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## Using the Baidu Index to Understand the Public Online Interest Towards Moral Education in Mainland China

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### Abstract

**Objective:** This article primarily aims to clarify the spatiotemporal characteristics of public attention to "moral education". **Method:** It uses the Baidu Index as a research tool to collect data on netizens' interest in moral education and uses this data as material for analysis. from January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2023. **Results and Conclusion:** Temporally, from 2013 to 2023, the concern for "moral education" showed a wave-like trend of rising and falling. "Socialist core values," "Three Views," and "faith" were the most popular related information among the public. Spatially, the geographical distribution of the group concerned with "moral education" generally spread from the eastern coastal areas to the central and western regions over the years, showing a spreading trend. The geographical concentration index showed a trend of dispersion-concentration-dispersion. In terms of population structure, females were the majority. The age group with the most attention was 40-49 years old netizens.

**Keywords:** Baidu index, Moral education, Online attention level

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## 1. Introduction

In 2022, UNESCO pointed out in its report "Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education" (2022) that "Respect for human rights and attention to education as a common good must become the central threads that bind our common world and interconnected world together." Humanity must confront modern crises such as moral indifference, political hegemony, wealth disparity, resource depletion, and species extinction in an uncertain society. As Sztompka (2005) stated, "In our era, the universality and hierarchy of risks seem to have increased." The ethical dilemmas reflected by the COVID-19 pandemic have led people to continually ask the moral question of "how should one live." Moral education, as the backbone of moral consensus in social spaces, enriches people's confidence and establishes high-quality interdependent

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relationships with others, helping human communities overcome these challenges together (Gan, 2022). Han (2020) wrote in the article, "In 2012, the renowned American educational psychologist, known as the father of the 'Theory of Multiple Intelligences,' Gardner, H pointed out that 'it is time to shift our focus, the central work of education, to character development', and 'cultivate youth with strong, positive, and excellent character'." Simultaneously, Kitcher (2021) proposed that "Moral education must take on the corresponding mission and responsibility, viewing moral education as an integral part of education." Kitcher (2022) identified three main overall goals of education: developing the ability to sustain oneself, developing the ability to function as a citizen, and developing the ability to lead a fulfilling life. All these abilities are closely related to moral education. Over the past few decades, research on moral education has begun to emphasize "character formation and the embodiment of virtues." According to Engelen *et al.* (2018), moral education has two main goals: "enabling people to uphold the norms and standards of society while cultivating their critical and creative abilities." Therefore, in the new historical era, we need to re-examine and explore the profound historical implications and contemporary values of moral education, ensuring its spirit permeates the thoughts and actions of every citizen. This is the proper duty in promoting the development of the human community.

According to the "Statistical Report on Internet Development in China" (2023), as of June 2023, the number of Internet users has reached 1.079 billion, among which the number of search engine users has reached 841 million, an increase of 39.63 million compared to December 2022. With the popularization of the internet, tasks such as filling out college application preferences and searching for information can be conveniently accomplished online. As an important portal for public information inquiry, search engines have become analyzable parameters. The China Search Engine Industry Research Report (2023) shows that Baidu is the search engine most commonly used by netizens. As of April 2023, Baidu accounts for 96.3% of the monthly active users across all platforms of traditional search engines. From the perspective of industry penetration rate on the PC end, Baidu's search industry penetration rate reached 64.1%, firmly ranking first in the search industry. From the mobile end data, Baidu's search monthly active users accounted for 88.4% of the overall active users in the search industry, maintaining the leading position. The Baidu Index, relying on Baidu, the largest Chinese search engine and its multiple platforms, gathers massive cloud data. On the one hand, we can analyze the public's level of interest and characteristics by examining the search categories and popularity of keywords. On the other hand, we can also delve deeper into user information, search demands, and features behind the search keywords. The accurate compilation of this data can be effectively applied to scientific research and behavioral analysis. Previous studies have used the Baidu Index as a tool to research Children's Mental Health (Tan *et al.*, 2022a), Kidney Stones (Wang *et al.*, 2020), Master of Physical Education (Tan *et al.*, 2022b), Greenhouse Gas (Zhu and Xia, 2021), Knowledge Management (Tan *et al.*, 2022c), Negative Emotions (Ding *et al.*, 2024), etc. The significance of this study lies not only in the use of a new tool but also in its ability to help us promote moral education among the public more effectively, thereby fostering social progress and development.

