



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
INNOVATION AND  
INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION  
(IJIREV)

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**INHERITANCE AND INNOVATION: THE DIGITAL  
VISUAL TRANSLATION OF CONFUCIAN MORAL  
PHILOSOPHY IN *NEZHA 2* AND ITS POSITIVE ENERGY  
ORIENTATION FOR YOUTH CULTURE**

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**Article Info:**

**Article history:**

Received date: 08.12.2025

Revised date: 30.12.2025

Accepted date: 25.01.2026

Published date: 10.03.2026

**To cite this document:**

Geng, T., & Manaf, A. A., (2026). Inheritance And Innovation: The Digital Visual Translation of Confucian Moral Philosophy in *Nezha 2* And Its Positive Energy Orientation for Youth Culture. *International Journal of Innovation and Industrial Revolution*, 8 (24), 132-151.

**Abstract:**

Against the backdrop of the rapid development of digital technology, animated films have become core carriers of cultural communication. With its outstanding box office performance and reputation, *Nezha 2* makes the digital visual translation of Confucian moral philosophy therein worthy of in-depth research. This paper first defines digital visual translation as the process of converting abstract cultural and moral concepts into perceivable visual symbols through digital technologies such as motion capture, particle simulation, and 3D modeling. This process realizes the semantic transmission and value communication of core concepts by means of the coding, visual presentation, and narrative expression of visual elements. Taking *Nezha 2* as the research object and focusing on young audiences aged 12-30, this study aims to explore the digital visual means through which the film translates Confucian moral concepts such as "ren (benevolence)", "yi (righteousness)", and "li (propriety)", as well as the role of these translations in guiding youth culture. Guided by visual semiotics (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020) and the film-philosophical perspective on moral visualization, the study adopts a research framework that combines film analysis, audience research, and theoretical exploration. The findings indicate that the film accomplishes the translation of core Confucian moral concepts through three strategies: ethical coding of character symbols, moral visualization of scene special effects, and dialectical presentation of narrative structure. These translations exert positive impacts on young people's values. This research provides strategic

references for integrating traditional culture with digital art to guide youth culture.

**DOI:** 10.35631/IJIREV.824009

**Keyword:**

Confucian Moral Philosophy; Digital Visual Translation; Nezha 2; Positive Energy Orientation; Youth Culture



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## Introduction

### *Research Background*

In the context of the rapid development of digital technology, animated films have become a key carrier of cultural communication. *Nezha 2* has achieved remarkable results in terms of box office and reputation, demonstrating its strong influence (Ren, 2025). As the core of traditional Chinese culture, Confucian moral philosophy contains rich value concepts. The use of digital technology in animation to realize the visual translation of Confucian moral philosophy can not only inherit traditional culture but also inject positive energy into youth culture. As the main force of cultural consumption, young people are easily influenced by animated works, so studying the connection between the two is of great significance.

### *Research Problems*

Existing studies on the integration of Confucian moral philosophy and animated films, particularly *Nezha 2*, have three key limitations: First, they lack systematic exploration of how digital visual technologies specifically translate abstract Confucian moral concepts into perceivable visual symbols; second, they fail to clarify the mechanism through which these visual translations influence young audiences' value cognition and behavioral tendencies; third, the concept of "digital visual translation" is only treated as a descriptive term rather than an analytical construct, and has not been linked to mature theories such as visual semiotics and the film philosophy of moral visualization. These gaps make it difficult to provide effective theoretical support and practical strategies for guiding youth culture through the integration of traditional morality and digital art.

## ***Research Scope***

This study takes *Nezha 2* as the research object, covering the digital visual presentation contents of the film, such as character design, plot structure, scene arrangement, and special effects application. The research subjects are mainly young audiences aged 12 to 30, aiming to explore the impact of the film on their values, cultural cognition and other aspects.

## ***Research Question***

Through what digital visual means does *Nezha 2* achieve the transformation of Confucian moral philosophy concepts such as "ren (benevolence)", "yi (righteousness)", and "li (propriety)"?

How do young audiences perceive and understand the visual presentation of Confucian moral philosophy in the film?

How do these visual presentations influence the values and behaviors of young audiences?

## ***Research Objective***

Define the analytical connotation and core dimensions of digital visual translation, and construct its theoretical framework and operational model based on visual semiotics (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020) and the film philosophy of moral visualization.

Identify the digital visual elements carrying Confucian moral philosophy in *Nezha 2*, and clarify the translation mechanism among technology, vision and morality.

Verify the impact of such visual translation on the values of young people and explore the moderating effect of demographic variables.

Propose strategies for integrating traditional culture with digital art to guide youth culture and discuss its cross-cultural communication value.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Research on the Integration of Traditional Philosophy and Animation Narration***

As the core thread of Chinese culture, the modern expression of Confucian moral philosophy in film and television art has long been a focus of academic attention. Bandsuch (2019)'s research reveals the unique value of visual narration in moral education — compared with texts, visual materials can trigger universal emotional responses with faster information processing speed, and mobilize audiences' senses and cognition through the synergy of images, sounds, and stories (Bandsuch, 2019). This conclusion offers theoretical support for the rationality of animation films carrying Confucian moral concepts, especially highlighting the key role of digital visual technology in the concretization of abstract ethical concepts.

In studies related to *Nezha 2*, Zhao Jingang (2025) takes "concrete collectivism" as the starting point to analyze Chentang Pass as a typical carrier integrating Confucian ethics and modern collective spirit. Its core lies in realizing the visual translation of the concept of "cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state, and pacifying the world" through individuals' specific identities in family ethics and collective labor, as well as the logic of

collective value generation through practice(Zhao, 2025). This research provides a micro perspective for understanding the animation expression of Confucian collective ethics but fails to extend to broader moral categories such as "benevolence," "righteousness," and "propriety," and also lacks discussion on how digital technology participates in this translation process.

