

Beyond Game Export: Platform Ecosystems and the Internationalisation of Chinese Esports

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Abstract: *This article examines the internationalisation of Chinese esports from a platform-ecosystem perspective. It argues that overseas expansion cannot be explained adequately as the export of a finished game product, because competitive gaming depends on infrastructures, recurrent tournaments, livestreaming, professional organisations and participatory communities that must be reproduced across markets. The analysis places Yupei Zhao and Zhongxuan Lin's concept of the Chinese esports "umbrella platform" at its centre. Their study of Tencent shows how state regulation, corporate capital, technical infrastructure, leagues, clubs and media platforms become mutually embedded, creating both coordination and power asymmetries. Building on this argument, the article proposes a Platform–Tournament–Community (PTC) model as an outward-facing extension of the umbrella platform. Platforms establish access and governance; tournaments generate repeated transnational attention; communities interpret, circulate and localise competitive content. A qualitative synthesis of ten peer-reviewed studies distinguishes structural capacity from cultural outcome. The article concludes that Chinese esports internationalisation is better understood as ecosystem-building than one-way cultural export, and that international visibility should not automatically be treated as evidence of cultural influence.*

Keywords: *Chinese Esports, Tencent, Platformisation, Umbrella Platform, Internationalisation, Digital Culture, PTC Model*

1. Introduction

Chinese esports provides an unusually revealing case for studying how a digital cultural industry moves beyond its domestic market. Zhao and Lin's analysis of Tencent shows from the outset that the industry is organised through an infrastructure of platforms, leagues, media and regulatory relations rather than through game products alone [1]. More broadly, esports scholarship has expanded across business, sport science, media studies, sociology, informatics and other fields [2]. An esports title is simultaneously software, a competitive rule system, a media event, a labour market and a participatory cultural space. Unlike a film or a book, it does not circulate internationally as a stable text alone. It requires servers and accounts, publishers and tournament operators, professional teams, broadcast services, commercial partners and audiences who repeatedly create and recirculate content. The object that crosses borders is therefore not simply a game, but an organised set of technical, commercial and cultural relations.

This distinction matters because the language of "cultural export" can make digital internationalisation appear more linear than it is. Export implies that a product is created in one national context and then delivered to consumers elsewhere. Esports has to be reproduced as an ongoing environment. Players require stable access and competitive integrity; leagues require rules, calendars and participating organisations; broadcasts require distribution and rights arrangements; and audiences need reasons to return after the first encounter. International success therefore depends not only on whether a Chinese game can be downloaded overseas, but also on whether an ecosystem can sustain competition, spectatorship and community formation over time.

The most important starting point for analysing this structure is Zhao and Lin's study of Tencent's esports industry [1]. Working through the concepts of platform governance and platform capitalism, they propose the "umbrella platform" to describe a specifically Chinese configuration in which government regulation, corporate platforms, clubs, media, coaches and professional players are connected through overlapping infrastructures. Their empirical design combines platform documentation, policy and financial materials with ethnographic interviews. Crucially, their argument does not depict the Chinese state and Tencent as two fully separate forces. Instead, it shows how

regulatory infrastructure and corporate platformisation can become mutually constitutive while still retaining unequal capacities and distinct institutional interests [1].

Zhao and Lin's evidence makes the scale and intensity of this arrangement visible. They document Tencent's involvement in professional leagues and tournament infrastructures, as well as its investment in domestic livestreaming platforms. For the first half of 2018, they report 7.09 billion views and more than 1.38 billion viewing hours for professional broadcasts in the LPL tournament area; they also note that the King Pro League generated more than 10 billion reported views in 2017 [1]. These are platform view counts, not unique individuals, and should not be converted into audience headcounts. Their analytical value lies elsewhere: they demonstrate how a platformised competition system can generate repeated, high-frequency contact between audiences and an esports property. That repetition is central to the argument developed here.

The present article asks how the domestic organisational capacity identified by Zhao and Lin can help explain the international circulation of Chinese esports. Its central claim is that the umbrella platform supplies an institutional foundation, but cross-border expansion operates through three more specific mechanisms: platform access, tournament institutionalisation and participatory communities. These mechanisms are summarised as the Platform–Tournament–Community (PTC) model. The model is not offered as a replacement for Zhao and Lin's concept. It is intended as an outward-facing extension that isolates the parts of a domestically consolidated ecosystem that become especially important when a game, league or media property is reproduced in other markets.

