

An Analysis on the Practical Path to the Activation and Utilization of Cultural Relics in the Interactive Video Game “Road to Empress”

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes the game “Road to Empress” as a case study, and sorts out the cultural elements such as architectural form, object decoration, costume and ritual system of the work. Its creative source, visual material and historical details are all derived from archaeological relics, which is the activation, utilization and dissemination of archaeological materials. This paper focuses on the analysis of the complete practice path of the game's archaeological cultural relics resources for content production, the realization of the living display of cultural relics with the help of digital media, and the completion of the export of Chinese culture by relying on global distribution channels. It summarizes the advantages and existing shortcomings of gamification and activation of cultural relics, and provides practical paradigms and optimization countermeasures for the digital development of Chinese cultural and museum resources, the standardized creation of historical digital games, the innovative use of cultural relics, and the international dissemination of Chinese civilization. The cultural relics of the Tang Dynasty are used for rigorous textual research and standardized restoration of game digitization. At present, the academic community has not yet formed a special research topic. In order to ensure the authenticity and rigor of the cultural content of the Tang Dynasty, it is necessary to put forward corresponding standards and bottom lines.

Keywords: “Road to Empress”, Digital games, Tang Dynasty cultural relics, Dissemination and utilization, Cultural relics Innovation.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is one of the core objectives of cultural relics work in the new era to make cultural relics alive and promote the overseas communication of Chinese context.[1] All kinds of physical remains unearthed from archaeological excavations are the most reliable first-hand information to restore ancient history. However, a large number of cultural relics data have been sealed in archaeological reports for a long time, the conversion rate of achievements is low, and the international communication channels are scarce. Against the dual background of digital culture and culture export, digital games, as a digital medium with strong contemporary influence, have created new possibilities for the dissemination of national style culture. The national style digital game has gradually become a new carrier for the activation

and utilization of cultural relics and the external dissemination of Chinese excellent traditional culture. In recent years, domestic original reality interactive games have been operated globally, and the scale of overseas players has continued to expand. “Road to Empress”, as a phenomenon-level interactive game with the theme of the Tang Dynasty, is different from many historical works of fictionalized historical adaptation. In the process of playing, various archaeological cultural relics are supplemented as the source of textual research of cultural elements, and the historical features of the Tang Dynasty are rigorously restored. Invisibly, the overseas audience continues to show the material civilization and social features of the Tang Dynasty in China.

2. THE VALUE OF TANG DYNASTY CIVILIZATION HERITAGE AND CULTURAL RELICS RESOURCES

The Tang Dynasty was an important peak period for the development of ancient Chinese civilization. Its open and inclusive social environment and multi-cultural exchange pattern made it an important representative of the external dissemination of Chinese civilization. The Tang Dynasty not only formed an influential political system and cultural system, but also left a large number of material remains reflecting social life, artistic aesthetics and technological development. These cultural relics resources are not only an important basis for understanding the history of the Tang Dynasty, but also provide rich materials for the digital dissemination of contemporary traditional culture.

3. ANNOTATION OF THE OPEN CHARACTERISTICS AND INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE OF THE TANG DYNASTY CIVILIZATION

In the Tang Dynasty, the economy was prosperous and the society was open. With Chang'an and Luoyang as the center, a communication network connecting the East and the West was formed. The continuous convergence of people, commodities and culture from different regions made the Tang Dynasty society show the characteristics of the times of multi-integration. At the same time, the Tang Dynasty had a strong influence on urban construction, institutional culture, literature and art, and had a profound impact on East Asia. The Tang Dynasty maintained close cultural exchanges with East Asian countries, and the East Asian cultural circle with Tang culture as the core gradually formed at the turn of the seventh to eighth centuries. The court sent a large number of Tang envoys, foreign students and learned monks to and from the two sides of the sea and land, bringing the Tang Dynasty's system, text, religion and art into Japan, Silla and other places. This historical origin makes the cultural symbols of the Tang Dynasty still a historical memory shared by East Asian countries-Tang poetry has long been an important part of Chinese education in Japan and South Korea. The works of poets such as Du Fu in the Tang Dynasty can still cause a wide range of cultural resonance in the cultural circle of Chinese characters in East Asia. For the current digital

transformation of traditional culture, the rich social life, distinct visual symbols and diverse cultural elements of the Tang Dynasty provide a good historical basis for digital content creation. The contents of architectural form, costume system, ornamentation and lifestyle can be presented and disseminated through digital media.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION VALUE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RELICS IN THE TANG DYNASTY

