

AESTHETICS

Overseas dissemination of 'Neo-Chinese style aesthetics'

By GUO PEI

Against the backdrop of globalization and rapid advances in digital technology, the expression of China's "Neo-Chinese style aesthetics" has emerged as a source of spiritual impetus for the country's development. It embodies distinctive Eastern sensibilities and offers a solid cultural foundation for constructing China's discourse and narrative systems. In recent years, an increasing array of Chinese cultural symbols has been infused with new vitality. Through trend-oriented expressions and immersive experiences, they have gained strong popularity among young people overseas, becoming striking symbols of cross-cultural communication. Rooted in the digital lives of Generation Z (those born from the mid-to-late 1990s to the early 2010s), these symbols transform traditional cultural elements into participatory and co-creatable "cultural languages," sketching the contours of new pathways through which Chinese culture reaches global audiences.

Cultural reconstruction in video games

As a novel cultural medium in the digital era, games decode traditional culture through contemporary lenses and reconstruct it in innovative ways, creating cultural works that combine the aesthetic qualities of the East with the narrative logic of the present. In recent years, China's rapidly growing game industry has produced high-quality titles such as "Genshin Impact" and "Black Myth: Wukong," which have attracted widespread global attention thanks to their rich content and profound cultural depth. According to a survey conducted in October 2024 by the Japanese communications and technology company LINE, the popularity of the Chinese mobile game "Genshin Impact" continues to rise among Japan's Generation Z, ranking within the top 10 for both male and female players.

"Genshin Impact" incorporates elements of traditional Chinese culture on multiple levels. The in-game region of Liyue is modeled on real Chinese landscapes, drawing inspiration from natural sites such as Mount Tai in Shandong Province and the Five-Color Pond in Huanglong, Sichuan Province, and blending architectural styles from places like Fenghuang Ancient Town in Hunan Province and Hongya Cave in Chongqing Municipality, along with architectural elements such as stone lions and *que* towers. Its soundtrack employs traditional Chinese instruments such as the *erhu* and bamboo flute to evoke the ambiance of daily life. Traditional motifs, tea culture, lantern customs, traditional Chinese medicine, and ancient mechanical arts are woven throughout the game, vividly showcasing the depth of China's cultural heritage. Through the digital reconstruction of Chinese mythology and aesthetics, the game brings Chinese culture to global players in ways that feel youthful and international.

Similarly, "Black Myth: Wukong," which draws on the classical Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, has drawn sustained attention since its earliest stages for its exquisite visual adaptation of the novel's worldview. As of February 2025, the game had received approximately 817,000 reviews on Steam, the

leading global digital distribution and online gaming platform, 96% of which are positive—earning it the rating of "overwhelmingly positive." It also won "Ultimate Game of the Year" and "Best Visual Design" at the 2024 Golden Joystick Awards in the United Kingdom.

According to the 2024 China Game Going-Global Report released by the Game Publishing Committee of the China Audio-video and Digital Publishing Association, games independently developed in China generated \$18.557 billion in overseas revenue in 2024, a year-on-year increase of 13.39% and a new historical high. The top five overseas markets for Chinese games in 2024 were the United States, Japan, South Korea, Germany, and the UK, with the US, Japan, and South Korea accounting for 31.06%, 17.32%, and 8.89% of revenue, respectively. These achievements are closely tied to Chinese developers' dual strategy of "premiumization + localization." Cultural adaptation has been key to this success, with the interactive experience and aesthetic reconstruction of culture becoming essential

describe Chinese-inspired looks as "gorgeous," "richly colored," and "mood-lifting." *The Economist* once published an article titled "Japanese youngsters want to look like Chinese starlets," noting that Japanese beauty influencers have become captivated with Chinese-style looks—a reversal of earlier trends in which beauty fashions largely flowed from Japan to China.

