



Multimodal Communication Strategies for the Cross-cultural Dissemination of Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in the ACGT Model: A Case Study of Genshin Impact's ICH Dissemination

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Abstract. The construction of China's intangible cultural heritage is rooted in its long history and social interactions. As an integral part of excellent traditional culture, it builds the cultural confidence of the Chinese people and is promoted not only domestically but also internationally. This study takes the theoretical issues of the international communication of intangible cultural heritage as the starting point, combining the characteristics of global networked geopolitics and the theory of network cultural circles' propagation, and innovatively integrates the transmission model of the genetic bases ACGT of biodiversity from the perspective of empathetic communication strategy. By conducting field research on the "Genshin Impact" game, we explore how to establish a framework for the international dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. Based on this, we believe that gamified communication embodies a form of "care for people," and in the context of digitalization, the cross-cultural dissemination of intangible cultural heritage needs to connect different cultural spaces in order to achieve "empathy" and enhance the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Cross-cultural transmission, cultural industry, intangible cultural heritage, Genshin Impact.

1 Introduction

The preservation and protection of China's intangible cultural heritage have moved towards digitization. The application of modern technologies such as digitization has become an important component of the China's cultural construction efforts.^[1] Within the realm of communication, digital dissemination of intangible cultural heritage refers to the comprehensive use of information technology and digital techniques in a multidirectional transmission mode encompassing many-to-many, many-to-one, and face-to-face communication. Compared to traditional modes of communication, digital dissem-

ination transforms the passive receivers of intangible cultural heritage into active producers, users, and consumers with individuality and agency.^[2]

ICH is a cultural product within societal operations. Vertically, it carries the inheritance and records of human civilization genes, while horizontally showcasing the uniqueness of cultures. It is one of the constitutive elements of global cultural diversity. The dissemination of intangible cultural heritage not only emphasizes cultural rights at the micro level but also holds significant importance in constructing social structures.

This paper adopts empathy as a value framework and delves into the field of the game "Genshin Impact" to discuss the cross-cultural transmission issues of intangible cultural heritage within the context of digital technology. By exploring the current situation of preservation, protection, inheritance, and dissemination of China's intangible cultural heritage, the study aims to propose feasible approaches within the digital landscape.

1.1 Geographical Marginalization and Cultural Sphere

The current global communication system, driven by technologies such as the internet, exhibits characteristics of equalization and decentralization. However, tracing its historical logic reveals that the internet and network communication have incorporated institutional power, resource-based power, and the concept of "knowledge is power" from traditional political power types^[3]. This complex integration has systematic implications for economic structures, power distribution, and meaning construction. Traditional authoritative institutions, policies and regulations, and organizational forms in social geography still significantly adapt within the internet system and remain connected to social reality.

Researchers have found a connection between traditional geopolitics and internet geopolitics as globalization accelerates. Geographically based cultural spheres, which are considered organic entities, encompass various cultural categories that fulfill human needs. These cultural spheres form and develop based on geographical relationships and can migrate to other regions once established. Cultural spheres have independent cultural clusters, and their movement involves all cultural categories, thereby revealing historical associations of culture between two regions^[4]. F. Granada further suggests that cultural spheres only indicate geographically manifested cultural associations, while the content lies within cultural clusters. In the cross-cultural context of the dissemination of Chinese ICH, if a certain intangible cultural element is taken as the center, the cultural cluster it constitutes can serve as the essential content for dissemination.

1.2 Communication from the Perspective of Cultural Sphere

Regarding the diffusion of cultural circles, Braj B. Kachru proposed the theory of "three concentric circles of English spread." He used three concentric circles to describe the spread of English: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. Expanding upon this concept and considering the characteristics of cultural communication, we propose a three-circle communication model.

