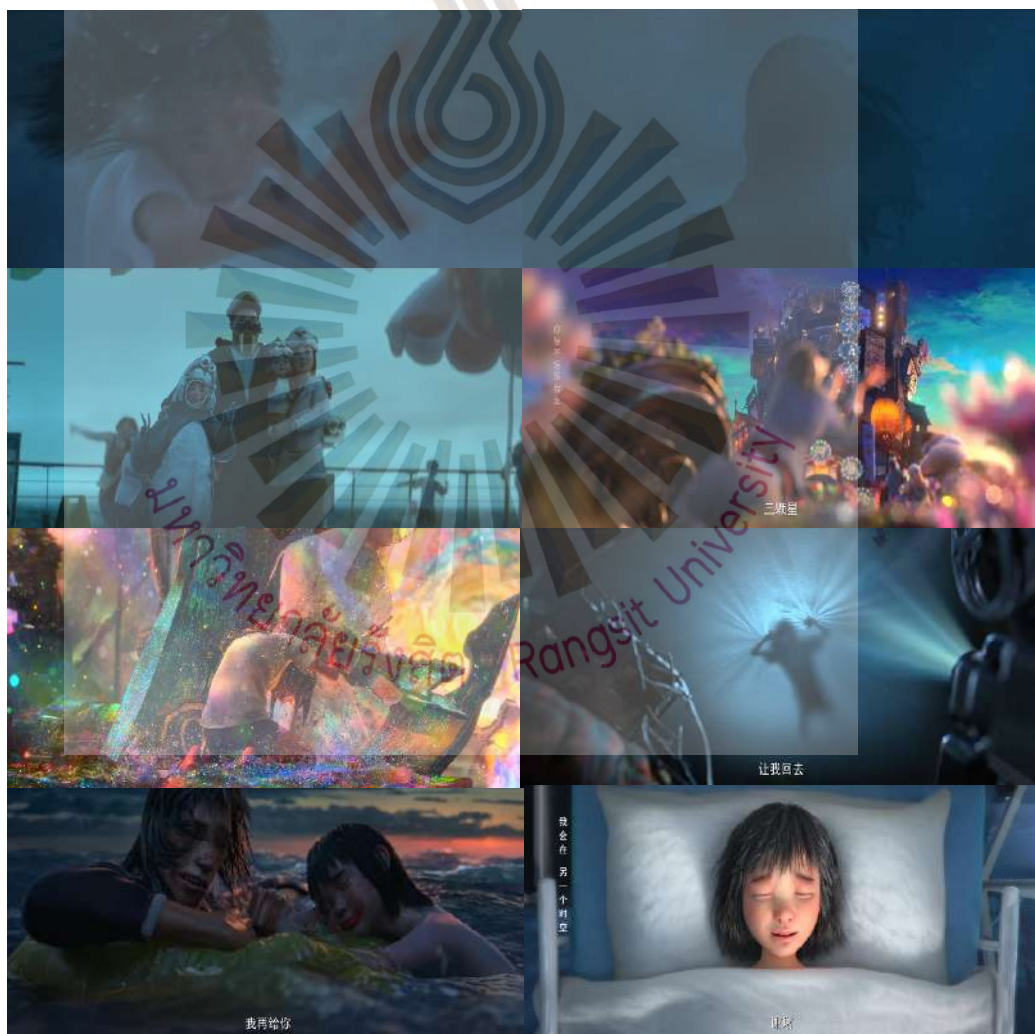


Figure 5.16 Beginning, Development, Climax, and End of Deep Sea

Source: Tian, 2023

### 5.2.1.2 Three-act narrative structure

The animation film "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" does not follow a linear narrative structure based on dramatic conflicts, but instead adopts the Hollywood-style "three-act structure" proposed by Syd Field, also known as the "Setup-Conflict-Resolution" dramatic linear narrative structure.