The cultural relics of the Tang Dynasty discovered by archaeology are important first-hand materials for restoring the social appearance of the Tang Dynasty, and its digital communication value first comes from the matching between the characteristics of the cultural relics themselves and the digital media. First, the visual expression of cultural relics in the Tang Dynasty is strong. The complex decoration of gold and silver wares, the smooth lines and rich colors of tomb murals are highly visual appeal. Such information is easily weakened in traditional text descriptions, while digital technology can maximize the retention and amplification of its visual features, so that the audience can get a viewing experience closer to the original. Second, the information density of cultural relics in the Tang Dynasty is high. A piece of gold and silver ware hoarded in Hejia Village not only reflects the level of metal technology in the Tang Dynasty, but also is the material evidence of cultural exchange along the Silk Road. In the traditional display, limited by the display conditions, this information often only presents the surface content; digital media can carry more interpretation dimensions.

However, for a long time, the spread of cultural relics in the Tang Dynasty mainly relied on museum exhibitions, academic research and traditional media. The professionalism of archaeological materials and the limitations of traditional display forms make it difficult for a large amount of cultural information to be fully understood and accepted by the general public. Therefore, how to use the new digital media to transform the cultural relics resources of the Tang Dynasty into cultural products with communication attraction has become an important direction to be explored in the process of innovative utilization of cultural relics.

5. DILEMMA ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL RELICS IN THE TANG DYNASTY WITH SHAANXI AS THE CORE IN CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Although the cultural relics of the Tang Dynasty bear a very high historical value and potential for external dissemination, for a long time, the use and dissemination of archaeological relics and archaeological materials have been mostly limited to the traditional mode, making it difficult to achieve a wide range of public popularization, and it is more difficult to complete the international cultural output. Archaeological achievements are often too specialized in content and too abstract in expression, making it difficult to achieve effective popular science popularization, resulting in a clear gap between the academic value of the achievements themselves and the actual cognition of the public.[2] This dilemma is manifested in three aspects: the first is the simplification of the communication scene — it is difficult for the static display to reach a wide range of people; the second is the specialization of content expression — there is lack of sufficient interaction and transformation between archaeological knowledge and public cognition; the third is the insufficient attention to young audiences — the means of communication have not been effectively connected with the mainstream media trends in the digital age. The superposition of the three dilemmas objectively gave birth to a new path of activating cultural relics with national style games.

The first is the simplification of traditional cultural relics display and communication scenes. Most of the archaeological unearthed cultural relics are stored in the exhibition hall or warehouse of the museum, with static display as the main display method, and it is also the main communication scene between the public and the archaeological relics. However, at present, there is a single problem in the use of media in museums. In recent years, although most museums have established new media platform accounts and regularly publish cultural relics-related knowledge introductions, they lack content production from the perspective of cultural relics dissemination. The upload content is mostly exhibition posters related to simple display, cultural relics pictures with text introductions, and lack of interaction with the public. Due to the obscure content of professional resources mastered by authoritative institutions and the lack of different interpretations in the

dissemination of cultural relics, the connection between the two has broken. [3] This means that the rich historical information carried by the cultural relics of the Tang Dynasty can only be circulated in a limited professional circle and exhibition space for a long time, and it is difficult to reach a wider public group.

Secondly, the connotation expression of cultural relics is too professional. At present, although the practice of public archaeology in China has formed multiple forms of communication, including academic writings, media communication and public participation activities, it still takes knowledge dissemination and education popularization as the main path on the whole, and there is no fully interactive communication mechanism between archaeological knowledge production and public cognition. Relevant research points out that there are still some limitations in the process of cultural interpretation in current public archaeology. On the one hand, the content of communication is more focused on archaeological discoveries, excavation processes and material remains, and insufficient attention is paid to the spiritual connotation and value significance behind cultural heritage.[4] On the other hand, the main body of archaeological culture communication still mainly relies on government agencies and cultural and museum units, and the degree of social forces and public participation is limited, which makes it difficult for archaeological culture to be transformed into popular culture content with wide social influence. It can be seen that the archaeological communication mode still has shortcomings in the translation of professional content. It is necessary to use new media forms to reduce the threshold of understanding and realize the effective transformation of archaeological culture from professional field to popular cultural space.

