Modularizing Emotion: The Rise of China's Eryou Games and the Logic of the Emotional Engine

Yueqin Chao

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in International Studies

University of Washinton

2025

Committee:

David M. Bachman

Ian Schnee

Jackson School of International Studies

University of Washinton

Abstract

Modularizing Emotion: The Rise of China's Eryou Games and the Logic of the Emotional Engine

Yueqin Chao

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

David M. Bachman

Department of China Study

This thesis explores the rise of Chinese *Eryou* (anime-style) mobile games from 2016 to 2024, focusing on how developers used emotional design to achieve rapid catch-up and global success. Using a dual-layered framework—Game_C (core mechanics) and Game_B (community and culture)—the study introduces the concept of an "Emotional Engine": a modular system that integrates player emotions into gameplay, narrative, and fan interaction.

Through case studies like *Onmyoji* and *Genshin Impact*, the thesis shows how emotional triggers such as gacha systems and character progression create structured player engagement. These emotions are amplified at the community level through co-creation and shared cultural practices.

Rather than copying Japanese models, Chinese developers pioneered a new emotional design paradigm, enabling them to dominate both domestic and international markets. This research contributes to game and innovation studies by highlighting how affective design can serve as a driver of industrial upgrading and cultural influence.

1 : Introduction: 2
Conceptual Work 5
Research Scale 6
2 : Analysis 7
Game_C: 8
1 : Gambling-like Gacha mechanics. 12
2 : Character-centric mechanics. 16
Character Progression System 16
Character Voice and Interactive Feedback 18
3 : Episodic anime-style narrative structure 21
Summary of Game_C level 24
Game_B 25
1: Community 26
2:Re-creation 36
Summary of Game_B level 41
Application of Emotional Engine 42
Background & introduction of Methodology 43
Strategies of Onmyoji 46
Summary of Application of Emotional Engine in Chinese Eryou's Catch-up 53
Conclusion 55
Theoretical and Practical Implications 57
Limitations 58
Final Reflection 58

1：Introduction:

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the video game industry has been experiencing rapid expansion. According to data released in 2015 by market research firm IHS Technology, as early as 2015, the global gaming industry had already reached a market size of $91.8 billion, surpassing the combined revenues of the global film industry ($62 billion) and the music industry ($18 billion), making it the largest entertainment market worldwide. According to Newzoo's *2024 Global Games Market Report*, global gaming revenue is projected to reach $187.7 billion in 2024, reflecting a 2.1% year-over-year growth.[1] The number of paying players worldwide is expected to grow by 5% to 1.5 billion, with a further increase to 1.67 billion anticipated by 2027. Meanwhile, the total number of global players is set to reach 3.42 billion in 2024, marking a 4.5% annual increase.[2]

With the emergence of smartphones, mobile gaming has become an indispensable segment of the global video game industry, accounting for nearly half of the market. In 2024, global mobile gaming revenue is projected to reach $92.6 billion, reflecting a 3% growth and comprising 49% of the total gaming market—far exceeding the revenues of PC gaming ($43.2 billion) and console gaming ($51.9 billion).[3] Within this sector, China plays a significant role, contributing approximately one-fifth of global mobile gaming revenue. According to the *2023 China Gaming Industry Report* published by the China Audio-Video and Digital Publishing Association, the actual sales revenue of China's mobile gaming market in 2023 reached 226.86 billion yuan (approximately $31.28 billion)[4], setting a new

[1] Newzoo, *2024 Global Games Market Report*, 16, https://newzoo.com/resources/trend-reports/newzoos-global-games-market-report-2024-free-version.
[2] Newzoo, *2024 Global Games Market Report*, 16, https://newzoo.com/resources/trend-reports/newzoos-global-games-market-report-2024-free-version.
[3] Newzoo, *2024 Global Games Market Report*, 19, https://newzoo.com/resources/trend-reports/newzoos-global-games-market-report-2024-free-version.
[4] Wei He and Jiajun Tang, eds., Xiaoyu Zhao and Nan Zheng, assoc. eds., *Annual Report on the Development of Digital Gaming Industry in China (2024)* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2024), p4.

revenue record and accounting for 74.88% of China's total gaming market revenue.[5] The number of mobile gamers in China reached 657 million, representing 20% of the global gaming population.[6]

Against this backdrop, anime-style games (二次元游戏) have emerged as a particularly popular niche in the global mobile gaming market. These games are typically characterized by art styles inspired by East-Asian anime or manga, featuring intricately designed characters, rich storylines, and gameplay that often integrates role-playing (RPG), strategy, or action elements. For example, **Genshin Impact**[7] by the Game Company miHoYo has captivated global audiences with its open-world exploration and stunning anime aesthetics, topping the app version rankings dozens of times in countries around the world. While **Honkai: Star Rail**[8] has drawn a massive player base with its sci-fi themes and deep narrative. Additionally, **Arknights**[9] by Hypergryph and **Wuthering Waves**[10] by Kuro Games are also notable representatives of this genre.

These games are not only renowned for their high production quality but have also created numerous opportunities for emerging studios. According to *The State of Anime*

---

https://www.pishu.com.cn/skwx_ps/databasedetail?SiteID=14&contentId=15672634&contentType=literature&type=%25E6%258A%25A5%25E5%2591%258A&subLibID=
(Raw Chinese Version:《2023年中国游戏产业报告》项目组:《2023年中国游戏产业报告》, 载何威, 唐贾军主编;赵晓雨, 郑南副主编《中国游戏产业发展报告(2024)》, 北京:, 社会科学文献出版社, 2024年11月, 第1-23页。皮书数据库:
https://www.pishu.com.cn/skwx_ps/initDatabaseDetail?siteId=14&contentId=15672634&contentType=literature)

[5] Wei He and Jiajun Tang, eds., Xiaoyu Zhao and Nan Zheng, assoc. eds., *Annual Report on the Development of Digital Gaming Industry in China (2024)* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2024), p6.
https://www.pishu.com.cn/skwx_ps/databasedetail?SiteID=14&contentId=15672634&contentType=literature&type=%25E6%258A%25A5%25E5%2591%258A&subLibID=

[6] Wei He and Jiajun Tang, eds., Xiaoyu Zhao and Nan Zheng, assoc. eds., *Annual Report on the Development of Digital Gaming Industry in China (2024)* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2024), p14.
https://www.pishu.com.cn/skwx_ps/databasedetail?SiteID=14&contentId=15672634&contentType=literature&type=%25E6%258A%25A5%25E5%2591%258A&subLibID=

[7] Genshin Impact – Step Into a Vast Magical World of Adventure

[8] Honkai: Star Rail — May This Journey Lead Us Starward

[9] Arknights

[10] Wuthering Waves — Waking of a World

Gaming 2022 report by Data.ai, although anime-style games cater to a relatively niche audience, their players exhibit exceptionally high engagement and spending willingness. As a sub-genre of the mobile games, anime game users contributed $1 out of every $5 in gaming revenue on global app stores, despite accounting for less than 3% of total users in 2021. Furthermore, from 2020 to 2021, global downloads of anime-style games grew by 15%, marking a 50% increase compared to 2018.[11]

According to the *Global Anime Mobile Game Market Research Report* published by Diandian Data, as of October 2024, the majority of the highest-grossing anime mobile games outside China were developed by Chinese companies, with three of the top five titles coming from Chinese studios. Among the top ten anime mobile games, those developed in China accounted for 52.67% of total revenue.[12]Also, in the domestic Chinese market, domestic Eryou mobile games have come to account for an astonishing 86.46% of the total number of Eryou products, while imported Eryou games represent only 13.54%. In terms of revenue share, the gap is even wider—domestic Eryou games account for 96.57% of total market revenue, while imported titles contribute only 3.43%.[13] However, in 2016, the situation was quite different: domestic Eryou games made up just 47% of the market by number, with imported games taking the majority at 53%.[14] How did Chinese Eryou games manage to rise so dramatically in just eight years? What characteristics distinguish these domestic Eryou titles from traditional games or other mobile games? And how have these characteristics helped them successfully achieve catch-up in the domestic market?

To address these questions, this paper begins by investigating the ontology of Chinese Eryou games and analyzes their core features from both the Game_C and Game_B levels.

[11] The State of Anime Gaming 2022 - data.ai
[12]Diandian Data, "2024 Global Anime Mobile Game Market Research Report," November 4, 2024, p15-25. https://vip.diandian.com/reports/qMYKCpMBh8JGffhaIXuE.
[13] Diandian Data, "2024 Global Anime Mobile Game Market Research Report," November 4, 2024, p15-25. https://vip.diandian.com/reports/qMYKCpMBh8JGffhaIXuE.
[14] https://www.gameres.com/699581.html

This approach aims to demonstrate how the key feature of Chinese Eryou—what this paper defines as the "Emotional Engine"—functions in practice. Ultimately, by examining the representative case of *Onmyoji*, the paper argues that Chinese Eryou developers successfully achieved a Path-creating catch-up by modularizing emotional engine components such as character progression, gacha systems, and community co-creation. In doing so, they established a new standard for emotion-driven game design that enabled Chinese Eryou titles to not only dominate the domestic market but also expand globally.

Conceptual Work

Games are spoken of in many ways, so I will first clarify the notion that I wish to provide a theory of. It is a commonplace to note that games are not merely self-contained systems of rules (which means that games as a kind of rule-based system in terms of inputs and outputs)[15], but dynamic entities whose boundaries extend beyond their formal mechanics. The same game can be analyzed as a closed rule-based system or as an open cultural phenomenon, for example. That means we cannot identify the game itself solely with its internal mechanisms, nor reduce it to its external manifestations. Though the dimensions and media of the game are not identical to each other, the identity of the game is the same. We must distinguish, then, the Core Game Itself—the rule-bound system of inputs, outputs, and values—from the Broad Game Universe—the ecosystem of player communities, co-created content, and cultural practices that orbit around it.

Games, then, have a dual ontological structure, each layer of which can be meant by the word "game":

[15] Schnee,Ontology and Aesthetics of Video Games,3.

1：The Core Game Itself (game_C): the rule-based system comprising mechanics, objectives, and player inputs.

2：The Broad Game Universe (game_B): the extended network of player-generated content, community practices, and cultural significance.

In general, these tiers exhibit a one-many relation: a single game_C can generate multiple game_B instances, each shaped by distinct communities and contexts. My fundamental goal of this part of the thesis is to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for identifying the Chinese er-you's Core Game Itself (game_C), while acknowledging the Broad Game Universe (game_B) as an inseparable dimension of modern Chinese er-you phenomena.

Research Scale

Building upon the theoretical construction of the dual-layered framework (game_C-game_B) for video games, this paper will further narrow its focus to the distinct genre of Chinese 二次元手游 (er-you), testing and expanding the model through representative case studies. The selected games—including ***Genshin Impact, Arknights, Honkai: Star Rail, Wuthering Waves, onmyoji, and Honkai impact 3rd***—are chosen for two critical reasons: first, they collectively span the core mechanical spectrum of er-you (character cultivation, emotional interaction), thereby encapsulating the diversity of game_C; second, their community ecosystems (e.g., Genshin Impact's global fan-creation network) profoundly demonstrate the symbiosis between game_B and game_C. By applying this layered framework to er-you—a gaming form marked by hyper-mediality, emotional engineering, and community-driven dynamics—this thesis seeks to explain the core features of Game_C and Game_B and the emotional engine built around the core features of Game_C

and Game_B, to show the special nature of Game_C and Game_B from the traditional video games: the close link between Game_C and Game_B built through the emotional engineering of players. Then, this thesis also tries to explain the role of this particularity in China's Eryou catch-up process, which in turn demonstrates the nature of the Emotional Engine's practical applications discussed in this paper.

2：Analysis

My analysis of Chinese 二次元手游 (Eryou) is this: as a distinct subset of video games, they are characterized by a symbiotic system where the Core Game Itself and Broad Game Universe are strongly connected through the key feature which I called 'Emotional Engine'—a deliberate rule-based system for emotional amplification, output and feedback. This framework fundamentally subverts the binary opposition between 'rule-system-as-design' and 'player-as-consumer' in traditional models (e.g., MDA framework)[16], instead positioning players as Co-collaborators in iterative game design through emotional feedback loops. Specifically, Chinese Eryou transform game rules into emotional interfaces by intensifying emotional input/output mechanisms (e.g., gacha rituals, character cultivation) at the Core Game level (Game_C). At the same time, the emotions obtained from Game_C will be further strengthened and amplified by outputting them into the Broad Game Universe (Game _B) layer, and ultimately feedback to Game_C layer, forming a benign self-closing loop.

