

The Integration of Two-dimensional Culture and Local Culture: A Case Study of the Global Sensation “Genshin Impact”

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Abstract. Genshin Impact stands out as a highly successful two-dimensional game, which effectively integrates two-dimensional culture with local cultural elements to create a unique charm within the game. This study focuses on Genshin Impact and utilizes communication science theories, particularly those related to localization. Additionally, it delves into the historical process of two-dimensional culture. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the two-dimensional and local culture content presented within the game, this paper aims to explore the process of reinterpretation and integration of two-dimensional culture under the influence of the local context. Additionally, this research provides suggestions on how to create excellent popular culture products. Genshin Impact serves as a prime example of how contemporary media can harmoniously merge elements from distinct cultural backgrounds, ultimately captivating a global audience. Understanding this fusion of cultures within such a successful product provides valuable lessons for the broader realm of cultural exchange and entertainment media.

Keywords: Cultural Industry; Gaming; Culture Integration; Two-dimensional Culture.

1. Introduction

Two-dimensional culture originally originated from Japan and became popular worldwide during the 1980s and 1990s. It refers to a culture primarily transmitted through the media of ACGN, which is formed by the “two-dimensional” (2D) community and possesses unique values and concepts. ACGN stands for Animation, Comic, Game, and Novel in English.

With the rise of the “IP adaptation” trend and the commercialization of two-dimension culture in China, the two-dimensional culture has also grown in China and received more and more attention. At the same time, the Japanese-originated two-dimensional culture has also been absorbed and integrated by Chinese local culture, and new two-dimensional cultural products are created based on Chinese local culture. China has even begun to export two-dimensional cultural products, which have been widely welcomed among global two-dimensional communities. This paper will take Genshin Impact as a case study and explore the local reinterpretation and integration of two-dimensional culture within the context of Chinese culture, drawing on theories from communication studies, such as localization.

Genshin Impact is an open-world adventure game launched by Shanghai miHoYo Network Technology Co., Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as miHoYo) in 2020 [1]. The game constructs a world called Teyvat. Thousands of years ago, seven magic gods won the war and established seven countries representing the seven elements on this continent: Mondstadt, Liyue, Inazuma, Sumeru, Fontaine, Natlan, and Snezhnaya. Players travel as “travelers” to visit these seven countries, meet different characters and complete adventure tasks during their journey, gradually getting closer to the truth of the world. The main storyline of the game has currently progressed to the Fontaine country representing justice and judgment.

Based on miHoYo’s excellent technology, outstanding artistic skills, and excellent plot design, Genshin Impact has become the top-ranked game in the mobile game chart in 27 countries within less than two years. It has also received numerous awards, including the prestigious “The Game Awards 2021 for Best Mobile Game, the GameLook Awards for Best Domestic Game of the Year, Best

Overseas Game of the Year, App Store 2020 Game of the Year, and Google Play 2020 Game of the Year. After three years of hard work, Genshin Impact has established a stable online user base and a vibrant gaming community. It has also generated countless fan creations of original content in the two-dimensional community.

2. The Historical Development and Influence of Japan's Anime Culture

Since the 1990s Japan has been giving significance to the advancement of its cultural industry and even initiated the slogan “cultural nation”. After years of groundwork, it officially approved the “Japanese Cultural Industry Strategy” (referred to as “the Strategy” below) in May 2007, which is now identified as the guiding principle for Japan’s cultural industry. The strategy states, “The impact of the cultural industry on overseas audiences can create a connection with Japanese lifestyles, values, aesthetic horizons, deepening their understanding of traditional Japanese culture and art. This ‘yearning’ of audiences for Japan’s overall cultural strength can lead to long-term positive impacts on various industries” [2]. The resounding triumph of Japanese anime series like Pokémon, Dragon Ball, Sailor Moon, and Detective Conan across Asia and worldwide has propelled Japanese pop culture, including anime, manga, games, and music, into the global mainstream.

Strong culture will have a great impact on the weaker culture, so some scholars have the fear that the world will have only one culture in the future [3]. It can be learnt that, as one of the world’s leading countries in the export of cultural products at that time [4], Japan’s popular culture naturally receives a wide range of attention from all over the world. Two-dimensional culture is an integral element of the Japanese pop culture that has impacted global society. In particular, with the prevalence of information technology, two-dimensional anime characters have attained popularity comparable to that of renowned film and television celebrities. For instance, the virtual idol character known as Hatsune Miku is a prime illustration of this trend. The global popularity of the “Loituma Girl” has left a lasting impression of a girl with her green twin braids on people around the world. Even to this day, due to the enduring nature of two-dimensional characters, she continues to be adored by fans globally.