## 2. Materials and Methods

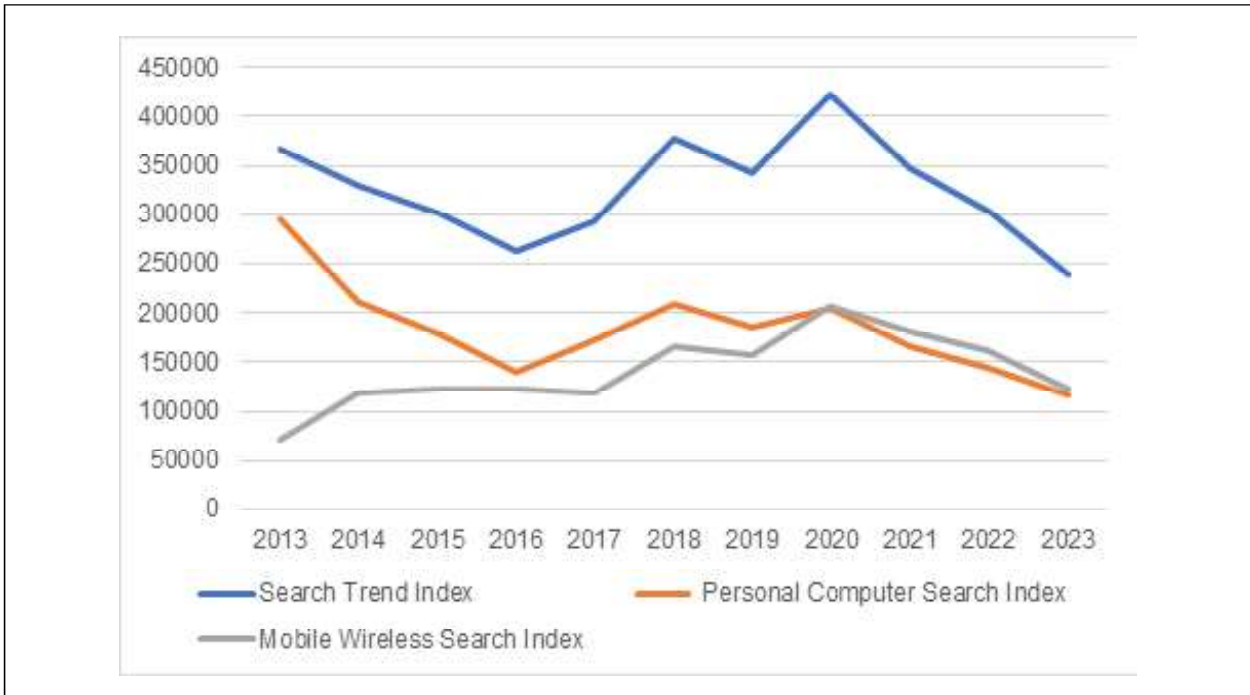
The Baidu Index utilizes three main functional modules—trend research, demand map, and audience portrait—to provide statistical analysis of data. Users can select specific times and regions to gauge the attention level of keywords based on their needs. Obtain data and materials related to sports tourism from 2013 to 2018 through Baidu Index and use Excel statistical software to collect and organize the data. The aggregation of these databases is highly representative as it comprises cumulative statistical data of similar keyword behaviors, meeting the requirements of big data statistical analysis rather than probability sampling analysis. Due to the incompleteness of the mobile terminal's statistical data before 2013, this study uses data from 2013 to 2023 to analyze the search keyword "moral education" across an 11-year period. The panel data includes the national daily average and the daily average of various provinces and cities, aiming to explore public attention to moral education at different levels.

## 3. Results and Discussion

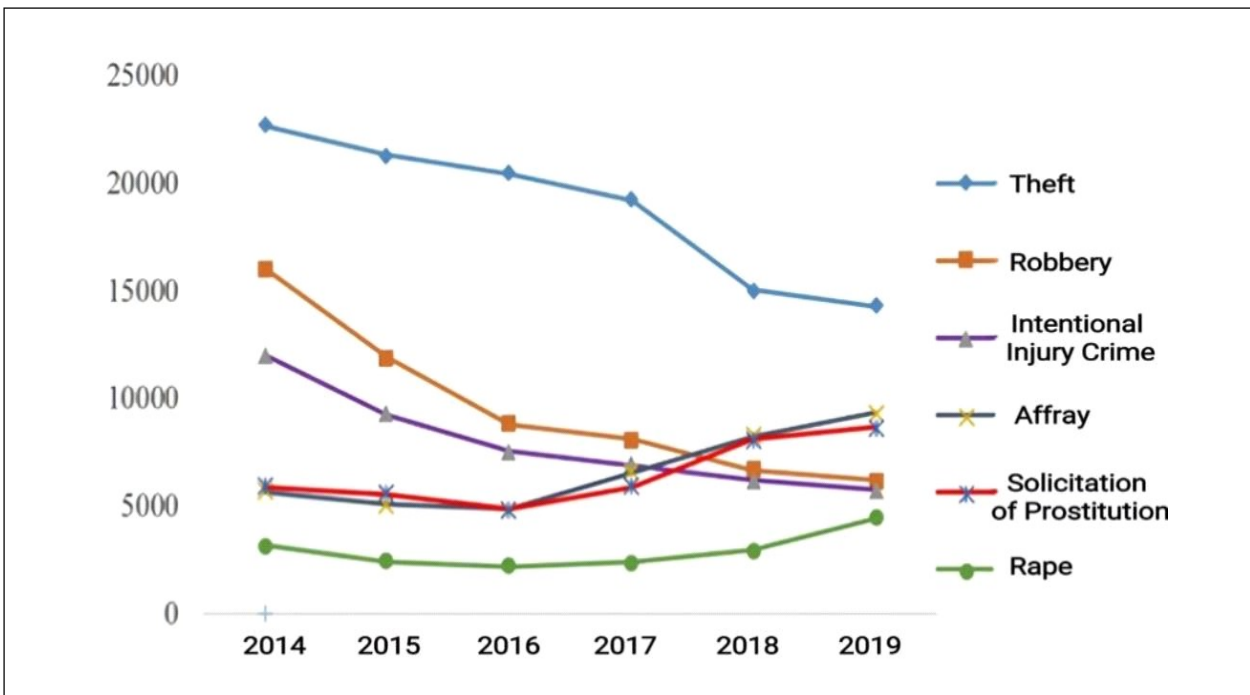
### 3.1. Temporal Differences in the Attention to Moral Education Online

#### 3.1.1. Overall Temporal Distribution Changes in the Attention to Moral Education Online

Figure 1 shows that since 2013, the public's online attention to moral education has generally exhibited a



