The International Communication of Chinese Culture in the Context of Games - A Case Study of Genshin Impact

Yanchen Fan*

School of Foreign Languages, Shandong University, Jinan, Shandong, 250100, China

Abstract: With the international development of Chinese game industry, game is becoming a new way to promote "cultural export" as a kind of new media form and communication method. Genshin Impact, a Chinese game that has been well received in overseas markets in recent years, is taken as an example in this study, and this phenomenon is analyzed to provide strategic support for the international communication of Chinese culture and the overseas development of Chinese game industry. The study found that Genshin Impact has conveyed the profound "Chinese beauty" to global players in a subtle way through the basic setting of Chinese style and the spiritual core of Chinese story. When conducting cross-cultural communication in the future, Chinese games need to take into account the cultural psychology of Chinese and foreign players, focus on the translation strategy of re-localization, and better get Chinese culture "into the mind of people" through various "secondary creation" settings and improvement of O&M mechanism.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the China Game Industry Report in the First Half of 2022 released by the Game Publishing Committee (GPC) of the China Audio-Video and Digital Publishing Association (CADPA) and China Games Industry Institute, the actual sales revenue of China's independently developed games in overseas markets continued to maintain a high growth trend in 2021, with revenue of USD 18.013 billion and a year-on-year growth of 16.59%[1], and the exported games maintained a good growth in terms of user downloads, length of use and user payments. In fact, games are no longer just a means of entertainment, but also an excellent carrier for "telling the Chinese stories well". On October 25, 2021, 17 departments, including the Ministry of Commerce and the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China, jointly issued the Notice on Certain Measures to Support the High-Quality Development of National Cultural Export Bases[2], which clearly proposed that games and other digital cultural products should go out.

From the perspective of academic research, although the overseas communication of games in China started late, some scholars have started to try to conduct in-depth study in this field. He Yuqing summarized the advantages, roles and existing problems of games in cross-cultural communication.[3-5] Following He Yuqing's opinions, Zeng Peilun and Deng Youxi believe that in order to realize the effectiveness of both "products export" and "cultural export" of Chinese games, the concept and operation of "cultural export" of China should change into "subject paradigm" from "carrier paradigm". Chinese contemporary culture and future culture should be constructed and spread with the original online game as the base and the "metaverse" as the vision, and the value innovation of Chinese culture "export" will be finally realized.[6] Different from the macro outlook of Zeng Peilun and others, Hu Yu and Zhu Geqi focus on the cross-cultural communication of online games and believe that online games are becoming a new way to promote "cultural export" as a new media form. The game should be taken as a method, youth should be taken as the main body, the form should be innovated by technology, and the content should be revitalized by creativity to open up new possibilities for the international communication of excellent Chinese traditional culture[7].

In recent years, Genshin Impact, an open world adventure game produced and published by miHoYo, has quickly gained a place in both Chinese and international markets due to its excellent production, high playability and cultural diversity. In 2020 and 2021, Genshin Impact won several top awards in the global game industry, including the Annual Best Mobile Game at the The Game Awards (TGA), which is known as the "Oscars of the game industry". At the same time, Genshin Impact has also promoted the international communication of Chinese culture with its distinctive cultural identity. It can be said that Genshin Impact is a landmark game product in both the field of Chinese games export and the process of Chinese culture spreading to the world. Therefore, the cultural characteristics and communication strategies in Genshin Impact are analyzed in this article to bring new thoughts to the cross-cultural communication of Chinese games.

*Corresponding author. Email: 905417757@qq.com

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2. ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS FOR THE SUCCESSFUL EXPORT OF GENSHE IMPACT

Liyue in the Genshin Impact is based on the reality of China and is created in a fantasy worldview with a Chinese-style theme, hoping to convey the charming "Chinese beauty" to players around the world while ensuring the acceptance of this element by everyone. In the following paragraphs, the Liyue state in the Genshin Impact with long-lasting Chinese traditional culture as the connotation and the integration of Chinese and foreign civilizations as the carrier will be stated from both the basic setting and the spiritual core to show the great rivers and mountains of China and to convey the humanistic spirit of "people-oriented" in Chinese culture.

2.1. Chinese-style Base Setting

As players from all over the world make adventures in Liyue as travelers, they seem to be in the presence of various places of China. With the combination of game and cultural tourism, the virtual and the real are connected. Genshin Impact makes the game world no longer a dream, and makes China no longer a distant country for the world.