The spread of 2D culture has also had an impact on the “3D” world. Take clothing, for instance, the “sailor suit” initially referred to the standardized naval uniforms worn by sailors, including those in Japan. However, due to the influence of Japan’s Meiji Restoration-era concept of “enrich the nation, strengthen the military,” it was adopted as the school uniform for Japanese students. Later, with the widespread dissemination of 2D culture, especially influenced by anime like “Sailor Moon” and subsequent anime featuring Japanese high school students, when people think of a sailor suit today, they do not primarily associate it with sailors in military attire but with Japanese-style “sailor-suited” cute girls. Additionally, this type of attire has gained popularity worldwide among 2D enthusiasts due to Japanese 2D culture.

The idea of “trucks are portals to another world” is rooted in the recent surge of isekai (otherworldly) anime in Japan. Since the popularity of the anime “Re: Zero - Starting Life in Another World” in 2017, there has been a significant increase in isekai-themed anime. A common trope in the anime is the protagonist “being hit by a truck” and only to awaken in another world. Due to the impact of Japanese anime, some enthusiasts in the 2D culture community also humorously refer to large vehicles like trucks as “portals to another world.”

There are numerous other examples to consider. For example, the term “萌え,” which signifies a girl’s cuteness, can be traced back to the Japanese language. Similarly, a humorous reference in film and television, the phrase “I’ll marry you after I finish fighting,” is often called a “death flag,” stemming from the fate of characters in Japanese anime who die after making similar statements. The term “flag,” originally referring to a piece of cloth, has been broadened to denote a specific occurrence preceding a particular event, following the impact of the well-known Japanese anime series “If Her Flag Breaks.”

3. Genshin Impact: Typical Features of the Two-Dimensional Game

Genshin Impact is a game that originates from China, rather than from the birthplace of the two-dimensional culture, Japan. However, this does not mean it is not a 2D game. Quite the contrary, it possesses all the qualities and traits of a two-dimensional game.

3.1. Strive to Create a Complete World

The majority of popular anime games have a common feature, which is that these games have a well-developed game world. For example, the renowned Japanese anime game “Pokémon” constructs a universe where Pokémon trainers and various cute Pokémon coexist and embark on adventures. Similarly, in the game “Fate/Grand Order”, the background is set in a world where “heroic spirits” and “masters” must travel through time to safeguard humanity’s future, engaging in battles against “history”. Since 2020, the greatly popular Japanese anime game “Pretty Derby” has also been set in a world where horse racing is personified as young girls, even though it falls under the genre of 2D simulation and development games.

In a similar manner, Genshin Impact also produces a world known as “Teyvat”, where the complete and unique surroundings are based on the player’s experiences during exploration and adventure. In line with most outstanding anime games, Genshin Impact endeavors to create a “comprehensive and highly distinct world”.

3.2. Attach Importance to Role Modeling

Anime games differ from MOBA games, which prioritize teamwork and cooperation, and from FPS games, which emphasize technology and tactical coordination. In the anime subculture, creating characters that come to life is regarded as significant, and this feature receives greater attention in anime games.

Some individuals relate two-dimensional characters to their looks, like possessing sizable cleavage, elongated limbs, particular hair hues, or fitting the stereotypes linked to anime culture (e.g., Lori, grown woman, handsome lad). This appearance-based association characterizes the concept in certain circles. Whilst it is indeed true that the appearance of characters in anime games is important and can potentially affect their marketability and, therefore, revenue in specific periods, this is not the sole aspect encompassed by the term “creating three-dimensional characters” in this paper.

The process of bringing characters to life surpasses mere visual representations or short introductions. It encompasses several aspects. For instance, in the video game “Fate/Grand Order,” the character Mashu Kyrielight has not only been given a distinct appearance but has also been featured as one of the anime series’ main protagonists. Furthermore, the character possesses a personal storyline in the game, along with multiple unlockable costumes. Additionally, players are actively encouraged by the developers to create fan-made comics focused on the character. This approach of promoting player involvement in character development and fan-generated content is fundamental to crafting a fully-realized and layered character that players can connect with and are inclined to purchase related merchandise.



Figure 1. Image of Raiden Shogun [5].

