

# Contemporary Expression and Narrative Strategies of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture in *Ne Zha 2*

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Promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Chinese culture is essential for enhancing China's cultural soft power. Taking *Ne Zha 2* as a case study, this paper employs case analysis, literature review, and questionnaire surveys to explore its contemporary expression and narrative strategies. The film integrates traditional cultural elements with digital technology, innovates audiovisual language, and presents a modern interpretation of Oriental aesthetics. Meanwhile, it reshapes mythological characters, adopts multi-threaded narrative structures, and incorporates contemporary values to strengthen emotional resonance among audiences. Through commercial intellectual property (IP) operation, the film also realizes transmedia storytelling and the widespread dissemination of traditional Chinese culture. This study summarizes the major approaches to the inheritance and development of excellent traditional Chinese culture and provides practical references for the future development of Chinese animated films in terms of cultural expression, narrative innovation, and IP operation.

*Keywords:* excellent traditional Chinese culture, contemporary expression, narrative strategies, *Ne Zha 2*

## Introduction

Ne Zha, a classic figure in Chinese mythology, has been widely recognized by the public since his appearance in literary works such as *Journey to the West* and *Investiture of the Gods*. Over the years, he has been repeatedly adapted in animated productions such as *The Legend of Ne Zha* and *Ne Zha Conquers the Dragon King*, becoming a shared cultural memory across generations. Among these adaptations, *Ne Zha 2* stands out as one of the few animated films to achieve phenomenal success. The film has not only gained remarkable box-office achievements but has also sparked extensive discussion both domestically and internationally. Taking *Ne Zha 2* as the research object, this paper investigates how excellent traditional Chinese culture is reinterpreted and communicated through contemporary audiovisual expression and narrative strategies.

## Literature Review

### The Core Connotations of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture

Excellent traditional Chinese culture refers to the spiritual and material heritage created, accumulated, and transmitted by the Chinese nation throughout its long history (Li, 2013). It encompasses philosophical concepts such as the theory of Yin and Yang, views on morality and destiny, as well as ethical values including family-

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oriented values. These cultural elements provide essential spiritual support for the contemporary expression of traditional culture (Zhang, Huang, & Sun, 2025).

### **The Contemporary Expression of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture**

Contemporary expression refers to the process of presenting traditional cultural elements through modern narrative methods and digital technologies, thereby generating new meanings and forms of communication (Shen & Xu, 2025). Through the integration of traditional culture with contemporary aesthetics and technological innovation, digital storytelling enables traditional culture to reach wider audiences. Technological innovation has also challenged the dominance of Western realist aesthetics, establishing independent technical standards for Oriental aesthetics and transforming cultural resources into developmental advantages (Liu, 2025).

### **The Narrative Strategies of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture**

Film narration refers to the act and process of storytelling that generates cinematic discourse and serves as the foundation and driving force of narrative works (Shen & Xu, 2025). The core of narrative strategies lies in adapting traditional stories to contemporary contexts through the modernization of thematic content, the optimization of narrative structures, and the reinterpretation of traditional characters. Such strategies enhance the attractiveness and cultural relevance of traditional stories and foster stronger audience identification and emotional engagement with traditional culture.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

This study focuses on the contemporary expression and narrative strategies of excellent traditional Chinese culture in *Ne Zha 2*. It aims to explore how the film integrates traditional cultural elements with modern audiovisual techniques and narrative approaches, as well as how audiences perceive and evaluate these practices.

### **Research Subjects**

This study primarily adopts a questionnaire survey method. The target respondents were audiences who had watched the film or possessed a certain degree of familiarity with it. Questionnaires were distributed through online platforms, and a total of 209 valid responses were collected. Among the respondents, 143 individuals (68.42%) had watched the film, 61 (29.19%) had not watched it but were familiar with it, and 5 (2.39%) had no prior knowledge of the film. Most respondents belonged to the younger generation, which corresponds closely to the film's primary audience demographic.

