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A Study on the Cross-cultural Communication of Chinese Animated Films Using Python Text Mining: Insights from International Audience Reviews on *Ne Zha 2*

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Abstract

The successful cross-cultural communication of *Ne Zha 2* provides a typical research sample for the globalization of Chinese fantasy IP. This study takes the user comments under the international propaganda film on the YouTube platform as the research object, uses Python text mining technology for sentiment analysis and semantic network construction, and systematically explores the key elements that trigger cross-cultural emotional resonance and their internal relations. The research is analyzed from three theoretical dimensions: cultural discount, extension-connotation visual communication, and emotional empathy. Through high-frequency vocabulary extraction and co-occurrence network analysis of Chinese and English reviews, the study found that specific visual elements play a key role in reducing cultural discounts in cross-cultural communication; the clever use of visual elements in semiotics effectively promotes the understanding and acceptance of international audiences. The core path of the formation of emotional resonance presents obvious cultural differences. This study aims to enrich the theoretical system of cross-cultural communication of Chinese animated films and provide empirical reference for the overseas market expansion of domestic animated films.

Keywords

Ne Zha 2; cross-cultural communication; text mining; cultural discount; emotional resonance

In recent decades, China's national development agenda has placed growing emphasis on building cultural strength and expanding its global reach. The implementation of the cultural power strategy inevitably requires the development of a corresponding theoretical framework for national cultural communication. National cultural communication refers to the process through which a country disseminates its culture to international target audiences through various channels and approaches, enhances positive attention and understanding, constructs a favorable national image, and consequently encourages positive national attitudes and behaviors (Dai et al., 2023). Python provides a novel methodological tool for exploring the mechanisms underlying the cross-cultural dissemination of animated films.

In the globalized cultural landscape, Chinese animated films are undergoing a role transition from "bringing in" to "going out". In 2019, *Ne Zha* was born and received wide acclaim. After a lapse of 6 years, the animated sequel *Ne Zha 2*, released in the Spring Festival of 2025, has once again refreshed the ceiling of Chinese animated films with a

box office score of 15.908 billion yuan (data source: Maoyan's Global Box Office Rankings, as of July 28, 2025). It not only ranks among the top five box offices in global film history, but also becomes the highest-grossing non-English-language film ever.

Most of the existing studies use Western film theory and criticism methods to analyze the political (Chen, 2023), economic (Pei & Nie, 2023), and cultural (Wang & Chen, 2025) issues involved in Chinese films. However, there is still a lack of systematic investigation on how domestic and foreign audiences understand Chinese films and whether there are cognitive differences among different audiences. In view of this, this study focuses on the user comments under the *Ne Zha 2* overseas propaganda film on the YouTube platform, and uses Python-based text analysis methods to analyze the emotional tendency of the comment content, and uses semantic network analysis to identify the key elements that stimulate emotional reactions and their correlations. On this basis, this study comprehensively examines the audience's acceptance status from three dimensions: cultural discount in cross-cultural communication, visual communication based on the framework of extension and connotation, and emotional empathy, trying to clarify the multiple factors that affect the audience's acceptance effect. The purpose of this study is to provide a reference for the overseas promotion of Chinese animated films, and also to bring some new perspectives to the international academic community.

1. Research Questions and Research Process

As the world's largest online video sharing platform, YouTube has about 1.68 billion users, covering a wide range of areas and diverse user composition (Li et al., 2024). The operation index and user demographic characteristics of the platform have always been the focus of academic attention. Statista's data shows that since its launch in 2005, YouTube's service has expanded to 224 countries and regions, and its footprint has spread all over the world, which has obviously constituted a typical transnational digital community. In terms of user activity, the platform has about 2 billion monthly active users, more than 1.5 billion daily video views, and about 30 million daily active users. These data fully reflect YouTube's core position in the global digital media ecology (Dai et al., 2023).

