

Stereotyped and Flattened: the Characteristics and Cultural Influence of Hero Reconstruction in the Game “Honor of Kings”

Zifan Qiu

Japanese, School of International studies, Zhejiang, 310058, China

1765208426@qq.com

Abstract

The characters in the popular game "Honor of Kings" are constructed based on historical characters. After being adapted and processed, they enter the public view, bringing cultural communication effects that cannot be ignored. From the perspective of cultural communication, the paper sorts out the game characters and discusses the image transformation and skin settings of the heroes in "Honor of Kings" and their possible impact. The transformation process intensifies the stereotype and flattening of the hero image, which not only affects the cultural image of the historical characters themselves, but also makes the cognition of the players on the historical characters and the shaping of the historical space-time concept deviate.

Keywords: "Honor of Kings"; hero characters; stereotypes

1. Introduction

With the popularity of the Internet and mobile terminals, the cultural communication mode has been innovated. Compared with oral communication and text communication, the emergence of new media has promoted the speed and scale of cultural communication to a certain extent. The essence of cultural communication is a kind of social ceremony and cultural ceremony based on the interaction and communication between symbols and subjects.[1]In cultural communication, the communication effect is susceptible to the method of communication and the scale of the communication channel.[2] "Honor of Kings" is a popular hero summoning game. The game sets many hero characters, most of whom have the prototypes of hero characters selected from Chinese and foreign historical legends. These hero characters have been adapted and polished, and they have been given a story that matches the worldview and skills of the game. These characters have rich historical connotations. Their appearance in the game increases people's understanding of history and culture, shows the cultural dimension, and brings about a communication effect that cannot be ignored.

The academic research on online games mainly focuses on game models, game development, game marketing, etc. For example, "Taking Honor of Kings as an example—exploring the innovation of the mobile game cultural industry" proposed a new development path for the mobile game cultural industry; "MOBA mobile game continued willingness to use" explored how to increase the viscosity of mobile game users. There are few studies related to the setting of cultural elements. For instance, "Cultural Inheritance and Transmission in Online Games-Interpretation of the Cultural and Creative Development of"

Honor of Kings", "Research on the Path of Chinese Mobile Games Entering Overseas in the Context of Intercultural Communication"- taking "Honor of Kings" discussed the inheritance and cross-cultural transmission of traditional culture in "Honor of Kings". Therefore, this article will explore the possible impact of the reconstruction of heroes and skins on traditional historical and cultural characters in the "Honor of Kings" from the perspective of cultural communication.

2. Character analysis of the game

"Honor of Kings" is a MOBA[3] mobile game developed and run by Tencent Games in 2015. It was included in China Entertainment Index Festival "China IP Value List-Game List Top10" in 2016.[4] According to a report from market research company Sensor Tower Store Intelligence[5], the registered users of "Honor of Kings" have exceeded 200 million, making it the most downloaded App Store mobile game in the world.

As a hero summoning game, "Hero" is a game with the character being selected and manipulated by players. All characters have their own characteristics and skills. With its deep cultural connotation of heroes and distinctive skin system, "Honor of Kings" stands out in the tremendous game market. In the game, each hero has his own fixed original character image, character lines, and skill effects. In order to meet the needs of players for diversified character appearance and game experience, developers set different skins for heroes. As a derivative product of heroes in the game, skins have the effect of alleviating aesthetic fatigue, adding attributes, and lighting up game achievements. As of now, there are a total of 99 heroes and 302 skins in "Honor of Kings". Heroes and skins are independent and correspond to each other. In the "Hero

summoning" mode, heroes with their respective historical backgrounds in "Honor of Kings" are selected by the player to appear in the same game, or are matched with different skins and transformed into a brand new image. It is actually the cultural overhead and reconstruction behind the game. For players, the emergence of heroes in different eras at the same time has become a reasonable phenomenon. Such settings affect the players in a subtle way.

