Chinese Online Games Going Global:

Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies in Practice

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The international dissemination of culture is an inevitable trajectory of national development and a direct reflection of soft power enhancement. As a core sector of the digital cultural industry, the global expansion of Chinese games has become both a symbolic vehicle of China's "going global" strategy and an important medium for cultural communication. The rapid rise of China's online gaming industry demonstrates the growing strength of national soft power. In recent years, Chinese games have achieved notable success in overseas markets, marked by broader global presence, continuous technological innovation, and deeper industrial collaboration. With strong policy support, the industry has advanced from its initial emergence to a stage where quantitative growth is increasingly accompanied by qualitative improvement. This transformation not only elevates the industry to a new developmental phase but also positions Chinese games as a vital conduit for cross-cultural exchange and international engagement.

Keywords: Chinese games going global, cultural integration, technological innovation, localization strategies, cross-media storytelling

Introduction

In the context of rapid globalization and the growing significance of cultural soft power, the international dissemination of digital entertainment has become a crucial avenue for nations to project their cultural influence. Among various cultural products, Chinese online games have emerged as a prominent medium for cross-cultural communication, combining entertainment with the export of cultural values. With the expansion of mobile

internet infrastructure and advances in game development technology, Chinese game companies have not only captured substantial domestic markets but have increasingly ventured into overseas markets, adapting their products to diverse cultural contexts. This globalization process entails not only market expansion but also the strategic application of cross-cultural communication practices, including high-quality localization, translation and creative adaptation, cross-media storytelling, and user-generated content and spontaneous dissemination within game communities. Examining the strategies employed in the global promotion of Chinese online games provides valuable insights into how digital cultural products can effectively facilitate international cultural exchange while enhancing national soft power.

The Current Development of Chinese Online Games in Overseas Communication

Chinese online games have evolved from a domestic industry into a globally competitive sector, marked by expanding market share, diversified international presence, and technological innovation.

Expanding Market Share and Growing Influence

Historically a global consumer, China's gaming industry has risen alongside mobile internet development since the early 21st century. Self-developed games now dominate the domestic market and have expanded to culturally proximate regions, with mobile-based profit models driving rapid value growth. In 2019, Chinese mobile games achieved notable year-on-year revenue growth in overseas markets such as the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, surpassing international competitors (Gamma Data). Many titles top global charts and win prestigious awards, reflecting a "quality era" of stronger international recognition. By 2023, Chinese games generated $16.366 billion in overseas sales—nearly nine times higher than a decade ago (Wang, 2024)—and nearly one-third of the world's top 100 highest-grossing mobile games outside China are Chinese, with publishers earning $2.11 billion in May 2024, representing 39.7% of global revenue (Yang, Cheng, Zhao, etc., 2024).

Diversified Overseas Layout

China's overseas gaming presence now spans nearly all major markets. Exports in 2023 were concentrated in the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and Germany, while new footholds emerged in the Middle East, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Saudi Arabia's investment in digital entertainment, Brazil's growing mobile market, and Southeast Asia's vast user base have attracted Chinese developers. Game genres abroad are increasingly diverse, including RPG, strategy, shooters, simulation, and puzzle games. Genshin Impact exemplifies worldwide RPG success, while Honor of Kings has built a growing overseas player base (Wang, 2024). Expansion models include launching overseas versions, creating international brands, co-developing with foreign partners, and acquiring studios. Tencent's Level Infinite, NetEase's collaboration with Warner Bros. on *Harry Potter: Magic Awakened, and Tencent's investment in PUBG MOBILE highlight these approaches* (*China Game Publishing Overseas Research Report, 2024*).

Technological Innovation and Industrial Collaboration Driving Rapid Growth

Technological innovation drives overseas competitiveness. According to Gamma Data's Bluebook on the Development of New Productive Forces in China's Gaming Industry, nearly 80% of leading companies invest in AI, cloud computing, and XR, with 60% adopting AI-driven production pipelines for efficient content creation and marketing. Companies like Tencent, NetEase, and miHoYo showcase proprietary engines and advanced 3D

character generation at global conferences. Genshin Impact demonstrates high-quality visuals, expansive world-building, and advanced real-time rendering, earning international acclaim. Beyond developers, platforms such as Huawei and Nimo TV support global promotion through IP integration and culturally tailored campaigns. Collaborations with overseas publishers and studios further enhance localization and strengthen the international ecosystem (Wang, 2024).

Reasons for the Success of Chinese Online Games in Overseas Communication

The success of Chinese online games globally stems from state support, cultural integration, and technological innovation, enabling them to compete internationally while promoting China's cultural influence.

Strong Support from National Policies

Video games, often hailed as the "ninth art," stand out for their participatory nature, allowing players to directly engage with the work and achieve deeper immersion. High-quality games integrate music, visual arts, literature, and film, making them a comprehensive art form. As a pillar of China's digital trade, game exports not only drive economic growth but also serve as a key vehicle for cultural dissemination. In recent years, the Chinese government has strongly supported the gaming industry, embedding it in national strategies. Policies such as the 14th Five-Year Plan and subsequent directives have called for developing foreign cultural trade, encouraging digital products to "go global," and strengthening cultural export bases (Cheng, 2024). Further measures emphasized brand-building and global recognition for Chinese games, while recent guidelines promoted digital culture, e-sports, and high-quality online products (Pei & Suo, 2024). Together, these initiatives provide strong institutional backing for Chinese gaming companies to expand overseas and actively promote Chinese culture worldwide.