The three-act structure of the animation film "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" can be analyzed as follows: In the exposition phase, Ne Zha, originally destined to be the "Spirit Pearl," has his identity swapped with the demon child due to the jealousy of Shen Gongbao. Shen Gongbao cunningly steals the Spirit Pearl and the elixir of life from Taiyi Zhenren, resulting in Ne Zha being born as a demon. Despite his innate talents, Ne Zha exhibits rebellious behavior and a violent temperament. Due to the difference in their birth durations, Ne Zha becomes infuriated when the townspeople mistake him for a monster. However, deep down, he longs for acceptance. On the other hand, his parents, Li Jing and Lady Yin, are the guardians of Chen Tang Pass, protecting the people from demons. This contradiction forces Li Jing and Lady Yin to confine Ne Zha within their residence, shielding the townspeople from fear. They also hope to help Ne Zha prove himself and achieve success. Meanwhile, Shen Gongbao colludes with the Dragon King, infusing the stolen Spirit Pearl into a dragon egg, which hatches into Ao Bing. The dragon clan's desire to break free from the underwater prison is now placed upon Ao Bing. During the exposition phase, the film establishes the adapted background and multiple "binary oppositions," making the character design and story logic of the new Ne Zha believable. It sets up the conflict between the Spirit Pearl and the demon child, hinting at their unity as the Chaos Pearl and foreshadowing their reunion when facing Heavenly Thunder. Simultaneously, the filmmakers also delve into the character development during the exposition phase, providing insights into the



characters' Internal thoughts and planting clues about their respective positions. At the 22-minute and 30-second mark, when Ne Zha sneaks out to play and almost kills someone due to being mocked, Li Jing, Lady Yin, and Taiyi Zhenren realize that their restrictive and oppressive approach towards Ne Zha is wrong. As a result, Taiyi Zhenren takes Ne Zha as his disciple and they embark on a journey to the Mountain and River Map to cultivate. They hope to guide Ne Zha and make him a useful person. With this, the exposition work of the entire film is completed.



Figure 5.17 Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, Act I Padding. The "dichotomy" setup of the blue "Spirit Pearl" Ao Beng and the red "Magic Pill" Nezha

Source: Yang, 2019

In the second stage of the conflict development, starting from the moment Nezha is taken in by Taiyi Zhenren, to Nezha's growth and attempts to prove himself by defeating Hai Yecha, encountering Ao Bing and forming a friendship, to being misunderstood by the people and Li Jing organizing a birthday banquet to clear Nezha's name, where Nezha invites his only friend, Ao Bing, to attend. Finally, on the day of the birthday banquet, Nezha discovers his demonic origin and leaves in anger. During this time, there are four conflicting forces that collide: Nezha versus the people, Nezha

versus himself, Nezha's family burden represented by Li Jing, and Ao Bing's self-exploration. Nezha, who has left, is filled with hatred. In the process of conflict development, the key element is the mount given by Taiyi Zhenren, which shows Nezha that his father was willing to sacrifice his life to save him. This realization instantly awakens Nezha's understanding that his parents truly love him. The conflict is resolved by the power of familial love after it reaches its climax, leading to Nezha's true heroism and self-awareness. He returns to Chentang Pass to save the people. Thus, the second stage of conflict development is completed.



Figure 5.18 Conflict in Act II of Ne Zha's Descent of the Demon Child. Nezha comes to his senses and returns to Chentang Pass to save the people.

Source: Yang, 2019

In the final stage of the film, all conflicts are resolved. During this stage, the story reaches its climax as Nezha returns and joins forces with the others to confront Shen Gongbao and Ao Bing's master-disciple duo. In this process, Nezha restrains his internal demons and continues to seal half of his powers with the Qiankun Circle. He uses reason to struggle against his own demonic nature, accepting his different identity and challenging both choice and fate. He tells Ao Bing, "My destiny is determined by

myself, not by heaven. Whether I am a demon or a god, it is up to me to decide." In the end, Nezha defeats Ao Bing but chooses not to kill him. Instead, he extends his hand in reconciliation. In the final resolution stage, Nezha first resolves the conflict regarding his self-awareness. Through his awakening, he overcomes the contradictions in his self-perception. Furthermore, during the confrontation, he defeats Ao Bing and Shen Gongbao, resolving the conflicts between the two families. Lastly, under Nezha's influence, Ao Bing has a sudden realization and joins forces with him to combat the heavenly thunder, resolving his own conflicts regarding self-identity. When Nezha saves everyone and the people kneel in gratitude for their saved souls, the conflict between Nezha and the people is also resolved. At this point, all conflicts throughout the film are resolved one by one through the confrontations, leading to a happy ending where harmony is restored.



