

Traditional Culture Communication in Film-Game Integrated Media: A Case Study of The World of Flourishing Ages

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Abstract. Against the background of "film-game integration", the presentation of traditional culture has been constantly changing. Taking the interactive film-game *The World of Flourishing Ages* as a case, this paper mainly analyzes it from the aspects of narrative mode, camera language and cultural symbol presentation, and explores how it enables players to gradually contact and understand traditional culture in the experience process. The study finds that "film-game integration" enhances the perceptibility of cultural content to a certain extent and expands its communication scope, making traditional culture gradually turn into a content form that can be "experienced". At the same time, however, such works also face problems such as excessive entertainment and superficial cultural expression. How to find a proper balance between "fun" and "depth" remains a key issue that needs continuous attention in the subsequent development.

Keywords: film-game integration, traditional culture communication, digital games, cultural narrative, *The World of Flourishing Ages*

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of digital media technology and the in-depth integration of the cultural industry, the originally clear boundary between film and television and games is gradually blurring, and film-game integration has thus become an important form in the creation and communication of digital content. Generally speaking, film and television works have accumulated relatively mature creative experience in narrative structure, audio-visual aesthetics and emotional expression; while games rely more on interactivity, immersion and participatory experience to form their own media advantages. The combination of the two in the content production process has not only changed the production mode of cultural content to a certain extent, but also exerted a new impact on the original communication pattern. In this context, as a representative film-game work, *The World of Flourishing Ages* shows prominent characteristics in narrative design, interactive experience and cultural presentation.

Since its launch in September 2025, *The World of Flourishing Ages* (The Lady Wu Chapter) has quickly gained high market attention, with its total online playback heat exceeding 1 billion in the first week; 12 days after release, its sales across all platforms exceeded 1 million copies, and it ranked top of the iOS paid list on mobile devices for many consecutive days. By the end of September 2025, the total online topic heat of the work exceeded 1.5 billion, and it hit the hot search

more than 270 times. The views of related topics on Xiaohongshu alone exceeded 260 million. In early 2026, with 1.8 million copies sold and 75 million yuan in sales, *The Lady Wu Chapter* ranked second in the annual list of domestic paid standalone game sales and first in the annual list of film-game sales. It has also won a number of industry awards, such as "Most Popular New Game of the Year" at Sina Weibo Dimension Awards, "Excellent Interactive Video Work of the Year" at Game Grape Golden Grape Awards, and "Best PC Game of the Year" at Game Teahouse Golden Tea Awards. In overseas markets, *The World of Flourishing Ages* has an 85% praise rate on Steam, a Metacritic media score of 83 and a user score of 8.9, and topped the App Store paid lists in Thailand, Singapore, Myanmar and other regions. Many media have also given high evaluations to it. The key to its remarkable market performance is that it has well broken the media boundary between traditional games and films and television, and fully presented the expression mode of "carrying game interaction with film and television texture". Specifically, relying on the relatively mature film and television industry system, it introduced film-level production standards into the field of interactive games, and also gave play to the production advantages of local teams in directing, photography, costumes, props and other aspects, making the overall content more complete and ornamental.

Based on the above background, this paper takes *The World of Flourishing Ages* as a specific case, combines text analysis and visual culture analysis methods, discusses from the perspectives of narrative mode, camera language and cultural symbol presentation, and focuses on analyzing how traditional culture is transformed, presented and communicated in the context of film-game integration, as well as the communication effect of this expression mode. At the same time, this paper also reflects on the problems such as insufficient depth of cultural expression in the work, and tries to provide a relatively specific and observable research perspective for understanding the contemporary expression of traditional culture in the digital context.

2. Literature review

In recent years, with the development of the digital cultural industry, the boundary between film and television and games has gradually blurred, and "film-game integration" has gradually become an important topic in cultural industry research. Relevant studies point out that film and television and games "are both composite media dominated by vision and images, supplemented by sound, voice and text" [1], and have certain commonalities in narrative mode, audio-visual expression and world view construction. In this context, the two media learn from each other continuously: games gradually strengthen narrative expression, and films and television pay more attention to immersive experience. At the same time, the academic circle has begun to pay attention to the "filmization" trend of games, believing that games made through cutscenes, film-style shots and character voice acting can enhance narrative expressiveness. When studying *Black Myth: Wukong*, Chen Xuguang and others pointed out that the most striking thing about the game is "the rich literary elements and film-style plots", and regarded it as "a typical filmized game, a new height of the new aesthetics, new thinking and new industry of film-game integration" [2]. However, some scholars also pointed out that film-game integration still faces the tension between "narrative" and "interaction", which needs to be coordinated in different media characteristics [1].

