

## **“Ne Zha 2” Classical Chinese Aesthetics and Modern Visual Presentation of Character Design: Taking Traditional Patterns as an Entry Point**

Yi Xu

*Xi'an Technological University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China*

**Abstract:** With the increasing attention paid by the state to the cultural industry, animation, as an important part of this sector, has produced numerous quality works in recent years. Against this backdrop, animation designers have begun to extensively reference traditional patterns and motifs, a trend that reflects the growing recognition of these motifs in the contemporary cultural context. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the current application of traditional patterns in animation art. Through the study of the character design in "Ne Zha's Magic Boy Haunts the Sea," it explores how traditional patterns can be integrated into the creation of modern animation in an era of technological advancement. The study aims to offer innovative ideas for the combination of tradition and modernity and to explore further possibilities for traditional Chinese patterns in the context of the new era, ensuring that they preserve the heritage of national art while showcasing the innovative vitality of modern design.

**Keywords:** Animation; Ne Zha2; Traditional Pattern; Character Design

### **1. Introduction**

Ne Zha 2 is a model of Chinese-style mythological films. Undoubtedly, it is the most eye-catching hot topic among numerous films released in 2025. Its box office has even exceeded 11 billion yuan, ranking it among the top 11 highest-grossing films in the history of global cinema. It has not only attained remarkable success in the domestic market but has also vividly showcased the unique charm and innovative dynamism of Chinese culture globally. Grounded firmly in traditional Chinese culture, this film skillfully blends modern technology with artistry. It has successfully

breathed new life into the classic mythological tale, emerging as a significant milestone in the development trajectory of Chinese animated films.

The rise of Ne Zha 2 marks a dual breakthrough of Chinese animated films at both the technical and artistic levels. The film employs advanced 3D animation technology, combined with meticulous character design, smooth action portrayal, and stunning visual effects, demonstrating the maturity and progress of China's animation industry. Meanwhile, the film incorporates the essence of Chinese classical aesthetics in its narrative. Both the scene design and character design are replete with a wealth of traditional patterns and classic elements of classical aesthetics. This enables the audience to not only enjoy a visual feast but also feel a strong sense of cultural heritage. Through its innovative adaptation of the traditional mythological story, Ne Zha 2 reflects the growing cultural confidence. For instance, within the realm of character design, not merely is the quintessential spirit of Ne Zha, that venerable mythological figure, preserved, but a reimagining is also enacted from a contemporary vantage point. Ne Zha's defiance and maturation, the nuances of his family bonds, and his arduous struggle against the ordained course of his personal fate have all assimilated modern values. This infusion has bestowed upon this age-old mythological narrative a more pronounced sense of contemporaneity and universal resonance. In the character modeling and costume design, traditional patterns have been transformed into modern visual presentations. Such creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture demonstrate the confidence and openness of Chinese culture in the context of globalization.

The global influence of Ne Zha 2 further demonstrates the international communicative power of Chinese culture. The film combines

elements of traditional Chinese culture with modern visual art, successfully attracting global attention. This kind of cultural output not only enhances the international status of Chinese animated films but also provides the world with a window to understand Chinese culture.

## 2. Classical Chinese Aesthetics and Character Design

Chinese classical aesthetics generally encompasses characteristics such as "aesthetic mood", "the unity of form and spirit", and "vivid rhythm". Aesthetic mood is a core category in Chinese art. It is not merely the representation of an image, but rather the integration of emotions and philosophy[1]. Aesthetic mood is one of the core concepts of Chinese classical aesthetics, emphasizing that art conveys infinite connotations through limited images in works. It pursues a profound realm that transcends specific images, enabling viewers to generate associations and resonances during the aesthetic process[2]. Artistic conception is not merely the depiction of external scenery, but also the expression of internal emotions and philosophy. Chinese traditional aesthetics has had a profound influence on the expressive forms of Chinese animated films. Especially under the edification of Chinese philosophical thoughts, the core aesthetic concept of "image" has gradually taken shape. The aesthetic mood is not just the portrayal of external scenery, but rather the expression of inner emotions and philosophical principles. Chinese traditional aesthetics has exerted a profound influence on the expressive forms of Chinese animated films. Especially under the edification of Chinese philosophical thoughts, the core aesthetic concept of "image" has gradually come into being. In Chinese classical aesthetics, "the unity of form and spirit" is also one of its important aesthetic characteristics. This aesthetic concept endows Chinese animated films not only with unique visual beauty but also with profound cultural connotations and emotional power. As a result, in terms of character design, emotional tone, and visual presentation, these films achieve the unity of form and content. "Vivid rhythm" largely realizes the unity of the internal and external aspects of the design of animated characters. The design of characters not only pays attention to their external images but also needs to convey their inner vitality and spiritual temperament through movements, expressions, postures, etc.

