

Western Audience Reception of Chinese Cultural IP in Ne Zha 2: An LDA and Critical Metaphor Analysis of Film Reviews

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Abstract

This study examines Western audience reception of the Chinese cultural IP Ne Zha 2 through a mixed-method approach which combines Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modelling and Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA). Specifically, this study collected 658 English-language film reviews from IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes as raw material, after pre-processing, we identify three dominant thematic interest—mythological archetypes and family dynamics, artistic craftsmanship and immersive storytelling, and audience reception and entertainment value—alongside three central conceptual metaphors: physical force, journey, and orientational metaphor. Findings indicate a encoding-decoding dissonance, whereby the film’s critique of systemic authority is often reduced to a story of personal rebellion, and its artistic achievements are evaluated against Western cinematic benchmarks. The study concludes with strategic recommendations for enhancing the global communication of Chinese cultural IPs, emphasizing the balance between cultural authenticity and cross-cultural narrative resonance, and advocating for the establishment of independent aesthetic evaluation systems beyond Western paradigms.

Keywords: Audience Reception, Film Review, Chinese Cultural IP, Ne Zha 2

1 Introduction

At present, there is increasing recognition of the necessity for the international dissemination of Chinese culture, which has already become a priority that firmly endorsed at the national policy level (Jiang, 2023). Against this backdrop, the role of Cultural IP as a pivotal vehicle for carrying and transmitting cultural narratives has become particularly salient. Cultural IP refers to a special form of intellectual property, which originally denotes the exclusive rights owned by individuals over their intellectual creations, as recognized by law (Wu et al., 2023). But with the rise of digitization, it evolved to representations of cultural symbols featured high recognition and robust monetization capabilities (Y. Zhang, 2025a)the consumption patterns of younger tourists have undergone a significant transformation. These consumers are no longer content with traditional local tourist souvenirs; instead, they exhibit a strong preference for innovative cultural and creative products characterized by unique design aesthetics. To investigate the impact of tourism cultural and creative products imbued with distinct cultural IP attributes on consumers’ purchase intentions, this study selected four represen-



tative IP-based scenic spots as research cases:the Palace Museum in Beijing,the British Museum,Shanghai Disney Resort,and Beijing Universal Resort.Data were collected through a comprehensive questionnaire survey and subsequently analyzed using SPSS statistical software.The results revealed that well-known IPs possess substantial advantages in stimulating the consumption of tourism cultural and creative products. However,the design and development of such products face multiple challenges.For instance,domestic private-brand IPs have a relatively late start,with development lags and difficulties in shaping popular IPs. Additionally,these products often suffer from low brand premiums and severe product homogenization.To address these issues and promote the sustainable development of the tourism industry based on cultural and creative products,several recommendations are proposed in this study.This research offers valuable references for the development of a sufficient supply of tourism cultural and creative products that better meet the demands of the tourism market and consumers.”,”archive_location”:"CNKI”,”container-title”:"The 2025 (23th. Chinese animated films, as one of the representations of cultural intellectual property (IP), not only provide an important formal carrier for presenting Chinese stories well on the international stage but also play a key role in shaping discussions around China’s national identity and soft power in a global cultural context (Z. Li, 2024). Ne Zha 2, as the most eye-catching Chinese-style mythological film released in 2025, has not only achieved remarkable success in the domestic market but has also become a vivid showcase of the unique charm and innovative dynamism of Chinese culture globally (Xu, 2025), showing the power of cultural IP in international communication. Nevertheless, due to differences in cultural background, ideology, and values, Western viewers may decode the cultural significances in Ne Zha 2 differently from the encoding intentions of its Chinese creators (Hall et al., 1980). And such encoding-decoding dissonance may find its manifestation as different discussed topics, contrast emotional tendencies as well as the divergent discursive strategies demonstrated by online film reviews, an interactive channel regarded as direct expressions of audience perceptions (L. Liu & Deng, 2022). Therefore, to assess international audiences’ reception of Chinese cultural IPs, a deeper mining of Western online film reviews will probably be of great research value.

To improve our understanding of the online film review, especially its role in reflecting Western reception of Ne Zha 2, it is necessary to identify in what aspect and in which way audience responses convey meaning beyond explicit evaluation. Specifically, we utilize Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model, which owns great proven effectiveness in uncovering latent topics within large corpora of text (Jelodar et al., 2019), as the main tool to detect the topics of interest among Western audiences. While such approach will effectively identify what audiences discuss at a macro level, it remains limited in revealing how they conceptualize the culture content they encounter. Therefore, the integration of metaphor analysis matters since metaphors are fundamental cognitive tools that structure our understanding of abstract and complex experiences through more concrete and familiar domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). When Western viewers describe a character’s journey as a “roller coaster ride,” or evaluate animation quality as “a feast for the eyes,” they are not just making comparisons. These metaphorical expressions reveal their subconscious conceptual systems—their biases, valuations, emotional responses, and ultimately, their acceptance or rejection of the cultural IP on a deeper level. Therefore, this dual methodology is expected to enable a nuanced understanding of not only what Western audiences focus on but also how they conceptualize and emotionally respond to the cultural IP.

In terms of research significance, this study aims to not only offer unique perspective in understanding language structure and meaning in cross-cultural communication context but also to decode Western audience reception of Ne Zha 2 to illuminate the interpretive patterns applied to Chinese cultural IPs, contributing to the soft power expansion of Chinese culture by strengthening its international influence and discursive resonance in global media landscapes.

2 literature review

2.1 Cultural IP

Cultural IP has evolved beyond its legal definition as intellectual property, transforming into a transmedia communication paradigm that integrates content creation, cultural symbolism, and commercial strategy (Cui & Deng, 2024). Its expressions now span literature, film, animation, traditional culture, and cultural-tourism hybrids (Y. Wang, 2025), drawing increasing scholarly attention due to its significant economic and cultural impact (Y. Zhang, 2025b). Current research primarily explores the following three dimensions:

First, studies on IP image innovation and industrial application emphasize the reconstruction of traditional cultural symbols—such as intangible cultural heritage and mythological figures—into modern IP images. To gain greater commercial success, this process requires balancing cultural authenticity with contemporary appeal (Peng, 2023) and building sustainable IP ecosystems through trans-media expansion (Y. Zhang et al., 2025). Second, research on cross-cultural communication and globalization examines how cultural IPs navigate international audiences. Such studies mainly focus on the potential cultural barriers between different cultures by conducting comparative analyses. For example, differences between Chinese and Japanese IPs call for the need for integrating local elements into universally accessible narratives (X. Li, 2023; Peng, 2023). Third, new technological advancements are increasingly applied in researches to explore the method for cultural IP preservation and revitalization. Tools like AI, IoT, and Digital Twins enable multilingual interpretation, personalized experiences, and preventive conservation, overcoming traditional limitations (Colace et al., 2025; L. Wang et al., 2025).

Despite these advances, current research predominantly adopts a supply-side perspective, focusing on content creation and dissemination. Therefore, a significant gap remains in understanding how Western audiences actually receive and interpret Chinese Cultural IP from a demand-side viewpoint.