Liu Yanbing (2025), in *Tradition and Innovation: The Integration of Confucian "Five Constant Virtues" in Nezha 2*, systematically sorts out the specific embodiment of the Confucian "Five Constant Virtues" (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness) in *Nezha 2*. By analyzing the in-depth integration of character behaviors and plot progression with the Five Constant Virtues, this study lays a solid theoretical foundation for subsequent discussions on the connection between Confucian moral philosophy and the film. Meanwhile, its detailed interpretation of the close link between character images and the "Five Constant Virtues" also provides key references for the research on the application of Confucian thought in the shaping of film and television characters. Furthermore, the in-depth exploration of the Confucian cultural connotations in the film offers important enlightenment for exploring the path of the film to convey positive values to young audiences.(Y. Liu, 2025). However, this study does not address the core carrier of "digital vision"; it only focuses on the textual manifestation of the "Five Constant Virtues" in character development and plot progression and fails to explore how the film utilizes digital technology to transform the abstract Confucian moral philosophy into perceptible visual images.

### ***Research on Innovation in Narrative Paradigms and Moral Expression***

The deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional mythological ethics in *Nezha 2* have provided a new paradigm for the modern expression of Confucian morality. Taking *Nezha 2* and *Black Myth: Wukong* as case studies, Zheng Pingxi and Wang Yike (2025) proposed the theory of "fluid narrative of good and evil," pointing out that contemporary animations break through the traditional binary framework of good and evil through three mechanisms: first, the paradoxical construction of character subjects, such as *Nezha* and *Ao Bing* being "intertwined as twin entities, with good and evil interwoven"; second, the dialectical tension in plot progression, such as *Shen Gongbao's* transformation from a villain to a savior; third, the polyphonic development of narrative discourse, such as mirror narration and non-linear narration(Zheng, 2025).

This narrative strategy has shattered the black-and-white moral dichotomy in traditional narratives. It not only presents a richer portrait of human nature and social reality, infusing modern film and television art with in-depth philosophical reflection and social criticism, but also directly challenges the traditional monopoly of power discourse on the definition of good and evil—transforming mythological narratives into profound metaphors for modern predicaments, thereby endowing the works with greater contemporaneity and making it easier for audiences to resonate with them. Instead of pre-labeling characters with fixed identities of good or evil, the animations depict how characters gradually establish their own moral values and sense of good-evil identity in the course of their lives: through interactions with others and things, they engage in constant confusion, self-reflection, and practical exploration.

### ***Research on the Relationship Between Cultural Communication and Audience Influence***

From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, Liu Weida et al. (2025), based on the theory of rough information transmission, point out that the global success of *Nezha 2* benefits

from the reverse utilization of "cultural discount" — by controlling the adaptability of knowledge content, it not only retains the core spirit of Confucian morality but also reduces the threshold of understanding through visual spectacles, enabling audiences with different knowledge levels to form effective cognition and thus achieve precise pricing. This research reveals the role of digital technology in reducing cultural barriers, such as transforming "Yin-Yang philosophy" into quantum entanglement effects(W. Liu, Zhou, Y., & Zhou, Y., 2025), but fails to deeply analyze the specific communication effects of Confucian moral elements, especially ignoring the acceptance mechanism of traditional values among young groups.

The common limitations of existing studies are as follows: first, at the technical level, they do not clarify the translation logic of digital vision for Confucian moral concepts; second, at the audience level, there is a lack of empirical analysis on the cognitive and behavioral impact on young groups; third, at the practical level, they fail to connect creative strategies with educational applications, making it difficult to guide the positive value output of cultural products. Therefore, it is necessary to systematically explore the modern expression path of Confucian moral philosophy in *Nezha 2* from the dual perspectives of "digital visual translation mechanism" and "youth culture orientation."

### ***Theoretical Foundations of Digital Visual Translation: Visual Semiotics and the Film Philosophy of Moral Visualization***

#### ***Visual Semiotics: A Core Framework for Symbolic Encoding and Meaning Generation***

Visual semiotics provides the transformation logic of "form-meaning" for digital visual translation. Barthes' (1977) dual-order semiotic theory of denotation/connotation proposed in *Image, Music, Text* serves as a core tool for interpreting the meaning hierarchy of visual signs: the denotative level refers to the direct physical form of a sign; the connotative level points to the cultural and value meanings embodied in the form; while the ideological level is the in-depth construction of connotative meanings, such as strengthening specific moral cognition through narrative frameworks(Barthes, 1977). This theory reveals the transmission path of visual signs from surface form to deep-seated values and offers a core analytical logic for the process of "from abstract moral concepts to visual signs and then to value transmission" in digital visual translation.

The visual grammar theory put forward by Kress & van Leeuwen (2020) in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* further operationalizes the encoding rules of visual signs. Its core proposition is that images, like language, consist of three metafunctions: the representational metafunction, the interactive metafunction, and the compositional metafunction, constructing meanings through modal markers such as color, perspective, composition, and movement. For instance, the contrast between warm and cool colors can regulate the emotional interaction of the audience, and symmetrical composition can convey moral connotations of order and balance(Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). This theory provides an operable analytical dimension for digital visual translation, enabling the abstract translation process to be disassembled and verified through specific visual elements.

## ***The Film Philosophy of Moral Visualization: A Mechanism Linking Vision and Moral Cognition***

The film philosophy of moral visualization offers theoretical support for the value transmission effect of digital visual translation. Its core viewpoint is that visual images are not passive carriers of moral meanings, but actively participate in moral construction through emotional arousal and cognitive guidance (Carroll, 1998). For example, the digital capture of characters' facial micro-expressions can strengthen the moral emotions of roles, allowing the audience to understand abstract moral concepts through emotional resonance. This perspective makes up for the neglect of the audience's cognitive process in traditional semiotics and clarifies that 'digital visual translation is not only a process of symbolic encoding, but also a process of moral cognitive activation'—thus providing a theoretical basis for the subsequent analysis of the impact of visual translation on young people's values.

