

On the Construction and Translation of Cultural Symbols in Chinese Online Games: *Taking Honor of Kings as an Example*

Zulin Song^{1*}

¹ School of Foreign Studies, Minzu University of China, Beijing, China

Email Address

24301966@muc.edu.cn (Zulin Song)

*Correspondence: 24301966@muc.edu.cn

Received: 12 June 2025; Accepted: 30 June 2025; Published: 29 July 2025

Abstract:

Honor of Kings has successfully attracted the attention of global players with its unique cultural symbols construction and ingenious translation and dissemination strategies. This thesis focuses on the construction of cultural symbols and translation and dissemination strategies of the international version of the Chinese online game *Honor of Kings*, aiming to reveal how Chinese games achieve cross-cultural communication and international dissemination through the construction and translation of cultural symbols in the process of globalization. The thesis first provides a detailed classification and description of the cultural symbols in *Honor of Kings*, including character design and game elements, which are deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture. Subsequently, based on Roman Jakobson's translation theory and Peirce and Roland Barthes' semiotics theory, this thesis deeply analyzes the strategies used when these cultural symbols are translated into different language versions, including literal translation, free translation, creative translation, transliteration, etc., as well as the cultural considerations behind these strategies. The case of cultural symbol translation of *Honor of Kings* shows that cultural symbol translation plays an important role in promoting cultural exchange through carefully designed game elements and culturally sensitive translation strategies. The significance of this thesis lies in providing strategic guidance for the internationalization of online games and presenting a new research perspective in the field of translation semiotics. In addition, this thesis helps professionals in related fields to better understand and utilize the role and value of cultural symbols in the context of globalization. Through in-depth analysis of *Honor of Kings*, this thesis elaborates on the current situation of role translation choices in the global cultural dissemination of Chinese online games, and also provides new ideas for future translation of Chinese online games targeting overseas audiences.

Keywords:

Honor of Kings, Cultural Symbols Construction and Translation, Translation Semiotics

1. Introduction

Since its release, online game has been attracting the attention of young people, and with the popularity of smartphones, high-quality online games are becoming increasingly accessible to and popular among teenagers. Among them, the mobile game *Honor of Kings* is one of the representatives of the flourishing development of online games in China. Since its launch in 2015, the national-level MOBA(Multiplayer Online Battle Arena, a multiplayer online competitive game) mobile game *Honor of Kings* has undergone more than 8 years of development, becoming one of the most popular and influential mobile games globally, maintaining a leading position in the mobile gaming field [1].

On foreign social platforms, people express similar admiration in different languages, indicating that *Honor of Kings* has successfully conducted overseas content output. At the same time, in the process of content output, the translation of cultural symbols between different cultures will have a significant impact on the effectiveness of content dissemination, thereby affecting the degree of acceptance of the game by overseas audiences. This paper aims to investigate the essence and impact behind constructing cultural symbols in online gaming, using *Honor of Kings* as a focal point. Specifically, the following three questions: (1) How are these cultural symbols developed, and what strategies do developers employ? (2) What cultural insights can be gained into translation semiotics methods, and how do these strategies impact cultural representation? (3) What meanings do they hold within the game environment, and how do they contribute to shaping different cultural perceptions and identities will be the objectives of this thesis. Practically, it is hoped that this paper could contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural symbol construction in online gaming and its broader social implications.

What's more, This paper mainly adopts a combination of quantitative analysis and case studies. Using quantitative analysis method to organize and classify the English translation texts of cultural symbols related to the *Honor of Kings*, laying a foundation for further analysis. And using qualitative analysis and case analysis methods to study and reveal the process of constructing cultural symbols and translation characteristics in the *Honor of Kings*. This paper will also adopt a descriptive approach to analyze the translated materials that have been organized. The translation of all cultural symbols will be analyzed one by one based on their meanings in dictionaries and historical documents.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Intersemiotic Translation Theory of Roman Jakobson

Jacobson's translation theory framework plays a substantial role in analyzing the construction of cultural symbols in the Chinese online game *Honor of Kings* and its translation and dissemination research. Jakobson proposed the renowned theory of three elements of translation, namely "Intralingual Translation, Interlingual Translation, and Intersemiotic Translation". These three elements provide a multidimensional analytical perspective for translation activities. The three forms of translation equivalence correspond respectively to the three properties of symbols: interlingual equivalence arises on the basis of intralingual translation and includes intralingual equivalence; intralingual equivalence is generated from interlingual equivalence and includes both interlingual and intralingual equivalence. The three

forms of equivalence constitute an orderly and interdependent whole as shown in the Figure 1 below [2]. This also indicates that from the perspective of semiotics, translation equivalence is no longer a one-to-one equivalence, but a one-to-many equivalence, where equivalence becomes a process [3].

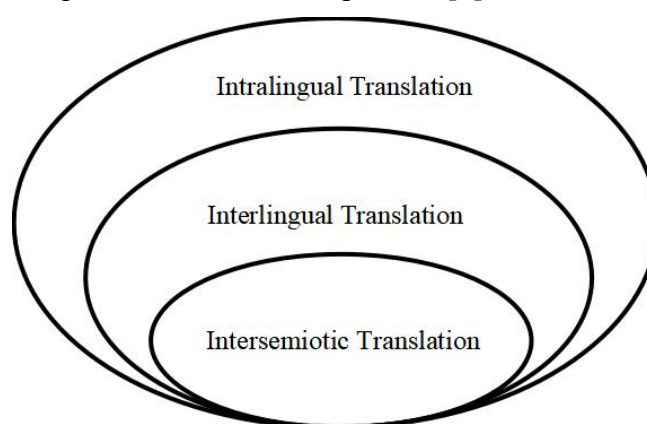


Figure 1. Jacobson's translation equivalence process.

Intersemiotic translation, also known as transmodal translation or transcoding, is a concept that refers to the process of translating or transferring meaning from one mode of communication or representation to another. Unlike traditional translation, which typically involves the conversion of written or spoken language from one language to another, intersemiotic translation can involve a variety of modes, including visual, auditory, tactile, and even olfactory or gustatory senses.

The concept of intersemiotic translation is rooted in the idea that meaning is not inherent to a particular mode of communication but is instead constructed through the interaction between the mode and the audience. This means that the same meaning can be conveyed through different modes, and the process of translation involves finding the most effective way to convey that meaning in the target mode.