[16] Hunicke, MDA model, p1.

In order to show how the key feature of Chinese Eryou, the Emotional Engine, works. We need to split the Emotional Engine into two parts: In game_C and In Game_B, and discuss them separately:

Game_C:

Based on previous traditional game theory such as Ian Schnee's LF theory, [17]the Game_C can be decomposed into the interactions of the following clauses:

"The Ludic-Functionalist Theory:

Something is a gam iff (i) it is a rule-based system;

(ii) it allows for player inputs;

(iii) it leads to multiple possible outputs;

(iv) Those outputs are multivalent;

(v) Some of those values are specified by the rules;

(vi) They are values specified by the rules as such (valued merely because the rules so specify)" (Ian Schnee, Ontology and Aesthetics of Video Games)[18]

[17] Also see Tavionor's book and Juul's book about other traditional Game theory.
[18] Ian Schnee, Ontology and Aesthetics of Video Games, 3-4.

Generally speaking, these functionalist theories—led by Ian Schnee's Ludic-Functionalist theory— have conceptualized games as "function-based input-output machines." Within this functionalist machine, player inputs are allowed, leading to multiple possible outputs, each of which carries multivalent meanings. These values are ultimately specified and assigned by the rules, which successfully define the rule space of the game (e.g., the movement rules in chess or the scoring system in basketball). Moreover, the rules establish clear win/loss conditions (e.g., the boss fight mechanics in *Dark Souls* or the Game Over condition in *Tetris*), forming the fundamental structural logic of the game world. Building on Jesper Juul's state machine model, these rules precisely map the input-state-output relationships (e.g., the movement constraints in chess).[19]

However, the LF theory presents a key limitation when applied to Chinese Eryou: it has a strictly neutral perspective. Specifically, within these functionalist theories, the values embedded in game rules are inherently neutral—which means they do not intervene in or shape players' emotional responses. For instance, the clearing mechanics in *Tetris* merely define success conditions without prescribing an emotional feedback pathway. This aligns with Huizinga's Magic Circle theory, in which rules construct a meaning space independent of reality.

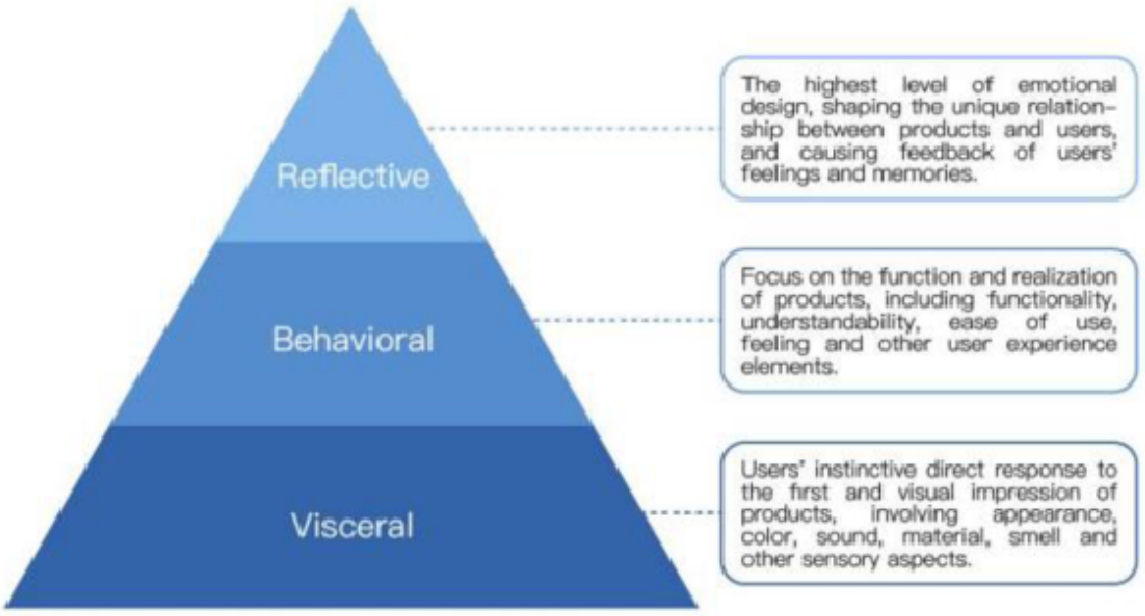
When exploring the emotional elements of Chinese Eryou, a core theoretical challenge lies in systematically analyzing how game designers convey emotions through rules and mechanics and explaining why these emotional responses are universally perceived by players. While traditional philosophical frameworks—such as Schnee's Ludic-Functionalist (LF) theory—effectively define a game's rule system and input-output logic, they struggle to quantify or uniformly describe the formation of emotional value.[20]

---

[19] Ian Schnee, Ontology and Aesthetics of Video Games, 4-8.
[20]To be fair to Schnee, his theory was not designed to do so.

After all, emotional experiences are inherently subjective and vary across individuals; the same rule design may trigger vastly different reactions in different players.

However, game designers do not merely leave emotional expression to chance. On the contrary, they deliberately embed emotional experiences into the rule system through carefully designed audiovisual stimulation, interactive feedback, and narrative symbols, creating a form of "industrialized emotion production". To analyze this process, I introduce Don Norman's theory of emotional design, which categorizes emotional experience into three levels—Visceral, Behavioral, and Reflective.[21]



[22]This framework, as validated by David Freeman's *Creating Emotion in Games*,[23] provides a structured approach to designing emotional feedback in games. Its layered structure allows for a systematic analysis of intentional design operations:

- Visceral Level: Corresponds to audiovisual rules within the rule system (e.g., the cute character illustrations or reinforced battle sound effects), directly stimulating players'

[21] Don Norman,Emotional Design,65.
[22] Don-Normans-3-levels-of-emotional-design-drawn-by-author-based-on-1.png (609×341)
[23] David Freeman, Creating Emotion in Games

sensory neurons and triggering dopamine release.

- Behavioral Level: Maps onto the LF theory's player input-multivalent output relationships (Clause ii & iv). Through operant conditioning (e.g., daily logins rewarding gacha resources), this level reinforces behavioral patterns, fostering emotional dependency through repetitive interaction.

- Reflective Level: Connects to cultural symbols and self-sufficient meaning (Clause vi), guiding players to sublimate fictional values into personal identity through character backstories, game narratives, community co-creation, and fan-generated content.

Norman's theory not only provides a practical, hierarchical analytical tool for emotional game design but also reveals how Chinese Eryou transforms subjective experiences into replicable, industrialized products by aligning rules (Such as the LF theory) with emotions (Three level layered model). Designers "capture" players' attention at the visceral level, "condition" their behaviors at the behavioral level, and "bind" their identities at the reflective level, ultimately completing the emotional value production cycle within the rule framework.

This approach bridges the gap left by purely philosophical theories, which struggle to quantify emotions, and provides a cross-disciplinary perspective for understanding the global success of Chinese Eryou. In the following analysis of the key features of Chinese Eryou, I will integrate LF theory with emotional design theory, deconstructing key features based on their interaction within the LF framework and examining how emotional design functions at

each clause level. This will illustrate how the Emotional Engine manifests in Chinese Eryou's key features and operates within different clauses of the LF framework.

I aim to refine the LF framework by integrating emotional factors at each clause, and apply this enhanced model to analyze the key features of Game_C, a representative example of Eryou games.

A key feature of Chinese Eryou is that Game_C consistently incorporates the following elements:

1. Gambling-like gacha mechanics
2. Character-centric systems
3. Episodic Anime-style narrative structure

1: Gambling-like Gacha mechanics.

One of the defining features of Chinese Eryou games is the gambling-like Gacha mechanics, which serves as a fundamental mechanic within their core gameplay. Originating from Japan, the idea "Gacha" refers to a lottery-based system commonly used in games, toys, and trading cards, where players spend resources (such as in-game currency or real money) to randomly obtain characters, equipment, or items in the game. At its core, the Gacha system represents a complex interplay between rule-based structures and emotional outputs. According to Schnee's Ludic-Functionalist (LF) theory, this gambling mechanism can be broken down into the following interacting components:

First, the Rule-based system (Clause i) establishes a self-contained and well-defined set of mechanics, including probability settings, pity systems and category division, which ensure the logical coherence of the system. Probability settings dictate the drop rates for

different items, category division has limiting the type of item the player wants to interact with, while pity systems define the lower limits for obtaining high-value rewards, ensuring the system's closure. For example, in *Genshin Impact*, one of the most globally popular Chinese Eryou games, the Gacha system (in game it was called as the "Wish System") has been divided into the following categories:

Wish Categories	Character	Weapon
Event wish	Character Event Wish	Weapon Event Wish
Chronicled wish	Character Chronicled Wish	Weapon Chronicled Wish

The Wish Gacha system operates as follows: the base probability of obtaining a five-star character is 0.6%, while the overall probability (including the pity system) is 1.6%, with a hard cap of 90 pulls. Players have a 0.6% chance of pulling a five-star character within the first 73 pulls, but starting from the 74th pull, the probability increases by 6% per pull, reaching 100% at the 90th pull (ensuring a five-star drop). Additionally, there is a 50% chance that the obtained five-star character will be the featured limited character. If the first five-star pull is not the featured character, the system guarantees that the next five-star pull will be.[24]

Second, Player inputs (Clause iii) in the gacha system can be categorized into resource inputs and operational inputs. Resource inputs form the core player interaction, as players invest limited in-game resources (often tied to premium currency purchasable via microtransactions) as gambling "tokens" to influence the outcome. Operational inputs, on the other hand, refer to specific player actions performed when initiating a gacha pull. While

[24] Wish | Genshin Impact Wiki | Fandom

these inputs do not directly impact the outcome—since Chinese Eryou gacha systems fundamentally align with Juul's "Classic Game Model" of chance-based gambling, characterized by pre-negotiated consequences and a lack of player effort—game developers introduce symbolic rituals to attach emotional significance to the act of pulling. For instance, in *Onmyoji*, players must manually draw summoning symbols, while in *Genshin Impact*, players often visit in-game locations like the Grand Narukami Shrine to "enhance their luck" before pulling. From the perspective of Norman's three-tier emotional design model, these operational inputs exist at the behavioral level, where they generate illusory agency and short-term emotional fluctuations for the player, thereby enhancing emotional engagement despite having no actual influence on the results.

Continuing from the previous discussion, another essential characteristic of the gacha system in Chinese Eryou games is its multiple possible, multivalent outputs whose values are assigned by the rules (Clause iii , iv and v). In this system, different gacha results (outputs) are generated based on player inputs, with each output assigned a distinct value. These values are determined within a predefined rule-based framework, where variations in quality and type define the nature of the obtained characters, weapons, or items. The probability-based structure governing these outputs has already been detailed in the Rule-based system section. However, beyond the mechanical assignment of probabilities, these outputs are further stratified into differentiated value systems. Within the scope of Game_C, I categorize these values into the following types:

First, there is performance value, which arises from the unique combat effectiveness of characters and weapons. No two characters or weapons possess identical functional capabilities, meaning their applicability and battlefield efficiency dictate their distinct value.

For instance, in Arknights, the character Exusiai is considered a "meta-defining" (幻神) operator due to her exceptional combat abilities.

Second, resource value refers to the compensation mechanics for duplicate items. Many Chinese Eryou games implement systems that allow players to recycle excess duplicates into alternative rewards. A notable example is Genshin Impact's Starglitter Exchange System, where surplus rare items can be converted into valuable in-game currency.

Third, and most critically, emotional value is deeply embedded in the gacha experience of Chinese Eryou games. Unlike purely mechanical lottery systems, in these games, acquiring a specific character or weapon unlocks exclusive background stories, voice lines, and lore, fostering an emotional bond between the player and the obtained content. I will further elaborate on character-driven emotional value in the Character section. Additionally, beyond this character-binding emotional attachment, Chinese Eryou games have placed the emotional value on the Gacha system through incorporating both Visceral and behavioral levels from the Emotional Design theory.