2.2 Audience Reception

Audience reception has been widely recognized as a key indicator of the dissemination effectiveness and market performance of cultural products, thus owns great significance in communication studies (McQuail, 2000). Despite of its value, there is still no standardized definition in the academic literature. According to previous relevant studies, audience reception has been conceptualized in different ways depending on the research focus and methodological approaches. Specifically, some studies consider it as a measurable attitudinal and behavioral outcome, such as rating, purchases, or clicks (Gu et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2025), while others treat it as a complex process of meaning negotiation and interpretation (Alfaify & Ramos Pinto, 2022; Holmgreen & Vestergaard, 2009). According to the latter's viewpoint, audiences do not passively accept transnational media content but reinterpret and resist it based on local social, historical, and political contexts (Y. Liu, 2025). Given that the present study also adopts a cross-cultural perspective to examine audience reception, it aligns more closely with the second view, which emphasizes the interpretive and contextually embedded nature of reception. Therefore, this study defines audience reception as a dynamic, interactive process through which audiences perceive, interpret, and respond to media content or cultural products. This process is expected to encompass cognitive understanding, emotional experience, and contextualized interpretation, which emphasizes the act of decoding rather than merely the final attitude or outcome.

For a systematic investigation of this process, existing research has primarily explored three aspects, which collectively inform the analytical focus of this study:

First, the cultural and textual foundations of interpretation. Research indicates that deep-seated cultural values significantly affect audiences' viewing motivation and interpretive pathways (Yu et al., 2025) cross-cultural research is essential for understanding behaviors and values across different cultural back-



grounds. The way audiences from diverse cultures interpret and accept film content significantly impacts the international dissemination and market performance of films. This study, grounded in Hofstede's six cultural dimensions—power distance index (PDI). The success of cultural IPs like the Chinese animated films *Ne Zha* in its domestic market is often attributed to its innovative integration of traditional cultural elements, which help foster cultural resonance (Yuan & Azahari, 2024). However, when these cultural products enter the global market, they often encounter the challenge of “cultural discount”. The reception study of the film *Hero* in the Anglophone world reveals that even with positive overall evaluations, systematic interpretive differences can exist between professional and general audiences, underscoring that cross-cultural understanding is a heterogeneous process mediated by audience position and translation modalities (H. Zhang et al., 2023). Furthermore, the relative weight audiences assign to cultural specificity itself is a subject of debate. While some products are evaluated through their cultural frame, studies on streaming series suggest that audiences may at times prioritize universal, text-centered standards (e.g., plot coherence, acting quality) and reception-centered experiences (e.g., emotional resonance) over explicit “cultural locality” (Beaudouin & Pasquier, 2017; Idiz et al., 2025). This tension between cultural and universal criteria remains a central point of inquiry in cross-cultural reception studies.

Second, the discursive and cognitive mechanisms in audience discourse. A majority of existing reception studies rely on methods such as surveys, interviews, or content analysis. While these approaches effectively capture attitudes and behavioral intentions, they offer limited access to the underlying cognitive frameworks through which meanings are subconsciously organized and negotiated by audiences. To solve this problem, computational text analysis methods have proven effective in identifying the central thematic concerns that embedded in audience discourse, revealing what aspects of a cultural product are most salient to them (Cela et al., 2024). Beyond thematic content, a deeper layer of understanding lies in the conceptual metaphors audiences spontaneously employ. As demonstrated in studies on various media, metaphors are not merely rhetorical ornaments but fundamental cognitive structures that shape understanding (Holmgren & Vestergaard, 2009). Therefore, integration of computational methods with critical metaphor analysis allows researchers to move beyond what audiences think to uncover how they think.

Finally, the role of socio-affective factors in reception. It is well-established that reception is deeply embedded in social identity and emotional response (Gu et al., 2025; Sibanda, 2025). This is powerfully illustrated by the differential reception of the film *Hero* in the Anglophone world, where systematic differences emerged between professional and general audiences: the former focused on color symbolism and subtitle quality, while the latter prioritized overall visual beauty and dubbing experience (H. Zhang et al., 2023). This case clearly demonstrates how an audience's social positioning and identity shape their interpretive priorities and cognitive focus. Therefore, the thematic concerns the audiences highlight and the metaphorical language they use to describe the experience may be the concrete reflections of their identity-driven perspectives, which is also a valuable insight for cross-cultural communication studies.

2.3 Critical Metaphor Analysis

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), situated within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), is premised on the view that discourse is a form of social practice that constitutes, rather than merely reflects, social realities and power relations (Fairclough, 1992; Teun A. van Dijk., 1994). CMA specifically focuses on metaphor as a key discursive strategy through which ideologies are naturalized and persuasive frames are constructed (Charteris-Black, 2004). The approach integrates Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) with the critical agenda of CDA, examining how metaphors in discourse shape thought and action.

The development of CMA has been characterized by diverse yet interconnected research foci. Building on foundational work, Charteris-Black (2004) laid groundwork by emphasizing the integration of metaphor with corpus linguistics to analyze political discourse, exploring how metaphors shape ideological

narratives. This built upon the cognitive foundation established by Lakoff (1993), who posited that metaphors are fundamental to conceptualizing abstract ideas (e.g., “argument is war”). Complementing this cognitive perspective, Kövecses (2002) highlighted the socio-cultural dimensions, showing how cultural experiences constrain metaphorical mappings. Within political communication, scholars like Chilton (2004) further applied CMA to uncover power dynamics in international relations, cementing political discourse as a primary genre for CMA research. The approach has then expanded from political discourse to multimodal and digital contexts, including blogs and online learning environments (Atanasova, 2018; Forceville, 2006; Jensen et al., 2021).

However, CMA faces challenges such as interpretive subjectivity and limited cultural diversity in data. To address these issues, this study integrates computational methods like topic modeling with traditional CMA, enhancing objectivity and enabling cross-cultural comparison of metaphorical patterns.

2.4 Film Review

Online film reviews have become a primary data source for understanding audience reception and critical evaluation (Hassan, 2021). In the context of global cultural exchange, analyzing reviews—especially for culturally distinctive media like Chinese animation—can yield valuable insights for both academic research and industry practices, informing production strategies and enhancing cultural dissemination (Chen et al., 2022; Tarigan et al., 2020). These reviews not only capture viewer’s preferences and interpretations but also shape non-viewers’ opinions, influencing box office performance and even determine the effectiveness of cultural dissemination (Chen et al., 2022). Given the rich research value of film reviews, scholars have employed diverse methodological approaches for analysis and related researches have also evolved from traditional text mining to more nuanced methods, especially the combination of linguistic analysis with computational tools.

While sentiment analysis has been widely used to quantify audience attitudes (Chen et al., 2022), it often overlooks the linguistic mechanisms underlying these responses. Recent studies have turned to intercultural and genre analysis to uncover deeper interpretive frameworks (De Jong & Burgers, 2013; Guo, 2023). Nevertheless, few studies have applied CMA to film reviews, despite metaphors’ central role in evaluative and ideological framing. This gap is critical, as metaphors shape how audiences conceptualize cultural meaning and significance.

Against this background, the present study adopts a sequential analytical framework to investigate how Western film viewers interpret *Ne Zha 2* and its implications for Chinese cultural IP globalization. Accordingly, there are mainly three phases: First, a macro-level analysis will be conducted to identify the dominant discussion topics and latent conceptual metaphors with the help of LDA topic modelling and corpus tools. Building on these findings, CMA will be employed to investigate how these discursive patterns reveal deeper cultural-ideological differences. Finally, the potential encoding-decoding dissonance will translate into actionable insights for optimizing the cross-cultural transmission of Chinese cultural IPs. The analysis was guided by three research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What dominant topics and conceptual metaphors emerge from Western audiences’ interpretations of *Ne Zha 2*?