### ***Theoretical Gaps in Existing Studies***

Existing studies on *Nezha 2* and Confucian morality have failed to organically integrate visual semiotics, the film philosophy of moral visualization, and digital visual translation: they either regard visual translation as a pure technical presentation, or interpret moral connotations in isolation, failing to establish a complete theoretical chain of technology-visual signs-moral meanings-audience cognition. This study will fill this gap and construct an analytical framework for digital visual translation based on the aforementioned theories.

### **Methodology**

Construct a research framework integrating film analysis, audience research, and theoretical exploration. First, conduct a comprehensive content analysis of *Nezha 2* to sort out the connection between digital visuals and Confucian moral philosophy; then collect feedback from young audiences through questionnaires; finally, combine theoretical analysis to explore the mechanism by which the film influences youth culture.

#### ***Content Analysis Method***

Detailedly dissect the plots, characters, scenes, etc., of *Nezha2*, and label the digital visual elements related to Confucian moral philosophy. For example, classify and code character behaviors, costume colors, scene atmospheres, etc.

#### ***Questionnaire Survey Method***

Design a questionnaire for young audiences aged 12-30, covering contents such as their cognition of Confucian moral philosophy, changes in their concepts before and after watching the film, and their feelings about the relevant elements of the film. Use a Likert scale to quantify the audiences' attitudes.

#### ***Survey Type and Sampling Method***

This study adopts a descriptive-explanatory mixed survey design: the descriptive survey is used to present the current status of young audiences' cognition of Confucian moral philosophy,

while the explanatory survey is applied to analyze the correlation between the visual elements of films and the changes in audiences' values.

Stratified convenience sampling is employed in this research. First, the population is stratified by age. Then, questionnaires are distributed via online questionnaire platforms and offline channels within each stratum. This approach takes into account young groups with different educational backgrounds, ensuring that the sample covers the core audience scope specified in the questionnaire.

### ***Data Collection Process***

The questionnaire targeted young people aged 12–30 who had watched the full-length film *Nezha 2*, and a total of 110 valid questionnaires were retrieved.

The sampling criteria are as follows:

Aged between 12 and 30 years old.

Having watched the complete version of *Nezha 2*.

### ***Data Processing Tools and Reliability Test***

SPSS 26.0 was adopted for data entry and analysis. A reliability test was conducted on the core matrix scale items of the questionnaire. The results showed that the overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of the scale was 0.82. Among them, the  $\alpha$  coefficient for the Confucian moral cognition dimension was 0.79, that for the film element perception dimension was 0.81, and that for the concept change dimension was 0.83. All coefficients were higher than the acceptable standard of 0.7, indicating that the questionnaire data had good reliability.

## **Results**

### ***The Digital Visual Translation Path of Confucian Moral Philosophy in Nezha2***

The film mainly accomplishes the translation of core Confucian moral concepts through three digital visual strategies: ethical coding of character symbols, moral visualization of scene special effects, and dialectical presentation of narrative structure. The integration of digital technology makes the characters' personalities and the values they intend to convey more concrete, lowering the audience's comprehension barrier. Even foreign audiences can understand the film's content more easily. According to foreign viewers' feedback, a significant number of them feel they can grasp most of the information conveyed in the film (Zhou, 2025). This effect is essentially driven by three core mechanisms that alleviate cultural discount, relying on the universality of visual symbols and the universality of moral themes: ① Visual simplification of core moral symbols is that the film uses cross-culturally universal visual metaphors such as "flame = resistance" and "ice crystal = perseverance" to replace concepts like "xiangyuan (hypocritical conformist)" that require in-depth cultural background, reducing the cognitive burden of foreign audiences; ② Universal presentation of moral conflicts is that it transforms the culturally specific conflict between "heavenly rules and human nature" into a globally resonant theme of "authority vs. justice", allowing audiences from different cultural contexts to quickly identify with the core contradictions; ③ Immersive experience of digital special effects is that the visual spectacles generated by particle systems, motion capture and other technologies convey emotions without linguistic intermediaries, directly triggering

emotional resonance across cultures. Foreign audiences' ability to grasp most of the information is precisely the concrete manifestation of these three mechanisms.

### ***Ethical Coding of Character Symbols: Anchoring Moral Types with Visual Traits***

Drawing on Bolter & Grusin's (2000) double logic of remediation from Remediation: Understanding New Media (Bolter & Grusin, 2000), the digital visual design of characters embodies both immediacy and hypermediacy: On one hand, technologies such as motion capture and the Facial Action Coding System achieve transparent presentation, such as, Nezha's natural movements and microexpressions, allowing audiences to ignore the medium itself and directly empathize with the characters' moral traits; on the other hand, special effects like flames and ice crystals generated by particle systems deliberately highlight the presence of the medium, strengthening the characters' moral symbolic attributes. The integration of this dual logic renders Confucian moral personalities both authentic and perceptible and distinctly symbolic, enhancing the effectiveness of moral transmission.

The film employs digital technology to conduct hierarchical design on characters' external forms, facial expressions, movement rhythms, and special effects styles, turning Confucian moral personality types such as "kuangjuan (impetuous and undaunted vs. reserved and principled)", "junzi (virtuous man)", and "xiangyuan (hypocritical flatterer)" into perceivable visual symbols (Zhang, 2025).

