The Narrative of Animated Films and the Construction of Family Values in the New Era: A Study of Cultural Inheritance Based on Xi Jinping's Family Values Thought and *Nezha 2*

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Abstract. Under the strategic context of "cultural confidence," domestic animated films are increasingly becoming vital carriers for the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional Chinese culture. This paper takes the widely influential Chinese animated film *Ne Zha 2: The Devil Child Strikes Back* as a case study and, by integrating the core connotations of Xi Jinping's thoughts on family values, explores the pathways for blending traditional cultural expression with the construction of family virtues in the new era. The study finds that the film reshapes Ne Zha's family relationships and strengthens the protagonist's growth trajectory from identity struggle to social responsibility. It weaves traditional values such as "filial piety, brotherhood, loyalty, and integrity" into a modern narrative, implicitly conveying core concepts like the "family destiny community" and the "family-nation isomorphism." This expands the practical path of family value ideology within the context of popular culture and fills a gap in existing research. Furthermore, the study points out that such cultural products can not only provide vivid situational references for youth values education but also offer cultural models for parents in their efforts to build positive family traditions. At the same time, they provide feasible approaches and methodological support for the soft dissemination of mainstream ideology, contributing to the promotion and deepening of socialist core values.

Keywords: Nezha 2; Xi Jinping's Family Values Thought; Animated Films; Cultural Inheritance

1 Introduction

China is currently at a critical stage of cultural revival, with the national strategy of "cultural confidence" emphasizing the in-depth exploration and promotion of the contemporary value of traditional Chinese culture. Against this backdrop, domestic animated films are increasingly becoming important. *Ne Zha 2: The Devil Child Strikes Back*, carried even greater public expectations. With its distinctive Eastern aesthetic

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and modern reinterpretation of ethical concepts, the film further advanced the popularization of traditional culture.

Xi Jinping's thoughts on family traditions emphasize the importance of promoting family civility, striving to make millions of families important foundations for national development, national progress, and social harmony [1]. The dissemination of family values requires more concrete and emotionally resonant carriers, especially for younger audiences. With their vivid visual expression and strong emotional appeal, animated films have become an ideal platform for putting family values into practice and guiding the value formation of adolescents.

Based on this, this paper takes *Ne Zha 2: The Devil Child Strikes Back* as a case study and, in conjunction with the core connotations of Xi Jinping's thoughts on family traditions, explores how animated films can utilize modern narratives to achieve both the inheritance and innovative expression of traditional family culture. In doing so, it aims to provide valuable insights for the construction of family virtues in the new era and the value education of young people.

2 Literature Research Gap

2.1 Research on animated films as carriers of traditional cultural inheritance

In recent years, animated films, as modern media that blend visual art with narrative expression, have gradually become important carriers for the inheritance of traditional culture. For example, *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child* restructures traditional mythological stories and integrates modern aesthetics and design, endowing traditional culture with renewed vitality and a distinct sense of Eastern aesthetics [2] [3]. In the digital media era, audiovisual works further expand the reach of traditional culture through innovative use of visual communication and cultural symbols, facilitating deeper interaction between culture and modern society [4].

2.2 A Study on Xi Jinping's Thoughts on Family Values and Their Dissemination in Popular Culture

In the context of the new era, Xi Jinping's thoughts on family values are regarded as a convergence point between China's fine traditional culture and the construction of modern family civilization, emphasizing the value linkage among family virtues, Party conduct, and social ethos [5]. Gao Shuang (2024) further points out that adolescents are in a critical period of value formation, and sound family values play a key role in fostering their moral cognition, ethical will, and behavioral norms, making them an essential focus of family value education in the new era [6]. Lin Liya (2025) proposes that film art, as an effective medium for emotional resonance and cultural identity, can integrate family values into the aesthetic education system. It enables a soft approach to dissemination among the youth, thereby expanding both the communication field and practical pathways for family value education [7].

In summary, Chinese animated films have revitalized traditional culture through modern narrative techniques and design approaches. President Xi Jinping's important discourse on family values is deeply aligned with traditional Chinese culture, emphasizing the foundational role of the family in moral cultivation and character development. Although existing studies have begun to explore the connections between animation, traditional culture, and family values, there remains a lack of systematic research on how animated film narratives internalize family ethics and effectively influence adolescents' value formation. Further investigation is urgently needed to understand the communication mechanisms and educational functions of such media.