**Figure 1: Differences in the Search Interest Index for Moral Education Online Attention**



**Figure 2: Trend Chart of Prosecution and Examination of Juvenile Suspects by Principal Charges, 2014-2019**

Source: White Paper on Prosecutorial Work for Minors (2014-2019)

wave-like trend of initial increase followed by a subsequent decline. The data in 2013 presented a small peak, mainly related to the national policy of November 8, 2012, which positioned “cultivating people through virtue” as the fundamental task of education. Additionally, in the following year, the “Chinese Dream” promotional and educational activities were extensively carried out. In 2020, the attention to moral education online reached a peak. This can be analyzed from several aspects. Firstly, from a legal perspective, Figure 2 shows the “three consecutive declines followed by three rebounds” trend of juvenile delinquency in the “White Paper on Juvenile Prosecution Work (2014-2019)” released by the Supreme People’s Procuratorate on June 1, 2020. Between 2014 and 2019, the top six crimes and the number of suspects prosecuted by the

procuratorial organs were theft (113,077 people), robbery (57,845 people), intentional injury Crime (47,881 people), Affray (39,881 people), Solicitation of Prostitution (39,082 people), and rape (17,690 people), accounting for 82.28% of all criminal suspects. The release of this white paper sparked public discussion on moral education for a period. Secondly, from the perspective of Chinese society, stories of fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic filled people's lives and continuously drew widespread attention to moral sentiments, psychological qualities, and behavioral habits. Dr. Sun Liqun volunteered to support Wuhan, demonstrating the spirit of dedication by actively offering assistance, saving lives, and upholding professionalism on the front line. Their team also displayed a collective consciousness by collaboratively discussing treatment plans and adhering to protective measures. This selfless commitment has been highly regarded by everyone (Zhao et al., 2020). Lastly, from an international perspective, continuing the advancement of anti-corruption efforts. On October 15, 2020, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres issued a statement emphasizing the importance of addressing corruption issues amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. He highlighted how corrupt individuals exploited weak oversight and lack of transparency during the pandemic to embezzle funds, depriving those in need of essential aid. In a study by Almada et al. (2022), the authors examined South Africa's Special Investigating Unit's handling of corruption cases related to the procurement of personal protective equipment during the COVID-19 crisis. The total amount involved was 8 billion rand, with over 700 companies implicated. The rise of corruption has underscored the necessity for the public to focus on fostering personal moral values, principles, and ethical standards. Only through such efforts can we effectively combat and diminish corrupt practices, thereby fostering the healthy progression of society.

The term "PC trend" refers to search trends on personal computers, while "Mobile trend" indicates search trends on personal mobile phones. As depicted in Figure 1, prior to 2020, the PC search index outweighed the mobile search index in terms of search channels. The PC platform boasts rich informational content, detailed presentation, exquisite graphic and textual representation, as well as a higher usage rate. Although the PC search index experienced a gradual decline from 2011 to 2016, its overall attention volume remained higher than that of mobile searches. From 2017 to 2020, the PC search index stabilized, while the mobile search index surged significantly, constituting 42.96% of the total volume. This increase can be attributed to the widespread adoption and usage of smartphones. In 2020, the two search indices exhibited distinct shifts, with the mobile search index surpassing the PC search index, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to more individuals working and living from home, thereby increasing the number of mobile users and the volume of information searched on mobile devices. With the continued advancement of smartphones and their inherent advantages of convenience and portability, it is anticipated that the mobile search index will continue to ascend, far exceeding the PC search index.

### 3.1.2. Monthly Differences in the Attention to Moral Education Online

Figure 3 shows that, from a monthly perspective, the curve of attention to moral education on the internet fluctuates in a wave-like pattern. There is a peak in May and November each year, with the peak value around November being the highest. The search index gradually rises at the end of the winter break in January and February, forming a convex peak, and then gradually declines with the arrival of the summer break in July and August, forming a trough. The convex peak around May is closely related to the national moral model selection activities. In China, the National Moral Model Selection activity is held every year to commend and promote the advanced deeds of moral models, inspiring the public to learn and practice moral cultivation (Yuan, 2021). The formation of the convex peak around November is mainly related to international days such as World Morality Day, Human Rights Day, and World Kindness Day. These days provide platforms and opportunities for moral education, promoting the dissemination and practice of moral values. During the winter and summer breaks, the attention to moral education forms a trough, partly because people's attention may be more focused on leisure, entertainment, and tourism. Figure 4 shows that the peak attention for "sports tourism" on mobile platforms occurs during holidays, such as the May Day holiday, summer vacation, National Day holiday, and winter vacation, covering the best leisure periods during holidays (Shu et al., 2020). Therefore, during these periods, there is less attention to moral education. On the other hand, other important current events and topics often occupy the public's attention. For instance, during the Spring Festival, people pay more attention to family reunions and traditional culture. The emergence of such hot topics might reduce the attention given to moral education.

