The Role of Games in Cultural Dissemination: A Comparative Analysis of Multilingual Reviews

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of video games in cultural dissemination through a comparative analysis of four culturally representative titles: *Black Myth: Wukong*(Chinese mythology, China-developed), *Total War: THREE KINGDOMS*(Chinese history, UK/Japan-developed), *Ghost of Tsushima* (Japanese culture, USA-developed), and *Red Dead Redemption 2* (American culture, USA-developed). By collecting and analyzing multilingual (Chinese, Japanese, and English) player reviews from Steam using co-occurrence network analysis (KH Coder), this research explores nuanced differences in player focus, cultural engagement, and perceptions of cultural narratives. Findings reveal that Chinese and Japanese players often demonstrate strong familiarity, appreciation, and deep engagement with culturally proximate or familiar narratives, though gameplay mechanics remain important. For instance, Chinese players showed strong cultural pride and engagement with *Black Myth: Wukong*, while Japanese players highly appreciated the cultural depiction in *Ghost of Tsushima*. In contrast, English-speaking players generally prioritize gameplay mechanics and overall game experience, showing more limited explicit engagement with the cultural backgrounds of foreign-themed games, unless the depicted culture is highly familiar (as observed with *Red Dead Redemption 2*). These patterns highlight the complex interplay of cultural proximity, developer origin, genre, and narrative appeal in shaping the cross-cultural reception and dissemination potential of video games.

Keywords

Cultural Dissemination, Video Games, Multilingual Reviews, Cross-Cultural Communication

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the channels for cultural dissemination have significantly diversified, with video games rapidly emerging as a potent and influential medium for

transmitting cultural values, aesthetics, and narratives across national borders. As Professor Cao Shule highlighted at the 2024 China Game Industry Annual Conference, the international success of games, particularly from nations like China seeking to expand their global cultural footprint, hinges on a sophisticated blend of unique gameplay experiences and profound cultural integration. The highly anticipated title Black Myth: Wukong, for example, by embedding traditional Chinese landscapes, artifacts, weaponry, and mythological narratives from "Journey to the West," aims to showcase the unique charm of Chinese culture while simultaneously sparking global interest.

However, the extent and nature of this cultural dissemination are not uniform and depend heavily on how diverse global audiences receive and interpret these cultural elements. Player reception is a complex phenomenon shaped by numerous factors, including the player's own cultural background, their familiarity with the depicted culture ("cultural proximity"), the game's genre, narrative design,etc.

METHODS

Objects

This study conducts a comparative analysis of player reviews for four culturally significant video games:

1) *Black Myth: Wukong*: A domestically developed action RPG steeped in Chinese mythology.

2) *Total War: THREE KINGDOMS*: An internationally co-developed strategy game depicting China's Three Kingdoms era.

3) *Ghost of Tsushima*: An American-developed action-adventure game set in feudal Japan.

4) *Red Dead Redemption 2*: An American-developed open-world adventure portraying the American West.

Each game represents a different cultural background (Chinese, Japanese, American), allowing for a comparative analysis of how players respond to different cultural themes.

The games enable analysis of how players from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds respond to both their own and others' cultures in games, highlighting emotional engagement, cultural recognition, and interpretation.

Data Sources

Game Title	Date	Number of Chinese Reviews	Number of Japanese Reviews	Number of English Reviews
Black Myth: Wukong[1]	2025.8.20-2025.6.2（Chinese Reviews：2025.1.1-2025.6.2）	24555	426	48525
Ghost of Tsushima	2024.5.17-2025.6.2	3094	389	271786
Red Dead Redemption 2	2019.12.6-2025.6.2	3635	178	9931
Total War: THREE KINGDOMS	2019.5.23-202412.15	31544	95	15954

Table 1: Number of Player Reviews Collected from Steam

Analysis Method:

After preprocessing the reviews, KH Coder was used for cooccurrence network analysis. Reviews were analyzed in their original languages to better capture linguistic and emotional nuances.