RQ2: How do the dominant metaphors identified in Western audiences’ interpretations reflect deeper ideological biases or cultural differences?

RQ3: How can the dissonance between the intended cultural significance of the IP and its reception inform effective globalization strategies for Chinese cultural products?



3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

In the Western academic tradition, metaphor research can be traced back to ancient Greece. Aristotle defined metaphor as a rhetorical device at the linguistic level in his works *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. This traditional view was not fundamentally questioned until 1980, when Lakoff & Johnson (1980) proposed the Conceptual Metaphor Theory in their groundbreaking research, advocating that metaphor is essentially a fundamental cognitive way for humans to understand and construct abstract concepts through concrete experiential categories, thus promoting a significant shift in metaphor research from the rhetorical paradigm to the cognitive science paradigm. The conceptual metaphor theory proposed by (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) states that the essence of metaphor is the cross-domain mapping from the source domain to the target domain, which depends on the similarity between concepts. Kövecses (2002) further demonstrates that metaphor plays a crucial role in human cognition and is an essential component of thinking and logical reasoning. Accordingly, conceptual metaphors are further classified into three categories, namely (1) structural metaphor, where one concept is systematically structured in terms of another; (2) orientational metaphor, which rely on spatial relationships; and (3) ontological metaphor, which attribute material properties to abstractions. When it comes to the mechanism of metaphorical mapping, the phrase *TIME IS MONEY* serves as a typical example, in which the economic concept is projected from the source domain *MONEY* onto the target domain *TIME*, revealing how abstract experience is conceptualized in terms of concrete words.

3.2 Critical Metaphor Analysis

Although Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) has innovatively elevated metaphor research from the rhetorical level to the cognitive dimension, its theoretical framework has obvious limitations: on the one hand, it fails to fully consider the constraining effect of socio-cultural context on metaphor generation, and on the other hand, it ignores the agency of the speaker's subjective intention in metaphor selection, especially the lack of in-depth exploration of the symbiotic relationship between metaphor, power structure, and ideology. In response to this theoretical blind spot, Charteris-Black (2004) constructed the innovative research paradigm of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) by organically integrating Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis (text discourse practice social practice) with Cameron & Low (1999) empirical metaphor analysis method, aiming to systematically examine the ideological operation mechanism of metaphors in social contexts such as political discourse and media reports. The in-depth research of predecessors has also made the research steps of CMA gradually mature, mainly including metaphor identification, metaphor interpretation and metaphor explanation.

Metaphor identification, as the initial stage, is to assess whether there are metaphors existing in the text. Generally, there are mainly two steps to follow: Firstly, candidate metaphors are identified through a thorough reading of the whole text, and vocabulary with metaphorical potential are selected. Subsequently, a secondary verification is conducted based on pragmatic and cognitive standards to ensure that the candidate vocabulary or expression truly achieves metaphorical function in the actual context. During this process, the frequency of metaphor keywords will also be calculated to demonstrate the overall distribution characteristics, laying the foundation for subsequent ideological analysis.

Metaphor interpretation, according to Charteris-Black (2004), is a process dealt with the interplay between linguistic decoding and contextual factors. Such interpretation has already transcended literal meaning by delving into the profound implications behind metaphors, grounded in specific contextual analysis and informed by the readers' experiences.

When proceeding to the final stage of metaphor explanation, various socio-cultural factors must be taken into consideration. Researchers need to investigate: why particular metaphors are chosen for use, what

underlying reasons account for the dominance of certain types of metaphors - questions that may involve ideological dimensions. Ultimately, this process reveals the discursive functions and ideological workings of metaphors in discourse.

Following such analyzing procedure, the present study will integrate CMT and CMA to establish theoretical framework for investigating conceptual metaphors embedded in film reviews of *Ne Zha 2*, with the aim of identifying the audience perception pattern of Chinese animation.

3.3 Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)

Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) is widely used as an unsupervised machine learning method in natural language processing. It functions by detecting latent topics hidden within a corpus by analyzing recurring word patterns, thereby categorizing semantically related terms into coherent themes (Ying, 2024).
 laten...,"container-title":"Heliyon","DOI":"10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e35894","ISSN":"2405-8440","issue":"16","language":"en-US","note":"publisher: Elsevier","page":"e35894","source":"gfbfh2224eb40e9b64b4ds9w0vq9qnufwx6ppc.fcix.librra.gdufs.edu.cn","title":"Guests' Aesthetic experience with lifestyle hotels: An application of LDA topic modelling analysis","title-short":"Guests' Aesthetic experience with lifestyle hotels","URL":"http://gfbfh2224eb40e9b64b4ds9w0vq9qnufwx6ppc.fcix.librra.gdufs.edu.cn/science/article/pii/S2405844024119251","volume":"10","author":{"family":"Ying","given":"Shun"},"accessed":{"date-parts":[["2025",8,14]]},"issued":{"date-parts":[["2024",8,30]]}},"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json". Specifically, the working mechanism of LDA is illustrated by the Figure 1 (Blei et al., 2003). Here M denote the total number of documents, N the total number of words in a document, k the number of topics, α and η the two hyperparameters respectively. θ represents the topic distribution for document m , where $m=1, 2, \dots, M$. β represents the word distribution for the k -th topic, where $k=1, 2, \dots, K$. The topic distribution θ is sampled from a Dirichlet distribution with parameter α , i.e., $\theta \sim \text{Dir}(\alpha)$. Similarly, the word distribution β is sampled from a Dirichlet distribution with parameter η , i.e., $\beta \sim \text{Dir}(\eta)$.

The relationship between documents and topics follows a multinomial distribution. A topic z is sampled from a multinomial distribution parameterized by θ , i.e., $z \sim \text{Multinomial}(\theta)$. The word w is then sampled from a multinomial distribution conditioned on z and β . This process repeats until an entire document is generated, and finally, M documents are produced. The better the generated documents align with the original documents, the higher the model's performance.

The optimal number of topics K can be determined by computing topic coherence. The best number of topics corresponds to the point where coherence is maximized. In practice, the optimal K is typically selected when coherence no longer improves significantly or reaches an inflection point.

In essence, LDA treats each document as a mixture of various topics, and each topic as a distribution over words. The model's key parameter is the number of topics K , which does not need to be predefined but can be optimized using metrics like perplexity (as done in section 5) to best fit the corpus.