From the perspective of geographical distribution, India, the United States, Brazil, and other populous countries are the most important sources of users for the platform. This pattern is closely related to the regional differences in the current global Internet penetration rate. In terms of demographic characteristics, the user structure of the platform has distinct characteristics: mainly under the age of 45, which accounts for about 60 % of the total number of users (Dai et al., 2023). It is particularly noteworthy that this user group shows typical new media usage habits, including strong acceptance of emerging technologies, frequent exposure to cross-cultural content, and relatively high cultural tolerance. Because of this, they play an important role in the process of network public opinion shaping and information dissemination.

1.1 Research Questions

In the context of cultural products going overseas in the digital age, this paper combines natural language processing technology with communication theory to try to answer the following three core questions: First, with the help of quantitative analysis tools based on Python, the emotional polarity distribution and intensity characteristics of audience comments on *Ne Zha 2* on the YouTube platform are measured. Secondly, through the semantic clustering analysis of multilingual reviews, the differences and commonalities of different language user groups in the dimension of film evaluation are revealed. Thirdly, from the perspective of the empathy mechanism, this paper evaluates the conversion efficiency of Chinese animated film symbols in cross-cultural communication, and puts forward the optimization strategy of cultural translation.

1.2 Research Process

In the data collection stage, this study conducted a preliminary search through keyword matching ("nezha2", "nezha", "nezha2"), selected the filtered conditional playback volume, and found that user-generated content (UGC) showed significant characteristics: Among the top 20 videos, 12 were second-creation works (including role imitation, scene reproduction, etc.), and there was a significant content shift in the comment area. Based on this, the research turned to the analysis of official communication channels, using a limited search strategy *Ne Zha 2* trailer to lock in the international version of the trailer released by CMC Pictures (video ID: CMC Pictures). As of March 30, 2025, the trailer has been played 3.28 million times, and the likes have been liked more than 30,000 times. The user interaction

index conforms to the law of social media communication. Therefore, this study takes 4042 comments in the overseas trailer review area as the core corpus to ensure that the research data has both communication representativeness and content validity.

Data processing. This study adopts a systematic data processing process to ensure the quality of the corpus. After the system automatically filters the comments that the user sets privacy protection and violates the community criteria, 3724 valid comments are crawled. After that, the Python language pandas (for data processing), regex (a high-level regular expression library), and langdetect (detection comment language) were used to judge the language type of the crawled comments. The results show that the comments include not only Chinese and English, but also a small number of other languages such as Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Urdu. Due to the small number of reviews in languages other than Chinese and English, it does not have language representation and statistical significance, so this study also deletes them. After that, jieba, nltk and manual assistance are used to clean and denoise the remaining comments; that is, user comment emojis, repetitive comments of the same user, @ interaction with other users (no text comments), and advertising information are deleted.

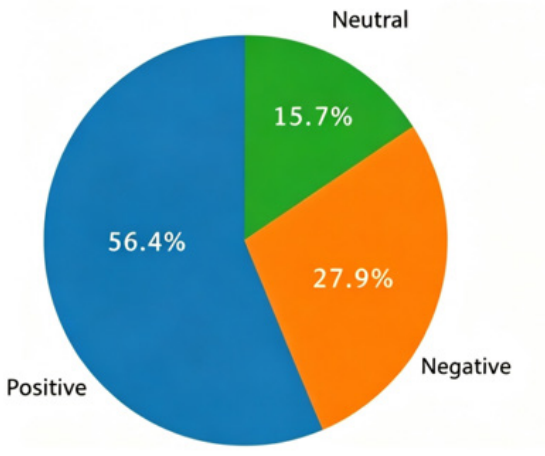
After the above two steps, 1299 valid comments in Chinese and 1597 valid comments in English were obtained, with a total of 2896 comments. SnowNLP and TextBlob are used to classify emotional polarity in order to obtain the proportion of positive comments, neutral comments, and negative comments. Such sentiment analysis is commonly used to uncover users' affective orientations—whether favourable or critical—and their broader views on a particular product or event. Previous applications of sentiment analysis in both Chinese and international contexts have primarily focused on product reviews, Weibo discussions, and news discourse (Zhang, 2019).