In addition, the cultural industry's emphasis on young audiences is still insufficient. In today's highly integrated life of the Internet, young audiences are the most dynamic and potential important groups. However, the communication of archaeological achievements and cultural relics has long been mainly targeted at professional research groups and the adult public, and insufficient attention has been paid to the cultural needs and acceptance habits of young audiences. [5] Some scholars have pointed out that it is necessary to educate and guide the masses of cadres, especially young people, to understand the historical context of the origin and development of Chinese

civilization. At the discourse level, teenagers have been placed in the key object position of cultural relics communication. [6] At the same time, the main channels for young people to obtain information have been fully shifted to mobile platforms such as short videos, social media, and live broadcasts. The mainstream methods of cultural relics dissemination are still offline exhibitions, documentaries, and graphic information. There is a clear disconnect with the media usage habits of young groups in terms of communication rhythm and content form. The structural dislocation between the supply of "communication content" and the demand of "young audience" restricts the acceptance and influence of cultural relics among young people. Therefore, although the cultural relics of the Tang Dynasty have extremely high cultural value, it is difficult to form a continuous attention and cultural identity among young people. In other words, it is not that young people are not interested in traditional culture, but that the existing means of communication fail to provide an attractive cultural experience in their media environment. [7] This gap provides space for digital games to intervene in the communication of cultural relics. As one of the most active cultural consumption scenes for contemporary young people, the immersive experience, interactive narrative and visual knowledge presentation of games can just fill the structural deficiencies of traditional communication models in reaching young audiences. [8]

It is precisely because of the structural shortcomings of the traditional communication mode in the above three dimensions-single communication scene, professional content expression, insufficient access of young audiences-historical digital games based on archaeological cultural relics to create textual research, which has become a new path to solve the dilemma of cultural relics communication and promote the Tang Dynasty culture to the sea. Compared with static exhibitions and professional reports, digital games, with its immersive experience, interactive narrative and global distribution channels, can transform the visual symbols and historical information of Tang Dynasty cultural relics into perceptible and participatory digital cultural products, which provides an unprecedented possibility for the activation, utilization and international communication of Tang Dynasty cultural relics. This is also the basic premise of the following case analysis of "Road to Empress".

6. INTERPRETATION OF THE ACTIVATION AND UTILIZATION OF CULTURAL RELICS ELEMENTS IN THE GAME "ROAD TO EMPRESS"

The rapid development of digital media has opened up a new track for the innovative transformation of cultural relics. With the unique advantages of interactivity, entertainment and global distribution, digital games are making up for the shortcomings of traditional cultural communication models. "Road to Empress" is a real-life interactive film and television work with the Tang Dynasty as the background and Emperor Wu Zetian as the main game plot. The game has clear cultural relics or historical materials from architectural form to utensil decoration, from character modeling to scene details. It is a typical case of the activation, utilization and dissemination of archaeological data.

6.1 Backgammon

For the archaeological restoration and plot embedding of the lost chess game in this game. In the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Sui and Tang Dynasties, the backgammon was popular, especially among the officials and aristocrats in the Tang Dynasty. Wu Zetian himself was a senior enthusiast of the backgammon. The "New Book of Tang: Biography of Di Renjie" recorded Wu Zetian's "losing on backgammon many times in dreams". Di Renjie and Wang Fangqing took the opportunity to "losing backgammon is because of no chess(child)" cleverly advised the story of the heir. In terms of archaeological objects, in 1973, the Tang Dynasty tomb No.206 in Astana, Turpan, Xinjiang, unearthed a mother-of-pearl backgammon chessboard, which was rectangular in shape. The crescent-shaped "gate" with symmetrical sides was inlaid with ivory, with 12 florid eyes on the left and right sides. The chessboard plane is divided into three regions and is now stored in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Museum. Zhou Fang, a painter of the Tang Dynasty, depicted the scene of court aristocratic women playing double land in his painting "Wives playing Backgammon". The pattern of the chessboard in the picture is highly consistent with the unearthed object of Astana. A total of eight pieces of Tang glazed backgammon chess, all blue-green glazed wares, were unearthed from the Sui and Qing Dynasties Zen Temple Site Sheli Tomb. They are now stored in the Shaanxi History Museum.