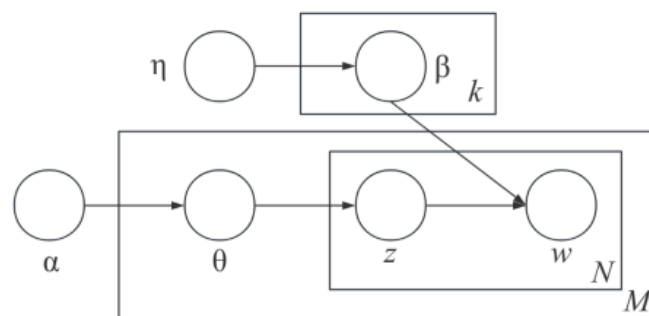


Figure 1 LDA Model

3.4 Analytical Framework

This study follows the outlined procedural steps illustrated in Figure 2:

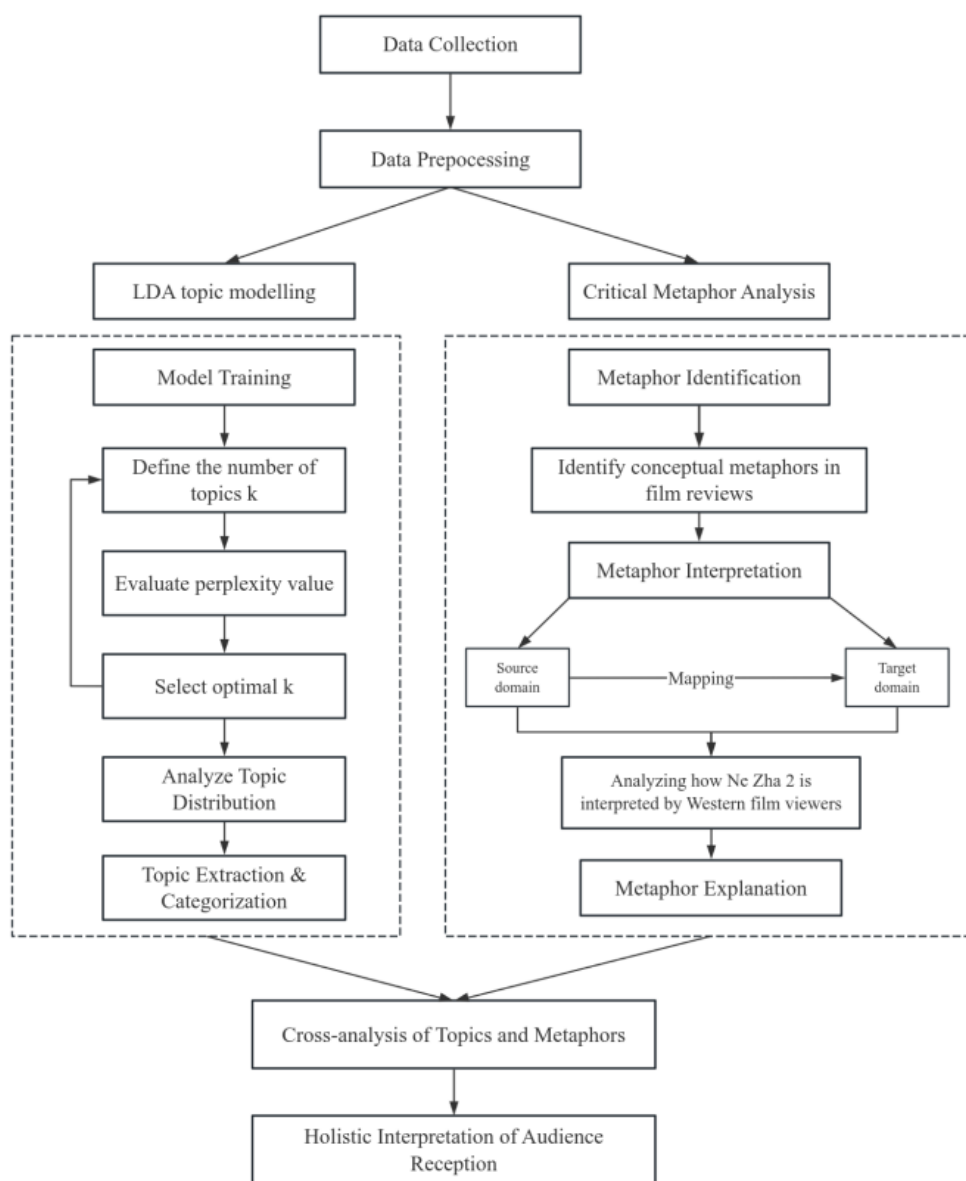


Figure 2 The Analytical Framework

At the preparation stage, it mainly includes data collection and data pre-processing. Utilizing the Octopus data scraping tool, we extracted film review data from IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes platforms to construct the textual corpus for subsequent analysis. Then the raw data underwent pre-processing, including removal of duplicate reviews, text segmentation (tokenization), elimination of stop words, and part-of-speech (POS) tagging. The resulting purified text corpus served as the unified foundation for both subsequent analyses.

At the analytical stage, the analysis comprises two parallel modules called LDA topic modelling and Critical Metaphor Analysis. The entire corpus was input into the LDA model for topics modelling, while the same corpus was subjected to manual and computational scrutiny for metaphor identification and analysis. The former underwent the determination of the optimal topic number k through empirical validation, text clustering and topic extraction to identify latent thematic structures in the reviews. While the latter follows the three stages

of metaphor analysis: identify candidate metaphors and metaphor keywords during metaphor identification process, clarify how concepts from the source domain are mapped onto the target domain and analyze how Western film viewers interpret *Ne Zha 2* at the stage of metaphor interpretation, and finally explores the influencing factors behind the choice of metaphors in metaphor explanation.

The integration of findings proceeds through two final steps:

Step 1: Cross-analysis of Topics and Metaphors. Identify the conceptual metaphors that are characteristically associated with each dominant topic identified by the LDA model.

Step 2: Holistic Interpretation of Audience Reception. Interpret the meaning of these topic-metaphor pairings to explain how Western audience understand the content how they judge it, thereby providing a comprehensive explanation of the reception process.

4 Data and methodology

4.1 Data Resources

This study examines user-generated film reviews as primary data sources to investigate Western audiences' reception of *Ne Zha 2*. The data collection and selection procedures are detailed below.

Firstly, the film reviews are all collected from IMDB (www.imdb.com) and Rotten Tomatoes (www.rottentomatoes.com) platforms. IMDb (Internet Movie Database) is globally recognized as the largest and most comprehensive database of movies, TV programs and celebrities. Compared to other overseas online platforms, it demonstrates significantly greater influence and coverage in terms of both comment volume and diversity of sources (Huang et al., 2025). While Rotten Tomatoes is a famous film review website in the United States and an important platform for film consumers and fans to obtain film reviews and information. These two platforms were selected due to their high traffic volume as well as geographic diversity of users.

Reviews were collected between January 31 and June 30, 2025, to capture immediate post-release reactions and the subsequent three-month stabilization period of audience feedback. Searches were filtered by entering the keywords “*Ne Zha 2*” on platforms, focusing on the User Reviews and Audience Reviews columns respectively. When crawling data, Octopus, a kind of data collector, was employed to capture star ratings, publication dates, usernames, and content for corresponding reviews. Subsequently, data preprocessing was conducted on the collected film reviews, which involved removing duplicate data and eliminating special characters and emojis. After this cleaning process, a total of 658 valid reviews were obtained for further analysis. Worth mentioning, all data were publicly accessible, no private or user-identifiable information was analyzed.

4.2 Research Method

The present study is expected to integrate both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The quantitative analysis comprises two complementary components: LDA (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) topic modelling to identify dominant topics in Western audiences' reviews and frequency analysis of conceptual metaphor keywords with resonance value calculations. This dual approach enables both topic identification and metaphor quantification. The qualitative analysis then conducts critical metaphor analysis of the dominant conceptual metaphors with the concrete contexts to explain how it is interpreted as well as the influencing factors behind the usage of metaphors. In conclusion, both quantitative and qualitative approach are employed to support the critical analysis of Western reception of *Ne Zha 2* as one of Chinese cultural IPs.

