Where Winds Meet: The Traceability, Dilemma and Breakthrough of Chinese Element Communication

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Abstract: The online game 'Where Winds Meet' demonstrates how games can innovatively express Chinese cultural elements. This study examines the game's communication methods, challenges, and optimization strategies. The game successfully balances historical authenticity with virtual storytelling through cross-media narratives, cultural symbols, and immersive folk experiences. However, it faces challenges including limited player interaction, weak market presence, and cross-cultural barriers. To address these issues, the study recommends enhancing interactive mechanisms, expanding IP partnerships, and improving cultural encoding-decoding strategies to strengthen cultural transmission effectiveness.

1. Introduction

Online games, as the 'ninth art', have become an important cultural and entertainment medium [1]. However, the game market faces fierce competition and serious product homogenization. The integration of Chinese elements offers a breakthrough for innovation in game development, drawing from China's rich historical and cultural heritage. 'Where Winds Meet', developed by Everstone Studios and supported by NetEase, is a martial arts open-world game set during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. Players embark on a journey to recover the sixteen states of Yan Yun. According to the 'Trend and Potential Analysis Report of China's Game Industry in 2025' [2], 60% of users show interest in open-world elements, demonstrating significant market potential.

While academics increasingly recognize games as vehicles for transmitting Chinese culture, existing research mainly takes a macro perspective or focuses on single aspects like music, art design, or character settings. Few studies comprehensively examine how Chinese elements are integrated into specific games. This research addresses this gap by analyzing the origins, challenges, and breakthroughs in incorporating Chinese elements in 'Where Winds Meet', offering both theoretical insights and practical implications for the gaming industry.

2. Traceability: Cross-media Communication Path of Chinese Elements

2.1. Cross-media Reconstruction of Historical Narrative

Cross-media reconstruction [3] involves reinterpreting narrative content through multiple media forms, enabling diverse expressions across different platforms and transcending single-medium limitations. 'Where Winds Meet' achieves a balance between historical accuracy and game virtuality through detailed historical research and virtual space creation. The game transforms historical facts into interactive character narratives through gamification of historical figures. This reconstruction approach not only broadens historical narrative boundaries but also revitalizes historical content through immersive gaming experiences.

2.1.1. Dynastic Evidence and Virtual Space Creation: Balance of Historical Authenticity and Game Virtualism

'Sixteen Voices of Yanyun' is set during the transition between the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms and the Northern Song Dynasty, focusing on Shi Jingtang's offering of sixteen Yanyun states to the Qidan. This historical event forms the game's core narrative. The game features two main areas: Qinghe and Kaifeng [4]. The Kaifeng area particularly reconstructs the period when Zhao Kuangyin established the Song Dynasty through the Chenqiao Mutiny. Through detailed historical research, the developers accurately recreated Kaifeng's urban layout and cultural environment, allowing players to immersively experience Song Dynasty society.

2.1.2. Game Translation of Historical Characters: Narrative Strategy from Historical Facts to Characters

At NetEase's Game 520 conference, the production team revealed their approach to translating historical figures into game characters. They chose Wang Qing, a renowned Later Jin Dynasty general known for fighting against the Khitan, as the protagonist. The game's narrative begins after Wang Qing's historical battle and reimagines historical events through virtual reconstruction. In the Kaifeng area, players interact with historical figures like "Brother Zhao" (Zhao Kuangyin, future Song Dynasty founder) and his brother Zhao Guangyi, then Kaifeng's governor. This narrative approach transforms historical figures into game characters while preserving historical relationships and context, enabling players to both enjoy gameplay and gain historical knowledge through virtual storytelling.

2.2. Interactive Communication Matrix of Cultural Symbols

Drawing on Peirce's symbol theory [5], cultural symbols consist of repertoires, objects, and interpretants. 'Where Winds Meet' employs visual, auditory, and interactive symbol systems to convey cultural meaning. For instance, in the bamboo forest duel scene, elements like dappled lighting, character postures, and movement designs (repertoires) represent martial arts culture (object), evoking players' emotional connection to Chinese martial arts spirit (interpretant). This multi-layered symbolic system enables deep cultural transmission through gaming.

2.2.1. Visual Symbol System: Constructing Historical Reality and Cultural Ambience

The game's visual symbols serve as cultural reproductions, with Five Dynasties and Song Dynasty history as their object and player perception as interpretant. The game constructs a multi-layered cultural symbol system through architectural and costume elements to maintain

historical authenticity.

For example, Shengping Bridge represents Song Dynasty architecture and trade culture, with its arched structure, wooden materials, and bustling crowds helping players experience the historical atmosphere. The use of authentic historical names enhances cultural learning. Similarly, costume designs accurately reflect ancient social hierarchies and dress culture, while artifacts like bamboo curtains, beds, and piers represent period craftsmanship. These visual elements enable players to comprehend historical social structures and cultural meanings.

