

# *Mirroring and Identity: a Brief Analysis of the Identity Mechanism in the Films *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* and *Your Name**

Feng Fei

*School of Humanities, Tiangong University, Tianjin, 300387, China*

**Keywords:** Mirroring, Identity, Narrative mode

**Abstract:** Animated films currently occupy a large share of the film market. A number of outstanding animated films that the audience is delighted in talking about appears throughout the domestic and foreign. The author taking two animated films, *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* and *Your Name*, as examples, refers to relevant theories of psychoanalytic criticism and takes Lacan's mirroring theory and identity mechanism as the main research field, to deeply analyze the setting of mirroring characters in the two cases and the structure of the narrative mode. Lacan's mirroring theory has exerted a profound influence on the movie-watching mechanism, narrative structure and the audience's psychology.

## 1. Introduction

In the 1930s, Jacques Lacan further put forward the theory of “mirroring stage” on the basis of Freud's psychoanalysis theory, which represented another development of psychoanalysis outside the field of clinical medicine. Lacan's “mirroring stage” presents from the process of the baby looking into the mirror and calls all the confusion of the real and imaginary scenarios as mirroring experience all over in every field of contemporary culture. And the film is no exception. With reference to Lacan's “mirroring theory” reflecting the psychological mechanism of viewing, many movie creators take consideration of identity, making the film narrative more profound. This paper takes two animated films as the basis to deeply analyze their reflection and narrative performance under the role of “mirroring theory”.

## 2. The Image Expression of “Mirroring Stage” Theory

Lacan proposed in the mirroring stage theory that a 6-18 month old baby will go through a process to recognize himself in the mirror. At first, the baby thinks that the mirror is other people, but later he realizes that the mirror is himself through other people. From the mirroring stage onwards, the infant establishes the opposition between “self” and “others”. In other words, a baby can only become aware of its “self” after it has recognized “others” in the mirror. <sup>[1]</sup>This theory provides great value in the study of films. At the beginning of its birth, films were regarded as a tool to make dreams, which is inseparable from its unique cinema mechanism and narrative structure.

## 2.1 The “Mirroring” Experience under the Cinema Mechanism

The space provided by the cinema has a natural fit with the “mirroring image theory”. When people enter the cinema to watch movies, they are completing an imaginary identification process. Before entered the cinema, they are an independent social individual. When people entered the cinema, the first identity is in the main body of social self-knowledge. After enter the theater, movie screen is equivalent to a mirror, it reflects their viewing self in the individual imagination. So the second identification is generated between the self and the characters in the image. As a result, people think the imaginary as the reality. As Christian Metz, who introduced psychoanalysis to film studies, said that the characteristic of film is not that it is possible to reproduce the imaginary world, but that it is the imaginary world from the very beginning, as an imaginary world constructed by signifiers.”<sup>[2]</sup>

## 2.2 “Mirroring Image” Identity in Film Textual Narration

As a kind of film art that provides people with “daydream” fantasy, there is also an identity mechanism of “mirroring theory” in the narrative. In most films that present psychoanalytic theory, there is a universal narrative mode in which the leading characters begins to search for a certain purpose at first, and then they continues to seek the result and finally achieves redemption. In such films, the growth experience of the leading characters’ “self” is very similar to the growth process of the baby in Lacan's “mirroring stage theory”, both of which achieve self-identification in “imagination”.

## 3. Mirroring and Identification in *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child and Your Name*

*Nezha* released in 2019 rewrite the traditional story, which can be seen as an innovative creation for the tradition. The film won wide audience recognition with bearing the controversy. With sophisticated production, the film referred as “the flood rise”. Among them a mirror in the shaping of image contain theory connotation. “Your Name” is a Japanese animation directed by Makoto Shinkai. It is also the first Japanese Hayao Miyazaki film to break through 10 billion yen in box office. In addition to beautiful pictures, the film also shows rich cultural significance, showing the process of national identity.

*Nezha* is a classic character in ancient Chinese myths and legends. She has been put on TVs and films for many times. However, the characterization of *Nezha* in various film and television works all the time, which retains the characteristics of her mother. However, the appearance of *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* has greatly overturned people's understanding of this character image. Based on the traditional character image, the director gives play to the identity mechanism and presents a new form of expression in the narrative structure.

The biggest rewriting of traditional mythology in the film is to transform the single personality images of *Nezha* and *Ao Bing* into a pair of mirror images that are opposite to each other. The two characters transformed to each other. However, *Nezha*, who is kind-natured but not recognized by the people because of her identity as a magic child. *Ao Bing*, the descendant of the Dragon, is regarded as an alien because of the reincarnated *Ling Zhu*. The opposites of each other's mirror structure are seeking for identification. On the one hand, they are self-identification from others, and on the other hand, they are self-identification, which is a pair of self-identification of *Nezha* and *Ao Bing*'s mirror relationship. In the film, *Ne Zha* and *Ao Bing* only face the same problems and questions - who I was. when *Ne Zha* met *Ao Bing*, it like a baby can't identify the man in the mirror. In the process of continuous growth and salvation he found himself gradually, until a narrative climax in the paragraph *Ao Bing* again say “who are you, only you have the final say”. From then on,

Ne Zha finally met his from otherness, implemented his self-identity and also fit the theme of “my life is on my own”.

#### 4. The Influence of “Mirroring Image Theory” on Narrative Mode

Mirroring structure Settings can make the film's narrative structure presents a more complex model. The construction of characters and Settings for dramatic conflicts can make the narrative structure more rigorous and into more remarkable level through the image shaping of the characters. In this way, the spirit of the film the kernel is clearer and easy to the audience to accept.

##### 4.1 The Narrative Mode Construction of Mirroring Image in Nezha

From the perspective of narration, the mirroring relationship between NeZha and Ao Bing in the film makes the original dull narrative mode have to be abandoned, thus bringing in a more dramatic conflict narrative mode. Chinese classical literature is always given priority to focus on internal spirit and lack of the conflict of the plot. The expression of the previously rewriting for Ne Zha mostly used the traditional narrative, and the film, compared with the classical texts, construct a more complex, more solid, more levels of characters, dramatic conflicts goes more confrontational, showing the growth of the classical Hollywood narrative mode.

##### 4.2 Narrative Mode of Identity in Your Name

Japan, as a former colonized country, has also experienced the trauma of a comet falling. The film unfolds a narrative about national “identity” with knots as the clue. In the film, the hometown where heroine live have a shrine ritual culture custom and show a unique traditional culture elements in Japan, which is not only a kind of culture to carry forward, in the narrative perspective, this is a foreshadowing for redemption, save the town is not only the will of the hero and heroine, but each audience for cultural heritage protection and a kind of identity, is a kind of ethnic identity, this constitutes a part of the mirror effect, also became the important clues to the film narrative structure.

#### 5. Conclusion

profound art tends to maximize the reduction of the complexity of the real world. For people, film not only as a way of entertainment. Maybe the viewers don't realize that their sub-consciousness exert its function. The “mirroring image” has quietly played a role, the audience is actually the process of identity film characters to own an illusory “mistake”. For the filmmakers, the “mirror theory” they have incorporated into the narrative and characterization of the film has a more memorable implication.

#### References

- [1] Zhu Xiaoquan. *Selected Works of Lacan [M]*. Shanghai: Sanlian Publishing House, 2001:90-91
- [2] Christian Metz. *Imaginary Signification: Psychoanalysis and Cinema [M]*. Translated by Wang Zhimin. Beijing: China Radio and Television Press, 2006:41