In terms of development form, the integration of film and games has moved from early IP linkage to a deeper cross-media symbiosis. Some studies point out that since the 1970s, film and video games have "experienced an evolution from one-way influence to in-depth integration". At present, film-game integration is moving towards a new stage of "technical symbiosis" and "narrative diversification" [3], and "has become a new form of current film production with its huge artistic

and industrial development potential" [4]. On this basis, new technologies such as AIGC have further promoted the in-depth integration of film and game into the production process, media form and industrial ecology [5]. In addition, film-game integration has also opened up a new path for the communication of traditional culture, enabling cultural resources such as Chinese folk music and mythological narrative to cross language and cultural barriers with "film-level narrative and game interaction" [6], and achieve more attractive expression, thus expanding the scope of communication.

In terms of traditional culture communication, the academic circle generally believes that digital media provides a new expression path for it. Some studies point out that digital games "better integrate Chinese culture into game content in a visual and participatory way" [7], thus enhancing the attractiveness of cultural content. For example, through elements such as costumes, architecture, historical figures and storylines, players can get in touch with traditional culture in the experience process. At the same time, some scholars pointed out that games allow players to "feel the beauty of elements of traditional Chinese culture in the process of entertainment through interactive participation" [8], and gradually influence players' cognition and understanding in this process. However, many studies also put forward reflections: some games only stay at the level of superficial symbols in the application of traditional culture, and there are still problems such as "insufficient cultural carrying capacity and superficial communication content" in cultural communication [9], which affect the depth of cultural expression to a certain extent.

To sum up, film-game integration and traditional culture communication have become important topics concerned by the academic circle, but the combination of the two at the specific practical level still needs further discussion. Based on this, this paper takes *The World of Flourishing Ages* as an example, analyzes the presentation mode of traditional culture in games from the perspective of film-game integration, and hopes to provide certain reference for relevant researches.

3. Analysis and results

3.1. Film-game integration features of *The World of Flourishing Ages*

3.1.1. Film-style narrative mode of the game

The narrative strategy of *The World of Flourishing Ages* can be understood as the combination of the dramatic tension in films and television and the interactive logic of the game itself. Based on the relevant experience of Wu Zetian (Wu Zhao), the game tells the story of the heroine "Wu Yuanzhao" from entering the palace as a talented lady at the age of 14, becoming a nun in Ganye Temple after the death of Emperor Taizong, and gradually moving to the center of power step by step. The first chapter currently online, The Lady Wu Chapter, mainly focuses on the relatively fragile and variable early stage of her life. This narrative angle is different from the concentrated shaping of the empress's "all-powerful" image in traditional films and television, but turns to present her "survival game" in the court environment, highlighting the survival state of characters facing complex situations.

In terms of "what story to tell", the game builds a main line centered on "survival". To a certain extent, it inherits the narrative experience of court-themed works such as *Legend of Zhen Huan* and *Story of Yanxi Palace*, and transforms multi-party power games, changes in character relationships and emotional conflicts into specific interactive nodes that players can participate in. At the same time, the game does not deliberately weaken the cruelty in history, but directly presents the fierce struggles Wu Zetian experienced on her way to power. It has a large script volume with 300,000

words of text and a total content duration of about 1,200 minutes, close to the scale of a medium and long-length TV series, which also provides sufficient content support for narrative development and character building.

In terms of "how to tell", the game adopts a "ergodic narrative" structure. Different from linear films and television, *The World of Flourishing Ages* has set up more than 400 decision-making nodes and more than 100 death endings, thus forming a complex network narrative system. Players need to constantly explore the story branches corresponding to different choices in the cycle of "trial and error - death - rebirth", and it is in this repeated process that they gradually understand the fate of characters, court rules and changes in power relations. This way of promoting narrative development through choice and interaction also reflects the change of user roles in digital media. Jenkins put forward "Participatory Culture" in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* [10], arguing that users are no longer just passive recipients of content, but participate in the generation of meaning through interaction. Under this mechanism, every choice of players will affect the plot direction, making them gradually involved in the story itself during the experience. On this basis, the game establishes "survival" as the core driving force of narrative. As the producer Demi said: "To survive, this goes without saying." Through constant choices and trial and error, players experience the uncertainty of plot development in interaction, and are more likely to feel the chain reaction of "one wrong step leads to another", thus enhancing the sense of immersion.