### **Research Instrument**

**Questionnaire design and pilot survey.** The questionnaire consisted of four major sections: respondents' basic information and viewing behavior; perceptions of the audiovisual presentation of traditional cultural elements; acceptance of the film's narrative strategies; and willingness to engage in IP-related dissemination and purchase derivative products.

Before formal distribution, a pilot survey was conducted with fifteen viewers. Based on their feedback, the wording of questions and response options was revised to improve the validity of the questionnaire.

**Questionnaire distribution, reliability and validity.** The questionnaire was distributed online through social media platforms such as WeChat. Data collection was conducted on October 26, 2025, resulting in 209

valid responses. The sum of the average item scores reached 7.03, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and structural validity.

**Data Analysis**

**Integration of audiovisual expression and traditional cultural elements.**

Table 1

*Audience Perceptions of Traditional Cultural Expression and Narrative Innovation*

Survey item	Option	Frequency	Percentage
How do you evaluate the use of ink-wash painting style in the film?	Did not notice it	13	9.09%
	Noticed it, but found it ordinary	23	16.08%
	Noticed it and thought it was well integrated	107	74.83%
How do you evaluate the use of traditional musical instruments in the soundtrack?	Did not notice it	35	24.48%
	Noticed it, but found it ordinary	23	16.08%
	Noticed it and thought it was well integrated	85	59.44%
	Very successful, innovative while preserving the essence	83	58.04%
How do you evaluate the adaptation of mythological stories and characters?	Relatively successful, creative, and natural	51	35.66%
	Average, no particular impression	4	2.80%
	Somewhat unsuccessful and slightly forced	1	0.70%
	Very unsuccessful and damaging to the traditional image	4	2.80%
	Active participant (frequently engages with fan-created content and has purchased merchandise)	18	8.82%
Which of the following best describes your engagement with fan-created content and official merchandise?	Interested observer (frequently engages with fan-created content but undecided about purchasing merchandise)	102	50.00%
	Indifferent observer (frequently engages with fan-created content but has little or no intention to purchase merchandise)	67	32.84%
	Marginal participant (rarely or never engages with fan-created content or merchandise)	17	8.33%

**Research Results**

Given the scope of this study, four representative questions were selected to illustrate audience perceptions of the film’s cultural expression, narrative adaptation, and IP engagement.

The results of Question 1 indicate that audiences responded most positively to the film’s use of ink-wash visual aesthetics. Specifically, 74.83% of respondents stated that they noticed the ink-wash style and believed it was effectively integrated into the film, while only 9.09% reported that they had not noticed it. This finding suggests that the independently developed dynamic ink-wash rendering technology successfully translated traditional Oriental aesthetics into a digital form, making it one of the film’s most distinctive visual symbols.

The results of Question 2 reveal that although traditional instrumental music received slightly lower recognition than visual elements, it was still positively evaluated by most audiences. Among respondents, 59.44% believed that the traditional musical accompaniment was well integrated into the film. However, the proportion of respondents who did not notice the musical elements increased to 24.48%. This finding indicates that auditory cultural elements tend to be less visible than visual symbols and may require more explicit thematic presentation to enhance audience memory and recognition.

The results of Question 3 demonstrate that the adaptation of mythological stories and characters was highly appreciated. A total of 58.04% of respondents regarded the adaptation as highly successful, while 35.66% considered it relatively successful. Together, these positive evaluations accounted for 93.7% of responses. In contrast, only 3.5% expressed negative opinions. These findings suggest that the film’s de-stereotyped character

reconstruction and incorporation of contemporary values effectively transformed mythological symbols into reflections of modern social realities.