The design of the characters' movements should especially pursue naturalness in dynamics. The inner spirit requires an understanding of the "rhythm" of the characters, while the external dynamics are a formal expression of "vividness".

Traditional Chinese patterns contain profound aesthetic spirits. These patterns are not only visual decorations but also a concentrated embodiment of Chinese classical aesthetic thoughts. Through their unique pattern designs and symbolic meanings, traditional patterns convey a sense of "implicative meaning", enabling the audience to generate boundless associations and resonances during the aesthetic process. At the same time, traditional patterns also attach importance to "the unity of form and spirit". They not only pursue the refinement and harmony in form but also can convey their inner spirit and vitality through lines and colors. In addition, the characteristic of "vivid rhythm" in traditional patterns endows the patterns with a dynamic sense and vitality both inside and out, making them seem as if they have a flowing rhythm and demonstrating the perfect integration of nature and art. These aesthetic features together constitute the unique charm of Chinese traditional patterns and also endow the characters in the field of animation with a unique rhythm and spirit.

Traditional Chinese patterns not only profoundly embody the spirit of Chinese classical aesthetics, such as the concepts of "implicative meaning", "the unity of form and spirit", and "vivid rhythm", but also carry profound symbolic meanings and cultural connotations. The character design of the film *Ne Zha 2* is inseparable from the expression of patterns. Traditional patterns represented by cloud patterns, dragon patterns, flame patterns, etc. have been widely used in the character design of the film *Ne Zha 2*. Cloud patterns symbolize auspiciousness and loftiness, dragon patterns represent majesty and power, and flame patterns convey a spirit of passion and resistance. Through delicate lines, flowing forms, and rich colors, these patterns add strong characteristics of Eastern aesthetics to the character design. At the same time, these patterns are not merely visual decorations. They also infuse the characters with vivid vitality and a unique spiritual temperament. For example, the flame patterns on *Ne Zha*'s costume not only highlight his rebelliousness and bravery but also

metaphorically represent his tenacious spirit of defying fate. On the other hand, the application of dragon patterns on Ao Guang enhances the character's sense of divinity and power. Integrating these traditional patterns into the character design not only makes the characters' images more vivid and three-dimensional but also endows the film with deeper cultural connotations and emotional resonances. In this way, while enjoying a visual feast, the audience can also feel the unique charm of traditional Chinese culture. Combining traditional patterns with modern design concepts and presenting them in a new visual way not only showcases the artistic height of Chinese animated films but also provides new possibilities for the modern expression of traditional culture.

### 3. Ne Zha 2 Character Design Analysis and Transformation of Traditional Patterns

The character design of Ne Zha in the film mainly continues the styling, color, and dynamic design from the first Ne Zha film, creating a mythical image that is both classic and innovative. In the overall styling, bold innovations have been made while retaining the basis of the traditional image. Among them, the most classic double-bun hairstyle and youthful facial features have been retained, but many modern elements have also been added. For example, there are more exaggerated facial proportions and more dynamic lines. In terms of styling, it breaks the image of a well-behaved and cute child in traditional animations, and instead adopts a more rebellious image of the "demon boy". His dark circles under the eyes, sharp teeth, and messy hairstyle highlight his identity as the "demon pill". This kind of design not only maintains the recognizability of Ne Zha as a mythical figure but also enhances the visual impact of the character. In the costume design of the film, a large number of traditional Chinese patterns are skillfully integrated. These patterns not only add a unique aesthetic feeling to the character's costumes but also profoundly convey the character's inner temperament and profound cultural connotations. Take Ne Zha as an example, his costume design is truly classic. Both Ne Zha's bellyband and trousers are decorated with flame patterns. These patterns are inspired by the armors or battle robes of ancient military generals. The form of the flames is lively and blazing, as if burning with boundless enthusiasm and power. The flame