In terms of "how to play", the game well balances fragmented consumption and immersive experience. The duration of each episode is mostly controlled at 1 to 3 minutes, which can adapt to the scattered usage time of mobile users; at the same time, the game directly connects players' specific operations with plot direction through interactive mechanisms such as "Quick Time Events (QTE)" and "long-press charging decision-making".

3.1.2. Film-style camera language of the game

In terms of visual presentation, *The World of Flourishing Ages* introduces film-style camera language into game expression. Compared with the previous interactive forms mainly promoted by static images, the overall presentation of this work is closer to continuous images, making it easier for players to form a sense of continuity when watching films and television. The game adopts 4K live-action shooting technology, and the image form has shifted from the still frame display common in early interactive videos to dynamic images with a sense of flow. Changes in light and shadow, the flow of eyes, and subtle emotional reactions in characters' expressions can be fully presented through shots, which also enhances players' sense of immersion into the situation and participation in the narrative to a certain extent.

Director Zhizhu has a background as a photographer and has directed ancient-style online dramas such as *Ancient Lovesickness Song*, and these creative experiences have a significant impact on the picture style of *The World of Flourishing Ages*. In the specific presentation process, the use of shots is not an independent visual technique, but combined with the plot rhythm to jointly promote the development of narrative. As Bazin emphasized, the organization of shots will directly affect the audience's understanding of reality [11]. For example, in plots such as court confrontations and assassinations, the work often intensifies the tension through shot advancement, close-up switching and other methods; when expressing characters' emotional changes, it mostly uses slow long shots and facial close-ups to present the characters' emotional ups and downs and psychological changes in more detail. In addition, the game chooses to shoot on location in Hengdian, combined with real actor performances, making the overall picture texture closer to that of films and television, and allowing players to get a more coherent experience between "watching" and "operating".

In terms of hearing, the game also designed an innovative "death echo" mechanism. When players fail in key choices, the system will trigger the character's voice feedback or inner monologue. On the one hand, this design can alleviate players' frustration caused by repeated failures; on the other hand, it provides players with an understanding perspective with a "meta-narrative" meaning, enabling players to better grasp character motivations and plot directions, thus further strengthening the connection between narrative content and interactive mechanisms.

3.2. Visual presentation of traditional cultural elements in *The World of Flourishing Ages*

3.2.1. Costumes and character images

In terms of costume and character image design, *The World of Flourishing Ages* shows a strong sense of historical reference. The production team specially invited Professor Gengzhe Yu, a historical expert, to participate in relevant textual research, trying to make details such as costume patterns and court rituals close to the style of the Tang Dynasty. Character modeling also refers to the costume system of the Tang Dynasty, and details from fabric patterns to accessories have been rigorously researched. From the perspective of semiotics, traditional cultural elements such as costume patterns, artifacts and flower hairpins bear certain cultural meanings, and these meanings will be reorganized and reinterpreted in specific narrative contexts [12].

Taking the protagonist "Talented Lady Wu Yuanzhao" as an example, she wears a plain ru skirt when she first enters the palace. This shape not only conforms to her status as a "low-ranking concubine", but also visually conveys the simplicity, caution and forbearance of the character in the early stage. With the progress of the plot, Wu Yuanzhao's costumes gradually become gorgeous and complicated. This change in external image corresponds to the transformation of the character's status, realistic situation and psychological state to a certain extent, and also becomes an intuitive visual mapping in the character's growth arc (see Figure 1).

In the shaping of supporting characters, the costumes of different characters also show obvious differences. "Li Zhi, Prince of Jin" wears a blue-gray brocade robe, with a gentle and restrained temperament and the demeanor of a noble; "Li Tai, Prince of Wei" matches a scarlet official robe with a gilded belt, highlighting his power strategy aura and strong personality; "Princess Gaoyang" wears a pink palace dress with playful hair ornaments, making the character image more vivid and recognizable. On the whole, costumes in the work not only play a decorative role, but also participate in the expression of character personality, status and narrative relationship, thus becoming an important visual means to promote the construction of character images.



Figure 1. Costume changes of Wu Yuanzhao at different narrative stages

3.2.2. Architectural culture

In terms of architectural scene design, *The World of Flourishing Ages* restores the architectural style of the Tang Dynasty to a certain extent. The production team refers to many historical materials and architectural regulations of the Tang Dynasty, and consciously conveys Chinese classical aesthetics from palace layout to color matching. Some studies point out that the game "accurately restores the social features and political pattern of the early Tang Dynasty through picture design and character setting", turning history from a mere background into a "credible, perceptible and explorable cultural space" [13].