Based on the above archaeological objects, handed down paintings and literature records, the production team of “Road to Empress” completed the restoration of the double-sided chess by referring to many ancient books such as “Sancai Tuhui”, “Shiwu Jiyuan”, “Shanqiao Yiyu” and so on. More importantly, duet is not a simple props display - the production team embeds it into the plot narrative. After the player learns the game from other characters, the change of the chess game echoes the fate and power relationship of the characters. In the “Meiniang Chapter”, it is used to “put the chessboard”. In the “Empress Chapter”, the change of the position of the chess pieces and the chessboard is a metaphor for the change of the power pattern. The game made the feeling of “using chess to describe the world” in the Tang Dynasty.

6.2 Cyan Sparrow Jade Pendant

Digital translation of historical symbols and ritual culture in the game. In the plot setting of “Road to Empress”, Li Tai, the king of Wei, gave Wu Zetian a “cyan sparrow jade pendant” as a token. This jade pendant carries emotional clues and power metaphors in the game - it is not only material evidence of the relationship between the Wei King and Wu Zetian, but also a hint of the Wei King's “chess” arrangement in the court layout, embedding cultural elements into the plot narrative, and undertaking the dual functions of props and metaphors. The game combines “cyan sparrow” and “jade pendant” into a fictional object, not created out of thin air - these two elements have their own real cultural and material basis in the Tang Dynasty. “Cyan sparrow” has a special symbolic meaning in the palace context of the Tang Dynasty. Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty named the fourth son Li Tai as “Qingque (cyan sparrow)”. Li Tai was the king of the Wei Dynasty. He was talented and one of the most beloved among Taizong's sons. According to the record of “Old Tang Book · The Biography of King Li Tai”, Li Tai “is good at literature since young age”. Emperor Taizong of Tang specially ordered to set up a literary museum in his mansion, allowing him to introduce his own bachelor, which was a rare honor among the princes of the Tang Dynasty. “Cyan sparrow” was naturally bound to Li Tai, the King of Wei, in the court discourse of the Tang Dynasty.

If “cyan sparrow” is a cultural symbol, then “jade pendant” is a Tang Dynasty ritual carrier supported by archaeological objects. Jade pendant

is a distinct symbol of identity and rank. In the Tang Dynasty's “sword pendant” dynasty costume system, group jade pendant is an indispensable part. Archaeological findings provide detailed physical evidence for the study of jade pendants in the Tang Dynasty. In the second year of Tang Zongzhang (669), a group of jade pendants were unearthed from the joint burial tomb of Liu Zhi and his wife Yin. When the tomb of Princess Li Xianhui of Tang Yongtai was excavated from 1960 to 1962, 10 pieces of jade wares were unearthed in the corridor, most of which were grouped and decorated. The bird-themed jade ornaments are also seen in the tomb of Li Zhen, King of Yue (unearthed in Liquan County, Shaanxi Province in 1972), indicating that jade objects shaped by birds are not rare in the imperial tombs of the Tang Dynasty. The game combines “cyan sparrow” with “jade pendant”, which is not based on imagination, but conforms to the artistic tradition of jade pendant decoration in Tang Dynasty based on nature, and completes the translation of Tang Dynasty's costume culture from object to symbol, from history to narration.

