

From "Breaking Out of the Circle" to "Chain Effect": Discussing How the Debut Economy Unleashes New Momentum for the "Nezha" IP

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Abstract: In the context of IP-based cultural industry and consumption upgrading, "breaking out of the circle" has become the key to IP value leapfrogging, while the debut economy is the core means to activate IP momentum and catalyze the "chain effect". As a benchmark for domestic animation, the "Nezha" IP's practice of extending from film and television to the entire industry chain provides a typical sample for studying the coupling of the debut economy and IP value. This article conducts research based on the "Nezha" IP: first, it combines the background of the debut economy policy and the core issues of cultural industry development to clarify the significance of the research; then, it reviews relevant literature to establish a clear research foundation; subsequently, it analyzes the implementation process of the debut economy chain development; further, it analyzes the dynamic mechanism from four dimensions: symbol, supply chain, industrial synergy, and regional linkage; meanwhile, it points out practical challenges such as lagging intellectual property protection and uneven regional development, and proposes optimization paths such as enhancing intellectual property protection, strengthening digital infrastructure construction, and reducing regional constraints, providing reference for the high-quality development of the cultural industry.

1. Introduction

The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China made scientific and systematic arrangements for building a unified national market, emphasizing the need to "improve and expand long-term mechanisms for consumption, reduce restrictive measures, reasonably increase public consumption, and actively promote the debut economy" [1]. In 2024, the debut economy further expanded to include inaugural events, exhibitions, and performances, and was repeatedly mentioned at major central conferences. Its essence aligns with China's economic transition from old to new growth drivers and the development of new-quality productive forces, making it an important carrier of new economic drivers. As a new economic form, the debut economy is increasingly becoming an important engine for promoting the upgrading of cultural consumption and the transformation of industrial momentum. At the same time, how to transcend the status of a single cultural phenomenon and a temporary surge in popularity, and achieve long-term and maximized value for the Nezha IP, constitutes the core issue in the current development of the cultural industry. Taking the "Nezha craze" as an example, its success lies not only in breaking through the original circle in terms of content, but also in extending from film and television to other industrial chains such as cultural tourism, fashionable toys, and digital collectibles. "Nezha: The Monkey King" has efficiently activated the multi-level consumer market through a series of premiere activities, co-branding, and derivative product launches, subsequently triggering a "chain reaction". However, existing research has primarily focused on IP content creation or marketing strategies themselves, and there is still a lack of in-depth theoretical explanations and case analyses on how the specific model of "the debut economy" systematically empowers IP, triggering its inherent mechanisms of value appreciation and industrial synergy. This study aims to analyze the practical path of the "Nezha" IP, filling this research gap and providing

theoretical basis and practical reference for the innovative operation of the Nezha IP and the high-quality development of the cultural industry. Exploring the debut economy promotion of the "Nezha" IP from "breaking through the original circle" to "chain reaction" can not only enrich the theories of cultural industry and regional economic development and fill the research gap, but also provide scientific basis for the government to formulate industrial policies and for enterprises to carry out IP operation and market expansion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Basic Connotation of the Debut Economy

The debut economy is considered as an innovative achievement that introduces new products, brands, scenarios, experiences, etc., drives consumption quality improvement and flow increase, promotes regional and industrial linkage innovation, and conforms to the requirements and trends of high-quality development and new economic forms. From the perspective of the basic connotation of the debut economy, it is the organic combination of first-cause effect and eyeball effect, the extension of the debut economy form, the embodiment of high-quality supply content, and the source of urban economic power (Lai Li, Hu Leming, and Su Xiaozhou, 2024)^[2]. It is believed that the debut economy is characterized by initial and substantial innovation, fashionable and effective leadership, high quality and market recognition, and a chain-like development process (Ye Xu, Wang Shuaiyao, and Mao Zhong, 2025)^[3].

2.2. The Basic Connotation of IP

This IP, an abbreviation for intellectual property in the traditional intellectual property knowledge system, refers to the exclusive rights to intellectual labor achievements created in human social practice, namely the right to intellectual achievements. However, the contemporary concept of IP is not limited to the field of intellectual property alone. It has a richer meaning and a trend towards generalization. Comics, TV dramas, novels, games, individuals, certain business phenomena, etc., can all become IP, and can also be referred to as "pan-IP". IP is born based on the mobile internet, with a very wide coverage and is inseparable from people's lives (Yu Lina, Zhong Lei, 2020)^[4].

