

# Research on the Asymmetric Development of the Contribution of Mobile Games and Client Games to China's Video Game Industry

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**Abstract.** This paper will focus on two important areas in the electronic game industry, namely, "mobile games", which are mainly operated and played on portable mobile devices and "client games", which are mainly operated on non-portable mobile devices such as computers, game consoles and televisions. The market in the Chinese mainland is selected as the research object. First, it explains the background of the development of these two different types of games in the Chinese mainland market and the trend in recent years. Clarify the basic content and specific differences between mobile games and client games in terms of definitions. Second, it discusses in detail the reasons for the asymmetric development of mobile and client games in the Chinese market. It uses the representative work of China's mobile games "Genshin Impact" and the part of 3A games in client games for case study, and makes a comparative analysis using classic sociological theories such as "localization", "globalization", and "McDonaldization". The paper discusses the internal reasons for the uneven development of these two different game media in the Chinese mainland market and the possible consequences of the assembly line of the game industry. Finally, the paper gives solutions to the market layout of mobile and client games in the Chinese mainland from the perspective of complete system and legal construction of the government, the improvement of the marketing mode of game developers and the enhancement of users' ability to explore the game market independently.

**Keywords:** Game industry, mobile game, client game, marketing strategy, globalization, localization.

## 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, China's video game industry seems to have developed a new vitality. Especially under the impact of today's highly media-oriented network media and advertising and the era of globalization, many games independently manufactured in the Chinese mainland and the game industry system with perfect industrial chain imported by large foreign manufacturers (such as Ubisoft, Electronic Arts) are blooming in Chinese mainland at the same time. According to the report of China's game industry in 2023, as of the official issuance of the report, there were 668 million game users in the Chinese mainland in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 0.61% [1], and the total population of China at the end of 2022 was 1.4118 billion [2], so the proportion of game users in the total population of China in 2022 was about 47%, and the total number of Internet users in China at the end of 2022 was 1.067 billion [3], and the ratio of game users to the number of Internet users in mainland China reached about 62.6%. Therefore, the researchers believe that the game industry has far-reaching strategic significance for the layout of the cultural industry in China, as nearly 2/3 of the online users are involved in the game industry, which is enough to explain the huge volume of the game industry in the Chinese market.

This paper will focus on the non-equilibrium development of the internal layout of the Chinese mainland market as a starting point. It also focuses on the reasons why the Chinese game market is still dominated by mobile games and the internal circulation game economy in a globalized environment. It is regrettable that in the rapid development of the game market in recent years, China has not been quick to embrace or integrate client games that have improved its industrial chain in other parts of the world. There has been little qualitative or quantitative analysis of client game

specialization in domestic research. As a result, China has yet to explore a clear path for the rest of the world's game industry systems to guide domestic policies on the introduction of client games. This paper will give its own constructive suggestions on the sustainable development of the Chinese client game industry to fill the gap in domestic client game industry research to a certain extent.

This paper will use the method of comparative analysis to explore the development of mobile games and client games in the Chinese mainland. In the way of "global issues, local perspective", combined with classical sociological theory, this paper will analyze the plight of China's domestic self-developed and imported games in the environment and opportunities of the seemingly vigorous development of the commercialization of the Chinese market, and analyze the in-depth causes of this phenomenon, and make critical reflection on the asymmetric development layout and its impact in the foreseeable future. Finally, this paper will give suggestions on the future layout of the game industry, and discuss the future prospects based on the asymmetric development of the game industry.