3 Content Analysis: The Convergence of Cinematic Narrative and Family Ethos

3.1 Reshaping Family Relationships: Narrative Metaphors of Conflict Resolution

In the prequel *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, Ne Zha faces a crisis of trust within his family due to his identity as a "demon pill," while his father, Li Jing, confronts an ethical dilemma of sacrificing himself to ensure his son's safety. The internal family dynamics are marked by intense conflict and tension. In the sequel *Ne Zha 2: Demon Child Rises from the Sea*, the external threat posed by the Dragon Clan serves as a catalyst that shifts the father-son relationship from confrontation to cooperation. Scenes of Ne Zha and Li Jing fighting side by side vividly illustrate the formation of a "family community of shared destiny," highlighting how family members can overcome estrangement and unite in the face of external challenges.

Reconciliation within the family not only lays a solid foundation for individuals to integrate smoothly into society, but also reflects the positive role of sound family values in resolving internal conflicts and promoting social harmony and stability. This narrative progression closely echoes General Secretary Xi Jinping's core principle of "valuing the family, family education, and family virtues," highlighting the essential role of family values in fostering a harmonious and stable society.

3.2 Moral Education: A Value Progression from Individual to Society

In terms of character development, Ne Zha evolves from the individual awakening in the previous film—embodied by the declaration "My fate is determined by me, not by heaven," which showcased his courage and defiance against destiny—to the collective pledge in the sequel: "I will protect Chentang Pass," marking a shift from focusing on personal fate to embracing social responsibility. This transformation reflects the value progression embedded in traditional Chinese ethics: from self-cultivation to family regulation and ultimately to governing the state ("xiushen—qijia—zhiguo"). The change in parental educational approaches plays a crucial role in this journey: Lady Yin shifts from indulgence to encouraging responsibility, while Li Jing moves from strictness to

trust. Together, they embody the wisdom of "loving with guidance," enabling Ne Zha's dual growth in both morality and responsibility.

This character growth trajectory vividly illustrates the educational principle of "fastening the first button of life right," highlighting the foundational role of the family as the earliest site of education [8]. Parents' educational philosophies and approaches profoundly influence the development of a child's moral character and sense of social responsibility, guiding them from self-centered awareness toward care for others and society as a whole.

3.3 Cultural Translation: Modern Coding and Innovative Expression of Traditional Values

The Transformation of "Filial Piety" (Xiao). The storyline in which Ne Zha saves his father breaks through the traditional model of filial piety, which centers on obedience and submission. Instead, it reflects a more equal and interactive relationship among family members in the new era. In the film, when faced with life-threatening challenges and fate, Ne Zha not only expresses respect and gratitude toward his parents but also actively takes on the responsibility of protecting his family. This character portrayal reconstructs the meaning of filial piety, transforming it from passive obedience into a modern value system encompassing responsibility, cooperation, and empathy. It helps audiences—especially young viewers—better understand the contemporary relevance of filial piety in today's society.

The Reconstruction of "Fraternal Love" (Ti). In the film, Ne Zha and Ao Bing evolve from adversaries to allies, surpassing the traditional limits of fraternal love, which was historically confined to kinship or members of the same group. Their cooperation represents mutual understanding and inclusiveness across cultural and social boundaries. As representatives of different identities and cultural backgrounds, they eventually support each other and coexist peacefully. This not only infuses the traditional value of "ti" with new cultural meaning but also provides a vivid example of intercultural communication and harmonious coexistence for young audiences. It reflects the transformation and innovative expression of family values in the modern era.

The Metaphor of "Integrity" (Lian). As the commander of Chentang Pass, Li Jing shoulders the responsibility of protecting his region, embodying the qualities of loyalty, dedication, and strict self-discipline. He not only fulfills his role as a caring father at home but also upholds justice and social order in his official capacity. Through the portrayal of Li Jing, the film conveys traditional values of honesty and integrity, emphasizing that public officials should lead by example, maintaining harmony within the family while upholding justice in society. This kind of character modeling subtly fosters in young viewers an understanding of the importance of integrity and strengthens their identification with the traditional family virtue of "Lian".