One of the key challenges in intersemiotic translation is the fact that different modes have different affordances and constraints. For example, a visual image can convey a lot of information quickly and can be easily understood by a large audience, but it may not be able to capture the nuance and complexity of a written text. On the other hand, a piece of music can evoke strong emotional responses and can be enjoyed by people regardless of their language or literacy skills, but it may not be able to convey specific details or abstract concepts.

Another important aspect of intersemiotic translation is the role of the translator or artist. Because the process involves not just a simple transfer of information but a creative reinterpretation of the source material, the translator or artist has a lot of freedom to make choices about how to convey the meaning. This can involve decisions about what to include or exclude, what to emphasize or downplay, and what new elements to introduce.

In practice, intersemiotic translation can take many different forms. For example, a novel might be adapted into a film, a sculpture might be translated into a photograph, or a dance performance might be translated into a series of paintings. In each case, the translator or artist must find ways to convey the meaning of the source material in a way that is appropriate to the target mode.

Overall, intersemiotic translation is a complex and nuanced process that requires a deep understanding of both the source and target modes, as well as a creative and flexible approach to the task of conveying meaning. It is a fascinating and important area of study that has implications not just for translation studies but for many other fields as well, including art, design, media studies, and more.

In conclusion, intersemiotic translation is a multifaceted process that involves the translation of meaning from one mode of communication to another. It is a creative and interpretive process that requires a deep understanding of the affordances and constraints of different modes, as well as a willingness to make choices and take risks.

2.2 Semiotic Triadic Structure of Charles Sanders Peirce

Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher and logician, is considered one of the founding fathers of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols. His semiotic theory is a comprehensive framework that has had a profound impact on various disciplines, including linguistics, philosophy, and cognitive science. Here are the instructions of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic triadic structure.

One of Peirce's most significant contributions to semiotics is the concept of the triadic structure of signs. He argues that every sign relationship involves three elements: the sign itself (the representamen), the object to which the sign is related, and the interpretant, which is the effect the sign produces in the mind of the interpreter. This triadic relationship is dynamic and transactional, emphasizing the role of the interpreter in assigning meaning to the sign. The interpretant is not merely a mental image but an actual response that completes the semiotic process, making Peirce's model inherently interactive and context-dependent. This symbol triad structure is shown in Figure 2 [4]:

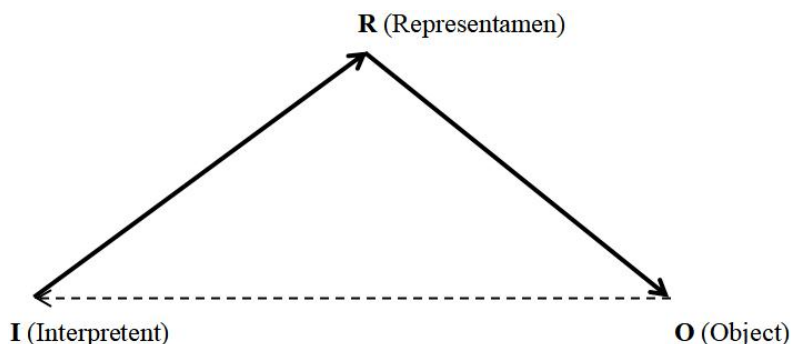


Figure 2. Triadic structure of signs.

2.3 Semiotic Dual Structure of Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, a cornerstone of 20th-century French thought, offers a profound framework for understanding the construction and dissemination of cultural symbols. Here is a structured elaboration of Barthes' concepts of the dual structure.

Roland Barthes innovatively developed Saussure's theory, proposing that "marks are composed of a signifier and a signified. The signifier surface forms the expression surface, and the signified surface forms the content surface." [5]. Barthes' semiotic theory posits that signs are composed of two layers: the primary level of denotation and the secondary level of connotation.

Denotation (Direct Signification). The denotative level is the most immediate and literal aspect of a sign. It represents the direct connection between the signifier (the word, image, or sound that represents something) and the signified (the concept or object it represents). This is the fundamental level of the sign where the relationship between the signifier (the form of the sign) and the signified (the concept it represents) is direct. At this level, the sign functions as a transparent medium, aiming to convey clear and unambiguous meaning. It is the point at which a sign is most straightforward and least interpretive.

Connotation (Concise Signification). The second layer is where Barthes' theory becomes particularly insightful. Connotation is the layer where cultural and social meanings are inscribed upon the literal meaning of the sign. It is the process by which a sign takes on additional, often subtle, meanings beyond its direct denotative sense.

Connotation involves the cultural, social, and ideological connotations that a sign carries beyond its direct meaning. These connotations are constructed through social consensus and cultural conventions, enriching the sign with additional layers of meaning.

It can be described as the Figure 3 [6]. From a specific perspective, an expression level (E) and a content level (C) can form a referential system, and the referential function is the relationship between the two levels (R) [5]. Taking the name “*Honor of Kings*” as an example, “*Honor of Kings*” uses a large number of game characters with Chinese elements (E), along with the represented Chinese history and culture (C), to intentionally indicate to users the symbol (R) with strong cultural attributes on a referential level [6].

E2	R2	C2
E1	R1	C1
Heroes' in <i>Honor of Kings</i>	Chinese historical and cultural resources	

Figure 3. The implied meaning of *Honor of Kings*.

As users gaze at the icon of “*Honor of Kings*” quietly placed on their mobile desktop, Yun Ying, a female warrior inspired by Chinese Sichuan culture, stands out among many local heroes with bravery, integrity, unity, and friendship. Her typical Chinese style avatar occupies the most eye-catching position of the entire game, conveying the core of the game through personification metaphors: emphasizing teamwork among five people and fair combat. So, it constructed the meta language of the game (as shown in Figure 4) [6].

E1	R1	C1
YunYing's avatar on the logo	E3	C3
	All heroes	

Figure 4. The meta language of *Honor of Kings*.

And the “myth” of “*Honor of Kings*” is constructed as shown in Figure 5 [6]. When both meta language and intentional referents are established and combined together, the logo between these dimensions hides a hidden “myth”, stating that “The absence of bourgeois names is not an illusory, accidental, incidental, habitual, or insignificant

phenomenon” [5]. Its logo clearly indicates that this game not only has excellent traditional Chinese culture, but also embodies the modern spirit of the West, which is a combination of Western spirit and Eastern culture, modern technology and traditional craftsmanship. When game users look at each other with their eyes, its commanding and compelling nature makes young people accept the myth that what you are entertaining is not a game, on the contrary, the best culture of ancient and modern times, both in China and abroad, is being controlled by users’ willing.