2. Research Findings

2.1 Analysis of Differences in Emotional Evaluations between Chinese and Western Audiences

Sentiment analysis, also known as opinion mining, refers to the process of using computational techniques to classify texts containing specific emotional orientations and to calculate and analyze their sentiment polarity values (Wu & Yao, 2024). As a representative case in the process of internationalization of Chinese animated films, the cross-cultural communication effect of *Ne Zha 2* shows significant differences in emotional evaluation between Chinese and Western audiences.

Based on the quantitative analysis of the emotional distribution of Chinese and English user reviews, the results show that in Chinese reviews, positive reviews account for 56.4%, neutral reviews account for 15.7%, and negative reviews account for 27.9 %. In English comments, positive comments accounted for 36.7%, neutral comments accounted for 54.5%, and negative comments accounted for only 8.8% (see Figure 1, Figure 2).



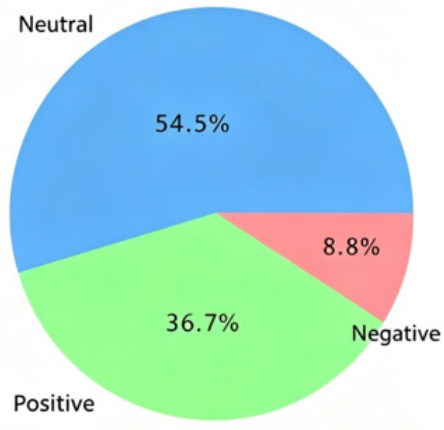


Figure 1. Emotional Distribution of Chinese-Language Reviews. Figure 2. Emotional Distribution of English-Language Reviews.

The quantitative analysis of the comment data shows that the positive evaluation of Chinese viewers accounts for 56.4%, which accounts for a relative majority overall. Among the rest of the feedback, neutral comments accounted for 15.7%, negative comments accounted for 27.9%, and the latter accounted for nearly a third of the total comments. This distribution trend shows that there is a certain degree of differentiation in the acceptance of domestic audiences: on the one hand, a large number of audiences have a strong emotional recognition of the film; on the other hand, there are also some audiences who have reservations or criticisms about the artistic treatment and cultural expression of the film.

In contrast, the emotional distribution of English comments presents a very different appearance. Although China-related public discourse on the English Twitter platform has long been biased towards the negative (Xiong & Zheng, 2024) due to certain stereotypes of China in the international community and the stigmatization operation imposed by some Western media through agenda setting, *Ne Zha 2* has received 36.7% positive evaluations in English comments, and neutral evaluations are dominated by 54.5%, while negative evaluations are only 8.8%, which is significantly lower than the negative proportion in Chinese comments. The above data show that the film has achieved relatively high recognition and acceptance among overseas English audiences.

It is worth noting that the proportion of neutral comments in English reviews is as high as 54.5%, which may reflect that international audiences have encountered a certain degree of cognitive ambiguity in the process of cultural decoding. This kind of neutral feedback not only contains the elements of rational judgment, but also implies the objective existence of cultural discount in cross-cultural communication to a certain extent.

2.2 Results of Semantic Network Analysis: Differences in Emotional Referents between Domestic and Overseas Audiences

With Python's WordCloud library, this study visualizes the high-frequency words in Chinese and English comments respectively, and adopts a differentiated implementation method according to the characteristics of the two language texts. In the aspect of the Chinese word cloud, a font library supporting Chinese vector rendering is selected to effectively avoid character distortion or abnormal coding, so as to ensure the integrity of Chinese font display and the accuracy of semantic expression. For the English word cloud, standard sans serif fonts are used to better match the baseline alignment and reading habits of Latin letters. On this basis, the high-frequency word cloud of Chinese and English reviews of *Ne Zha 2* is generated (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). It can be clearly seen that there are significant differences in cross-cultural discourse characteristics between the two.

Figure 3. Word Cloud in Chinese Comments.

Figure 4. Word Cloud in English Comments.

