

THE RISE OF CHINA’S ANIMATION POWERHOUSE: *NE ZHA 2* AND THE MAKING OF AN INDUSTRY

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The modern Chinese animation industry had a tumultuous genesis, developing amid political chaos of a modernising China, wars, technological backwardness and economic deprivation. It emerged as a sub-contracting powerhouse during the Deng-ist economic reform era, gaining funding, knowhow and technology. This growth culminated in the production of *Ne Zha 2* which raked in US\$1.33 billion at the Chinese box office by February 2025. Key to this success was Chinese classics-turned-animations with “unique oriental aesthetics” and a collectivist strategy bringing together talents, studios and creative stakeholders in a single project. Creators downplayed nationalism (which characterised previous blockbuster movies in China) and heightened the element of resonance, appealing to disaffected, lonely or rebellious Chinese youths. The success of *Ne Zha 1* and *2* was also augmented with advanced technologies and special effects. Despite concerns over extreme nationalism and patriotic sentiments that potentially intimidate producers, the success of *Ne Zha 2* signals a new renaissance in Chinese animation.

(Click on the link to read the above in [Chinese](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#))

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Chinese:

中国动画强国的崛起：《哪吒之魔童降世》及其产业的形成

中国现代动画产业的起源经历了一段坎坷的历程。它是伴随着中国现代化进程中的政治混乱、战争、技术落后、经济匮乏和革命而发展的。但中国在这些挑战中不断发展，并在邓小平经济改革时代成为动画分包大国。通过这种方式获得资金、技术和人才，该行业最终于 2025 年制作了《哪吒 2》，在中国创造了 13.3 亿美元的票房收入。成功的因素有很多。中国动画人在制作中国经典动画方面取得了历史悠久的成功，天生具有“独特的东方美学”。他们采用集体主义集群策略，将人才、工作室和创意利益相关者集中在一个项目上，然后进行分工来管理制作的不同部分。在故事情节上，主创淡化了民族主义（这是中国以往大片的特征），并强调了共鸣的元素，以吸引不满、孤独或叛逆的中国年轻人。《哪吒 1》和《哪吒 2》的成功还得益于先进的技术和特效。但《哪吒 2》的巨大成功也激起了极端的民族主义和爱国情绪，动画利益相关者担心这可能会适得其反，并恐吓制片人。尽管如此，撇开如此极端的粉丝群体不谈，中国似乎正因《哪吒 2》而处于新动画复兴的时代。

French:

L'ESSOR DE LA PUISSANCE DE L'ANIMATION CHINOISE: NE ZHA 2 ET LA FABRIQUE D'UNE INDUSTRIE

L'industrie moderne de l'animation chinoise a eu des débuts tumultueux, se développant au milieu du chaos politique de la modernisation chinoise, des guerres, du retard technologique et de la privation. Elle a émergé comme une puissance de sous-traitance durant l'ère des réformes économiques de Deng Xiaoping, acquérant financement, savoir-faire et technologie. Cette croissance a culminé avec la production de Ne Zha 2, qui a rapporté 1,33 milliard de dollars américains au box-office chinois en février 2025. Un élément clé de ce succès a été l'adaptation en animations de classiques chinois avec des “esthétiques orientales uniques” et une stratégie collective réunissant talents, studios et acteurs créatifs dans un seul projet. Les créateurs ont minimisé le nationalisme (qui caractérisait les précédents blockbusters en Chine) et ont accentué l'élément de résonance, attirant les jeunes Chinois désillusionnés, solitaires ou rebelles. Les succès de Ne Zha 1 et 2 ont également été renforcés par des technologies avancées et des effets spéciaux. Malgré les préoccupations concernant le nationalisme extrême et les sentiments patriotiques qui pourraient intimider les producteurs, le succès de Ne Zha 2 annonce une nouvelle renaissance de l'animation chinoise.

Spanish:

EL ASCENSO DE LA POTENCIA DE ANIMACIÓN DE CHINA: NE ZHA 2 Y LA CREACIÓN DE UNA INDUSTRIA

La industria de animación moderna china tuvo un génesis tumultuoso, desarrollándose en medio del caos político de una China en proceso de modernización, guerras, atraso tecnológico y privaciones económicas. Surgió como una potencia subcontratante durante la era de reformas económicas de Deng Xiaoping, obteniendo financiamiento, conocimientos técnicos y tecnología. Este crecimiento culminó en la producción de Ne Zha 2, que recaudó 1.33 mil millones de dólares en la taquilla china para febrero de 2025. La clave de este éxito fueron los clásicos chinos convertidos en animaciones con “estéticas orientales únicas” y una estrategia colectivista que reunió talentos, estudios y partes interesadas creativas en un solo proyecto. Los creadores minimizaron el nacionalismo (que caracterizó a películas taquilleras anteriores en China) y realzaron el elemento de resonancia, atrayendo a jóvenes chinos descontentos, solitarios o rebeldes. El éxito de Ne Zha 1 y 2 también se vio potenciado por tecnologías avanzadas y efectos especiales. A pesar de las preocupaciones sobre el nacionalismo extremo y los sentimientos patrióticos que potencialmente intimidan a los productores, el éxito de Ne Zha 2 señala un nuevo renacimiento en la animación china.

Executive Summary

1. The Chinese movie, *Havoc in Heaven* 大闹天宫 (or ‘Uproar in Heaven’), released in 1961 became the first iconic classic produced under the Mao era to excite a whole new generation of local filmmakers and animators (and even some overseas).
2. *Ne Zha 2* set a new box office record for the Chinese film industry, earning approximately RMB9.51 billion (US\$1.33 billion) and cinema admissions of 187 million in China by February 2025. It became the first film to make US\$1 billion in a single market and the first non-Hollywood production to join the billion-dollar club.
3. The revival of China’s animation industry began with Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms, creating new opportunities as China became a sub-contractor for American and Japanese animation. While this modernises the Chinese animation industry, it faces domestic criticism for suppressing local productions.
4. This subcontracting trend brought in the well-needed foreign revenues to build up China’s animation capabilities and introduced modernised techniques and technologies to make animation.
5. The emergence of technologies was useful for creating new opportunities and platforms for the Chinese animation industry. Aside from commercial cinema chains, Chinese animation fandom was drawn to offerings on major video-streaming platforms with products like *Mo Dao Zu Shi* 魔道祖师.
6. In the 21st century, the 2018 success of *Ne Zha 1* 哪吒, a five-year old production based on a well-known Chinese folklore broke box office records in the summer of 2018 and amassed more than US\$742 million by 2021, making it the second-highest grossing film in Chinese cinematic history at that time.
7. The early successes of Chinese classics-turned-animations have laid the groundwork for contemporary China’s animation renaissance in the 21st century. It culminated

in the global success of *Ne Zha 2* in 2025, the classical tale of a boy using his powers to battle demons.

8. More than 130 firms collaborated on *Ne Zha 2* with a division of labour strategy. This clustering heightened collectivist values, aligning with Confucian management, as individuals form a “technological community” to advance the animation industry.
9. The film has attracted nationalistic sentiments/feelings in China, politicising the film to the extent that it becomes associated with nationalism. Social media users were criticised if they did not watch the animation and such sentiments were widely expressed on Chinese social media like Douyin.
10. The success of *Ne Zha 2* revived Chinese domestic interest in cinema-going during the 2025 Spring Festival and reversing the decline in cinema attendance.