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The Application of Three Kingdoms Elements in Games from the Perspective of Semiotics Path Study

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Abstract

Based on the perspective of semiotics, this paper combines the game Lost in Books as a practice to analyze how to use semiotics to refine game elements and explore the application path of the Three Kingdoms elements in the game. In the process of game design, it tries comparatively novel game modes and presentation methods to increase the playability and attractiveness of the game.

Keywords

semiotics, Three Kingdoms, Battle of Red Cliff, two-player games

1. Introduction

"The process of literary production, circulation, and transmission, i.e., the process of classicizing literary works by the extent and density of their influence and the degree of audience participation." [1] These works have been examined in different times and cultural contexts, and continue to resonate across time and space boundaries, which is the process of classicization of the works. The conception and formation of the Three Kingdoms culture has gone through this slow and complex process of classicization of literary works. From ancient handwritten texts and oral tradition to modern printed publications and digital media, works are disseminated to readers through different forms and media. As a medium of contemporary cultural communication, games are one of the most important ways for people to entertain and communicate. Whether it is TV programs or movies, interactivity, and game elements are increasingly pursued. Diana, a British scholar, believes that contemporary media culture is increasingly pursuing the state of game media, and game media has become a key factor in the globalization of the media industry [2]. Based on the perspective of semiotics, this paper interprets and extracts the symbolic functions and meanings of the Three Kingdoms elements, and combines them with game design practice to complete the reconstruction and interpretation of classic literature. It then explores the dissemination of traditional culture and the application of the Three Kingdoms' cultural elements in national-style games.

2. Project Background

Three Kingdoms theme video game has become a competitive red sea, differentiation and specialization works are expected by users, but also the form that R & D enterprises expect to see. On another level, this

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is the path problem of innovative expression of traditional culture, which is an important link in the training of game talents in colleges and universities.2022 China Academy of Art School of Animation and Games, in conjunction with Ali Linghuo Hub Entertainment, jointly organized the "Common Drawing of the Three Kingdoms" theme creation camp. To respond to society, enterprises, and college talent training. More than 200 games with elements of the Three Kingdoms developed by various countries remain on the market, but there is a common problem of the elements of the Three Kingdoms becoming only fragments of surface elements. For example, Zhao Yun's Legend of the Three Kingdoms, an action-adventure game released in 2001 with Zhao Yun as the protagonist, imitates many of its systems, such as the backpack system and weapon system, borrowed from the European and American game Diablo. Other games such as Legend of the Crouching Dragon and other bare-bones art swaps and plagiarized works are outside the scope of our discussion.

3. Theoretical Framework

Semiotics is the study of signs and sign systems. In semiotics, signifier and signified are two important concepts proposed by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. [3] The American logician Charles Sanders Peirce examined the relationship between signifier and referent object, and proposed to classify the signifier into three categories, i.e., image signifier (icon), indication signifier (index), and symbol signifier (symbol) [4]. Game semiotics focuses on the signs and symbols used in games, and explores how the symbols in games interact with players, establish meaning, and influence players' game experience. Scholar Zongqian summarizes the definition of games as follows: games are human activities that are governed by rules, have uncertain endings, are competitive, and are imaginary rather than pseudo. [5] He believes that there are two levels of symbolic texts in games: "in-game text" and "game text ". Among them, "in-game text" is the first level of symbolic text, which refers to the various elements contained in the game, such as game rules, plot, character dialogues, etc., which are formed between the "game designer" and the "player", and are the main elements constituting the game. They are formed between the "game designer" and the "player", and are the basic components of the game world. The "game text" is formed between the "player" and the "viewer", and refers to the materials and information used to analyze and interpret the game. It can include images, sounds, and texts from the game, as well as social media comments and player discussions related to the game. Through the study of game texts, authors can gain insight into the meaning and impact of games.