2.1. An Analysis of the characteristics of heroes and skins in "Honor of Kings"

2.1.1 Sorting out heroes in "Honor of Kings"

Among the 99 heroes, 68 are males and 31 are females, 8 are children, accounting for about 8%, and 3 are elderly, accounting for 3%, and all are male game characters. 81% of the hero characters in the game have their own corresponding historical character prototypes, and the remaining 19 heroes are also fictional characters based on the game world view. Among the 81 hero characters, in addition to traditional Chinese historical characters, there are classic cultural images of Western, Japanese, and Indian historical legends, such as ancient European knights, ancient Japanese warriors and ninjas, ancient Indian monks. However, the overall proportion is the hero image based on the prototype design of Chinese historical figures. (Refer to Table 1)

Table 1-Classification of heroes by era

Fictional character Game original	Kai, Luna (Referring to the moon goddess) , Angela (Referring to the magician Merlin) , Ake, Baili Shouyue, Baili Xuance, Ming Shiyin, Pei Qinhu, Yi Xing, Magnus, Milady, Yuan Ge, DunShan, Jialuo, Yao, Feng Long, Yao, Jing	
Ancient west	Mythology figure	Athena
	Historical figure	Marco Polo, Arthur
Ancient Japan	Musashi Miyamoto (SAMURAI)	
Ancient India	Dharma (warrior monk)	
Game-derived characters	Ukyo Tachibana, Mai Shiranui, Nakoruru, Munchie	
Chinese legend figures	Wukong, Yang Jian, Zhong Kui, Dong Huang Taiyi, Toro, Houyi, Taiyi Zhenren, Nezha, Nvwa, Daji, Gan&Mo, Pangu, Zhu Bajie, Chang'e, Li Yuanfang	
Chinese historical figures	Zhou Dynasty	Jiang Ziya
	The Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods	Old Master, Mozi, Bai Qi, Lian Po, uiguzi, Mi Yue, Bian Que, Zhong Wuyan, Zhuang Zhou, Gao Jianli, Luban, Xi Shi, Li Xin
	Qin and Han Dynasties	Ying Zheng, Meng Ya, Xiang Yu, Cosurt Yu, Liu Bang, Han Xin, Zhang Liang, Wang Zhaojun
	Three Kingdoms Period	Cao Cao, Liu Bei, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Zhao Yun, Huang Zhong, Xia Houdun, Dian Wei, Lu bu, Diaochan, Lady Zhen, Zhuge Liang, Cai Yan, Zhou Yu, Liu Shan, Sun Xiaoqiao, Da Qiao, Ma Chao, Sima Yi, Sun Ce
	Wei Jin South and North dynasties.	Prince of Lanling, Hua Mulan
	Sui and Tang Dynasties	Cheng Yaojin, Di Renjie, Wu Zetian, Li Bai, Su Lie, Shangguan Wan'er, Yang Yuhuan
	Song Dynasty	Shen Mengxi (Shen Kuo)
	Yuan Dynasty	Genghis Khan

2.1.2. The characteristics of the hero's image in "Honor of Kings"

The heroic prototypes in "Honor of Kings" are heroes of various dynasties, all with complete and profound historical backgrounds and cultural connotations. However, in order to adapt to the game, heroes have undergone a certain degree of transformation. The following paragraph will explore the image characteristics of heroes in "Honor of Kings" from three aspects: background story, original painting image, and character lines.

2.1.2.1. Overhead background story

According to media memory theory, there are many integrated and condensed "knowledge networks" in the brain that have been waiting for deep extraction.[6] In the "Honor of Kings", in order to organize heroes with different historical backgrounds and to make the game logic self-consistent, the game developers adapted from the original historical allusions and created different background stories and professional types and skills of each hero. Because the heroes involved in "Honor of Kings" have ancient and modern ones, covering a great time span in order to conform to the game logic and construct the intersection of various heroes, developers can only overrule history and force the far-fetched association. Developers "kidnapped" heroes from their original historical time and space, and established a "knowledge networks" overhead. For players lacking a complete historical understanding, the chaotic "knowledge networks" may be used to replace the original fragmented knowledge, enter the deep memory of players and affect their cognitions. For example, Jixia Academy, the first officially-run institution of higher learning in history, has become a school for gathering various masters and organ masters in the background of the game. Zhou Yu, Zhuge Liang and other characters from the Three Kingdoms became students in Jixia Academy during the Warring States Period. Historical characters and original stories have been torn apart, leaving little cultural connotation.