Figure 5.19 Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, Act III Resolving the Conflict

Source: Yang, 2019

The narrative structure of "Big Fish and Begonia" employs a three-act structure, intertwining memories, dreams, and reality to present an imaginative and emotionally charged story. The film can be divided into three main parts: exposition, conflict, and resolution.

In the exposition, the first act of the film, the audience gradually learns about the origins of the film's world and the childhood spent by Tsubaki's and Qiu in the underwater realm through Tsubaki's 's memories and voiceover narration. This section emphasizes the friendship between Tsubaki's and Qiu, as well as the familial bonds in their homeland. Through Tsubaki's 's perspective, the film presents a mysterious and beautiful underwater world. Next, the film transitions to Tsubaki's 's seven-day journey to the human world when she turns sixteen. Leaving her homeland, Tsubaki's transforms into a red dolphin and explores the human realm. She encounters various unfamiliar people and experiences, observing the changes in the human world. However, on her way back, Tsubaki's gets trapped in a fishing net, and Kun, disregarding his own safety, rescues her but remains trapped underwater due to lack of oxygen. This part highlights Tsubaki's 's exploration and adaptation in the human world, as well as her motivation to revive Kun.



Figure 5.20 Act I padding of Big Fish and Begonia

Source: Liang & Zhang, 2016

In the conflict, the second act of the film, Tsubaki's makes a deal with the Soul Keeper to revive Kun, unaware of the frequent disasters occurring in her hometown. The villagers discover that the abnormal climate is caused by Kun and decide to pursue and kill him. Tsubaki's realizes that Kun's existence is causing the

collapse of the underwater world. Faced with the villagers' grief and the chaos in her homeland, Tsubaki's chooses to take responsibility and transforms into a sea Begonia tree, blocking the hole in the sky.



Figure 5.21 Tsubaki disguised as a begonia tree

Source: Liang & Zhang, 2016

In the resolution, the third act of the film, with the self-sacrifice of Qiu, Tsubaki's and Kun return to the human world together. Tsubaki's reflects on her experiences through voiceover narration and, facing her Internal fears and pain, she takes on her responsibilities once again, growing into a strong and courageous individual. This part emphasizes Tsubaki's 's personal growth and self-redemption, as well as her contemplation and acceptance of the past and the future. Overall, the narrative structure of "Big Fish and Begonia" weaves together childhood memories, adventurous journeys, and personal growth through a three-act structure. It tells a captivating story about emotions, friendship, and maturation in a unique and engaging manner. This narrative structure not only enhances the audience's engagement with the story but also showcases the protagonist Tsubaki's 's Internal world and her journey of growth.



Figure 5.22 Big Fish and Begonia Act III Resolution, Tsubaki and Kun returned to the human world together

Source: Liang & Zhang, 2016

### 5.2.1.3 Film Narrative Summary

(1) linear narrative: A linear narrative showing the fate of the characters. In the new generation of Chinese animation films, many works present a linear narrative to depict the cause-and-effect relationship of the story. Among these animation films, those featuring child characters as protagonists more prominently apply a linear narrative structure, which makes the storytelling clear, structurally simple and straightforward. This approach aids in showcasing the changes in plot and the growth of child characters, making it easier for viewers to understand, accept, and resonate with the plot developments in the film, evoking a strong emotional resonance. Simultaneously, in the process of plot development, the use of intricate and touching storylines to portray child characters enhances the narrative tension. The linear narrative in these works presents the development of the story and the transformation of child characters in a concise and clear manner, enabling the audience to better comprehend and follow the plot. On the other hand, in animation films where child characters serve as supporting or auxiliary roles, the narrative clues related to children are simpler, and a linear narrative constructs a compact story structure. This approach makes the subplot

more attractive and engaging, injecting freshness and a sense of conflicting emotions, thereby enhancing the story tension of the film and giving it a "dreamlike" characteristic.

(2) Three-act narrative structure: The application of the three-act structure in Chinese new generation animation films enriches the sense of depth in child characters. The three-act visual narrative structure concentrates the fascinating conflicts arising from "binary opposition" in each small plot. As the story progresses in time, the plot is combined based on causal connections. This plot construction promotes story development and drives visual storytelling, allowing for a focused exploration of deep thematic cores. This efficiently captivates the audience without adding to their "reception cost." This approach represents an organic absorption of foreign creative methods and a rejuvenation of traditional Chinese dramatic structures. In many Chinese new generation animation films, child characters are designed with a growth-oriented destiny. Through the three-act structure, the narrative intertwines childhood memories, adventurous journeys, and growth, presenting a captivating story about emotions, friendship, and personal development. This narrative structure not only enhances the audience's engagement with the story but also showcases the inner world and growth process of the child characters.