ANALYSIS

Through the analysis of player discussion co-occurrence network graphs for the four games mentioned (*Total War: THREE KINGDOMS; Red Dead Redemption 2; Ghost of Tsushima and Black Myth: Wukong*), we can observe significant differences and some commonalities in the focus points, cultural engagement, and perceptions towards domestic and foreign cultural narratives among players from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

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[1] * Due to the large volume of Chinese reviews for *Black Myth: Wukong*, only 24,555 reviews used between January 1 and June 2, 2025, were included in the analysis.

Chinese Players:
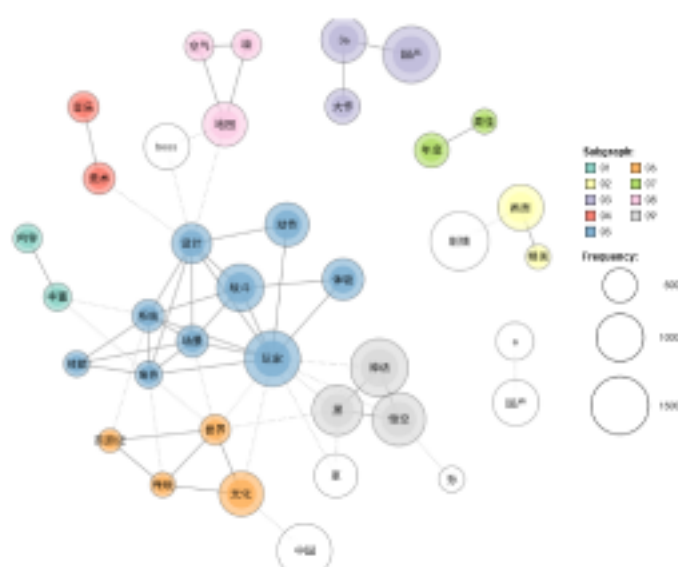
Figure 1: *Black Myth: Wukong* – co-occurrence network Graph of Chinese Player Reviews

For the domestically produced *Black Myth: Wukong*, which has a deep Chinese cultural background, Chinese players showed extremely high enthusiasm. The Figure 1 indicates that discussions were densely centered around keywords such as 神话 (Mythology), 悟空 (Wukong), 西游记 (Journey to the West), 国产 (Domestically produced), and 文化 (Culture).This reflects a profound identification with local cultural elements and significant pride in high-quality domestic game productions.
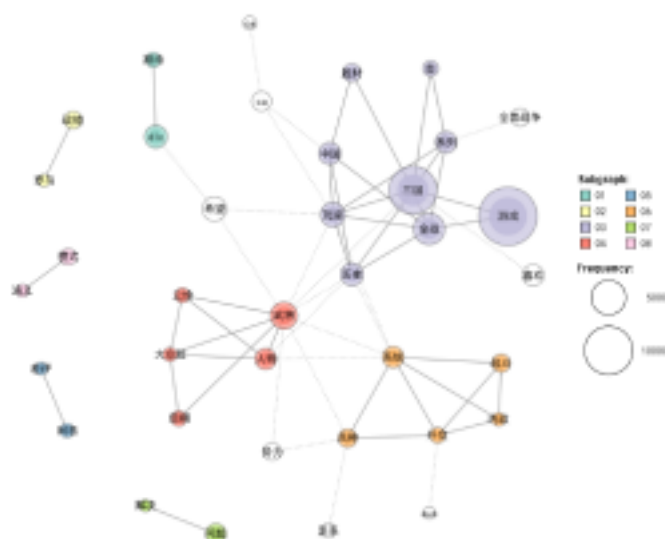
**Figure 2:** *Total War: THREE KINGDOMS* – co-occurrence network Graph of Chinese Player Reviews

For *Total War: THREE KINGDOMS*, players to show strong interest in cultural elements like 三国 (Three Kingdoms), 历史 (History), and 武将 (Generals).because of the