4. The path of the Three Kingdoms' cultural utilization from the perspective of semiotics

The combination of games and traditional culture is not new, and the Three Kingdoms theme is a treasure trove for game developers: for example, Kill of the Three Kingdoms, Legend of the Three Kingdoms, and Three Kingdoms Strategy Edition are all excellent Three Kingdoms games. In these games, the Three Kingdoms elemental symbols interact with each other, presenting a strategic and competitive nature, expressing the complex themes of division and unification, power and loyalty, wisdom and courage in Chinese history. For example, in the Three Kingdoms card game Three Kingdoms Kill, players can take on the roles of various Three Kingdoms-era heroes, such as Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Sun Shangxiang, and fight against other players through card skills and strategies. The cards, soldiers, skills, and other elements in the game are all extensions of the symbols. Cards represent resources and strategies, troop types are symbols of power and combat, and skills are expressions of wisdom and tactics. Players use these symbols to build their strategies and influence

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the course and end of the game.

First of all, based on the semiotic theory, the "Three Kingdoms Cultural Elements" are classified into symbols, and the classical element symbols are extracted and analyzed for their meanings. Among them, pictorial symbols, indicative symbols, and symbolic symbols form the "visual elements", indicative symbols and symbolic symbols form the "auditory elements", and the narrative is constructed by combining the "visual elements" and "auditory elements" organically. Narrative construction is achieved by organically combining the "visual elements" and "auditory elements". Secondly, after determining the combination of symbols, the game production is centered on "play and interaction". Finally, in the above process, the "in-game text" is created between the "game designer" and the game, and the "game text" is formed between the "player and the viewer". The "game text" is created between the "game designer" and the game, and between the "player" and the "viewer". The "in-game text" and the "game text" illustrate the "plasticity, tangibility, and extensibility" of classic literature. (Figure 1)

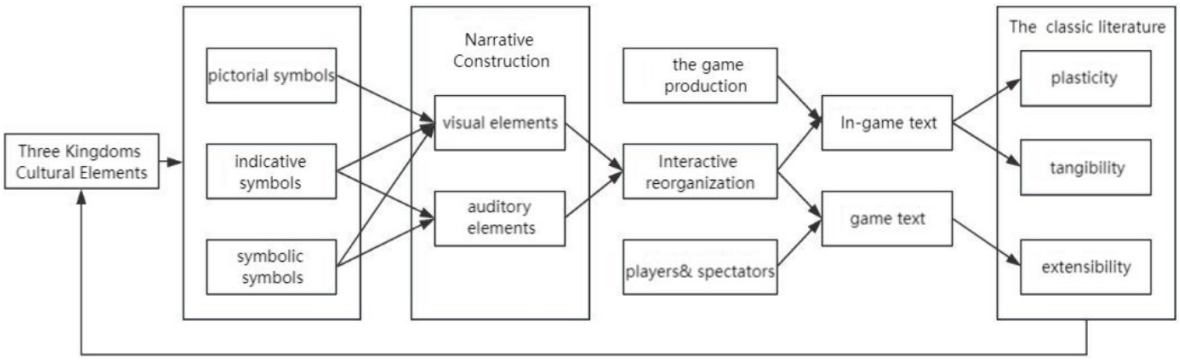


Figure 1 Innovation pathway

5. Design Practice

Lost in Books (hereinafter referred to as <Lost>) is a two-player action-strategy tower defense game that focuses on two protagonists who come from books to the real world and return to the original book world after many trials. In the process of searching for the way home, they accidentally fall into the books about the Red Cliff War and are forced to start a fierce battle.

5.1 Extraction and categorization of the symbols of the Three Kingdoms cultural elements

Based on Peirce's classification of symbols from icon, index, and symbol, the authors have organized the three cultural elements needed in the game.

