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The development of video game industry and the construction of national image in the context of Trans-cultural diffusion

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Abstract:
As an indispensable component of a country's cultural strategic industries, the significance of China's electronic game industry in realizing socialist cultural diplomacy is self-evident. Taking the national image construction after the convening of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China as the theme, this paper explores the shaping of national image through the development of China's electronic game industry in the context of cross-cultural communication. It analyzes the characteristics of electronic games as a medium and their unique position in cultural communication, emphasizing the significant advantages of electronic games in the overseas promotion of ideological values, social survival methods, and popular cultural products. However, despite some achievements in this regard, China still faces difficulties and challenges. Therefore, this paper examines the issues faced by Chinese domestic electronic games in national image construction and proposes countermeasures to enhance the overseas influence of electronic games, supporting the goal of building a "credible, lovely, and respectable" national image put forward at the 20th National Congress.

Keywords:
Intercultural Communication; 20th National Congress; Video Games; Industry Development; National Image

1 The Significance of National Image Construction in the Context of the 20th National Congress

1.1The Leading Role of the 20th National Congress in National Image Construction

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China plays a pivotal role in guiding national image construction. This section will explore the specific leading role of the 20th National Congress in national image construction and analyze its significance and impact.

Firstly, the 20th National Congress has pointed out a new path for national image construction by clarifying development goals and directions. The report of the 20th National Congress emphasizes upholding the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, comprehensively implementing the thought of social-

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ism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, carrying forward the great founding spirit, being confident and self-reliant, adhering to the principle of maintaining the right path while making innovations, striving with vigor and perseverance, and unifying efforts to build an all-around moderately prosperous society in all respects and advance the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in an all-around way. This provides powerful spiritual motivation and value guidance for national image construction. Secondly, the 20th National Congress emphasizes the importance of cultural confidence, providing ideological and theoretical support for national image construction. The report underscores the significance of cultural confidence and points out the need to promote the prosperous development of socialist culture and enhance the attractiveness and influence of Chinese culture. This provides an internal support of cultural confidence for national image construction, enabling China to showcase its unique cultural charm on the international stage.

Therefore, the 20th National Congress plays a crucial leading role in national image construction. It provides clear development goals and directions for national image construction, emphasizes the importance of cultural confidence and technological innovation, and offers powerful motivation and support for national image shaping. Under the guidance of the 20th National Congress, China will continue to enhance its image and present a "credible, lovely, and admirable" national image in the international community.

1.2 The Potential of the Electronic Game Industry in National Image Construction

Currently, the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century, with increasingly close relationships among various parties. The establishment and dissemination of international images are no longer limited to traditional media such as radio, newspapers, and periodicals but have far exceeded the scope of media brands, penetrating deeply into people's lives. Compared to the past, which emphasized "rationality," "seriousness," and "emptiness" in political portrayal, the national image has undergone tremendous changes. Upon careful observation, it has become a more vivid, specific, and sensible group and society, closer to the real world. Merely adhering to old ways and passively engaging in international exchanges can only result in a shaped image. Therefore, seizing the right to speak, grasping the direction of national development, ensuring national benign development, and actively shaping a positive national image are essential requirements for ensuring that national development progresses in a positive direction.

As a creative product, the electronic game inherently carries strong literary colors and necessary entertainment and artistic characteristics. Whether it's the overall structure of the electronic game or the entire gameplay, people can perceive the outlook on life and moral concepts it advocates, thereby understanding the spiritual meaning behind it. Looking at the world market, the electronic game industry is currently dominated by enterprises from China, Japan, and Europe and the United States. Rapid development in the information field drives the booming development of electronic games and the electronic game cultural industry. China's profound history, spanning over five thousand years, provides abundant material for the creation of electronic games. Electronic games based on major historical events in China, incorporating modern technological elements, occupy an important proportion in the electronic game industry, such as the widely acclaimed "Chinese Paladin" series and "Guigu Bahuang" on the Steam game forum. Japanese electronic games also have their typical national characteristics, blending bushido and ninja culture, with the most famous being "Ghost of Tsushima" and "Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice," inspired by Akira Kurosawa films. Additionally, in recent years, the anime industry has spawned otaku culture, with Nintendo, the world's most famous game company,

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being a leader in this field. Classic European and American electronic games incorporate more of the essence of Western European civilization, such as "Kingdom Come: Deliverance" promoting knight culture and "Marvel's Avengers" series games filled with personal heroism. It can be seen that the cultural value of electronic games is gradually being explored.

