

Research Article

A New Expression and Development of China's Outstanding Traditional Culture in Digital Games

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Abstract:

Digital games, as an emerging cultural communication medium that integrates cultural and technological innovation, represent an important new method of cultural dissemination. As a representative of interactive communication in the new era, digital games are known as the "ninth art" and enjoy extremely high acceptance among Generation Z internet users worldwide, becoming a high-quality medium for cultural transmission. With the deepening of economic globalization, China's excellent traditional culture has more opportunities for protection and inheritance. Digital games are a popular form of entertainment that is widely loved by young people all over the world. Digital games have the characteristics of wide dissemination and rapidity, enabling cross-cultural, cross-ethnic and cross-language communication. Integrating elements of Chinese traditional culture into the design of digital games can make the games serve as a medium for communication, achieving innovative inheritance and development of traditional culture.

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1. Introduction

Digital games serve as a cross-media and cross-cultural communication medium. It not only has entertainment value but also contains rich cultural connotations. With the rapid development of China's game industry, more and more Chinese games are emerging and developing on the international stage. Many Chinese games have achieved great success in both domestic and international markets. More and more digital games incorporate elements of Chinese traditional culture. These games gradually come into the public eye and have become important platforms and tools for promoting Chinese traditional culture (Yang, Yang and Yang, 2024:144). These games can gain international recognition to some extent because they conduct in-depth exploration and innovative application of Chinese traditional culture elements.

Games do not merely fall within the realm of human life, and their origin is not associated with any specific stage of civilization. The game gradually permeated into all aspects of culture along with its emergence, until it reached the current civilized era we are in (Huizinga, 2014: 89). Culture and games have always been closely linked.

Digital games are a highly interactive medium. And digital games have become one of the important media for cultural dissemination. Compared with other media, games are more likely to attract players to deeply engage and experience the cultural connotations within them. Games have a wide audience base and strong dissemination power. Games also have rich forms of expression. Different games can simultaneously present cultural elements and storylines from various regions and styles. How to maximize the role of digital games in cultural dissemination is an important issue that needs to be explored at present.

This article adopts a qualitative cultural research approach, primarily using case study methodology, cultural-symbolic analysis, and textual interpretation to examine representative digital games. The entire article focuses on the core question of *How do digital games carry, disseminate and reconstruct China's excellent traditional culture?* This article views digital games as a form of culture for research and analysis. The article pays full attention to the cultural symbols, values and ideologies carried by digital games. The article emphasizes the spiritual connotation and value guiding role of traditional culture. At the same time, the article highlights the cultural identity, cultural dissemination and cultural confidence demonstrated by games in the process of spreading

traditional culture. The article mainly explores the cultural dissemination function of the combination of digital games and traditional culture in the context of globalization.

This paper selects several representative Chinese video games, including *Tang Dynasty Chang'an*, *Black Myth: Wukong*, *Naraka: Bladepoint*, and *Honor of Kings*, as case studies. By analyzing narrative themes, visual symbols, character design, architectural representation, and folk cultural elements, this paper explores how video games can carry, disseminate, and reconstruct China's excellent traditional culture in the contemporary digital context. In this article, "reconstruction" refers not to the simple reproduction of traditional culture, but to its reinterpretation, transformation, and reorganization within digital game narratives, visual systems, and interactive mechanisms.

Literature Review

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have explored the relationship between digital games and traditional culture. Burri pointed out in his research that although digital games face conflicts with traditional forms of cultural expression, they also demonstrate a positive aspect. They have become a new way to protect and express cultural heritage (Burri, 2010: 35). Suominen and Sivula argued that digital games can serve as an effective tool for cultural inheritance, preserving and disseminating traditional culture through modern technology (Suominen&Sivula, 2013: 2). Crawford and Rutter explored the intersection between digital games and cultural studies. They believed that digital games are an important medium for understanding and studying contemporary culture (Crawford, & Rutter, 2006:150).

Regarding the comparison between traditional games and digital games. Anggara and Purnomo found that the introduction of digital technology has, to some extent, changed the cultural significance of traditional cultural games. Digital technology has also influenced cultural behaviors (Anggara, & Purnomo, 2025:5). In terms of the preservation and inheritance of digital games. Barwick and other scholars have put forward their viewpoints through case studies. The preservation work of digital games is still in its infancy. The potential of digital games in the preservation of cultural heritage cannot be ignored (Barwick, Dearnley, & Muir, 2011:380).