At the Visceral level, the gacha experience is designed to evoke sensory stimulation and immediate gratification. Developers achieve this by integrating visually striking animations, special effects, and unique voice overs for high-rarity items or characters. For example, in most Chinese Eryou games, gold signifies the highest rarity, purple represents the second tier, and blue or colorless denotes the lowest tier. When a player pulls a top-tier character (5-star character for example), the screen often flashes with a golden glow, accompanied by a cinematic entrance animation, unique illustrations, and exclusive voice lines, all of which enhance sensory engagement and amplify the emotional reward of acquiring rare content.

At the Behavioral level, additional feedback mechanisms provide further emotional reinforcement. Developers implement tactile responses and achievement-based rewards to enhance the player's sense of accomplishment. For instance, in mobile games, obtaining a five-star character often triggers haptic feedback (phone vibrations), and the game may display a special achievement notification marking the milestone of unlocking an ultra-rare character. These elements work in conjunction to create an immersive and emotionally engaging gacha experience, elevating it beyond mere probability-based mechanics.

2：Character-centric mechanics.

The character-centric mechanics in Chinese Eryou represent the culmination of rule-based systems and emotional design, encompassing two key aspects: character progression and voice interaction and feedback. According to Schnee's Ludic-Functionalist theory, these mechanics not only establish a cohesive rule framework (*Clause i-iii*) but also generate multivalent outputs (*Clause iv*), triggering multi-layered emotional experiences for players. From a psychological perspective, this system precisely aligns with Norman's three-tier emotional design model, covering the Visceral Level , the Behavioral Level, and the Reflective Level. Together, these elements form a closed-loop system of 'Emotional Engine', seamlessly integrating game mechanics with emotional engagement.

Character Progression System

The character progression system is the most fundamental and comprehensive component of character-centric mechanics, encompassing all principles of LF theory and forming a structured rule-based system. In Chinese Eryou games, character progression primarily refers to the process by which players enhance a character's attributes, skills, and

equipment through various resource investments (e.g., experience books, ascension materials). This system closely resembles traditional RPG character development, where predefined rules shape a structured resource consumption framework (*Clause i*).

Players engage with this system by spending time (quantified as stamina or energy within the game) to acquire multi-value resources, which they then invest in strengthening their characters (*Clause ii*). The allocation of these resources influences a character's stats and performance, thereby creating variability in character value and function (*Clause iii*).

Beyond its rule-based structure, the character progression system in Chinese Eryou games also incorporates multi-layered emotional reinforcement. On the Visceral level, players experience sensory gratification through visual, auditory, and interactive effects that accompany character growth—such as unlocking new illustrations, voice lines, and special effects at specific upgrade milestones. These design choices enhance player immersion by creating a tangible sense of character development.

On the reflective level, the character progression system fosters emotional attachment by requiring character-specific ascension materials, meaning that incorrect materials will not contribute to character growth. This forces players to invest time in understanding the character's unique traits and upgrade requirements, deepening their connection to the character. Furthermore, the stamina-based energy system quantifies real-world time spent acquiring these materials, reinforcing the idea that a character's progress symbolizes the player's own time and emotional investment.

A prime example is the tower defense game *Arknights*, where players consume "Sanity" (stamina) to obtain EXP materials ("Battle Records") (*player input, Clause ii*). These materials are then allocated to operators for level progression (*Clause i*), and the chosen development path directly impacts overall team strength (*Clause iii*). Additionally,

upon reaching the Elite 2 promotion stage, characters unlock exclusive new artwork and voice lines (*Visceral level*), while players pursuing a "full Elite 2 collection" continue investing in progression as a long-term emotional goal (*reflective level*).

Character Voice and Interactive Feedback

Another core component of character-centric mechanics in Chinese Eryou games is the character voice and interactive feedback system, which enhances character immersion and emotional connection with players through voice acting, dynamic dialogue options, and environmental interactions. This system is structured upon rule-based mechanics (Clause i), player input and multivalent output (Clause iv), and self-sufficiency (Clause vi).

Chinese Eryou games establish rules governing character responses to specific player inputs, ensuring that voice lines, animations, and hidden interactions are triggered when players perform designated actions. These interactions generate rule-based value, often through affection point increases (which can lead to character stat enhancements, further integrating interaction with character progression) or achievement-based rewards (such as unlocking additional dialogue, animations, or in-game currency). Beyond its functional role, this system is deeply rooted in emotional design theory, offering players multi-layered emotional engagement:

On the Visceral Level, professional voice actors provide multi-faceted emotional performances, enhancing auditory pleasure. Simultaneously, customized interaction animations stimulate visual engagement, drawing players into the character's presence.

On the Behavioral Level, game designers reinforce habitual interactions by integrating character interactions into daily tasks (e.g., gifting items or tapping on the

character model to trigger responses). This conditioning fosters a sense of dependency on the character.

On the Reflective Level, character voice lines, quotes, and gestures reinforce personality archetypes, evoking player identification and emotional resonance. This process strengthens the bond between player and character, effectively integrating the character into the player's self-perception and emotional landscape.

Take one of the most popular characters in Chinese Eryou, Zhongli, from Genshin Impact, as an example. The character voice and interaction system in Genshin Impact is a precisely designed emotional binding tool, with Zhongli as a representative example. The rules (Clause i) dictate that interacting with Zhongli in specific scenarios (such as tapping the character model or completing story quests) triggers voice and animation feedback—for instance, his idle animation of sipping tea or reciting the phrase:

> "此世群魔诸神并起，我虽无意逐鹿，却知苍生苦楚。"
>
> ("This is an age of gods and monsters. I wish not for dominion, yet I cannot watch the common folk suffer.") [25]

These interactions are driven by player input (Clause ii) and result in multivalent outputs (Clause iv): Including the Rule-based value, such as increased affection points (unlocking passive stat boosts) and achievement rewards (such as Primogems and Mora). Emotional value: Voice actor Peng Bo's deep, resonant voice reinforces Zhongli's wise and composed persona, while his idle animations (e.g., elegantly holding a teacup) visually embody his philosophical demeanor.

[25] https://www.bilibili.com/opus/690862639625011234

From an emotional design perspective, Zhongli's voice and interaction system spans all three levels of experience:

On the Visceral Level, Zhongli's voice actor, Peng Bo, delivers a rich and textured vocal performance, complemented by traditional Chinese-inspired background music (e.g., *Liyue's Jade Moon upon a Sea of Clouds")*[26]. His outfit details, including intricate geo-themed patterns, and the visual spectacle of his elemental abilities (e.g., summoning stone pillars) heighten sensory immersion.

On the Behavioral Level, The daily commission task *"A Leisurely Stroll"* requires players to gift Zhongli a Glaze Lily to increase affection points, reinforcing habitual interaction through operant conditioning.

On the Reflective Level, Zhongli's narrative as the "God of Contracts" (e.g., his sacrifice of divine power to protect Liyue in the second *Legendary Mission: "No Mere Stone"*[27]) aligns with his symbolic representation of "China" within the game's world. This design elevates him from a fictional character to a cultural icon, allowing players to project their values and national identity onto him.

Furthermore, this system fulfills the LF theory's principle of self-sufficiency (Clause vi)—Zhongli's intrinsic game value is determined by the rules (e.g., his Constellation System reinforcing his *Jade Shield* ability). However, through emotional layering, Zhongli transcends his role as a mere game entity, becoming an emotional anchor within the player's gaming experience.

---

[26] Jade Moon Upon a Sea of Clouds - Disc 1: Glazed Moon Over the Tides | Genshin Impact
[27] Zhongli Story Quest 2 | No Mere Stone | Historia Antiqua Chapter: Act II

3：Episodic anime-style narrative structure

The episodic anime-style narrative structure is another defining feature that sets Chinese Eryou apart from traditional video games. By adopting chapter-based serialization, character-centric storylines, and suspense-driven storytelling, this structure integrates the seasonal broadcasting logic of Japanese anime into game narratives, creating a systematic and emotionally engaging content delivery framework. According to Schnee's Ludic-Functionalist theory, this structure is not only an extension of the rule system's narrative framework but also a deep integration of multivalent output and player input, ultimately fostering a progressive emotional resonance across the visceral, behavioral, and reflective levels.

This structure is inspired by the episodic format of Japanese anime, in which main story chapters are updated periodically, mimicking the seasonal rhythm of anime releases. Alongside the main storyline, character-centric side stories—often introduced through limited-time events or additional side quests—offer deeper insights into individual characters. To maintain long-term player engagement, cliffhangers are frequently employed at the end of each chapter, ensuring sustained player anticipation and investment in the unfolding story.

Within the LF theory framework, episodic anime-style storytelling operates at the intersection of rule-based mechanics (Clause i), player input (Clause ii), and multivalent output (Clause iv). The rule system (Clause i) is evident in the fixed content release cycles and structured narrative progression, where access to new chapters is gated by character level requirements or mandatory completion of prerequisite quests. Player interaction is introduced through dialogue choices and branching narratives, enabling player input (Clause ii) and multi-possible output (Clause iii). These choices influence story direction and dialogue outcomes, ensuring that narratives remain interactive rather than entirely linear. Finally,

multivalent output (Clause iv) transforms these narrative branches into both rule-based value and emotional value—the former includes in-game resource rewards granted for story participation, while the latter is reflected in alternate story routes unlocked through different player choices.

From an emotional experience perspective, episodic storytelling provides multi-layered engagement across all three levels of emotional design theory. On the visceral level, high-quality animated cutscenes, professional voice acting, and immersive background music create audiovisual impact, heightening player immersion.

On the behavioral level, players engage through narrative choices and environmental interactions, such as solving in-game puzzles or investigating minor details within scenes to uncover hidden lore, fostering a sense of active participation.

On the reflective level, the long-term narrative investment in both the main story and character-centric episodes facilitates deep emotional projection onto characters, strengthening player attachment to the game's fictional world. As a result, the episodic anime-style structure constructs a complete emotional industrialization chain, progressing from sensory stimulation to deep identification. This not only highlights Chinese Eryou games as "super-rule-based emotional carriers" but also underscores their distinct approach to narrative immersion and player engagement.

Taking Genshin Impact's Version 3.2, *Akasha Pulses, the Kalpa Flame Rises* as an example.[28] The structured rhythm and emotional design of episodic anime-style storytelling are fully exemplified. First, players must progressively unlock Sumeru's main storyline in accordance with the game's version cycle. This rule-based progression (Clause i) is reflected in the *Jail of the God of Wisdom* questline, which deconstructs Lesser Lord Kusanali's

[28] Version 3.2 | Genshin Impact Wiki | Fandom

predicament into staged narrative suspense. When players first witness Nahida trapped within the glass chamber of the Sanctuary of Surasthana, the interplay of soft lighting and shattered glass particle effects, combined with the sudden swell of melancholic orchestral music, delivers a visceral-level sensory impact that instantly triggers feelings of protectiveness and indignation.

Following this emotional escalation, the game introduces the "consciousness link" mechanic, requiring players to control the NPC Haypasia's dream perception to solve puzzles. Here, behavioral-level interactive input (Clause ii) directly influences the narrative branches: choosing to expose the sages' conspiracy unlocks a hidden rebellion sequence led by Nahida, whereas a more cautious approach leads to a prolonged struggle against the Akademiya. Finally, as Nahida proclaims, "Knowledge should not be monopolized; wisdom must grow freely, like grass and trees," the reflective-level philosophical resonance reaches its peak—players begin contemplating whether Nahida symbolizes educational equality and even compare her ideals to Mondstadt's Anemo Archon, Venti, and his philosophy of freedom, fostering an emotional continuity across different game versions.[29]

This narrative structure not only strictly adheres to the six-week update cycle framework (Clause i) but also creates a closed loop between player time investment (Clause ii) and multivalent output (Clause iv), elevating the fate of a virtual character into a cultural symbol. As a result, this storytelling model achieves a seamless transformation from rule-driven mechanics to emotional symbiosis, reinforcing the unique narrative depth of Chinese Eryou games.