The results of Question 4 indicate that although the film has cultivated an active fan-created content ecosystem, the conversion of audience engagement into merchandise consumption remains limited. Active participants accounted for only 8.82% of respondents, whereas interested observers represented 50.00%, and indifferent observers accounted for 32.84%. This suggests that IP management should move beyond traffic-oriented strategies toward product-oriented approaches. By optimizing product design and consumption scenarios, producers may better stimulate purchasing motivation and improve the conversion of cultural influence into actual consumer behavior.

Overall, audiences expressed strong approval of the contemporary expression and narrative innovation of traditional cultural elements in *Ne Zha 2*. In particular, visual symbolism and character reinterpretation received highly positive evaluations. However, a noticeable gap remains between audience attention and actual consumption of derivative products, suggesting that audience interest has not been effectively converted into purchasing behavior.

## Discussion

While the survey results demonstrate the effectiveness of *Ne Zha 2* in presenting traditional culture through contemporary forms, they also reveal several issues worthy of further discussion. Based on the findings, three implications can be identified for the future development of Chinese animated films.

### **Integrating Digital Technology With Traditional Chinese Cultural Symbols**

The survey results show that visual cultural elements, such as the ink-wash painting style and traditional Chinese architecture, received higher levels of audience recognition than auditory elements, including traditional instrumental music. This suggests that visual symbols serve as the most effective medium for the contemporary presentation of traditional culture.

Therefore, Chinese animated films should continue to promote technological innovation and explore new ways of digitally transforming traditional aesthetics. Advanced rendering technologies can be employed to integrate traditional artistic styles into three-dimensional animation. In addition, cultural symbols such as regional architecture, decorative patterns, and traditional color systems should be systematically incorporated into visual design in order to establish a recognizable Chinese animation aesthetic. Meanwhile, auditory cultural elements should be presented more prominently to enhance audience awareness and memory.

### **Reshaping Traditional Characters and Narrative Logic**

The survey demonstrates that audiences responded positively to the film's adaptation of mythological characters and its multi-layered narrative structure. More than 90 percent of respondents expressed approval of the film's reinterpretation of traditional myths. This finding suggests that contemporary audiences are receptive to innovative adaptations as long as the essential spirit of the original culture is preserved.

Future animated productions may therefore retain the cultural core of traditional stories while providing classic characters with motivations and values that resonate with modern audiences. At the same time, multiple narrative threads involving personal growth, collective struggle, and social conflict can be incorporated to increase narrative depth. Strategic plot reversals and thought-provoking storylines may further strengthen audience engagement and encourage discussion.

### Improving the IP Industrial Chain and Communication Ecosystem

The survey findings reveal that although *Ne Zha 2* possesses strong communication power and an active fan community, its derivative products have not fully transformed audience interest into purchasing behavior. Many viewers are willing to discuss the film and participate in fan-created content, yet relatively few choose to purchase official merchandise.

This phenomenon indicates a gap between cultural influence and commercial conversion. To address this issue, IP management should adopt a product-oriented approach rather than focusing solely on audience traffic and online popularity. At the cultural engagement level, affordable and accessible merchandise can help broaden audience participation. At the deeper engagement level, multilingual editions, behind-the-scenes documentaries, and other value-added content may strengthen emotional attachment to the IP. At the ecosystem level, immersive cultural experiences and integrated merchandise development strategies should be introduced at an early stage of production to encourage immediate consumer engagement and improve the sustainability of IP operations.

### Conclusion

Focusing on *Ne Zha 2*, this study analyzes how excellent traditional Chinese culture is expressed and communicated through contemporary. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to existing research on the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional Chinese culture. From a practical perspective, it provides useful references for the visual presentation, narrative innovation, and IP operation of Chinese mythological animation, thereby supporting the dissemination of Chinese culture in the new era and promoting its international communication.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. It focuses solely on *Ne Zha 2* and does not include comparative analysis with other Chinese mythological animated films. Future research may incorporate a wider range of cultural products and conduct comparative studies across different works in order to further explore effective approaches to the contemporary expression and narrative construction of traditional Chinese culture.

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