patterns not only enhance the decorativeness of the costumes but also symbolize Ne Zha's innate rebellious and combative spirit. He is like a blazing fire, fearless of the constraints of the secular world, and bravely challenges his fate. And at the collar of Ne Zha's costume, lotus patterns are exquisitely decorated. Since ancient times, the lotus has enjoyed the reputation of "Growing out of the mud without staining, washed by clear water without becoming", symbolizing a noble character and a transcendent spiritual realm. It grows and blooms from the silt but always maintains its purity and elegance. This unique way of growth also symbolizes the cycle and rebirth of life[3]. For Ne Zha, the application of the lotus patterns has an even deeper meaning (e.g., Figure 1. Ne Zha). As the "demon pill", he has gone through numerous hardships and heavenly tribulations. In the end, he reshaped his true body with lotus root powder, achieving the rebirth and blooming of his life once again. This process coincides with the growth process of the lotus flower, as if it is a metaphor for Ne Zha's fate. In addition, the use of lotus patterns also conveys the divinity and wisdom of Ne Zha as a mythical figure. Although he has a rebellious and unruly appearance and a bold and straightforward way of doing things, his actions and choices always reflect his resistance to fate and his persistence in justice. This complex and contradictory character highly corresponds to the symbolic meaning of the lotus flower. By adding traditional patterns to the character design, Ne Zha's image has become more three-dimensional and full-fledged. He is not just a brave warrior, but also a mythical hero full of wisdom and depth.



Figure 1. Ne Zha

The innovative use of traditional patterns is not only reflected in the character design of the protagonist Ne Zha, but also has excellent artistic presentations in supporting characters such as Ao Guang, the East Sea Dragon King, and the Boundary Beasts. In the movie, the

design of Ao Guang's magic weapon is unique and ingenious. Dragon patterns are skillfully used for decoration on the magic weapon. This design is inspired by the ancient dragon-patterned knives from the Shang Dynasty and the jade knives from the Yin Ruins. The dragon patterns on these ancient cultural relics have smooth and dynamic lines, exuding a mysterious sense of power. Ao Guang himself is portrayed as a classical Chinese gentleman, while also possessing extremely high combat power. The dragon patterns on his magic weapon complement his image perfectly, exuding a majestic sense of power. It's as if one can feel the imposing and powerful aura of Ao Guang, the Dragon King. However, different from the majestic and solemn style of the dragon patterns in the Shang Dynasty, the dragon patterns in the middle and late Qing Dynasty gradually evolved to have an "amiable" temperament[4]. The dragon-patterned magic weapon of Ao Guang cleverly integrates these two styles in its design. On the one hand, it retains the majestic sense of power of the ancient dragon patterns, which perfectly matches Ao Guang's status as the Dragon King and serves as a symbol of his identity. On the other hand, it incorporates the softness of the dragon patterns from the middle and late Qing Dynasty, making Ao Guang's image more three-dimensional. This design not only showcases Ao Guang's status as the Dragon King in terms of appearance, but also profoundly interprets his qualities and connotations at the inner spiritual level.

In the film, the character design of the Boundary Beasts is an innovation and integration of the Sanxingdui culture. Their colors and features are mainly derived from the gold-faced bronze head statues, large bronze masks, bronze beast faces, and bronze eagle-shaped bells of Sanxingdui (e.g., Figure 2. Boundary Beasts). Among them, the Boundary Beast with thick eyebrows has exaggerated eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes and a pug nose. These design inspirations all come from the bronze head statue with a gold mask of Sanxingdui. The nose of the Boundary Beast with a curled nose draws on the mouth features of the bronze eagle-shaped bell, and its curled shape echoes the hooked nose of the bronze mask with protruding eyes. In addition, elements such as the patterns on the ears of the Boundary Beasts and the gold masks highly reproduce the cultural characteristics of the Sanxingdui culture.

