

Research on the Development Trends of Open-World Anime Games in the Chinese Market

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Abstract: With the continuous development of digital entertainment, open-world anime-style games have shown a significant growth trend in the Chinese market. This study focuses on analyzing the driving factors behind this phenomenon and its impact on the gaming industry, particularly how anime culture plays a role in game design and meeting player demands. Utilizing methods of literature review and market research, this paper delves into the characteristics of anime culture, the development of open-world games, and how their integration innovates the gaming experience, attracting a large number of players. The research questions concentrate on how this cultural and technological integration can promote innovative game design and explore its specific impact on the Chinese market. The study finds that anime culture not only enhances the narrative and visual presentation of games but also drives market expansion by meeting the needs of young players for gameplay, narrative, and emotional engagement with characters. Ultimately, this research points out that a deep understanding of the interaction between cultural elements and market demands is crucial for developing commercially successful games.

Keywords: Open-world anime games, ACG, cultural impact, cultural appropriation, Chinese market.

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of the gaming industry has not only revolutionized the way people consume entertainment but also resulted in significant growth in the niche market of anime style open-world games, particularly within the Chinese gaming landscape. While extensive research exists on the development of open-world games and the influence of anime culture, there remains a dearth of exploration at the intersection of these two fields, especially within the Chinese context. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on the emerging trend of anime-style open-world games in China, seeking to understand both their popularity drivers and unique challenges they encounter. The specific research questions encompass understanding technological advancements and market demands that have facilitated the rise of these games, as well as examining how the fusion of anime culture and open-world gameplay appeals to Chinese gamers. To tackle these questions comprehensively, the study employs a combination of literature review and market analysis to examine the evolution of this genre. This research focuses on filling a gap in the current academic discourse and provides insights into future developments and strategies for game developers. By understanding the current

trends and potential challenges, this study offers recommendations for leveraging anime culture in creating successful games in the global market.

2. The Current State of Open-World Anime-Style Games in the Chinese Market

Anime culture, originating from Japan, primarily refers to cultural phenomena in the fields of animation, manga, and video games, elements that together form a unique cultural sphere [1]. In China, anime culture has evolved from just a form of entertainment into a widespread social phenomenon, deeply beloved by the younger generation. Its core characteristics include highly imaginative content, distinct visual styles, and complex character and plot development. Additionally, anime culture emphasizes community interaction and user-generated content, making fans not just consumers but also creators of content.

2.1. Overview of the Chinese Market and the Rise of Anime Games

China stands as one of the largest gaming markets globally, witnessing a meteoric rise in the popularity of anime-style, or anime games—a genre that has significantly expanded in recent years, bolstered by the country's economic growth and increasing acceptance of diverse cultural themes. The surge in popularity for such games was notably catalyzed by the phenomenal success of *Genshin Impact*, an open-world game that has captured the attention of millions across China and beyond.

The widespread adoption of smartphones has been a critical factor in the rapid expansion of the mobile gaming sector, where anime games have found a particularly fertile ground. These games are characterized by their distinctive artistic style, which draws heavily on the rich traditions of anime and manga, and their narrative techniques that often incorporate intricate storylines and complex character development, resonating well with a young, tech-savvy audience.

Furthermore, the rise of anime games in China can also be attributed to the sophisticated localization strategies employed by developers, which ensure cultural relevance and appeal [2]. Games like *Genshin Impact* leverage advanced gaming technologies and integrate cultural motifs and storytelling elements that reflect a deep understanding of local preferences and historical contexts. This tailored approach has enabled anime games to carve out a significant niche in China's gaming landscape, making them a dynamic and influential part of the entertainment industry in the region.

2.2. Case Study of Representative Open-World Anime-Style Games

Among the many successful anime-style open-world games, *Genshin Impact* stands out as a quintessential example. Developed by the Chinese company miHoYo, the game blends anime art style with open-world gameplay mechanics, offering in-depth character role-playing, extensive world exploration, and a compelling narrative. MiHoYo's earlier venture, *Honkai Impact 3rd*, a 3D action role-playing game released in 2016, had already garnered a dedicated following in China due to its advanced graphics and unique storytelling.

Since its launch in September 2020, *Genshin Impact* has seen remarkable success both in the Chinese market and globally. In its first year alone, the game generated approximately \$2 billion in player spending, setting a new standard for mobile gaming revenue. By its second anniversary, *Genshin Impact* had reached \$3.7 billion in global revenue, making it the third highest-grossing mobile game worldwide during that period. Notably, China was the game's largest market, contributing \$1.2 billion, or about 33% of its total revenue [3-4]. The game supports cross-platform play between PC and mobile devices, leveraging the technological expertise developed during *Honkai Impact 3rd* to deliver stunning visuals on mobile. This cross-platform functionality, combined with effective marketing strategies, led to *Genshin Impact* exceeding expectations rapidly. Details on the marketing strategies will be discussed later in the text.