6.3 Mingtang (Main Hall of Ziwei Palace, Luoyang)

The archaeological restoration and scene reproduction of the Tang Dynasty ritual architecture after optimization. If the backgammon is the activation of cultural relics at the artifact level, and the blue sparrow jade is the cultural translation at the symbolic level, then the presentation of Mingtang in the “Road to Empress” represents the digital reproduction at the architectural site level. In the game plot, there is an option to “build the Mingtang that symbolized imperial power”. Players need to choose to “build the Mingtang that symbolized imperial power”, and then choose to “use the auspicious event to promote that you are the fate of the world”, so as to promote the plot. The construction of Mingtang was shaped as a key measure for Wu Zetian to consolidate the imperial power and declare “the fate of the world”. This plot setting has a solid historical basis. In the fourth year of the Chuigong (688), Wu Zetian demolished the Qianyuan Palace, the main hall of the East Capital Luoyang Palace, and built the Mingtang on its place, which was originally named “Wanxiang Shengong (the all-inclusive god palace)”. According to the literature, there are three layers of Mingtang: the bottom square, symbolizing the four seasons; the middle twelve-sided shape, symbolizing twelve hours; the upper twenty-four quadrilateral, symbolizing the twenty-four solar terms. Wu Zetian

held many ceremonies in Mingtang to accept the greetings, and Mingtang also became an important symbol of the legitimacy of the Wuzhou regime.

The archaeological work provides key evidence for the restoration of Mingtang's shape. From October to December 1986, the Luoyang Tangcheng Task Force of the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences discovered the Wu Zetian Mingtang Site at the northeastern corner of the intersection of Zhongzhou Road and Dingding Road in Luoyang City. The excavation shows that the plane of the Mingtang foundation site is octagonal, which is composed of six octagonal rammed earth from the inside to the outside. Its center is a giant large column pit, and the column base stone at the bottom of the pit is about 3.67 meters in diameter. The site is located on the central axis of the palace city of Luoyang in the Sui and Tang Dynasties and is one of the most important buildings in the core area of the palace city. The Mingtang Site Protection and Exhibition Project was started in June 2010, officially opened to the outside world in April 2012, and completed the renovation and internal exhibition in April 2015.

The game transforms the Mingtang from a historical site into an interactive digital scene, allowing players to “personally participate” in the process of building the Mingtang in the plot. Compared with the traditional cultural museum display in which the audience can only view the site or model from afar, the game provides a “participatory viewing” experience - by choosing to promote the plot, in the narrative process to understand the symbolic significance of the Mingtang for the legitimacy of Wu Zetian's regime. From the restoration of the artifacts of backgammon, the symbol translation of cyan sparrow jade pendant, to the scene reproduction of the Mingtang architectural site, the three cases follow the same logic. That is, the game embeds cultural elements into interactive narratives, so that players can naturally complete the reception of cultural relics information and the understanding of cultural significance in the process of advancing the plot. This is the unique value of digital games as a cultural relic activation medium.

7. CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND VALUE ANALYSIS OF “ROAD TO EMPRESS”

The rapid development of digital media has opened up a new track for the innovative

transformation of cultural relics. With the unique advantages of interactivity, entertainment and global distribution, historical digital games are making up for the shortcomings of traditional cultural communication models. “Road to Empress” reproduces the historical symbols carried by the cultural relics of the Tang Dynasty in a digital way, and successfully realizes overseas online operation. It is a typical sample of the activation of cultural relics games and the external dissemination of Chinese culture. This chapter analyzes from four dimensions: value of communication in China, overseas cultural communication, industry practice value and limitation reflection.

The value of communication in China is mainly reflected in the popularization of cultural relics knowledge. The primary value of communication in China is to break the professional barriers of archaeological data and transform obscure cultural relics data into visual and participatory digital scenes. Specifically, the archaeological restoration of backgammon, the symbolic translation of ritual culture behind cyan sparrow jade pendant, and the digital reproduction of Mingtang architectural sites are all typical practices that transform professional archaeological knowledge into public perception. In the process of advancing the plot, the players choose to “personally participate” in the historical scene through interaction-learning chess, receiving rituals, and building a hall to naturally complete the cognition of the material culture and ritual civilization of the Tang Dynasty in the narrative process. This kind of “participatory cognition” is particularly important for young groups, allowing players to contact the orthodox Tang Dynasty history in entertainment, and completing the effective transformation of cultural relics knowledge from the professional field to the popular culture space.