The argument is deliberately narrower than a claim about national soft power. Three questions need to remain separate: who owns or governs the infrastructure; what cultural material is carried by the game and its competitions; and how overseas audiences interpret that material. These dimensions may interact, but none can be inferred automatically from the others. An internationally available Chinese-developed game is not necessarily experienced as “Chinese culture”, and high viewing figures do not by themselves demonstrate favourable attitudes toward China. A defensible account of internationalisation must first explain the mechanisms of access, repetition and participation before making stronger claims about cultural influence.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Esports as Digital Cultural Production

A first requirement is to avoid reducing esports either to conventional sport or to an ordinary videogame commodity. Witkowski's qualitative research on competitive Counter-Strike demonstrates that high-level play involves embodied skill, coordinated team practice, technological mediation and organised performance [3]. Her analysis is useful because it relocates attention from the software object to the relations among players, technologies and competitive settings. Esports is produced through these relations. This relational quality also helps explain why a title can remain commercially available yet fail to develop a durable esports scene: the software may be present while the institutional and social conditions of competition are weak.

Reitman and colleagues reinforce this point. Reviewing esports research from 2002 through March 2018, they identify work across seven academic disciplines, confirming that esports is a compound object rather than a single market category [2]. For internationalisation, sales or downloads are therefore insufficient indicators: competitive practice, spectator culture, professional labour and media infrastructure are constitutive parts of the product.

2.2. Platformisation and the Umbrella Platform

Platformisation provides the second conceptual foundation. Nieborg and Poell describe the penetration of the economic and infrastructural extensions of online platforms into cultural production, distribution and circulation [4]. In games, cultural commodities become increasingly contingent: they are modular, continuously reworked and responsive to data, platform rules and monetisation. The product is therefore not independent of the platform through which it is maintained.

The Chinese context adds another layer. De Kloet and colleagues argue that the platformisation of Chinese society must be understood through the interaction of infrastructure, governance and everyday practice rather than by applying a simple Western platform model [5]. Platforms in China operate within distinctive regulatory, commercial and cultural arrangements, and they increasingly function as

infrastructural environments rather than optional media channels. This observation matters for esports because the same company may participate in publishing, communication, payments, streaming, social networking and competition. Such vertical and horizontal connections alter both the speed of coordination and the distribution of bargaining power.

Zhao and Lin make this platform perspective specific to Chinese esports [1]. Their “umbrella platform” captures a system in which heterogeneous actors occupy connected positions beneath a larger regulatory and corporate structure. The metaphor is analytically useful in two ways. First, it foregrounds interdependence: authorities, Tencent, clubs, professional players, media organisations and livestreaming services may pursue different interests, but their activities are structurally linked. Second, it foregrounds unequal power. Tencent is able to operate across several stages of the value chain, including content authorisation, production and distribution, league organisation, technical infrastructure and media investment [1]. Integration can reduce transaction costs and stabilise standards, yet it also makes opting out increasingly expensive for dependent actors.

The empirical detail in Zhao and Lin’s analysis is particularly important for an internationalisation argument. They describe Tencent as a major executive of professional leagues, document the Tencent Games Arena as an integrated tournament infrastructure, and trace investment into livestreaming services such as Douyu and Huya [1]. Livestreaming occupies a pivotal position because it links production to consumption and transforms competition into traffic, viewing time and commercial value. The “umbrella” is therefore not simply a metaphor for corporate size; it is an account of how regulatory arrangements, technical systems, capital and cultural circulation are assembled.

A later study by Zhao, Li and Lin develops this perspective through a business-ecosystem framework [6]. Based on content analysis, observation, financial and investment data and fifty interviews with elite stakeholders, the authors examine Chinese esports through the dimensions of productivity, robustness and niche creation. Their findings are valuable because they resist a simple success narrative. Tencent’s agenda, municipal governments, real-estate developers and tournament activities can co-evolve, but the ecosystem also contains precarity and uneven capacities for coordination [6]. Internationalisation should therefore be analysed not as the replication of a finished domestic model but as the problem of rebuilding workable relations under different regulatory, linguistic and commercial conditions.

2.3. Spectatorship, Livestreaming and Community

Audience research supplies the third component. Hamari and Sjöblom surveyed 888 esports spectators and found that escapism, knowledge acquisition, novelty and perceived athlete aggressiveness positively predicted spectating frequency [7]. Their results show that viewing is not simply an extension of gameplay. Spectators return because competitions provide information, affect, uncertainty and opportunities to follow skilled performance. This matters for internationalisation because product availability and spectator attachment are different achievements. A game can enter a foreign app store without creating reasons for audiences to follow a league week after week.