E2		R2	C2	
			Ancient, modern, domestic and foreign culture integration	
E1	R1	C1		
Yun Ying’s avatar on the logo		Prominent Chinese heroes from numerous characters		
	E3	R3	C3	
	All heroes			

Figure 5. The “myth” in *Honor of Kings*.

3. Case analysis of *Honor of Kings*’ English translation on Cultural Symbols

So far, the *Honor of Kings* has launched a total of 105 characters, which can be divided into five major types: clash lane, mid lane, farm lane, jungling, and roaming. Based on the characters, a total of 406 skins have been released. Next, an analysis will be conducted on the translation and construction of the cultural symbols behind the collected text materials. Including the name, map elements, and user interface(UI).

3.1. Translation of Role Names

The culture of the Chinese nation has a long and illustrious history. Cultural confidence is a more fundamental, profound, and enduring strength of the Chinese nation. *Honor of Kings* is a game that incorporates a large number of Chinese elements. Many of the hero characters are not original but are inspired by historical Figures and characters from ancient Chinese myths [7].

The setting of international game characters can be divided into three types [8]:

The first type is based on mythological and historical characters, as well as their eponymous characters in the original game. The character images and identities are redesigned. In the international version, the prototypes of Wukong (孙悟空), Diaochan (貂蝉), Lv Bu (吕布), Zilong (赵云), and Arthur (亚瑟) are from Chinese mythology, novels, and British mythology.

The second type is to collaborate with well-known overseas literary and game works, incorporating original characters into the game, such as Marco Polo (马可波罗), Nacolo Lulu (娜可露露), Mai Shiranui (不知火舞), and Ukyo Tachibana (橘右京).

The third type is to design original characters with brand new names, appearances, identities, and stories based on the needs of the game plot and the skill characteristics of the original game characters. Like Ata (阿塔) and Butterfly (刀锋宝贝).

Based on the three types mentioned above, *Honor of Kings* has also adopted corresponding translation strategies. These strategies also reflect the close integration of semiotics and translation. At present, among the 105 heroes in the international server, the English translations of most hero names (a total of 43) can correspond to their Chinese names through direct translation. However, there are 41 heroes whose Chinese names and English names differ to varying degrees. These differences also reflect the different translation strategies of the members of the *Honor of Kings* development team. The following is a classification and analysis of the English translations of these 41 heroes' names. If an individual hero meets the requirements of multiple groups, it is categorized under the most suitable group.

The first category, as shown in Table 1, involves retaining the original Chinese syllables while additionally decreasing the number of words.

Table 1. Translations of name with reduced words.

Chinese Name	English Name	Chinese Name of Type	English Name of Type
百里守约	Shouyue	发育路	Farm Lane
云缨	Ying	打野	Jungling
高渐离	Gao	中路	Mid Lane
钟无艳	Wu Yan	对抗路/打野	Clash Lane/Jungling
夏侯惇	Dun	对抗路/游走	Clash Lane/Roaming
宫本武藏	Musashi	对抗路/打野	Clash Lane/Jungling
老夫子	Fuzi	对抗路	Clash Lane
花木兰	Mulan	对抗路	Clash Lane
张良	Liang	中路/游走	Mid Lane/Roaming
孙悟空	Wukong	打野	Jungling
李元芳	Fang	发育路/打野	Farm Lane/Jungling
东皇太一	Donghuang	对抗路/游走	Clash Lane/Roaming
诸葛亮	Kongming	中路/打野	Mid Lane/Jungling
明世隐	Ming	游走	Roaming
裴擒虎	Pei	打野	Jungling
上官婉儿	Shuangguan	中路	Mid Lane
赵云	Zilong	打野	Jungling

The translations of heroes' names in Table 1 still belong to phonetic translations. They are all based on the original meaning of the Chinese, with words related to their own image being omitted. This treatment of hero names in translation causes the loss of the original cultural significance and character image of the heroes, which not only affects the effectiveness of cultural dissemination but also confuses overseas players when they encounter such heroes. For example, “百里守约” is only translated as “Shouyue”, which loses the image of keeping promises implied by “百里”; “云缨” is a character created based on the culture of Sichuan province and is simply translated as “Ying”, which makes it difficult for overseas users to understand the unique Sichuan culture behind the character. In contrast, when it comes to the translation of the names of historical Figures, *Honor of Kings* also simply translates part of their names in a phonetic way, willingly giving up the cultural connotations of the historical Figures.

For instance, “老夫子” is translated as “Fuzi”, while the character’s prototype is Confucius, a great ancient Chinese thinker, politician, educator, and the founder of the Confucian. While “孔子” is translated as “Confucius” not simply as “Kongzi”; and there is no unified standard for handling other culturally related characters. When translating “钟无艳”, “夏侯惇”, “宫本武藏”, “花木兰”, “张良”, “孙悟空”, “李元芳”, “诸葛亮” and “赵云”, the names are phonetic translations of the given name part, while for “高渐离”, “东皇太一”, “明世隐”, “裴擒虎” and “上官婉儿”, the surname part of the names is translated instead. This undoubtedly adds to the understanding barrier for overseas players towards these characters and is even less conducive to the overseas promotion of these dazzling cultural characters. From the perspective of Roman Jakobson’s translation theory, the rough use of phonetic translation actually obscures their brilliance and is not conducive to the interlingual translation and dissemination of these cultural symbols. A better implementation of name translation should start from each character’s actual situation, patiently explore the cultural connotations behind the character, and present them to overseas players with appropriate English translations to enhance their sense of identity and satisfaction with the output of Chinese cultural products.

The second category, as shown in Table 2, involves making partial modifications while retaining the original literal characteristics of the names.

Table 2. Translations of name with partial modifications.