Chafotili and Fokides proposed their research focus through case analysis. They pointed out how digital games can promote the teaching of local history

and culture. In these cases, digital games effectively conveyed local traditions and culture (Chartofili&Fokides, 2019:83). Murray pointed out that the cultural theory of digital games goes beyond the games themselves. Digital games are influencing society's cognition and interaction (Murray, 2006:186). Kerr explored the interaction between the digital game industry and the traditional culture industry. The digital game industry is gradually becoming an important part of the global cultural industry (Kerr, 2006).

Veresov and Veraksa analyzed how digital games affect the cultural game behaviors of young children. Digital games have become an important means for the cultural inheritance of the new generation of children. Digital games are associated with traditional culture. And digital games have created new cultural forms (Veresov&Veraksa, 2023:1090). Digital games are an important platform for the integration of traditional culture and contemporary technology. Digital games have a profound impact on the dissemination, education, and preservation of culture.

From a comparative perspective, integrating traditional culture into video games is not unique to China. In Japan, video games often incorporate Shinto beliefs, samurai ethics, and classical myths into the narrative world and character creation. In Nordic countries, Viking history and Norse mythology have also become important cultural resources for game design. These international cases demonstrate that video games have become a global medium. They are used to re-activate, re-interpret, and disseminate traditional cultures. In this context, China's experience can be understood not only as a national cultural practice but also as part of a broader global trend, that is, video games as carriers of cultural memory and identity. Compared with these cases, China's experience places greater emphasis on the continuity of civilization, the depth of philosophy, and the integration of traditional cultural symbols into aesthetic design and value expression.

2. Analysis of the Necessity of Integrating Excellent Traditional Culture into the Development of Digital Games

The advancement of technology has provided a significant boost to the development of games. This powerful support has led to continuous updates in the content and form of games. The speed of technological updates on the Internet is extremely fast, which has resulted in an increasing variety of game types and the emergence of various new types of games in the market.

2.1.The demand for the development of the game market



With the advent of the Internet era, the digital game industry has also entered a period of rapid development. The development of the digital game industry has also driven the development of related industries. Digital games, as a new type of cultural and entertainment form in the cultural industry, have increasingly significant value in creating social and economic benefits. According to the "2024 China Game Industry Report", the actual sales revenue of the Chinese game market in 2024 was 325.783 billion yuan, with a year-on-year growth of 7.53%. The user base of the game market increased to 674 million people (China Audio-visual, 2024). Especially after the 5G technology was put into use, the types of games became more diverse. This change brought a brand new gaming experience to gamers. Overall, the gaming industry demonstrated great potential for development, and thus the gaming industry entered a new stage of development.

The rapidly developing gaming industry also has many problems. For instance, the issue of homogeneity among many games is quite serious. Often, only minor changes are made in aspects such as character design or game style. Additionally, a large number of games lack cultural depth and are unable to meet the cultural demands of players (Cui, Dai, Luo, & Diao, 2021: 35). The main task of the gaming industry has shifted to drawing more inspiration from excellent traditional culture, presenting more content related to culture, reflecting the cultural attributes of game products, and creating high-quality games with cultural depth and profound thought.

2.2. The need to promote the innovative development of traditional culture

The "Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035" requires the implementation of a digital strategy for the cultural industry, accelerating the development of new cultural enterprises, cultural formats, and cultural consumption patterns, and strengthening industries such as digital creativity, online audiovisual, and digital entertainment (Chinese People's Government, 2021). In the new era, the public's enthusiasm for traditional Chinese culture is high, and they have a high degree of confidence in it. The pressure from all aspects of society is increasing, and the public is under greater pressure. This situation has made people powerless in terms of protecting, inheriting and innovating Chinese traditional culture.

The digital game industry is an important direction and determinant for

promoting the innovative development of traditional Chinese culture. The harmonious combination of digital games and traditional Chinese culture can create a high-quality cultural atmosphere for the people, especially for teenagers. This integrated development can also promote the innovative development and creative transformation of traditional culture.

2.3. The requirements for protecting and inheriting excellent traditional culture

The Chinese government has been placing increasing emphasis on the protection and inheritance of traditional cultural heritage. At present, many official museums and folk museums have taken on the responsibility of protecting cultural heritage voluntarily, and each of them has played its own role in protecting and inheriting cultural heritage. Against the backdrop of deepening globalization, the economy and culture of the world are constantly integrating and invading each other. The protection and inheritance of the excellent traditional culture of our own nation are also facing great challenges. How to maintain the diversity of traditional culture while ensuring the difference in its dissemination is a key research topic in the current issue of cultural inheritance. How to make traditional culture adapt to the trend of the times and maintain its vitality by integrating with various activities of people is also a problem that needs to be addressed at present.