2.2.2. Auditory symbol system: creating immersion experience and cultural resonance

The game's auditory symbols function as reproductions of regional characteristics and culture, with player comprehension serving as interpretant. The development team constructs an engaging symbolic system through careful design of dialectal elements, enhancing both regional authenticity and cultural transmission.

Dialects serve as reproducible elements representing distinct regional linguistic and cultural features. Players interpret these through characters' dialectal expressions, experiencing regional atmosphere and cultural familiarity. For instance, the NPC Mu Ji'an speaks in Shandong dialect, saying "You can't see that this book is incomplete, but it is actually very precious." Such detailed language design helps players immerse themselves in Shandong's regional characteristics while enriching the game's cultural diversity.

2.2.3. Interactive Symbol[6] System: Conveying the Spirit of Martial Arts and Cultural Core

The game's interactive system represents traditional chivalric spirit and Chinese medicine culture, with players' cultural value recognition serving as interpretant. Through innovative gameplay like "Hanging Pot to Help the World," abstract cultural concepts are transformed into tangible interactive experiences.

The Chinese medicine gameplay mechanics require players to diagnose patients through multiple steps: listening for symptoms, observing NPCs' facial colors and tongue conditions, and preparing herbal prescriptions through dialogue interactions. This multi-dimensional interactive design faithfully recreates Traditional Chinese Medicine's diagnostic processes while transforming the spirit of chivalry into actionable gameplay elements, making abstract cultural concepts concrete through player interaction.

2.3. Folk culture immersive experience design

Folk culture [7] is a culture relative to the 'elite and canonical culture', which is a kind of life culture created by the people spontaneously to satisfy themselves. Integrating folk culture into game character art design plays an important role in enhancing the influence and popularity of the game.

2.3.1. Game Mechanism Transformation of Festival Ceremonies: Integration of Cultural Inheritance and Player Experience

'Where Winds Meet' transforms traditional festival ceremonies into interactive game activities. During Spring Festival, the "Ten Thousand Homes and One Garden" event allows players to join traditional parades with gongs and drums. The Kaifeng East Cross Festival becomes a hub for cultural activities, featuring multiplayer mahjong, sumo wrestling, and fireworks displays.The game environment is decorated with lanterns and red silk, while lion and dragon dances animate the streets. Players can participate in or watch traditional entertainment like cockfighting. Through these immersive experiences, festivals become more than static symbols—they become dynamic

cultural practices[8]. This integration of game mechanics with player behavior enables authentic engagement with traditional festival celebrations, promoting cultural inheritance through interactive experiences.

2.3.2. Interactive presentation of traditional skills: the combination of cultural education and game entertainment

In Fenghe Village's Qinghe District, players can interact with Cui Wu, a shadow puppet craftsman, and watch his performance of "The Battle of Zhongdu Bridge." Players can share their reactions through pop-up comments and support the art form through an in-game reward system. This interactive presentation combines entertainment with cultural education, allowing players to unconsciously absorb traditional cultural knowledge while enjoying the performance. The approach not only makes cultural education more engaging but also revitalizes intangible cultural heritage through digital gaming, giving traditional skills new relevance in the modern era.

2.4. The dissemination of Chinese martial arts values

The martial arts complex, jianghu sentiment and chivalrous dream are the three key words to read Chinese martial arts culture. With the help of game forms, The Where Winds Meet realises the innovative dissemination of Chinese martial arts values, allowing players to feel the charm of martial arts culture in the virtual world.

2.4.1. Gamification expression of chivalry

The game narrates historical events through personal perspectives, focusing on Wang Qing, a Later Jin Dynasty general who died fighting the Khitan at the Battle of Zhongdu Bridge in 946 AD. Through immersive storytelling, players experience Wang Qing's embodiment of the principle "Chivalry is for country and people."The narrative extends beyond martial arts, exploring the Five Dynasties' historical trauma, including Shi Jingtang's cession of sixteen Yanyun states to the Khitan in 936 AD—a decision that led to four centuries of suffering and cultural loss in the Central Plains. By experiencing these events through individual characters' perspectives, players witness acts of chivalry while understanding the importance of preserving Chinese civilization.

2.4.2. Interactive design of Jianghu ethics and players' behaviour

The game connects jianghu ethics with player behavior through complex NPC interactions. NPCs possess distinct personalities and destinies that can be influenced by player choices—for instance, helping a troubled carter overcome alcoholism and rebuild his life. This design demonstrates how player actions shape the jianghu's ethical order.The game presents moral dilemmas through special events, such as the Ugly Niang mission where players must decide whether to provide antidotes to those who previously harmed her. These choices test players' moral judgment while illustrating jianghu ethics' complexity. Through this feedback mechanism between player actions and jianghu ethics, players are encouraged to reflect on their choices' alignment with martial arts world values.