2.3. Research on the Debut Economy

Currently, research on the debut economy mainly focuses on its connotation, characteristics, functions, facing problems, and countermeasures. For example, Ouyang Rihui and Tang Chang (2024) found that the debut economy is an economic activity centered on innovation, satisfying consumer demands through new product launches, opening of first stores, first exhibitions, and first shows. Its scope covers dimensions such as new products, new scenarios, new formats, and new models, and it is characterized by innovation, drive, and scenario integration^[5]. Furthermore, Huang Yinling and Xu Zheng (2024) argue that the debut economy is still in the exploratory stage, facing increasingly severe issues such as homogenization of fields. Therefore, it is necessary to establish and improve a policy support system for the debut economy and other countermeasures to overcome the practical difficulties encountered during its development process^[6].

2.4. Research on IP Operation and the "Nezha" Phenomenon

The success of "Nezha 2" not only brings significant short-term economic benefits to cinemas, such as rapid growth in box office revenue and increased surrounding consumption, but also promotes the upgrading of the film industry chain, especially in terms of animation film production, distribution strategies, and derivative development (Zhang Qiaoxi, 2025)^[7].

Scholars have achieved certain results in IP research. Taking the "Nezha" IP as an example, they have clarified the internal and external factors contributing to its success, thoroughly analyzed the "cross-media" theory of IP operation and the "breaking out of the circle" communication mechanism, and recognized the innovative nature and industry benchmark significance of its

derivative product launches and other operations.

2.5. Literature Evaluation

Existing research has provided mature analysis on the "cross-media" theory of IP operation and the "breaking out of the circle" communication mechanism, and recognizes the innovativeness of operations such as the premiere of derivatives and its significance as a benchmark for the commercialization of Chinese animation IP. However, there are deficiencies in the research: Firstly, it often focuses on a single film or scattered derivative phenomena, lacking an integrated framework to explain the transformation of IP momentum from "blockbuster" to "sustained success", and the concept of "the debut economy" has not been fully introduced. Secondly, the mechanism research is fragmented, treating "content breakthrough" and "commercial development" as independent stages, failing to reveal their mutually empowering relationship through the "initial release" node, and ignoring the fact that the initial release combines attributes of content event and marketing activity, as well as serving as the continuation of "breakthrough" and the starting point of the "chain reaction". Thirdly, there is a lack of dynamic and chain perspective, with most research being static retrospectives, failing to present the chain effect: from the initial release of a film igniting the market, to the continued heat generated by the initial release of derivatives, and then to the further breakthrough through collaborative models, this series of industrial chain extensions drives the chain development of the debut economy.

Future research can be advanced in three aspects: first, integrating theories such as "the debut economy" and "cross-media narrative" to construct a new framework for the release of IP momentum; second, using the "Nezha" IP as a case study to empirically demonstrate the effectiveness of initial release activities; third, constructing a "chain reaction" model for the debut economy of IP, clarifying the driving factors and transmission mechanisms.

3. The Process of Chain Development of the First Release Economy

3.1. Atmosphere Creation Stage

The beginning of the chain development of the debut economy is to establish the public's cognition and emotional identification with "first release", which is the core foundation for the subsequent chain extension. Cultural IPs, as important carriers, transform "first release" from an abstract commercial behavior into an attractive consumption symbol through high-quality content creation and precise dissemination, helping the debut economy reach the public's vision^[8]. Taking the "Nezha" IP as an example, this IP not only boldly reconstructs the traditional Chinese mythological figure but also endows it with the rebellious spirit of "my destiny is in my own hands" and the universal emotional core of modern society, successfully breaking through the barriers of different ages and social circles and triggering widespread emotional resonance^[9]. With high word-of-mouth and global box office, it has formed a strong content influence, quickly pushing "Nezha-related first releases" into the public's attention, completing the cognitive enlightenment of the chain development of the debut economy. In terms of dissemination, in addition to traditional screening channels, IP-related topics have sparked a discussion craze on social platforms, and user secondary creations have further amplified the volume. Combined with the pre-sale of the film, the emotional identification with the IP has been transformed into expectations for first release consumption, allowing the concept of "paying attention to first releases and participating in first releases" to permeate the market and open the entrance for chain development.

3.2. The Stage of Industrial Extension

Based on the accumulation of extensive market recognition, the debut economy enters a substantive expansion stage, gradually breaking through the limitations of the original single content first release, and extending to multiple dimensions such as derivative product development, cross-industry collaborations, and cultural tourism experiences, thereby constructing a multi-field first release industrial chain from content to physical products, achieving systematic and large-scale

expansion from point to area.