---

29 https://wiki.biligame.com/ys/%E7%BA%B3%E8%A5%BF%E5%A6%B2%E8%AF%AD%E9%9F%B3

Summary of Game_C level

The Game_C component of Chinese Eryou games exemplifies a sophisticated integration of rule-based systems and industrialized emotional design, fundamentally redefining player engagement through its "Emotional Engine." Drawing on Ian Schnee's Ludic-Functionalist (LF) theory, which frames games as rule-bound input-output machines, My theory of Chinese Eryou transcends traditional functionalist neutrality by embedding emotional amplification into its core mechanics. This is achieved through Don Norman's tripartite emotional design model—Visceral, Behavioral, and Reflective levels—which systematically converts subjective experiences into reproducible emotional outputs. Three key features illustrate this synthesis: gacha mechanics, character-centric systems, and episodic anime-style narratives.

Gacha mechanics operationalize the Emotional Engine by merging LF's rule-based probability systems (e.g., drop rates, pity counters) with layered emotional triggers. At the Visceral level, sensory stimuli like golden animations and character entrances heighten anticipation; Behaviorally, ritualized inputs (e.g., drawing symbols) and haptic feedback condition habitual engagement; Reflectively, exclusive lore and cultural symbolism transform pulls into identity-shaping acts. Character-centric systems deepen this interplay: progression mechanics (e.g., stamina-based upgrades) bind player effort to character growth, while voice interactions and narrative arcs (e.g., Zhongli's philosophical quotes) foster emotional attachment across Norman's tiers. Finally, Episodic anime-style storytelling take the player's emotion to the next level through rule-gated narrative cycles (e.g., version updates), blending LF theory's multivalent outputs (branching choices) with cinematic cutscenes (Visceral), puzzle-solving agency (Behavioral), and reflective cultural allegories (e.g., Nahida's struggle for wisdom).

Together, it becomes evident that game companies deliberately embed emotional feedback mechanisms within various key features of Game_C, intentionally shaping players' emotional responses. In the following Game_B sections, I will explain how two key features within Game_B—Community and Re-creation—channel these emotional outputs, both positive and negative, and feed them back into the Game_C system, thereby sustaining and evolving the emotional ecology of Chinese Eryou.

Game_B

If Game_C operates as the industrialized heart of Chinese Eryou's Emotional Engine—pumping rule-bound affective experiences through meticulously designed mechanics—then Game_B constitutes its aftermarket system by further augmenting,expanding, and releasing the emotions players gained in Game_C. Unlike traditional gaming models that relegate community activities (e.g., fan art, lore debates) to a peripheral "fandom" sphere disconnected from core gameplay (e.g., The Legend of Zelda's fan theories never altering Hyrule's canon), Chinese Eryou deliberately erases the boundary between Game_C's rule-space and Game_B's cultural extensions. Here, player creativity is not merely tolerated but systematically harvested: community memes refine character designs, fanfiction tropes reshape official narratives, and collective rituals (e.g., "玄学抽卡" superstitions) are codified into Game_C's probability algorithms. This feedback-driven symbiosis transcends Hunicke's MDA model, positioning Game_B as both a cultural refinery that amplifies Game_C's emotional outputs and a data-driven focus group that directly reprograms its rulebook. By analyzing Game_B's key features—community and re-creation—this section will demonstrate how Chinese Eryou's Emotional Engine

weaponizes player sentiment into a self-optimizing industrial loop, feeding back the core game itself, and making players join the designing process.

The key feature of Chinese Eryou in Game_B has incorporates the following elements:

1. Community.
2. Re-creation

1: Community

Community in the context of Chinese Eryou refers to the dynamic network of player interactions that forms around the game, encompassing a variety of spaces including official forums (such as HoYoverse's *miHoYo Community*), social media groups (like Bilibili topic circles and Weibo super topics), and offline events (such as anime conventions and themed pop-up stores). Within Chinese Eryou, the community evolves into an emotional "massager" that amplifies the player's positive emotional feeling and helps in releasing and relieving negative emotions. It also formed a "participatory culture",which as Jenkins has mentioned in his book *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, that "one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connections with one another (at least they care what other people think about what they have created)"[30] At the same time, developers strategically foster and guide this participatory culture through initiatives such as content-sharing permissions, creator incentive programs, and version livestreams. The community thus functions not only as a platform for player interaction, but also as an extension and reproduction space for the

[30]Jenkins, Henry. Textual Poachers : Television Fans and Participatory Culture, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/washington/detail.action?docID=1097854.
7.

game's emotional value itself. Within Chinese Eryou, the community has embodied a tightly structured system which interlinked around four key features that unfold in a sequential and mutually affecting manner:

1: Official/ Game Company design actively encourages community participation (How they encourage players to join the participatory culture)

2: Community management（"社管"）guides and shapes public discourse (How they enhance the participatory culture in the community)

3: Community functions as a bridge between virtual and real-world interactions（The effect of participatory culture in real world)

4: Community pressuring the official to respond and adapt. (The effect of participatory culture for the game company)

Firstly, the official operators of Chinese Eryou—namely, the game companies themselves—extend player behavior beyond in-game interaction into a broader community ecosystem through systematic incentive design and strategic community operations. Within the game, incentive mechanisms are deeply embedded across Game_C: for instance, the Gambling-like gacha mechanics often includes a "share to community for rewards" feature. In line with Norman's emotional design theory, this behavioral-level feedback allows players to receive instant rewards (e.g., *Genshin Impact* grants 5 Primogems for daily sharing) to gain positive emotional feedback. Besides that, by sharing the Gacha Gambling's result to the community, the Chinese Eryou could successfully transform players' emotional highs and lows—such as the elation of pulling a rare character or the frustration of hitting pity—into fuel for collective emotional resonance. Just as Jenkins notes in his work *Textual poachers : television fans and participatory culture*, fans often amplify their emotional investment by

sharing, rewatching, and exchanging media fragments within the community—ritualistic behaviors that intensify individual affect through collective practice.[31] In this case, players can elevate their personal experience to a collective expression by Posting screenshots of the lottery draw or sharing complaints with the community, thereby evoking emotional resonance from other players.

The Character-centric systems further reinforces this by converting private achievements—such as reaching breakthrough levels—into public displays through "breakthrough share" functions, which tap into social comparison and activate reflective-level identity validation. Meanwhile, under the serialized Episodic Anime-style narrative structure, players are encouraged to join community discussions after completing main story arcs in exchange for entry into prize draws (as in *Honkai: Star Rail*'s story discussion events). This approach uses narrative suspense as a hook to redirect player engagement toward content reproduction, which echoes Jenkins' suggestion that fan readings in participatory culture complements and reconfigures the official narrative through associational discussion and thus:

> Fan reading, however, is a social process through which individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussions with other readers. Such discussions expand the experience of the text beyond its initial consumption.[32]

Outside the game, the incentive system demonstrates even greater strategic ambition. Creative support programs on platforms like Bilibili and YouTube (such as *Arknights*' "Terra Creative Camp") incorporate revenue-sharing schemes and cash prizes, effectively

---

[31]Jenkins, Henry. Textual Poachers : Television Fans and Participatory Culture, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/washington/detail.action?docID=1097854.
68-74.

[32]Jenkins, Henry. Textual Poachers : Television Fans and Participatory Culture, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/washington/detail.action?docID=1097854.
45.

industrializing fan creation and integrating it into the production pipeline. Large-scale fan competitions (e.g., HoYoverse's "Genshin Doujin Festival") and official partnerships with top fan creators further institutionalize this process, co-opting elite community members as collaborative authors of the game's extended universe. By setting the confirmation as the highest reward for the recruitment and community discussion, the Chinese Eryou Company has provided a sense of achievement to the players and community participants, thereby encouraging players to participate in the community.

The ceremonial design of community operations underscores the emotional engineering at play. For instance, during version preview livestreams, developers release limited-time redemption codes to deliberately generate scarcity, stimulating collective anxiety at the reflective level while triggering a frenzy of code-sharing and claiming. Additionally, on character birthdays, players receive birthday push notifications and have the opportunity to "call" the character—complete with voice messages—delivering Visceral-level auditory pleasure while simulating intimate one-on-one interaction. This illusion of personal connection also deepens emotional bonds between players and virtual characters on the Reflective level, reinforcing long-term player attachment and emotion through a blend of game mechanics and community ritual.

Secondly, developers of Chinese Eryou strategically implement a systematized approach to community management ("sheguan") in order to actively intervene in and shape player discourse, transforming individualized gameplay experiences into collective emotional resonance. Within character cultivation and gacha mechanics, community managers stimulate players' desire to share by designing themed hashtags such as "Lucky Pull Showcase" or "Pity Support Group,"which guide players to share positive emotions in the community and try to smooth out the player's negative emotion and avoid causing negative

emotional resonance among other players in the community. Simultaneously, they embed directed discussion prompts into narrative dialogues—such as “Which character do you most want to save? ”—to encourage deeper player engagement in the co-creation of storyworlds, ultimately fostering what Jenkins defines as a participatory narrative community. Just as previously noticed, sharing and exchanging experiences within the community will amplify the emotional investment of players and intensify individual affect through collective practice. In this context, discourse guidance functions as a reflective-level amplifier of in-game emotional feedback, constructing a social boundary of “Us versus Them” and fostering a profound sense of group identity among players. This intentional modulation of player sentiment—blending the “Invisible hand” of Community management with the visible frenzy of player-driven expression—combines into a dense network of emotional mobilization. As a result, the social manager is able to provoke and guide the positive emotional output of the players in the Community to a certain extent, and tries to avoid the negative emotional resonance of the players in the Community, thus maintaining the stability of the Community and guiding the virtuous cycle of emotional output.

Third, the participatory culture cultivated by the virtual communities of Chinese Eryou significantly enhances players’ interactions across both virtual and real-world spaces. As Professor Zhou Rongting of the University of Science and Technology of China notes in his article “Participatory Culture: A New Form of Media Culture”(”参与式文化:一种全新的媒介文化样式”), that:

> “网络的出现使得网民的媒介行为摆脱了孤立的状态,他们可以通过各种微妙的机制建立起相互间的联系。这种联系起初是相对松散而不稳的 ，并且大多缺乏与现实世界的双向互动。借助于网络评价带来的反馈效应和数字作品衍生创作所带来 的连锁效应．联系本身变得日渐多元 (既可以是密切的朋友交往,也可以是稳定的商业往来,还可以是临时的会话关系)．联系强度也显著增强 (长期而稳定的网络交往), 与现实世界的互动明显增多(对六度分割理论的充分诠释)…… 由此可见．参与式文化让社会得到了改观．新型网络环境中的个人媒介行为正着力构建一种更为开放和灵活的社会联系。”[33]

[33] 周荣庭、管华骥, “参与式文化:一种全新的媒介文化样式”, 新闻爱好者 , 2010.6.

> ("The emergence of the Internet has enabled netizens' media behaviors to break away from an isolated state. They can establish connections with each other through various subtle mechanisms. This connection was initially relatively loose and unstable, and mostly lacked two-way interaction with the real world. With the help of the feedback effect brought by online evaluation and the chain reaction effect brought by the derivative creation of digital works. Connections themselves have become increasingly diverse (they can be close friendships, stable business transactions, or temporary conversational relationships). The intensity of connection has also significantly increased (long-term and stable online communication), and the interaction with the real world has significantly increased (a full interpretation of the six-degree division theory)... From this, it can be seen. Participatory culture has changed society. Personal media behaviors in the new network environment are striving to build a more open and flexible social connection.")