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game's high degree of restoration and detailed portrayal of the historical background that, even with overseas developers, Chinese players' discussions deeply focused on the story background and historical connotations presented by the game.
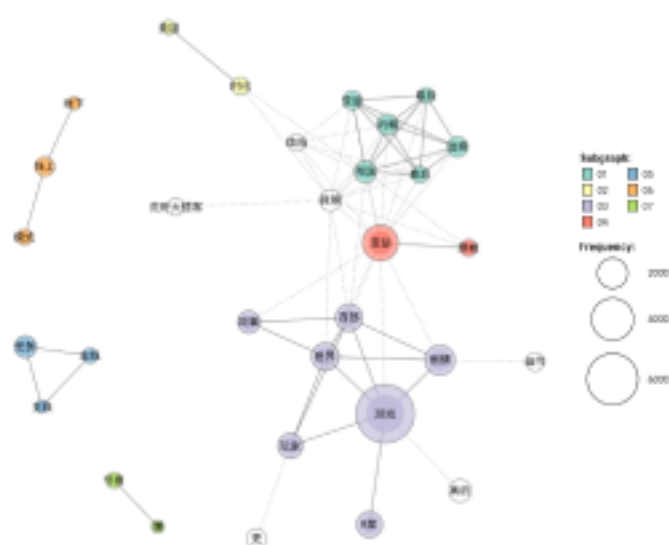
Figure 3 *Red Dead Redemption 2* – co-occurrence network Graph of Chinese Player Reviews

When experiencing games with non-native cultural backgrounds, such as *Red Dead Redemption 2*, Chinese players deeply focused on the core character (亚瑟 Arthur) and his 剧情 (Story) and 救赎 (Redemption).Although the "American era" was mentioned, players' attention was more drawn to the specific narrative storyline and characters within the game world.
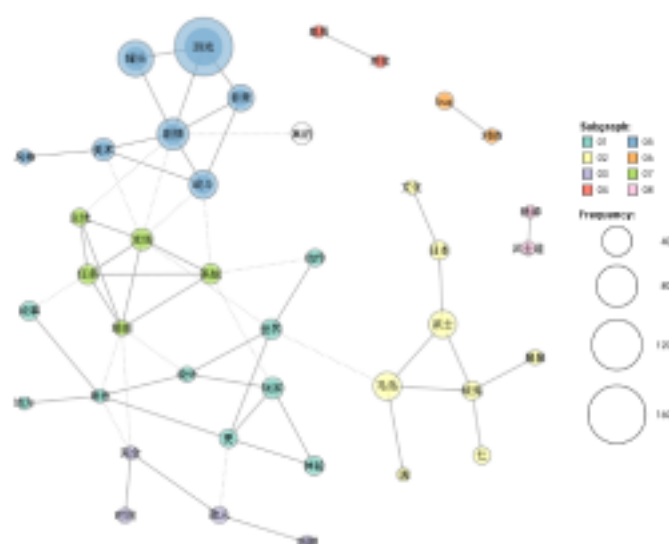
Figure 4:*Ghost of Tsushima* – co-occurrence network Graph of Chinese Player Reviews

For *Ghost of Tsushima*, they clearly identified and discussed elements like 日本 (Japan), 武士 (Samurai/Warrior), and 文化 (Culture), showing awareness and interest in neighboring cultural elements.

Priority is given to cultural connotation, historical background, and narrative, especially for works related to their own culture or high-quality domestic productions. For excellent foreign cultural works, they are easily attracted by strong character development and engaging plots.

English-Speaking Players:

In all four games, the discussion co-occurrence network Figures of English-speaking players showed an overwhelming focus on universal game elements such as "game," "ary；battle（combat）," "story," "gameplay," and "diplomacy."