## 2. Definitions and Marketing Strategies of Mobile Games and Client Games

Before analyzing the layout of China's game industry, the public should first clarify the definition of mobile games and client games in the game industry. Mobile games refer to embedded, downloaded or networked games [4] in specific processing devices, such as media players, mobile phones or tablet computers. These devices also have a wide range of connection functions, such as infrared, Wi-Fi, 4G, and Bluetooth; due to the portability, accessibility, interconnection and simple and easy operation of portable devices, the industrial scale and public attention of mobile games have been growing rapidly in recent years [4]. Due to the rapid growth of Internet penetration in China since the 21st century and the rapid rise of companies specializing in manufacturing portable mobile devices, such as Apple, Samsung, Huawei and Xiaomi in the Chinese mainland, the commercialization of portable mobile devices (mobile phones, tablet computers) in Greater China has achieved widespread success. This gives game manufacturers ample incentive to develop different types of mobile games to maximize their business interests. Chinese game company giants Tencent, Netease and new game giant miHoYo are all committed to maintaining their most representative mobile games to meet the demand of game users' consumption appeal. The business cycle process of cementing the game through the way subcultures are shaped. Taking the MOBA game "Glory of the King" launched by Tencent as an example, from a cultural point of view, the game builds identity and community tags by shaping real-time scene interactions such as multiplayer combat. The Glory of the King will be transformed from a micro "game" to a macro "social card" for young groups so as to expand its impact on the game in the field of mobile devices. Other more common publicity strategies, for example, "brand marketing" (that is, to attract players through the scale effect behind the company and the influence of big brands) and "cross-border marketing" (also known as "linkage" by senior groups in the game, that is, two different types of goods complement each other in marketing functions, and two unrelated industries are bundled together for publicity. Successful cross-border marketing can effectively enhance the user image of the two brands). It has also injected new vitality into the mobile game market [5].

Client games refer to traditional online games that rely on a download client and are played on large-scale devices with graphical computing capabilities. Specific operable devices include laptops, desktops (such as Windows), or consoles (such as PS5, Xbox) and other media for operation. Generally speaking, the client on the media is the necessary software platform for running client games (such as Steam and Epic game platform). The advent of the console has simplified the process. It can not only undertake the graphics calculation required for running games (the graphics card part of the console) but also serve as an independent software platform for running client games (the online account on the console), thus further improving the portability of playing client games. Along with the term "client game", another term widely mentioned by the game itself, "3A game", is an informal game evaluation term, mainly referring to some games with high investment cost, high user volume and high game quality [6]. It has been shown that the marketing approach and strategies of client

games are similar to mobile games in many aspects. For example, they will carry out brand marketing campaigns to continue the industrial system of the client game or 3A game by shaping the brand image; both of them will construct community culture so as to establish a good reputation among relatives or friends: the research survey found that many respondents prefer to use the same game console to play multi-person interactive client games, which also shows to some extent that the value of social activities and sense of belonging is more than the game itself [6].

### **3. Analysis of the causes and effects of the asymmetric development of mobile games and client Games: a case study of the Genshin Impact and 3A games**

Having clarified the basic concepts and marketing strategies of mobile games and client games, this paragraph will next analyze the concrete reality mapping of the mainland Chinese market to the mobile games and client games industry from different perspectives. Figures also from the China Game Industry Report 2023 show that the actual sales revenue of the mobile game market in China in 2023 was 226.86 billion yuan, an increase of 17.51 percent year-on-year, accounting for 74.88 percent of the revenue and dominating the Chinese game market; Revenue from actual sales in the client games market was 66.283 billion yuan, up 8 percent year-on-year; The actual sales revenue of China's game console market is 2.893 billion yuan, up 22.93% year on year, but its market share is still less than 1% of the total share of China's game industry (302.964 billion yuan) [1]. Arguably, the game industry landscape in Chinese mainland is still dominated by mobile games, a mode that monopolizes the turtle's head. There is still a lot of room for the development of client games in China, and standalone display console devices in client games are an urgent area to be developed in China.

The author will elaborate on the reasons why mobile games are thriving so well in the Chinese mainland market. Taking the domestic unprecedented popular open-world adventure game "Genshin Impact" as the case study object. From the global launch on September 28, 2020, to December 29, 2022, the global sales of "Genshin Impact" have exceeded 4 billion US dollars, of which about 1.37 billion US dollars have been contributed by players in the Chinese market [7]. From this data, the public can know that Genshin Impact has not only been well received in the Chinese mainland market but also achieved good results in the global market. The author believes that the success of "Genshin Impact" as a representative work of mobile games in the Chinese game market is based on the following four points: first, the carrying platform of "Genshin Impact" largely depends on mobile phones and mobile tablets. According to the statistics of the China Electronic Equipment Technology Development Association, by the end of 2021, the social ownership of mobile phones in China had reached 1.856 billion, with an average of 1.3 mobile phones per person [8]. As a result, the massive popularity of mobile devices such as mobile phones has enabled many players to participate in China's mobile game industry and become a cornerstone of industrial output. Huge population or mobile device users are among the necessary preconditions to expand the market size of mobile games and give mobile games potential profit prospects and room for competition. Indeed, it is not enough to have only the "hardware conditions" of the market but also the "soft power" of the game itself. Second, Genshin Impact's level of communication about its cultural symbols or community construction is far higher than other similar mobile game works. In the world of the Genshin Impact, there are different exquisite characters and regions/countries with local characteristics, and three playing methods of adventure, cultivation and exploration are introduced to create an immersive experience combining vision and hearing online and the display of different cultures is integrated into the details of the game. At the same time, offline also creates an ecosystem of "secondary creation" centered on players, so that players are subject to the covert influence of the cultural and economic circle with internal circulation [9]. Through the player's independent construction of the game ecosystem, the player is able to continuously spread the Genshin Impact culture through the central diffusion of the Genshin Impact worldview in circulation.