The core word clusters in Chinese comments revolve around national identity and cultural subjectivity. The three key terms—"China" (194 occurrences), "box office" (94 occurrences), and "release" (85 occurrences)—construct a tripartite narrative framework, reflecting Chinese audiences' strong attention to the film's market performance and dissemination effectiveness as a cultural product of the Chinese nation. The co-occurrence of "Ne Zha" (176 occurrences) with "original work" (29 occurrences) and "mythology" (22 occurrences) indicates Chinese audiences' deep engagement with the modernization of traditional intellectual properties. Such engagement encompasses both emotional identification, represented by expressions such as "good-looking" (65 occurrences) and "like" (50 occurrences), and sharp criticism expressed through terms such as "garbage" (25 occurrences), thereby creating a tension between

polarized value judgments. Notably, the frequent occurrence of geopolitical symbols such as "America" (65 occurrences) and "Japan" (35 occurrences) suggests the implicit presence of cultural comparison awareness within the comment discourse space.

In contrast, English comments demonstrate reception characteristics shaped by a globalized perspective. The extremely high frequency of "Chinese" (297 occurrences) and "China" (257 occurrences) highlights the film's positioning as a symbol of cultural otherness in international audiences' cognition. Meanwhile, the frequent use of terms such as "animation" (140 occurrences), "box office" (91 occurrences), and "billion" (85 occurrences) constructs a dual discourse system combining technological evaluation and industrial observation. Positive emotional expressions, including "good" (112 occurrences) and "amazing" (68 occurrences), frequently co-occur with "watch" (208 occurrences) and "world" (92 occurrences), indicating that international audiences tend to emphasize the universal value of the viewing experience. Compared with the explicit negative expression "garbage" found in Chinese comments, English-language comments tend to employ indirect criticism through negative markers such as "no" (132 occurrences) and "don't" (69 occurrences), a difference that may be associated with politeness strategies in cross-cultural communication.

The results of word frequency analysis further reflect the big differences in symbol decoding mechanisms. In the comments of domestic audiences, abstract concepts such as "culture" (29 occurrences) and "myth" (22 occurrences) appear repeatedly, which reflects the strong appeal of local audiences for the right to interpret cultural archetypes. In English reviews, industry terms such as "animation" (75 occurrences) and "release" (65 occurrences) are more prominent, indicating that international audiences are more inclined to evaluate films within the framework of the global animation industry.

From the results of co-occurrence analysis, the semantic network of *Ne Zha 2* Chinese reviews (see Appendix Figure 1) and the top ten co-occurrence word pairs (see Appendix Table 1) clearly show the significant differences between discourse structure and cultural decoding practice. In the Chinese data set, the main co-occurrence clusters revolve around core nodes such as "Chinese film" (30 occurrences), "China-Naza" (28 occurrences), and "film-box office" (14 occurrences), forming a dense network that closely links national narratives with business performance. At the same time, the emergence of cross-border pairings such as "China-U.S." (15 occurrences) and "China-Japan" (9 occurrences) indicates that audiences have a tendency to make cross-cultural comparisons when discussing films. The connection between "plot-special effects" (12 occurrences) and "China-culture" (10 occurrences) reflects the core issue of how traditional IP can achieve modernization in both technical and cultural dimensions. It is worth noting that the negative co-occurrence of 'not-movie' (15 occurrences), "not-China" (15 occurrences), and the high frequency of the derogatory term "garbage" (25 occurrences) constitute an intertextual expression, revealing the complex attitudes and internal tensions of domestic audiences towards the film.

The semantic network of English reviews (see Figure 5) and its top ten co-occurrence word pairs (see Table 1), it shows a significant feature of the coexistence of technical rationality and industrial observation. Among them, "box–office" (371 occurrences), as the core node in the network, together with the words "billion" (85 occurrences) and "world" (92 occurrences), builds a discourse framework around global box office evaluation. At the same time, the technical-aesthetic evaluation embodied in co-occurrence combinations such as "animation–Chinese" (101 occurrences) and "good–looks" (52 occurrences) further reveals the analytical perspective that international audiences rely on when they recognize Chinese animation production.

Negative expressions in English comments are mostly presented by indirect discourse, such as "can–no" (203 and 132 occurrences respectively, showing potential association) and "watch–don't" (208 and 69 occurrences respectively), which is in contrast to the more direct critical tone in Chinese comments. This difference reflects the differences in the choice of discourse strategies among audiences in different cultural backgrounds.