Figure 5:*Total War: THREE KINGDOMS* – co-occurrence network Graph of English Player Reviews
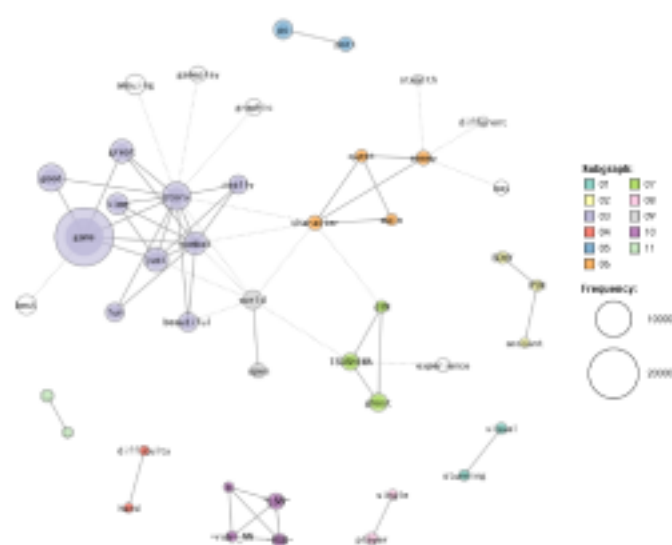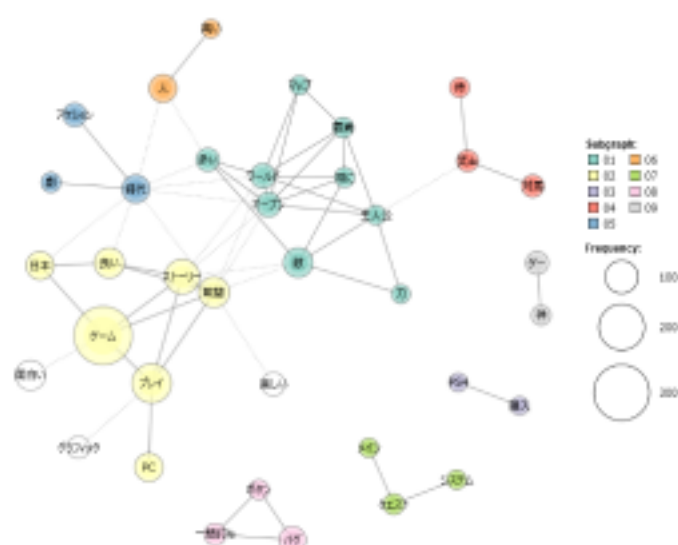

Figure 6:*Ghost of Tsushima* – co-occurrence network Graph of English Player Reviews

6

Figure 7:*Black Myth: Wukong* – co-occurrence network Graph of English Player Reviews

For games with non-native cultural backgrounds do not mainstream in English-speaking cultures(e.g., *Total War: THREE KINGDOMS; Ghost of Tsushima; Black Myth: Wukong*), culturally specific terms (like "Three Kingdoms," "samurai," "Wukong" "Journey to the West") were present but generally less central and frequent in the network than core gameplay terms.

Figure 8:*Red Dead Redemption 2* – co-occurrence network Graph of English Player Reviews

The apparent exception was *Red Dead Redemption 2*, a game deeply portraying American culture. By looking at the graph, it's clear that the connections between keywords are not as tight as in the previous 3 games. 'game' is still the focus, 'story' also appears on the periphery.However, the keywords such as 'western' and 'cowboy', which are frequently mentioned in the comments of Chinese and Japanese players, did not appear in the comments of English players.
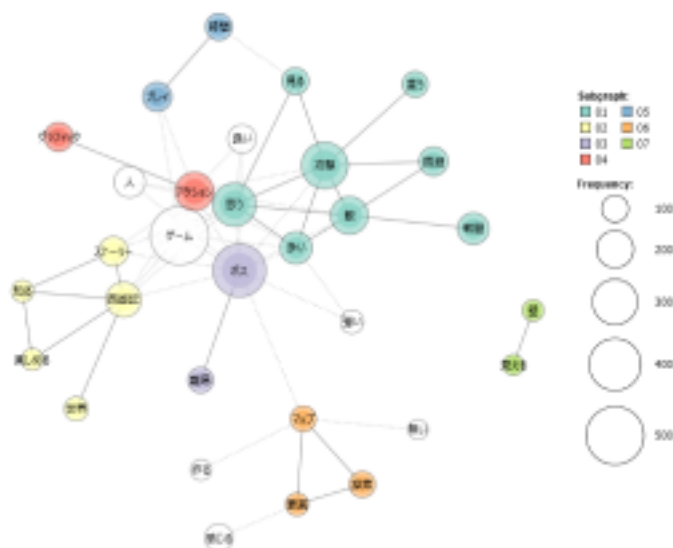
Japanese Players:

Figure 9:_Ghost of Tsushima_ – co-occurrence network Graph of Japanese Player Reviews

For _Ghost of Tsushima,_ which depicts their own culture, Japanese players gave high praise for its respectful portrayal of elements like 侍 (Samurai), 武士 (Warrior/Samurai), 日本 (Japan), and 時代 (Era/Period), with cultural elements closely integrated with the game experience.
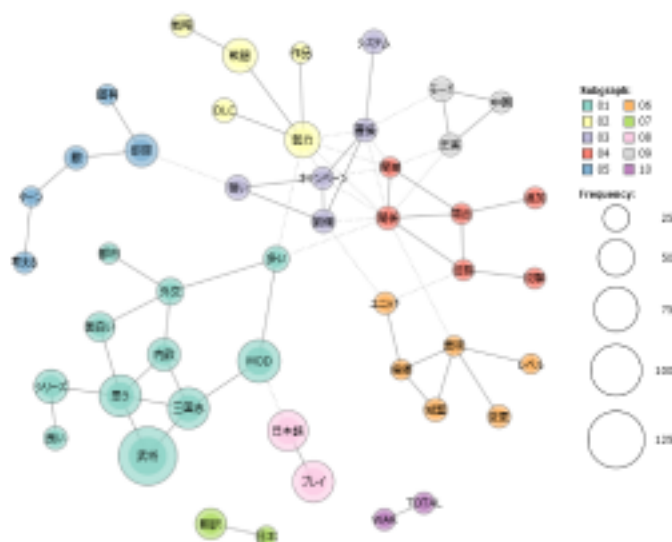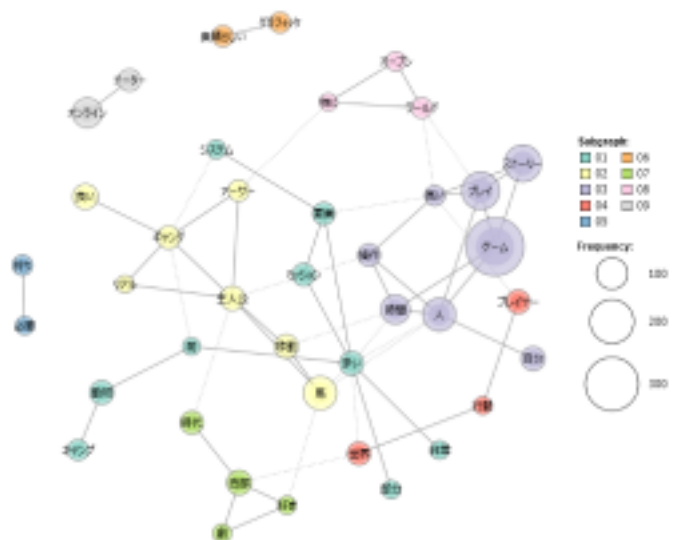

Figure 10:_Total War: THREE KINGDOMS_ – co-occurrence network Graph of Japanese Player Reviews

Figure 11:*Black Myth: Wukong* – co-occurrence network Graph of Japanese Player Reviews

For games with familiar East Asian cultural backgrounds, such as 武 将 (Warlords/Generals) and 三国志 (Records of the Three Kingdoms) in Total War: THREE KINGDOMS, and 西遊記 (Journey to the West in *Black Myth: Wukong*, Japanese players showed high recognition and affinity, enjoying the cultural narratives. At the same time, for action-heavy games like *Black Myth: Wukong*, their discussions about ボス (Boss) and アクション (Action) were also central.

Figure 12:*Red Dead Redemption 2* – co-occurrence network Graph of Japanese Player Reviews

When experiencing Western cultural contexts like *Red Dead Redemption 2*, Japanese players were similarly captivated by the protagonist アーサー (Arthur) and his スト

ーリー (Story), demonstrating cross-cultural appreciation for excellent character development and storytelling.