Traditional culture differs from the contemporary trend culture. Traditional culture urgently needs to attract the attention of young people in a novel and unique way. Games are an excellent medium for dissemination. Digital games can enable traditional culture to smoothly return to the public's attention, especially the attention of most young people. Digital games can subtly influence users by exposing them to Chinese traditional culture.

3. Analysis of the Application of Excellent Chinese Traditional Culture Based on Digital Games

3.1. The combination of digital games with ancient social life

Digital games all have their unique game styles and game concepts. Different game styles and concepts create a unique world for each game. Large game companies shape the overall world of the game by integrating various types of traditional cultural symbol elements into different types of games.

Many Chinese scholars classify architectural symbols into three categories: image symbols, indicative symbols, and symbolic symbols. When combined with traditional culture, the meanings conveyed by these symbols will become

rich and diverse (Sun, 2006: 187). In digital games, creators can utilize the architectural styles and historical backgrounds of ancient China to create a rich gaming experience for players.

On the Steam platform, there is a game called *Tang Dynasty Chang'an*. This game is set in the Chang'an City of the Tang Dynasty in China. The game builds and reconstructs Chang'an City on a model map with a 1:1 scale. The game design team ensured the authenticity of the reconstruction of Tang Dynasty buildings in the game by conducting extensive field investigations and literature research on the layout of the entire city and the detailed elements of each building. This restoration is not a mechanical copy, but rather a transformation of historical space into experiential and explorable digital cultural scenes.

3.2. The combination of digital games with ancient scripts

The combination of digital games with ancient literature is now very popular. The general public can explore and verify the true essence of related history and legends through digital games. This combination can also encourage creative interpretations of ancient literature. People can obtain more comprehensive information (Yu, 2010: 116). Many gamers pay more attention to the profound artistic and emotional expression of game products. The plot design of the game and the lines of the game characters have gradually become one of the key factors for players to evaluate the game. This situation has led to more and more players demanding higher standards for the dialogues and plot texts in the games.

In 2024, Steam game platform released a list of the games with the largest number of online players. The first Chinese 3A game *Black Myth: Wukong* topped the list. The online player count for this game reached a maximum of 2.4 million. This game is set in the world of the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West*. *Black Myth: Wukong* has become an excellent case for exploring the relationship between games and ancient literary culture due to its unique artistic style and profound cultural connotations.

In *Black Myth: Wukong*, the game embodies the profound philosophical thoughts of Buddhism and Taoism in ancient China. In the game's storyline, a philosophical monologue "Desire of man is the law of heaven" is presented. This makes one think of the core viewpoint of the *Cheng Zhu Neo Confucianism* in the Song Dynasty, which is "Preserve the Heavenly Principles and Eliminate Human Desires". This viewpoint advocates that individuals should strive to practice moral and ethical behaviors that conform to

righteousness and the principles of heaven, and necessary suppression and restraint of their desires and selfishness should be carried out. However, in the game, a completely different viewpoint is proposed: Not killing, hatred will never cease. Not stealing, the strength and weakness are no different from me. Not immoral sexual acts, all sentient beings are sins. Not lying, dreams, illusions, and emptiness are all void. Not drinking alcohol, worries and fears are constantly changing and unpredictable. This viewpoint embodies the concept of *harmony between heaven and humanity* in traditional Chinese philosophy. The combination of ancient philosophical thoughts and games is a very correct choice.

More importantly, *Black Myth: Wukong* does not simply reproduce the cultural meanings of the classical text *Journey to the West*. Instead, it reconstructs traditional cultural resources through new narrative tensions, character perspectives, and philosophical reinterpretations. In this sense, the game transforms traditional culture from a static textual heritage into a dynamic and participatory cultural experience.

3.3. The combination of digital games with traditional folk customs

Folk customs and traditions refer to the cultural life created, enjoyed and passed down by all the people within a country or a nation (Zhong, 1998: 4). Chinese traditional folk culture is one form of intangible cultural heritage. Traditional folk culture contains abundant historical and cultural resources. Folk culture is a powerful manifestation of the cohesion and cultural confidence of the Chinese nation over the past several thousand years. In modern society, many traditional folk cultures have failed to adapt to the development of social life. These folk cultures are gradually being forgotten by society. Some scholars have put forward some viewpoints regarding this situation. Traditional folk culture should be combined with people's fast-paced and technologically advanced modern life. These traditional folk cultures should be integrated into cultural consumption products through innovative means. The traditional folk culture combined with modern culture can meet the spiritual needs of the public for traditional folk culture (Li, Liu, Zhang, & Zheng, 2021:214).