For LDA topic modelling, this study utilized Python scikit-learn library. In order to find out the optimal number of topics that can better represent the most interested topics of Western film viewers on *Ne Zha 2*, multiple candidate models were evaluated with different topic numbers. According to (Röder et al., 2015),



the number of topics should be determined by examining various metrics such as perplexity since the minimum perplexity value may indicate the optimal number of topics, aligning with the goal of extracting differentiated themes from the text corpus. Therefore, this study employs perplexity value to determine the optimal number of topics and utilizes the Python visualization package LDAvis for interactive visualization of topic-specific characteristic terms.

For Critical Metaphor Analysis, this study follows matured 3-steps, namely metaphor identification, metaphor interpretation and metaphor explanation, to systematically examine conceptual metaphors in Western audience' reception of *Ne Zha 2*. Specifically, the analysis begins with metaphor identification, where metaphorical keywords are extracted from the review corpus using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIPVU). Next, metaphor interpretation involves categorizing the identified metaphors into conceptual domains and analyzing their cognitive mappings. Finally, metaphor explanation contextualizes these patterns within broader socio-cultural discourses, exploring how metaphorical framing influences cross-cultural perceptions of Chinese IP.

5 Results

5.1 LDA Topic Mining Results

According to the previous processing, this study scratched 658 pieces of online English film reviews and established a corpus with 73,325 tokens and 7,485 types of characters. Experimental results based on Python implementation demonstrate that the perplexity value reaches its minimum when the number of topics k is set to 3, as demonstrated in Figure 3. This indicates that the model achieves optimal generalization performance at this point. Therefore, we select $k = 3$ as the final number of topics for subsequent analysis in this study.

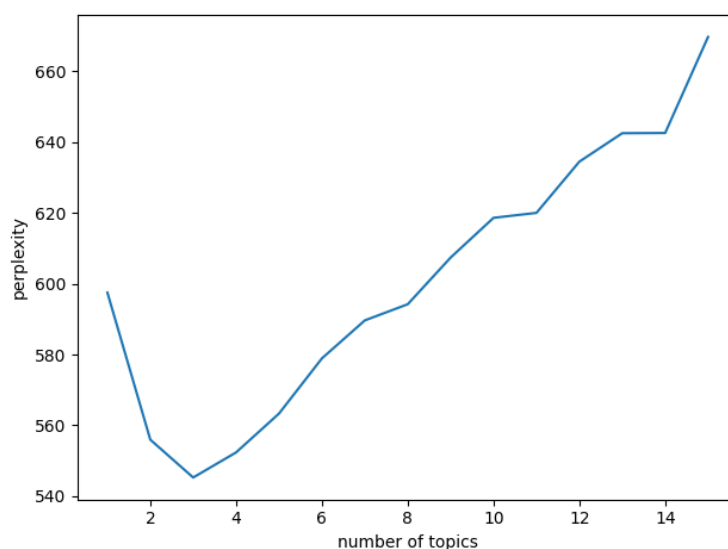


Figure 3 Result of Perplexity Value

As demonstrated in Table 1, the three topics extracted through LDA modeling encapsulate distinct yet interconnected dimensions of the film's discourse. Topic 1 Mythological Archetypes & Family Dynamics is characterized by keywords such as "Nezha", "dragon", "fate", and "family", which collectively reflect the film's grounding in Chinese mythological traditions. The prominence of oppositional terms like "immortal" and "demon" signal a thematic focus on moral duality and intergenerational conflict. Topic 2 Artistic Craft & Immersive Storytelling derives its identity from technical and aesthetic terminology ("animation", "vi-

suals”, “storytelling”) paired with emotional descriptors (“stunning”, “emotional”). This demonstrates the framework Western film viewers established for animated film success, where technical innovation and narrative depth jointly determine artistic impact. The co-occurrence of “mythology” and “experience” further suggests a deliberate fusion of cultural heritage with contemporary cinematic techniques. Topic 3 Audience Reception & Entertainment Value exhibits a lexicon dominated by evaluative adjectives and consumption verbs, mirroring the high frequency of hyperbolic praise underscores the film’s success in achieving audience engagement. This tripartite structure—cultural roots, artistic execution, and viewer response—demonstrates the methodological validity of the topic modeling approach.

Table 1 The results of LDA topic modelling

Topics	Corresponding Keywords	Summarized Theme
Topic 1	demon nezha film dragon immortal child people chinese world shen good bing fate like body character nezhas sea power family evil zha love parent effect	Mythological Archetypes & Family Dynamics
Topic 2	film zha character animation chinese action nezha emotional story stunning storytelling narrative audience animated visual depth moment experience theme visuals sequence mythology breathtaking new visually	Artistic Craft & Immersive Storytelling
Topic 3	film story animation watch zha best scene like great good just animated chinese time character amazing seen watching plot watched really absolutely love better ive	Audience Reception & Entertainment Value

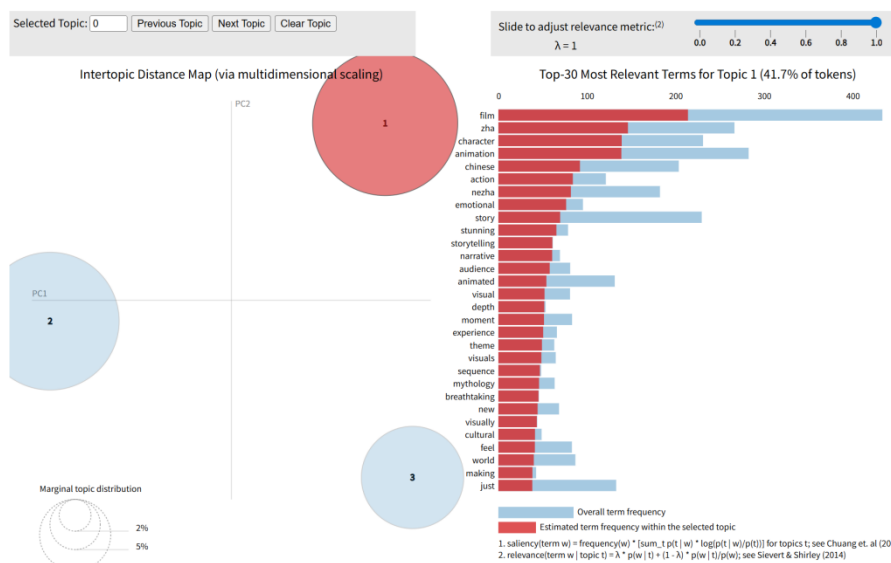


Figure 4 Visualization of LDA Topic Modelling

To be align with the analytical process of critical metaphor analysis, the analysis is conducted by undergoing three steps, namely metaphor identification, interpretation, and explanation.