Third, Genshin Impact has a refined localization process that other creative teams do not necessarily have. Roland Robertson pointed out that the ideas, cultures, products and ideology

brought about by globalization spread all over the world, including music, fashion, consumerism or other concepts and values [10]. These forms become "localized" through the connection with local communities or individuals [10]. Although the Genshin Impact was questioned about its cultural origin at the early stage of its release, such as imitating the Japanese game Legend of Zelda - The Breath of the Wild, Genshin Impact is also a romanization translation of Japanese, not Chinese Pinyin [11]. In the game, the Genshin Impact combines Chinese classical elements, food, and scenery and festivals with Chinese local characteristics and deeply promotes China's own "secondary culture". Finally, in terms of marketing strategy, Genshin Impact even uses a variety of public relations techniques to accelerate community communication. A public relations technology derived from political communication, called "sound bite", originally meant to use concise, condensed and persuasive language to persuade competitors in political elections [12]. It is now used by the main creative team or players for secondary creations to create subculture circles. For instance, "Genshin Impact, start!", "I am the dog of Shenlilinghua (The character in the Genshin Impact)", and other minimalist slogans are widely used in the network subculture circle of "Genshin Impact".

It should be noted that the four reasons analyzed above apply not only to Genshin Impact, but also to other mobile games that have achieved a certain level of revenue effect. Mobile games such as these have been blossoming in the Chinese mainland market. Therefore, researchers can conclude from this analysis that the development of the Chinese game industry in the mobile terminal sector has achieved a fairly complete process of cultural self-processing, even with a tendency of game export and spillover. Here, the public has to lament the growing sophistication of China's mobile game industry.

For the promotion of client games and cultural self-construction, China is less mature in this regard. First, in terms of client games in China, there is no independently developed game with a highly mature industrial chain system like Genshin Impact. Therefore, the client game market needs to import a large number of "3A Games" with mature industrial chain systems from other parts of the world to make up for the shortage of Chinese client games. At the same time, imported client games have aspects beyond the four points of industrial and cultural construction process proposed above for mobile games. For example, the game console industry and ownership in the Chinese mainland is relatively small, and the price of a console usually costs thousands of yuan to buy. Many users are reluctant to accept such a high price for a platform that can only play client games. This has also become the most fundamental reason why client games, and the console industry in particular, cannot be widely promoted in China. Second, focusing on the content of the client game, researchers often find that some 3A games are slightly weaker than mobile games in terms of constructing cultural and plot perspectives. Many 3A games do not even have corresponding Chinese versions listed on the Chinese mainland market and only focus on polishing and investing in the content and experience of the game in terms of marketing. The corresponding marketing strategies or public relations means that can lead game users to attract consumer interest have not been applied to this type of 3A game in time (corresponding to the second, third and fourth points of the above mobile game marketing guidelines, respectively), so that the client games cannot have the phenomenal level and prosperity of mobile games in China's local game market.

It seems that the Chinese game market, which is dominated by mobile games, has increased the stickiness of game users in the local game market, which is commendable. However, ignoring client games or console development will also bury the hidden danger of asymmetric development for the Chinese game market. As many game creators want to imitate mobile games such as "Genshin Impact" as a successful case and take a share in the Chinese mobile game market, this will lead to the abnormal development of the game market. George Ritzer put forward the concept of "McDonaldization" in the 20th century: he pointed out that the five important components of "McDonaldization" are efficiency, calculability, predictability, controllability and rationality [13]. Such a mechanized and structured mode of production will narrow the diversity of industries. In order to remain competitive in the market, the company must abide by the rational or efficient principle adopted by competitors, that is, to produce products with homogeneous and uniform modules to adapt

to the expanding or fast-growing industry [13]. The "McDonaldization" theory also reminds researchers to reflect on the problems faced by the unbalanced development of China's game market. The researchers put forward a hypothesis: the higher the proportion of "monopoly" in the mobile game industry, the more serious the problem of "McDonald's" in the game industry will become, which will lead to the decline of the vitality of China's game industry, the increase of homogenization, and the damage to the diversity and originality of games. It can also occur in legal gray areas, such as the increased risk of creative plagiarism in games. Once these problems occur, they not only affect companies, including the game industry, but also spread through society as a whole and each individual's view of game-oriented pessimism or reduce investor confidence in the game industry.