Based on the "communication distance" of intangible cultural heritage, we divide the dissemination of Chinese intangible cultural heritage into the Inner Circle, Outer Circle, Expanding Circle, and Transnational Cultural Circle. The "communication distance" refers to the geographical relationship of the original region where intangible cultural heritage is disseminated. In the digital communication era represented by the internet, the Inner Circle represents the place of origin for intangible cultural heritage and embodies a culturally contextualized understanding. The Outer Circle refers to the East Asian cultural sphere, which has been influenced by Chinese civilization and shares relatively similar cultural contexts.^[5] The Expanding Circle encompasses all other regions and countries, where the connection to Chinese civilization is weaker, and there is a lack of culturally contextualized understanding of Chinese intangible cultural heritage. The Transnational Cultural Circle refers to a special cultural sphere, mainly referring to overseas Chinese cultural communities. Analyzing this circle presents complexities as it includes individuals with a Chinese cultural background whose socialization process occurs outside of China and who receive cultural training within a Western cultural framework, thus having both Chinese and Western characteristics in terms of emotional identification and cultural understanding.

Regarding the dynamic process of cultural dissemination, we believe that "breaking the circle" of cultural dissemination needs to be done within the communication system, establishing a cross-cultural communication system outside the capitalist system, and constructing a framework for the dissemination of ICH based on communication theories and discursive strategies. On a micro level, strategic innovations should focus on these two aspects, employing empathetic communication strategies and utilizing multimodal discourse to achieve dissemination goals. Additionally, attention should be given to the phenomenon of cultural discount in the dissemination process, breaking down cultural barriers in online spaces, and promoting the concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind."

1.3 The Characteristic of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Classification of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Intangible cultural heritage in China represents traditional historical, cultural, artistic, scientific, and other values. These representational elements of ICH are established within the vertical development context of Chinese society, exhibiting ethnic characteristics. For a particular type of intangible cultural heritage, its representational elements, related cultural environment, and cultural significance constitute a cultural cluster, and the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage is essentially the dissemination of this cultural cluster.^[6]

However, due to the horizontal (spatial) and vertical (diversity) aspects of the cultural environment that generates representational elements, bridging the gap of understanding is necessary to achieve the desired dissemination effect. Therefore, the effectiveness of dissemination needs to be examined. The presentation of the relevant cultural environment provides a "reasonable" context for cultural communication. In addition, creating proximate texts promotes the sharing of cultural significance in dissemination and provides contemporary cultural value for the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

2 Discourse Strategies in the ACGT Framework

2.1 Rationality of Gamified Pathways

"The most wonderful aspect of mass communication lies in allowing readers to immerse themselves in subjective games." Games and communication are closely related, as games themselves are a form of communication behavior, and communication inherently contains the genes of gamification. As a gene of communication, gamification aligns well with the "user-centered" approach of the post-internet era, which emphasizes the individual's subjective consciousness under media communication logic and presents an "individual perspective." Additionally, gamified communication provides a sense of "presence".^[7] For the transmission of intangible cultural heritage, gamification can effectively integrate collective values and individual experiences, and to some extent recreate a "cultural space."

The Chinese original game "Genshin Impact" is a prime example of cross-cultural gaming from China, causing a qualitative change in the reputation of domestic mobile games overseas. Within just one year of its release, "Genshin Impact" has been translated into multiple languages and distributed in 175 countries and regions. It was hailed as the "most mentioned game on Twitter in 2021." Based on the analysis of Genshin Impact's successful international expansion, this article provides insights that can be applied to the digital transmission of intangible cultural heritage.

2.2 Applicability of ACGT in Empathetic Communication

Empathy refers to an individual's ability to understand another person's unique experiences and respond to them. It enables a person to sympathize with another and act altruistically. Empathy is generally considered an innate human ability rooted in genetics. It is not an emotion or feeling but a natural capability. Within the concept of a human community, empathetic communication is seen as a primary mode of communication. In international communications centered around the idea of a human community, communication practices need to start from specific contexts and find factors that can be shared by all audiences, thus invoking their enthusiasm and initiative. ^[8]"Common 'action' requires shared 'knowledge,' and the 'harmony' of interests requires cultural 'understanding'," which in turn cannot be achieved without emotional engagement.^[9]

In May 2022, Chinese scholars Shi Anbin and Liu Changyu analyzed the international communication elements of the Digital Silk Road from four perspectives: articulation, common good, global impact, and technology (ACGT). Specifically: "A" represents articulation, rooted in the field of cultural studies, which refers to the integration of local culture and the embedding of social mechanisms. "C" represents common good, referring to the shared goals and values of all members, which, in the context of global communication, can be understood as the common pursuit of a better future for all humanity. "G" represents global impact, aiming to shape global influence through "inclusive globalization." "T" represents technology, encompassing its development and dissemination.^[10] Through articulation and common good, communicators can achieve

emotional resonance with cross-cultural audiences through empathy, while global impact and technology seek new cognitive understanding and action feedback. Based on these ACGT elements, this article analyzes the implementable pathways for cross-cultural transmission of intangible cultural heritage through gamified approaches.

