

NEZHA (2019): A TRANSMEDIA ANALYSIS OF NEZHA ON BIG SCREEN

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Abstract

This essay examines “convergence culture” by analysing the presence of the Chinese folk character Nezha in Chinese popular media. Using Henry Jenkins’ definitions of adaptation and transmedia, the essay addresses the integration of traditional Chinese literature and mass-media cultural products, a process that reinvigorates traditional figures and narratives. Nezha, a protector god, is found in several eastern religions such as Taoism, Confucianism and even Indian Buddhism (Tavor, 2019; Meulenbeld, 2017). In China he is primarily known through one of China’s “Four Great Classical Novels”, *Journey to the West* (1952) (*hereinafter: JtW*), where he is secondary character to the Monkey King, *JtW*’s protagonist, and generally depicted as a figure oscillating between good and evil. Just as western religious and political institutions established their authority by incorporating smaller, ancient Asian narratives into local and broader, newer mythical stories, Nezha and his traditional stories are featured in mass-media films such as *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King* (1979), the Nezha TV series, and the recent feature film *Nezha* (2019); he is even a presence at Chinese theme parks. The current media’s elaboration on the Nezha myth today performs different functions, and the figure has today been reconfigured to serve a consumer-oriented culture.

Keyword: convergence culture, Chinese folklore, Nezha, transmedia