2.1.2.2. Image flattening of the original painting

Stereotype refers to people's general and fixed view on the formation of a certain thing or object, and generalizes this viewing method. It is believed that such things have this feature on the whole, while ignoring individual differences.[7] The original remote historical figures are presented by vivid animation, which is intended to make the players be familiar with historical figures and traditional culture imperceptibly in the game. However, in the "Honor of kings", the animation simply summarizes the hero image, highlights some fixed views of the public on the hero, and flattens the hero image. After such entertainment processing, each historical figure seems to be more vivid but actually more superficial. Historical figures are simply refined and

summarized. Players only have the stereotype of "Diaochan is beautiful, Daji is charming, Li Bai is handsome, and Hou Yi is cool". For example, Daji, a famous beauty who is stereotyped as a fox spirit, always shakes her fox tail and ears to gouge out human's heart in the game.

"Honor of Kings" also tends to cater to the needs of the youth market. Among the male characters, generals are all tall and powerful, officials are shaped as "a jade tree in the breeze". In addition, female roles are scantily clad with thin waist and long legs. The settings of some heroes have been changed dramatically, ignoring the original settings of historical figures, completely animating, even losing the human type, and becoming the image similar to the fighting machine. For example, Luban has become a puppet image, the mythical figure Taiyi immortal has become an image of an alchemy furnace, Mozi has become an image of a MechWarrior, and the like.

2.1.2.3. Casual character lines

According to the stereotype theory, the hero's lines in the game match with the stereotype that the hero's image tends to be flat, which is just random. Although some lines enrich the players' memory of heroes and endow different heroes with different characters, for example, Lady Zhen's recitation of "On the Goddess of Luo River" and Guan Yu's promotion of the right way all play a positive role in presenting the images of heroes. But in the shallow setting, most of the lines are just to match the hero, not only meaningless, but also strengthen the stereotype of the hero, so that it is easier to extreme the character. For example, Luban has a line in the game: "Luban master, IQ 250, worship, prostrate myself in worship." This includes not only the derogatory implication in Chinese semantics, but also the word of "worship" to emphasize the gap. The great Luban Master is shaped into a shallow and parochial puppet.

2.1.3. Skin classification in "Honor of Kings"

As of April 1, 2020, there have been 302 types of skins in "Honor of kings" (including the initial image of the character, that is, classic skin). Popular heroes such as Hou Yi and Xiao Qiao have up to 7 types of skin. (the popular standouts are ranked according to the occurrence rate on the list of heroes).

Table 2-Classification of skins.

Strengthen heroes' image	152 types	
Apply Chinese and foreign classic historical legends (not related to the hero prototype)	Chinese cultural allusions	33 types
	Foreign cultural allusions	51 types
Integrate trendy and modern elements into it.	Western cultural elements	24 types

	(festivals, weddings, royalty, etc.)	
	Science fiction elements	20 types
	Motional elements	8 types
	Starry night elements	11 types
	Pets elements	10 types
	Summer elements	6 types
	Rock/HipHop elements	9 types
	Dream elements	7 types

It can be seen from the table that the most important function of skin is to match and strengthen the image and skill characteristics of heroes in the game. For example, although seven skin types of Daji are integrated with different cultural elements, they all aim to strengthen the stereotype of "Fox spirit", and highlight the shape of the fox tail. Furthermore, each kind of skin has a relatively obvious gain in the attack effect of Daji's magic skills.