The first is the image symbol, which can directly express the symbols of the appearance characteristics of the represented object. From the perspective of character design, there are many famous historical figures in the Three Kingdoms period, such as Guan Yu, Zhuge Liang, Cao Cao, and so on, whose deeds and stories occupy an important position in Chinese history and have deeply influenced Chinese culture. The images of these figures are generally known to the public through movies and TV dramas. For example, when mentioning the green brocade war robe, people will think of it as the iconic dress of the military general Guan Yu, and then associate it with the date-red face, Danfeng eyes, and his title of "Bearded Lord". And mention Zhuge Liang must be head wearing a spandex scarf, holding a feather fan, and wearing a crane my classic image. So

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in the game, to let players directly into the game character is in the Three Kingdoms time and space, the author according to Zhu Geliang's crown and hat and Guan Yu's beard two elements, for the game the two characters were designed for the two crown and hat styles of crowns and buns, and put on the beard. In terms of the enemy's attack method, the author has skillfully applied the tactics of the time. For example, a scarecrow is placed on the design of the enemy ship. If the player hits the enemy ship, the scarecrow will have arrows inserted into its body, and the enemy ship will make a counterattack on the player before it is defeated, thus presenting a straw boat with arrows. From the perspective of scenario design, the Battle of Red Cliff in the Three Kingdoms was the first large-scale river battle in the Yangtze River Basin in ancient Chinese history, which is often used as the plot and background of the game, in which elements such as the river, fire attack, and deployment of troops allow players to deeply experience the cruelty and wisdom of the ancient military battles. The author transforms the elements of the river directly into the enemy's attack field, surrounded by reeds, mountains, waves, and other natural sceneries, as well as city walls, ships, burning flames, and other elements in line with the ancient wars for articulation, palace-style buildings, wall structures and other architectural features showing the era of the Three Kingdoms, are interspersed with them, which can visually allow players to substitutes for the scenario.

The second is the indicative sign, which refers to a sign that can be linked to the represented object through some kind of causal relationship. For example, the author uses the sound of war drums in the background music as an indicator sign of enemy attack. In the preparation stage of the battle, the player needs to buy ammunition, and as soon as the war drums sound in the background music, the player learns that the enemy is going to start attacking. In general, the flags, totems, or military flags of different forces can be used as indicator symbols for the enemy in the game, so that the player can recognize the cultural characteristics and positional differences of each force.

Lastly, there is the symbol, which is a sign that represents a certain concept or object by convention, and its representation is jointly formed by society and culture. In the game, the crowns and hats of the two protagonists are worn by people with status in ancient times, symbolizing power and wisdom. The huge ships in the background of the scene imply that the battle is taking place in a river, with a large number of warships lined up on the water and flags flying from their bows, showing the confrontation between the two camps of Cao Cao and the Sun-Liu allied forces. During the breaks in the level, the author designed special effects of flames flying out of sparklers, and the entire battlefield is set off by red flames, reminding players of the various fire attack schemes during the Three Kingdoms period and symbolizing the intensity and grandeur of the Battle of Red Cliff. In addition, the background music is associated with the player's battle situation. For example, when the enemy is approaching our territory, the background music may become tense and intense, showing a tense and hostile atmosphere; while when the enemy is being suppressed by us, relatively mild music clips will be played. This combination of music and context allows the player to be better immersed through auditory elements.

5.2 Narrative construction of game themes

The main scene of Lost is set on the desk, different book worlds are different levels, and entering different book worlds will lead to different encounters. With the Battle of Red Cliff as the historical background, the levels incorporate elements such as the iron rope connecting the boats, the burning of Red Cliff, and the straw boat lending arrows, etc., which are rich and interesting forms for players to understand the art of war and

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wisdom of ancient Chinese wars. Players need to prepare the ammunition, maneuver the cannon, to defeat the enemy to win the victory, leaving the strange world of books, the two protagonists need to work together, and finally find their books, their own home.