The character design of Nezha in Nezha2 carries forward the strong rebellious spirit from traditional texts, with his resistance to established secular rules and prejudices running through the entire story: even when in the highly revered sacred realm of Yuxu Palace, he remains unconstrained. Digital technology enhances his unrestrained external traits through relaxed body motion capture and casual demeanor rendering (Ling, 2025). When confronting the seemingly authoritative and just yet actually hypocritical and unfair rules of the immortal clique, the confrontational light and shadow created by particle effects highlight his resolute attitude, which is further emphasized by the red particle glow surrounding him. When realizing that the immortal clique is actually a "people-eating" organization and that the so-called recognition is nothing but an illusion, the fluid special effects bursting around the teenage Nezha in the explosive scene transform the shout "I'm a demon, so what?" into a visual impact, embodying his uncompromising stance against the rules of heaven, the experience of predecessors, and the existing world order—this rebellion is precisely a brave challenge to unjust fate and authority.



**Figure 1: Nezha Remains in a Casual and Unruly State in The Yuxu Palace**

Source: Screenshot From the Film Nezha 2



**Figure 2: Nezha in His Teenage Form**

Source: Screenshot From the Film Nezha 2

In reference to Confucius' assertion in *The Analects·Zilu* that "the bold and unrestrained (kuang) are proactive and enterprising, while the principled and cautious (juan) refrain from doing certain things" (Confucius, 5th century BC), Nezha is a typical example of the "bold and unrestrained (kuang)". Digital technology, by enhancing the explosive force of his movements and the resoluteness in his expressions, externalizes the proactive spirit of the "bold and unrestrained" into perceivable visual symbols, highlighting his characteristic of breaking through mediocrity and pursuing higher morality and ideals.

Ao Bing, on the other hand, can be called a vivid portrayal of the "principled and cautious (juan)". As the young master of the Dragon Clan, digital technology endows his ice crystal magic with a cold texture and his body movements with a restrained rhythm, metaphorizing his persistence in the gap between immortals and demons: when refusing to blindly follow the unfair rules of the immortal realm, the solidifying sense of the frost effects strengthens the determination of "refraining from doing certain things"; when refusing to seek benefits for his clan at the expense of others, the stable state of the water ripple effects highlights the bottom line of "righteousness", perfectly interpreting the connotation of "the principled and cautious refrain from doing certain things".

The qualities of a virtuous man (junzi) advocated by Confucius are presented in a layered way through digital technology in *Li Jing*: on the external level, the metallic texture of the armor patterns and the symmetrical composition of the military management scenes strengthen his strict and majestic etiquette norms; on the internal level, the capture of subtle facial expressions and the warm-toned light and shadow in actions of protecting the people highlight his sense of responsibility for the people and deep paternal love for his son. This digital balance between internal and external qualities accurately presents the standard of a virtuous man (junzi) as "the harmonious unity of external etiquette and literary grace with internal simplicity and essence". The "hypocritical conformists (xiangyuan)" denounced by Confucius (whom he described as "thieves of virtue") are symbolically constructed through digital technology in the *Wuliang Immortal Elder* and his disciples: the contrast between the gorgeous halo of the immortal costumes and the dynamic capture of hypocritical expressions reveals their essence of "packaging selfishness with authority"; the contrast between the exaggerated sense of the magic effects of *Lutong* (Deer Lad) and *Hetong* (Crane Lad) and the viciousness of their actual behaviors strengthens the harm of "confusing moral standards", and embodies the Confucian criticism that "unprincipled catering is indeed moral corruption".

**Table 1: The Ethical Coding of Role Symbols**

Personality Type	Personality Traits	Representative Character
Confucian 'Wild' (kuang) “狂”	Proactive and enterprising, daring to break through conventions, yet sometimes slightly radical.	Nezha
Confucian 'Reserved' (juan) “狷”	Uphold one's original aspiration, and the bottom line of principles, refuse to follow the crowd, and sometimes appear slightly introverted.	Ao Bing
Virtuous person (jun zi) “君子”	Embodying the virtues of "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity", and conducting oneself in accordance with moral norms.	Li Jing
Hypocritical Conformist (xiang yuan) “乡愿”	Seeming gregarious and upright on the surface yet actually lacking a sense of right and wrong and conforming to unhealthy trends.	Wuliang Xianweng

Source: Self-compiled by the Author

**Table 2: Visual Characteristics and Digital Technology Expression of Confucian Moral Personality in *Nezha 2***

Representative Character	Visual Characteristics	Digital Technology
Nezha	<p>1. Childhood: Uninhibited in words and deeds, naughty and impulsive, with red as the main color in visual design.</p> <p>2. Adolescence: Has a resolute and sharp expression, a handsome appearance with a touch of evil. Their hair floats and is surrounded by flames; they can transform into a form with three heads and six arms. Signature lines are "My fate is decided by me, not by heaven" and "So what if I am a demon?"</p>	<p>1. A motion capture system based on an inertial sensor array (Vicon optical capture) records motion data of real performers.</p> <p>2. The Facial Action Coding System (FACS) captures facial expression details such as furrowed brows and slight trembling of the mouth corners when [the character is] angry.</p> <p>3. The NVIDIA Flex real-time physics calculation system enables the particle fluid dynamics simulation of the flames on the Flame Spear;</p> <p>4. In the scene where Nezha unleashes the magical power of having three heads and six arms, the production team adopts a complex particle system to create magical effects, and combines it with color correction technology, ensuring the</p>

		visuals possess a sense of fantasy while maintaining a realistic texture.
Ao Bing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Appearance: Elegant and handsome, with blue as the main color in visual design.</li> <li>2.Behavior: Dignified and restrained in words and deeds.</li> <li>3.Special skill: Proficient in ice-based magic.</li> </ol>	Long-range ice-based magic: Leveraging Houdini's VEX particle programming technology; it generates delicate dynamic effects of ice crystal shattering and frost spreading.
Li Jing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Appearance: Majestic and resolute.</li> <li>2.Personality: Taciturn.</li> <li>3.Traits: Has a sense of responsibility to protect the people externally; is willing to sacrifice himself for his son internally. He can see through conspiracies and conducts himself with candor and courtesy.</li> </ol>	The production team used professional 3D modeling software such as Maya and Blender to reflect Li Jing's character traits through his facial features, body proportions, clothing texture and patterns.
Wuliang Xianweng	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Camouflage Phase: Short in stature, with kind-looking eyebrows and eyes but occasionally showing a fierce glint.</li> <li>2.True Form Phase: Tall and sturdy, with a fierce face. White is the main color in its visual design, and its move "Gēnshēndìgù" (Deeply Rooted) metaphorically represents the solidification of classes and rules.</li> </ol>	The ancient ginkgo tree is used as the tangible carrier for the move "Gēnshēndìgù" (Deeply Entrenched), and the ancient tree, which appears elegant and sacred on the surface, metaphorizes the character's nature of "seeming kind on the outside but evil on the inside".

