



A Study of the Protagonist in *Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny* From the Perspective of Karen Horney's Psychoanalysis

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Abstract

Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny is an animated movie with excellent public reputation in china and international market. Setting in traditional Chinese mythology, the leading character, Ne Zha, undergoes a life full of twists and turns. The author analyzes the movie under the guide of the representative of new Freudian, Karen Horney. In the light of Karen Horney's theory, Ne Zha bears the tendency of neurotic personality from the phenomenon of moving toward people, moving against people and moving away from people. However Ne Zha ultimately achieve self-actualization and transcendence through the appeal of mastery, the appeal of love as well as the appeal of freedom. The movie exerts far-reaching and profound significance to the people in the present world.

Key words: *Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny*; Karen Horney; Freud; New Freudian

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, "culture confidence" has been a key political word in China. Since then, the practitioners in media industry have strived to carry forward the traditional Chinese culture and value system in order to boosting Chinese's culture confidence as well as opening

up a window for people around the world understanding China. Traced back to the 5000-year splendid Chinese history, men of literature and writing created many mythological figures that handed down generations upon generations till now, which can be called as the spiritual pillar for the majority of Chinese people. It is primarily because the fact that the stories of these mythological figures like Sun Wukong, Ne Zha are regarded as essential enlightened reading materials for Chinese children. In this chapter, the author will give a brief introduction about the analyze material and theory.

1.1 Background Information about *Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny*

The analyze material is a Chinese animated movie called *Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny*. As the author mentioned above, Ne Zha is one of the most typical Chinese mythological figures in traditional culture. This movie has just run on 26th July, 2019, and becomes fashionable for a time. It performed extremely well in the Chinese box office, reaching 4.97 billion RMB, which exceeded many other popular movies such as *Avengers: Endgame*, *Zootopia* and so forth. The plot summary about the *Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny* is shown as follows:

Supernatural being Primus extracts and purifies two reincarnation balls from the essence of nature, one is virtuous, and another is demoniac. The virtuous reincarnation ball is supposed to enable the rebirth of the leading character, Ne Zha. However, the two reincarnation balls have been secretly swapped by Shen Gongbao, the villain of the piece in this movie. Thus, Ne Zha is born with the demoniac reincarnation ball. Other people in the village knowing this fact want to kill Ne Zha as soon as he born into this world. Thanks to the promise from Ne Zha's father, a venerable personage of this village, villagers prevent the thought of killing Ne Zha, but require his parents to guard over Ne Zha. In this way, little Ne Zha grows up with tons of difficulties related to the bias and misunderstandings of the villagers as well

as the alienation of his peers. In order to prevent Ne Zha from mental illness, Tai Yi (another supernatural being in Chinese mythology) takes him to cultivate his moral and physical character in virtual space. Meanwhile, Tai Yi and Ne Zha's parents tell a white lie to Ne Zha: "the root cause of being opposed is due to the reason that you was born with the virtuous reincarnation ball, so people regard you as 'monster' for your inherent supernatural powers, and your true mission is strengthen yourself and protect common people." However, at Ne Zha's three-year-old birthday feast, he was told the truth by Shen Gongbao that he himself is "demon" from common people's perspective, and the person with real virtuous reincarnation ball is Ao Bing, the only offspring of the downhill dragon clan. Ne Zha is as mad as a wet hen at that time, and attacks brutally to innocent people and even parents and Tai Yi. In fact, Ao Bing is command by his father and Shen Gongbao to destroy the village where Ne Zha lives. All of a sudden, Ne Zha awakens that his destiny is actually control by himself, not the god. He yells: "being a demon or immortal is only up to me myself!" Then, Ne Zha fights against and defeats Ao Bing to avoid the dying of innocent people, but he refuses to kill Ao Bing because they are once best and only friend of each other. Since the demoniac reincarnation ball was under a cursed that the people with it can live no longer than three years, then Ne Zha is targeted by thunderstorm and suffers from lightning strike. Ao Bing resists letting Ne Zha endure the death penalty alone, and decides to accompany Ne Zha without considering his own life. When their hands hold together, the virtuous reincarnation ball and the demoniac reincarnation ball merge together and release tremendous energy to withstand thunderstorm. Finally, both Ne Zha and Ao Bing lose their human body but remain their psyche. Witnessing the whole process, all the villagers kneel down to Ne Zha with guilt and gratefulness.