### **5.3 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter analyzes the rhetoric of children's images in Chinese new-generation animation films through both film language and film narrative.

1) Film language: The film language of portraying children in Chinese new generation of animation films, Chinese new generation animation films enrich the portrayal of child characters and enhance the expression of their inner world and the

story through the use of image language, sound language, editing language, and other techniques. These films not only showcase the unique charm of Chinese culture but also enable the audience to better understand and experience the growth and inner world of the child characters, thereby enhancing emotional resonance and engagement.

2) Film narrative: Narrative structures for portraying children in new generation Chinese animation films, Chinese new generation animation films showcase continuous innovation and development in narrative structure by employing various editing techniques and rhythms. They incorporate both traditional linear structures and complex three-act structures. Through a comparative analysis of the narrative structures in Chinese new generation animation films, we can observe the significant role of "linear narrative" in the formulaic creation of animation films. The plot arrangement in linear structures follows certain regularities, making it easier for the audience to understand and engage with the narrative style, thus evoking their emotions. The story unfolds chronologically, gradually depicting character growth, and ultimately leading to a satisfying conclusion. Chinese new generation animation films explore and innovate within these regularities, with different starting points for innovation and storytelling. When viewers watch these films, they experience emotional resonance, resulting in the desired effect.

In conclusion, this study conducted an in-depth analysis of the rhetorical portrayal of child characters in Chinese new generation animation films using a case study approach. The findings of this research are of significant importance for understanding the characteristics and development trends of Chinese new generation animation films. It provides a theoretical framework for the study of child characters in animation films and offers valuable insights and research cases for understanding the portrayal and expression of child characters in films.



## Chapter 6

### Conclusion And Recommendations

The research is the rhetoric of children's images in Chinese new-generation animation films aims to 1) To study the children's images in Chinese new-generation animation films and 2) To study the rhetoric of Chinese new generation animation films. This is qualitative research by using textual analysis from six Chinese animation films released between 2015 - 2023, with box office revenues exceeding 500 million RMB. The selected films are as follows:

- 1) Monkey king hero back
- 2) Big Fish and Begonia
- 3) Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child
- 4) Legend of Deification
- 5) New Gods: Yang Jian
- 6) Deep Sea

#### 6.1 Conclusion

On the basis of defining the scope of application of the theory of "children's image" in animation films, this paper carries out a more in-depth study on the rhetoric of the new generation of Chinese animation films.

Part 1: Children's images in Chinese new generation animation films

The external image of children in the new generation of Chinese animation films

1) External image design that highlights the character's personality: In terms of external image design, through the external image design that highlights the character's personality, each image of a child has unique external features and clothing styles, so that visually it can be immediately recognized and remembered by the audience.

2) Head-to-body ratio and five senses design contrast sense of the external image: It is a major feature of children's images in Chinese new generation animation films. Through exaggerated head-to-body ratios and rich and varied facial expressions, the personalities and emotions of children's images are vividly displayed.

3) External image design focuses on Chinese elements: Chinese elements are also a highlight of children's images in new generation Chinese animation films. Through the treatment of clothing, hairstyle, accessories and other details, the children's images are integrated with traditional Chinese culture, showing unique national characteristics and cultural heritage.

The internal image of children in the new generation of Chinese animation films

1) Internal image setting of the children with emphasis on character defects: The setting of children with character flaws makes the characters more three-dimensional and interesting. Each child character has his or her own unique personality traits, some are innocent and cute, some are witty and smart, some are timid and cowardly, and some are brave and strong. These character flaws make the children more realistic and believable, and the audience can better empathize with them.

2) The internal image of children in conflict with adults: Children's images often face pressures and challenges from the adult world, they need to face all kinds of difficulties and trials, and through conflicts and confrontations with adults, children's images gradually grow and mature.

3) The internal image of the children transformed in growth: The children's image undergoes various changes and transformations in the process of growing up, from innocence to understanding and maturity, from confusion and uneasiness to firmness and self-confidence, and this metamorphosis makes the children's image more contagious and malleable, which is a major highlight in Chinese new generation of animation films.