The overall design of all characters in the game is one of the key factors determining the success of the game. There are many ways to showcase the personality and characteristics of the characters. Carefully designing and presenting their costumes is the most effective way to display the characters. In the action competitive game *Naraka:Bladepoint* produced by NetEase, the game



team collaborated with the Hangzhou Museum to carry out a cultural heritage linkage activity. The activity centered around the famous Chinese folk mythological story The White Snake and the ancient jade Double Dragon Pattern Jade Disk in the collection of the Hangzhou Museum, and carried out digital secondary creation of traditional clothing. The design team used the museum's jade disk as the prototype, combined with the carving characteristics of the jade disk and the color combination of blue and white, and designed the game fashion pendants Double Dragon·White and Double Dragon·Blue. This linkage design achieved the role of spreading Chinese traditional culture through jade pendants in both the game and the real world. The design team of *Naraka: Bladepoint* also invited professional costume designers to create White Snake and Blue Snake costumes that conform to the game's characteristics and traditional folk culture within the game. The dragon and snake in traditional culture both symbolize deities and good luck, which also greatly restored the character memories left by the TV series *The White Snake* in the public's mind in the application and design of the dragon pattern. The digital tunnel built between reality and virtuality further enriched the cultural experience of traditional clothing in the game for the public.

Such practices demonstrate that digital games do not merely preserve traditional symbols, but reconstruct them into new cultural forms that are accessible to contemporary audiences through fashion systems, character skins, and interactive festival events.

Chinese traditional festivals, like traditional clothing, also carry rich historical and cultural connotations. Even compared to traditional clothing, traditional festivals can better integrate with the main elements of the game's world view, plot, etc. This integration process can make traditional festivals become deeper cultural symbols, and at the same time enable players to have a deeper understanding of Chinese traditional folk culture. China has been a farming civilization country since ancient times, with blood ties as the bond and agriculture as the foundation. During the farming process, what farmers need most is to understand the laws and changes of natural seasons (Liu, 2022: 83). In traditional Chinese agriculture, labor activities were carried out in accordance with the seasonal cycle. Around the four seasons, ancient China created and accumulated rich traditional festival culture. The extremely popular Chinese mobile game *Honor of Kings* explored and accumulated traditional Chinese festivals and, through cultural co-creation with all players, deeply decoded the



symbols of traditional festivals. Taking the 2020 Year of the Rat-themed limited skin as an example, the game design team integrated *Rat* with China's *Five Great Mountains* and launched *Five Great Mountains* limited skins. The game team presented the background story of the *Five Great Mountains* limited skin to the players. The game team conveyed the beautiful vision of the Chinese New Year through this story. The game design team combined traditional culture with the game content. This combination method enabled players to be subtly influenced by the charm of Chinese traditional culture.

Digital games have created new forms of cultural symbol presentation for the dissemination of Chinese traditional culture. Different game scenarios and game plots and other elements will produce different effects. Different styles of digital games provide the public with different traditional culture experiences. These cultural experiences have greatly enhanced people's confidence in traditional culture. These games that incorporate rich cultural connotations have achieved good results in the domestic market. These games are also able to be promoted globally through global dissemination and cross-border integration (Li, 2024:85).

This chapter can explain the integration of Chinese traditional culture into video games from three interrelated aspects. Firstly, games convey traditional culture by embedding cultural symbols, stories, values, and aesthetic elements into the virtual world. Secondly, games reach a wider audience through interactive and cross-border media platforms, thereby spreading culture. Thirdly, and more importantly, games reinterpret the significance of traditional culture through reinterpreting it in contemporary digital narratives, audio-visual systems, and player participation, thus reconstructing traditional culture. Video games are not only a channel for cultural dissemination but also a place for cultural re-creation.

4. The path of the integrated development of China's excellent traditional culture and digital games

The dissemination of traditional Chinese culture in the digital game industry has become quite frequent, but games based on traditional Chinese culture still face development challenges in terms of game development, operation, and cultural dissemination. To address these issues, the integration of traditional Chinese culture with the digital game industry needs to be optimized from multiple perspectives. This also means that traditional Chinese culture needs to be integrated into the complete industry chain of digital games.



4.1. Government policy support and guarantees

Intellectual property protection has always been a key issue restricting the development of the digital game industry. For the digital game industry, where game content creation is the core competitive advantage, many game companies can easily be defeated by other companies' copying attacks if intellectual property rights are not adequately protected. Ultimately, this led to original products being defeated by pirated products. This situation can severely dampen the enthusiasm for game development. With the continuous expansion of the market and the emergence of numerous high-quality Chinese-developed game IPs, the government's legal framework for game copyright and intellectual property rights is urgently needed. The integration of traditional Chinese cultural elements with the digital game industry must be carried out under the premise of intellectual property protection. Government agencies and cultural departments need to gradually increase their oversight of the digital game industry. The state needs to continuously improve the protection of copyright and originality rights in the field of digital games at the legal level. Regarding the intellectual property protection of digital games featuring traditional Chinese culture, the government should add and improve laws and regulations related to the protection of traditional Chinese culture, and keep pace with the times.

