

Globalization and Localization of Subculture: Cultural Conflicts and Integration in the Overseas Expansion of Chinese Tactical Competitive Mobile Games

Kaiheng Zhang*

Immersion Academy, Irvine, California, United States

**Corresponding author: Kaiheng Zhang.*

Abstract

This study focuses on the globalization of Chinese tactical competitive mobile games, such as PUBG Mobile and Peacekeeper Elite, to explore how Chinese youth subculture achieves cross-cultural communication through gaming platforms. It analyzes cultural conflicts arising from symbol misinterpretation and value differences between Chinese youth subcultures and local cultures in Europe, America, and the Middle East. Adaptation strategies, including localized skin design and regional holiday events, are summarized to foster cultural integration. From the perspective of cultural imperialism theory, this research demonstrates how Chinese youth subculture maintains its subjectivity and enhances cultural soft power in global expansion. This study further argues that globalization does not lead to simple cultural domination but results in hybrid cultural forms through continuous interaction between global and local elements. It highlights the role of players as active agents who reinterpret and reshape cultural meanings within game environments. Additionally, the research emphasizes that successful localization depends on balancing cultural authenticity with market adaptability, providing a sustainable model for global cultural dissemination. It not only provides theoretical and practical references for Chinese youth subcultures to gain international recognition, but also offers insights into the global dissemination of Chinese digital cultural products and the international influence of youth subcultures.

Keywords

youth subculture globalization, localization adaptation, tactical competitive mobile games, cultural integration, cultural imperialism theory

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of accelerating globalization, cross-cultural interactions have become increasingly frequent and in-depth. As a dynamic and innovative component of contemporary culture, youth subculture is rapidly spreading through digital media, demonstrating a distinct trend of global dissemination [1]. Online games, characterized by high interactivity, immersive experience, and a wide youth audience, have emerged as a critical medium for the cross-cultural communication of youth subculture [2]. Chinese tactical competitive mobile games, with their polished product quality and global operations, have amassed hundreds of millions

of users worldwide, serving as a typical example of China's digital cultural industry going global and achieving cross-cultural integration [3]. This study takes the overseas expansion of tactical competitive mobile games as its entry point to systematically examine the cross-cultural communication process of Chinese youth subculture, with a focus on cultural conflicts and integration practices in different cultural contexts. By exploring the interactions of youth subculture across various cultural fields, it aims to reveal the communication characteristics and developmental logic of youth subculture under globalization, providing theoretical and practical references for enhancing the international influence of Chinese youth culture and strengthening national cultural soft power [4]. The theory of cultural imperialism provides a critical perspective for examining how Chinese youth subculture maintains its cultural subjectivity and challenges traditional Western cultural hegemony in global dissemination [5]. This research not only enriches the academic framework of subculture globalization but also offers practical strategies to guide the global expansion of Chinese digital cultural products in adapting to diverse international markets, optimizing communication paths, and achieving sustainable global dissemination [6].

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Core Concepts

Globalization of Youth Subculture refers to the transnational dissemination of cultural symbols, values, and lifestyles led by youth through digital media. It features decentralization, high interactivity, and a hybrid identity. Youth actively integrate local traditions with global trends, forming cultural expressions that blend regional characteristics with contemporary elements, thus becoming the most dynamic force in cross-cultural communication [1]. Originating in the 1960s, Cultural Imperialism Theory critiques the unequal power relations in global cultural flows, revealing how developed countries exercise cultural dominance and value penetration over developing nations [5]. Evolving alongside global changes, the theory now emphasizes the cultural agency of marginalized countries. It highlights that latecomer nations can achieve cultural resistance through creative cultural products, break unilateral hegemony, and enhance their cultural soft power and international discourse power. Game Localization involves optimizing game art, narratives, gameplay, and social systems according to the cultural norms, religious customs, and aesthetic preferences of target markets. It is widely recognized as a key approach to mitigating cross-cultural conflicts, improving user acceptance, and enhancing market competitiveness [7].