In the context of Chinese Eryou, virtual communities actively convert emotional resonance from digital spaces into embodied interactions in the real world through systematically designed offline events, thereby constructing a social ecology of "online empathy–offline co-presence." A prime example is the Genshin Impact x KFC collaboration event, themed "When Worlds Collide, Savour the Moment." In this campaign, players were required to visit KFC stores and recite the in-game line "The contract is sealed, victory shall be ours" in order to receive an exclusive in-game glider. This rule-based design cleverly externalized the game's Liyue contract narrative into a real-world ritual, prompting fans across the globe to spontaneously organize cosplay groups and flood KFC locations—from Akihabara in Tokyo to Nanjing Road in Shanghai—where symbolic identification with virtual characters became a passport for breaking the social barriers between strangers.[34]

[34] Accessed from https://ys.mihoyo.com/main/news/detail/116528

Genshin Impact x KFC collaboration event, themed "When Worlds Collide, Savour the Moment."(异世相遇，尽享美味)

Simultaneously, player communities such as Bilibili's "Genshin" topic hub began to organically generate support groups like the "Social Anxiety Mutual Aid Squad," offering help to shy participants in delivering the required line, and even giving rise to temporary roles like "Proxy Shouters" who would step in to speak on behalf of others. These developments illustrate how participatory culture within Chinese Eryou can reshape real-world economic behaviors and social dynamics. The sense of connection deepens even further through large-scale cultural events like the Genshin Symphony Concert, where community coordination around ticket acquisition (e.g., "ticket-snatching strategy groups"), on-site exchanges of support materials (such as character standees and fan-made merchandise), and post-concert creative relays (including music remixes and in-depth reviews) collectively transform a single performance into a cross-dimensional network of cultural reproduction. These hybrid practices not only reinforce emotional engagement but also solidify a strong sense of identity and belonging among players, extending the Community from a space of interaction into a lived cultural environment.[35]

[35] Accessed from https://www.miyoushe.com/ys/article/55081154

Genshin Impact's 2024 Global Concert Tour

Lastly, in the Chinese Eryou's community, players can also constantly challenge the dominance of the game designer by turning their negative emotions (which gets from Game_C level) into collective action, thus forcing the game designer to compromise on rule design and narrative construction, and ultimately feeding back and reshaping the Game_C level. A notable example of this dynamic occurred during the 2021 "Bunny Girl Incident" in Honkai Impact 3rd.[36] In this case, a globally exclusive event in the international server, featuring characters dressed in bunny girl outfits, sparked widespread backlash in the Chinese-speaking community. The visual portrayal clashed with players' long-held perceptions of the Valkyries as noble warrior figures, triggering a wave of participatory resistance.

Chinese Eryou players mobilized across multiple platforms: they produced reimagined "dark versions" of the storyline through fan-made videos on Bilibili, flooded Weibo with protest hashtags such as #MiHoYoSilentTreatment#, and organized mass

[36] https://www.dualshockers.com/genshin-impact-mihoyo-honkai-bunny-girl-controversy-explained/

campaigns to downvote the game on app stores. This multi-pronged strategy eventually forced the developer, miHoYo, to issue a public apology and revise the event content. The relationship between players and game production company, in which players force the game production company to change by feeding back their negative emotions from the game itself to the game production company through collective activities in the community, is similar to the resistance relationship between fans and the creative company that Jenkins mentions in his book. As he notes: "The history of media fandom is at least in part the history of a series of organized efforts to influence programming decisions—some successful, most ending in failure... Fans must actively struggle with and against the meanings imposed upon them by their borrowed materials; fans must confront media representations on an unequal terrain."[37]

This example shows that, unlike the situation in other traditional games, players in China's Eryou are not completely receptive and passive parties. By amplifying the negative emotions they receive at the Game_C level through community resonance, and then exporting them through resonance with other players, thus forcing game makers to modify Game_C content that causes negative emotions, Chinese Eryou players have successfully demonstrated that they are part of the game designers and creators of their related creations, and are able to participate in the "participatory culture" of Chinese Eryou through the release of their emotions. Chinese game players have successfully proved themselves to be part of the creators of game designers and their related creations, and have been able to successfully participate in the "participatory culture" of Chinese Eryou through the release of their emotions.

---

[37]Jenkins, Henry. Textual Poachers : Television Fans and Participatory Culture, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/washington/detail.action?docID=1097854.
28-33.

In summary, within the context of Chinese Eryou (Chinese anime-style mobile games), the Community refers to a dynamic network of player interactions that spans various spaces, including official forums, social media groups, and offline events. These communities serve not only as platforms for information exchange but also as spaces for emotional output and cultural production, making the community a continuation of Game_C. Game companies embed incentive mechanisms—such as rewards for sharing gacha results or participating in story discussions—within core gameplay level (Game_C) to encourage players to transform their personal experiences into collective resonance in the community. Meanwhile, external programs like Bilibili's Content Reward Program and Fan Art Competitions further incentivize and guide players to engage in targeted, positive emotional output in the community.

Community management strategies (commonly referred to as "社管") further channeled player's emotions by planning topics (e.g., "Lucky Pull Contests") and ritualized events like version livestreams or character birthday celebrations, which enhanced player's ability to received from Game_C of positive emotional feedback while also mitigating players' negative emotions trends. These practices strengthened players' individual emotions by building collective practices and constructed the borders of the Eryou player community, thus fostering a sense of group identity and successfully moderating players' emotions.

In addition, communities play a bridging role in virtual and real-world interactions, meaning that players can simultaneously influence and reshape the Game_C level by exporting positive or negative emotions in both the virtual and real worlds through communities. Examples include Genshin Impact's offline slogan campaign with KFC and the "Bunny Girl Incident" in Honkai Impact 3rd, where player protests—through fan edits, mass review campaigns, and social media actions—pressured the developer to respond. These

actions reflect what Jenkins describes in participatory culture as the ongoing negotiation of cultural ownership between fans and creators.

Altogether, this community ecology functions as an amplifier of player emotions, a site of feedback on player's emotion, and a negotiation house for players and game designers, ultimately feeding back into and influencing the core structure of the game (Game_C). It forms a dynamic cycle of creation and response that characterizes the participatory nature of Chinese Eryou.

2:Re-creation

Re-creation is a core component of the emotional industrialization within Chinese Eryou, where players actively appropriate and rework in-game symbols to transform emotion generated by the rule-driven systems of the core gameplay (Game_C) into sustainable cultural capital. This allows players to express both positive and negative emotional value. At its core, this process reflects how game developers, by opening up creative boundaries and offering incentive mechanisms, gradually turn players from "consumers" into "prosumers." In doing so, they aim to amplify positive emotional output. At the same time, players also use re-creation as a means of expressing dissatisfaction, which can prompt developers to revise elements of the game itself, thereby involving players in the design process.

Rather than focusing on the different forms or genres of re-creation, this section treats re-creation as a general mechanism that parallels the structure of the Community. Since some aspects of re-creation have already been discussed in the community section, the emphasis here is placed on its functional logic within the Emotional Engine of Chinese Eryou.

In practice, re-creation in Chinese Eryou typically unfolds across four parts:

1: Game_C's key features inspired player's creative engagement for re-creation

2: Game Company's incentives that actively encourages re-creation (similar as community section)

3: Game Company's encourages the positive emotional output of re-creation, forming a virtuous cycle

4: Players express their dissatisfaction by exporting negative emotional output of re-creation, forcing the Game Company to make changes.

First, the three key features of Game_C contain deliberately designed emotional feedback mechanisms that initially inspire players' creative impulses during gameplay.

At the Gambling-like gacha mechanics level, the pure randomness of the gambling-like mechanics—similar to the chance-based gambling described in Jesper Juul's model—encourages players to share their results within communities. This motivates them to engage in re-creation as a way to express their feelings about the unpredictability of the system, often through humor, satire, or celebration. Whether the emotional response is frustration (negative) or joy (positive), re-creation serves to transform individual reactions into shared emotional rituals within the community.

At the Character-centric systems level, players convert the positive emotional feedback received from character cultivation into character-based re-creations. These works not only express attachment but also supplement character development by filling in narrative gaps left by the game itself. Meanwhile, in terms of the Episodic Anime-style narrative structure, the story's chapter-based updates, version-to-version cliffhangers, and planted foreshadowing create emotional engagement through curiosity and anticipation. Players

respond by producing lore analysis and prediction videos, transforming narrative suspense into fuel for creative work during content gaps.

Second, developers actively support re-creation by offering creative incentives and lowering barriers to entry. As noted in the Community section, this includes launching regular creation campaigns tied to emotional experiences (e.g., "share your most touching in-game moment") to encourage players to express positive emotional feedback through re-creation. Additionally, developers often provide access to official character models, and even offer voice acting support from in-game actors for high-quality fan works. Take *Genshin Impact* as an example, Genshin Impact has conducted an official re-creation contest six to seven times per year, with all new character models open for creators to download and use free of charge in each edition.[38] These measures reduce the technical and creative threshold, inviting more players to participate.

Third, by officially recognizing and adopting widely praised re-creations—for example, integrating fan works into canon settings or featuring them as one of the show in that Eryou's Spring Festival Gala ("游戏新春会", an official event that happened annually and globally just like the CCTV's Spring Festival Gala)[39] —developers further stimulate positive emotional output, creating a virtuous feedback loop between the community and the game.

---

[38]《原神》迫近的客星视频征集计划 This is an example of Genshin Impact open it's character models for creators to download and use free of charge for making the re-creation work. (In the "模型下载" Model download part. B站《原神》5.5版本创作者激励计划即将开启 This is the most recent incentive program's link that shows the incentive program held in each game version.

[39] Some examples of Eryou's Spring Festival Gala:
2025鸣潮新春会(This is the game Wuthering Wave's 2025 Spring Festival Gala).
2024崩坏星穹铁道新春会（This is the game Honkai Starrail's 2024 Spring Festival Gala)
2022原神新春会 (Genshin impact's 2022 Spring Festival Gala)
明日方舟（Arknight's 2025 Spring Festival Gala)
Each of Eryou's Spring Festival Gala has far more than 10 million plays.

At the same time, players also use re-creation to express dissatisfaction or disagreement with the game's characters or storylines, enabling negative emotional feedback to take shape through satire or deconstruction. A notable example is found in *Wuthering Waves*, where the character "Yangyang" (秧秧) sparked widespread criticism due to dialogue that was perceived as unrealistic. In response, players on platforms like Bilibili produced a wave of re-creation videos that mocked or dissected the character. One of the most popular videos surpassed 5 million views within just one month of release, with total related content views reaching over 10 million.[40] This public response ultimately pushed the developers to revise the character's lines in the next version update. This echoes what Jenkins described:

> "The raw materials of the original story play a crucial role in this process, providing instructions for a preferred reading, but they do not necessarily overpower and subdue the reader. The same narratives (Dragnet, say) can be read literally by one group and as camp by another. Some groups' pleasure comes not in celebrating the values of their chosen works but rather in 'reading them against the grain,' in expressing their opposition to rather than acceptance of textual ideology…Here, the fans' pleasure lies in distancing themselves from the text, in holding it at arm's length and laughing in its face. Such an approach combines both a begrudging respect for these films, albeit within an inverted framework of evaluations, as well as a gleeful disrespect for their bad plotting, clumsy acting, and pretentious conceptions."[41]

In summary, re-creation is a key component in the emotional industrialization of Chinese ACG (Anime, Comic, Game) mobile games. By adapting and reworking in-game symbols, players transform emotions triggered by game mechanics (Game_C) into sustainable cultural capital—both to express positive feelings and to release negative emotions. Game companies, by opening up creative permissions and offering incentives, turn players from consumers into prosumers, encouraging the production of positive, emotion-driven content and fostering a virtuous creative cycle. At the same time, players also

---

40 https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1DM4m1z7tB/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=df88fa534b6236a0a9353f84bf829812

41 Jenkins, Henry. Textual Poachers : Television Fans and Participatory Culture, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/washington/detail.action?docID=1097854.64-65.

use re-creation to voice dissatisfaction—mocking or deconstructing characters and plotlines, thereby pressuring developers to make changes.

The motivation for re-creation often stems from three key emotional triggers embedded in the game's core design. First, the randomness of the gacha system creates moments of surprise or frustration, which players eagerly share with others. This element of chance, much like Jesper Juul's notion of "chance-based gambling," drives players to create humorous or exaggerated re-creations that either celebrate their luck or satirize their failure. Second, the emotional attachment formed during character progression encourages players to deepen their engagement with the story world. By producing re-creations that expand on a character's backstory or personality, players not only express their affection but also fill in narrative gaps left by the official content. Third, the episodic anime-style storytelling, which unfolds across discrete narrative updates, builds suspense through unresolved plotlines and hidden clues. This suspense invites players to produce fan theories, analyses, and speculative content, effectively turning anticipation into a source of creative fuel.

In response to this creative enthusiasm, developers actively lower barriers to participation by offering accessible tools and official support. For instance, companies release character models for public use, invite voice actors to collaborate with high-quality fan works, and launch topic-based creation campaigns tied to emotional themes. Moreover, by integrating outstanding re-creations into official programs—such as featuring them in annual livestream events—developers reinforce a positive feedback loop that celebrates emotional investment and community contribution. Through this dynamic process, re-creation becomes a channel through which players not only share emotional experiences, but also engage in an ongoing dialogue with developers—ultimately shaping the future direction of the game itself.