2.1.1. Environment Shaping: Chinese Landscapes in Visual Rhetoric

In the art creation of open world games, the natural landscape is particularly important as the basis for undertaking all the contents of the world. Genshin Impact's scene art director pointed out that there are few open world games with Chinese-style content, and Genshin Impact used cartoons to create a fresh, bright and unique style, combined with various natural elements and humanities of Chinese-style Genshin Impact uses cartoons to create a fresh and bright unique style, combined with various Chinese-style natural elements and humanities, while adding a sense of fantasy based on realistic references to convey the core arts of the Liyue.[8]

This design has received many positive reviews at home and abroad, with one YouTube player, Ewwch, said, "The real Genshin Impact should have started in Liyue. When I arrived at the Liyue, I was shocked by the mountains and architecture[9]." Dihuap Marsh is the first scene after entering Liyue, and it largely determines the player's overall impression of the state. Its design is inspired by the landscape of Guilin, China, with vast mountains, winding water, passing fishing boats and reed marshes on both sides, bringing the life of Liyue people and China's best landscape to players around the world. Liyue's Luhua Pool is inspired by China's Huanglong 5A Scenic Area, it's a highly recreated version of the unique scenery of calcified colored pools, with the lustrous multicolored pools glistening like overlapping pearls. Under the official tweet of Genshin Impact comparing the scenery of Huanglong and Luhua Pool, one netizen excitedly replied, "We are going to Sichuan for our honeymoon next month, I must convince my wife to visit it!" Another netizen, IgSaysNo, said frankly, "This makes me want to go to China!"

2.1.2 Music Creation: Modern Interpretation of Ancient Folk Music

Players move around in Liyue and the BGM changes with them, which creates a harmonious vibe carried by the beauty of music. Liyue's BGM has a unique Chinese beauty and oriental beauty. Based on western orchestral music, the music creation is added with Chinese elements and Chinese instruments, representing the collision and fusion of Chinese and western cultures. The melody created by traditional Chinese pentatonic mode is charming, mellow, simple and graceful. The flute has a natural vibe, which can be gentle and elegant or lively and dynamic as the range varies. Erhu is suitable for playing melodious and confident melodies, fully representing the tone of the Chinese instrument. Guzheng has a noble, calm and dignified sound, which is an excellent match for Liyue's overall style. Liyue's music album on the Genshin Impact's official YouTube has received nearly 7 million views, and the live video documenting the music creation process has received 11.41 million views. Foreign players have said, "It's great to see these traditional Chinese instruments being used to play Liyue's BGM; they sound so beautiful and moving." Others exclaimed, "If this symphony orchestra comes on tour in the US, I'll be there! They definitely don't disappoint[12]."

2.2. Spiritual Core of Chinese Story

2.2.1. Characterization of "Oriental Heroes"-Xiao during the Rule of Gods

Liyue has spent 3,700 years with God. Among them, Xiao, as the "Mighty and Illuminated Adaptus", also known as "Vigilant Yaksha", whose prototype is the great golden-winged bird, has become an extremely rich and representative character in Liyue's era of rule by Gods. As an immortal who has been guarding the Liyue for thousands of years, Xiao has been fighting against the remnants of the demons and evil around Liyue every night in places that are invisible to people, and is also suffering from the painful countercharge of karma. This setting will allow foreign players to think of the dark knight - Batman, the guardian of justice in Gotham in the DC universe, thus generating the cultural identity and affinity. As a Liyue character, Xiao's movements are designed with elements of the oriental world, and his image is vividly summed up by the Chinese character "chivalry". His movements are characterized by the "lightness" of oriental martial arts and the determination of Vigilant Yaksha, who has fought for thousands of years. Xiao's characterization is complex, with many images from different cultures fused and reconstructed on the same level to make up this character, which is one of the reasons why he is so attractive to Chinese and foreign players. Xiao is an immortal of Liyue in Genshin Impact, and his image is also the embodiment of
countless heroes who have stepped forward in face of calamity and danger and sacrificed themselves during the 5,000 years of on the Chinese land, and their spiritual core of selflessness and love for everyone is exactly the same. Marvel and Warner have created American "superheroes" in a series of comics and movies, so Xiao can also be interpreted as Genshin Impact's exploration of shaping "oriental heroes" as a phenomenal game.