2.2 Theoretical Controversies

Scholars have long debated whether subculture globalization leads to cultural homogenization or hybridization. Some warn against the risk of Western-dominated homogenization, fearing the erosion of local cultures [8], while others focus on the rise of non-Western cultures and acknowledge the trend of multicultural coexistence [9]. There is an inherent tension between cultural authenticity and localization: excessive adaptation may dilute cultural uniqueness, while insufficient localization can lead to market rejection due to cultural barriers [10]. This study addresses this practical dilemma in the context of Chinese tactical competitive mobile games going global.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Research on Youth Subculture Globalization

Existing literature defines subculture globalization as a decentralized, internet-driven process. As active participants in global cultural flows, youth reconstruct and spread cultural symbols in transnational spaces, forming hybrid identities rooted in local contexts yet with global perspectives to construct self-identity in cross-cultural settings [1]. The rebellious and innovative nature of youth subculture injects vitality into society, but may also clash with mainstream values and traditional cultures [11].

3.2 Research on Games as Subculture Communication Platforms

Games have become a core medium for the formation and dissemination of youth subculture. Tactical competitive games, through their rule design, establish subcultural communities centered on competition and

collaboration [2]. Character images, gameplay mechanisms, and social functions collectively reinforce players' cultural identity, enhancing community cohesion and a sense of belonging [2]. Localization strategies are crucial for the global success of games. Accurate language adaptation, integration of local cultural elements, and regionally customized events have been proven effective in bridging cultural gaps and increasing user loyalty in overseas markets [7]. However, systematic research connecting specific localization strategies with the expression logic and global dissemination trends of Chinese youth subculture remains relatively scarce [3].

3.3 Evolution of Cultural Imperialism Theory

Early cultural imperialism theory focused on criticizing the one-way cultural output of Western countries to achieve ideological penetration [5]. As the global cultural landscape evolves, research has shifted to the agency of emerging cultural subjects. New cultural forces, represented by China, are leveraging high-quality digital products to convey diverse values, challenging traditional unilateral cultural hegemony and promoting the construction of an inclusive global cultural system.

3.4 Research Gaps

While existing studies cover game localization and youth subculture, they fail to use cultural imperialism theory as the core analytical framework to explore the subjective construction of Chinese youth subculture in the global market. Additionally, in-depth case studies on specific scenarios such as conflicts with religious customs in the Middle East and differences in gameplay perception among European and American players are lacking [12]. This study aims to fill these gaps by examining cultural conflicts, localization adaptation, and subjective construction in the overseas expansion of Chinese tactical competitive mobile games.

4. Discussion and Comprehensive Analysis

4.1 Research Consensus and Contradictions

A general consensus has been reached that appropriate localization strategies significantly facilitate the overseas expansion of game products. Measures such as launching region-exclusive skins and designing holiday events tailored to local customs effectively reduce conflicts caused by cultural differences, improve product acceptance in target markets, and enhance market performance [7]. For example, character skins incorporating Islamic elements for the Middle Eastern market and Christmas-themed limited-time events for the European and American markets have achieved remarkable success. However, a core contradiction persists: while localization drives commercial success, it may dilute the unique cultural connotations of Chinese youth subculture. Over-adaptation to local preferences may lead to the loss of cultural characteristics, resulting in the product losing its cultural identity [13]. Cross-cultural design must strike a balance between meeting the cultural needs of target markets and preserving the core traits of Chinese youth subculture, avoiding the predicament of cultural loss of voice.

4.2 Trends in Youth Subculture Globalization

Current global cultural exchanges are shifting from passive reception to active participation. Non-Western youth subcultures, represented by Chinese game subcultures, have become constructive participants empowered by digital platforms [14]. These platforms break down temporal and spatial barriers to cultural communication, enabling Chinese youth to directly showcase their cultural characteristics and engage in equal exchanges with global youth. This transformation is reflected in multiple aspects. In character design, traditional Chinese cultural elements such as martial arts and mythology are integrated to attract global players [3]. In gameplay design, Chinese strategic thinking is incorporated to provide unique competitive experiences for global users. This active participation reshapes the global cultural structure, promoting collisions and integration between youth subcultures from different backgrounds and fostering the emergence of new cultural forms. It also prompts the evolution of cultural imperialism theory, moving beyond a focus on one-way hegemony critique to recognizing the multi-directional nature of cultural flows and the practice of counter-hegemony [5].