Summary of Game_B level

In summary, in the Chinese Eryou, the Broad Game Universe (Game_B) serves as the aftersale end of the emotional engine,transforming players from passive game experiencers and emotional reeceivers to active emotional producers and game design participants through the two core elements: Community and Re-creation. Unlike traditional games or films, the community and re-creation in Chinese Eryou are not marginalized fan activities; instead, they are deeply integrated with the game itself (Game_C), forming a self-sufficient cycle of emotional value.

The Community is the main space where players' emotions resonate and cultural production happens. Through designing incentive mechanisms—such as gacha sharing rewards and story discussion activities—developers guide players to turn personal emotions like excitement or frustration into collective experiences. Community managers use topic guidance (such as "lucky gacha showcases") and ritualized activities (such as version livestreams and character birthday events) to build group identity among players and manage the spread of negative emotions. Online and offline collaborations, like the *Genshin Impact* × KFC event, further project in-game emotions into real-world interactions, breaking social barriers and creating a cross-dimensional cultural ecosystem. Players can even influence the Game_C level through collective actions, such as the protests during the *Honkai Impact 3rd* "bunny girl" event, showing that the community has become an important platform for emotional feedback that developers take seriously. It has become an essential part of the Chinese Eryou structure.

Re-creation is the core link in the emotional industrialization process. Players adapt and rework game symbols, turning emotions driven by rules—such as the randomness of gacha, the attachment built through character development, and the suspense from episodic

storytelling—into cultural capital. Developers encourage positive emotional output by opening material libraries, holding creation contests, and integrating outstanding re-creations into official events, such as *Genshin Impact*'s New Year celebration shows, creating a positive feedback loop. At the same time, players also use satirical re-creations—such as the parody videos about the character "Yangyang" from *Wuthering Waves*—to express dissatisfaction, pushing developers to make changes. This two-way interaction makes re-creation not only an outlet for emotional expression but also an important source of feedback for improving the game itself (Game_C).

Application of Emotional Engine

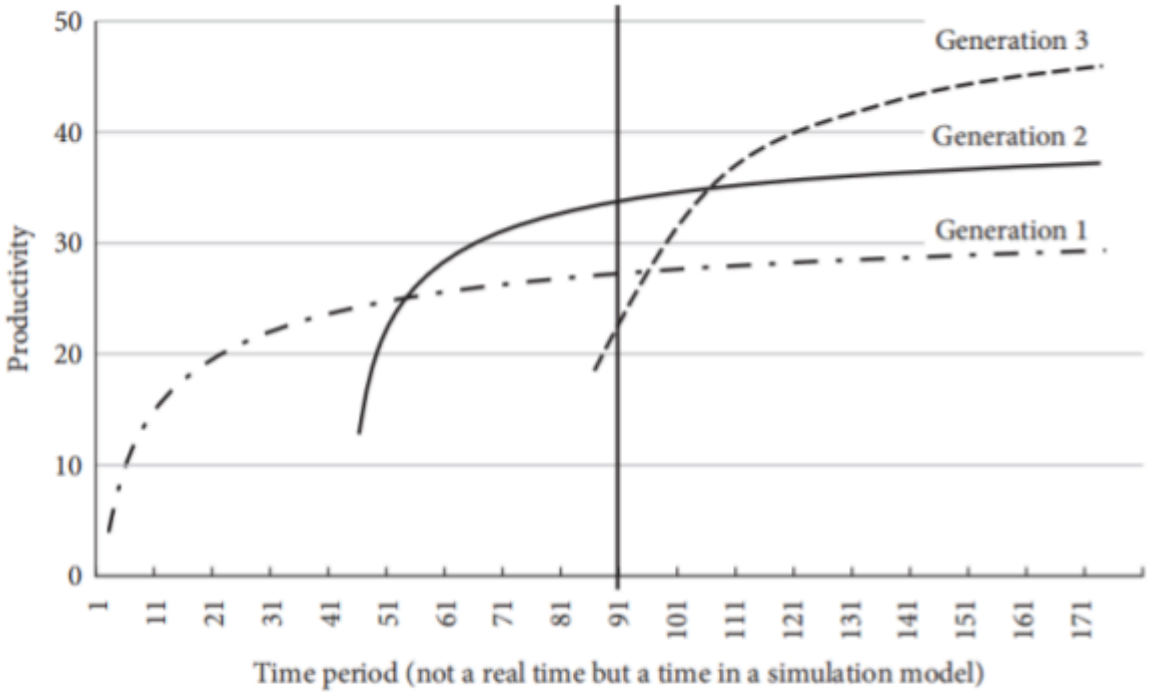
In the previous parts, we have discussed how Emotional Engine has existed and worked as the main feature in Chinese Eryou. This part argues that by developing the emotional engine to consistently stimulate player emotions and transforming these emotional strategies into replicable modules, Chinese Eryou Companies have successfully achieved a path-creating catch-up. After that, since this emotional engine module is not protected by intellectual property rights, other Chinese Eryou companies have been able to adopt and apply the mature model. As a result, China's Eryou industry as a whole has found it easier to succeed and has managed to overtake its overseas counterparts, reaching a globally leading position.

Background & introduction of Methodology

The Schumpeterian theory was an economic theory that explained latecomer companies' catch-up process. Many economists have adapted the Schumpeterian theory into their own theories to help them explain how late-comers have successfully catch-up. In this part,I will mainly apply the new Schumpeterian's theory(adapted by Professor Keun Lee) to analyze how the emotional engine was used in the Chinese Eryou's catch-up process.

As Keun Lee has mentioned, in the Chinese context, the term "catch-up" primarily refers to "closing the gap between forerunning non-Chinese(or foreign) and indigenous Chinese firms in terms of their market shares in China and technological capabilities."[42]

[42]Keun Lee,China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up: *A Schumpeterian Perspective*, 31.



Three types of catching-up and leapfrogging
Source: Adapted from Lee and Ki (2017).
Notes: Path-following strategy: to adopt the oldest (generation 1) technology
Stage-skipping strategy: to adopt the latest (generation 2) technology
Path-creation (leapfrogging) strategy: to adopt the emerging (generation 3) technology

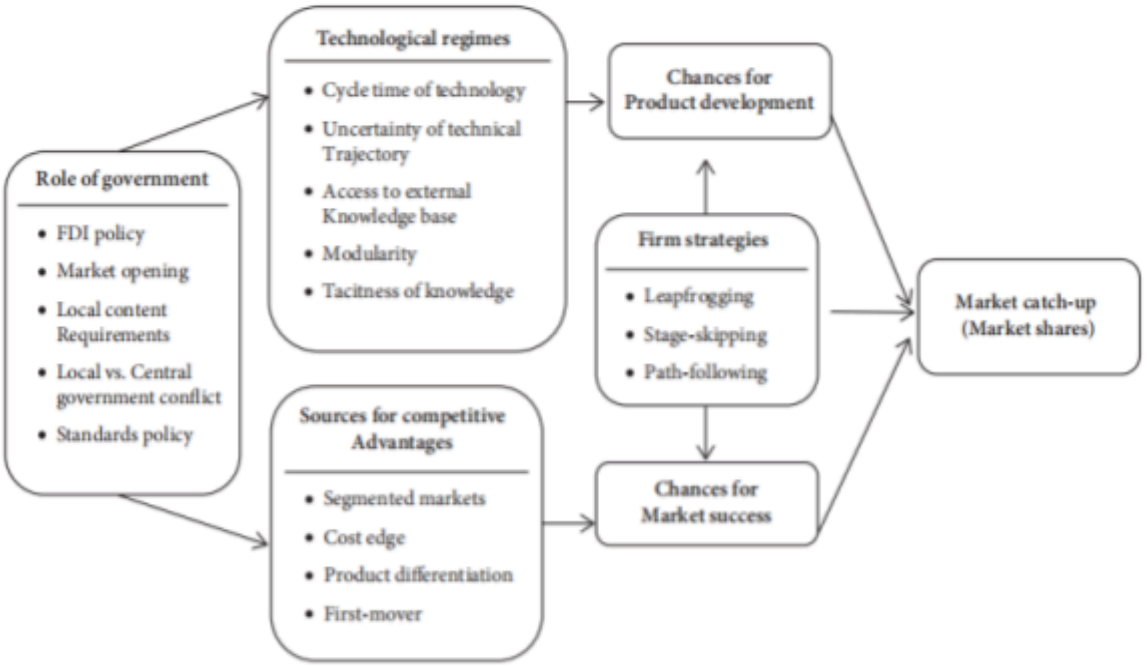
[43]

In the new Schumpeterian theory, there are three choices or strategies for a latecomer firm to successfully achieve the catch-up process. The first choice is to adopt the first-generation or oldest technology with the lowest price, that is, the path-following strategy.[44] The second choice is the stage-skipping strategy, which refers to the case in which latecomer firms follow the same path as that of incumbents but skip older generation technology (Generation 1 in Figure) to adopt the most up-to-date technology (Generation 2 in the Figure);[45] The third choice, which is an ambitious and risk-taking strategy, is the path-creating strategy. This strategy refers to the case of a latecomer exploring its path of

[43] Keun Lee,China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up: *A Schumpeterian Perspective*, 26.
[44] Keun Lee,China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up: *A Schumpeterian Perspective*, 25.
[45] Keun Lee,China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up: *A Schumpeterian Perspective*, 26.

technological development by utilizing a new techno-economic paradigm or a new generation of technologies.[46]

In the technological development regime of the Chinese context, Professor Keun Lee divides the catch-up of technological development into the following related elements: cycle time of technology, uncertainty of technical trajectory, access to external knowledge base, modularity and tacitness of knowledge. Among them, modularity is an element that is often applied in the fields of automotive and smartphone manufacturing. increasing modularity of the technologies generally enables latecomers to catch up with pioneers more easily.[47]



Schumpeterian model of technological and market catch-up
Source: Author; Lee, Gao, and Li (2016).

As Keun Lee has mentioned in his book *China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up*, typically, the Online Game Industry has meet such problem that:

[46] Keun Lee,China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up: *A Schumpeterian Perspective*, 27.
[47] Keun Lee,China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up: *A Schumpeterian Perspective*, 30.

Developing a single online game takes at least three years, with great uncertainty involved in the success probability of a new game. The reason for this uncertainty is that the success of any online game relies on playing up customer's emotions, which are difficult to predict.[48]

In addition, compared to local Eryou games, overseas-imported Eryou games (mainly from Japan), although they had a first-mover advantage, often struggled to localize and break into the broader market. This is largely due to their unfamiliarity with Chinese social media platforms, low utilization of local channels, and the requirement for marketing and game version updates to be approved by their Japanese headquarters.[49] These monitoring and review processes are time-consuming and slow down responsiveness. In contrast, local Chinese Eryou developers have been more agile. According to reports from various data firms on China's Eryou mobile game market, prior to 2016, the sector was still in its early developmental stage, with very few products available and limited public attention. During this period, the market was largely dominated by Japanese Eryou games such as *Million Arthur* and *Love Live! School Idol Festival*.[50] Hence, this section will use *Onmyoji*, the first domestic Eryou game to successfully achieve a catch-up by developing and perfectly applying the emotional engine which launched in 2016, as an example, showing how Chinese Eryou has applied an emotional engine to successfully achieve the catch-up.

Strategies of Onmyoji

Onmyoji is a 3D semi-turn-based RPG mobile game independently developed by the Chinese company NetEase Games. It was officially released across platforms such as iOS and Android in September 2016. Set in Japan's Heian period, the game features a distinctive Japanese-style art direction, incorporating elements of ukiyo-e and dynamic 3D scenes to

[48] Keun Lee,China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up: *A Schumpeterian Perspective*, 179.
[49] https://www.gameres.com/477243.html
[50] Diandian Data, "2024 Global Anime Mobile Game Market Research Report," November 4, 2024, p15-25. https://vip.diandian.com/reports/qMYKCpMBh8JGffhaIXuE.

create a world where humans and spirits coexist under a traditional aesthetic. Within just one month of its release, *Onmyoji* topped the China App Store's best-selling chart and remained among the top three for an extended period. It reached over 10 million daily active users (DAU) within 50 days and recorded over 2 billion RMB in monthly revenue.[51] Its success was largely due to its effective use of the emotional engine across both Game_C and Game_B, which resonated with domestic players by meeting their emotional expectations and fostering emotional connection.