Through detailed storytelling and character development, the film achieves a "soft landing" of family value ideology, skillfully integrating the traditional core values of

filial piety, fraternal love, and integrity into modern narratives. By adopting an animated storytelling format that is popular among the general public, especially youth, the film makes it easier for audiences to accept and comprehend these profound ideas, thereby promoting cultural inheritance and value education.

4 Practical Significance: Expanding the Channels and Practices of Family Value Communication

4.1 Addressing the Current Challenges of Value Hollowing in Cultural Products

Two major issues currently confront the development of Chinese animation. First is the phenomenon of value hollowing. Some myth-based adaptations focus excessively on visual spectacle and technical prowess while neglecting deeper ethical and social value expression. This leads to a loss of spiritual guidance, particularly weakening the cultural impact on young audiences. Second is the increasing Westernization of narrative models. The dominance of individualism and heroism in storytelling weakens traditional Chinese values that emphasize family-nation unity and collective responsibility over individual pursuits.

Ne Zha 2: Demon Child Rises from the Sea offers a positive exploration of value construction in domestic animation. The film incorporates an ethical perspective of "family and nation as one," showcasing the value wisdom of "harmony is most precious" and "unity in diversity" through plotlines such as reconciliation between the Dragon Clan and the Heavenly Court. Moreover, by presenting a structure of responsibility within the family, it reinforces the Confucian logic of "ordering the family," where responsibilities precede rights. This makes the family narrative an effective medium for promoting traditional cultural spirit. The film provides a valuable reference for how Chinese animation can avoid value hollowing and achieve the modern transformation of traditional culture.

4.2 Expanding the Realm of Moral Education for Youth

Studies show that visual media significantly influence the formation of youth values. Animated films, with their vivid characters and emotional storytelling, can effectively resonate with young audiences and foster value alignment, making them a powerful tool for moral education. The themes of *Ne Zha 2*—such as "defying fate" and "defending the family and nation"—have resonated deeply with young viewers, demonstrating the positive function of visual narratives in moral education.

The film portrays Ne Zha's parents adopting an approach of "trust without indulgence," reflecting modern educational ideals of "respecting individuality and guiding responsibility." For instance, while allowing Ne Zha to explore the world, they also set time boundaries—ensuring both autonomy and discipline. This provides a practical model for moral education, where parents can use animated content to subtly instill in

children a sense of responsibility and awareness of rules, enriching and enlivening the educational environment within the family.

4.3 A Realistic Reminder to Strengthen Family Education for Party Members and Officials

Family values are not only essential to personal moral development but also directly influence the conduct of Party members and officials. General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the importance of "valuing the family, family education, and family virtues," recognizing good family values as the foundation for moral cultivation and clean governance. Since the 18th National Congress, the Party has vigorously promoted full and strict governance, implementing the Eight-point Regulation and its guidelines. Alongside improving work style, family value construction has been integrated into cadre education.

In *Ne Zha 2*, the character of Li Jing offers a vivid example for such educational practices. He is a loving and responsible father and a disciplined, dutiful official, embodying the unity of personal and public virtue. His character conveys the value orientation of "honest family governance." Such portrayals can serve as educational material for Party cadres, helping them enhance their awareness of integrity through film and internalize family values into political character and behavioral discipline. This contributes to building a clean and upright Party and government ethos.

5 Conclusion

Ne Zha 2: Demon Child Rises from the Sea centers on family narratives to vividly interpret how mainstream values—particularly family values—can be embedded within popular cultural products. The film demonstrates the unique strength of literary and artistic works in fulfilling the function of ideological dissemination in a subtle, immersive manner. By combining entertainment with education, the film transforms traditional cultural values such as filial piety, fraternal love, and integrity into a visual language that is accessible and comprehensible to young audiences, thereby facilitating the transmission and promotion of family values.

Only by deeply embedding core ideas into media formats that resonate with the public can we truly achieve the strategic vision of "making millions of families the foundation of national development, social harmony, and national progress." Family value construction must become an essential part of the modernization of national governance systems and capabilities, providing strong cultural support and spiritual strength for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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