1.2 Background Information About Psychoanalysis

Founded by Freud, psychoanalysis has played a tremendously important role in psychology, literature and many other social sciences, and exerted a significant role in literacy criticism. Apart from Freud, scholars represented by Alfred Adler, Jacques Lacan have also made a great contribution to the psychoanalysis. However, at the end of 1930s, new psychoanalysis derived from the previous one and put forward many different thoughts from Freud. Psychoanalyst like Harry Stack Sullivan, Karen Horney and Erich Fromm both inherit and criticize the idea of Freud. The author will illustrate the detailed theory review in the next chapter.

2. THEORY REVIEW

Psychoanalysis is a theory that lasts for almost a hundred years, which could be improved only via the collision of

ideas. Although different thoughts about psychoanalysis never stop, it is still worth mentioning the overall review about the theory. Hence, in this chapter, the author will elaborate the main idea of Freudian, New Freudian as well as Karen Horney.

2.1 Freudian VS New Freudian

The most vital and fundamental concept Freud pointed out is "conscious" and "unconscious". According to *the ego and id* wrote by Freud, based on the definition of "conscious" and "unconscious", Freud divided psychology into three sections, namely the id, the ego and the super-ego. In addition, Freudian's idea cannot be separated from the notion of sex, and there are many terminologies he put forward in this field, such as libido, Oedipus complex, penis envy and so forth. Freud believed that neurosis is caused by the unconscious repression of sexual desire to father, mother or other people in childhood, and it can be solved by the interpretation of dream and other psychoanalysis methods (Freud, 2001).

By the contrast, many scholars like Harry Stack Sullivan, Karen Horney and Erich Fromm further promote the progress of psychoanalysis, breaking the limitation of Freudian. New Freudian believes that there are three major issues in the previous theory: the tendency of non-rationality, the tendency of biologization and the limitation of methodology. To be specific, Freud views unconsciousness more important than consciousness, which fundamentally deny the leading role of the essence of psychology, consciousness. Additionally, Freud builds his whole theoretical system based on sexual instinct. He believes that people's psychology development undergo three sexual psychological stages, namely oral stage, anal stage and phallic stage; while he wipes out the significance of social and culture context. Furthermore, Freud applies the theory that he concluded based on neurotic patients to all normal people. Thus, the methodology Freud used is overgeneralized. Aiming at these three drawbacks, new Freudian emerges to improve and perfect the preceding idea. Thus, new Freudian is called by a joint name including all new theories that critique Freudian.

2.2 Freud VS Karen Horney

Freud is a famous Austria psychiatrist and psychologist as well as the founder of psychoanalyst. He has exerted a tremendous influence in the psychology field, and cultivates many outstanding students like Carl Gustav Jung and Erik Erikson who also made a great contribution to psychology. Freud is a pioneer in unconsciousness research, boosting the development of dynamic psychology, personality psychology and abnormal psychology and laying a new foundation for modern medical model.

Karen Horney is the representative of new Freudian, female psychologist and one of the earliest amateurs of social psychology. Strictly speaking, Karen Horney

both inherits and criticizes the theory of Freud. On the one hand, she goes along with Freud's idea in terms of unconsciousness and childhood experiment. They both believe that unconscious motivations hide behind all people's mentality and behaviors. Additionally, Karen Horney, the same as Freud, attaches great importance to childhood experience, the parent-child relationship in particular. From Karen Horney's perspective, it is a must for children to grow up under a warm, concerned and loving environment created by their parents, which will reduce the risk they suffer from mental illness in their adulthood. On the other hand, it is Karen Horney who firstly speaks out against Freud from female's perspective. Firstly, instead of analyzing all human behaviors based on libido like Freud, Karen Horney believes that human behaviors are closely related to social and cultural elements. As one of her saying goes: "like all sciences and all valuations, the psychology of women has hitherto been considered only from the point of view of man.", She puts forward the idea of "womb envy" to response Freud's idea of "penis envy". Secondly, when it comes to the driver of neurosis, Freud emphasizes the repression of instinct, while Karen Horney pays more attention to the imbalance of interpersonal relationship. Thirdly, Freud and Karen Horney hold different view about human nature. Freud describes human beings as basically greedy, selfish and destructive; for Karen Horney, these are not the true human nature but neurotic responses to a negative society. Overall, with the undaunted spirit of pursuing truth, Karen Horney points out her own psychoanalysis theory and emphasizes the important of social and cultural context for human growth.