Source: Self-compiled by the Author

### ***Moral Embodiment Through Scene Effects: Conveying the Core of Ren and Xiao in Dynamic Visuals***

In animated scene construction, the emotional bond of parent–child interaction is reinforced through delicate special-effects design. The scenes of Nezha playing shuttlecock with his parents, as well as the farewell sequence before he departs for the Immortal Ascension Examination, employ meticulous animation and warm scene composition to concretize the emotional tension among family members. Likewise, the affectionate gestures between Ao Guang and Ao Bing, enhanced by subtle changes in facial expressions and the atmospheric rendering of the setting, convey parental tolerance, understanding, and profound love, as well as the children’s trust in and attachment to their elders. These embodied forms of interaction vividly perform the Confucian ethic of “fatherly love and filial devotion,” achieving a contemporary translation of traditional moral values in animated art(Wang et al., 2025).

The scene of mutual assistance among the residents of Chentang Pass is presented with warm-toned lighting and dynamic group composition. When the townspeople work together to prepare lotus-root powder to help Nezha restore his body, the soft ambient light and synchronized motion design materialize the spirit of mutual love—“Those who love others will be loved in return”(Mencius, 3rd century BCE).

***Dialectical Presentation of Narrative Structure: Strengthening Moral Cognition Through the Fluidity of Good and Evil***

According to Zheng Pingxi’s (2025) theory of moral fluidity in narrative, the characters in the *Nezha* series exhibit complexity and subversive qualities, with Shen Gongbao being a prime example. Although initially portrayed with villainous traits, in the context of Wuliang Xianweng’s plot to massacre Chentang Pass and frame the dragon clan, along with the betrayal of their kin by the Three Dragon Kings, Shen rescues Li Jing and his wife and single-handedly confronts the enemy. His lone battle against the Three Dragon Kings forms one of the most visually striking highlights of *Nezha 2*, where digital effects use a blend of tragic grandeur and intense spectacle to embody the deconstruction of the “good–evil” boundary within a concrete narrative. In this desperate moment, Shen’s rescue actions manifest the Confucian moral core of *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness), breaking fixed perceptions and enacting the conduct of a *junzi* (noble person). Through enhancing visual impact and the expressiveness of movement, digital effects transform abstract moral principles into perceptible visual symbols, heightening audience empathy while deepening reflection on human complexity and moral steadfastness.

In the grand battle between immortals and demons, moral alignments are reversed: Wuliang Xianweng, leader of the ostensibly righteous Chan Sect, is revealed as an evildoer who strengthens himself by slaughtering the demon race. His attendant children and fairy maidens, when struck back into their original forms by Ao Guang, are exposed as deer and crane demons. The confrontation between the undersea demon clans and the Chan immortals reveals that the original labels of “immortal” and “demon” are merely a smokescreen maintained by vested interests—the supposed immortals of justice and the so-called evil demon clans are sharply at odds with their actual deeds. The immortal soldiers, meanwhile, are chastised by Taiyi Zhenren for blindly aiding tyranny. Rather than delivering moral lessons through direct preaching, the film invites viewers to draw their own conclusions through narrative experience and reasoning.

**Table 3: The Transformation Between Good and Evil of the Characters in the Battle Between Immortals and Demons**

Character Name	Original Identity	Converted Identity
Wuliang Xianweng (Immortal Wuliang)	Ruler of the Immortal Realm	Those who bully the weak by virtue of their strength and are vassals of powerful forces
Hetong (Crane Lad) and Lutong (Deer Lad)	Immortal Lad and Immortal Maiden	Deer demons, crane demons
Immortal soldiers of Chan Sect	Immortal soldiers of the Chan Sect	Youngsters who cannot distinguish right from wrong and act as accomplices to the wicked,
Nezha	Demon Lad	Rebels against unjust rules, young heroes

Source: Self-compiled by the Author

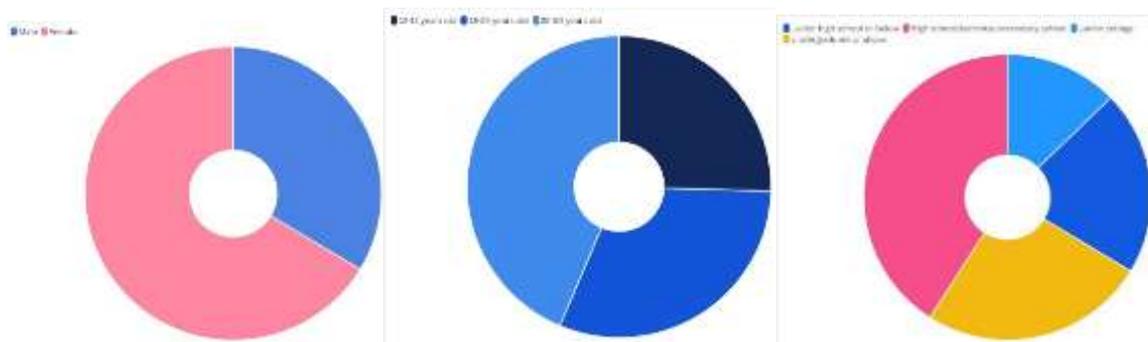
## ***Audience Perception and Behavioral Responses***

### ***Demographic Profile of Respondents***

A total of 110 valid samples were collected, with the following characteristics:

The proportion of female respondents is relatively larger, while that of male respondents is smaller. In terms of age distribution (as shown in the second pie chart), the respondents are mainly concentrated in the 25-30 age group, followed by the 18-24 age group, and the proportion of respondents in the 12-17 age group is relatively small. All samples fall within the 12-30 age range specified in the research design, which is consistent with the target research population of young audiences.