Chinese Name	English Name	Chinese Name of Type	English Name of Type
澜	Lam	打野	Jungling
莱西奥	Alessio	发育路	Farm Lane
米莱狄	Milady	中路	Mid Lane
鲁班七号	Luban No.7	发育路	Farm Lane
庄周	Zhuangzi	对抗路/游走	Clash Lane/Roaming
甄姬	Lady Zhen	中路	Mid Lane
虞姬	Consort Yu	发育路	Farm Lane
孙尚香	Lady Sun	发育路	Farm Lane
扁鹊	Dr Bian	中路	Mid Lane
达摩	Dharma	对抗路/打野	Clash Lane/Jungling
王昭君	Princess Frost	中路	Mid Lane
干将莫邪	Gan & Mo	中路	Mid Lane
蔡文姬	Cai Yan	游走	Roaming
梦奇	Menki	对抗路/打野	Clash Lane/Jungling
公孙离	Arli	发育路	Farm Lane
瑶	Yaria	游走	Roaming
亚连	Allain	对抗路	Clash Lane
海诺	Heino	中路	Mid Lane
伽罗	Garro	发育路	Farm Lane

Compared to the first category of phonetic translations, in this category of character name translation, *Honor of Kings* truly conveys the cultural connotations of the characters reasonably and accurately in English. The main body of the translated names is created through domestication strategies combined with English pronunciation rules, allowing overseas users to understand the character stories more clearly.

Jakobson's theory emphasizes the importance of context in translation, suggesting that the cultural and social context of the target language should be considered. For example, “米莱狄”, who is a city manager in the game, seems to have a simple Chinese name, but it is translated as “Milady” for foreign users, which not only reflects the original Chinese pronunciation characteristics but also conveys the nobility of the character to overseas players.

Similarly, the six characters “甄姬”, “虞姬”, “孙尚香”, “扁鹊”, “王昭君” and “干将莫邪” have also been translated with precision. “甄姬”, “虞姬”, and “孙尚香” are translated as “Lady Zhen”, “Consort Yu” and “Lady Sun” respectively. “甄姬” mainly refers to Empress Wen Zhao of the Three Kingdoms period, and her real name is not recorded in history, so she is known as “Lady Zhen”. “虞姬” mainly refers to the beauty of Xiang Yu, the overlord of the Western Chu during the Chu-Han Contention. Moreover, “姬” in the dictionary is defined as “an ancient Chinese term of beauty for women” [7], and the use of “Lady” retains the original aesthetic of the character while highlighting the resilience of women. “Consort” goes beyond “Lady”, reflecting the deep love between Yu Ji and Xiang Yu.

Peirce's semiotic theory, with its focus on the relationship between signs and their objects, can be applied to names like “Dr. Bian” for “扁鹊” and “Princess Frost” for “王昭君”. “扁鹊” was a famous ancient Chinese physician known for saving lives, and the term “Doctor” accurately conveys his superb medical skills. “王昭君” is one of the four great beauties of ancient China, and the term “Princess” reflects her noble status, while “Frost” closely aligns with the character's ability to use freezing skills in the game. These translations use indices that point to the characters' roles or abilities within the game. This approach ensures that the translated names not only represent the characters but also convey their in-game attributes to the English-speaking audience.

“干将莫邪” is translated as “Gan & Mo”, combining domestication and free translation, making the characters' unique traits clear to overseas players. “干将莫邪” refers to a couple of swordsmiths from the Spring and Autumn period of China, as well as the names of two swords. The translation “Gan & Mo” does not weaken the character's expressive power but highlights the two main entities of the character, “干将” and “莫邪”. In the case of “Gan & Mo” for “干将莫邪”, the translation cleverly captures the dual nature of the character, and the dual-subject setting is also concentrated in the game, where the character uses a long sword with a variable attack range and can refresh the skill to use the ultimate move twice, dealing high burst damage. The translation “Gan & Mo” also indirectly shows the character's double damage power.

The names “Luban No.7” for “鲁班七号” and “Arli” for “公孙离” demonstrate a direct transliteration approach, which may not offer immediate cultural or contextual understanding but maintains the originality and uniqueness of the names. This can be seen as a form of “ekphrasis”, a term from Barthes' theory, where the translation stands as a representation that invites the audience to engage more deeply with the source material.

The remaining names “澜”, “莱西奥”, “庄周”, “达摩”, “蔡文姬”, “梦奇”, “瑶”, “亚连”, “海诺” and “伽罗” have also been translated in various styles, respectively translated as “Lam”, “Alessio”, “Zhuangzi”, “Dharma”, “Cai Yan”, “Menki”, “Yaria”, “Allain”, “Heino”, and “Garro”. Among them, the translations “Lam”, “Alessio”, “Menki”,

“Yaria”, “Allain”, “Heino”, and “Garo” are close to the spelling habits and understanding methods of overseas players, making them easy to understand. The translations of “庄周” and “蔡文姬” directly translate the traditional Chinese names “Zhuangzi” (庄子) and “Cai Yan” (蔡琰), bringing overseas players closer to the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

The third category, as shown in Table 3, involves incorporating creative translations based on the heroes’ characteristics.

Table 3. Translations of name with creative approaches.

Chinese Name	English Name	Chinese Name of Type	English Name of Type
狂铁	Biron	对抗路	Clash Lane
云中君	Cirrus	打野	Jungling
姬小满	Mayene	对抗路/打野	Clash Lane/Jungling
刀锋宝贝	Butterfly	打野	Jungling
铠	Kaizer	对抗路/打野	Clash Lane/Jungling

As a domestic game, how to enhance the overseas players’ affection for the game through game characters is also an issue that needs to be considered. In the third category of translation, *Honor of Kings* adopted a creative approach to better align the game with the overseas market. The creative translation in game translation is a method that arranges the game content according to the life and thinking logic of the target language players, using language styles that conform to the cultural habits of the target language game players, making the game content more understandable and avoiding the translation form of direct translation and rigid transfer [9].

The mythical Figure “云中君”, a cloud deity from the pre-Qin era of Chinese mythology, has also made its way onto the international stage. In the translation process, *Honor of Kings* did not translate the Chinese name to “God of Cloud”, but instead to “Cirrus”. “Cirrus” means “a type of thin cloud found very high in the sky”, which not only retains the high-end feeling as a cloud deity but also highlights the character’s ability to stay airborne continuously and move flexibly.

“狂铁”, “姬小满”, “刀锋宝贝” and “铠” are all original virtual characters created by *Honor of Kings*. In the process of international dissemination, *Honor of Kings* created down-to-earth names for them to facilitate understanding by overseas users.

“狂铁”, in Chinese, represents a fearless and unrestrained image, while the English translation “Biron” cleverly combines the consonant syllable from the word “Bold” and the entire word “Iron” to form a new word through the method of blending words. This innovative approach not only allows players to make associations but also highlights the character’s brave and tenacious game style.