5.2 Metaphor Identification

To ensure an arguably thorough examination of metaphors embedded in the collected corpus, this study also applied the KWIC function in AntConc to fast position the context. To better demonstrate the result, to-



tal types and tokens, resonance, and percentage of resonance are calculated. Here resonance is calculated by multiplying the total number of tokens by the total number of types for metaphors sharing a common source domain (Charteris-Black, 2004). The overall distribution of metaphors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Distribution of main conceptual metaphors in English film reviews on Ne Zha 2

Conceptual Metaphor	Total Types	Total Tokens	Resonance	Percentage
Physical Force Metaphor	67: blown away (8), grip (6), hook (6), push (9), hit (4), burst (6), collide (4), electrify (3), impact (3), strike (4), touch (3), draw (4), adrenaline-pumping (2), blow (3), break (4), bring (2), control (2), dynamic (2), explode (3), forced (2), overwhelming (2), pull (5), shatter (2), stir (2), stun (2), undermine (2), flooded (2), mindblowing (2), move (2), pull (2), bruised (1), buckle (1), capture (1), carry (1), cram (1), crush (1), drill (1), driven by (1), engaged (1), eye-popping (1), grappling (1), grasp (1), gravity-defying (1), impose (2), let go of (1), momentum (1), no-holds-barred (1), overturn (1), pinch (1), pressure (1), punch (1), scratch (1), severance (1), smash (1), snatch (1), stick (2), strip (1), sweep (1), tear up (3), throw (2), touch (2), tugged (1), undercut (1), uphold (1), warp (1), wipe (1), withstand (1)	147	9849	31.15%
Journey Metaphor	68: journey (13), way (7), path (7), roller coaster (6), stumble (4), landmark (3), milestone (3), navigate (3), pace (3), stay (3), twist (7), landscape (3), mountain (3), arc (3), beginning (3), drive (4), exploration (3), lost (2), nosedive (2), end (3), ride (3), adventure (1), ahead (1), back (1), break (1), bumpy (1), dive (2), chapter (1), cloud-hopping (1), coast (1), embark (2), fast-paced (1), follow (1), get off (1), guide (1), jump on (1), lane (1), lead (1), leap (1), land (1), line (1), linger (1), long-haul (1), move (2), nonstop (1), odyssey (1), pass (2), pick up (1), plot (1), reach (1) run (1), rush (2), stage (1), step (2), straightforward (1), stray (1), surpass (1), territory (2), there (1), trace (1), trajectory (1), transport (2), tread (1), turn (1), turnaround (1), unfold (1), vehicle (1), walk (1)	143	9724	30.76%
Oriental Metaphor	39: depth (15), deeper (10), elevate (13), core (8), up (6), heights (7), beyond (5), edge (5), apart (4), deep (4), pinnacle (4), top-notch (4), raise (6), high (3), rise (3), down (3), behind (2), far from (2), on par with (2), peak (2), profound (2), top (4), top-tier (2), upper (2), above (2), ascend (1), away from (1), beneath (1), bottom (1), broader (1), central (1), highs and lows (1), in front of (1), inner (1), lift (1), sky-high (1), soar (1), towards (1), upside (1)	134	5226	16.53%



Human Metaphor	34: bring to life (13), heart (6), soul (4), awaken (2), breathe (4), evolve (4), gene (2), reborn (3), breathtaking (2), heartfelt (2), alive (1), backbone (1), blood (1), bow (1), care (1), coma (1), come to life (1), copy (1), eye (1), feet (1), heart strings (1), marry (1), shed (1), wake (1), flesh (1), foster (2), bone (1), life (1), live (2), mature (1), mimick (1), orgasm (1), parrot (1), skin (1)	68	2312	7.31%
Economic Metaphor	28: rich (6), exploitation (5), make up for (3), gem (2), high-stakes (3), invest (3), treasure (2), worth (3), waste (2), bait-and-switch (1), bet (1), bread and butter (1), cheap (2), deal (1), exchange (1), gain (2), gamble (1), goldmine (1), hype (2), overrated (1), premium (1), price (1), recycle (1), underrated (1), underutilized (1), untapped (1), rake (1), spend (1)	51	1428	4.52%
Building Metaphor	20: forge (5), foundation (4), groundbreaking (3), solidify (7), facade (2), structure (2), crystallized (2), synthesis (1), groundwork (1), reshape (2), base (1), bridge (2), build (2), cement (3), construct (1), deconstruction (1), demolish (1), reconstruction (1), stand (1), well-structured (1)	43	860	2.72%
Sound Metaphor	14: resonate (26), chord (5), beat (1), dissonance (1), echo (1), harmonize (2), orchestrate (1), quiet (1), rhythm (1), shout (1), symphony (1), undertone (1), volume (1), buzz (1)	44	616	1.95%
Container Metaphor	14: into (7), wrap (6), pack (5), out (5), fill (4), full of (3), outside (3), overstuffed (3), hollow (2), through (2), crowded (1), empty (1), frame (1), harbor (1), overload (2), shell (1), immerse (1), teem with (1), in (1), hidden (1)	32	448	1.42%
War Metaphor	18: battle (2), rebellion (2), struggle (3), against (1), conflict (1), free from (1), rebellious (1), devastating (1), kill (2), riddled with (1), ruin (1), turmoil (1), hit (2), out of the water (1), beat (1) charged (1), slam (1), hands down (1)	24	432	1.37%
Food Metaphor	11: feast (17), candy (3), treat (3), blend (2), digest (2), a fresh take (1), bitter (1), cookies (1), fast-food (1), savor (1), taste (1)	33	363	1.15%
Fabric Metaphor	10: weave (14), tapestry (5), seamless (3), interwoven (2), thread (2), tailored (1), texture (1), tightly-knit (1), uneven (1), veil (1)	31	310	1%
Plant Metaphor	3: root (12), grow (2), stem from (2)	16	48	0.2%
Total	338	766	31,616	100%

It is vividly demonstrated that physical force metaphor (31.15%), journey metaphor (30.76%) and orientational metaphor (16.53%) are the primary conceptual frameworks in English film reviews on Ne Zha 2, which suggests that the narrative structures in storytelling and emotional impact the whole story brings are the main focus of the audiences. To be more specific, the next section will delve into the concrete phrase and try to give reasonable interpretation.



5.3 Metaphor Interpretation

Accordingly, this section provides detailed interpretations of the main three types of metaphors, physical force metaphor, journey metaphor and spatial metaphor, to detect the perception pattern of Western viewers of *Ne Zha 2*.

5.3.1 Physical force metaphor

The proposal of event structure metaphor, as stated by Lakoff (1993), is rooted in the main principle that “Causes Are Forces” (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Here, a cause is conceptualized as a force that affects an object, producing a change. Such mapping serves to explain how can emotional or psychological cause be described as a physical impact. For example, in the phrase *THE NEWS HIT ME HARD*, the possible emotional or psychological cause brought by the news is vividly described through the word “hit”. And the potency of this metaphorical mapping is arguably magnified when the subject matter itself is an intensely sensory and kinetic experience like film.

In this study, physical force metaphor is used when viewers describe the emotional impact the story brings, the captivation owned by the film, the production of film as a creative act, and the lasting effect after viewing the film.

Table 3 Submappings of Physical Force Metaphor

Source domain	Target domain	Metaphor keywords
Physical Impact	Emotional Impact	Blown, Pull
Physical Traction	Captivation	Drawn
Physical Transformation	Creativity	Break
Physical Imprint	Lasting Effect	Stick

1. EMOTIONAL IMPACT IS PHYSICAL IMPACT

But the story of *Ne Zha* and his mom blown me away, again. I felt engaged with the movie from start to finish (Rotten Tomatoes, username: kinggidorah-55950).

While adequate and typical of a film of this nature, it misses some opportunities to pull on the heartstrings and, at the same time, invigorate (IMDB, username: jmdemarestjd).

In describing the emotional impact of a film, “blown away” indicates that the viewer perceives the emotional impact of the entire film’s story as extremely intense, which can be mapped to a powerful physical force. This metaphor vividly conveys two meanings: first, the viewer is completely emotionally overwhelmed and loses their original calmness and judgment; second, this experience is sudden and overwhelming. It emphasizes that the film’s emotional power is not gentle but destructive and subversive, acting directly on the viewer’s senses.