The debut economy first formed a linkage path between content first release and derivative product first release in the derivative product field. Taking the "Ne Zha" IP as an example, during the movie's release period, various derivative products such as blind boxes, collectible cards, and themed stationery were simultaneously launched, and their sales significantly exceeded those of similar IPs. This move not only achieved a leap from the first release of the movie in cinemas to the first release of multiple derivative products but also effectively attracted a broader consumer base through high-frequency consumption scenarios.

Furthermore, the debut economy breaks through industry barriers through cross-industry collaborations, building a cross-industry first release collaboration ecosystem^[10]. The "Ne Zha" IP has conducted first release collaborations with brands in multiple different fields such as dairy products, maternal and infant products, stationery, collectibles, games, fast-moving consumer goods, and jewelry^[11], covering a wider range of categories than the industry's conventional level. Such collaborations not only effectively reach non-native fan groups through cross-industry cooperation channels and achieve a breakthrough in user circles but also extend the first release chain from "IP-related industries" to "non-IP-related industries", greatly expanding the reach of the debut economy.

At the same time, the debut economy also actively extends to offline experience scenarios, forming a new model of bidirectional drive between virtual content and physical scenarios. This IP has created immersive theme areas and limited-time pop-up stores in collaboration with commercial complexes and cultural tourism projects, enhancing user participation through recreating movie scenes and adding interactive elements. This not only means that the first release activities have extended from online or retail products to offline experiences but also has driven the development of surrounding industries such as catering and accommodation, thereby upgrading from merely selling products to promoting the common development of the entire regional business ecosystem.

3.3. The Stage of Chain Transmission and Amplification of Economic Effects

After completing the extension in multiple fields, the debut economy enters a mature development stage. This stage relies on the coordinated integration of each link in the industrial chain and the cross-regional and cross-industry radiation and driving effect to achieve a leap from "multi-scenario linkage" to "full industrial chain drive", forming a closed-loop development pattern and thereby amplifying its overall economic effect.

In terms of industrial chain coordination, the debut economy builds a complete value chain from creative research and development, production and manufacturing to first release through the efficient cooperation of the upstream, midstream, and downstream links. The upstream link closely follows the first release demand, promoting the rapid development of copyright transactions and creative design, and continuously providing innovative support for first release activities; the midstream production link closely tracks market dynamics, significantly shortening the product development-to-market cycle, and can quickly respond to market hotspots; the downstream link comprehensively utilizes methods such as first release zones on e-commerce platforms, offline theme pop-up stores, and live-streaming sales to achieve a smooth conversion from attracting traffic, physical experiences to immediate purchases. Each link is closely connected and mutually coordinated, jointly ensuring the efficient operation of the debut economy at the chain level.

From the perspective of cross-regional and cross-industry radiation, the debut economy continuously breaks through geographical boundaries and industry barriers, achieving all-round and multi-dimensional diffusion. In the cross-regional aspect, it relies on the online and offline integration model to achieve simultaneous first releases in multiple cities across the country and launch city-themed cultural tourism projects, promoting the extension of the debut economy from core cities to the entire country; in the cross-industry aspect, the debut economy effectively stimulates users' UGC creation (user-generated content) and secondary dissemination. Relevant topics and derivative content not only significantly increase the exposure of first release brands but also further drive the consumption of official products, allowing the first release effect to penetrate into the user content ecosystem and achieve further extension of the value chain^[12].

Ultimately, the debut economy has formed a complete chain-like development path from cognitive foundation to scene expansion and then to full-scale diffusion. It not only runs through multiple industries but also activates supporting industries, achieving a leap from single-point explosion to full-chain symbiosis, fully demonstrating the economic multiplier effect brought about by chain transmission.