The author believes that the theory of Karen Horney is feasible to analyze the film *Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny* for several reasons. First and foremost, Ne Zha suffers from the negative social and cultural elements and tends to become neurosis. According to Karen Horney's definition, the essence of neurosis is the alienation of inner health and the loss of the real self (Horney, 1965). Thus, the ultimate goal treatment of neurosis is to help patients gain inner independence give full play to life energy, which is exact what Ne Zha does in the end of the story. Secondly, the method Ne Zha used to cope with basic anxiety and conflicts is basically the same as Karen Horney's theory, namely moving towards people, moving against people and moving away from people (Horney, 1957). Last but not least, ultimately, Ne Zha achieves self-realization under the assistance of his parents, Tai Yi, and most importantly, himself. The solutions he implemented are also in line with Karen Horney's theory: the appeal of mastery, the appeal of love and the appeal of the freedom (Horney, 1965). Thus, it is reasonable to analyze the film based on Karen Horney's theory. The details of analysis are clarified in the next chapter.

3. THE WAY NE ZHA COPE WITH BASIC CONFLICTS

Based on Karen Horney's theory, childhood is generally dominated by a need for safety, security and freedom from fear. In this period, children are susceptible to basic anxiety, a feeling of helplessness in a potentially hostile world. Sometimes, basic conflicts do not arise in the first place or on the surface, but it is by no means easy for sufferers to cope with basic conflicts. There are three major lines crystallized by Karen Horney for children to deal with it: moving toward people, moving against people and moving away from people (Horney, 1957). In the plot of *Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny*, the leading character Ne Zha is a child less than three years old. On account of the demoniac reincarnation ball, Ne Zha was antagonized by the exterior world, which leads to basic anxiety and conflicts in his mind. Then he adopts an array of measures including moving toward people, moving against people and moving away from people to cope with his basic conflicts. In this chapter, the author will illustrate these three main lines separately.

3.1 Moving Toward People

According to Karen Horney's idea, the features of "moving toward people" are compliant, subordinate and dependent upon others. To be specific, this compliant type of people has strong desire to be loved, accepted and taken care of. They tend to become sensitive and eager to fulfill the other's expectation unconsciously. In addition, they are very likely to judge themselves on account of other's opinion, as they seek affection and acceptance compulsively. Karen Horney points out that love is a solution for this type of people. If "moving toward people" are fortunate enough to find someone who loves them from the heart, they may suffer less and enjoy more happiness.

The phenomenon of Ne Zha moving toward people can be embodied from two aspects. Firstly, Ne Zha strongly desires to be accepted by the majority. After two-year-long practice in the virtual space, the first thing he does when he returns to the real world is to save a little girl who captured by the monster. During the time Ne Zha fight against the monster, Ao Bing turns up by coincidence and participants in the combat to save the little girl together with Ne Zha. It is this plot that sows the friendship seed between Ne Zha and Ao Bing, two friendless and lonely souls. Finally, Ne Zha and Ao Bing successfully save the little girl. Ne Zha thought that he could be accepted by ordinary people after this event, but unexpectedly, people misunderstand him as the person who carried off the little girl and strike him violently. Another action showed Ne Zha is willing to move toward people is that he tries his utmost to live up to others' expectation. After his parent and Tai Yi tell him a white lie that he born with the virtuous reincarnation ball and entrusts with the an

important post, Ne Zha stops leading to trouble like usual but practices the ability of demolishing demons diligently in the virtual space for two years. Although Ne Zha is merely a child less than three years old, he still arises the sense mission spontaneously and refuses to disappoint the people who trust and love him. Overall, all these behaviors indicate that Ne Zha tends to move toward people and yearns for being accepted from inner world.