In terms of visual elements, the author uses the elements of the three-dimensional book as the interface UI and scene display of the game, which brings a unique game experience to the players, and the combination of the three-dimensional and two-dimensional scene rendering effect makes the players realize that they are in the world of the book in the process of the game, which enhances the players' curiosity and desire to explore the game. The battlefield and surrounding buildings are built with 3D models, while the protagonist, enemies, enemy ships, props, and the background including mountains, sun, reeds, clouds, etc. are built with 2D surfaces, and the program makes the effect of front and back light and shadow blocking. In the game battle, to facilitate the player to see the enemy, the author sets the camera into a top-down perspective. (Figure 2)

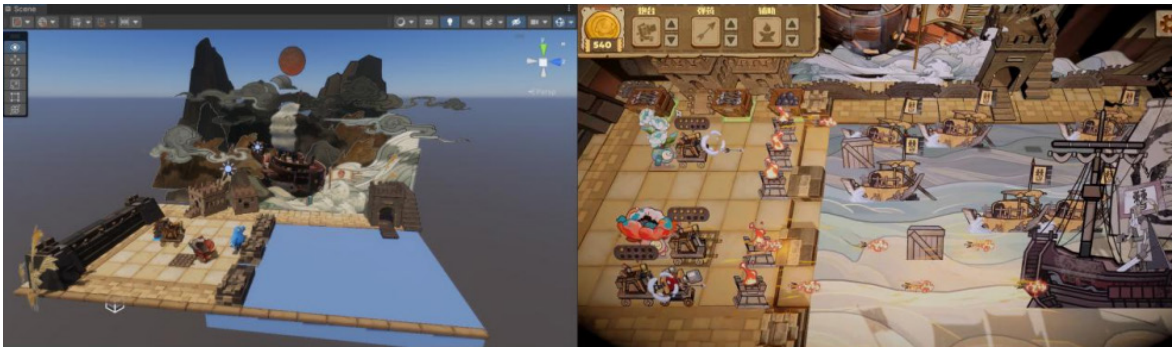


Figure 2 The unity scene display (left) and the game real field scene (right)

For the auditory elements, the author has adopted a classical, war-like soundtrack to create an epic atmosphere through grand drum beats and stirring battle songs, guiding players into the emotions of the game world. Sound effects also play a key role in the narrative. The sound of the air when a turret is fired, the sound of explosions when ammunition hits, and the sound of the protagonist swinging his fists and striking all enhance the player's sense of immersion, allowing the player to better experience the intensity and cruelty of the battlefield. At the same time, a variety of environmental sound effects will also add a sense of realism to the game world, such as the sound of the fire burning fiercely, the sound of the flag dancing, etc., all of which can enrich the background details of the game and enhance the experience of the game. Auditory elements through the use of music and sound effects can provide a rich emotional experience and audio-visual feast for the game's narrative construction, making it easier for players to immerse themselves in the game and enjoy the emotional impact and pleasurable experience brought by the game.

The organic combination of visual and auditory elements constitutes the narrative theme of the game, and the game designers can let players better understand and feel the history and culture of the Three Kingdoms period, and at the same time, enhance the playability and fun of the game.

5.3 Play and Interaction Symbol Reorganization

Games are composed of "symbols", and symbols in games are combined into "symbol combinations" through a system of rules. The game medium has been the subject of scholarly attention, and "Honor of the King" is one of the most discussed by scholars. Scholar Xiang Lei's point of view is more pertinent, and he believes that "this is the basic grammar of game creation and the nihilism of history" [6]. However, since the

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core mechanism of the product is user-user competition, the classic textual "symbols" can only appear in such aspects as the introduction of the character selection interface and the character's voice, and the textual fragmentation is strong. The core gameplay is centered around a combination of On the other hand, around the core gameplay, various symbolic elements such as images, sounds, words, actions, etc. are combined together to form a meaningful system, which can effectively avoid the fragmentation of expression. These symbols can represent specific meanings or messages and convey them to players through interaction and interpretation. Different types of games use different combinations of symbols to create their own unique game experiences. For example, role-playing games build rich virtual worlds through character images, dialogues, and plot lines; puzzle games stimulate the player's thinking ability through symbolic elements such as images, numbers, and logical reasoning. Symbolic combinations can also be created and altered by the players themselves, such as in sandbox games, where players can use a variety of gadgets and models to build their own scenarios and stories.