The success of *Genshin Impact* not only showcases the innovative capabilities of Chinese game developers but also underscores the competitive edge of anime-style games in the global market.

3. The Analysis of Driving Factors

Anime-style games, characterized by their utilization of toon shading technology, present a unique blend of visual aesthetics that resemble 2D Japanese anime while employing 3D models. Toon shading offers several advantages: firstly, it circumvents the limitations of realistic rendering, which, despite technological advancements, still struggles to achieve a completely lifelike appearance of human characters. In contrast, toon shading can flawlessly replicate the distinctive visual style of anime. Additionally, for audiences familiar with anime, playing games that visually echo this style can enhance a sense of familiarity and immersion.

In the case of *Honkai Impact 3rd*, the developer miHoYo invested heavily in toon shading technology, which significantly elevated the game's visual presentation beyond that of its peers, including many console games. This exceptional graphical quality quickly garnered popularity among a niche audience. However, it did not achieve as widespread recognition as its successor, *Genshin Impact*. This phenomenon suggests that while "*Honkai Impact 3rd*" marked significant graphical advancements, superior graphical fidelity alone is not sufficient to break out in a broader market.

Genshin Impact further advanced in visual technology, which may imply that while outstanding image quality can contribute to a game's success, it is not the sole factor for an anime-style game to transcend its niche boundaries. This analysis indicates that the broader acceptance of *Genshin Impact* may also be attributed to other strategic elements beyond graphics, such as storytelling, gameplay mechanics, and global marketing strategies.

The surging demand for anime-style games in the Chinese market can be attributed to evolving market needs influenced by accumulated aesthetic preferences. This trend is particularly evident in the gaming sector, where visual and narrative styles borrowed from Japanese anime have resonated strongly with global audiences. Aesthetic accumulation refers to the gradual integration and familiarity with anime characteristics over decades, leading to a broader acceptance and demand for games that mimic this style. This aesthetic preference, shaped through decades of cultural contact and accumulation, is increasingly influencing the design and marketing strategies of new game releases [5]. The combination of game development with these aesthetic preferences not only meets existing demands but also creates an environment that introduces new users to anime-style games, further perpetuating this cycle of demand and supply.

Simultaneously, the Chinese market has long lacked high-quality games that are meticulously crafted in terms of storylines, visual effects, and interactivity. This gap has led to a pent-up demand among Chinese gamers for games that offer not only excellent graphics and gameplay but also an engaging storyline [6]. The success of *Genshin Impact* in the Chinese market can largely be attributed to its effectiveness in meeting these needs. The game employs a Hollywood-style narrative structure, which is easy to understand and attracts a wide audience, including those who typically do not watch anime.

This strategic narrative approach has been proven essential for enhancing the gaming experience of mainstream gamers, who, although not traditional anime viewers, can appreciate the visual art and compelling storyline of the game. *Genshin Impact* not only satisfies the desire for high-quality game content but also introduces the aesthetics of anime style to non-core anime fans, potentially cultivating a love for anime art style among a broader audience. This provides an engaging gaming experience for Chinese players and also facilitates widespread acceptance by international audiences. As such, *Genshin Impact* has become a significant player in the global market, partly leading the creation of new standards for game quality and shifting consumer expectations towards a preference for rich

narrative and visual content. This trend has already influenced future game development, encouraging more creators to attempt making anime-style games.

4. Market Strategies and Cultural Export

4.1. Analysis of Overseas Market Marketing Strategies

In the scholarly analysis of overseas marketing strategies, using *Genshin Impact* as an example, the game serves as a quintessential example of achieving significant international success through multifaceted marketing approaches. The game's promotional strategies were diverse and effectively tailored to global audiences.

Firstly, social media marketing played a pivotal role. miHoYo established multiple social media pages for *Genshin Impact* across platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. These channels were utilized to engage with a global player base by disseminating updates and character introductions, which enhanced fan engagement and retention.

Secondly, localization was crucial. *Genshin Impact* underwent extensive localization for various regions, involving professional voice actors for multiple languages beyond its original Chinese. In Japan, for instance, miHoYo developed a dedicated official webpage and conducted marketing communications in Japanese to captivate local players.

Collaborations with key opinion leaders (KOLs) were also instrumental. By partnering with well-known influencers on platforms like YouTube and Twitch, the game leveraged the KOLs' substantial reach to attract potential players through video content and live streams.

Additionally, participation in international gaming conventions, such as the Tokyo Game Show (TGS), allowed miHoYo to engage directly with core gamers by providing demos and thereby enhancing the game's brand visibility and stature.