Nowadays, young people spend a lot of time engaging with anime and games when accessing media. The author conducted interviews with classmates currently studying in South Korea, Japan, Canada, and the United Kingdom and learned that many young people abroad spend very little time watching TV and newspapers, with the most frequent engagement being with mobile media and electronic games, and their primary reason for accessing media is to watch game videos. This shows that the influence of electronic games on young people may have surpassed traditional media such as newspapers, TV, and movies. Compared to traditional media, electronic games, as a communication medium, have a broader promotional field, with less prominent political colors and educational nature, strong entertainment, and easy acceptance by the audience, making them significant in conveying social value awareness. Thus, in the modern social environment, electronic games are undoubtedly a good method for China's image construction.

2 Challenges Faced by Domestic Video Games in Constructing National Image

2.1 Challenges in Game Production Technology

Generally, the interactive ports for video games can be divided into three major categories: mobile phones, PCs (personal computers), and consoles. In the field of mobile games, thanks to inexpensive hardware, early adoption of 4G/5G communication technology, and a huge user market, many game companies in China have accumulated a solid technological foundation. Tencent Group, in particular, has become the world's most valuable gaming company with the help of mobile games. However, despite mobile games being the mainstream in today's gaming landscape, their high profitability is accompanied by low efficiency in cultural dissemination. According to the latest Global Gaming Market Report by Newzoo, popular mobile games from China, Japan, and Western countries are not well-received in other countries, resulting in disappointing revenues. Even products from leading companies, such as Tencent's "Honor of Kings" and Nintendo's "Dragalia Lost," cannot break the curse of struggling to succeed overseas. The report also indicates that compared to mobile games, 3A games are easier to export and gain fame, with a more mature system.

In the video game industry, 3A games refer to those developed with a substantial amount of money, resources, and time. The most renowned international gaming companies, such as Japan's Nintendo, France's Ubisoft, and the U.S.-based Rockstar Games, Microsoft, and Blizzard Entertainment, have decades of technical accumulation in this area. However, currently, there are only a handful of games in the Chinese market that meet international 3A standards. Even giant game companies like Tencent and NetEase lack experience in 3A game development. Last year, "Bright Memory: Infinite," developed by domestic independent game studio FYQD-Studio, was launched on various platforms. It cleverly combines ancient Chinese architecture, martial arts, and future sci-fi elements, and both its graphics and action reach 3A game production levels, earning widespread praise from players both domestically and internationally. However, due to the limited

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manpower of a single developer, its storyline is hollow, with only a four-hour gameplay, making it unable to compete with other games and losing the opportunity for international award nominations. A 3A game is usually comprehensive and can even be regarded as the most realistic projection of people's imagination of real life. 3A game development is a grand systematic project in the virtual world, and its extensive process poses significant challenges in the fields of science and technology, art, capital, management, and funding, which cannot be accomplished by individuals alone. As small workshops cannot produce large products like airplanes, ships, and aircraft, individuals or small groups cannot create 3A games. Behind big products is the support of a large industrial system; similarly, the birth of 3A games signifies the establishment of a large game industrial system.

2.2 Challenges in Cultural Connotation Expression

Edward Hall once proposed the concept of high- and low-context cultures. High-context cultures rely mainly on context to convey information, so both parties in communication have a pre-set information transmission program, such as shared customs, values, and social axioms. In contrast, low-context cultures rely mainly on information encoding to convey information, emphasizing the logicality of language expression in communication and having a low dependence on context. Therefore, people in low-context cultures view indirect expressions as a lack of respect for communication itself. The difference between high- and low-context cultures determines that foreign video game players find it difficult to understand the core values expressed in Chinese history and Xianxia culture, which also leads to a natural cultural discount for excellent Chinese games when they go overseas.

At the beginning of 2022, "SIFU," developed by the French team Sloclap, was released on various gaming platforms. It is an action game themed around Chinese Kung Fu culture, telling the story of a young White Eyebrow (a style of Kung Fu) apprentice who ventures into a modern city alone to seek revenge for the murder of his family. Although the game has received positive reviews from foreign players, many domestic players are not impressed, criticizing it as "having the form but not the essence." Since the beginning of the last century, many Chinese people, represented by Bruce Lee, have opened martial arts schools in foreign countries and produced numerous Kung Fu-themed film and television works, officially exporting Chinese Kung Fu. Some foreigners who are unfamiliar with China inevitably think of "Kung Fu" when mentioning China. However, due to contextual differences, foreigners find it difficult to appreciate the inner essence of Chinese Kung Fu and are often only interested in its combat abilities. Kung fu is the crystallization of Chinese wisdom, the embodiment of traditional Chinese culture, and a unique "martial art" in the world. It emphasizes the combination of hardness and softness, internal and external cultivation, possessing both a vigorous and beautiful appearance and elegant and profound connotations. It embodies the understanding of life and the universe by ancient philosophers and is a valuable cultural heritage accumulated by the Chinese working people over a long period. Therefore, the French-made "SIFU" only demonstrates the violence of Chinese Kung Fu without understanding that "to stop war is true martial art" is the real connotation of Chinese Kung fu.