3 The Transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Genshin Impact

3.1 Intertextuality and Contextualization

According to Hall, intertextuality signifies a form of connection that unifies different elements under certain conditions. This connection is not necessary, definitive, absolute, or intrinsic. Intertextuality brings together diverse elements to form a "differentiated unity" under specific historical conditions and contexts. Each element of human communication practice is relatively autonomous and a product of contextualized practice, without an inherent unity among them. Cross-cultural transmission operates as a contextualized process of "transcultural communication," where cultural features of the transmitting party merge with the cultural values and real-life contexts of the target destination, creating a communicative pattern that adapts to local needs creatively.

In the cross-cultural transmission of ICH in Genshin Impact, the game content revolves around the fictional space of the "Teyvat" continent. Virtual nations within the game such as "Liyue," "Inazuma," and "Sumeru" are constructed based on real-world countries and cultural spheres. For example, Liyue corresponds to Chinese territorial culture, making it the primary setting for the transmission of Chinese ICH. Furthermore, the main entry point into the Genshin Impact game world is through the coherent narrative progression of the "main quests." This creates a form of intertextuality on two levels.

On one hand, it combines the concepts of real-space cultural field and virtual-space cultural field, enabling a closer connection between different real-life cultural spheres and their representation in the game space. When transmitting intangible cultural heritage, players can transform the content they encounter in Genshin Impact into knowledge applicable to real-life contexts. In designing the "Liyue" game scene, Genshin Impact incorporates Chinese ICH elements such as lanterns and storytelling. For example, in the main quest "Farewell, Archaic Lord," the character Zhongli utilizes the element of "kites" during a ceremony for the Geo Archon.

When game content migrates to another medium, the attraction established within the game space and the empathetic connection fostered through shared experiences drive a deeper understanding of heterogeneous media content. For instance, during the specific time-limited event known as the "Lantern Rite Festival," players can enjoy traditional Chinese shadow puppetry performances with the children from Liyue. Simultaneously, outside of the game, Genshin Impact releases a documentary series called "Glimpses of Other Worlds" that focuses on another type of ICH, showcasing significant responses from international audiences.

On the other hand, the main storyline of Genshin Impact features a universally relatable narrative structure that seeks an emotional "common denominator" among different cultural circles. For example, the sibling relationship serves as both an emotional clue and motivation within the main plot. However, the "game localization" is culturally dominated by Chinese perspectives, incorporating certain Chinese characteristics into the narrative design. This balance creates a smoother gaming experience. In the main quest "Farewell, Archaic Lord," the collective effort to protect the Guili Assembly demonstrates a spirit of resilience and solidarity.

During specific periods, Genshin Impact regularly hosts game events in fixed locations. For example, the "Lantern Rite Festival" coincides with the Spring Festival season. In the game scene featuring the Lantern Rite Festival in Liyue, numerous traditional Chinese accommodation scenes are displayed, including lanterns and the color red. Players can also engage in interactive gameplay and complete story quests during the event, such as the "Flame Illuminating the Sea" thematic activity that challenges players to create fireworks. This provides a feasible pathway for spreading "cultural space" type intangible heritage games.

Language translation plays a significant role in the transmission of intangible cultural heritage as it aims to achieve effective communication. External promotion translation belongs to the category of external communication and inherently involves cross-cultural transmission. Only by following the laws of communication can promotional translation achieve favorable propagation results. The game settings of Genshin Impact provide players with thirteen language options, including Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, English, Korean, Japanese, Spanish, French, Russian, Thai, Vietnamese, German, Indonesian, and Portuguese. In terms of voiceover, there are Chinese, English, Japanese, and Korean options. This covers the major regions and audiences targeted for international game dissemination. The combination of language translation and voiceover provides players from different cultural spheres with a sense of proximity, creating a better gaming environment for the transmission of intangible heritage.