The global promotion strategy of *Genshin Impact* was not regionally confined but was pan-channel, aiming for widespread global visibility and user growth. In specific regions like Akihabara, Japan, the game utilized massive offline advertising, tapping into the local anime culture with promotional activities at anime conventions and collaborations with famous voice actors. In Western markets, extensive offline advertising strategies included placing ads in iconic urban locations and collaborating with KOLs for social media content promotion on YouTube and Twitch.

These comprehensive strategies enabled *Genshin Impact* not only to expand its global influence but also to achieve remarkable commercial success, demonstrating the effectiveness of its diverse and adaptive marketing approaches.

4.2. Insights and Cultural Export

In the domain of cultural integration within video game design, *Genshin Impact* presents a compelling case study, demonstrating how traditional Chinese cultural elements can be seamlessly woven into game mechanics to enrich player experience and enhance narrative depth. The game incorporates architectural styles, attire, music, and festivities that are distinctly Chinese. For instance, the region of Liyue in the game draws inspiration from iconic Chinese natural landscapes such as Zhangjiajie and Huanglong, with background scores that feature traditional Chinese folk music and characters like Xiao who embody elements of Chinese folklore [7].

The game's storyline and character development are particularly notable for embedding Chinese traditional wisdom and values, thereby fostering a deeper emotional connection and understanding of the game's lore among players [2]. For example, the character Zhongli's promotional video (PV) not only highlights Chinese storytelling and martial arts culture but also integrates these elements to give players a rich cultural experience.

Furthermore, *Genshin Impact* employs a strategic blend of globalization and localization in its operations to cater to diverse cultural tastes across different geographical regions [8]. This approach is evident in its adaptation of regional background music and thematic settings that resonate locally while maintaining universal appeal. In Inazuma, traditional Japanese musical instruments are featured in the soundtrack, contrasting with Liyue, which showcases distinct Chinese characteristics.

This nuanced approach to cultural integration not only underscores the game's global strategy but also highlights the importance of local sensitivities in creating a universally engaging yet culturally respectful gaming environment. Such practices not only expand the game's global reach but also establish a model for incorporating cultural heritage into modern digital entertainment, thereby offering valuable insights for future developments in the gaming industry.

5. Challenges and Recommendations

As open-world anime-style games continue to expand in the Chinese and global markets, the technical challenges they face are also increasing. A large influx of homogenized games has flooded both domestic and international markets in a short period of time. These games, which are struggling to maintain player interest, are now facing the risk of shutting down. To maintain competitiveness, game developers must constantly seek technological innovations. On one hand, graphics rendering technology needs further improvement to support higher quality visual effects and more complex game environments.

The inclusion of a mild social system in "Genshin Impact" has infused the player community and game interactivity with enhanced vibrancy and playability [9]. However, the integration of more extensive or deeper social interactions within the framework of single-player open-world games remains an area ripe for exploration. Future iterations in the genre could benefit from examining how to effectively incorporate such mechanisms to further enrich player engagement and overall game dynamics.

On the other hand, the application of AI in games should be deepened, for instance, by enhancing the intelligence of NPC behaviors to provide more realistic interactive experiences. The emergence of large AI prediction models will enable players to interact more deeply with NPCs, providing a more immersive gaming experience. However, in existing cases, interactions with AI are mostly limited to text input and have not yet become an integral part of gameplay [10]. How to make AI NPCs genuinely influence the player's game world will be a key area for game developers to focus on in the future when enhancing gameplay.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the intricate dynamics of the Chinese gaming market, particularly focusing on the proliferation and impact of anime-style open-world games like *Genshin Impact*. The findings affirm that technological innovations, particularly in toon shading and cross-platform functionality, along with a keen understanding of market demands and cultural aesthetics, have significantly propelled the popularity of these games both domestically and internationally. Moreover, the study highlights the effectiveness of nuanced marketing strategies and deep cultural integration in achieving global reach while maintaining local relevance. *Genshin Impact* exemplifies this through its adept combination of global promotion and regional customization, leveraging cultural elements and narratives that resonate with diverse audiences. The game's success underscores the potential of culturally enriched gaming experiences to bridge global markets, showcasing the strength of cultural authenticity in global entertainment dissemination. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. For instance, the scope of data could be expanded to include longitudinal studies on player engagement and retention, which would offer deeper insights into the long-term

impact of cultural elements on global success. Future research could explore comparative analyses with other global markets and different genres of games to provide a broader understanding of cultural influence in the gaming industry. Moving forward, it is crucial for research to continue focusing on the dynamic interplay between technology, culture, and market strategies within the gaming industry. This not only facilitates a better comprehension of the broader implications of cultural integration in digital media but also aids in devising more effective approaches towards achieving global market penetration. Exploring these dimensions will contribute to the enrichment of the global gaming landscape, offering pathways for new innovations and market strategies.

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