Livestreaming deepens this distinction. Hilvert-Bruce and colleagues analysed survey data from 2,227 Twitch users and found that social interaction, sense of community, meeting new people, entertainment and information seeking helped explain livestream engagement [8]. The social component was particularly pronounced among viewers of smaller channels. Although their sample is not specific to Chinese esports, the study establishes an important mechanism: live digital viewing can be organised around social relations rather than around content exposure alone. International esports ecosystems consequently require spaces in which audiences can discuss, interpret and belong, not merely channels capable of delivering video.

Johnson and Woodcock reach a complementary conclusion from one hundred qualitative interviews with professional livestreamers, combined with event ethnography and online observation [9]. They show that livestreaming has become structurally important to the wider video-game industry, influencing consumer choice, the visibility and longevity of games, and relations between developers and influencers. The implication for esports is straightforward but significant: broadcasting is not downstream publicity added after a competition has been created. It participates in the production of value and in the social life of the game itself.

Taken together, these studies point toward a gap between two established conversations. Research on platformisation explains how infrastructure, governance and data reshape cultural production [4,5], while esports research explains competitive practice, spectatorship and professional labour

[2][3][7,8][9][10]. Zhao and colleagues bridge part of this gap by showing how Tencent coordinates a specifically Chinese esports ecosystem [1,6]. What remains less explicit is how that domestic configuration should be translated analytically when the object of study is cross-border circulation. The PTC model addresses this question by identifying platform, tournament and community as three mutually reinforcing mechanisms through which internationalisation becomes durable rather than episodic.

2.4. The Platform–Tournament–Community Model

The Platform component refers to the technical and commercial conditions of access: publishing arrangements, account systems, servers, data infrastructures, broadcast distribution, rights and platform governance. Platform access is a precondition rather than an outcome. A game may be technically downloadable in a new territory, but an esports ecosystem remains fragile if latency, account management, patch synchronisation, language support or media distribution are unreliable. In this sense, internationalisation depends on infrastructural portability: the ability to reproduce core functions while adapting their organisation to local conditions.

Tournament refers to recurrent competitive institutions. Tournaments convert a game into an event cycle, concentrating attention at predictable moments and generating narratives around teams, players, regional styles and competitive uncertainty. Their significance is temporal as much as commercial. A launch campaign creates an initial spike in visibility; a league creates a calendar and therefore repeated reasons to return. Repetition is essential because cultural familiarity is usually cumulative rather than instantaneous.

Community refers to the distributed practices through which audiences and participants interpret competition. Viewers discuss strategy, produce clips and memes, translate commentary, follow individual players and form affinities around teams. Community is therefore not a residual category for “fans”. It is the layer through which formal competition acquires informal meanings that cannot be fully designed by the publisher. This is also where localisation becomes socially consequential: overseas audiences may attach to a local player or team before they attach to the national origin of the game.

The three components form a recursive rather than linear relationship. Platforms make tournaments accessible; tournaments create concentrated moments of attention; communities extend the life of those events through interpretation and recirculation; and sustained community activity can justify further investment in platforms and tournaments. The model therefore differs from an export chain in which value simply moves from producer to foreign consumer. It describes an ecosystem loop in which technical, institutional and cultural conditions repeatedly reproduce one another.

3. Method

This article uses a focused qualitative synthesis of ten peer-reviewed studies. The objective is conceptual explanation rather than the measurement of current market size. Sources were selected purposively because each addresses a necessary part of the argument: the umbrella-platform structure of Chinese esports [1]; the multidisciplinary scope of esports research [2]; embodied and organised competitive practice [3]; platformisation of cultural production [4]; the distinctive governance of Chinese platform society [5]; the Chinese esports business ecosystem [6]; spectator motivation [7]; social motivations for livestreaming [8]; livestreaming’s role in the games industry [9]; and professional-player labour in China [10].

The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, empirical findings and concepts from the ten studies are organised around four questions: what makes esports an institutional cultural form; how platform power structures production and circulation; why spectators return; and where dependency or precarity enters the system. Second, these findings are compared with Zhao and Lin’s umbrella-platform concept [1] to identify which domestic capacities become critical when the ecosystem crosses borders. The resulting PTC model is therefore a synthesis, not a claim that the cited authors themselves proposed a three-part framework.