2.3 Challenges in a Multi-Stakeholder Market Environment

Strictly speaking, the beginning of the domestic video game industry started on the other side of the Taiwan Strait. In 1983, Wang Junbo founded Softstar in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, which was the world's first company to

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obtain permission to sell Chinese-language games. Since then, video games began to be introduced to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the mainland, officially starting their development. Subsequent policies have had a significant impact on the video game industry.

On June 12, 2000, seven departments, including the Ministry of Culture, the State Economic and Trade Commission, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of Information Industry, jointly issued the "Opinions on Conducting Special Governance of Video Game Operation Venues," which was referred to as the "Game Console Ban" because its target was game consoles and game arcades. The direct cause of the Game Console Ban was the shocking "Lan Jisu Internet Cafe Arson Case" in Beijing on June 16, 2000. Of course, this case was also a microcosm of the lack of management and illegal operations in game arcades at that time, so the issuance of the Game Console Ban was justified. However, video games were still an emerging industry in China at that time, and society lacked awareness of them, which led to some legitimate game industries being affected. The most severely affected was the home game console industry. From today's perspective, the distinction between arcade games and home games is still quite obvious. Arcade games require coins to play and have larger game machines, such as "Metal Slug" and "King of Fighters 97," while home games can be played by inserting cards and are smaller in size, such as "Mario" and the "Pokémon" series. Although these can all be considered games, there are still certain differences. However, for people at that time, there was no distinction between the two. Consoles have also been implicated by the console ban, which also explicitly bans all domestic video game sales. In fact, foreign gaming giants such as Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft have always had the intention to enter the Chinese game market due to recognizing the spending power of Chinese players. Moreover, many domestic companies that have been exposed to advanced foreign gaming concepts have also begun to produce localized games. However, due to the Game Console Ban, foreign companies abandoned the Chinese market, and many domestic game companies were stifled before they could take off. One of the consequences of the Game Console Ban is that China's game industry drifted further away from console games. Games that succeeded domestically were often not console games, but instead, the emerging field of mobile games succeeded in China. However, as discussed above, mobile games face far greater difficulties than console/PC games in cross-cultural communication and national image construction.

3 Building a "Credible, Lovely, and Admirable" National Image in Video Games

In addressing how to "tell China's story well," President Xi Jinping has proposed showcasing a credible, lovely, and admirable image of China to the world. In the realm of video games, "credible" means adhering to realism and reflecting the true development of modern China; "lovely" entails showcasing China's image, enhancing the recognizability of China's stories, and increasing their dissemination; "admirable" refers to achieving fame in the field of game production technology and striving to become a leading gaming nation.

3.1 Rooting in Social Reality to Shape a "Credible" Image

When mentioning the content of video games, many people's first reaction is that they are filled with "virtuality and fantasy," having no direct connection with social reality. However, this is not the case. On the

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contrary, games, like literary works such as novels and movies, can deeply reflect social reality and ideology through their unique interactive nature. A notable example is "Disco Elysium," hailed as "the last letter from the Soviet Union." Its creators, ZA/UM, are Estonians who witnessed the entire process of the establishment and collapse of the Soviet socialist state, gaining firsthand experience of communist ideology and philosophy. The creators of Disco Elysium structured the game's worldview based on this political philosophy. To deeply understand the worldview and creative background of Disco Elysium, it is necessary to understand its political philosophy—communism—derived from Marx's philosophy of class struggle. As stated in "The Communist Manifesto," "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Each struggle ends either in a revolutionary transformation of society or in the common ruin of the struggling classes."

Therefore, in terms of game content, domestic developers should not be confined to virtual worldviews. Instead, they should root in reality and attempt to reflect China's modern, tortuous yet bright development journey. Leveraging the unique interactivity and immersion of games, they can shape a "credible" image of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In this regard, visual novel and text adventure games similar to Japanese Galgame, with their abundant text, have inherent advantages. For instance, "Invisible Guardian," released in 2019, mainly features four main endings and numerous regular endings (including brainwashing, shooting, burial, etc.). It tells the story of a patriotic youth who returns from studying in Japan and, during the Anti-Japanese War, infiltrates enemy territory, maneuvers among various forces, and ultimately makes significant contributions to the Chinese revolutionary cause. After its release, the game not only received overwhelming praise in China but also caused a huge sensation worldwide, prompting requests for an English dub version. Many foreign gamers learned about the resilience of the Communist Party during difficult times and its dedication to the people through the characters in this game.