“姬小满”, as the name implies, “a beauty born during the Grain Buds solar term”. “Grain Buds” is one of the twenty-four solar terms in China, occurring between May 20th and 22nd each year, when the sun reaches the celestial longitude of 60°. After Grain Buds, the weather gradually becomes warmer, and the wheat ears in the fields begin to show [10]. The character’s English name “Mayene” is constructed such that “May” corresponds to the month of the Grain Buds solar term, and the suffix “-ene” may be a hint of the character’s female identity (the suffix “-enne” is commonly used to denote female characters, such as “comedienne” meaning a female comedian). This

translation method also provides convenience for overseas players to understand the twenty-four solar terms of China.

The translation name for “刀锋宝贝” is “Butterfly”. The character, with high-level operations in the game, can infiltrate the enemy’s backline and defeat the core output hero during confrontations and can also withdraw unscathed. This is akin to a butterfly flying lightly into the thicket without any hindrance. The translated name “Butterfly” vividly conveys the character’s swift and agile characteristics.

Although “铠” is not a real character, it is known as “铠爹” by many domestic players due to its high damage and long endurance capabilities. In the international version, the name is translated as “Kaizer”, which, while maintaining the Chinese pronunciation “Kai”, adds the suffix “-zer” which denotes a person. The entire word also resembles the German word “Kaiser”, which means emperor in German, thus inheriting the literal characteristics of the Chinese name and adding a domineering aura from the German culture, accurately reflecting the character’s powerful abilities.

3.2. Translation of System-Related Information

Apart from character construction, the development team of *Honor of Kings* has also uniformly translated the game maps, user interface, and so on. When players open the game, they will first see the entire system interface of the game. The interactive effects of the game interface will directly affect the players’ favorability towards the game, which in turn will affect the dissemination effect of the entire game. Therefore, doing a good job on the “front-end work” is very important. The second part of the case analysis will revolve around the translation of system settings, focusing on the cultural dissemination effects that *Honor of Kings* demonstrates in terms of user interaction experience.

3.2.1. Translation of Map Elements

Entering the game and playing, how to make players quickly become familiar with the entire gameplay and style is also an important factor affecting the player’s satisfaction with the game. The internal game map of *Honor of Kings* is a 10-person two-team confrontation type, and there are three confrontation routes. When translating the elements of the game map, what needs to be considered is not only the direct conversion of language but also cultural adaptability, the commonality of terminology, and the gaming experience of players in the target language.

When translating the elements of the game map, the commonality of terminology, cultural adaptability, and the gaming experience of players should be taken into account. Some translations may need to be fine-tuned according to the cultural background and customary usage of the target language to ensure that the translation is not only faithful to the original text but also acceptable to the audience of the target language. And most of the map element translations are accurate and convey the original concepts well. In some cases, optimizing the translation can make them more fluent and easier to understand. As shown in Table 4, the translation expressions of the related map elements are listed.

Table 4. Game map in *Honor of Kings*.

Chinese Name of Map Element	English Name of Map Element
对抗路	Clash Lane
中路	Mid Lane

发育路	Farm Lane
游走	Roaming
打野	Jungling
泉水	Base(Spawn Point)
水晶	Crystal
高地塔	High Ground Tower
二塔	Inner Tower
一塔	Outer Tower
原初法阵	Primal Portal
二塔视野之灵	Inner Tower Vision Sprite
野区精灵保护	Jungle Sprite Protection
补血花	Healing Dew
草丛	Brush
蔚蓝石像	Azure Golem
腥红石像	Crimson Golem
蜥蜴	Lizard
赤甲	Spiketail Beast
猎豹	Cheetah
山豪	Tusked Boar
烈雉	Fire Beak
暴君	Tyrant
暗影暴君	Shadow Tyrant
主宰	Overlord
暗影主宰	Shadow Overlord
风暴龙王	Tempest Dragon
中路河道之灵	Mid Lane River Sprite
边路河道之灵	Side Lane River Sprite
红隼	Firehawk
近战小兵	Melee Minion
远程法师	Mage Minion
弩车	Ballista Minion
炮车	Cannon
超级兵	Super Minion

Starting with the term “Clash Lane”, which corresponds to “对抗路” in Chinese, this translation is effective in terms of Jakobson’s communicative equivalence. It conveys the competitive nature of this part of the map, which is a key aspect of the gameplay. However, from Peirce’s perspective, “Clash Lane” could be seen as an index, pointing to the conflict that occurs there, rather than an icon or symbol that might provide a more nuanced representation of the gameplay dynamics.

“Mid Lane” is a direct translation that maintains semantic and grammatical equivalence, fitting well within Jakobson’s framework. It is a clear and concise term that is easily understood by players familiar with the genre.

“Farm Lane” as a translation for “发育路” is less effective. While it attempts to capture the idea of economic development through farming minions, it may not fully convey the strategic depth of this concept to players unfamiliar with the term “farming” in the context of MOBA games.

“Roaming” is a suitable translation for “游走”, capturing the essence of a player’s movement around the map. It aligns with communicative equivalence and is a term commonly used in the gaming lexicon.

“Jungling” is an interesting case. It is a term that has been adopted into English from gaming culture and fits Jakobson’s communicative equivalence well. However, as an index in Peirce’s theory, it points to the specific activity of clearing the jungle, which may not be immediately clear to those outside the gaming community.

The translation of “泉水” to “Base(Spawn Point)” is effective in terms of semantic equivalence but could be improved in terms of conciseness and communicative equivalence. The inclusion of “Spawn Point” in parentheses adds clarity but may not be necessary for players already familiar with the term “Base”.

“Crystal” is a direct and effective translation for “水晶”, maintaining semantic equivalence and being widely recognized in gaming culture.

The tower translations, such as “High Ground Tower”, “Inner Tower” and “Outer Tower” are clear and maintain both semantic and grammatical equivalence. They are effective in communicating the strategic importance of these structures on the map.

“Primal Portal” for “原初法阵” is a creative translation that attempts to capture the mystical and strategic nature of the structure. It may not fully align with semantic equivalence but does offer a sense of intrigue and importance, which could be seen as effective in its own right.

The translations for the various creatures and minions, such as “Azure Golem”, “Crimson Golem”, “Lizard”, “Spiketail Beast”, “Cheetah”, “Tusked Boar”, “Fire Beak”, “Tyrant”, “Shadow Tyrant”, “Overlord”, “Shadow Overlord”, and “Tempest Dragon” are generally effective. They use a combination of color, creature type, and descriptor to create a vivid image that aligns with both Jakobson’s and Peirce’s theories.