In terms of educational attainment, the respondents with an educational level of senior high school/vocational secondary school account for the largest proportion. Respondents with educational backgrounds of, junior high school or below, junior college, and undergraduate or above also each account for a certain proportion, indicating that the distribution of the respondents' educational attainment is relatively diverse.



**Figure 3: Characteristics of the Respondents**

Source: Self-compiled by the Author

### ***Pre-Existing Cognition of Confucian Moral Concepts***

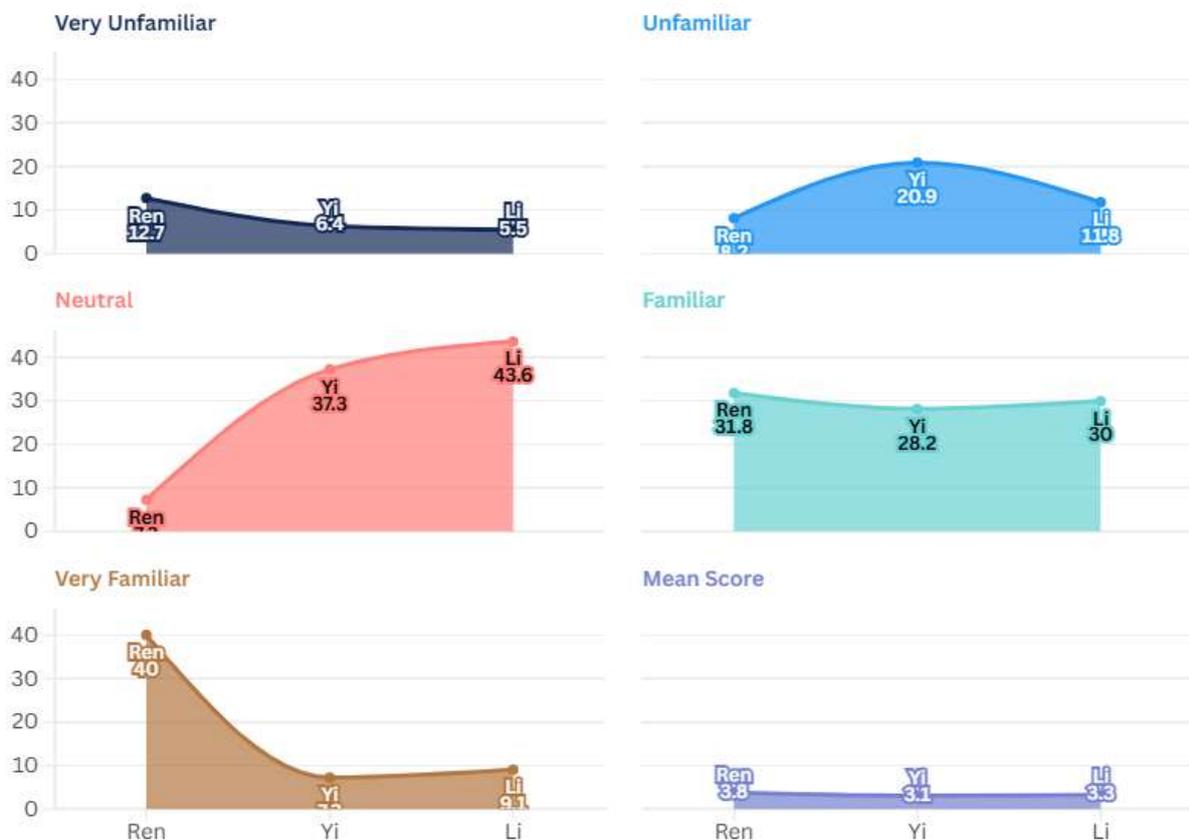
The average score for familiarity with Confucian moral concepts was 3.32 (out of 5), indicating a moderate level of prior knowledge. Specific performance:

Highest familiarity: Ren (benevolence,  $M=3.78$ ), with 71.82% of respondents reporting "familiar" or "very familiar" (31.82% for "familiar" and 40.00% for "very familiar"). Notably, the proportion of respondents who rated their familiarity as "neutral" was only 7.27%, the lowest among the three Confucian moral concepts, indicating that young people have relatively clear cognitions and attitudes towards "Ren" (a concept focusing on care and mutual assistance). Meanwhile, the combined proportion of those who chose "very unfamiliar" (12.73%) and "unfamiliar" (8.18%) was 20.91%, which was at a low level, further reflecting that "Ren" is the most well-known Confucian moral concept among young people.

Lower familiarity: Yi (righteousness,  $M=3.09$ ), with only 35.45% of respondents reporting "familiar" or "very familiar" (28.18% for "familiar" and 7.27% for "very familiar"). It is worth noting that the proportion of respondents who rated their familiarity as "neutral" reached 37.27%, which was relatively high, showing that many young people have an ambiguous and

uncertain attitude towards "Yi" (a concept centered on upholding justice and taking responsibility). In addition, the combined proportion of those who chose "very unfamiliar" (6.36%) and "unfamiliar" (20.91%) was 27.27%, higher than that of "Ren", indicating that a considerable number of young people have insufficient cognition of the Confucian moral concept of "Yi".