Firstly, at the Game_C level, *Onmyoji* introduced innovations in three key areas—Character-centric systems, Gambling-like gacha mechanics and Episodic Anime-style narrative structure—that had not been seen in earlier games. These innovations were later widely adopted by other domestic Eryou developers, forming a uniquely modular emotional engine that distinguishes Chinese Eryou games from their overseas counterparts. In terms of Character-centric systems, *Onmyoji* allowed players to unlock unique character biographies, voice lines, animations, and even personal storylines after leveling up characters and breaking level limits. This helped strengthen emotional bonds between players and characters, and established a fixed modular loop of "character growth – emotional feedback" that has since been reused by many Chinese Eryou games.

In the Gambling-like gacha mechanics, *Onmyoji* was the first to introduce the tiered classification of R, SR, and SSR characters. It also allowed players to draw by manually tracing summoning symbols, making their emotional input a direct part of the gambling loop and increasing emotional involvement during the gacha process.

In terms of Episodic Anime-style narrative structure, *Onmyoji* pioneered a system where players could send and view real-time comments (danmaku) during episodic story

[51] https://www.jiemian.com/article/934939.html

segments. It also introduced a reward system that encouraged players to share their emotional reactions on local social platforms like Weibo and Tieba, effectively channeling in-game emotional experiences into broader social engagement.

Secondly, at the Game_B level, *Onmyoji*'s developer NetEase had already accumulated rich experience in social media marketing and community management through its earlier work operating Blizzard games like *World of Warcraft* and *Hearthstone*. When *Onmyoji* launched, NetEase leveraged this experience by having its CEO Ding Lei live-stream gacha draws on major Chinese platforms like Baidu Tieba (China's Reddit) and Weibo (China's Twitter). [52] They also organized fan creation contests and encouraged players to participate in offline anime conventions such as ChinaJoy and Comicup18. These efforts successfully amplified player emotions and brought key Game_C features—such as gacha gambling, character-centered system, and Episodic Anime-style narrative structure—into the public spotlight. By directly addressing Chinese players' emotional needs, the game resonated deeply with its audience.

According to data from November 2016, just a month and a half after launch, the Weibo hashtag "#OnmyojiMobileGame" had already reached 1.19 billion views.[53] The Onmyoji's Baidu Tieba page also attracted over 600,000 followers, with more than 4.5 million total posts. and the Baidu Index peaked at 170,000 before stabilizing around 130,000.[54] This successful application of the emotional engine at the Game_B level fueled *Onmyoji*'s viral growth and helped rapidly expand the Eryou market, prompting other developers to adopt similar emotional strategies. For instance, miHoYo's *Honkai Impact 3rd* followed closely with similar actions and achieved notable success.

---

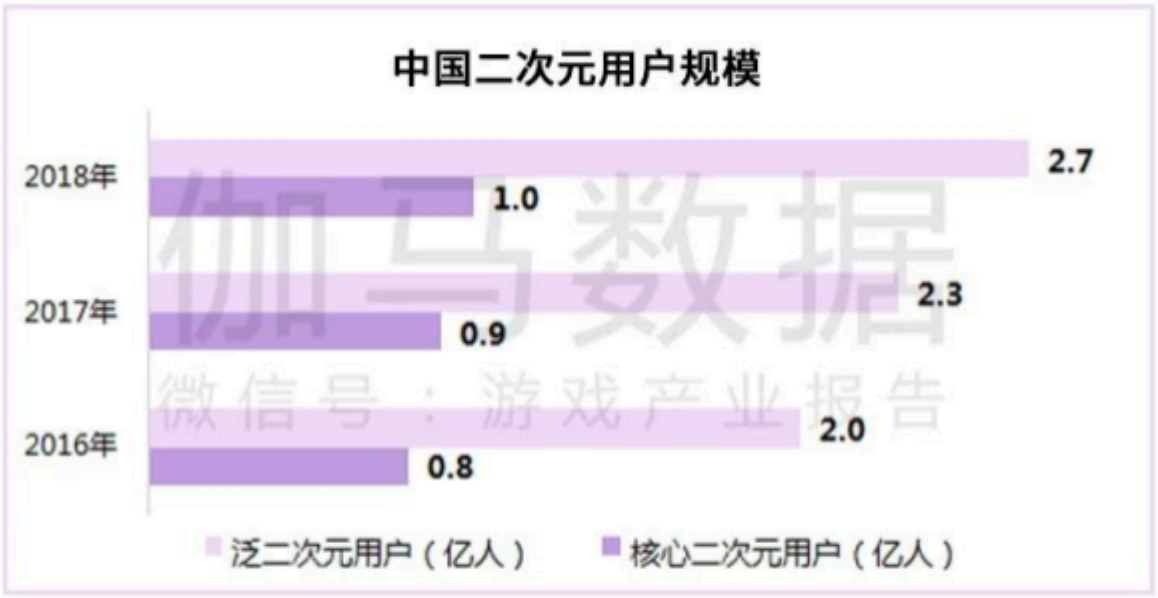
[52] https://www.jiemian.com/article/887687.html
[53] https://www.163.com/game/article/C4I8I7E700314OSE_mobile.html
[54] https://www.163.com/game/article/C4I8I7E700314OSE_mobile.html

In contrast, overseas Eryou games often face multiple limitations at the Game_B level—most notably, the issue of supervision when entering the Chinese market. In Japan's anime industry, "supervision" is a key step in adapting an IP into other forms such as anime, merchandise, or games. Supervisors serve as liaisons between the original creators and developers, ensuring the adaptation aligns with the brand image of the IP. Although the intent is to protect the IP, the process becomes a major constraint when Japanese Eryou IPs are localized into Chinese mobile games. Developers must obtain approval from supervisors for almost every detail—character designs, storylines, voice actors, launch schedules, and even promotional content on platforms like Weibo and WeChat.[55] These approvals typically take at least two weeks, and failed reviews must be revised and resubmitted. As a result, the entire release cycle is prolonged, and developers lose flexibility in managing community platforms and promotional activities. This makes it difficult for overseas Eryou titles to effectively apply the emotional engine in practice.

The distinctive features of *Onmyoji* and its successful application of the emotional engine drew attention from outside the niche community, revealing the market potential of Eryou games and helping rapidly expand the sector. According to research reports on China's mobile and Eryou gaming markets from 2016 to 2018, by 2016, China already had 80 million core Eryou users and 200 million general users, totaling 280 million users and showing a broad user base.[56] With the breakout success and broad promotion of domestic hits like *Onmyoji*, by 2018, China's ACGN user base had reached 370 million — including 270 million general users and 100 million core users — a 32.14% increase.[57]

---

[55] https://www.gameres.com/477243.html
[56] Gamma Data, The report of the Chinese Eryou market in 2018. http://www.gamelook.com.cn/2019/01/346638/
[57] Gamma Data, The report of the Chinese Eryou market in 2018. http://www.gamelook.com.cn/2019/01/346638/



China's ACGN user scale from 2016 to 2018

Source :Gamma data

China's Eryou market size from 2016 to 2018

Source : Gamma Data

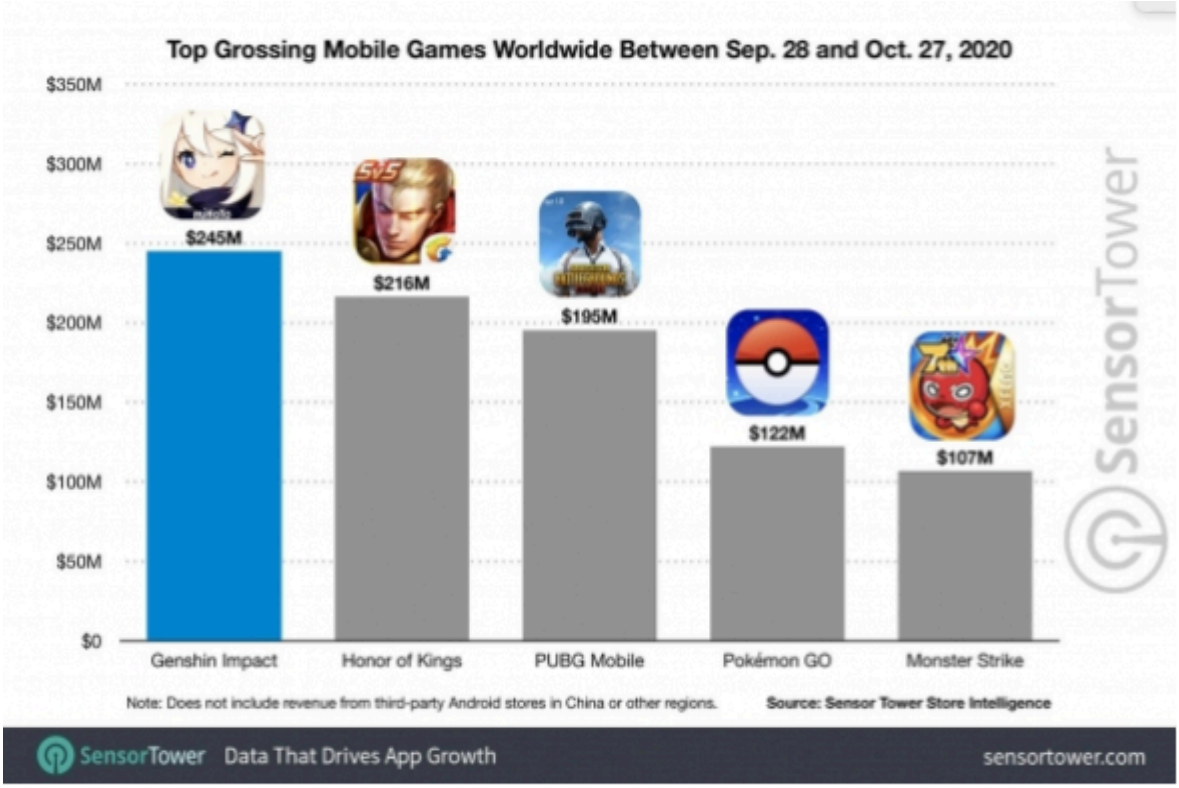
In terms of market scale, China's Eryou mobile game market was worth ¥11.03 billion in 2016. Thanks to the explosive performance of *Onmyoji*, that number jumped to ¥15.98 billion in 2017, a year-over-year increase of 44.8%, and reached ¥19.09 billion in 2018,

growing by 19.5%. *Onmyoji* alone contributed nearly 30% of the market growth in 2017. This marks a turning point where domestic Eryou games moved from a niche subculture to mainstream consumer entertainment. NetEase further proved that emotional-driven, long-term content iteration and community co-creation could effectively reduce user churn — by opening up the fan-creation ecosystem and collaborating with cross-media IPs (such as *Inuyasha* and *Bleach*), it set a strong example for the industry.

Beyond its own success, *Onmyoji* also helped shape the path for other Chinese Eryou developers. Following its model, a new wave of domestic titles emerged, using modular upgrades of the emotional engine to break into the mainstream:

- **miHoYo's *Honkai Impact 3rd* (2016) and *Genshin Impact* (2020)**: These games retained deep character storytelling and immersive audiovisuals, but shifted the gameplay to 3D action and open-world exploration. They strengthened emotional bonds via "virtual companionship" features — for example, *Genshin Impact* uses character side quests and birthday emails to integrate emotional feedback into daily play. In its launch month, *Genshin* earned $245 million globally, setting a record for Chinese Eryou games overseas.[58]

[58]The paper, Genshin Impact has become the money-making champion, and MiHoYo has taken the second place on the revenue list of Chinese mobile game companies, Accessed from https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_9878138.