“Mid Lane River Sprite” and “Side Lane River Sprite” are effective translations that maintain semantic and communicative equivalence, providing clear information about the location and nature of these entities.

“Firehawk” is a creative translation for “红隼”, which adds a layer of fantasy and intrigue to the creature. It may not be a direct semantic equivalent but serves the purpose of engaging the player’s imagination.

The minion translations, such as “Melee Minion”, “Mage Minion”, “Ballista Minion”, “Cannon” and “Super Minion” are all effective and align with the communicative equivalence, providing clear and concise information about their roles in the game.

The translations for the game map elements in *Honor of Kings* are generally effective, with some room for improvement in terms of conciseness and clarity. They align well with the principles of Jakobson’s communicative equivalence and Peirce’s indices, providing players with the necessary information to understand and engage with the game’s mechanics.

3.2.2. Translation of User Interface

Upon launching the game, the first thing that catches the player’s eye is the main page of the game. The arrangement of elements on the main page and the convenience

of interaction are crucial factors that influence the player's first impression of the game. Currently, the main interface of *Honor of Kings* is relatively simple, allowing players to access corresponding services by clicking on the relevant UI icons. The accuracy of the translation of the functions corresponding to the icons also determines whether the player can quickly understand the general interactive content of the game.

After organization, there are still some areas where the system UI translation of *Honor of Kings* can be improved, as shown in Table 5, some parts of the English translation.

Table 5. User interface in *Honor of Kings*.

Chinese Name of User Interface	English Name of User Interface
商城	Shop
战令	Pass
夺宝	Draw
活动	Events
回归礼	Return Gift
五五朋友节	High Five Day
百相轮盘	Super Wheel
每日奖励	Daily Reward
圈子	Group
定制	Customize
社区	Community
比赛	Match
神钩对决	Hook or Crook
无限乱斗	Infinite Brwal
5v5 匹配	Normal 5V5
小峡谷	Mini Gorge
1v1 匹配	1v1 Match
冠军赛	Championship
娱乐	Casual
训练营	Boot Camp
实战模拟	Simulation
单人训练	Solo Practice
珍稀盲盒机	NYST-O-MAT
五五权益卡	High Five Perks Card
倾心许愿	Heartful Wish
时雨许愿	Bring the Rain

Jakobson's theory, which underscores the importance of function in translation, suggests that the translated terms should serve the same purpose as the original. Terms such as "Shop", "Events" and "Community" are functional equivalents that maintain their marketplace, social gathering, and communication roles in the English context, thus fulfilling Jakobson's criteria for adequate translation.

Peirce's semiotic theory, with its focus on signs and their objects, can be applied to evaluate the translations. For example, "Super Wheel" for "百相轮盘" is an effective translation as it uses an indexical relationship to the spinning action of the wheel, which is a common feature in games offering rewards. This translation is clear and invites players to engage with the feature, aligning with Peirce's concept of an index.

Barthes' theory, which discusses the multiplicity of meanings and the reader's role in interpreting them, is particularly relevant for translations like "Hook or Crook" for "神钩对决". This translation invites players to engage with a playful interpretation of the game mode, suggesting a battle of wits and skill. It allows for a range of interpretations, which is in line with Barthes' idea of the reader's active role in constructing meaning.

However, some translations may not fully capture the essence of the original terms. "Pass" for "战令" lacks the connotative meaning of a progression system or a seasonal event pass that is implied by the original term. A term like "Battle Pass" might be more appropriate, as it is commonly used in gaming to denote a system where players earn rewards as they advance through levels.

"Draw" as a translation for "夺宝" could be ambiguous, as it might imply a random selection process rather than the act of claiming a prize. A term like "Treasure Draw" or "Loot Draw" could provide a clearer indication of the action involved, thus enhancing the player's understanding.

"High Five Day" for "五五朋友节" is a creative translation that attempts to convey the celebratory nature of the event. However, it may not resonate with all English-speaking players who are not familiar with the gesture of a high five. A more descriptive translation that captures the spirit of friendship and celebration, such as "Friendship Festival" or "Five-Five Friendship Celebration", might be more effective.

"Mini Gorge" for "小峡谷" might not convey the intended scale or significance of the game mode. A term like "Miniature Canyon" or "Small Canyon Mode" could provide a clearer indication of the game mode's nature, which is important for player comprehension.

4. Dissemination of Chinese Online Game Cultural Symbols

The international success of *Honor of Kings* offers a compelling case study for the role of cultural symbols in the global appeal of online games. The followings will explore the various dimensions of cultural symbol construction and translation, analyzing their impact on the game's dissemination, player perception, and the broader social implications for cross-cultural communication and identity. Furthermore, it will examine the role of these cultural symbols in enhancing China's cultural soft power and provide insights into the game's performance in the international market, offering recommendations for further global expansion.

4.1. Social Significance and Impact of Online Game Cultural Symbols

The cultural symbols in online games like *Honor of Kings* carry significant social implications, particularly in the realm of cross-cultural communication and identity formation.

The game's cultural symbols have played a role in enhancing cross-cultural understanding by presenting Chinese cultural elements in a relatable and engaging manner. This has not only increased the game's international appeal but also promoted cultural exchange and dialogue.

Honor of Kings has contributed to shaping a cultural identity that is both rooted in Chinese heritage and universally appealing. The game has become a medium through which Chinese culture is shared and celebrated globally, fostering a sense of pride and identity among players.

The cultural symbols in *Honor of Kings* have also played a crucial role in promoting cultural dissemination and exchange. The game has facilitated cultural exchange by providing a common ground for players from different cultural backgrounds to interact. The shared experience of engaging with the game's cultural symbols has led to increased dialogue and understanding among players.

Honor of Kings has expanded the cultural horizons of its players by introducing them to Chinese cultural symbols and narratives. This exposure has not only enriched the gaming experience but also contributed to the broader goal of cultural diversity and appreciation.

4.2. The Impact of Cultural Symbols as Seen in *Honor of Kings*

In the global landscape of online gaming, the game *Honor of Kings* stands out as a beacon of cultural exchange, showcasing the intricate tapestry of Chinese culture and values to an international audience. The game's success can be attributed to its strategic use of cultural symbols, which are meticulously woven into the fabric of its design and narrative. These symbols, deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, extend beyond mere visual representation; they embody the ethos and narratives that resonate with players, thereby enhancing the game's appeal and relatability.