Moderate familiarity: Li (propriety,  $M=3.25$ ), with 39.09% of respondents reporting "familiar" or "very familiar". Notably, the proportion of respondents who rated their familiarity as "neutral" reached 43.64%, which was the highest among the three concepts, reflecting that most young people demonstrate a state of "basic comprehension yet incomplete mastery" regarding. Meanwhile, the combined proportion of those who chose "very unfamiliar" (5.45%) and "unfamiliar" (11.82%) was 17.27%, indicating that only a small number of respondents had insufficient (cognition) of this Confucian moral concept.



**Figure 4: Familiarity with Confucian Moral Concepts**

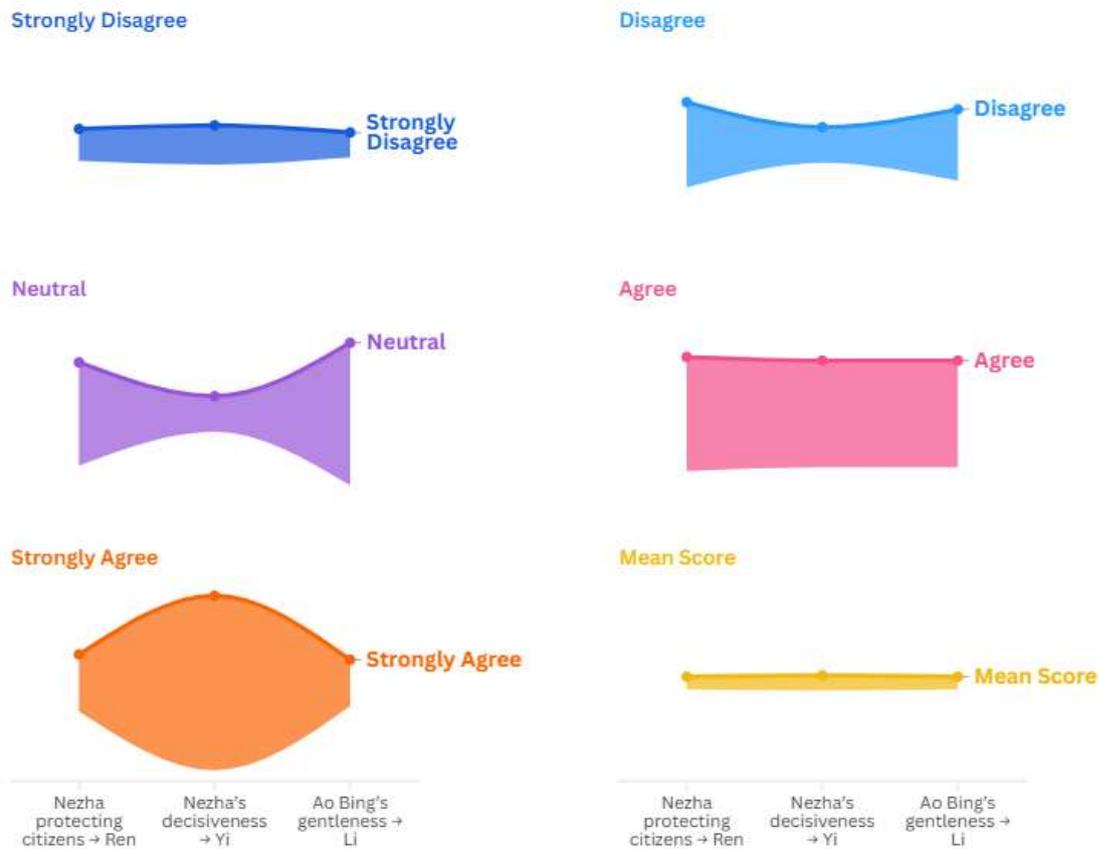
Source: Self-compiled by the Author

### *Perception of Confucian Elements in Nezha 2*

The average score for audience perception of moral elements in the film was 3.28, with significant variations across dimensions:

Highest perception: Yi embodied in Nezha's decisive and just behaviors ( $M=3.87$ ), with 71.82% of respondents "agreeing" or "strongly agreeing".

Lowest perception: Li reflected in Ao Bing's gentleness (M=3.2), with only 39.09% of respondents perceiving it clearly.



**Figure 5: Perception of Confucian Elements in the Film**

Source: Self-compiled by the Author

### *Changes in Values After Viewing*

The average score for post-viewing value changes was 3.25, showing positive shifts:

Most significant change: Willingness to help others (Ren, M=3.69), with 68.18% of respondents reporting increased willingness.

Moderate changes: Awareness of respecting others (Li, M=3.20) and courage to face difficulties (Yi, M=3.07).



**Figure 6: Post-Viewing Changes in Values**

Source: Self-compiled by the Author

## Discussion

While this study clarifies digital translation mechanisms and youth impacts, its simplifications and sample constraints highlight the need for larger-scale, multimodal investigations to fully unpack how traditional ethics thrive in digital storytelling.

### *Subjectivity in Film Analysis Interpretation*

Although coding rules are constructed based on visual semiotics, there remains a certain degree of subjective deviation in the moral interpretation of characters' microexpressions and scene colors. Future research can explore methodologies to reduce such subjectivity.

### *Challenges in Inferring Moral Cognition from Visual Perception*

This study verifies the correlation between visual translation and changes in values through correlation analysis, yet it cannot completely rule out confounding variables such as prior moral cognition and influences from other media. Experimental designs can be adopted in future research to further verify the causal relationship.

This study focuses on the digital visual translation of Confucian morality, but it does not involve the adaptability of other traditional cultures, nor does it explore the risks of digital technology reconstructing moral connotations—such as the dilution of morality caused by

over-entertainment. Future research can expand to a broader scope of traditional cultures and incorporate the perspective of ethical criticism.