This is also applicable in Genshin Impact, where Raiden Shogun, the esteemed ruler of the Inazuma nation, is a notable illustration (Figure 1). From a character design perspective, Raiden General is the supreme ruler of Inazuma in the game, which is based on the real Japan. As a result, traditional Japanese elements are heavily used in the design, such as the sword drawn from the character's chest and the Japanese kimono worn by the character. At the same time, because of her status as the supreme ruler, the character's eyes give a sense of a ruler's commanding gaze. Players will be able to classify Raiden Shogun as a beautiful, noble and cold leader of a country based on her character design.

As mentioned earlier, a vivid character is not simply a static character illustration, nor is it a brief introduction. Players of anime games value personality and uniqueness, and it is essential to create characters comprehensively. In order to establish a character who plays a crucial role in the main storyline, the game has prepared for Raiden General's appearance by adding relevant content to the game's storyline prior to her in-game implementation, which refers to the point at which players can obtain the character in-game (here the implementation date was September 1st, 2021). When players first meet Raiden Shogun, she appears to be a decisive ruler, willing to take action but leaving the running of the country entirely to her subordinates and the artificial beings she has created.

However, as the story progresses, she gradually changes her ways and decides to take charge of the country once again. In her own storyline, she presents a gentle, beautiful and sexy image as an anime-style mature woman who undergoes an anime-style "transformation" that will surprise players. She changes from a fearsome leader to a beautiful and charming older sister. Based on the fact that the income of the Genshin Impact game skyrocketed to the top of 43 countries within three hours after the Raiden Shogun character pool was opened on September 1, 2021, Raiden Shogun is undoubtedly a successful character design.

Genshin Impact is a highly successful anime-style game, known for its strong commitment to character development and design. Its parent company, miHoYo, is exceptionally skilled at bringing characters to life. As a result, there are many vivid and well-received characters in the game, including characters such as Raiden Shogun. Each of these characters has received enthusiastic support and love from players, further demonstrating Genshin Impact's success in character development.

3.3. Embodying the Core Essence of the Anime Sub-culture

Genshin Impact embodies fundamental characteristics of the anime subculture. This paper posits that the anime subculture has significant facets - among them are humanism and idealism. Anime works typically focus on providing individual care for human beings, emphasizing the maintenance of human dignity as well as self-worth, which is consistent with humanism. The aforementioned notion is naturally reflected in Genshin Impact, where the player, in the role of a "traveler," endeavors to locate their lost relatives while traveling through seven countries and visiting the gods of each land. The game recounts the historical transformations, both voluntary and involuntary, of seven countries that the traveler and the inhabitants actively engage with. The four countries already concluded stress the significance of "people." In the initial country, dubbed Mondstadt, gods have entrusted country management to humans for an extended period and have encouraged and safeguarded them in pursuing wine, poetry, and liberty.

In the second nation, Liyue, the monarch is judicious, and the populace is prosperous. Upon the player's arrival, the deities are retiring, yet a calamity strikes. Notwithstanding the absence of divine protection, the population prevails against the catastrophe and makes way for a transition from a "deity-ruled" era to a "people-ruled" period. In the third country, Inazuma, owing to the conscious dereliction of the divinities, the lives of the citizens are stifled and destitute. The individuals bravely protested against the deities and fought for a promising future for themselves. In the fourth nation, Sumeru, the populace holds a considerable significance in rescuing their gods by applying their intellect. The chronicles of these four lands underscore the inhabitants, evidently embodying the essence of humanism.

The two-dimensional world is essentially a utopia constructed in the mind and, thus, inherently idealistic. In Genshin Impact, Mondstadt embodies people’s desires for poetry, wine, and freedom, while Liyue represents their visions of prosperity and wealth. Inazuma portrays the unleashing of people’s potential in the face of oppression, and Sumeru reflects the strength of human wisdom. The next country that players have not yet fully grasped, referred to as Fontaine, the “Land of Justice and Judgment,” ostensibly seeks to exemplify the pursuit of justice and equity by its people. This aligns with idealistic principles that are important to many.

Moreover, Genshin Impact also “evokes emotional resonance among people through the universality of civilizations.” For example, Genshin Impact presents the philosophical issue of life and death to players through the character Hu Tao, who is engaged in the funeral industry. Hu Tao’s sunny and lively image challenges the common taboo around death, and she conveys the reverence for life and the importance of cherishing current happiness through the mouth of the Hu Tao [6]. In conclusion, “Genshin Impact” conforms to the conventions of an anime-themed open-world game.