However, this experience also has its drawback—it lacks a sense of delicacy. As one viewer commented, “it misses some opportunities to pull on the heartstrings”, it cannot, like a musician, gradually pull on the viewer’s heartstrings through precise narration, resulting in a certain deficiency in the film.

2. CAPTIVATION IS PHYSICAL TRACTION

This reimagining is executed with such finesse that viewers are drawn into a world where the ancient and the modern coalesce seamlessly (IMDB, username: glexljxnsu).

Whether you’re drawn in by the captivating visuals or the compelling story, *Ne Zha 2* offers an immersive experience that appeals to both the heart and the funny bone (Rotten Tomatoes, username: rosesmaryvn).

Most relevant reviews employ the word “drawn”, constructing a metaphor that the film’s world is a grav-



itational field or a vortex. This means the viewer’s attention is conceptualized as an object, while elements such as the film’s visuals and narrative exert an intangible physical traction, pulling this object toward the center of the film’s world. This metaphor perfectly explains that the viewing mechanism of immersion constructed by the film is effectively recognized by viewers—film viewing is not a passive act of watching, but an active “being pulled in” by the viewer.

3. CREATIVITY IS PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION

With its unstoppable momentum at the box office, it’s now poised to break into the global Top 15 rankings (IMDB, username: tansuoliu).

In viewers’ cognition, the global film market is constructed as a highly fragmented arena riddled with barriers. Ne Zha 2’s successful entry into the rankings through its creativity is defined as an aggressive intrusion or occupation. This not only affirms the film’s inherent innovation but also reflects, to a certain extent, the viewers’ superior perspective—namely, the criteria for judging Ne Zha 2’s success remain rooted in the Western-dominated evaluation system. Instead of challenging the existing Western-centric cultural power structure, such recognition reinforces it.

4. LASTING EFFECT IS PHYSICAL IMPRINT

This was another movie that stuck with me and will do so for years to come (Rotten Tomatoes, username: Lily T).

Here, the enduring memories and emotional impacts left by the film are mapped as a sticky physical entity adhering to the audience. This indicates that the film has transformed from a one-time entertainment product into a lasting part of personal cultural memory, signifying that Ne Zha 2 has touched the audience’s deeper spiritual world—with its characters, themes, or emotions becoming an integral part of the audience’s inner selves.

5.3.2 *Journey metaphor*

By proposing the typical case LIFE IS A JOURNEY, Lakoff (1993) conceptualized the journey metaphor as one that involves understanding an abstract experiential domain by systematically projecting the structural elements from a more concrete experiential domain, allowing us to comprehend in terms of physical movement along a path. The journey metaphor in this study mainly appears in the following three scenarios: the growth experience of Nezha character, the development process of Ne Zha 2 as a successful Chinese animated film, and the personal experience of viewers watching the entire film.

Table 4 Submappings of Journey Metaphor

Source domain	Target domain	Metaphor keywords
Voyage	Ne Zha’s life	Journey
Expedition	Film	Step, Leap, Reach
Adventure	Viewing experience	Embark, Exploration

1. NE ZHA’S LIFE IS A VOYAGE

Ne Zha is not just an animated film; it’s a profound journey of self-discovery, rebellion, and acceptance wrapped in stunning visuals and powerful storytelling (IMDB, username: jwang-24033).

Ne Zha’s development throughout the film - is a powerful journey that encourages viewers to believe in themselves and their ability to overcome obstacles (IMDB, username: zoeh-98769).

As demonstrated by the view extracted above, the growth of Ne Zha is depicted as a journey marked by struggles and sufferings, and the protagonist is praised for bravely overcoming numerous obstacles on the path towards self-discovery. Ne Zha, therefore, is portrayed as a hero who dares to resist the destiny. Nevertheless, the simplified interpretation of destiny as “fighting fate” to some extent deviates from the critique of



rigid societal hierarchies conveyed by the film. The meaning conveyed by the film is far from that. Despite Ne Zha’s rebellion against his predetermined doom as a demon, Ne Zha also challenges the entire rigid celestial system that enforces such destinies. This system, which arbitrarily labels individuals as heroes or monsters based on origin and upholds an unjust social hierarchy, is the true target of his defiance.

2. THE FILM IS AN EXPEDITION

It’s not just a step forward for Chinese animation-it’s a leap into a new era of what the medium can achieve, and it sets a new benchmark (IMDB, username: salmanmulla-74299).

Nezha 2 is undoubtedly a stunning sequel that not only carries forward the essence of its predecessor but also reaches new heights in visual design, storytelling, and emotional expression (IMDB, username: likelight).

Gratefully, Ne Zha 2 is widely praised by Western critics as a new milestone of Chinese animation, especially its improvement in special effects technology, as evidenced by the selected reviews above. Several Hollywood animations are also mentioned for comparison. While the progress is fully acknowledged, there are still several points worth noting: firstly, as reviews like “My impression to this series was like it’s a good movie for kids just like other classic Disney or Pixel animation (IMDB, username: earnienew)” conveyed, the film is measured against Western benchmarks which reflects the failure of the establishment of Chinese animation standards. And secondly, much of the attention is paid to the technologies instead of those aesthetic designs full of Chinese traditions, ink-wash paintings for instance.

3. THE VIEWING EXPERIENCE IS AN ADVENTURE

Don’t hesitate, buy your tickets now and embark on this fantastic exploration with Ne Zha! (IMDB, username: zxh-12934).

Superb in the big screen and embark the spectacular journey of a fighter (IMDB, username: frankdublin).

When sharing the viewing experience, the word “adventure” appears more frequently since Western audiences highly praised the visual immersion brought by the film. But such framing also risks commodifying the cultural product. Phrases like “embark on this fantastic exploration” and “buy your tickets now” effectively market the film as an experiential product, whose emphasis is placed on the transient experience of consumption instead of the lasting cultural discourse it might inspire.

5.3.3 *Oriental metaphor*

Oriental metaphors give a concept a spatial orientation; for example, HAPPY IS UP. They are called orientational metaphors because most of them have to do with spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral. These spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The reviews collected for this study are rich with orientational metaphors, demonstrating how Western viewers instinctively employ these spatial concepts to structure their understanding and evaluation of the film.

Table 5 Submappings of Oriental Metaphor

Source domain	Target domain	Metaphor keywords
Vertical Height	Quality	Elevate,
Physical Depth	Significance	Beyond, Depth, Profound
Interior of a Container	Emotion	Core
Exterior of a Container	Innovation	Edge



1. QUALITY IS UP

The visuals alone elevate the scenes to next level and the proper blending of humor and drama, gets the narrative even more engaging.

The quality of film scenes is conceptualized as an object that can be elevated to the next level, while the appeal of the narrative is also conceptualized as a degree that can become higher. Such reviews reveal a significant cognitive pattern among Western audiences, that is, they perceive artistic and technical achievements as a vertical hierarchical system. It reflects that audience subconsciously hold a quality ladder for animated films, and fortunately the accomplishment of *Ne Zha 2* lies in its upward movement rather than its static excellence.

2. SIGNIFICANCE IS DEEP

The arrogance and oppression displayed by certain forces in the story mirror real-world geopolitical dynamics, elevating the film beyond mere mythology and imbuing it with a deeper social commentary.