The popularity of Chinese makeup is rooted in the fusion of traditional culture and contemporary aesthetics. Chinese beauty brands have demonstrated creative reinterpretations of Eastern aesthetics by integrating cultural symbols into product design. Florasis, for instance, seeks to capture the essence of Chinese culture by creatively combining traditional intangible cultural heritage crafts—such as ceramics, Miao silverwork, filigree inlay, leather carving, and Suzhou embroidery—with modern manufacturing techniques. Using beauty products as a medium, these brands present the richness of traditional Chinese culture and the unique charm of Eastern aesthetics to global consumers, showcasing the value and cultural

and cultural phenomenon created by China, following in the footsteps of Hollywood films, Japanese manga, Korean K-pop, and British miniseries.

Micro-drama apps such as ReelShort and DramaBox, both developed in China, have each surpassed 100 million global downloads, forming an expanding "matrix" of Chinese apps. At the 2025 Shanghai Micro-Drama Festival, Japanese entrepreneur Hiroshi Osaki announced a collaboration with Chinese investment firm CMC Capital to launch Helo, a micro-drama app entering the Japanese market this year.

Thanks to the wide reach of platforms such as TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and LINE Video, Chinese micro-dramas have been rapidly gaining traction overseas. With their visually striking styles, unexpected plot twists delivered in rapid succession, and emotionally resonant themes that cross cultural boundaries, micro-dramas have captivated young audiences. Their lighthearted humor, vivid characters, and fast pacing allow Chinese cultural symbols



FILE PHOTO: "Genshin Impact" is an open-world adventure role-playing game developed by miHoYo, a video game company headquartered in Shanghai, China.

mechanisms through which overseas players engage with Chinese games.

Creative transformation of Eastern cosmetics

In recent years, Chinese-style trends have also surged in the beauty industry. With their distinctive visual language and cultural symbols, Chinese beauty brands are steadily expanding into global markets, turning beauty into another lens through which young people come to understand China.

According to data from the Cosmetics Importers Association of Japan, Japan's total imports of color cosmetics from China reached 13.58 billion yen in 2024, ranking China third in Japan's cosmetics import market. During the first three quarters of 2024, Japan imported 10.7-billion-yen worth of Chinese color cosmetics, a year-on-year increase of 13%. Chinese imports ranked among the top three in lipstick, eye makeup, and nail products. Sales of Chinese brands such as Perfect Diary, Florasis, and Into You have steadily increased in Japan, with Florasis' sales in Japan accounting for 40% of its global overseas revenue in 2024.

This wave of interest in Chinese beauty is closely tied to the surge of Chinese-style makeup in Japan since 2019. Japanese women who have used Chinese cosmetics frequently

confidence of Chinese brands. This redefinition of "tradition + trend" not only fuels the popularity of Chinese-style makeup but also turns traditional Chinese culture into portable, experiential, and shareable cultural symbols, shaping an international "business card" for Chinese aesthetics.

Micro-dramas and the rise of 'new traffic'

Chinese "micro-dramas" have recently gained momentum in the Japanese market by offering "lightweight content" that transcends cultural barriers. By accurately capturing Generation Z's fragmented consumption habits and combining localized operations with platform collaboration, Chinese micro-dramas have developed a unique pathway for cultural dissemination. According to the White Paper on the Development of China's Micro-Drama Industry (2024) published by the China Netcasting Services Association, China's micro-drama viewer base has reached 576 million—52.4% of all internet users—showing steady growth. In 2024, China's micro-drama market expanded to 50.44 billion yuan, surpassing the national box office total of 47 billion yuan for the first time. The white paper suggests that Chinese micro-dramas are poised to become a new cultural product

to enter international viewers' cultural experiences in ways that are accessible, relatable, and easy to consume. As Generation Z's consumption habits continue to evolve, Chinese micro-dramas are constructing a new paradigm in which "culture is content and content is communication." This development not only deepens cultural exchange between China and other countries, but also enhances the global influence of China's cultural soft power.

Whether through the construction and narration of traditional culture in games, the expression of Eastern imagery in beauty products, or the micro-narratives of social culture in micro-dramas, these practices collectively form the overseas dissemination pathways of "Neo-Chinese style aesthetics." Through flexible, everyday, and experiential modes of presentation, they are weaving themselves into the cultural lives of young people around the world. Such cultural practices not only enhance the global communication capacity of Chinese culture but also strengthen the interpretive power of its core values, contributing to the reshaping of global dialogues among civilizations.

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