#### Part 2: The rhetoric of Chinese new generation animation films

1) Film language: The film language of portraying children in Chinese new generation of animation films, Chinese new generation animation films enrich the portrayal of child characters and enhance the expression of their inner world and the story through the use of image language, sound language, editing language, and other techniques. These films not only showcase the unique charm of Chinese culture but also enable the audience to better understand and experience the growth and inner world of the child characters, thereby enhancing emotional resonance and engagement.

2) Film narrative: Narrative structures for portraying children in new generation Chinese animation films, Chinese new generation animation films showcase continuous innovation and development in narrative structure by employing various editing techniques and rhythms. They incorporate both traditional linear structures and complex three-act structures. Through a comparative analysis of the narrative structures

in Chinese new generation animation films, we can observe the significant role of "linear narrative" in the formulaic creation of animation films. The plot arrangement in linear structures follows certain regularities, making it easier for the audience to understand and engage with the narrative style, thus evoking their emotions. The story unfolds chronologically, gradually depicting character growth, and ultimately leading to a satisfying conclusion. Chinese new generation animation films explore and innovate within these regularities, with different starting points for innovation and storytelling. When viewers watch these films, they experience emotional resonance, resulting in the desired effect.

## 6.2 Discussion

The research result found that Chinese new generation of animation films, the internal image design of children's characters focuses on the transformation of children as they grow up. I think that the children portrayed in Chinese new generation of animation films are experiencing inner growth and transformation. They may gradually become brave and strong from an introverted and timid child. This inner growth and metamorphosis often occur in the process of facing difficulties and challenges, gradually overcoming fears and insecurities, and discovering one's own potential and value. This growth and metamorphosis make the child characters stronger inside, able to cope with all kinds of difficulties and challenges, and also allows the audience to see their inner growth and progress, empathize with them and feel the power of growth. This refers to Buckingham (1996) explains that the internal image of children in films is usually expressed as children's character traits. In established studies and works, on the one hand, the internal image of children in films may present typical children's traits such as innocence, enthusiasm, kindness, sensitivity, and mischievousness; on the other hand, the internal image of children's roles in films may also show beyond-age qualities such

as maturity, independence, resilience, and wisdom, in order to emphasize their specific situational growth and change. This internal image connects the story destiny of the child characters and usually reflects the director and screenwriter's deep thinking about social reality, cultural background and human concern.

The research result found that the focus of the rhetorical design of children's characters in the new generation of Chinese animated films lies in the films language. I think that in the image language: highlighting the combination of red "Chinese-style" aesthetics and the Children Images; Sound language: multiple soundscapes combining reality and complexity in the portrayal of children; and Editing language: complex and varied techniques catering to an all-ages audience. Sound language: multiple soundscapes combining reality and complexity in the portrayal of children. and Editing language: complex and varied techniques to satisfy an all-ages audience. The use of these three aspects enriches the children's images and increases the inner world of the characters and the expressiveness of the story. These films not only show the unique charm of Chinese culture, but also allow the audience to better understand and feel the growth and inner world of the children's characters, and enhance the audience's emotional resonance and sense of participation. This refers to Bordwell and Thompson (2017) explains that the rhetoric in film refers to the artistic techniques used by film directors and screenwriters to achieve specific goals and effects in the process of film creation and expression, through the conscious organization and processing of various audio-visual languages and skills. Film rhetoric enhances the expressive, persuasive, and infectious power of film works by consciously organizing and processing elements such as images, sounds, editing, and performance, providing audiences with rich aesthetic and cognitive experiences.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

With the development of the animation film industry, there has been a continuous evolution in rhetorical techniques within animation films. As a crucial component of animation films, the rhetorical construction of children's characters holds paramount importance for the dissemination impact of these films. This study, through an examination of the rhetorical strategies applied to children's characters in China's new-generation animation films, asserts that the portrayal of children's characters in animation films can be further enriched through diversified rhetorical techniques, thereby enhancing the modes of representation for these characters. Exploring a broader spectrum of rhetorical devices can involve the utilization of an array of colors and visual effects, as well as innovative sound design, all aimed at heightening the audience's perception and comprehension of the children's characters. Furthermore, filmmakers can strengthen interdisciplinary collaborations with other art forms, thereby expanding the boundaries of rhetorical construction for children's characters.