2.2.2. Grand Exhibition of Chinese Culture - the Moonchase Festival, A Transition from the Rule of Gods to the Rule of Human

The Moonchase Festival, a major event launched on the first anniversary of the opening of Genshin Impact, adds the plot to Liyue and completes the shift from the rule of Gods to the rule of human. Moonchase" is taken from "She would follow the moonbeams to shine on his face" in A Moonlit Night on the Spring River, which has the artistic conception that looks back at the past and looks forward to the future. The plot PV was released during the Chinese National Day in 2021, which corresponds to the traditional Chinese festival - Mid-Autumn Festival from the time point of view. By using the characters and playing method in the game, the connotation and meaning of Mid-Autumn Festival have been told to the world. Not only did Chinese players praise the event, but foreign players also had emotional resonance with it. A Korean player commented below the video, "To be honest, the last part of the PV when Liyue people are living their new peaceful lives made me cry[14]." In addition, the Moonchase Festival's activities also contain a lot of Chinese food culture, such as the Chinese food focus on the differences between the four seasons, the harmony of color, flavor, taste, shape, and utensils, the taste when eating, and the homology of medicine and food in the culinary, the Moonchase Festival's activities and plots give players the opportunity to experience or operate it themselves[15]. Food is an integral part of people's lives around the world, and "the Moonchase Festival" takes "food" as its entry point. Based on the fact that Chinese restaurants have opened all over the world in recent years and various cuisines have been presented globally, it is obviously a good choice for cultural communication with good public acceptance and a window to attract foreign people to learn about traditional Chinese culture. During this event, many foreign players tweeted that they also want to taste authentic Chinese food and experience the wonderful Chinese story through their tongues.

3. INSPIRATIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION OF CHINESE GAMES

From the perspective of Chinese cultural export, we will find that there are still some problems behind the successful figures of games export in recent years. On the one hand, many enterprises and game products that have made important contributions to the export of Chinese games are not operating in China. Although they have captured part of the overseas market, they have not yet achieved the purpose of spreading Chinese culture to the world; while games that focus on the theme of "Chinese traditional culture" often encounter difficulties in opening the international market due to cultural differences and other problems. Therefore, the win-win situation of Genshin Impact in terms of market profitability and cultural communication will definitely bring inspirations for the future cross-cultural communication of Chinese games.

3.1. Taking into Account the Cultural Psychology of both Chinese and Foreign Players

With the current foundation, promoting a purely Chinese-style game (such as the genres of immortal, ancient infrastructure, etc.) to overseas is not easy. If a win-win situation for games export and cultural communication is planned to be achieved, it is quite crucial to grasp the psychology and demand of foreign players for games and accurately seize the opportunity and content of Chinese culture appearing. In fact, the first
state that the main characters arrive in Genshin Impact is not Liyue, which is based on China, but Mondstadt, a medieval Western European state represented by Germany and Netherlands, which reflects the wisdom of game export and cultural communication. Compared to Liyue, Mondstadt can better grasp the cultural demands of foreign players when they are exposed to a new game, thus attracting overseas players, opening up the international market, eliminating the problems caused by cultural differences to a great extent, preventing a large portion of players from resisting, dismissing and giving up the game without in-depth contact due to the unfamiliar culture and settings. When Liyue appears as the second state, players have already been attracted by Genshin Impact and invested sunk costs, and they also mastered the basic operation methods and game routines through the exploration of Mondstadt, finally getting more and more enjoyable. At this point, Liyue, with its very different cultural characteristics, will give players a big surprise, freshness and desire to conquer. With the overall recognition of Genshin Impact, there will be a higher acceptance of unfamiliar culture and new settings, which will be more conducive to the Chinese-style Liyue to the world and gradually let more people understand the charm of Chinese culture. However, if Liyue is the third or another subsequent order, players have been in contact with Genshin Impact for a long time, and may be in a burnout period, there is a certain possibility of aesthetic fatigue, it will be difficult to bring the shocking effect to the players when they reach the second state.

3.2. Translation Strategies for Re-localization

Liyue's Chinese-style setting will inevitably lead to difficulties in translating Chinese into other languages, but Genshin Impact does a good job of re-creating the translation style, which is Genshin Impact's way of localizing English in terms of cultural content. Such localization focuses on expressing the form, but not expressing the meaning. It is not a direct translation of the beautiful Chinese text and sentences, but an attempt to translate the content in a way that meets the English reader's understanding habits and the aesthetics of English. For example, in the plot of the Moonchase Festival, there is a translated sentence "one for the foodies, two for the show, three to get ready, and here we go" in Genshin Impact, which actually comes from a popular phrase in English, its original sentence is "one for the money, two for the show, three to make ready, and four to go." The expression probably first came from children in the 19th century. It truly became a buzzword after its prominence in the field of music. In 1955, the first four lines of Elvis Presley's cover of Blue Suede Shoes used this phrase[18]. From this, it can be seen that if the connotative things in Chinese need to be spread, enabling foreign players to be exposed to Chinese culture in a way they are familiar with is a good method, and make the translation more in line with their habits from their perspective, which is more conducive to improving foreign players' acceptance of unfamiliar culture and enhancing their interest in active learning, thus spreading culture.