3.2 Moving Against People

Different from the compliant type above, the “moving against people” belongs to aggressive type and takes it for granted that everyone is hostile and enemy. This type of people does everything they can to fight against people. Emotions like love, empathy and friendliness have passed out of existence. The reason why they become violent is that they feel heartbroken due to the outside world. The way that could be applied to help this type of people is that letting them feel being loved. Thus, “moving toward people” and “moving against people” are two polar extremes that neither is advisable and both harmful to our growth (Horney, 1957).

In *Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny*, Ne Zha expresses his hostility to the exterior world and people with progressive negative emotion. At the beginning, Ne Zha usually sneaks out from the guarded house due to loneliness and wants to find someone who can play with him like other average children. However, once people on the street saw him, they either hide themselves in house, or strike and fling abuses Ne Zha, let alone allowing their children to play with him. On one occasion, Ne Zha disguises himself as another child in order to play well with his peers, but others broke out into curses and call him “monster” loudly and repetitively once been recognized. This time, Ne Zha has reached the end of his forbearance and fought against all these peers inexorably. In addition, the emotion of moving against people has been upgraded when Ne Zha was told the whole naked truth by Shen Gongbao. This time, he nearly out of control and outbreaks all his repressed emotion. Apart from the people who once injured him, Ne Zha even points his weapon to the all people who love and support him all long including his parents, Tai Yi and so forth. In short, the behavior of moving against people is the result of being misunderstood and cheated.

3.3 Moving Away From People

Generally speaking, the type of “moving away from people” is keen on detachment. The major character detachment people possess is estrangement, both estrangement from people and estrangement from the self. It means that they are suffered from disturbed interpersonal relationships, and neither can they experience emotions such as love, hope, cooperation and so forth. Furthermore, they are striving for self-sufficiency and independence with a strong desire for privacy.

Judging superficially, people who want to move away is artificial harmony or a protection mechanism that avoids being hurt. However, the root problem cannot be solved unless they can feel the sense of security (Horney, 1957).

In fact, the desire of moving toward people is much stronger than that of moving away from people for Ne Zha from beginning to the end. The manifestation of moving away from people can be classified into two categories, namely passive detachment and initiative detachment. At the beginning of the story, villagers want to kill the baby Ne Zha due to fearing of the disaster caused by demoniac reincarnation ball. It is Ne Zha's parents who urge and persuade villagers letting off Ne Zha and promise to keep an eye on him twenty-four hours a day. Therefore, Ne Zha was cabined in the yard and moves away from people passively. On the other hand, the initiative detachment happens when Ne Zha is misapprehended by villagers that he is the one who captured the little girl instead of protecting the girl. At that time, he shuts himself up in his room, refusing taking food and people who want to comfort him. The strong desire for privacy shows Ne Zha feels extremely heartbroken, distraught and hopeless. He believes that he can do nothing but moving away from people to protect himself from being harm endlessly by the obdurate people.

Regarding all these negative social and cultural elements, Ne Zha ultimately masters his own life and wins the respect of all people. The happy ending cannot be separated from three main solutions that Ne Zha and his parents implemented based on Karen Horney's theory. The three major solutions will be illustrated in the next chapter.

4. THREE MAJOR SOLUTIONS OF NE ZHA

People usually prefer to regard psychoanalyst as the surgeon who heal the mental disease of patients. Different psychoanalysts may perform an operation under the assistance of various tools and methods. For instance, Freud helps his patients by the interpretation of dreams; Carl Jung treats his visitors via personality, collective unconsciousness and so forth; whereas Karen Horney points out three major solutions to deal with inner conflicts, namely the appeal of mastery, the appeal of love and the appeal of freedom. Although different solutions are designed for different type of people, it is still reasonable to analyze Ne Zha by this theory since many people including Ne Zha might boast more than one character traits. The persona they wear, to a large extent, depends on the thing and people they confront with.

4.1 The Appeal of Mastery

According to Karen Horney's theory, the appeal of mastery is the solution for the expansive type of people.