### **6.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

Although there is a considerable amount of research on animation films, there are still limitations in the study of children's images. In future research, there is research space for comparing the internal images of children in Chinese new-generation animation films with those of children in other historical periods in China, as well as comparing them with the film language of animation films in other countries. This can not only help explore the ways and meanings of Chinese children's images in films and their relationship with social and cultural backgrounds but also promote the development and international exchange of animation films.

## References

- Bartsch, A., & Schneider, F. M. (2018). The role of character development in narrative engagement: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 213.
- Baxter, J. (2008). The linear narrative of film: A study of film plot patterns. *Journal of Film Studies, 15*(2), 87-102.
- Bazalgette, C., & Staples, K. (1995). *Unshrinking the kids: Children's cinema and the family film*. In C. Bazalgette & D. Buckingham (Eds.), *In front of the children: Screen entertainment and young audiences* (pp. 29-48). London: British Film Institute.
- Bernstein, M. (2002). Ten tips for narrative construction. In M. Bernstein & D. Albers (Eds.), *Hypertext 2002: Proceedings of the 13th ACM Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia* (pp. 81-84). New York, NY: ACM Press.
- Bordwell, D. (2006). *The way Hollywood tells it: Story and style in modern movies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2008). *Film art: An introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2017). *Film art: An introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Branigan, E. (1992). *Narrative comprehension and film*. London, England: Routledge.
- Bremond, C. (1964). The logic of narrative possibility. *Critical Inquiry, 30*(4), 637-655.
- Brosch, T., Sander, D., & Scherer, K. R. (2007). *That baby caught my eye... attention capture by infant faces*. *Emotion, 7*(3), 685-689.
- Brown, S., & Davis, M. (2020). The Power of Linear Narrative in Contemporary Film: A Case Study of 'Moonlight'. *Cinema Studies Quarterly, 35*(4), 78-95.

### References (continued)

- Buckingham, D. (1996). *Moving images: Understanding children's emotional responses to television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Chatman, S. (1978). *Story and discourse: Narrative structure in fiction and film*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Chen, X. (2018). A Study on Film Photography Techniques and Visual Language. *Film Culture Research*, 4, 65-70.
- Chen, X., Rubin, K. H., & Li, B. (1995). Social and school adjustment of shy and aggressive children in China. *Development and Psychopathology*, 7(2), 337-349.
- Chen, Y., & Liu, R. (2019). A Study on the Rhetoric of Chinese Animation Films: A Case Study of "Big Fish and Begonia". *Modern Communication*, 41(11), 114-116.
- Chion, M. (2018). *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Currie, G. (1995). *Image and mind: Film, philosophy and cognitive science*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Dmytryk, E. (2016). *On film editing: An introduction to the art of film construction*. New York: Routledge.
- Field, S. (2005). *Screenplay: The foundations of screenwriting* (Revised ed.). New York, NY: Delta.
- Greenberg, H. (2011). *The digital condition: Class and culture in the information network*. London: Routledge.



### References (continued)

- Jiang, Y., & Huang, X. (2018). Analysis and Enlightenment of Children's Views in Domestic Children's Animation: A Case Study of the "Seventeen Years" Animated Film. *Contemporary Television*, (09), 91-93.
- Johnson, R., & Thompson, L. (2021). The Role of Linear Narrative in Contemporary Blockbuster Films. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 39(3), 123-140.
- Krcmar, M., & Kean, E. (2019). The role of character identification and character likability in narrative persuasion: A replication and extension. *Media Psychology*, 22(2), 307-328.
- Li, J. (2021). The representation of femininity in Chinese historical dramas: A case study of the TV series "Story of Yanxi Palace". *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 15(2), 169-185.
- Li, M. (2016). A Study on the Relationship between Film Editing and Visual Language. *Film Criticism*, 2, 45-49.
- Li, X., & Wu, Y. (2020). Chinese Animated Films as Cultural Export: A Case Study of "White Snake: Origins". In *Proceedings of the 2020 International Conference on Culture, Education, and Economic Development* (pp. 123-130).
- Liu, Y. (2017). The Evolution of Sound Films and Film Visual Language. *Art Review*, 3, 134-139.
- Lorenz, K. (1943). Die angeborenen Formen möglicher Erfahrung [The innate forms of potential experience]. *Zeitschrift für Tierpsychologie*, 5(2), 235-409.
- Misek, R. (2010). *Chromatic cinema: A history of screen color*. New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons.
- Nelson, T. (2011). *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Nolan, P. (2010). *Inception: The shooting script*. San Rafael, CA: Insight Editions.