The difference in cross-cultural symbol decoding is also reflected in the use of the word "Chinese–people" (111 occurrences), especially when it is in contrast to the lack of the co-occurrence pair of China-people in Chinese comments. The former helps to construct an imaginative "cultural other", placing Chinese culture in an internationally perceived position; the latter is replaced by industry-oriented words such as "box office" (94 occurrences) in domestic discourse, indicating that Chinese audiences are more inclined to evaluate films from the perspective of market performance.

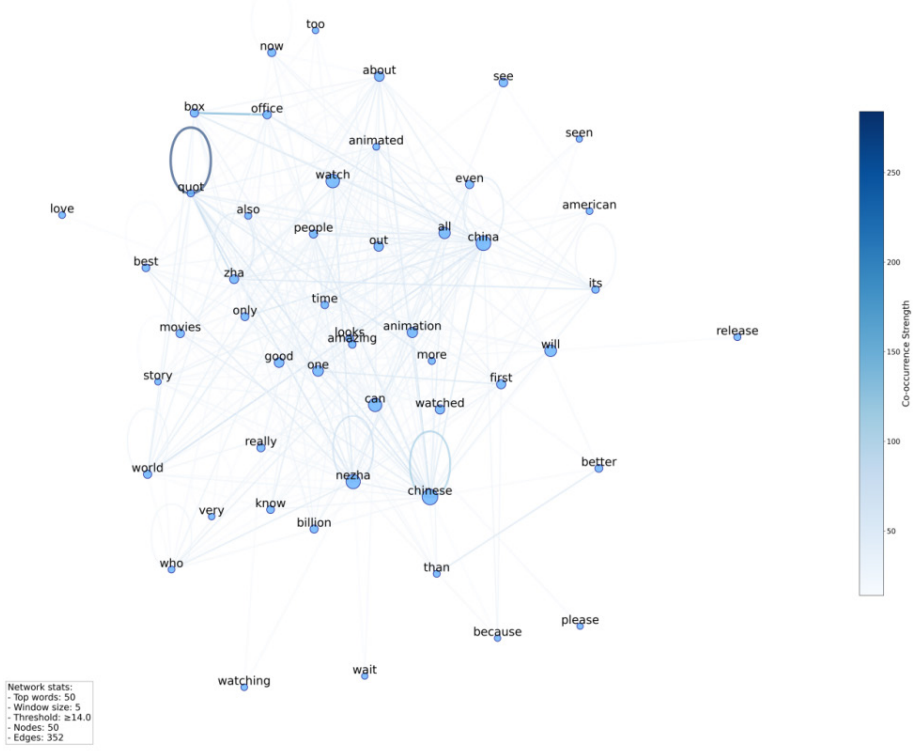


Figure 5. Semantic Network of English Comments.

Table 1. Top Ten Co-occurring Word Pairs in English Comments

Word 1	Word 2	Co-occurrence
box	office	371
quot	quot	224
can	watch	202
better	than	142
first	one	118
nezha	nezha	117
Chinese	people	111
all	time	109
animation	Chinese	101
can	see	101

The analysis results of the semantic network show that Chinese reviews construct an axis around cultural inheritance through co-occurrence relationships such as “culture” (29 occurrences)–“mythology” (22 occurrences) and “original work” (29 occurrences)–“animation” (27 occurrences). This shows that *Ne Zha 2* actually bears the media role of international transmission of traditional cultural elements in the process of communication. In contrast, English reviews use more collocation modes such as “release–will” (71 occurrences) and “better–than” (142 occurrences) to form an evaluation chain focusing on industrial prospect prediction and horizontal comparison. This divergence supports Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory: the Chinese semantic network reflects a stronger orientation toward long-term cultural continuity and cultural consciousness, whereas the English semantic network emphasizes short-term performance evaluation and outcome-oriented assessment.