4. Chinese Local Culture in Genshin Impact

Although Genshin Impact adopts an anime-style aesthetic, as a Chinese-origin game, it inherently incorporates facets of Chinese regional culture. Taking Liyue as an example, it can be observed that it portrays ancient China, and subsequently, represents the Chinese local culture extensively throughout the game. Firstly, from the country’s perspective, the gods and the supreme ruler “Rock Emperor” and the acting ruler “Liyue Seven Star” have dedicated thousands of years of effort to lead the country towards prosperity. Hence, the citizens of this nation respect, love, trust and support them widely. This “king wise, people prosperous” environment ideally portrays the state of a country’s political system in Chinese Confucian traditional culture. During the time when players come to this country and participate in this plotline, the transition from “god rule” to “people rule” alludes to the historical process of China from the collapse of the Qing Dynasty to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.



Figure 2. Image of Zhongli [7].



Figure 3. Image of Keqing [8].

From a character development standpoint in the game, “Zhongli” (Figure 2) and “Keqing” (Figure 3) embody two distinct Chinese cultural and ideological themes. “Zhongli” is the god of Liyue transformed into a human form. In appearance, Zhongli is a tall and handsome man with lightly furrowed brows that exude an aura of natural authority. In terms of clothing, his jacket has a split hem that is similar to a long robe, and his necktie is near the waist, giving players a sense of propriety and elegance. In combination with his identity as a wise emperor who led the country to prosperity, it can be inferred that he is also extremely progressive and advanced in his thinking based on his ability to appropriately transfer power back to the people. In the game, he is knowledgeable and well-versed, always able to provide timely reminders and assistance to players and other characters, which perfectly fits the image of a wise emperor in traditional Chinese culture and also coincides with the description of “junzi” in ancient China.

“Keqing” is a member of the “Liyue Seven Star” leadership circle during the “people rule” period in Liyue. She is one of the earliest characters available to players in the game. At first glance, she gives people the impression of a capable and talented young girl. Her appearance must mention the hairstyle on her head, which is tied into two shapes that are both like cat ears and bamboo shoots, giving this capable female character a few “cat ears girl” attributes. In fact, this hairstyle is called “cow horn bun” and is a type of hairstyle for unmarried girls in ancient China. In the game, this hairstyle is mainly used to express that this girl at the top of the country is very young.

In terms of clothing, the purple outerwear with long sleeves and hem contains a lot of Chinese-style pattern design, such as the magic cloud on the hem and the feather on the chest, which are very distinctly Chinese-style. Under the outerwear, there is a blue and white skirt with smooth asymmetric black stockings, which is a typical design of capable and talented girls. With miHoYo’s strong artistic skills, this combination of new and old elements is very harmonious. While retaining the style of “knight-errant woman” and Chinese elements, it is not out of touch with modern aesthetics.

In terms of character traits, Keqing is a humanist. In the game, an NPC scholar believes that the former prosperity of Liyue relied on the good governance of the gods. If one day the gods of Liyue suddenly disappear, it would be difficult for the people of Liyue to continue this prosperity. However, Keqing believes that the most important factor that has supported Liyue for a thousand years is ultimately its people. She believes that the people of Liyue can make the country more prosperous. Keqing is portrayed as a relatively radical figure who emphasizes people-oriented values and pursues modern breakthroughs as a pioneer. According to the game’s plot, the gods of Liyue voluntarily withdrew from their positions, and Keqing became one of the leaders of this new era in the country due to her advanced ideas and excellent abilities.

If Zhongli is the most ideal gentle and wise king as seen through the perspective of traditional Chinese culture, Keqing represents the enterprising and forward-looking younger generation under the contemporary mainstream Chinese culture.

5. Respect for Other Cultures in Genshin Impact

There are many reasons for the global popularity of Genshin Impact. The most important factor, in the author’s opinion, is its successful fusion of local and other cultures. The following takes the differences between the Chinese and Japanese players’ perception of the Inazuma country as an example to explain. In the game, there is a character named Sangonomiya Kokomi who is portrayed as a “military strategist” image. When she first appeared in front of players, the game told players through the plot that she was a military strategist. Thus, many players thought that Sangonomiya Kokomi was a military strategist like Zhuge Liang, who could plan and win battles from afar. However, after near with this character and her subsequent performance in the main plot, players found that the character was actually intellectually overwhelmed by another character Yae Miko, deceived by the game’s anti-hero Fatui, and even indirectly killed some subordinates with social anxiety. These experiences gave many players at that time a feeling of “character design failure,” so this character was not popular in the Chinese market.

