

A Multimodal Metaphor Analysis of Chinese Architecture in *Ne Zha 2*

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From the perspective of Multimodal Metaphor Theory, the architectural scenes in *Ne Zha 2* embody highly condensed cultural connotations. Through the synergy of vision, soundscape, and dialect, the film constructs a metaphorical chain of “human order—ethnic oppression—theocratic structure” via the three core architectural spaces. As core signifiers, buildings drive the plot, shape characters, and convey values. The study reveals that animation activates traditional architecture’s metaphorical potential through cross-modal mapping, endowing historical symbols with contemporary vitality and providing a paradigm for the creative transformation of traditional culture.

Keywords: multimodal metaphor, *Ne Zha 2*, Chinese architecture

Introduction

With the advancement of the industrialization of Chinese animated films, cinematic language serves not only a narrative function but also acts as a crucial carrier of cultural meaning construction. Based on the theory of multimodal metaphor in cognitive linguistics, this paper selects typical Chinese architectural scenes from *Ne Zha 2* as the object of study. By analyzing visual, auditory, and linguistic modalities, the paper explores in depth how the film constructs deep metaphors such as “space as order”, “destruction as rebirth”, and “boundaries as discipline”. The study finds that the film utilizes a multimodal synergy mechanism to transform traditional architectural aesthetics into visual rhetoric that drives the narrative and expresses philosophical themes.

Visual Modality: Metaphors of Form and Color in Time and Space

The visual modality is the most direct presentation of multimodal metaphors. In *Ne Zha 2*, the spatial layout, structural style, and color tones of the architecture construct a dual metaphorical structure: “The Heavens represent oppression/order” and “The Human Realm/Purgatory represents chaos/vitality”.

Rigid Symmetry and Hierarchical Order

The architectural complex of the Heavenly Palace in the film highly restores the beauty of “axial symmetry” and “dougong brackets” (corbel brackets) found in traditional Chinese palaces. However, in the film’s camera language, this architectural beauty is endowed with a sense of discipline and constraint.

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For instance, in the scene where the spirits of the people of Chentang Pass are led to the Heavenly Court for judgment, a high-angle vertical long shot is employed. The architectural complex of the Southern Heavenly Gate presents a strictly symmetrical layout. The huge white marble steps and progressively advancing gateways create a massive sense of visual oppression. At this moment, “architecture acts as a cage”. The towering red palace walls and the infinitely extending golden tiles construct a visual field of strict hierarchy, metaphorizing the suppression of the individual by the so-called “Heavenly Way” and the indifference of the institutionalized system. The visual contrast between the massive volume of the architecture and the diminutive size of the characters materializes the theme that “fate cannot be defied”.

Hanging Temples and the “Margin” of Chaos

In contrast to the rigidity of the Heavens, the hanging temples or monster settlements appearing in the film utilize a scattered, non-symmetrical structure. These buildings are often built along steep mountain ridges, with exposed mortise and tenon joints, creating a visual tension of instability.

In the scenes where Ao Bing reconstructs his physical body and Ne Zha recovers from heavy injuries, the background is composed of dim, hanging towers interspersed with clouds and mist. Here, the architectural metaphor is no longer order, but “marginality” and “transition”. The visual precariousness mirrors the awkward situation of the protagonists as the “Devil Pill/Spirit Pearl”—neither accepted by the Heavens nor easily tolerated by the secular world. This visual sense of “danger” metaphorizes their struggle to survive within the cracks and break established rules.

Auditory Modality: Emotional Metaphors of Soundscape and Material

The auditory modality activates the audience’s synesthetic experience by enhancing visual metaphors through the resonance of sound effects, music, and architectural materials. In *Ne Zha 2*, architecture is not just an object to be viewed, but also a subject that produces sound.

The Sound of Wood and Stone and the Intensity of Resistance

Chinese architecture is mostly wooden or stone, and its acoustic properties are cleverly utilized in the film. When Ne Zha fights the Heavenly Soldiers and Generals on the city gate tower of Chentang Pass, the film emphasizes the breaking sounds of the architectural materials.

For example, in an intense fight scene, Ne Zha’s Red Armillary Sash strikes the wooden city gate of Chentang Pass. The sound design does not use a dull impact sound but emphasizes the crisp snap of breaking wood and the crunch of shattering tiles. Accompanied by intense drumbeats (Chinese large drums simulating the heartbeat and war drums), this sound constructs the metaphor of “architecture as body”. Every tremble and collapse of the Chentang Pass city tower audibly equates to the suffering endured by the people of Chentang Pass and Ne Zha himself. The severity of the sound quantifies the intensity of the resistance.