The side profile of the Boundary Beasts is extremely similar to the large bronze bird heads unearthed from Sanxingdui. The design of their noses is not only like an inward-hooked bird's beak but also resembles the patterns of a bird's beak. This detail fully reflects the bird culture of the ancient Shu Kingdom[5]. This presentation of the unique bird culture not only adds a sense of mystery to the characters, but also demonstrates the reverence of the Ancient Shu civilization for nature and deities. The meander pattern is also widely used in the body design of the characters. The meander pattern is a common decorative pattern in ancient Chinese architecture, often used in the doors, windows, beams and columns of buildings, symbolizing the cycle and the endlessness of life. In the palace buildings of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the meander pattern was widely used for decoration, implying protection and eternity[6]. This not only highly coincides with the connotation of the duty of the Boundary Beasts as guardian beasts, but also endows the characters with an ancient and mysterious power. Overall, the design of the Boundary Beasts not only presents a cute image visually, but also conveys a profound historical heritage and a sense of mystery by applying the Sanxingdui culture. This ingenious cultural integration allows the audience to feel the unique charm of the Ancient Shu civilization while appreciating the characters.



**Figure 2. Boundary Beasts**

While making bold innovations in character design and aesthetic expression, "Ne Zha" skillfully combines traditional Chinese aesthetic concepts with modern animation technology. Through modern technology, the film reinterprets traditional patterns, not only retaining the essence of traditional culture but also endowing classical patterns with new vitality. Through the geometric and symbolic treatment of patterns, the core characteristics of traditional patterns are extracted, and the most representative elements are retained. To a large extent, this strengthens the inner spirit and

external characteristics of the characters. While enhancing cultural recognition, it also provides visual beauty for the movie and evokes the audience's cultural memories and emotional resonance[7]. Traditional patterns are important symbols of Chinese culture. As a visual language, they can transcend language barriers and help international audiences understand the profound connotations of Chinese culture. They can also stimulate the interest of international audiences in Chinese culture and thus promote the export of Chinese cultural products. Such innovation not only enhances the visual expressiveness of the film but also enables Chinese animated films to demonstrate unique artistic charm and cultural confidence on the international stage.

#### 4. Apocalypse

As a treasure of Chinese culture, the application of traditional patterns in animated films not only injects profound cultural connotations into the films but also provides a continuous stream of inspiration for modern design. In the field of animation design, traditional patterns have a very wide range of applications. They can be used in the design of characters' costumes, accessories, weapons, etc. Through the portrayal of these details, not only can the identity, personality and cultural background of the characters be reflected, but also a richer and more three-dimensional visual experience can be brought to the audience. The ingenious application of traditional patterns and classical aesthetic elements can also imply the historical background, region, and social environment in which the story takes place, thus enhancing the audience's sense of immersion and the authenticity of the story. This design approach

can not only inherit and carry forward Chinese culture, but also create animated character images that are more ethnically distinctive and in line with the aesthetic standards of the times. Through such innovation and integration, Chinese animated films can better step onto the world stage, enhance their competitiveness in the global market, and let the world witness the unique charm and cultural value of Chinese animation.

#### References

- [1] Li Z. (2009). *The Course of Beauty, Life-Reading-New Knowledge* Joint Publishing House, 160-162.
- [2] Jin, K. (2013). A Study on the Application of Chinese Traditional Patterns in Animation Art. *Popular Literature and Art*, (16), 185.
- [3] Jiang, S. (2010). An Analysis of the Symbolic Meaning of Lotus Patterns. *Grand Stage*, (07), 121-123.
- [4] Bi, Q. H. (2000). A Brief Analysis of the Modeling Characteristics of Dragon Patterns in Different Dynasties of China. *Journal of Yangzhou Polytechnic College*, (02), 42-46.
- [5] Qu, M. (2012). Exploration of the Aesthetic Characteristics of Pattern Symbols in the Bronze Art of Sanxingdui. *Hundred Schools in Arts*, 28(02), 214-216.
- [6] Sun, Q. Y. (2012). A Study on the Meander Pattern as a Symbol of Chinese Traditional Art [Master's thesis, Hunan University of Technology]. pp. 33-36.
- [7] Ma, C. C., & Zhu, H. (2021). The Artistic Inheritance and Innovation of Traditional Decorative Aesthetics from the Perspective of Chinese Classic Animations. *China National Expo*, (03), 139-141.