Ne Zha 2 jumps out of the conventional character setting, and enhances the ideological depth and artistic value of the film.

Ne Zha 2 has a very profound philosophical depth and worldview. If you watch it repeatedly, each time you will have a different understanding of the story's details.

This set of metaphors conceptualize the ideological and artistic values embodied in the film as entities with depth. This also constructs a core cognition: the value of a film lies in its excavable depth. Here, audiences repeatedly use terms such as depth and profound to detach *Ne Zha 2* from the category of a mere myth but define it as a text with rich inherent layers that demands and deserves in-depth exploration. This depth metaphor indicates that audiences pursue an intellectual and emotional experience with substantive connotations that transcends sensory stimulation.

3. EMOTIONAL IS CENTRAL, INNOVATION IS AT THE EDGE

The emotional core of the story is built around deep bonds of love, loyalty, and friendship, highlighting the universal human themes of growth, redemption, and self-discovery.

Wrapped in the guise of mythology is the edge of thought. The core inspirations are: the eternity of the spirit of resistance, the mirror-like critique of power structures, and the enlightening power of tragic aesthetics.

Together with container metaphors, such metaphors reify narration as a container with a center and peripheries: inspiration and emotion lie at the core, while other innovative elements are positioned at the peripheries. The use of core indicates that audiences place universal humanistic themes such as emotion, love, and loyalty at the absolute center of their understanding of the film. Meanwhile, the "edge of thought" stands in contrast to the "guise of mythology" that envelops it, constructing a "center-periphery" cognitive model. Mythology is a familiar, central narrative form, whereas the sharp ideas embedded in the film, such as criticisms of power structures and the spirit of resistance, are positioned at the periphery. This suggests that Western audiences' reception of *Ne Zha 2* is a combination of core identification and peripheral appreciation. They are moved and connected by the film's solid emotional core, while feeling excited and expressing praise for its ideological peripherality, i.e., innovation and criticality.

5.4 Metaphor Explanation

Charteris-Black (2004) argues that both individual and social resources shape the choice of metaphors in discourse. In terms of social resources, they primarily encompass political or religious perspectives, as well as historical and cultural knowledge. The present study holds that the dominance of journey metaphors and reification metaphors as well as the connotation contained reflects deeper political and cultural factors in cross-cultural reception.



5.4.1 Political factors

From a political perspective, the dominant journey and orientation metaphors in Western film reviews reflect an underlying neoliberal ideology and geopolitical narratives. The journey metaphor, particularly the concept of FILM IS AN EXPEDITION transforms the artistic achievements of *Ne Zha 2* into a successful COMPETITION and BREAKTHROUGH in the global cultural market. Expressions such as “breaking into the global top 15”, while seemingly objective descriptions of commercial success, actually reinforce a cultural power structure with Western market standards and ranking systems at its apex, tying the value of non-Western cultural products to their visibility and position within the established Western framework. Meanwhile, simplifying *Ne Zha*’s personal growth into a “personal journey of defying fate” subtly co-opts and narrows the film’s systemic critique of destiny — a concept embodying hierarchy and collective oppression — into a classic liberal narrative that celebrates individualism and self-struggle. This metaphorical interpretation, while praising individual heroism, invisibly blunts the potential edge of the original work’s structural critique of social injustice, rendering it compatible with mainstream Western political discourse and thus harmless.

5.4.2 Cultural factors

On a cultural level, the prevalence of these dominant metaphors reveals Western audiences’ deep cognitive need to domesticate unfamiliar cultural texts. As a powerful cultural template, the journey metaphor stems from the long-standing Western narrative tradition of the “hero’s journey”. It serves as a pre-set cognitive framework, allowing audiences to fit mythological stories filled with Chinese philosophical elements into narrative patterns they are familiar with—those centered on growth, exploration, and self-discovery. While this process enhances the accessibility of cross-cultural understanding, it often leads to the flattening of cultural uniqueness.

Similarly, the frequent use of physical force metaphors reflects a sensory individualism in Western culture that emphasizes sensory experiences and personal reactions. Audiences conceptualize themselves as independent, bounded entities and evaluate the film’s value through force experiences such as “being shocked” or “being drawn in”. This reflects a tendency to commodify cultural experiences into measurable, consumable emotional impact.

Moreover, the spatial logic of orientation metaphors constructs a cognitive map for managing cultural otherness: universal emotions are placed at an easily accessible core, while sharp ideas with cultural specificity are positioned at the edge—appreciable yet kept at a safe distance. This allows for the acceptance of innovation while maintaining the stability of one’s own cultural worldview.

5.4.3 Historical factors

From a historical perspective, the selection and acceptance of these metaphors do not occur in a vacuum, but are deeply influenced by specific historical contexts and path dependence. Western audiences’ interpretation of *Ne Zha 2* is potentially shaped by the framework of reception history established with Japanese anime over the past few decades. Therefore, describing *Ne Zha 2* as a LEAP or BENCHMARK for Chinese animation implies placing it in a narrative of historical comparison and competition with East Asian neighbors—especially Japan, a leader in the anime field. This marks the RISE of a new force in the global animation landscape.

On the other hand, the reason why *Ne Zha*’s image as a rebel resonates strongly lies partly in its activation of a long-standing and powerful historical archetype in Western cultural memory—from Prometheus to the individual heroes who resist tyranny in modern Hollywood narratives. This archetype provides Western audiences with a ready-made cognitive template with historical legitimacy to understand and praise *Ne Zha*’s

rebellious behavior, even though the object of his resistance contains cultural specificities different from those in Western contexts. While this interpretation based on historical archetypes promotes resonance, it may also obscure in-depth exploration of the unique Chinese philosophical and cultural logic behind the spirit of resistance.

6 Conclusions

Based on the main findings of this study, Western audiences' discussions on *Ne Zha 2* focus on three core themes: cultural core, artistic expression, and viewing experience; their interpretive framework is mainly composed of three types of conceptual metaphors--physical force metaphors, journey metaphors, and orientation metaphors. Behind these metaphor choices lie profound political, cultural, and historical drivers: when receiving this film, Western audiences often unconsciously adopt the perspective of a culturally dominant position and use Western-centered evaluation criteria to measure the film's success. At the same time, the cognitive tradition of individualism and heroism also makes them tend to simplify *Ne Zha*'s image into a rebel who "fights against personal fate," while ignoring the in-depth implication of his challenge to the overall authoritative system and the spiritual dimensions carried by supporting characters (such as Shen Gongbao).

Based on the analysis of the audience reception mechanism of *Ne Zha 2*, the following path inspirations can be provided for the global communication of Chinese cultural IPs:

First, understanding begins with acceptance. Chinese cultural IPs can be packaged using narrative motifs with cross-cultural resonance, such as "resisting fate" and "growth journey," and fully respond to international audiences' expectations for audio-visual impact and technical performance. On this basis, audiences should be gradually guided to perceive the internal emotional layers and cultural depth of the works, so as to avoid hindering cross-group understanding due to over-emphasis on cultural specificity. Second, constructing an independent evaluation system is crucial. Currently, the overseas promotion process of most Chinese cultural IPs is still restricted by or dependent on established Western standards. Only by establishing China's own artistic value coordinates and discourse expression methods can we achieve the transformation from "being watched" to "being recognized" in the global cultural landscape.

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