Genshin Impact earns $245 million in global revenue in first month

Source: Senior Tower

- **Hypergryph's *Arknights* (2019)**: This game maintained gacha mechanics and fragmented storytelling but differentiated itself with a dystopian theme and tower defense gameplay. By introducing high-difficulty events like "Contingency Contract" and the "Operator Records" system, it deepened character backgrounds and stimulated player engagement. Within its first year, it surpassed 50 million downloads and became the first Chinese strategy game to top Japan's iOS revenue chart.[59]

- **Papergames' *Mr Love: Queen's Choice* (2017)**: Targeting female players, it blended otome-style romance simulation with real-time message interactions, pioneering the

[59] GameLook, Game "Arknights" tops the Japanese bestseller list Accessed from http://www.gamelook.com.cn/2020/08/393255/

"virtual boyfriend" model. Through voice actor livestreams and themed pop-up shops, it boosted its user payment rate to 24.7% and catalyzed growth in the female-oriented game segment.[60]

What these games share is a modular approach: breaking down *Onmyoji*'s proven emotional components (e.g., character development, social virality) and reassembling them for different audiences. *Genshin Impact*, for instance, combined open-world tech with anime-style art to form a dual "tech + emotion" barrier to entry. *Arknights* used low-poly art to reduce production costs while targeting strategy fans. This diffusion of "path-creating" innovation built an ecosystem where top-tier products set standards, mid-tier games iterate rapidly, and long-tail titles fill in niche demand. By 2022, Chinese Eryou games had captured over 60% of the global market, fully reversing their early reliance on Japanese IPs and proving the long-term viability of the modular emotional engine strategy.

Summary of Application of Emotional Engine in Chinese Eryou's Catch-up

To sum up, this section demonstrates how Chinese Eryou achieved a path-creating catch-up by modularizing and replicating the emotional engine, thus surpassing overseas competitors. Drawing on Keun Lee's *new Schumpeterian catch-up theory*, which outlines three strategic paths for latecomer firms—path-following, stage-skipping, and path-creating—the analysis argues that Chinese Eryou firms chose the most ambitious: path-creation. Specifically, NetEase's *Onmyoji* (2016) exemplifies this strategy by

[60] Aurora Data, How popular is *Mr Love: Queen's Choice*,"? Less than a month after its launch, the number of players has exceeded 7 million. Accessed From https://www.zhihu.com/column/p/32876271

engineering a replicable “emotional engine” that integrates player emotions into core gameplay and marketing processes.

At the Game_C level, Onmyoji innovated through: (1) a character-centered system that linked in-game progression to emotional feedback; (2) gacha mechanics that intensified emotional engagement by involving users physically and emotionally in draws; and (3) anime-style narrative structures with danmaku and reward systems that encouraged emotional expression and social sharing.

At the Game_B level, NetEase leveraged its prior experience in managing Blizzard titles to orchestrate a highly effective launch campaign across platforms like Weibo and Baidu Tieba. This included CEO livestreams, community fan competitions, and offline anime conventions, which amplified emotional resonance and brought the game’s design features into the public spotlight.

In contrast, Japanese Eryou imports struggled with slow localization and rigid IP supervision, delaying their responsiveness and hindering their use of emotional engagement on Chinese platforms. These structural constraints limited their ability to deploy an emotional engine effectively.

The success of *Onmyoji* proved that modularizing emotional elements—such as character progression, gacha systems, and community co-creation—could form a new standard for emotional game design. This model was quickly adopted by later titles like *Honkai Impact 3rd*, *Genshin Impact*, *Arknights*, and *Mr Love: Queen’s Choice*, each adapting the emotional engine to different genres and audiences. This widespread diffusion marked the emergence of a robust, self-sustaining ecosystem of emotional design, propelling China’s Eryou industry to global leadership by 2022.

3: Conclusion

This thesis has explored the meteoric rise of Chinese Eryou mobile games from marginal players in 2016 to global leaders by 2024, focusing on how their emotional design strategies enabled a path-creating catch-up. Drawing on both ludological and industrial perspectives, the analysis has demonstrated that Chinese Eryou developers achieved success not by following the established paths of Japanese pioneers, but by engineering a novel "Emotional Engine" that systematically integrates player emotion into core gameplay, community design, and cultural production.

Drawing on Ludic-Functionalist theory and Norman's three-tier model of emotional design, I demonstrated at the Game_C level how gacha randomness, character-centric progression, and episodic anime-style narratives were each transformed into reproducible modules that reliably trigger visceral, behavioral, and reflective reactions in players. In this thesis, I have shown how Chinese Eryou mobile games moved from marginal niche to global leadership in just a few years by inventing, modularizing, and diffusing what I have called the "Emotional Engine." At the Game_C level, Chinese Eryou games deploy emotional amplification as a foundational design logic. Through mechanisms like gacha systems, character progression, and episodic storytelling, they create a layered emotional experience that draws on Don Norman's tripartite emotional design and Ian Schnee's Ludic-Functionalist theory. These mechanisms do not merely entertain—they evoke, shape, and circulate emotions with industrial precision. More importantly, they modularize emotional triggers such that they can be consistently replicated across titles and genres.

At the Game_B level, this emotional intensity is channeled into collective meaning-making. Community activities and fan-based re-creations do not sit outside the game's design, but rather function as integral components of the emotional economy. Developers manage these spaces carefully, transforming user frustration into feedback loops and encouraging affective labor through official recognition and incorporation of fan works. Through this structure, Chinese Eryou titles evolve from products into platforms for co-creative emotional worlds.

By applying Keun Lee's adaptation of the Schumpeterian catch-up framework, I argued that Chinese Eryou firms pursued a path-creating strategy. Rather than merely copying incumbent mechanics or skipping ahead to the newest technologies, the dual-level design of Game_C and Game_B has enabled Chinese developers to invent a new techno-economic paradigm—an industrialized emotional design system—that any studio could plug into its own title. NetEase's Onmyoji provided the proof-of-concept in 2016, and almost overnight the "Emotional Engine" blueprint was adopted by miHoYo, Hypergryph, Papergames, and dozens of others. The result was a rapidly expanding domestic market—growing from under half of all Eryou titles in 2016 to over 86% by 2024—and a reversal of earlier reliance on Japanese imports, with Chinese studios capturing over 60% of global Eryou revenues by 2022.

This emotional industrialization carries both promise and questions for the future. On one hand, it has demonstrated that carefully designed affective loops can sustain long-term engagement, drive community-level creativity, and accelerate innovation across an entire sector. On the other hand, it raises issues of artistic authorship, player agency, and the ethics of engineered emotion. As Chinese Eryou continues to evolve—branching into open-world exploration, strategic tower-defense hybrids, and romance simulations—the challenge will be

to balance reproducible emotional modules with genuine innovation and to ensure that the "prosumer" partnership remains empowering rather than exploitative.

Looking ahead, further research might examine how these emotional architectures perform in new technological contexts—such as AI-driven personalization, virtual reality, or cross-media transmedia projects—and what regulatory or community norms may emerge in response. More broadly, the story of Chinese Eryou suggests that emotional design, once a hidden subroutine of gameplay, has become a core strategic asset. Understanding its mechanisms, limits, and social consequences will be essential not only for game studies, but for any field seeking to harness the power of emotion at scale.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to both game studies and innovation studies. It enriches the Ludic-Functionalist framework by showing how rule-based systems can be fused with emotional design to create structured affective responses. It also expands the application of catch-up theory to the creative industries, demonstrating that emotional and cultural capacities—not just technological or financial ones—can serve as engines of industrial upgrading.

Practically, the thesis offers insights for developers, publishers, and cultural policymakers. For developers, it shows that emotional design is not merely a soft skill, but a scalable system that can differentiate a product in a crowded market. For publishers aiming at overseas expansion, the emotional engine provides a framework for creating cross-cultural resonance without sacrificing local depth. For policymakers, the success of Chinese Eryou suggests that cultural IP and emotional capital can become new pillars of national soft power.

Limitations

Despite these findings, this research has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses on a select number of successful titles, particularly *Onmyoji*, which may not represent the full spectrum of Eryou products. Failed or mediocre titles could offer alternative insights into the risks and constraints of emotional modularity. Second, while the study draws on textual and industrial analysis, it lacks empirical data from players themselves. Future research could incorporate interviews, surveys, or ethnographic methods to investigate how players actually experience and interpret emotional design elements. Finally, the research focuses primarily on the Chinese and Japanese contexts; deeper analysis of Eryou's reception in Western or Southeast Asian markets would provide a more comprehensive global perspective.

Final Reflection

In conclusion, the rise of Chinese Eryou games represents not only a commercial success, but a paradigmatic shift in how games are conceived, designed, and lived. By industrializing emotion through modular design, and by embedding emotional production into both gameplay and community participation, Chinese developers have established a new model of creative innovation. Their success shows that affect is not merely a byproduct of gaming—it is the engine that drives its evolution.

This thesis has argued that behind every gacha pull, every character arc, and every community meme lies a calculated effort to engineer emotional engagement. In recognizing and theorizing this effort, we move closer to understanding how digital culture itself is increasingly shaped by the interplay of design, desire, and affect.

Bibliography

1: Aurora Data. *How Popular Is Mr Love: Queen's Choice? Less Than a Month After Its Launch, the Number of Players Has Exceeded 7 Million.* Accessed from https://www.zhihu.com/column/p/32876271.

2:Diandian Data. *2024 Global Anime Mobile Game Market Research Report.* November 4, 2024. https://vip.diandian.com/reports/qMYKCpMBh8JGffhaIXuE.

3:Freeman, David. *Creating Emotion in Games: The Craft and Art of Emotioneering.* Indianapolis: New Riders, 2003.

4:GameLook. *Game "Arknights" Tops the Japanese Bestseller List.* Accessed from http://www.gamelook.com.cn/2020/08/393255/.

5:Gamma Data. *The Report of the Chinese Eryou Market in 2018.* http://www.gamelook.com.cn/2019/01/346638/.

6: Genshin Impact Wiki. *Version 3.2.* Accessed from https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Version/3.2.

7: He, Wei, and Jiajun Tang, eds. *Annual Report on the Development of Digital Gaming Industry in China (2024).* Associate editors: Xiaoyu Zhao and Nan Zheng. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2024. https://www.pishu.com.cn/skwx_ps/databasedetail?SiteID=14&contentId=15672634.

8: Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture.* New York: Routledge, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/washington/detail.action?docID=1097854.

9: Jiemian News. Accessed from https://www.jiemian.com/article/887687.html.

10: Jurgensen, Zach. *Appreciating Videogames.*

11: Lee, Keun. *China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up: A Schumpeterian Perspective.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

12: Moon, Jade. *Jade Moon Upon a Sea of Clouds - Disc 1: Glazed Moon Over the Tides.* Genshin Impact Original Soundtrack.

13: Moser, Shelby. "Videogame Ontology, Constitutive Rules, and Algorithms." In *The Aesthetics of Videogames*, edited by Jon Robson and Grant Tavinor. Routledge, 2018.

14: Newzoo. *2024 Global Games Market Report.* Accessed from https://newzoo.com/resources/trend-reports/newzoos-global-games-market-report-2024-free-version.

15: Norman, Don. *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things.* New York: Basic Books, 2004.

16: Robson, Jon. "The Beautiful Gamer? On the Aesthetics of Videogame Performances." In *The Aesthetics of Videogames*, edited by Jon Robson and Grant Tavinor. Routledge, 2018.

17: Rough, Brock. "Videogames as Neither Video nor Games: A Negative Ontology." In *The Aesthetics of Videogames*, edited by Jon Robson and Grant Tavinor. Routledge, 2018.

18: State of Anime Gaming. *The State of Anime Gaming 2022.* data.ai.

19: The Paper. *Genshin Impact Has Become the Money-Making Champion, and MiHoYo Has Taken the Second Place on the Revenue List of Chinese Mobile Game Companies.* Accessed from https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_9878138.

20: Version Livestream Event. *Zhongli Story Quest 2 | No Mere Stone | Historia Antiqua Chapter: Act II.*

21: Wei, Zhou, and Guan Huaji. “Participatory Culture: A New Type of Media Culture.” *Journalism Lover*, no. 6 (2010).

22: Wiki Biligame. *Nahida’s Voice Line (Genshin Impact).* https://wiki.biligame.com/ys/%E7%BA%B3%E8%A5%BF%E5%A6%B2%E8%AF%AD%E9%9F%B3.

23: 网易游戏频道 [NetEase Games Channel]. Accessed from https://www.163.com/game/article/C4I8I7E700314OSE_mobile.html.