An explicit evidentiary hierarchy is used to avoid overstatement. Quantitative figures reproduced from Zhao and Lin are treated as historical platform indicators and are not presented as current audience numbers [1]. Survey findings from Hamari and Sjöblom and Hilvert-Bruce and colleagues are used to identify general mechanisms of spectator and livestream engagement, not to claim that

audiences in every national market behave identically [7,8]. Qualitative work is used to clarify relationships and tensions rather than to estimate prevalence. Most importantly, the article does not infer national-image or soft-power effects from platform reach. Such effects would require direct comparative audience research that measures interpretation and attitudinal change.

The method has clear limitations. A synthesis of published studies cannot establish the present distribution of market share, current overseas audience size or the causal effects of a particular international tournament. It also privileges Tencent-centred research because that work provides the strongest empirical basis for the umbrella-platform argument. These constraints are accepted because the article's purpose is narrower: to build a rigorous mechanism-based framework that can guide subsequent empirical studies of Chinese esports internationalisation.

4. Analysis: From Domestic Umbrella to International Ecosystem

4.1. Platform Infrastructure and Infrastructural Portability

The first implication of the umbrella-platform analysis is that internationalisation begins before a product enters a foreign market. It begins with domestic capacities for integrating content, technology, capital and distribution. Zhao and Lin show that Tencent did not simply publish games; it occupied positions in leagues, tournament operation, technical infrastructure, livestreaming and investment [1]. These positions give the company multiple routes through which a game can be converted into a continuing esports property. Infrastructural power is therefore productive: it allows standards, schedules, media flows and commercial relationships to be coordinated at scale.

Nieborg and Poell's account of platformisation helps explain why this coordination matters [4]. Platform-dependent cultural products are continually adjusted through data and governance. For esports, this dependence is intensified by the need for synchronisation. Competitive integrity requires compatible software versions and rules; leagues require administration and dispute procedures; broadcasts require technical feeds and rights; teams require access to stable competitive environments. Internationalisation therefore requires more than translation or marketing. It requires a portable organisational architecture.

The Chinese platform context also makes the portability problem political. De Kloet and colleagues stress that infrastructure and governance are intertwined in China's platform society [5]. A domestic configuration can benefit from dense connections among corporate services, regulators and users, but these connections do not travel automatically. Overseas markets have different app-store systems, data rules, broadcasting norms, payment infrastructures and competitive histories. The relevant question is therefore not whether a domestic umbrella can simply be opened abroad; it is which functions must remain centralised and which must be renegotiated locally.

This distinction prevents the PTC model from becoming a theory of corporate omnipotence. Strong integration can speed expansion, yet Zhao and Lin explicitly identify platform dependency, organisational homogenisation and deep power asymmetries as outcomes of Tencent's multidimensional growth [1]. A structure that is efficient at home may generate resistance when local publishers, teams or media organisations perceive insufficient autonomy. Infrastructural portability is consequently a governance problem as well as a technical one.

4.2. Tournaments as Recurring Nodes of Transnational Visibility

The second mechanism is tournament institutionalisation. Zhao and Lin identify tournament infrastructure as a central element of Tencent's value-chain expansion and describe its role in professional leagues including KPL and LPL [1]. Tournaments matter because they transform an always-available game into a sequence of socially synchronised events. Regular seasons, playoffs and championships create shared time: audiences know when to return, media know when to cover the game, and teams have a structure within which reputations can accumulate.

This temporal function is crucial for international cultural circulation. A product launch creates visibility, but it does not necessarily create memory. Recurrent competitions produce rivalries, upsets, narratives of improvement and recognisable player identities. Each event renews the cultural object. The historical figures in Zhao and Lin's study—billions of reported platform views for major Chinese competitions—should be treated cautiously, yet they illustrate the volume of contact that a recurring

tournament system can generate [1]. The relevant mechanism is not the headline number but the repetition embedded in the league format.

Tournaments also provide an institutional route to localisation. Textual localisation changes menus, language and sometimes cultural references; tournament localisation gives local actors consequential roles. A locally based team, player, commentator or organiser can connect an imported game to existing identities and media routines. This process is more durable than cosmetic localisation because it changes who can participate in the production of meaning. The competitive system becomes a shared space rather than a finished object delivered from elsewhere.