In the era of accelerated globalization and the widespread adoption of internet technologies, the influence of Chinese online games on the global stage has become increasingly evident, serving as a pivotal medium for the representation of Chinese culture and values. *Honor of Kings*, the international version of the popular Chinese game *King of Glory*, exemplifies this trend through its strategic use of cultural symbols and its adept translation and dissemination tactics. This game has garnered global attention by embedding cultural elements that resonate deeply with traditional Chinese heritage, which are then meticulously translated to appeal to a diverse international audience.

The game's cultural symbols are intricately woven into its character designs and game elements, reflecting a profound connection to Chinese traditions. These symbols are not merely aesthetic; they serve as a bridge for cross-cultural communication, enabling players from different backgrounds to engage with and appreciate Chinese culture. The translation strategies employed in *Honor of Kings* are informed by a blend of theoretical frameworks, including Roman Jakobson's translation theory and the semiotic theories of Peirce and Roland Barthes. These theories guide the translation process, which encompasses a range of techniques such as literal translation, free translation, creative translation, and transliteration.

The careful selection of these translation strategies is driven by cultural considerations, ensuring that the essence and nuances of the original cultural symbols are preserved while also being made accessible to a global audience. This approach not only facilitates cultural exchange but also enhances the game's international appeal. The case of *Honor of Kings* demonstrates that thoughtful game design and culturally sensitive translation can significantly impact the way cultural symbols are perceived and appreciated in the global gaming community.

Through an in-depth analysis of *Honor of Kings*, players can discern the current state of translation choices in the dissemination of Chinese online games and their role in global cultural communication. Furthermore, it offers a wealth of insights for future endeavors in translating Chinese online games for overseas audiences, suggesting that

a nuanced understanding of cultural symbols and their translation is crucial for successful cross-cultural engagement.

4.3. Online Game Dissemination as a Form of Cultural Soft Power

The cultural symbols in Chinese online games like *Honor of Kings* have a significant role in enhancing China's cultural soft power. The game's cultural symbols have served as a form of cultural diplomacy, showcasing Chinese culture in a positive light and attracting international players. This has increased China's cultural influence and soft power on the global stage. The pathways for cultural influence through *Honor of Kings* include the game's narrative, character design, and gameplay mechanics. These elements work together to create a comprehensive cultural experience that resonates with players and contributes to China's cultural soft power.

The international edition of *Honor of Kings* has shown promising performance in the global market, but there is room for further improvement. An analysis of the game's performance reveals its strengths and weaknesses in the international market. The game's success can be attributed to its cultural appeal and strategic localization efforts, while challenges include cultural misunderstandings and competition from other international games.

To further enhance its global presence, *Honor of Kings* should continue to refine its localization strategies, engage with international players through community-building initiatives, and explore partnerships with local cultural institutions. Additionally, the game should focus on continuous content innovation to maintain player interest and loyalty.

5. Conclusions

Honor of Kings, as a carrier of communication, not only bears the important task of cultural outreach, but also shapes a production field for the secondary creation and dissemination of culture. Different players, especially overseas players, when experiencing Chinese games, are subject to the rules of game mechanisms. However, such game rules are also shaping the gaming habits of overseas players, thereby subtly spreading Chinese culture [11].

With the background of the thriving global gaming market, the development strategy of "Culture Exporting" has become crucial for most domestic game developers. The quality of game translation plays a decisive role in the success of domestic games overseas [12]. *Genshin Impact* serves as a successful case study, providing more development possibilities for future domestic games. The international version of *Honor of Kings*, launched by Tencent (one of China's Internet giants, was founded by current CEO Ma Huateng(Pony Ma) in 1998.)in collaboration with Garena (an online game operation company, was founded in Singapore in 2009 by Li Xiaodong(Forrest Li), who was born in China) in overseas regions, has received enthusiastic responses internationally. However, the international version of *Honor of Kings* underwent modifications from the original game, with changes in both game content and characters [8].

Research on the construction and translation dissemination of cultural symbols can help reduce obstacles for domestic games going global. Studying the construction and translation dissemination of cultural symbols in the international version of *Honor of Kings* can better explore the multiple meanings and expressions carried by different cultural symbols in cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, this paper will delve

into the role of online game cultural symbols in promoting cultural communication and exchange on a global scale, summarizing the role and pathways of constructing and translating online game cultural symbols in enhancing China's soft power in the gaming culture, thus providing a reliable approach for future outstanding domestic games to enter the global market.

5.1. Main Findings

The *Honor of Kings* (also known as *King of Glory*) incorporates rich Chinese cultural symbols in character design, map construction. Examining the core issues of cross-symbolic meaning and other aspects of translation from the perspective of semiotics can not only help clarify the essence of translation, but also expand the research ideas and scope of semiotics [13]. Character symbols, through unique appearances and background stories, showcase the depth and charm of Chinese historical culture. Characters like Guan Yu, Zhuge Liang, and Luban, derived from the Three Kingdoms period and ancient Chinese legends, have become distinctive symbols in the game. Map symbols depict the architectural style of the East and the grandeur of ancient palaces, creating a game world full of Chinese flavor. Equipment symbols blend traditional weapons with magical gear, showcasing the fusion of Eastern martial arts culture and Western fantasy culture.

In terms of translation and dissemination, the international version of *Honor of Kings* adopts a primarily estrangement-oriented translation method, aiming to highlight the uniqueness of Chinese culture. Additionally, cultural symbols are constructed and translated according to the cultural and linguistic characteristics of different countries and regions to enhance the game's acceptance in the international market. For example, in character names and skill descriptions, translation methods that align with the linguistic habits and cultural backgrounds of the target audience are employed, enabling the game to better integrate into local markets.

Through in-depth interviews and grounded theory research methods, this study found that the international version of *Honor of Kings* has gained high acceptance among overseas players. Although initial cultural differences may lead to decoding conflicts, later cultural enrichment within and outside the game gradually fosters recognition among overseas players. This successful practice indicates the enormous potential and advantages of Chinese online games in cross-cultural communication.

5.2. Research Innovations and Limitations

From the perspective of research innovations, to begin with, the paper adopts interdisciplinary approach, which combines translation studies with cultural studies, offering a multidisciplinary perspective on how Chinese online games like *Honor of Kings* are localized and marketed globally.