Distinct Chinese Characteristics and Remarkable Cultural Integration

Chinese online games function as cultural vehicles, attracting global players through interactive engagement. Games like Genshin Impact integrate motifs such as tea culture, Nuo opera, and Chinese mechanics, while its opera-inspired promotional video The Divine Damsel of Devastation sparked global discussions (Liu, 2025). Honkai: Star Rail blends Chinese aesthetics with global cultures and internet memes, while Arknights draws on diverse civilizations to create unique worldviews. Such integration combines traditional culture, modern national spirit, and gamified design, ensuring that distinct Chinese features are accessible to diverse audiences.

High-Quality Game Production, Immersive Interactivity, and Non-Utilitarian Communication

High-quality production is the foundation of global success. Chinese developers now produce titles with advanced visuals, narratives, and gameplay, supported by breakthroughs in engines, AI, and cloud gaming. Black Myth: Wukong exemplifies this trend, earning worldwide acclaim for its visuals and combat mechanics. Developed with Unreal Engine 5, it reaches world-class standards while showcasing Chinese cultural depth. The success of this single-player game signals China's growing ability to compete globally (Wang, 2024). Games' interactive nature enhances cultural communication by encouraging participation, creativity, and social interaction. Prolonged engagement cultivates receptivity and reduces cultural resistance, allowing games to act as effective, non-utilitarian cultural messengers (Yu & Jing, 2018).

The Application of International Communication Strategies in the Overseas Expansion of Chinese Games

Between the global success of Chinese online games and their concrete strategies for expansion lies the crucial role of international communication practices. As Chinese games enter diverse cultural markets, their ability to resonate with local players depends not only on technological innovation and gameplay design but also on how effectively they adapt to new linguistic, cultural, and social contexts. In this regard, international communication strategies have become indispensable tools, allowing Chinese developers to bridge cultural gaps, strengthen player engagement, and enhance their global competitiveness.

High-Quality Localization

Localization adapts games linguistically, culturally, and technically for target markets (Dunne, 2006). In the context of globalization, the production, marketing, reception, and consumption of games involve collision, negotiation, and integration between source and target cultures, testing translators' communication and coordination abilities (Tang & Xiao, 2017). Beyond translation, localization also requires cultural adaptation, regulatory compliance (Cui, 2017), and data privacy adjustments. For example, Honkai: Star Rail modified violent content in Europe and removed alcohol references in Middle Eastern versions. Developers must also meet strict overseas data protection requirements by adopting transparent privacy systems. Effective localization therefore demands interdisciplinary expertise in language, culture, and law (Deng & He, 2024).

Transcreation

Where direct translation fails, transcreation—creative adaptation—ensures resonance (Zhang, 2013). Following Skopos theory, it reorganizes narratives for target audiences, preserving playability and immersion. Examples include League of Legends' "Kindred," localized in Chinese as "Qianjue," evoking dual spirits, and Honkai: Star Rail's character "Xiadie," rendered as "Castorice," reflecting Greek mythology. These adaptations enrich cultural reception and strengthen emotional engagement.

Transmedia Storytelling

Henry Jenkins (2003) defined transmedia storytelling as dispersing story elements across multiple media to co-create expansive worlds. In gaming, this reduces overload while enhancing immersion (Lü, 2021). Arknights illustrates this with serialized manga, music albums, cinematic shorts, and anime collaborations, forming a multidimensional ecosystem. Research suggests that intertextuality enables players to navigate and reinterpret story elements across different media (She & Zheng, 2024). Other studies argue that constructing coherent story worlds sustains long-term engagement and extends cultural resonance (Sun & Liu, 2022). Together, these insights demonstrate how cross-platform narratives strengthen both player immersion and the global impact of Chinese games.

Fan Communities, User-Generated Content, and Organic Dissemination

Fan communities play a central role in sustaining popularity and cultural dissemination. Collins' Theory of Interaction Ritual Chains (2004) highlights emotional energy and group solidarity, which manifest in gaming communities (Liu, 2025). Official communities span mainstream platforms (Reddit, YouTube), specialized forums (Steam, Discord), and developer platforms (HoYoLAB, Skland). Organic fan groups produce UGC such as fanfiction, illustrations, and cosplay, often reaching audiences beyond the player base. For example,

Arknights communities like "Zhou Scholars" and "Bing Scholars" have enriched collective interpretation and identity. These ecosystems drive retention, engagement, and word-of-mouth dissemination. In overseas expansion, global platforms connect players cross-culturally, making community cultivation a vital strategy.

Conclusion

China's advances in digital technology and game production, combined with domestic market saturation, have driven global expansion. Backed by policy, cultural integration, and technological innovation, Chinese games balance competitiveness with cultural authenticity. Through localization, transcreation, transmedia storytelling, and community engagement, they serve as cultural ambassadors, promoting both economic growth and China's soft power on the global stage. Their success demonstrates how digital entertainment can effectively convey national culture while engaging diverse international audiences.

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