The expansive-type people are ambitious, emulative and hanker for becoming the mastery of fate. Mastering life is the measure that helps people conquering fears and anxieties. In most cases, there is much hostility in their world, which possesses some similarities with moving against people in the previous chapter (Horney, 1965).

The motivation of appealing mastery is quite distinct for Ne Zha. The word “destiny”, like a mountain, weighs on his shoulder and makes him breathless. Due to the stereotype of the demoniac reincarnation ball, Ne Zha suffers from tons of criticism and bias, and extremely thirsts for becoming the master of his own fate. There are two main actions showed his appeal for mastery. Firstly, after two-year-long practice, he cannot wait to return to the real world protecting ordinary people. Regardless of the objection from his parents or Tai Yi, Ne Zha arbitrarily breaks through the boundary and goes back to the real world. This is the first obvious behavior that Ne Zha no longer obedient to others and makes his own choice. Secondly, before Ne Zha being tortured by the thunderstorm, his father could and is willing to substitute him to die, but Ne Zha refuses to do so. In the film, Ne Zha says: “I shoulder the fate of my own, never incriminating others.” At that point, he achieves the true master of his own destiny.

4.2 The Appeal of Love

The second major solution of conflicts is the appeal of love, which is suitable for the self-effacing type of people. Opposite to the expansive type, the self-effacing type tends to dependent upon and appeases others' expectation like the people who “moving toward people” unconsciously. They need emotional support consumingly, since Karen Horney emphasizes that “love therefore is an intrinsic part of the self-effacing solution.” (Horney, 1965). What love to them is like what oxygen to breath? Furthermore, in *Our Inner Conflicts*, Karen Horney states that love is the effective medicine for both “moving toward people” and “moving against people.” Therefore, it is of great significance for people who suffer from mental problems accept and experience the power of love.

Undoubtedly, god cracks a huge joke to Ne Zha and his family. However, what is fortunate to Ne Zha is that he never loses the love from his parents and Tai Yi. Although common people hate him, curse him and even fight him, Ne Zha can all through feel the loving atmosphere encircle him. It is love that cure Ne Zha's trauma step by step and give him a helping hand to self-actualization. The love Ne Zha receives can be divided into two aspects, namely physical level and spiritual level. No matter from the protection since the birth or willing substitute Ne Zha to die, these actions all shows the love of parents from physical level. As parents, the most vital desire to their children is neither achieving success, nor wining recognition, but alive healthily. Exactly as an ancient Chinese saying goes “where there is life, there is hope.”,

physical health is the solid foundation of success. The parents of Ne Zha never balk at any personal sacrifice, including reputation and life, in an attempt to protect their child. Apart from the love of physical level, Ne Zha's parents also worry about Ne Zha's psychological fitness and output spiritual love unremittingly. Take the white lie for example, Ne Zha is extremely disappointed and furious about people's attitude, and says “they treat me as a monster, and then I will show them as monster!” The utterance of Ne Zha shows that he is at the edge of demonization and mental illness. Thus, parents tell the white lie to Ne Zha and pacify him to keep away from diseases spiritually. The psychological love can be viewed as the spiritual pillar and supporting energy for Ne Zha.

4.3 The Appeal of Freedom

With regarding to neurotics withdrawing from the inner conflicts and declaring himself uninterested, “resignation” can be counted as an appropriate name for this type of people from Karen Horney's perspective. The label of this type of people can be listed as “detachment”, “do not care”, “avoidance”, etc, which shares some common points with “moving away from people.” The appeal of freedom gives these people the possibility of inner independence and exerts positive significant influence (Horney, 1965).

The appeal of freedom is the inner voice of Ne Zha which pervades the entire story. At the very start, Ne Zha is restricted in the yard and not allowed to get in contact with people. It is the first time that Ne Zha realizes the important of communication, so he breaks through the boundary ceaselessly and wants to be free in the outside world. The second occasion that Ne Zha feels comfortless is been constrained in the virtual space. The appeal of freedom is also one of the reasons why Ne Zha runs amuck to the real world without the allowance of his parents or Tai Yi. Nevertheless, at the end of the story, the form of appealing freedom has been sublimated and upgraded. Ne Zha bears the thunderstorm by his own initiative, which shows that he wants to break the bondage of stereotype and gain inner independence. The fire of pursuing freedom never extinguish in Ne Zha's mind until he achieve freedom authentically.

5. SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND TRANSCENDENCE

Cited by Karen Horney, “in all neurotic developments, the alienation from self is the nuclear problem.” (Horney, 1965), indeed, “self” is one of the most essential words in psychoanalysis. The concept of self is composed of two ideas in accordance with Karen Horney's theory, namely the real self and the ideal self (Horney, 1957). To be specific, the real self refers to who and what we actually are, and possess the potential to grow; the ideal self represents the type of person we feel that we should

be, or the role model to the real self. What normal people generally do is to try his utmost narrowing the gap between the real self and the ideal self. In fact, the process people chasing the ideal self is actually the course of self-actualization. From another psychoanalyst Abraham Maslow's perspective, the need of self-actualization is on the second top of the hierarchy of needs, superior to other human needs such as psychological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, need to know and understand needs as well as aesthetic needs. What Abraham Maslow puts on the top of the needs' pyramid is the need of transcendence. Transcendence is one of the core words in transpersonal psychology, and focuses on the further reaches of human nature like the heights of creativity, intuition and inspiration.

In the movie, superficially, Ne Zha pays the price of pursuing freedom as he loses his human body. Nevertheless, in fact, Ne Zha fulfills his needs in self-actualization and transcendence. It is primarily because of two reasons. Firstly, Ne Zha gets rid of the curse control of the demoniac reincarnation ball, so as to become the real master of his own fate. He courageously fights against those who want to kill the people in his hometown, despite it is these villagers who make Ne Zha heartbroken over and over again. Ne Zha's behavior embodies a classical Chinese thought—return good for evil. Secondly, after this combat, the villagers finally understand that Ne Zha is not monster or demon, but the savior of their life. They are ashamed of what they used down to Ne Zha, and all kneel down to the psyche of Ne Zha. At that point, the real self and ideal self of Ne Zha coincide with each other, since being accepted, loved, cared and respected by these villagers is the deepest desire buried in his heart. Finally, Ne Zha achieves self-actualization and transcendence as well as gains transpersonal growth.

6. CONCLUSION

The movie, *Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny*, can be counted as the phenomenon as it breaks many records in the history of Chinese animated film. The little Ne Zha suffers from inner struggles and conflicts from an early age. Analyzing from the view point of Karen Horney, Ne Zha manifests typical traits of neurotic personality such as moving toward people, moving against people and moving away from people. Thanks to the assistance and support from the people surrounding him and his own awaken, he eventually surmounts all his psychological barriers through the appeal of mastery, the appeal of love and the appeal of freedom, so as to achieve self-actualization and transcendence.

It is without saying that this movie can also be analyzed by other theories like feminism. The author believes that

the way producer dealing with female characters is totally different compared with female roles in other movies. Firstly, Ne Zha's mother is not superstitious. Due to the peculiarity of Ne Zha, unlike other children born after ten month pregnancy, Ne Zha's mother spends three years to give birth to Ne Zha. In the plot, during the three-year-time, Ne Zha's parents go to the temple praying for smooth parturition. What surprise the audience is that Ne Zha's father kneels down and worships Buddha; however his mother refuses to do so. This behavior is completely contradictory to that of traditional Chinese woman who tend to be more superstitious owing to the lack of discourse power in patriarchal society. Secondly, Ne Zha's mother also removes the evils from the people. In ancient china, female cannot accept education or work outside the home. Nevertheless, Ne Zha's mother is deeply conscious of the righteousness of a cause and keeps getting rid of evils for the people regardless of the excessive negative attitude the villagers show to his son. Overall, there are many other analysis angles the author fails to mention in this paper.

To sum up, *Ne Zha: I Am The Destiny* is a thought-provoking movie. The story of Ne Zha tells people never bend to fate even though we might confront tons of difficulties and barriers in daily life. Only via believing we are the master of our own fate, can we release potential to the greatest extent and narrow the gap between the real self and the ideal self. Self-actualization and transcendence are not unreachable under unremitting efforts.

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