## Contribution

The study clarifies the digital visual translation mechanism of Confucian moral concepts, proposes three core strategies—"ethical coding of character symbols", "moral visualization of scene effects", and "dialectical presentation of narrative structure"—and fills the research gap in the concretization of abstract virtues such as "ren (benevolence)", "yi (righteousness)", and "li (propriety)" through digital technology. Additionally, it demonstrates how digital tools facilitate the deconstruction of binary ethics, enriches the theory of "fluid moral narrative", and provides a framework for moral communication in digital narratives.

For the field of digital Confucianism, this study constructs, for the first time, an operational framework of *Confucian morality – digital technology – visual signs*, clarifies the digital transformation paths of abstract moral values such as *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness) and *li* (propriety), and provides an operable technical paradigm for the digital inheritance of traditional morality.

For the field of moral communication, it breaks through the traditional moral communication mode of textual preaching, verifies the moral influence mechanism of digital visual narrative, enriches the media theory of moral communication, and offers a new education-oriented path for adolescent moral education.

For the field of cross-media ethics, it clarifies the dialectical relationship between digital technology and ethical communication – technology is not merely a tool for presentation, but also a participant in moral construction, thus providing an integrated technical-to-ethical analytical perspective for ethical communication research in the cross-media era.

The study offers guidance for multiple groups: it points out to creators the way to balance culture and technology through character design, special effects, and narrative to meet the needs of young people; it provides educators and cultural institutions with paths to enhance young people's understanding of Confucian ethics via digital visuals; and it offers methods for cross-cultural communication to reduce "cultural discount" through the adaptation of digital spectacles and promote the global dissemination of Chinese ethics.

Study bridges theory and practice. It not only provides the academic community with a paradigm for the digital dissemination of traditional ethics but also offers creative and communication strategies for practitioners, helping to vitalize traditional morality through digital art and guiding the development of positive youth culture.

## Impact

### *Behavioural Impact*

The study reveals that *Nezha 2*'s digital visual translation of Confucian virtues correlates with positive behavioral shifts among young audiences, particularly increased willingness to help others ( $M=3.69$ ). This indicates that digitally mediated moral narratives can effectively nudge

youth toward prosocial behaviors, providing a model for using popular culture to foster ethical conduct in daily life.

### ***Social-Education Impact***

By clarifying how digital visuals simplify complex Confucian concepts and enhance their accessibility, the research supports educational initiatives aiming to transmit traditional morality to younger generations. Educators and cultural institutions can leverage these findings to design curriculum supplements or public awareness campaigns, making Confucian ethics more relatable and engaging for youth in a digital age.

### ***Cultural Impact***

The research underscores how digital technologies revitalize Confucian moral philosophy, enabling its integration into contemporary youth culture. This not only strengthens cultural continuity by making traditional values visible in popular media but also facilitates cross-cultural communication: foreign audiences' ability to grasp core ethics through visuals demonstrates potential for soft power projection, positioning Confucian virtues as globally relevant moral frameworks.

A comparative analysis with Disney·Pixar's moral narratives further clarifies the core logic of cross-cultural value transmission through digital visual translation. Disney·Pixar's moral narratives are centered on "individual growth coupled with family bonds" — such as family love and memory in *Coco* — focusing on emotional resonance at the individual level. In contrast, *Nezha 2*'s moral narrative takes "Confucian collective ethics coupled with individual justice" as its core: it retains the collectivist traits of mutual assistance in Chentang Pass, while integrating the individual consciousness of "My fate is decided by me, not by heaven", forming a dialectical unity of collectivism and individualism. This difference stems from distinct cultural roots, but the common success of both proves a key proposition: the core of digital visual translation lies in transforming culturally specific morality into universal human emotions. Disney achieves this through "family", while *Nezha 2* achieves it through "justice and resistance" — both realizing cross-cultural value transmission by anchoring universal emotional anchors.

### ***Technological Impact***

By mapping specific digital tools to moral translation, the study provides a technical blueprint for creators. This encourages innovation in digital visual art, pushing developers to design tools that better serve cultural and ethical communication, bridging technological advancement with meaningful content creation.

Collectively, these impacts highlight how *Nezha 2*'s model of blending digital art and traditional morality can drive positive changes in youth behavior, education, cultural preservation, and technological application.

## Conclusion

The study confirms that Nezha 2 realizes the digital visual translation of Confucian moral philosophy via three core strategies, which lower the comprehension barrier of abstract virtues and positively influence youth values, especially improving their cognition of "yi". A notable exception is young people's uneven perception of Confucian elements, and the study has limitations including small sample size, oversimplified content analysis and neglect of audio-visual synergy. Nezha 2 proves digital visual art is powerful for translating Confucian moral philosophy, with recommendations for future research, practitioners and educators to better promote Confucian values among youth.

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**Acknowledgements:** The authors sincerely thank the Department of Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia for providing necessary resources and support throughout the research. Special appreciation goes to colleagues and peers for their valuable insights and constructive feedback, which greatly enhanced the study's quality. Heartfelt gratitude is extended to our supervisor, Professor Ahmad Azaini Manaf, whose professional guidance from topic selection to result refinement and rigorous scholarly attitude laid a solid foundation for this.

**Funding Statement:** No Funding

**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for resubmission to the International Journal of Innovation and Industrial Revolution (IJIREV).

**Ethics Statement:** This study did not involve any human participants: animals, or sensitive data requiring ethical approval. The authors confirm that the research was conducted in accordance with accepted academic integrity and ethical publishing standards.

**Author Contribution Statement:** All authors made significant contributions to this study. GENG Tian was responsible for the study's conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis and interpretation; they also conducted the literature review and participated in critical revisions. Ahmad Azaini Manaf initiated the research topic, provided overall academic supervision, and offered critical insights on theoretical framework construction and data analysis methods. He also ensured compliance with ethical standards and academic integrity, coordinated the submission process, and took ultimate responsibility for the research's accuracy and validity. All authors read and approved the final version prior to submission.

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