The business-ecosystem perspective developed by Zhao, Li and Lin sharpens this point [6]. Their concepts of productivity, robustness and niche creation suggest that a viable ecosystem must do more than produce content. It must survive coordination problems and create positions in which new actors can obtain value. Applied internationally, this means that a tournament system is sustainable only if teams, organisers, creators and commercial partners in the receiving market can occupy meaningful niches. Replicating a domestic hierarchy without local opportunity may produce visibility but weak resilience.

4.3. Communities as Distributed Cultural Intermediaries

The third mechanism is community participation. Hamari and Sjöblom's survey shows that esports spectatorship is motivated by knowledge acquisition, novelty, escapism and other gratifications rather than by exposure alone [7]. These motivations matter because internationalisation is sustained only when audiences have reasons to return after initial curiosity fades. Competitive games can support this process particularly well: each patch, roster change or strategic innovation creates new information to learn, while uncertain outcomes preserve novelty.

Livestreaming turns these motivations into social practice. Hilvert-Bruce and colleagues found that social interaction and sense of community help explain viewer engagement, with smaller channels showing especially strong social motivations [8]. In international contexts, such spaces can function as informal localisation environments. Fans explain unfamiliar terminology, translate clips, compare regional strategies and create shared jokes. None of these practices guarantees a favourable interpretation of the game's country of origin, but they deepen familiarity with the competitive property itself.

Johnson and Woodcock show why livestreaming should be treated as part of the industrial structure rather than as a promotional afterthought [9]. Their interviews and ethnography demonstrate that streaming can influence consumer choice, extend the lifespan and visibility of games, and create new relationships between developers and influential creators. For Chinese esports internationalisation, this means that community infrastructure cannot be separated cleanly from platform infrastructure. Streamers, commentators and fan creators are cultural intermediaries whose labour helps convert technical availability into attention.

At the same time, participatory circulation reduces corporate control over interpretation. Companies can provide official broadcasts, tournament narratives and promotional material, but users decide what to clip, mock, celebrate or ignore. This creates a productive tension. Community participation can amplify a game far beyond official communication, yet the meanings produced may be local, ironic or detached from Chinese national identity. International circulation is therefore co-produced rather than transmitted.

4.4. Power, Labour and Local Participation

A credible ecosystem analysis must also account for labour and power. The umbrella platform coordinates heterogeneous actors, but it does not place them on equal terms. Lin and Zhao's research on Chinese professional players shows that esports careers are shaped by meritocratic aspiration alongside precarity and disposability [10]. The finding complicates any assumption that growth automatically benefits all participants. Professional players are central to tournament narratives and fan attachment, yet their career horizons may be short and their bargaining power limited.

This labour perspective matters internationally. Rapid replication may use local players and organisations as instruments of market entry without giving them comparable influence over rules or value distribution; excessive decentralisation, however, can fragment standards. The governance problem is to coordinate essential infrastructure while preserving meaningful room for local actors.

Zhao, Li and Lin's concept of niche creation is useful here [6]. An ecosystem becomes more than a vertically integrated distribution system when it permits new specialisations to emerge. In an international market these niches may include local tournament operators, multilingual commentators, community organisers, player-development programmes or regionally specific media partnerships. Such actors do not merely assist localisation; they alter the structure of the ecosystem by adding locally rooted capabilities.

This is why the PTC model treats community as structurally significant rather than decorative. Platforms and tournaments can be built by a powerful company, but durable internationalisation requires social investment that is partly outside direct corporate control. The stronger the local ecosystem becomes, the less appropriate it is to describe the process as a one-way export. The resulting formation is better understood as negotiated reproduction: a Chinese-origin property is maintained through a network that increasingly includes actors, practices and meanings produced elsewhere.

4.5. International Visibility Is Not Automatically Cultural Influence

The final analytical issue is the relationship between international visibility and cultural influence. Digital-cultural discussions often move too quickly from reach to effect. The PTC model introduces a more cautious sequence. Platform access creates the possibility of encounter. Tournament recurrence increases the frequency and salience of encounter. Community participation can convert encounter into knowledge, routine and attachment. Only after these stages would it be reasonable to investigate whether attachment to the esports property affects perceptions of Chinese culture or China more broadly.

Audiences may attach to different objects: a player, a local club, strategic depth or a multilingual fan community. None necessarily becomes an encounter with "China". The empirical question is therefore not whether esports is soft power, but when and through which mediating practices national-cultural meaning becomes salient.