3.2 Overcoming Cultural Discount to Shape a "Lovely" Image

It is undeniable that previous Chinese electronic games based on native myths of immortal beings and martial arts culture have achieved remarkable communication effects and word-of-mouth on their way overseas, attracting a considerable number of overseas audiences fascinated by traditional Chinese culture. However, these games have also branded Chinese games with the images of "immortal beings" and "martial arts," which are difficult to erase. In terms of cultural communication, this has created a stereotype among foreign players, making them believe that China only has myths of immortal beings and martial arts. In fact, there are countless cultures on the Chinese mainland worth telling, and there is no need to limit oneself. Chinese local games should break through first and then establish new ideas, overcoming cultural discounts in cross-cultural communication, to achieve the "soft landing" of the "hard demand" for cultural image shaping.

Taking "Genshin Impact," which has become a hit in the foreign market in recent years, as an example, the game's worldview features seven countries, each with a unique artistic style and some connection to reality. Currently, three countries have been opened, and subsequent countries are still under development. The first country, Mondstadt, is inspired by medieval Europe, blending natural scenery and cultural characteristics of countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The second country, Liyue, is based on ancient China, with architectural styles resembling those of the Tang Dynasty, achieving a "grand and open" aesthetic. The third country, Inazuma, is inspired by feudal Japan. Four more countries are being developed, potentially incorporating more global cultural elements. "Genshin Impact" has achieved cultural inclusive-

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ness, allowing players from different cultural backgrounds to find their own corner of the world and explore other exotic cultures. This is a significant reason why "Genshin Impact" has topped mobile game rankings worldwide for two years. Therefore, only by embracing cultural inclusiveness and output can a "lovely" national image be truly constructed.

3.3 Promoting Industrial Transformation to Shape an "Admirable" Image

Although the market and economic benefits of mobile games are currently more objective, 3A games are still considered the crown jewels of the gaming industry. Their promotion of the entire game industry chain and game production talents (including programmers, artists, planners, etc.) is unmatched by mobile games. In addition, 3A games have an extremely far-reaching cultural influence. For instance, Ubisoft, a French company, has been deeply engaged in the "Assassin's Creed" series for over a decade. All maps in the series are created to the greatest degree of one-to-one accuracy by professional teams after field visits. Therefore, while playing, gamers can freely explore Venice, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Paris, Egypt, and Greece, experiencing local customs. The value of 3A games cannot be measured solely in monetary terms. Therefore, China's gaming industry should accelerate its structural transformation, moving from "only" producing mobile games to becoming proficient in all areas and promptly updating game production technology to create games that are both critically acclaimed and commercially successful. Fortunately, some domestic companies are already making efforts in this direction. Tencent has invested in and acquired many overseas game studios (such as Marvelous and PlatinumGames) in recent years, while NetEase has recently established "Sakura Studio," focused on developing next-generation console games. In addition, Game Science Studio, which originated from mobile game production, began recruiting talent, production, and promotion for "Black Myth: Wukong" in 2020. Although it only updates a trailer once a year, it always causes excitement among global gamers, with many foreign video bloggers recommending it to their fans on platforms such as YouTube and Twitter, sparking a "Journey to the West" craze worldwide. Although domestic game companies may not develop 3A games for the domestic market in the short term, building up their game production capabilities is always beneficial. Only by focusing on technology and investing resources can cultural content find excellent carriers, thereby shaping an "admirable" communication image.

4 Conclusion

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has charted a new direction and set new goals for the construction of China's national image. As an important cultural medium, electronic games also play a pivotal role in this process. As a new medium, electronic games possess many characteristics that distinguish them from traditional media. They serve not only as a communication tool but also have their own complete communication system. This endows them with unique features in every aspect of the communication process, including the communicator, communication channels, and communication targets. By leveraging these characteristics, China's cultural output can be further expanded through the medium of games. Chinese culture is extensive and profound, rich in charm. While China boasts a 5,000-year cultural heritage, it lacks appropriate means of dissemination. There is a need to promote and develop this culture in a way that is popular and enjoyable to the masses. Electronic games, with their substantial market share, relatively young audience, and beautiful virtual game scenes, possess certain cultural dissemination characteristics. By

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analyzing these characteristics and identifying their common ground, we can establish a starting point for games to disseminate traditional culture. Culture needs to adapt to the development of the times, rather than remain constant; it is a process of seeking common ground while reserving differences, as well as a process of absorption and re-export. It is worth noting that China's gaming industry is still in its infancy and requires attention from various aspects and continuous self-improvement to achieve better development. This necessitates learning from the cultural connotations that give vitality to the Western gaming industry. In this context, this paper selects electronic games as the research object, discusses the connection between current domestic electronic games and national image construction, briefly describes the difficulties faced by electronic games in this regard, and proposes countermeasures to assist in national image construction through gaming. It is hoped that this paper can provide theoretical support for the international dissemination of domestic electronic games, the development of national culture, and the construction of the national image.

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