Besides, the in-depth symbol analysis is also used in the thesis. By meticulously categorizing and describing the cultural symbols within the game, the paper provides a granular level of analysis that is often overlooked in studies focusing on the broader impact of media. Next, the application of established translation and semiotics theories to dissect the translation strategies used in the game's international versions is a novel approach that bridges theoretical knowledge with practical application.

Furthermore, the paper sheds light on the role of translation in facilitating cultural exchange, which is an under-explored area in the context of gaming and digital media.

While the paper presents a innovative research in the field of translation and cultural studies within the context of online gaming, it has limitations that could be addressed. First and foremost, the focus on *Honor of Kings* as a single case study might restrict the broader applicability of the findings. By extending the analysis to include a comparative study with other games, the paper could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the translation strategies and their impact on cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, the depth of cultural representation is a critical aspect that may not be fully explored in the thesis. A more profound examination of the range and depth of cultural representations, as well as their global audience perception, could provide a richer understanding of how cultural symbols resonate with different players worldwide.

Additionally, the paper's reliance on qualitative analysis without the support of quantitative data could be seen as a limitation. The inclusion of quantitative methods to measure the effectiveness of the translation strategies and the game's cultural impact would provide empirical evidence to reinforce the qualitative insights. This would strengthen the argument by offering a more robust and scientifically grounded analysis.

The theoretical framework used in the thesis, while established, may not fully capture the complexity of the translation process. By incorporating a wider range of theories, the paper could offer a more nuanced understanding of the translation strategies employed and their implications for cross-cultural exchange.

Moreover, ethical considerations in cultural translation, such as cultural appropriation or misrepresentation, are not explicitly addressed. A deeper exploration of these ethical dimensions would add another layer of depth to the thesis, considering the potential cultural sensitivities and implications involved in the translation and dissemination of cultural products.

Lastly, the paper appears to lack a discussion on audience reception, which is pivotal for assessing the success of cross-cultural communication. Understanding how the target audience receives and interprets the translated cultural symbols would provide crucial insights into the effectiveness of the game's international appeal and the translation strategies' success.

5.3. Prospects

Future research can be expanded in several aspects:

Firstly, further explore and integrate traditional Chinese cultural elements to enrich game storytelling and world-building. By delving into Chinese history, literature, art, etc., create a more profound and extensive Chinese-style online game to enhance its competitiveness in the international market.

Secondly, strengthen research on translation and dissemination strategies. Develop more precise and effective translation strategies based on the cultural and linguistic characteristics of different countries and regions to enhance the game's acceptance and identity in local markets. Additionally, enhance cooperation and communication with international game development teams to jointly promote the dissemination and development of Chinese online games globally.

Finally, expand the scope and depth of research. In addition to focusing on individual successful cases like *Honor of Kings*, attention should be paid to more Chinese online games' performance in international markets, analyzing their cultural

symbol construction and translation dissemination strategies and effects. Furthermore, combining interdisciplinary theories and methods, delve into the challenges and opportunities of Chinese online games in cross-cultural communication, providing theoretical support and practical guidance for the industry's healthy development.

In conclusion, Games are products of culture, with their artistry and creativity being of paramount importance [14]. The issue of Chinese culture going global is both urgent and severe, as it relates to the enhancement of China's soft power and the elevation of its international discourse influence [15]. The construction of cultural symbols and their translation dissemination in Chinese online games are complex and intriguing research areas. Through in-depth research and practical exploration, foreign users can better promote Chinese online games onto the world stage, showcasing the unique charm and value of Chinese culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- [1] *Honor of Kings* Goes Global: Unveiling New Opportunities in Game Exportation. Available online: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/9-Ognz525KVYNypuCYTMRg> (accessed on 28 February 2024).
- [2] Xu, L. On Translation Equivalence From a Perspective of Semiotics. *Journal of Chengdu Normal University*, 2007, 000(05), 60-62, DOI: 10.3969/j.issn.1000-5757.2007.05.022.
- [3] Zhang, W.J.; Wang, F.Y. A Study of the Translation of Modern Chinese Essays from the Perspective of Semiotics--A Case Study of Selected Modern Chinese Essays. *English Teachers*, 2021, 000(07), 93-95+98.
- [4] Li, K.X. A Semiotic Approach to Meaning and Relative Translation Equivalence. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*, 2008, 000(05), 97-101, DOI: 10.3969/j.issn.1002-2643.2008.05.020.
- [5] Barthes, R. Éléments de sémiologie. *Communications*, 1964, 004(01), 91-135, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/comm.1964.1029>.
- [6] Meng, F.; Peng, Y.J. Cultural integration and Element Combination: A Study on Symbolic Construction of *Honor of Kings*. *Journal of Hangzhou Normal University(Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 2021, 043(06), 92-101.
- [7] Huang, J.J. Research on the Translation of Chinese Elements in the Localization of Mobile Games—A Case Study of *King of Glory*. *Comparative Study of Cultural Innovation*, 2021, 005(14), 188-191.
- [8] Cao, Y.L.; Kuang, X. Research on the Adaptation of Characters from *Honor of Kings* in the Context of Cross-cultural Communication. *New Media Research*, 2021, 007(22), 88-91, DOI: 10.16604/j.cnki.issn2096-0360.2021.22.023.

- [9] Zhang, W.J. The application of transcreation in game localization translation. *Modern Communication(Journal of Communication University of China)*, 2013, 035(12), 165-166.
- [10] Ask if you don't know! Why is “*Xiao Man*” translated as “Grain Buds”? Available online: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/SFlH2ZJqnoiOEEFsJ6JdSA> (accessed on 21 June 2023).
- [11] Lin, Y.J. How has *King of Glory* been accepted by overseas players?—A grounded study based on the globalization of domestic games. *Contemporary Communication*, 2024, 000(01), 97-102.
- [12] Xiao, N.H. A Research on the Translation of *Genshin Impact*. *Comparative Study of Cultural Innovation*, 2023, 007(15), 25-29.
- [13] Wang, H.L. Semiotics and Translation Studies “Marriage”: Retrospect and Prospect. *Foreign Languages Bimonthly*, 2022, 000(06), 116-123+156.
- [14] Wang, Y. Video Game Translation: Transfer the Same Player Experience to a Different Culture. *Overseas English*, 2015, 000(15), 143-144.
- [15] Zheng, D.H. The Globalization of Chinese Culture and the Translation of Culture-Loaded Words. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, 2016, 000(02), 53-56.



© 2025 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)