The literature reviewed here supports the mechanisms of repeated attention and participation, but it does not support a general claim of positive attitudinal change. Hamari and Sjöblom and Hilvert-Bruce and colleagues identify motivations for spectating and livestream engagement [7,8]; they do not measure perceptions of China. Zhao and Lin explain a platform structure and its power relations [1]; they do not claim that every user of Tencent-linked esports develops national affinity. Maintaining these evidentiary boundaries is essential to a rigorous argument.

The appropriate contribution of the PTC model is therefore explanatory rather than promotional. It specifies how an esports ecosystem can create sustained cross-border cultural contact while leaving the outcome of that contact open to empirical investigation. This makes the model suitable for comparative research: future studies can test whether particular combinations of platform access, tournament participation and community density are associated with stronger cultural identification, and whether those relationships differ across countries.

5. Discussion

The analysis revises the idea of Chinese esports "going global" in four related ways. First, it shifts the unit of analysis from product to ecosystem. The central question is not simply whether a Chinese-developed game reaches overseas consumers, but whether a system of access, competition and participation can be maintained around it. Zhao and Lin's umbrella platform provides the strongest foundation for this shift because it shows that Chinese esports is already organised through a dense integration of infrastructure, capital, regulation and stakeholders [1].

Second, the argument treats platform power as both capacity and constraint. Integration makes large-scale coordination possible, but it can also deepen dependency. Nieborg and Poell's platformisation framework and the Chinese platform literature help explain why cultural producers become structurally dependent on technical and economic systems that they do not fully control [4,5]. Zhao and Lin's contribution is to show how this tension takes a particular form in Chinese esports, where state regulation and corporate platformisation are neither identical nor cleanly separable [1]. Internationalisation therefore cannot be evaluated only by speed of expansion; the distribution of control within the resulting ecosystem also matters.

Third, tournaments should be treated as institutions of cultural circulation rather than marketing events. Their distinctive contribution is recurrence: calendars produce shared time, ongoing narratives and identifiable actors. This connects platform capacity to the spectator motivations identified by Hamari and Sjöblom [7], while livestreaming supplies social environments in which competitive experiences are discussed [8,9].

Fourth, audiences are intermediaries rather than endpoints. Spectators, creators and local organisations participate in producing meaning, so cross-border circulation cannot be understood as a message transmitted intact from China to passive recipients. The result is more likely to be hybrid, negotiated and sometimes contested.

The PTC framework thus extends the umbrella-platform concept without removing its critical edge. Platform corresponds to the umbrella's infrastructural and commercial capacity; Tournament isolates the recurring institutional form that converts software into a global media event; Community identifies the participatory layer through which attention becomes social practice. The three components are analytically distinct but mutually dependent. Weak access undermines tournaments, weak tournaments deprive platforms of recurrent focal points, and weak communities limit the conversion of visibility into durable attachment.

This formulation also clarifies what the article does not claim. It does not suggest that Tencent's domestic structure can be copied unchanged abroad, or that Chinese ownership automatically generates Chinese cultural influence. Zhao, Li and Lin show that ecosystem growth depends on co-evolution among actors with different capacities [6], while Lin and Zhao expose the precarity beneath industrial success [10]. Sustainable internationalisation therefore requires coordination, local participation and attention to who bears risk and captures value.

6. Conclusions

Chinese esports internationalisation is better understood as ecosystem-building than as simple game export. The domestic evidence analysed by Zhao and Lin shows how Tencent's esports position emerged through the interaction of regulatory infrastructure, platform capabilities, professional leagues, livestreaming, investment and multiple stakeholder groups [1]. Their "umbrella platform" concept is especially valuable because it captures two realities at once: concentrated coordination can accelerate industrial development, while the same concentration can produce dependency, homogenisation and asymmetrical power.

Building on that insight, this article proposes the Platform–Tournament–Community model as an outward-facing extension of the umbrella platform. Platform infrastructure makes participation technically and commercially possible; tournaments organise repeated moments of transnational attention; communities convert those encounters into interpretation, social relations and continuing engagement. The model therefore explains internationalisation as a recursive process in which technical access, institutional repetition and participatory culture sustain one another.

The argument remains deliberately cautious about cultural influence. International availability, platform traffic and tournament spectatorship demonstrate contact, not attitudinal outcome. Whether repeated engagement with Chinese-origin esports changes perceptions of Chinese culture must be tested directly with comparative audience research. Future work could combine platform data with surveys, interviews and digital ethnography across different regions, asking not only how many people watch but what they believe they are participating in. Such research would provide a stronger basis for judging when a platformised digital-cultural ecosystem becomes a meaningful form of international cultural influence.

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