4. The Driving Mechanism for the Chain Development of the First Economy

4.1. Symbolic Empowerment Mechanism : from Cultural Identity to Consumption Transformation

The initial economic chain development provides a new path with cultural depth and commercial value for Nezha IP. The core of Nezha IP empowering the debut economy is to shape a "symbolic carrier" with high emotional resonance and cultural recognition. NeZha: The Birth of the Demon Child "breaks away from the tragic framework of traditional mythology and binds the spirit of" my fate is determined by me, not by heaven "with the mentality of contemporary youth, making" Ne Zha "a spiritual symbol of the new era. During the initial release of this movie, related topics were already fermenting on social media platforms, quickly establishing a "symbol emotion" connection and laying the foundation for the innovation, empowerment, transformation, and upgrading of the product. The symbolic value of 'Nezha' extends to the first release product, promoting the upgrade of the product from 'functionality' to 'emotion'. The design of Shiji Niangniang's "petrified texture" in Ne zha 2 provides many materials for derivative products, such as themed makeup palettes and co branded trendy shoes. Ding Renzhong (2025) pointed out that the debut economy stimulates vitality through enhancing new consumption drivers and other means^[13]. The derivatives of Nezha IP also confirm this viewpoint: cultural symbols can enhance product value, make it emotionally premium, make the first release product a cultural identity medium, form a closed loop of "symbol identity purchase conversion social sharing", and improve the efficiency and stickiness of the debut economy.

4.2. Supply Chain Response Mechanism :from Demand Explosion to Supply Matching

The debut economy chain development empowers Nezha IP to generate "short-term explosive" demand, and the efficiency of the supply chain determines the success or failure of its heat conversion. Nezha IP relies on the domestic industrial system to build a mechanism of "agile production+flexible customization" to avoid the problem of "IP being ignored and products being unsold".

After the release of "Ne Zha 2", IP brands and the industry chain share demand. E-commerce can obtain production orders based on pre-sale sales orders, and manufacturers can work together with supporting enterprises to synchronize debugging, shorten the production cycle of products, and ensure that derivatives cover the market during peak heat periods.

4.3. Industrial Collaboration Mechanism : from Single IP to Ecological Linkage

Nezha IP needs to break through the "content+derivatives" model and establish an "IP+N" ecological mechanism through "industry collaboration". Lu Minfeng and Liu Yingmei (2025) believe that the debut economy is guided by personalized consumption and utilizes mechanisms to enhance brand and regional synergies^[14]. Through horizontal and vertical collaboration, Light Media has made "Nezha" a cross disciplinary symbol.

Horizontal collaboration is cross industry authorization, building a matrix of "content+N". The IP brand opens up its own authorization and combines it with food, automobiles, cultural tourism, etc.: Snack brands promote themed gift boxes containing movie coupons; Customized themed car models by car companies drive initial sales. Vertical collaboration focuses on the collaboration between IP brand owners, manufacturers, and channel partners. In the toy merchandise of Nezha 2, the IP brand has released characters in advance and started pre-sales; Manufacturers' production is determined by sales to avoid waste; E-commerce synchronizes

orders, shortening delivery time; Channel providers use live streaming sales to accelerate conversion.

4.4. Regional Linkage Mechanism : from Single Point Outbreak to Global Driving

The initial launch of Nezha IP requires the use of "regional linkage" to expand its impact scale. Zhang Min (2025) found that domestic mythological IP animation can expand its path through cross media production ^[15]. Nezha IP activates the national market with "core promotion and sinking acceptance". The core cities (Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen) have undertaken the function of "creating hype and exposure". The Beijing premiere of "Ne Zha" has become a hot topic, and Shanghai pop-up stores have also become check-in spots. The increasing awareness of first tier city consumers towards their products has laid the foundation for nationwide promotion. Third - and fourth tier cities and lower tier markets are responsible for "transforming consumption". The market has a large population base and high acceptance of China-Chic. Nezha 2 has led to a significant increase in the search rate of related tourism, with more than half of the third and fourth tier users.

From the development of the industrial chain, the "Nezha" IP has formed a complete chain of "content authorization production channel cultural tourism". Online e-commerce has set up special zones, and offline stores have created themed scenes. Online and offline collaboration is working together to expand influence and promote the all-round development of the debut economy from point to chain and from chain to surface.

5. Realistic Challenges of the First Economic Chain Development

5.1. Insufficient Product Innovation

Enterprises find it difficult to meet the market's demand for first-time products in terms of key technology research and innovation capabilities. Some companies use micro innovation to package old products, turning the initial launch into a simple marketing tactic .Causing market 'initial fatigue'. In the "Nezha" IP related products, many are only used for simple image applications in appearance, Lack of exploration of the deep connotation of IP and innovative technological integration has led to serious product homogenization, Unable to continuously stimulate consumer interest and form a chain development momentum based on product innovation.