4.3 Limitations of Existing Research

Current research has notable limitations in data sources and methodologies. Most studies rely on secondary data, such as official reports, media coverage, and online reviews, lacking field research and in-depth player interviews. This results in insufficient insights into players' cultural identity and long-term behavioral impacts [15]. For instance, first-hand data on players' emotional engagement and changes in social behavior across different regions is lacking, making it difficult to accurately grasp user needs. Moreover, there is a "survivorship bias" in literature research, with a focus on successful cases while neglecting failed localization experiences and ongoing cultural frictions. Although successful cases provide valuable insights, failure lessons are equally important as they offer reverse references for future research [15]. Future studies should strengthen empirical methods by using ethnographic research to capture players' cultural practices and big data analysis to trace the dissemination paths of cultural symbols. It is also necessary to expand regional comparisons to analyze differences in subculture communication across diverse cultural contexts and explore sustainable subculture globalization models that balance commercial interests and cultural values, ensuring the healthy dissemination of subculture in the global market [16].

5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the overseas expansion of tactical competitive mobile games to analyze the cross-cultural communication of Chinese youth subculture. It identifies cultural conflicts with local cultures in Europe, America, and the Middle East and summarizes adaptation strategies such as localized art design, holiday event planning, and social function optimization. From the perspective of cultural imperialism theory, Chinese youth subculture can maintain its subjectivity, achieve cultural integration, and enhance cultural soft power in the global market. Moderate localization is not a form of cultural dissipation, but a critical path to help subcultures gain recognition and achieve sustainable dissemination. The contribution of this study lies in systematically connecting game localization, subculture globalization, and cultural imperialism theory, with a case study of Chinese tactical competitive mobile games. However, the research has limitations such as insufficient empirical data. Future research can conduct qualitative field studies, expand to more game types and regions, and propose actionable plans to balance cultural identity and global adaptation. Chinese youth subculture carried by digital games holds great potential to engage in global cultural interactions and promote the construction of a more inclusive global cultural ecosystem. Highlighting the potential of Chinese youth subculture in shaping a more inclusive global digital culture.

References

- [1] Bennett, A. (2011). Youth subcultures in the digital age. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14(5), 587-602.
- [2] Williams, D. (2019). Digital games as cross-cultural communication tools. *Journal of Communication*, 69(4), 789-810.
- [3] Li, Y., & Wang, H. (2023). The global expansion of Chinese tactical competitive mobile games: A cultural perspective. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 16(2), 189-207.
- [4] Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.
- [5] Schiller, H. I. (1976). *Communication and cultural domination*. International Arts and Sciences Press.
- [6] Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice*. Polity Press.
- [7] Chandler, D. (2006). Localization and globalization in digital games. *Game Studies*, 6(2), 1-18.
- [8] Barber, B. R. (1996). *Jihad vs. McWorld: How globalism and tribalism are reshaping the world*. Crown Publishers.
- [9] Pieterse, J. N. (2004). *Globalization and culture: Global mélange*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- [10] Buchanan, I. (2010). Cultural authenticity and localization in global media. *Media, Culture & Society*, 32(7), 1045-1061.
- [11] Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. Methuen.

- [12] Chen, L. (2021). Cross-cultural challenges of Chinese mobile games in global markets. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24(4), 512-528.
- [13] Zhao, M. (2024). Cultural identity preservation in global game localization. *Cultural Studies Quarterly*, 38(1), 78-95.
- [14] Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.
- [15] Humphreys, L. (2010). Empirical methodologies in game studies. *Games and Culture*, 5(3), 247-265.
- [16] Zhang, H., & Liu, Q. (2022). Sustainable globalization models for youth subculture: Balancing commercial and cultural values. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 32(5), 421-437.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the science project.

Open Access

This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