3.3. Rich and Diverse "Secondary Creation" Settings

Genshin Impact's current secondary-creation works are known for their large base, high popularity, numerous topics and high quality. It is also extremely rich in forms of creation, including and not limited to: fan fiction, illustration, comics, videos, music cover, lyric songs, COSPLAY, etc. There are many creators and fans on different social platforms both in China and abroad. The boom of Genshin Impact's secondary creations has also expanded the influence and popularity of the game itself, greatly increased user stickiness, motivated players to keep investing their time and effort, and attracted more new users. In fact, Genshin Impact is a well-made game with several conditions that make it suitable for secondary creations. First, its basic worldview and setting are very grand and rich, thus giving the creators huge space to give play to. Second, as of version 3.0, Genshin Impact has released 52 characters that can be selected and controlled by players, which can largely meet the different preferences of different players, and Liyue's characters are even more popular, with four of the top five most-played character demo videos belonging to Liyue. They have vivid story backgrounds, distinct personalities and attractive appearances. At the same time, massive voice packs, well-made character chatting videos, and immersive dialogues with travelers in the plot all help to complete the realism and 3D effect of character details. For this reason, many creators are willing to dig into the deep cultural elements behind the game's setting, and there are countless evidence-based videos, such as a video teaching the meaning and pronunciation of characters' name in the Liyue with 2.65 million views on YouTube [19], and Chinese YouTuber using the customs shown in Liyue's Lantern Rite to popularize the Chinese New Year. In addition, Genshin Impact is good at using the deep stories of the characters to explore the so-called "tormenting points". Another main reason for fan fiction authors is to make up for regrets, such as the Harry Potter series, which has been a long-lasting part of fan fiction culture for many years.

3.4. Continuous Improvement of Operation and Maintenance Mechanism

Genshin Impact is committed to creating a relaxed gaming ecosystem for players. In June 2021, Genshin Impact released the Trial Guidelines for Genshin Impact Fan Derivatives in Mainland China [20] for mainland China. In September of the same year, Genshin Impact also officially announced: Genshin Impact does not charge royalties, does not set the upper limit on the amount, everyone can sell fan goods, and opens up fan rights worldwide. Thus, Genshin Impact has done what other game producers have not yet achieved in this issue. The semi-openness of Genshin Impact's IP has a great positive effect on achieving ecological diversification.
and prompting the re-climbing of the heat. On the basis of ensuring the good development of the IP brand and giving enough freedom to players, creators at home and abroad can get more motivating enthusiasm, which can expand and stabilize the diversified environment, thus forming a virtuous circle. In addition, Genshin Impact, a product of miHoYo, also has its own independent communication community -- HoYoLAB. It is divided into a domestic version and an international version. Creators and players who have a strong interest in Genshin Impact can freely discuss the game in this community, which provides a more harmonious environment and atmosphere compared to large social platforms. In addition, Genshin Impact has also established a mature creation incentive mechanism. This is an important reason for the high quality and large base of Genshin Impact's secondary creations. Genshin Impact has cooperated with many platforms such as Weibo, Bilibili and LOFTER, and open a "creator incentive program" when each new version is launched, with detailed divisions for video, live streaming, drawing, text and photography, as well as lucrative cash and game rewards to encourage more people to join the creation. Many foreign players have also quietly participated in Chinese activities to enjoy the benefits, which also largely promotes the exchange between Chinese and foreign players.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Genshin Impact has become one of the successful cases of Chinese game export with its distinctive label of Chinese-style Liyue, which outlines the image of China with unique game language and takes into account the cultural and backgrounds needs and acceptability of players all over the world. In the current background that Chinese games are striding from "export" to "globalization", the game is not only a simple means of entertainment, but also a good carrier for exporting Chinese stories. In the process of international communication of Chinese culture, it also undertakes the important mission of expressing the charm of Chinese traditional culture and "telling the contemporary Chinese stories" to the world. In the future, we expect more Chinese game producers to launch more high-quality games with Chinese culture as the core and integrate the global diversified cultural backgrounds with scientific operation strategy and refined operation mode, which can keep expanding the communication channels between China and foreign countries, better promote the globalization of Chinese games, and spread more excellent cultures with Chinese charm, Chinese spirit and Chinese wisdom to the world.

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