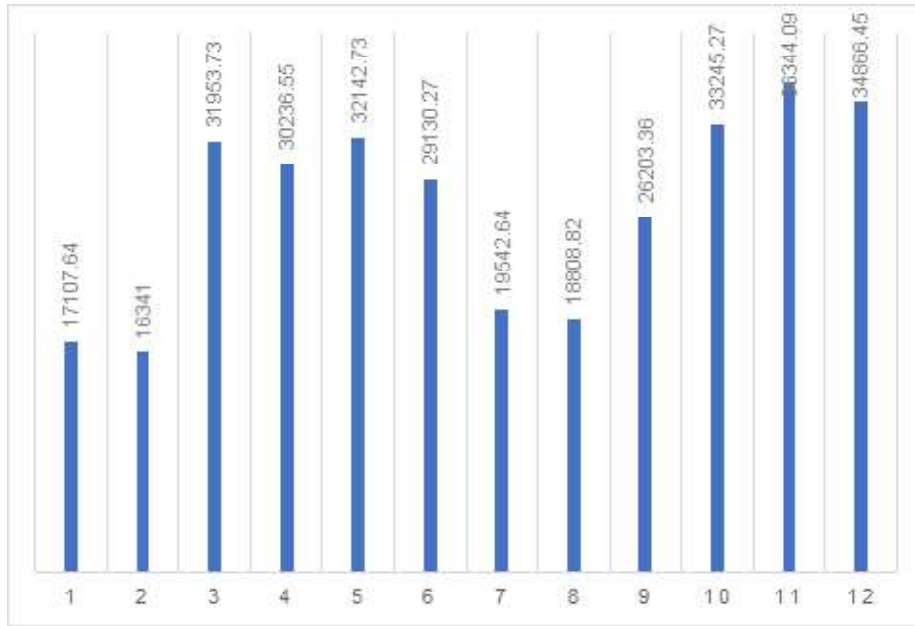


Figure 3: Monthly Average Attention to Moral Education Online from 2013 to 2023



Figure 4: Mobile Trend of Network Attention of China's Sports Tourism

Source: "Research on the Online Attention of Sports Tourism in China Based on Baidu Index"

### 3.1.3. Keywords Search Interest in Moral Education on the Internet

In the "Demand Map" module on the Baidu Index, the top five rankings for the keyword "Moral Education"

are socialist core values, belief, three views, craftsmanship spirit, and Chinese traditional culture, in that order. Table 1 presents the average values of each keyword. In a longitudinal comparison, from 2013 to 2023, the attention to “socialist core values” overall shows a wave-like trend, first rising, then falling, and rising again, reaching a peak average value of 16,850 in 2020. The attention to “faith” also shows a wave-like trend, reaching its highest average attention of 3,767 in 2016. The attention to the “Three Views” (worldview, outlook on life, and values) has generally shown a steady upward trend, reaching an average peak of 2942 in 2021. Since the “craftsmanship spirit” was officially introduced in the “Government Report” in 2016, the average search volume from 2013 to 2015 was relatively low, while the average attention from 2016 to 2023 has been around 2000. This phenomenon reflects that, on the one hand, while economic development is taking place, people are paying increasing attention to product quality and the preservation of traditional craftsmanship (Partarakis and Zabulis, 2023). On the other hand, with the acceleration of globalization and the intensification of international competition, the international market’s demand for high-quality, high-value-added products and craftsmanship continues to increase (Ma, 2019). This has led to more attention and recognition being given to the spirit of craftsmanship in various countries. Moreover, “Chinese traditional culture” has also become a hot search term among internet users, with the moral education content contained in Chinese traditional culture still being an important content demand for moral education in Chinese mass families and society (Guang, 2022).

### 3.2. Spatial Differences in the Attention to Moral Education Online

#### 3.2.1. Overall Regional Differences in Attention to Moral Education Online

According to the division standards of China’s seven major geographical regions, the regions are divided accordingly. From an overall trend perspective, during the period from 2013 to 2023, the attention to moral education online in various regions maintained a common trend of change. Among them, the East China region is overall higher than other regions, while the Northeast region is overall lower than other regions. Through comparative analysis, Zhou (2023) concluded that the Northeast region has been relatively lagging in economic development in recent years, generally ranking low. The East China region is one of the most economically developed regions in China, with a generally higher per capita GDP, especially the development level of Shanghai, Southern Jiangsu, and Northern Zhejiang is particularly outstanding. In Wang Xiaoxi’s “Economic Ethics: A Philosophical Analysis of the Relationship between Economy and Morality” (2015) it