### References (continued)

- Park, S. H., & Kim, S. H. (2019). The influence of animated movies on children's social skills: A case study of the movie Frozen. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 28(5), 1317-1326.
- Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. New York, NY: International Universities Press.
- Piotrowska, A. (2018). Children's cinema: Genre, gender and identity. *Journal of Children and Media*, 12(1), 1-17.
- Propp, V. (1928). *The morphology of the folktale*. Virginia: American Folklore Society.
- Rascaroli, L. (2009). *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Ribeiro, T., & Cardoso, A. (2019). The Role of Sound Design in Animated Films: A Case Study of Pixar Animation Studios. *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*, 1(1), 45-58.
- Rowling, J. K., & Chris, C. (2001). *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Shaffer, D. R., & Kipp, K. (2013). *Developmental psychology: Childhood and adolescence*. Cengage Learning.
- Sito, T. (2018). The Art of Animation Production: A Case Study of Studio Ghibli. *Animation Practice, Process and Production*, 8(2), 123-136.
- Smith, J. (2008). The three-act structure and universal story design: A study of film plot patterns. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 20(3), 123-135.
- Smith, J., & Johnson, E. (2019). Narrative Structure in Contemporary Cinema: A Comparative Analysis of Linear and Nonlinear Storytelling. *Journal of Film Studies*, 25(2), 45-62.

### References (continued)

- Sternberg, M. (1992). Telling in time (II): Chronology, teleology, narrativity. *Poetics Today*, 13(3), 463-541.
- Sun, L. (2018). The Role of Film Set and Lighting in Visual Language. *Art Research*, 5, 74-78.
- Tamborini, R., & Bowman, N. D. (2018). The role of character identification in media entertainment. *Media Psychology*, 21(3), 373-395.
- Tang, L. (2022). *B station, why the rise of national animation "new business card"?* Retrieved from <https://gongyi.cctv.com/2022/11/24/ARTIizdLIvvznrgoAp06CDNq221124.shtml>
- United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Vander, K. (2000). *Film and children: A historical and critical survey*. In I. R. Berson (Ed.), *Children and media: A global perspective* (pp. 19-36). London: Blackwell.
- Wang, H. (2019). The Diversity and Expressiveness of Film Visual Language. *Art Education Research*, 6, 21-25.
- Wang, L. (2019). Children's Characters in Chinese Animated Films: A Case Study of "Ne Zha". *Film Literature*, (12), 23-25.
- Wang, Z., Chen, X., & Li, W. (2023). Aesthetic Characteristics of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films. *Western Radio and Television*, (07), 5-7.
- You, J. (2021). *Research on the Transformation of the Visual Image of "Wukong" in Chinese Animated Films from the Perspective of Technological Aesthetics* (Master's thesis, Northwest University). Retrieved from <https://mall.cnki.net/magazine/article/CMFD/1022447301.nh.htm>
- Zacks, J. M. (2015). *Flicker: Your brain on movies*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

### References (continued)

- Zhang, J. (2015). Characteristics of Visual Language in the Silent Film Era. *Film Criticism, 1*, 34-38.
- Zhang, J. (2022). The Era Dilemma and Optimization Path of China's Animation Film Industry. *Film Review, (12)*, 109-112.
- Zhang, X. (2020). The Portrayal of Children in Chinese Animated Films: A Case Study of "Ne Zha". *Art Baijia, (11)*, 164-165.
- Zhao, C. (2020). Rhetorical Strategies and Their Influence in Chinese Animated Films: A Case Study of "White Snake". *Journal of Chinese Radio and Television, (1)*, 81-83.
- Zhao, L. (2017). A Study on the Application of Color in Film Visual Language. *Film Art, 2*, 98-102.



## Biography

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Name                 | Lingxi Zhang  |
| Date of birth        | August 10, 1994   |
| Place of birth       | Sichuan Province, China   |
| Education background | Neijiang Normal University<br>Bachelor of Fine Arts, 2018<br>Rangsit University<br>Master of Communication Arts in Film and<br>Television Writing and Directing, 2023 |
| Address              | Sichuan Province, China   |
| Email Address        | Zhanglingxi810@gmail.com  |