Ethereal Reverb and the Illusion of the Heavens

The soundscape design within the Heavenly Palace is distinct. When characters walk through the empty main halls or long corridors, their footsteps are specially processed to carry distinct reverb and echo, as if they are walking in an infinite void.

This auditory processing dissolves the “materiality” of the architecture, making it appear ethereal and sacred, yet also cold and unapproachable. The auditory metaphor of “emptiness” reveals the essence of the Heavenly Order: grand on the surface but lacking human warmth. This auditory sense of alienation allows the audience to subconsciously empathize with Ne Zha’s “rebellion”.

Linguistic Modality: Intertextual Metaphors of Symbols and Text

The linguistic modality includes dialogue, voiceovers, and textual symbols within the architectural space (such as plaques and couplets). In *Ne Zha 2*, the inscriptions on the architecture and the lines of the characters form an intertextual relationship that directly clarifies the metaphorical connotations of the architecture.

Plaques and Deconstruction

Traditional Chinese architecture emphasizes “inscriptions on the lintel”, which serves as the identity of the building. The film frequently uses close-up shots to focus on the plaques hanging high on the architecture.

For instance, at the entrance of the “Locked Demon Tower” or a similar adjudicative body where Ne Zha’s fate is determined, the plaque bears words representing “justice” or “judgment”. However, as the plot progresses, Ne Zha’s line directly deconstructs this linguistically: “If fate is unfair, just fight it till the end”.

Here, the linguistic modality (dialogue) forms a strong conflict with the visual modality (the solemn plaque). The text on the plaque originally metaphorized “unshakable authority”, but under the linguistic provocation of the character, this metaphor transforms into “hypocritical dogma”. This processing of “image-text discrepancy” or even “image-text confrontation” deeply satirizes the rigid system.

Spatial Metaphors in Dialogue

Architectural imagery is also used in dialogue to refer to abstract concepts.

When Li Jing comforts Ne Zha or reflects on the situation, he might mention, “The walls of Chentang Pass can protect us for a while, but not for a lifetime”. Here, the specific architectural object, “the walls of Chentang Pass”, is linguistically mapped onto abstract concepts such as “traditional protective mechanisms” or “parental shelter”. The language abstracts the architectural into a kind of limitation, implying that the protagonists must break through the double enclosures of the physical (architecture) and the psychological to achieve true growth.

Cross-Modal Interaction and Metaphoric Reinforcement

In *Ne Zha 2*, architectural metaphors achieve cognitive potency through the strategic integration of modalities, rather than their isolated use.

Reinforcement and Dissonance

The film utilizes alignment and conflict between modalities to deepen the narrative. In scenes depicting the Heavenly Court, visual symmetry, ethereal audio reverb, and formal dialogue align to reinforce the metaphor of “Architecture as an Oppressive Cage”. This coherence creates an atmosphere of inviolable authority. Conversely, Ne Zha’s rebellion relies on modal dissonance: As he faces visually majestic structures, the soundtrack shifts to aggressive rhythms and colloquial language. This conflict between visual solemnity and auditory/linguistic defiance exposes the fragility of the established order, turning the architecture into a symbol of hypocrisy.

Synchrony and Emergent Meaning

Furthermore, temporal synchrony transforms physical destruction into philosophical concepts. During climactic scenes where structures collapse, the visual crumbling of buildings, the crescendo of sound, and the protagonist's defiant lines arrive simultaneously. This precise alignment fuses the sensory experience of the crash with the narrative context, solidifying the "Destruction as Rebirth" metaphor. Through these cross-modal interactions, the film ensures that the architectural spaces resonate both emotionally and intellectually with the audience.

Conclusion

In summary, through the ingenious use of Chinese architecture, *Ne Zha 2* transcends the level of pure art and design to construct a complete system of multimodal metaphors. Visually, it utilizes the layout and volume of architecture to metaphorize the oppression of the system and the insignificance of the individual; auditorily, it metaphorizes the tragedy of resistance and the coldness of order through the sound of materials; linguistically, it deconstructs the hypocrisy of authority through the intertextuality of plaques and dialogue.

These three modalities do not exist in isolation but intertwine and reinforce each other. For instance, when *Ne Zha* shatters the architectural plaque symbolizing the Heavenly Rules, the visual collapse, the auditory crash, and the linguistic roar occur simultaneously, pushing the theme of "breaking fate" to a climax. This multidimensional architectural metaphor analysis not only reveals the maturity of domestic animated films in symbolic narration but also provides a new research perspective for the modern visual expression of traditional Chinese culture.

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