#### **4. Imbalance in the game industry and the solution of "assembly line mode"**

In this regard, agencies from all sectors must work together to rectify the potential problems caused by the asymmetric development of the Chinese game industry. The author will present viable solutions at all three levels of government, developers and game users. First, from the government level, it can strengthen the original review and quality monitoring mechanism for various games. In reality, the Chinese government has been committed to promoting the game version number (ISBN) review mode to monitor the quality of the game. Through GAPP (the General Administration of Press and Publication of the People's Republic of China) and MOC (the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China) carrying out the review and supervision before and after the release of the game, the purpose of double protection is achieved [14]. Second, the government can negotiate terms of cooperation with client game platforms, promote a series of game preferential measures, and lower the access threshold for Chinese game users for the client game or console industries. In reality, game platforms led by Steam and Epic often release different game incentives on specific Chinese festivals, including some popular games, thereby broadening the sales of players in client games. JD.com, Taobao and other Chinese online shopping platforms have also taken corresponding measures to discount and promote otherwise expensive console systems, thus increasing the potential desire of users to buy consoles and client games.

At the level of game manufacturers (provided that they are committed to maintaining their sales image in the Chinese mainland market and are willing to continue to expand the market), they should try their best to solve the localization problem in the Chinese mainland market, promote the offline ecosystem, build the integrity of the game industry chain system, and add an immersive detail experience with the characteristics of Chinese cultural symbols in the game plot, let players experience the "sense of national cultural belonging" like mobile games when playing client games. Whether it is based on world cultures or ancient cultures within China, the content of the game presented to the user level still needs to be user-oriented and self-constructed. In addition, the developer's innovation in the way the game is played is one of the important elements for users to gain traction when choosing a game. At present, the playing methods of many client games (mobile games also have the same problem) have been labeled so that developers can only make some small modifications on the basis of the framework of large game types. The games thus produced have the hallmarks of an assembly line, which is not conducive to the original development of the game industry.

In the end, gamers had to make some changes. In consumer ports, the important criteria by which gamers choose games are largely limited by the various methods of game marketing. Players usually rely more on the series of games launched by big brands and ignore 3A games or independent masterpieces to a large extent, which makes the game industry more prone to the polarization phenomenon of extremely high and very low marketing level, resulting in the macro level of the game tending to "M-shaped curve" rather than the "arch curve" in the ideal health state. Therefore, when selecting games, players can use a certain degree of independent judgment and critical thinking as the criteria for selecting different types of games so as to expose or explore small but high-quality games

to a certain extent and promote the diversified and rational development of the entire Chinese game industry.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper firstly clarifies the definition of mobile games and client games in specific details, and briefly describes the current state of the game industry and the output value of mobile games and client games in China in recent years. It also pointed out the unbalanced and incomplete development of mobile games and client games in China's regional games industry. It also discusses ways to rationalize the layout of the Chinese game industry from the three spectator levels of government, developers, and players, and gives the author's own critical reflections on the future prospects of industrial development and proposals to address the imbalance. This article will help the public to further deepen their understanding of China's macro game industry such as client games or console industry, which is not the mainstream guidance in China, and play a positive guiding role in the rational cognition of this aspect. This is conducive to drawing public attention to the importance of developing the Chinese game industry, especially the client game industry. Based on the classical theories of sociology, this paper qualitatively analyzes the prospect of the development structure of China's game industry without specific content analysis or detailed quantitative analysis to analyze the views of game users on a single game at the micro level, although with the help of "Genshin Impact" as the case study of this paper, it demonstrates the success of China's mobile game industry. Overall, however, some macro game output data from official reports are still used to make basic judgments about the general direction of the Chinese game industry. Next, researchers can further study the quantitative audience feedback of a single game, research the cognition of game users on the development of 3A games or independent studio games in China, further deepen the cognition of researchers and the public on the branch fields of the whole game system, and supplement more relevant materials and data to fill the theoretical basis of this paper.

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