3. Review: Existing Dilemmas in the Dissemination of Chinese Elements

3.1. Insufficient Player Interactivity: The Separation of Cultural Expression and Gaming Experience

The game's cultural interaction suffers from two main limitations. First, player participation remains superficial. The "Museum" feature functions merely as a collection book where players can view and record items, lacking deeper engagement mechanisms. This shallow interaction prevents players from truly experiencing cultural inheritance and innovation, limiting their understanding of traditional skills. Second, the presentation of cultural elements is overly simplistic. The game relies primarily on static 2D scenery to display ancient architecture and brief dialogues to introduce cultural concepts. This reduces cultural elements to mere decorative backgrounds, failing to explore deeper historical and cultural connotations. The limited interactive design prevents players from forming emotional connections with cultural elements or truly appreciating historical heritage.

3.2. Lack of visibility and competitiveness: limitations of market positioning and brand communication

'Where Winds Meet' faces two major market challenges. First, as a new release, it lacks brand recognition and an established player community. The game's limited promotional efforts on platforms like Weibo and Xiaohongshu, coupled with minimal official guidance and low social media engagement, result in poor visibility and awareness among potential players.

Second, the game struggles with market competitiveness. Despite its martial arts theme, it lacks significant differentiation in gameplay mechanics. The similarity of its combat systems, mission modes, and character development to other martial arts games makes it difficult to stand out in a crowded market.

3.3. Obstacles to cross-cultural communication: cultural differences and the challenge of decoding ability

The game faces two major cross-cultural communication challenges. First, its international distribution channels are limited. On platforms like Twitch, insufficient promotional content and live broadcasts restrict access to overseas audiences, limiting the game's global reach and cultural influence. Second, the game struggles with content adaptation. Set in Chinese history, its cultural elements face what Hoskins et al. term "cultural discounts" [9] when crossing borders. Concepts like Chinese martial arts-based "chivalry" and historical references may be misinterpreted by international players lacking cultural context. These cultural barriers create cognitive thresholds that reduce content appeal and prevent deeper engagement, limiting the game's effectiveness as a vehicle for cross-cultural communication.

4. Breaking through: Optimisation Strategies for the Dissemination of Chinese Elements

4.1. Deep Interaction: Activating the Engine of Cultural Inheritance

To enhance cultural inheritance, the game should focus on two interactive improvements. First, develop immersive traditional skills learning through first-person perspective gameplay. Players can experience complete crafting processes with detailed guidance and real-time feedback. A master-apprentice system could offer special rewards for completing inheritance tasks, deepening players' engagement with traditional skills. Second, implement augmented reality (AR) technology

for enhanced plot immersion. Mobile AR scanning and VR panoramic interaction could enable players to reconstruct ancient buildings and interact with historical figure holograms in real environments. This technology integration would seamlessly blend historical narratives with physical spaces, creating immersive experiences that make cultural heritage more accessible and engaging for modern audiences.

4.2. IP (Intellectual Property) Linkage: Expanding the Boundaries of Cultural Communication

The game should expand cultural communication through two IP strategies. First, develop cross-border IP collaborations to enhance market presence. Partnerships with food brands could increase accessibility, while collaborations with museums and cultural institutions could strengthen cultural transmission. These linkages would help overcome low visibility challenges while maintaining both entertainment and cultural value.

Second, construct "super symbols" [10] to build brand recognition. In a homogenized market, super symbols—highly communicative symbols easily recognized by the public—are crucial for distinct brand identity. The game could develop a martial arts-themed symbol for consistent use across marketing materials and merchandise. However, IP collaborations must carefully consider brand compatibility and alignment with the game's cultural values.

4.3. Decoding Strategies for Cultural Coding: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Intercultural Communication

The game should implement three strategies to enhance cross-cultural communication effectiveness. First, utilize cultural proximity to reduce cultural discounts [11]. For East Asian markets, focus on deep localization with professional dubbing while retaining key terms like "jianghu" and "neiqi" with cultural annotations. Game developers should incorporate cultural background through detailed tutorials and draw parallels between Chinese concepts and familiar Western elements like "chivalry" or "superheroes."

Second, Game marketers should apply Hall's high and low context culture theory [12] for targeted communication. The marketing team should emphasize cultural allusions and narrative promotion in high-context cultural regions. They should highlight core gameplay mechanics and immediate emotional experiences through simplified advertising in low-context regions.

Third, translators should balance Venuti's naturalization and foreignization strategies [13] in translation. The localization team should apply naturalization for core gameplay elements to enhance accessibility—for example, translating "jianghu" as "The world of martial arts." They should use foreignization for culturally specific terms like "meridian" and "neigong," maintaining their phonetic forms with visual explanations. This hybrid approach preserves cultural authenticity while ensuring comprehensibility for international players.These strategies work together to reduce cultural barriers while maintaining the game's cultural integrity and appeal across different markets.

5. Conclusion

'Where Winds Meet' exemplifies cultural transmission through its integration of martial arts themes and Chinese elements, successfully blending historical facts with fictional narratives. While the game effectively combines traditional culture with modern gameplay elements, it requires stronger player community engagement and deeper cultural interpretation. To achieve global success, developers should focus on both cultural presentation and spiritual essence, using innovative design to create cross-cultural resonance. This approach can help Chinese culture gain

international recognition while maintaining its authentic value.

Acknowledgements

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