From the overall structure, the building complex represented by Daming Palace in the game adopts the layout structure of "front court and rear bedchamber". The main buildings face south from north and are arranged in an axisymmetric manner, which visually reflects the ritual thought of "the emperor in the center". The palace scenes in the game, from the magnificent spatial scale of the main hall to the detailed wooden structure details of the corridors, echo the majestic and grand style characteristics of Tang Dynasty architecture. Among them, the main hall space is relatively open, mainly used to express the solemnity of the power center; corridors and side halls are relatively closed, more suitable for carrying interactions, temptations and plot advancement between characters.

At the same time, there are certain differences in the spatial scale and decorative details of the palaces where concubines of different ranks live. This spatial distinction corresponds to the characters' status and court position to a certain extent. Through these scene designs, architecture is no longer a static background, but participates in the narrative, enabling players to further feel the existence of court order and power relations in spatial transformation and visual differences.

3.2.3. Traditional art elements

In the application of traditional art elements, *The World of Flourishing Ages* mainly strengthens the overall atmosphere through two levels: color and symbol. In color processing, the game uses strong contrasting colors to present the internal tension of "external prosperity wrapped in essential cruel survival"; at the same time, it uses soft tones with low saturation as the picture base, forming a unified emotional tone for the work visually. That is to say, traditional color aesthetics are not simply restored or copied here, but re-transformed into a visual language with camp recognition function, which not only serves the construction of picture style, but also participates in the expression of character relationships and narrative atmosphere.

In terms of pattern and decoration design, some traditional symbols in the work have been given new expressive meanings, a process that can be understood as a kind of "cultural recoding" [14]. For example, "peony flower hairpin" in the game not only represents the character's status, but also is further endowed with the metaphorical meaning of power game; "osmanthus", which often carries the implication of good luck and beauty, is transformed into an important carrier to promote conspiracy development in the game narrative. The representative "Osmanthus Soup" plot (see Figure 2) gives this traditional image a new narrative function. Court rituals are no longer just external formal norms, but are treated as important skills for characters to survive, maneuver and protect themselves in the court environment. In addition, Tang Dynasty game artifacts such as Shuanglu chess and touhu are arranged as background symbols in the environmental narrative system. Through the continuous accumulation of these visual details, players' perception of historical and cultural atmosphere is continuously strengthened; these contents together form a

visual carrier of the cultural spirit of the Tang Dynasty and further enrich the traditional cultural expression of the work.



Figure 2. Narrative transformation of traditional symbols in the "Osmanthus Soup" episode

4. Discussion

4.1. New possibilities for cultural communication provided by film-game integration

Compared with the relatively one-way communication mode of traditional films and television, *The World of Flourishing Ages* combines film-style expression with game interaction, bringing cultural content into a more participatory experience situation, and providing a new path for the expression of traditional culture in the contemporary context.

On the one hand, the audience's acceptance mode has changed significantly: the audience is no longer a "bystander" in the original sense, but gradually turns into a "presence", and even a "participant" who can personally enter the narrative process [15]. This change is also clearly reflected in domestic interactive film-games in recent years. For example, *The Invisible Guardian* allows players to promote the plot direction in different choices through multi-ending narrative; *I've Been Surrounded by Beautiful Girls!* further strengthens players' sense of immersion with a first-person perspective. It can be said that these works all show a trend of transformation from "watching" to "participating" to varying degrees.

On the other hand, film-style audio-visual expression has also improved the presentation effect of traditional culture to a certain extent. In addition to *The World of Flourishing Ages* relying on mature film and television production methods, similar visual expressions are also reflected in works such as *Black Myth: Wukong* and *Naraka: Bladepoint*, which transform Chinese myths and oriental martial arts scenes into more impactful visual experiences, enabling traditional culture to be accessed by the audience in a more intuitive and perceptible way. At the same time, games such as *Genshin Impact* have achieved a wide range of overseas communication by integrating Chinese architectural and landscape cultural elements, which also shows that film-game integration has certain development potential in cross-cultural communication.

4.2. Reflection: problems and challenges in film-game integration

Of course, *The World of Flourishing Ages* also presents some noteworthy problems in the process of film-game integration and cultural communication. First, the tension between entertainment and historical authenticity. Film-game products have strong entertainment attributes. To enhance plot attractiveness and dramatic conflict, creators often rewrite historical content to a certain extent, and sometimes add exaggerated plot processing. Although *The World of Flourishing Ages* is based on historical facts on the whole, it significantly increases the density of conflicts in the presentation of court struggles, and the overall narrative is closer to the expression mode of "court battle dramas".