5.2. Shortcomings in Brand Cultivation

Local brands have relatively weak influence in the debut economy. In terms of brand planning and marketing promotion, There is a gap between local enterprises and international brands. International brands, with their global marketing strategies and ability to shape brand stories, can quickly attract global attention upon their debut, However, local brands often lack systematic planning, making it difficult to form a strong market impact at the initial launch. Many local brands have received a lukewarm market response after their debut, making it difficult to continuously increase brand value and market share, This makes it difficult for local enterprises to dominate in the debut economy related to the "Nezha" IP, Unable to fully tap into the value of IP and form the core driving force for chain development.

5.3. Intellectual Property Protection Lags Behind

Over reliance on popular public IP addresses may lead to issues such as homogenization ^[16]. After the emergence of the debut economy, Many Nezha IPs have sprung up like mushrooms after rain, but due to the lack of relevant technology, they can only imitate many successful cases, But it is difficult to grasp the degree of imitation, which leads to frequent incidents of plagiarism and infringement, As a result, the enthusiasm for innovation of enterprises has been greatly reduced, which has made Nezha IP's initial economic launch difficult, Unable to form a virtuous cycle, the economic effect of Nezha IP empowering the first launch is not significant.

5.4. Uneven Regional Development

The debut economy has a significant driving effect on enhancing regional linkage development^[17], Firstly, it occurs in economically developed areas along the eastern coast, so there are significant differences in regional distribution, The eastern region, equivalent to the central and western regions, has a relatively large first store scale, The proportion is large, while the central and western regions are affected by economic underdevelopment. Due to its small scale and low popularity, the role of Nezha IP in empowering the debut economy in different regions is uneven, Unable to utilize Nezha IP as a whole to promote the comprehensive development of the debut economy.

6. Optimization Path for the Chain-like Development of the Debut Economy

6.1. Enhance Product Innovation Capability and Activate the Driving Force for Chain - style Development

Enterprises should be encouraged to increase R & D investment and establish a collaborative innovation system integrating industry, academia, and research. They should cooperate with universities and research institutions to tackle the key technologies of products related to the "Ne Zha" IP. At the same time, enterprises should be guided to change their concepts, abandon the short - term thinking of "minor innovation to repackage old products", and establish a market - demand - oriented product innovation mechanism. Through methods such as consumer surveys and big - data analysis, they can accurately grasp market trends, ensure that the first - launch products of the "Ne Zha" IP are both innovative and market - adaptable, continuously arouse consumers' interest, and inject continuous impetus into the chain - style development.

6.2. Strengthen the Cultivation of Local Brands and Build the Core Competitiveness of IP

Program On the one hand, the government can set up special support funds to encourage local enterprises to carry out brand planning and innovation around the "Ne Zha" IP. Enterprises should be supported to cooperate with professional marketing agencies to explore the traditional cultural connotations and spirit of the times contained in the "Ne Zha" IP and create brand stories with global recognition. On the other hand, local enterprises should be promoted to cooperate and communicate with international brands, learn advanced marketing concepts and operation models. At the same time, through channels such as cross - border e - commerce platforms and international exhibitions, the first - launch products related to the "Ne Zha" IP should be introduced to the global market. Gradually enhance the leading position of local brands in the debut economy and strengthen the core driving force for chain - style development.

6.3. Strengthen the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights

Leverage the non - tamperable feature of blockchain to preserve the original copyright evidence and relevant root information of original IPs, providing strong electronic evidence for infringement acts and thus reducing the occurrence of infringement. For example, the MicroAlgo algorithm transforms IP transaction information into a multi - dimensional vector matrix and generates a unique "digital fingerprint" through eigenvalue decomposition to ensure that core data such as creation time and author identity cannot be tampered with.

6.4. Strengthen the Construction of Digital Infrastructure and Reduce Geographical Restrictions

With the high - speed and high - efficiency characteristics of 5G networks and the immersive experience brought by technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), a model can be formed that significantly reduces the previous dependence of offline first - launches on geographical locations, venues, and long - distance transportation. Products can be virtually displayed and press conferences can be held online, enabling disadvantaged geographical locations to achieve an advantage in online traffic^[18], so as to promote the "cloud first - launch" in various

regions.

7. Conclusion

The chain-like development of the debut economy has successfully unleashed the new momentum of the "Nezha" IP through "breaking out of the original circle" and "chain effect". It emphasizes the combination of initial release and full-chain development, with technology empowerment, leadership, and trendiness as its core. Through the development of the entire industry chain, it maximizes the value of the IP. From content creation to commercial transformation, the debut economy promotes effective connection and collaboration among various links, building a dual-driven model of "content + commerce". This not only ignites the audience's emotions but also leverages a market worth billions, demonstrating strong market appeal and commercial potential.

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