3. Reflection and Discussion

Under the strategic background of promoting the construction of cultural self-confidence in the new era, domestic film and television works, as an important carrier of the spiritual core of Chinese civilization, have become one of the key indicators to measure the soft power of national culture. This kind of cultural output is not only the transnational flow of image symbols, but also the multi-dimensional dialogue space of civilization mutual learning in the context of globalization.

3.1 Cultural Discount and Symbolic Translation: Cognitive Gaps in Mythological Systems

Cultural discount is a core concept that has been repeatedly discussed in cross-cultural communication research. It was first proposed by Colin Hoskins and R. Mirus in 1988 (Pan & Wang, 2020). In the process of cross-border flow of cultural products, a common dilemma is "cultural discount", that is, audio-visual content can often gain higher attraction in the local market than in the overseas market, resulting in a decline in international returns (Zeng & Deng, 2022). Hoskins' cultural discount theory points to a fundamental problem faced by cultural products in cross-border communication: when cultural symbols are pulled out of the original meaning soil, their symbolic system inevitably encounters fragmentation and loss of meaning, and this process is almost irreversible. If overseas audiences want to accurately grasp the cultural connotation of high dependence on context behind these symbols, they must have a systematic cognitive reserve about the cultural system (Zeng & Deng, 2022).

The holistic mode of cognition and collectivist values widely embedded in Chinese culture differ significantly from Western cultural traditions, which encourage individual expression and the assertion of personal agency during the process of socialization. These two cognitive frameworks have resulted in substantial differences between Eastern and Western cultures in terms of social institutions, social psychology, and educational structures (Guo & Teng, 2011). The term "Ne Zha" (261 occurrences in English comments), functioning as an isolated symbol detached from its mythological network, fails to convey the metaphorical meaning of his identity as the reincarnation of the "Spirit Pearl." Consequently, the character is reduced to an ordinary superhero figure. Similarly, the "Primordial Pearl" (Hunyuanzhu) in *Ne Zha* embodies profound Yin–Yang philosophical meanings. Within the Chinese cultural context, its significance is constructed through concepts such as "the chaotic force of heaven and earth's spiritual energy."

3.2 The Dimensional Reduction Effect of Visual Communication: The Symbolic Breakthrough of Ink-Wash Aesthetics

Roland Barthes' theory of visual semiotics provides an effective analytical tool for analyzing the visual communication strategy in *Ne Zha 2*. In his mythology and semiotic principles, Barthes defines extension as the first-level symbolic system, which is composed of the signifier and the signified of language, conveying a clear and straightforward meaning, which is stabilized by a relatively fixed coding method. The connotation is another meaning level superimposed on the first-level system, thus forming the second-level symbol system, which carries ideological characteristics and is characterized by the openness of interpretation and the multiplicity of meaning (Zhang, 2013).

This kind of symbol segmentation is particularly prominent in role modeling and visual aesthetics. As a signifier symbol at the textual level, "Tai Yi Zhen Ren" is characterized by exaggerated appearance, which activates the deep-rooted cognitive schema of "Da Zhi Ruo Yu" in the context of Chinese culture. With the help of the imperfection of the flesh, this way of shaping dispels the opposition between the sacred and the secular. Similarly, although "Tencel" can win a certain degree of technical recognition from the audience in the performance of dynamic fluidity, the symbolic meaning of its color has led to different directions of interpretation. Western audiences tend to incorporate it into the general narrative logic, while Eastern audiences regard it as a moral allegory of the theme of innocence. Because of this, this symbol has also suffered cultural discounts in its cross-border communication.

3.3 The Compensatory Mechanism of Emotional Resonance: Cross-cultural Activation of Narrative Archetypes

The achievement of *Ne Zha 2* can be attributed not just to the rebellious spirit of its protagonist, but also to the film's portrayal of how familial affection and support serve as a source of redemptive strength (Pa & Cao, 2025). Meanwhile, Shen Gongbao's journey of cultivation and his experience of being marginalized within disciplinary frameworks strike a chord with the collective memories of young individuals from smaller towns, who strive for social

advancement through exam-oriented education. The sense of alienation and the anxiety of being treated as the "other" that are woven into his character arc mirror the identity struggles faced by educated youth in post-industrial societies.