The overseas communication value it embodies mainly opens up the immersion experience and the soft cultural output of Chinese civilization. “Road to Empress” has completed the global distribution relying on digital distribution platforms such as App Store and Steam, and has realized the transformation from “advertising” to “active reception”. Cross-cultural communication of games is not a one-way output of cultural symbols, but a two-way interactive process shaped by game text design and target audience acceptance context, presenting hierarchical characteristics. [9] “Road to Empress” jumps out of the passive viewing mode of traditional film and television, and gives

overseas players the right to actively participate in the evolution of the story based on the interactive choice-driven narrative system. At the same time, the elements of Tang Dynasty cultural relics are transformed into interactive plot nodes, so that overseas players can complete the cognition of Tang Dynasty culture in active selection. This way of exporting Chinese history with immersive experience weakens the cultural estrangement and realizes a more penetrating soft cultural output.[10]

Through the market feedback brought by “Road to Empress”, people can clearly understand the practical value of cultural undertakings and the boundary problem of the gamification and activation of cultural relics. Practice has proved that archaeological heritage resources can enter the game narrative system through digital technology, and realize the transformation from professional materials to popular cultural products. The game's application of cultural elements such as backgammon, blue sparrow jade pendant, Mingtang, etc., shows the possibility of the transformation of archaeological data from “research object” to “creative resources”, and provides a new practical path for the digital utilization of cultural resources. At the same time, the case also raises a question worthy of further discussion: when cultural relics enter the entertainment medium of digital games, how to maintain the authenticity and rigor of historical and cultural content while enhancing the communication effect. However, at present, there is no clear discussion framework for the restoration degree, adaptation boundary and evaluation criteria of cultural relics elements in historical digital games. In the future, it is necessary to further clarify several issues: first, which cultural elements belong to the unbreakable authenticity requirements, such as the core information of object shape, architectural structure, and historical background; second, what content can be reasonably adjusted according to the narrative needs of the game, such as scene performance, character interaction mode and plot presentation form; third, when fictional content is combined with historical elements, how to ensure that players can distinguish between historical facts and artistic creation. Taking “Road to Empress” as an example, the contents of backgammon and Mingtang all have clear archaeological or literature basis. Although the blue sparrow jade pendant belongs to the plot design, its cultural symbol comes from the historical context of the Tang Dynasty. This boundary between recreation based on historical elements and entertainment fiction is an important issue that

needs to be paid attention to when cultural relics are activated through games or film and television dramas in the future.

Therefore, the development of digital games related to archaeological relics not only needs to pay attention to the communication effect, but also needs to gradually establish evaluation criteria around data sources, restoration basis, cultural interpretation and artistic processing boundary. At present, the gamification of cultural relics is still in the exploratory stage, and the relevant normative system is not yet mature. As a representative practice, “Road to Empress” provides a case reference for archaeological cultural relics resources to enter digital media, and also provides a new research direction for exploring the balance between historical authenticity and game expression in the future.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper takes the interactive video game “Road to Empress” as a case to analyze the complete path of the activation and dissemination of archaeological relics in the Tang Dynasty by means of digital games. The communication of traditional cultural relics has shortcomings such as single display form, obscure content, and difficulty in reaching young people. The work relies on archaeological and historical resources such as backgammon, cyan sparrow jade pendant, and Mingtang to integrate artifacts, rituals, and architectural elements into interactive narratives. The immersive experience reduces the acceptance threshold of historical knowledge. It not only completes the popularization of domestic Tang Dynasty culture, but also realizes the softness of Chinese culture to the sea with the help of global distribution channels, and provides a practical model for the digital development of cultural relics.

As an entertainment medium, games still have problems such as the difficulty in balancing historical textual research and artistic creation, the lack of unified restoration criteria in the industry, and the shallow excavation of the spiritual connotation of cultural relics. In the future, it is necessary to jointly build creative norms in the fields of archaeology, cultural creation and communication, and clarify the boundary between historical facts and artistic fiction. The research-based national style interactive video game is a new carrier to activate cultural relics and promote the international communication of civilization. It is expected that more digital works with both rigor

and communication power will continue to promote the inheritance of Chinese historical context and foreign exchanges in the future.

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