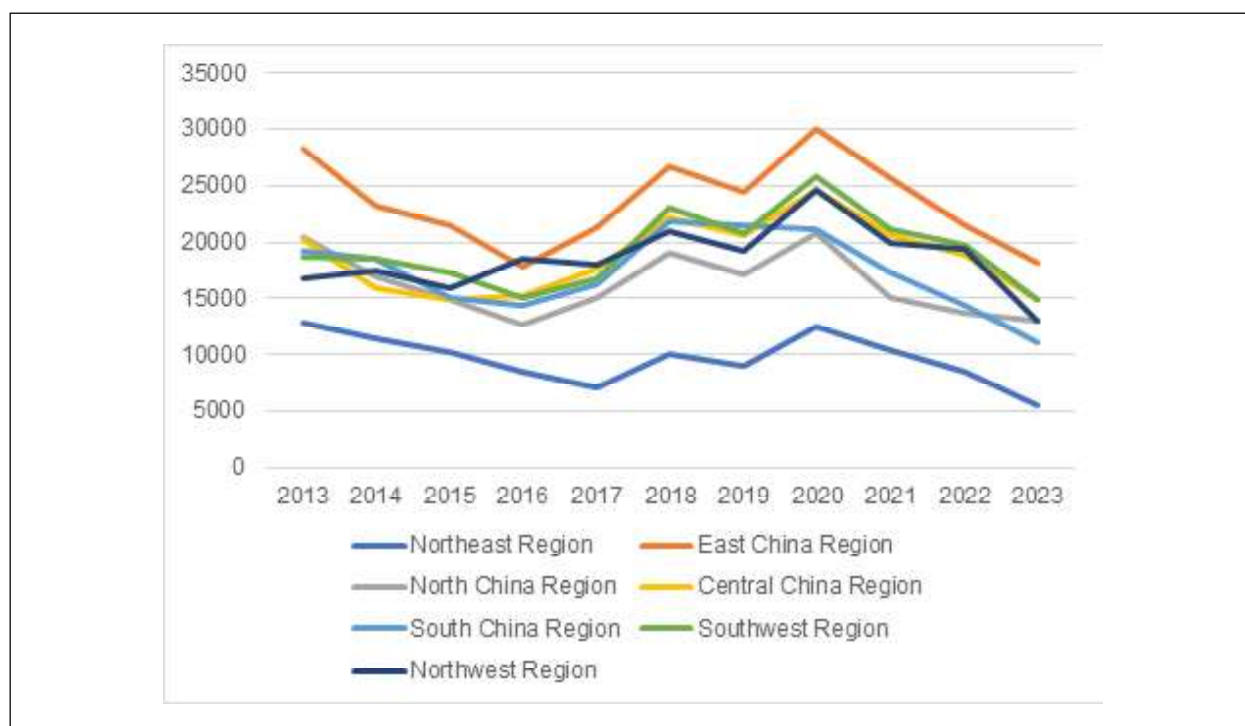


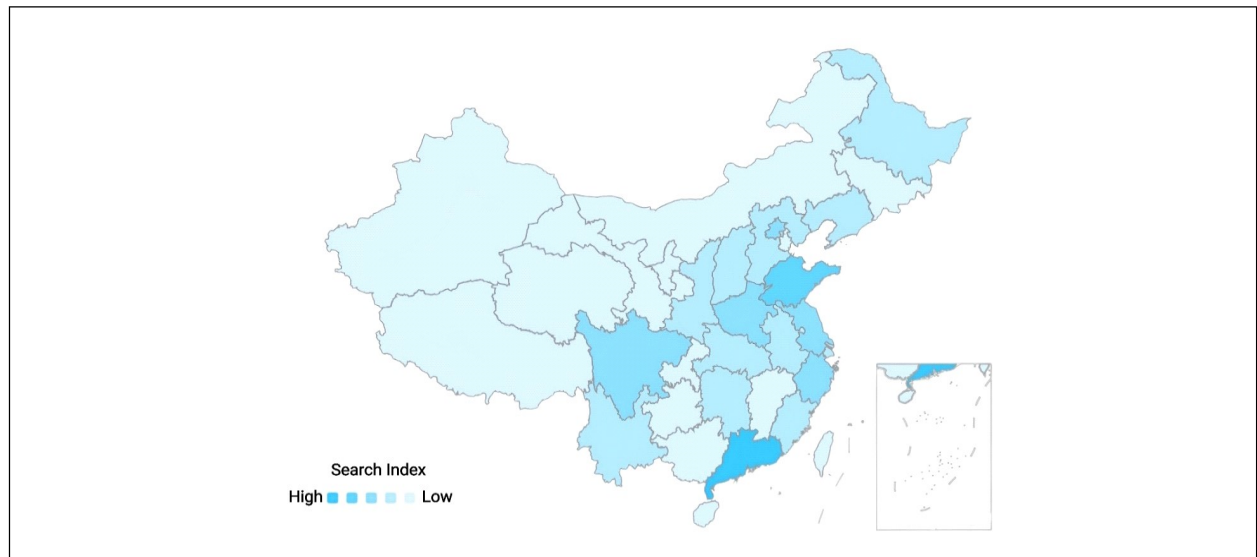
Figure 5: Development Trend of Online Attention to Moral Education in the East and West from 2013 to 2023

Year	Chinese Traditional Culture	Socialist Core Values	Three Views	Craftsmanship Spirit	Faith
2013	1133	966	1763	160	1915
2014	1484	10172	1303	263	2062
2015	1855	12271	1551	505	2831
2016	1851	11180	1856	2496	3767
2017	2079	4725	3332	2740	2566
2018	1300	8337	3275	2072	1967
2019	1243	16133	3159	2066	1715
2020	1137	16850	3350	1864	2766
2021	1228	14580	2942	2164	2133
2022	1354	15241	2680	2187	3342
2023	1231	10317	2135	1883	3698
<b>Average</b>	1445.00	10979.27	2486.00	1672.73	2614.73

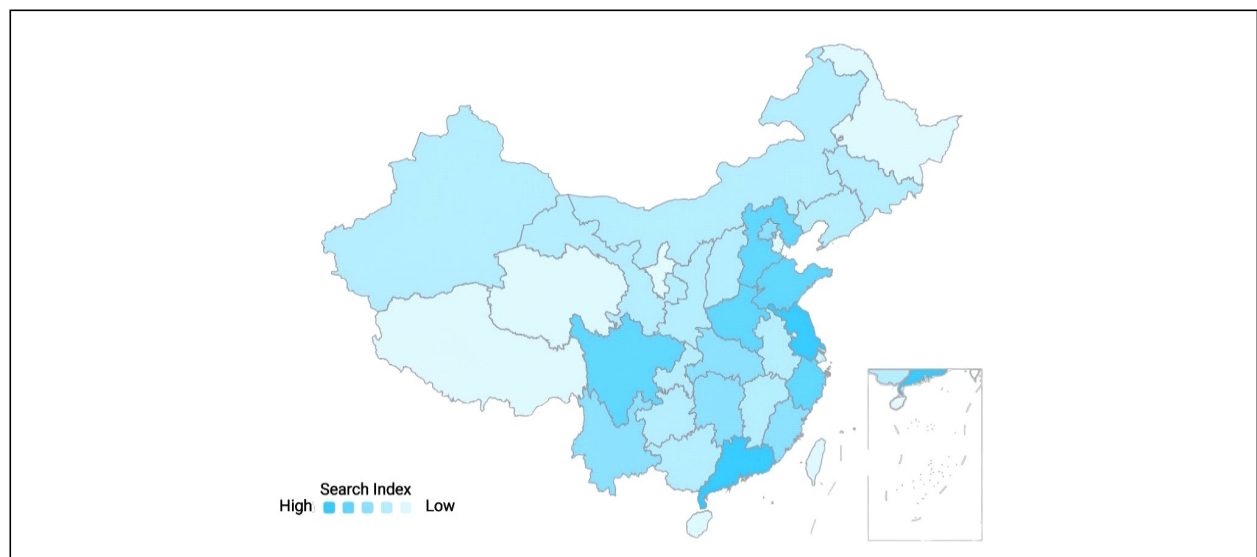
is mentioned that in the modern economic system, moral ethics can be regarded as a unique core competitiveness of enterprises, especially in terms of brand image shaping, it has a huge influence. Today's world is an era of rapid information dissemination, an era that emphasizes corporate social responsibility and awareness, and an era of public consciousness and conceptual awakening. If enterprises show stronger social moral ethical consciousness and characteristics in economic activities and match the public's expectations for corporate moral ethics, it is easy to generate an emotional resonance. Therefore, the attention to moral education is higher. Figure 5 shows that 2018 and 2020 are the two years with the highest level of attention to moral education in all regions. From 2013 to 2023, the fluctuation range in the South China region is relatively low compared to other regions. The South China region includes Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan, which have always attached importance to the inheritance of Chinese traditional culture. Therefore, the level of attention to traditional culture as a content for moral education remains relatively stable.