At the same time, the central government needs to strengthen policy guidance to local governments, and the government needs to attach greater importance to cultivating new industrial forces. Because the current survival environment for small and medium-sized enterprises is not optimistic. Many large enterprises employ tactics such as launching similar products to target small and medium-sized enterprises, which directly lead to a shrinking space for growth for medium-sized enterprises. Therefore, proper guidance from the government, coupled with the constraints of relevant laws and regulations, is particularly important.

4.2. Positive Energy Guidance in Digital games

Digital games combine both entertainment and cultural elements. Digital games provide people with entertainment services and spiritual enjoyment. The realism of the game graphics and the immersive experience contain the dissemination of its cultural content and values. An outstanding digital game product can have a positive and beneficial value guidance effect on the audience. Valuable games can prompt people to value values such as teamwork, human

emotions, and national spirit (Zhang, & Dai, 2014: 180).

The design of digital game products should be achieved through in-depth vertical exploration and horizontal integration. These products should be centered on Chinese traditional culture and continuously incorporate more game activities and content. Digital game products should continuously explore and innovate Chinese traditional culture. Digital games need to combine appropriate elements of Chinese traditional culture with specific content. Game companies can jointly develop with relevant cultural departments and the cultural industry. The game team can link the game content with various aspects of Chinese traditional culture. The kind of valuable games can allow players to deeply experience Chinese traditional culture in the game. Game companies need to firmly establish the correct values of game content. The game design team should firmly abandon the negative elements in culture and must not bring them into the design of game content. For excellent cultural parts, the design team should deeply integrate them with the game content. This design can allow players to be influenced by culture unconsciously.

4.3. Deeply explore the cultural connotations and enhance the cultural content of the game

The game itself is an unstable product. People may be afraid of the connection between the game and ideology. The act of introducing a temporal game into a simultaneous historical event also carries certain risks (Jayemanne, 2020: 820). As a cultural product, digital games inevitably have an impact on cultural values. If Chinese traditional culture is to be effectively disseminated and inherited in the digital game industry, game companies need to integrate more and deeper traditional cultural elements into the overall design of the digital games. Only in this way can this dissemination method achieve the cultural value leadership of the digital game industry.

At present, the mainstream digital games on the market have played a certain leading role in the dissemination of Chinese traditional culture. The integration and application of traditional Chinese cultural elements in these games cover multiple aspects such as traditional costumes, traditional music, traditional customs, and traditional architecture. From a fundamental perspective, the integration of various digital game products with traditional Chinese cultural elements mostly remains at the micro level. Many game products only combine traditional culture with game content at certain specific moments. For digital games, the development of the product is carried out continuously throughout

the product's life cycle. Many digital game products will also give rise to the next generation of the same-named or similar game IP before the end of their life cycle. The excellent ideas and core values of Chinese traditional culture are the cornerstone for the inheritance of Chinese traditional culture for thousands of years. In the process of game software development, the design team must attach importance to the application of Chinese traditional culture at the macro level. Game companies should not only extract the surface symbols of traditional culture, but also integrate its values, narrative logic, and philosophical spirit into world-building, character creation, and interaction mechanisms. The design team also needs to be closely connected with Chinese traditional culture in multiple aspects such as the construction of the game world, the overall storyline design of the game, the psychological and language portrayal of game characters. Such excellent design can stimulate players' exploration and love for traditional culture during the game process.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of representative game cases, this study finds that digital games have become an important medium not only for the transmission of traditional culture, but also for its reinterpretation and reconstruction in the digital age. More importantly, digital games do not merely transmit traditional culture; they also reconstruct it by translating inherited cultural meanings into new forms of digital expression, interaction, and imagination.

The backdrop of economic globalization and cultural diversification, the integration of China's outstanding traditional culture with digital games is not only an inherent requirement for the high-quality development of China's game industry, but also an important way for the Chinese nation to enhance its cultural confidence and spread Chinese culture to the world. With improved policy support, enhanced corporate innovation capabilities, and deeper cultural exploration, digital games will become an even more powerful disseminator of culture. In the future, digital games will help China's outstanding traditional culture shine with new brilliance in the digital age and contribute unique Chinese wisdom to the integration of diverse cultures.

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