No matter applying Chinese and foreign classic legends or integrating popular elements, it reflects that skin is essentially to meet the needs of players for diversified shapes. In skin setting, "Appearance is Everything" becomes the first direction, regardless of logical rationality and character matching. It is only for eye catching and popularity, not following certain laws and principles.

3. Analysis of the influence of game characters

As a game platform with a wide range of dissemination objects, "Honor of Kings" adapts traditional heroes in various forms, takes heroes as the carrier and games as the means to spread culture. Its dissemination effect is worth pondering.

3.1. Cultural image of historical figures is affected

We should stick to the bottom line and respect history in the process of recreating historical figures. Some historical figures have been handed down to this day because of their great achievements. They themselves represent a cultural image. For example, Bian Que, a famous doctor, is a master of using poison to hurt people in the game. Li Bai, a poet, becomes an assassin in the game. In "Honor of Kings", he confuses the overhead history and randomly arranges the characters' lines, thus resulting in certain damage to the cultural image represented by these historical figures. Because they represent more than a period of history, but also an industry and even a culture. Once such images are established, it will hurt cultural images behind these

historical celebrities, some industries and cultures they represent.

3.2. Cognitive deviation of players

3.2.1. Cognitive deviation of historical figures

According to the media memory theory, the cultural identity of the masses is largely carried and constructed by the media. However, the network of the youth knowledge is not perfect enough. Through gradually integrating the game memory into cultural memory, the youth cultural cognition is likely to deviate. According to the data[8], among the memory sources of traditional characters, game images account for 33% of the memory share, which is much higher than those of other traditional medias.

Different from the text data, the game image can be easily implanted into the minds of players, resulting in the cognitive deviation of the players to the historical figures. According to the data, the top three heroes in the appearance replacement rate of "Honor of Kings" are Tai Yi, Lu Ban and Bian Que. They are just the heroes with unclear public cognition. Their personal characteristics are not clear enough, and literature and television are not creative, such as the God in the poem "Nine Songs·The Great Unity, God of the Eastern Sky" written by Qu Yuan, a poet in the late Warring States period. Compared with the God in the obscure songs of Chu, it is obvious that the characters of human body and dragon tail in the game are more popular. There are some unreasonable problems in the hero design in "Honor of Kings", such as over processing. Once the distorted cognition of the historical character image enters the memory, it will cause the public cognitive deviation of the historical character image.

3.2.2. Structural deviation of historical space-time view

The heroes in "Honor of Kings" have a long history from ancient times to the Yuan Dynasty. In the background of the game, all heroes can compete on the same stage, and the players will not feel disobeyed. Therefore, it is easy to confuse the time perception of each historical figure and reduce its sensitivity to historical time and space. For players who are accustomed to appearing various heroes at the same time, the historical characteristics of the heroes will be weakened, and the corresponding structure of the concept of historical space-time will also be affected.

In addition to the separation of the hero relationship and the alternative history, the grafting of the skin will also cause cognitive confusion of historical time and space. In derivative skins, the famous Tang Dynasty minister Di Renjie has the image of the imperial guard of the Ming Dynasty. Such an aerial history is far fetched, which is easy to confuse the players with the political and historical products of different times.

4. Conclusion and discussion

The Internet has not only changed the traditional communication platform, but also expanded the communication channels. With the deepening of online games in people's lives, the role of cultural communication carrier is gradually reflected. If used properly, traditional culture can be effectively spread through online games, thereby opening up an effective path of cultural communication. Online games and traditional culture present a new communication relationship in the current society[10]: online game has become a new channel for cultural output, while traditional culture has made online game have more powerful vitality. Although there are many beneficial attempts in the process of excavating and recreating of heroes in "Honor of Kings", it is necessary to further study and explore if we really want to bear the responsibility of cultural communication carrier, so that traditional culture and online games can be integrated, forward hand in hand, stop tampering with history and overhead without bottom line, and stop over entertainment secondary creation. Only in this way can we make traditional culture keep its core and renew itself for a long time.

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