### 3.2.2. Provincial Differences in Attention to Moral Education Online

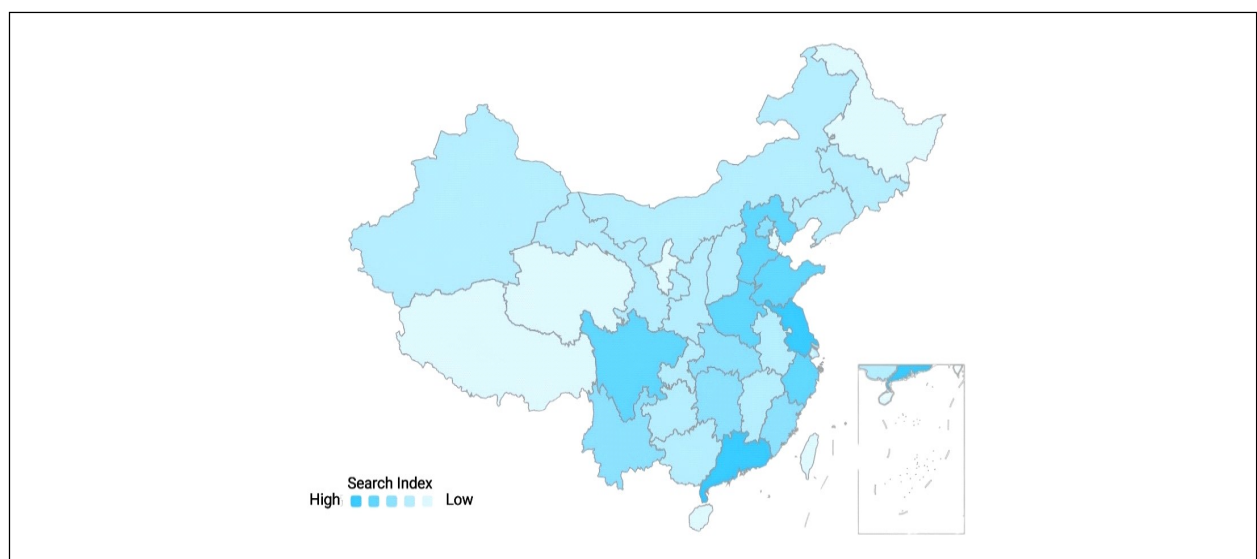
Regarding the differences among provinces, we conducted a statistical analysis of the annual average online attention to moral education for the years 2016, 2020, and 2023. The study found that the spatial representation of online attention to moral education varied significantly across these three different periods in 2016, 2020, and 2023. As shown in Figure 6, in 2016, regions with higher attention to moral education online included Guangdong, Shandong, Sichuan, etc. In Figure 7, in 2020, in addition to the aforementioned regions, provinces in the central region began to show signs of activation, and the attention to moral education online in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and other places also showed a growth trend. In Figure 8, in 2023, in addition to traditional advantage regions, the attention to moral education online spread from the eastern coastal regions to the central and western regions, especially in the eastern regions like Guangdong, Shandong, and central and western regions like Henan, Sichuan, Yunnan, which all saw rapid growth. Table 2 is a comprehensive data from 2013 to 2023. Beijing, with an average daily attention of 1000, ranks first. Guangzhou, in the eastern region, ranks second, and Chengdu, in the western region, ranks third. Through the analysis of provincial and city data, the population with higher concern primarily comes from the economically developed provinces and cities along the eastern coast of China. These areas have a higher internet penetration rate and abundant educational resources, leading to more frequent discussions on moral education (Baue et al., 2024). Moreover, some places along the eastern coast have cultures and social atmospheres that emphasize more on moral ethics, family values, and social responsibility. Hence, there is a relatively higher level of interest in moral education among people in these regions.