Empirical support for Klaus Bruhn Jensen's theory of emotional communication can be found in the case of *Ne Zha 2*. The film, through its use of the archetypal narrative centered on "challenging fate," succeeds in eliciting emotional resonance among audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. Jensen's notion of emotional compensation, meanwhile, is further evidenced by the way the phrase "My fate is determined by me, not by Heaven" has been circulated and reinterpreted across national borders. At a deeper level, the mechanism by which emotional narratives offset cultural discount lies in the convergence of Chinese fatalistic worldviews and Western conceptions of free will, a convergence that is made possible through the shared archetypal motif of "struggling against destiny."

4. Conclusion

The overseas spread of *Ne Zha 2* exposes a deep contradiction in the process of globalization of Chinese animation: the inherent tension between the hard power driven by technology and the soft constraints faced by cultural translation. If we want to move from going in to going out in the true sense, Chinese animation not only needs to give full play to the dimensionality reduction advantage brought by advanced visual production, but also depends on the construction of a set of emotional and cultural communication mechanisms. The audience recognition, cultural discount coefficient, value resonance intensity, and other indicators of overseas markets are directly related to the effective implementation of cross-cultural emotional resonance. Previous studies have pointed out that when evaluating international communication capabilities, we should take into account the two dimensions of the communicator and the recipient, combine the quantification of media influence with the actual reception effect of the audience, and must not ignore the active role of the audience in the communication results (Guo, 2017).

The globalization process of *Ne Zha 2* shows that if Oriental cultural products want to truly reach the international market, it is far from being a matter of going out, and it is more necessary to build an ecosystem of multicultural coexistence. In this system, cultural discount is an obstacle that must be faced directly, and visual expression and emotional connection may become the breakthrough point. The ultimate goal is to promote the creative transformation of symbolic meaning through continuous cross-cultural dialogue. When Nezha, who stepped on the wheel of wind and fire, appeared on the giant screen of New York's Times Square, he was no longer just a bearer of cultural symbols, but a messenger of mutual learning of civilizations. This is perhaps one of the most enlightening answers that cross-cultural communication can give.

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Appendix

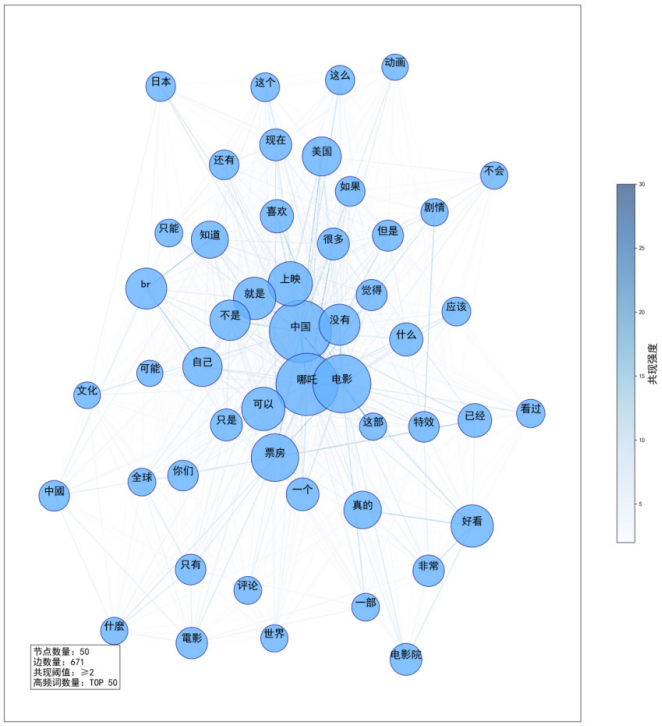

Figure 1. Semantic Network of Chinese Comments.

Table 1. Top Ten Co-occurring Word Pairs in Chinese Comments

Word 1	Word 2	Co-occurrence
中国	电影	30
中国	哪吒	28
哪吒	电影	25
电影	这部	19
中国	票房	18
中国	没有	18
可以	哪吒	17
哪吒	很多	16
中国	就是	15
中国	美国	15