3.2 Common Good

The common good refers to the goals and values pursued collectively by all members of a community. It is not a simple accumulation of individual interests but rather a shared experience formed during collective participation and understanding of shared goals. At the global level, the common good can be understood

The process of playing intangible cultural heritage games contributes to the formation of players' collective memory. Genshin Impact combines "narrative" and "gameplay" to establish players' basic understanding of Chinese ICH. Motivated by the reward mechanism, players first watch the narrative and participate in the design phase of intangible cultural heritage games. The narrative is designed to be unskippable, requiring players to follow character dialogues to progress through the story. This part provides value and emotional cognition for the overall theme. Following the narrative, players engage in intangible cultural heritage games, which mainly involve experiential content. Through these games, players develop a basic understanding of ICH and emotionally resonate with the interaction between gameplay and narrative. The narrative

game modes can be categorized into "narrative-first, gameplay-second" and "narrative-first, gameplay-interlaced." For example, in Genshin Impact's "Lantern Rite" event in 2023, the "Dreams of Blossoms" activity introduces the narrative of shadow puppetry through dialogues, then allows players to control the shadow puppets to solve puzzles, reinforcing the impression of shadow puppetry as an ICH through interactive actions.

Genshin Impact designs the main background music based on the country setting, with different countries corresponding to music styles from their respective real-world cultural spheres. When designing Liyue's music, the game selected unique and distinctly Chinese melodies, blending Western orchestral music with traditional Chinese elements. Instruments such as flutes, erhus, and pipas were used to achieve a perfect fusion of Chinese folk music and symphonic music, thereby bridging the aesthetic gap caused by cultural heterogeneity. The enhanced ability to recognize Chinese instruments through auditory experiences, combined with the repeated stimulation of regional and musical elements, constructs distinctive auditory symbols for identification.

To promote traditional Chinese opera culture, Genshin Impact combines character background narratives with storylines and introduces a video segment of a traditional Chinese opera song called "The Divine Maiden Splits the View" in the main storyline. This integrates Chinese opera elements into the game, creating the "Liyue Opera." The video has gained over 30 million views worldwide.

3.3 Global Influence

The characteristics of global influence are mainly reflected in the following three aspects: First, the communication entities transcend national boundaries and accommodate diverse communication subjects. Second, it explores the meaning of international communication in the context of globalization and a global village, without solely emphasizing the satisfaction of specific national interests. Third, it emphasizes the free flow of information and symbols across national borders, opposes information hegemony, and extends its theoretical perspective to the "world of light and shadow beyond the Western streetlights," paying attention to the communication practices and theoretical traditions of countries around the world. It breaks the binary opposition between dominant and marginalized cultures. Genshin Impact's portrayal of intangible cultural heritage not only emphasizes the uniqueness of specific communities but also promotes equal exchange in cultural narratives. While highlighting Chinese intangible cultural heritage and other cultural forms, it also strives to create excellent cultural features of other "nations" from the perspective of "sharing" in cultural dissemination.

3.4 Technology

The development of international communication is closely tied to advancements in digital technology and multiple empowerment. Technological advancement is the driving force behind the Digital Silk Road and serves as the foundation for connecting and enabling the aforementioned elements to function together. Technology serves as the infrastructure for Genshin Impact's dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. It sup-

ports improved visual effects and increased interactive operations, facilitating the further immersion of players and enhancing their sense of presence.

4 Conclusion

The cross-cultural dissemination of ICH faces various challenges. The generation path of intangible cultural heritage exhibits both horizontal and vertical differences, and its cultural forms are diverse. There are also differences in categorization between countries. During the dissemination process, cultural forms to some extent determine the limitations of path selection. Multimodal approaches can provide a relatively complete context for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. However, some intangible cultural products do not fit well with the perceptual experiences brought by digital media such as the Internet, requiring necessary translation.

In the specific context of digital development and global competition, the diffusion of intangible cultural heritage requires a tight grasp on emotional factors. By employing cross-cultural communication methods, actively shaping core values, and promoting local development, it can achieve empathy based on shared beliefs and experiences. Building on the concept of a community with a shared future for humanity, providing globally shared information products and leveraging core technologies to explore new avenues of dissemination may be an important approach for expanding the dissemination of cultural heritage through games in the future.

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