This treatment does enhance the watchability of the work and makes the plot progress more compact, but at the same time, it may make some audiences directly understand the plot content as real history, and then produce certain deviations in historical cognition. Therefore, how to balance "good-looking" and "relatively authentic" is a practical problem that such film-game works must face.

Second, cultural expression is easy to stay at superficial symbols. Many film-game works tend to present intuitive visual elements such as costumes, architecture and artifacts when using traditional cultural resources, but pay relatively little attention to the institutional structure, ideological concepts and social context behind these elements. Similar situations can also be seen in Three Kingdoms-themed games such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms: Strategy Edition* and *Land of Chaos*. When presenting historical figures and events, such works usually emphasize strategy, conflict and playability, and simplify the complexity of the historical background itself. In this way, although cultural elements are seen by players and can form a certain impression visually, their deep meanings may not be truly understood.

Third, the impact of commercial logic on narrative and cultural expression. In the actual development process, works need to consider cost recovery, user retention and market feedback, so problems such as too fast plot progress and repeated branch content are easy to occur. Some interactive film-games constantly set similar choice nodes to extend the game duration or increase players' sense of participation. Although this design increases the number of interactions in form, it may also affect the coherence of the narrative to a certain extent and weaken the overall player experience.

Existing studies point out that in the process of watching movies, the audience "on the one hand is clearly aware that they are watching a movie, and on the other hand is immersed in the film, so as to regard everything on the screen as reality" [15]. This viewing state is further amplified in the context of film-game integration, because players not only watch images, but also participate in plot advancement through choices and operations, which makes problems such as entertainment rewriting, symbolic presentation and commercial design more prominent.

4.3. Future prospects: towards in-depth cross-media cultural communication

"Film-game integration not only generates a new language, new thinking and new aesthetics of image art, but also becomes a 'big film' industry with huge artistic and industrial potential" [16]. From the perspective of follow-up development, film-game integration still has a large space for expansion and can be further promoted from multiple levels.

First, it is necessary to strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation to further improve the professionalism and depth of content. Game developers can cooperate more with researchers in history, culturology, sociology and other fields, and establish a relatively stable cultural consultant mechanism. In the script creation stage, works should not only conduct textual research on external elements such as costumes and artifacts, but also further pay attention to the social structure, ethical concepts and aesthetic taste of specific historical periods, so that cultural content can truly enter the game mechanism and narrative logic, rather than just staying in the restoration of visual surface. Second, the narrative mode can be handled more delicately, and richer interactive forms can be continuously explored to avoid simply relying on "multiple-choice" paths to promote the plot. Works can enable players to gradually understand cultural content in the process of exploration and operation through environmental narrative, task design and other ways. For example, elements such as Tang Dynasty poems, calligraphy, painting and music can be integrated into puzzle solving, plot advancement or interactive tasks, so that players can slowly approach the culture itself in the process

of "playing" instead of passively accepting the instillation of cultural knowledge. Third, film-game can be regarded as a "starting point": it does not have to stay at the level of a single game or interactive drama, but can further extend to animation, novels, cultural and creative products, cultural tourism experience and other fields. In this way, film-game integration has the opportunity to further form a linkage path of "film-game + cultural tourism + cultural creativity", so that traditional cultural content can be more continuously communicated in different media and consumption scenarios.

"The new business form of film-game integration needs to be based on the coordinated and orderly development of market system construction, government supervision and services, industrial entity development and public participation" [16]. Content production, communication methods and industrial extension should be considered together to maximize the contemporary value of traditional culture and promote Chinese culture to the world better.

5. Conclusion

Returning to the film-game integration practice discussed in this paper, it can be seen that technological changes have not changed the value of culture itself, but changed the way we approach it. From books to images, and then to operable games, what *The World of Flourishing Ages* presents is a new path to "walk into history". When making choices, players may not really think about concepts such as systems and rituals, but between hesitation and judgment, they have actually contacted and approached that period of history. The future problem of film-game integration is: after approaching, can we go deeper? This is perhaps more worthy of attention than technology itself.

Of course, this study has several limitations and shortcomings. This study takes *The World of Flourishing Ages* as a single case, mainly carries out text analysis, lacks empirical data on players and in-depth understanding of the development context, so the conclusion still has certain limitations. Follow-up research can further examine the cultural communication effect and long-term impact of film-game integration in different situations through multi-case comparison, questionnaires, interviews and other methods.

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