**Figure 6: Distribution Map of Online Attention to Moral Education in 2016**



**Figure 7: Distribution Map of Online Attention to Moral Education in 2020**



**Figure 8: Distribution Map of Online Attention to Moral Education in 2023**



Sorting	City Name	Search Index	Sorting	City Name	Search Index
1	Beijing	1000	6	Zhengzhou	487
2	Guangzhou	607	7	Wuhan	484
3	Chengdu	579	8	Chongqing	449
4	Shanghai	556	9	Xi'an	416
5	Hangzhou	496	10	Changsha	412

### 3.2.3. Geographic Concentration Index of Attention to Moral Education Online

To gain a more detailed understanding of the recent geographical distribution changes in moral education, we will conduct a specific analysis using the Geographic Concentration Index. The Geographic Concentration Index (G) is an effective tool for measuring the geographical concentration of the population’s online attention. By analyzing the spatial distribution characteristics of online attention, we can gain a deeper understanding of people’s focus and interests. The calculation formula is:

$$G = 100 \times \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{X_i}{S}\right)}$$

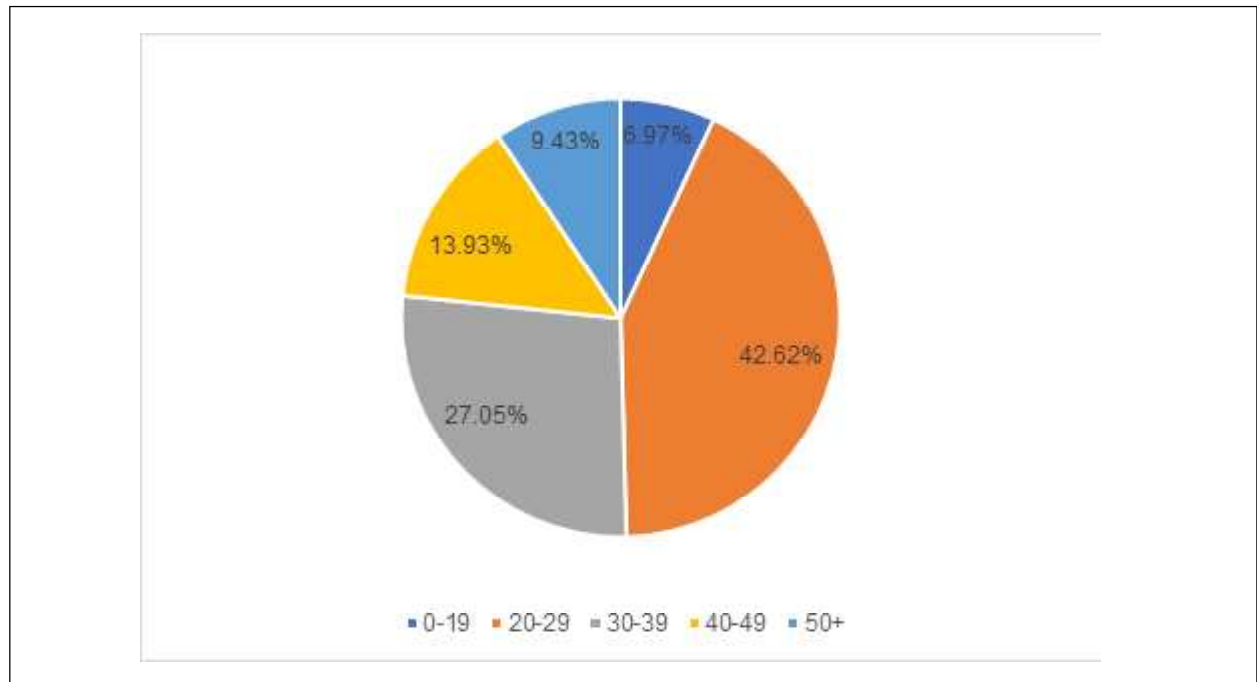
Where  $X_i$  is the online attention of the  $i^{th}$  province;  $S$  is the total online attention of the top 10 provinces each year; and  $n$  is the total number of selected provinces. The smaller the  $G$  value, the less concentrated our attention is and the easier it is to be dispersed; conversely, the larger the  $G$  value, the more concentrated our attention is and the easier it is to focus on a specific event. We collect the daily average of the network attention to moral education in each province from 2013 to 2023, and calculate the proportion of network attention in each province based on the formula. Table 3 presents the geographical concentration index obtained from this calculation. According to the survey data from 2013 to 2023, the level of attention towards online moral education ranged from 33.09 to 34.85, showing a trend of dispersion-concentration-dispersion. This is mainly due to the continuous improvement of moral standards among the Chinese people and the gradual perfection of the moral education system (Xue, 2021). The “Outline for the Implementation of Citizen Moral Construction in the New Era” policy was introduced in 2019, which clearly states that socialism with Chinese characteristics and the Chinese Dream is deeply rooted in people’s hearts, the consciousness of practicing socialist core values, inheriting Chinese excellent traditional culture has continuously improved, patriotism, collectivism, and socialist thought have been widely promoted, admiring heroes, respecting models, and learning from the advanced have become a fashion, national self-confidence, and pride have greatly increased, people’s ideological awareness, moral standards, and cultural literacy have continuously improved, presenting a positive, healthy, and upward trend in the moral field. Therefore, the attention to moral education decreased, and the concentration also decreased.

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
G	33.48	33.63	33.52	33.37	33.76	34.18	34.85	33.37	33.60	33.21	33.09