Discussion

Game	Chinese Players	English-Speaking Players	Japanese Players
Black Myth: Wukong	Highly enthusiastic, discussions centered on Mythology (神话), Wukong (悟空), Journey to the West (西游记), Domestically produced (国产), and Culture (文化), showing pride in domestic production.	Focused on universal game elements like "game," "ary," "battle (combat)," "story," and "gameplay." Culturally specific terms were less central.	Showed high recognition and affinity for the Journey to the West (西遊記) cultural narrative. Discussions about Boss (ボス) and Action (アクション) were also central, indicating engagement with gameplay.
Total War: THREE KINGDOMS	Strong identification with cultural elements like Three Kingdoms (三国), History (历史), and Generals (武将) due to the game's detailed historical portrayal.	Focused on universal game elements like "game," "ary," "battle (combat)," "story," and "diplomacy." "Three Kingdoms" was present but less central.	High recognition and affinity for familiar East Asian cultural background, including Warlords/Generals (武将) and Records of the Three Kingdoms (三国志). Enjoyed the cultural narratives.
Red Dead Redemption 2	Deep focus on the core character (Arthur 亚瑟), Story (剧情), and Redemption (救赎). Attention was on the specific narrative and characters, with less emphasis on the broader "American era."	Focused on universal game elements like "game" and "story." Connections between keywords were less tight. Keywords like "western" and "cowboy" did not appear.	Captivated by the protagonist Arthur (アーサー) and his Story (ストーリー), demonstrating cross-cultural appreciation for character development and storytelling.
Ghost of Tsushima	Clearly identified and discussed elements like Japan (日本), Samurai/Warrior (武士), and Culture (文化), showing awareness and interest in neighboring cultural elements. Priority given to cultural aspects.	Focused on universal game elements like "game," "ary," "battle (combat)," "story," and "gameplay." "Samurai" and "Japan" were present but generally less central.	High praise for the respectful portrayal of their own culture, including Samurai (侍), Warrior/Samurai (武士), Japan (日本), and Era/Period (時代), with cultural elements closely integrated.

1. Impact of Cultural Proximity:

Chinese and Japanese players show stronger cultural immersion and attention to details of cultural elements when faced with games related to their own culture (or the broader East Asian cultural sphere). For instance, Chinese players' pride in the cultural details and "domestically produced" status of *Black Myth: Wukong*, Japanese players' resonance with the "samurai" culture in Ghost of Tsushima, and both groups' familiarity with historical figures in *Total War: THREE KINGDOMS*.In contrast, while English-speaking players recognize these cultural markers in games foreign to their mainstream culture, their discussion tends to lean more towards universal game experiences.

2. Gameplay as a Universal Focus (especially for English players):

All players, regardless of language, focus on core gameplay elements like combat, missions, and system design. However, this is particularly prominent and consistent as the primary focus for English-speaking players.

For Chinese and Japanese players, gameplay discussions are often intertwined with discussions of cultural background and narrative experience. Cultural elements can significantly enhance or influence their evaluation of gameplay.

3. Cross-cultural Appeal of Narrative and Characters:

Red Dead Redemption 2 serves as an example where the protagonist "Arthur's" compelling story resonated strongly and led to deep emotional engagement across Chinese, Japanese, and English-speaking player groups. This indicates that excellent narratives and character development can transcend cultural barriers and touch upon shared human emotions.

OUTLOOK AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is limited by its small sample of four games and the lack of control over game genre, which may influence player responses to cultural content. future studies will compare games with similar cultural themes but different genres, or games in the same genre with diverse cultural narratives.

Future research will address these limitations through a mixed-methods approach. Planned qualitative interviews will explore how players from different cultural backgrounds perceive cultural elements, the role of developer origin, and the sense of cultural authenticity. Quantitative surveys will then help measure these perceptions across a broader sample, examining factors like narrative engagement, gameplay preferences.

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