Unlike the Chinese market, “Coral Palace Heart Sea” is very popular in the Japanese market. This is because in the eyes of Japanese players, the corresponding character of Sangonomiya Kokomi is not Zhuge Liang but a famous Japanese military strategist named Takechi Shigehiro. In “Japanese History,” it is recorded that he was a “man of great intelligence, gentle character, and without ambition” [9]. In history, he had two highlights. The first was when he faced Oda Nobunaga, using the stratagem in the book to make his army be defeated completely. The second was when he only brought 16 people to successfully raid and capture the rice leaf mountain city with only 16 people. These characteristics coincide with the character image and deeds of Sangonomiya Kokomi in the game, successfully gaining the favor of Japanese players.

There is a lot of content related to Inazuma in the game that may seem innocuous to Chinese players, but it always gives them a feeling of discomfort. However, Japanese players think that everything is normal and realistic, which is precisely due to the differences caused by different cultures. Some Chinese players have even made the mistaken assumption that miHoYo is promoting Japanese culture rather than Chinese culture. However, this paper argues that only when Inazuma in Genshin Impact is similar enough to Japan, Mondstadt is similar enough to Europe, and the future Fontaine is similar enough to France, players would think that Liyue in the game is similar enough to China.

6. Popular Culture as a Carrier

From a communication perspective, popular culture can be a vehicle for local culture. “Popular culture can use local cultural elements to better disseminate popular culture locally, in line with Joseph Straubhaar’s “Cultural Proximity” [9]. For example, American animated films such as the “Kung Fu Panda” series and “Mulan” use a lot of Chinese elements and even directly base their plots on traditional Chinese stories, but essentially still promote American values with a strong emphasis on “individual heroism”. Similarly, Dragon Ball largely utilizes elements from the Chinese traditional story “Journey to the West” to spread Japan’s popular culture.

At the same time, popular culture can also serve as a carrier of local culture, and it has a strong promoting effect on the dissemination of traditional culture. For example, Japan’s two-dimensional culture has greatly promoted the spread of Japanese traditional culture worldwide. The anime “Naruto” made the world aware of the special profession that has existed in Japan since the Edo period. The anime “Natsume’s Book of Friends” has generated interest among fans in Japan’s yokai culture, while the movie “5 Centimeters per Second” has closely linked cherry blossoms with the country of Japan.

The paper argues that foreign popular culture can also serve as an excellent carrier for spreading local culture, which has the following reasons. Firstly, popular culture is a culture that has been widely disseminated and is more easily accepted. The prerequisite for all cultural dissemination is the willingness of the disseminated to accept what the disseminator disseminates, which is in line with Lu Xun’s point of view that “only what is global is national” [10]. The anime culture mentioned in the paper is a typical example of popular culture. Anime culture has become one of the widely spread popular cultures in the world. Therefore, Genshin Impact is first accepted by anime fans worldwide as a 2D game, and also because of its excellent game quality, as well as for its content related to local culture.

Secondly, “culture exists in the form of diversification, and the cultures of different countries, different nations and different times have their own forms, connotations and characteristics” [11]. Cultural products based on cultural output also have diversity, so the content of cultural products depends on the ideas that the creators want to express and the local culture in which the creators live. TYPE-MOON produces “Fate/Grand Order”, Cygames publishes “Carnival Phantasm”, and miHoYo produces the game Genshin Impact. Even with the same genre of anime games, there are significant differences between these products due to the different companies and creators involved. This suggests that as long as the creators are able to incorporate their own ideas and perspectives, it can result in distinct cultural products.

Finally, popular culture has a rich variety of dissemination methods and faster dissemination speed, which is highly compliant with modern people’s fast-paced lifestyle and information acquisition habits. Therefore, it can enable local culture to be disseminated in a more relaxed, entertainment-oriented, and attractive manner.

7. Summary

Undoubtedly, Genshin Impact is an excellent anime game that not only meets the gaming needs of anime fans but also fully integrates local culture into the game. It gives a new interpretation and presentation of anime culture while also greatly assisting in the dissemination of local culture.

The success of Genshin Impact also serves as an inspiration for the creation or development of other pop culture products that intend to incorporate local cultures. Firstly, it is important to accurately define the nature of the popular cultural product itself. For example, Genshin Impact identifies itself as an anime game, thus receiving welcome from anime fans. Secondly, a thorough understanding of both local and popular culture is necessary. Only then can local and popular culture be truly and fully combined. Finally, when it comes to cultural products that involve aspects of other countries' local culture, these products must fully respect other cultures involved. Only when a country's culture is respected by the target audience will they accept the game itself, and thus respect the local culture presented in the product.

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