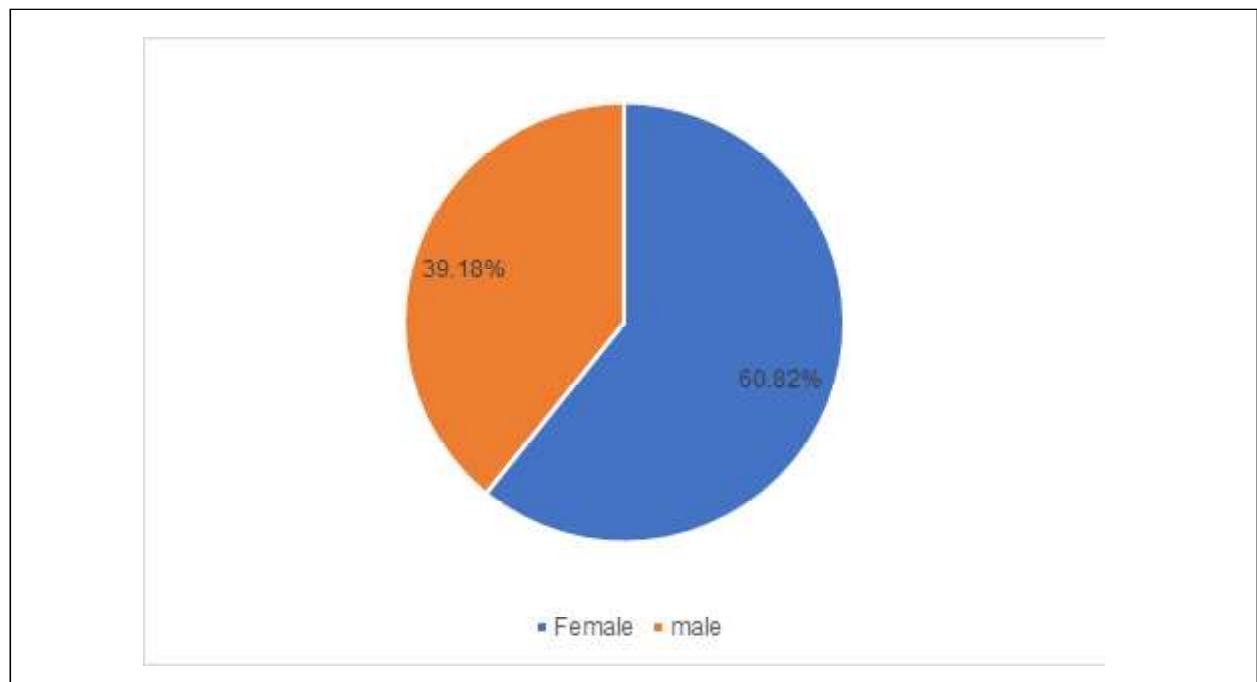
### 3.3. Demographic Structure of Moral Education Online Attention

Obtain the spatial source of moral education attention through the “crowd portrait” module, and count the age (Figure 9) and gender (Figure 10) of the demographic concerned with moral education online.

The data shows that among the age groups of the audience, the largest proportion is the 40-49 age group, accounting for 43% of the total attention; the least is the under-19 age group, accounting for 7% (Figure 9). The potential reasons why the 40-49 age group pays more attention to moral education include: first, a stronger sense of responsibility. Sorokowski (2023) mentioned that individuals aged 40-49 usually bear more



**Figure 9: Age Distribution of the Audience Concerned with Moral Education Online**



**Figure 10: Gender Distribution of the Audience Concerned with Moral Education on the Internet**

responsibilities in their families, careers, and society. Moral education can help them better understand and fulfill their responsibilities, enhancing their moral awareness and behavior. Second, being at a turning point in life, individuals in this stage may reflect on their life values, moral beliefs, and the meaning of life. Moral education can provide guidance and support, helping them better navigate the challenges and confusion of this stage. Third, it's a critical period for children's education, where they play a significant role in their children's moral education. Valavi *et al.* (2022) have also mentioned that by receiving moral education, they can improve their own moral literacy and educational level, setting an example for their children and fostering correct values and moral concepts. The least attention from the under-19 age group is partly due to less opportunity to use smart devices and mainly because discussions about moral content are conducted face-to-face with classmates, teachers, and family members.

In terms of gender (Figure 10), males account for 39.18%, and females account for 60.82%, reflecting higher attention to moral education among females. This phenomenon may be partly due to women facing a series of social issues and gender inequalities in society, such as domestic violence, gender discrimination, and workplace injustice. These issues have attracted widespread social attention, and women express their concerns and calls for action through online platforms. On the other hand, women are traditionally assigned significant family education responsibilities. They usually undertake the role of educating children in the family, hence their higher attention to moral education. Female attention to moral education is not only for their moral literacy but also to better educate and guide the next generation.

#### 4. Conclusion

- 1) Over the past nearly 11 years, online interest in moral education has followed a consistent annual wave-like trend, closely intertwined with the level of social development, demonstrating a synergistic growth pattern. The search index on mobile devices has progressively surpassed that on PCs. Notably, there is a discernible leading indicator effect in online moral education interest, with the months of January, February, July, and August registering the lowest search engagement. Among popular search terms associated with online moral education, “socialist core values” and “three views (worldview, outlook on life, and values)” are highly favored by internet users, while “Chinese traditional culture” and “craftsmanship” are the preferred content themes for moral education among online audiences.
- 2) Spatially, the attention to moral education online among various provinces shows a spatial dislocation distribution, characterized by a bi-directional gradient decrease from south to north and from east to west. The top five cities in terms of attention to moral education online are Beijing, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Shanghai, and Hangzhou. From the perspective of evolutionary trends, the East China region has the highest level of attention, the Northeast region has the lowest, and the other five regions are in the middle. The geographical concentration index shows that the attention to moral education networks has exhibited a trend of dispersion-concentration-dispersion from 2013 to 2023.
- 3) The spatial and temporal variances in online interest in moral education are primarily influenced by the extent of internet penetration, current social issues, and the availability of educational resources. Social hotspots exert the most significant impact on online moral education engagement, while educational resources also play a role in shaping this interest. Meanwhile, the level of internet penetration, serving as a fundamental indicator, positively correlates with the attention to moral education online. When considering gender and age, women display a greater interest in moral education, and the 19-40 age group exhibits the highest overall proportion of concern for moral education.

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