As a two-player action strategy tower defense game, Lost has consciously delved into the computer layer to create the possibility of "national style" gameplay. The author hopes to not only form a figurative narrative through audio-visual elements so that players can take in the meaning of the Three Kingdoms culture in the traditional "reading" way but also to let players actively and positively acquire knowledge in the process of interacting with the game, which involves the ideological mechanism of the computer layer in the deeper level.

The enemies in the game are enemy ships, enemy soldiers, and sailors from Cao's camp. Each type of enemy ship has unique characteristics, such as grass ships walking fast, iron rope boat ships quickly breaking down barriers, fire ships that are fast but can disappear every once in a while, grain ships can drop gold coins after hitting them, and giant ships can randomly release fire ships. According to the allusion to the straw boat borrowing arrows, the author of the game uses the straw boat borrowing arrows to the straw boat of Cao's army, if the player hits the enemy boat, then the scarecrow in the bow of the boat will have arrows inserted into its body, and this enemy boat will make a counterattack to the player before it is completely defeated. In the game, the author set up a beacon, after the wooden arrows are fired and pass through the beacon, they will produce wooden arrows with fire, causing more damage, which is a great restraint for the enemy ship with iron ropes. This design not only tells the historical tales of the straw boat and the iron rope boat in the image and narrative but also interprets the language logic at the computer level.

In terms of the game's level design, Lost utilizes a strategy of gradually increasing difficulty so that players will have to face more complex terrains and scenarios in later levels. In order to be able to cope with these challenges, players need to constantly improve their skills and strategies, utilizing skills such as throwing ammo and picking up ammo in conjunction with each other to complete the loading and attacking of the turrets. In this way, players will be able to gradually reach the peak of the game and experience a more exciting and interesting gaming experience. (Figure 3)

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Figure 3 Conceptual diagram of the scenario

5.4 Symbol Interpretation

From the perspective of semiotics, the symbols of the Three Kingdoms' cultural elements extracted from Lost are designed by the author to form the basic content of the game, which is the so-called "in-game text". These internal symbols and information play an important role in the game, determining the overall experience and gameplay. By interacting with the in-game text, players think about and interpret the meaning contained therein, thus participating in the game, developing game strategies, and accomplishing game goals. "Game texts are written, verbal, or symbolic messages that result from the unique game processes and interactions that players experience in a game, and they vary from player to player. This is because each player's in-game decisions, behaviors, and choices affect the plot development, mission changes, and game environment they face. Players may make different choices, interact with different characters, and explore different areas and scenarios, leading them to encounter different game texts such as dialogues, plot lines, and prop introductions. For example, in a role-playing game, different players may choose different character professions, and character skins, take different paths of action, and engage in dialog with different NPCs (non-player characters). These different choices and behaviors will lead to the generation of different game texts, and each player has his or her own game story and experience. Therefore, the generation of "game text" is different according to each player's individual game choices and interactive behaviors, which allows each player to create a unique story and experience in the game.

During the production of the game Lost, the authors carefully analyzed the selected classic literary work Romance of the Three Kingdoms, extracting key scenes, symbols, dialogues, and emotional elements as the core material for the game design. Together, the team members designed the core mechanics of the game, considering how to enable players to participate and interact, and how to better present the essence of the classic literary work. Through in-game dialogues, choices, and decisions, the storyline of the classic literature is reconstructed in a way that enables players to participate and influence its development.

From the perspective of the hermeneutics of literary ontology and accepted theory, the construction of literary classics is actually a historical process of continuous re-interpretation. The construction of literary classics is actually a historical process of continuous re-interpretation. Classical literature often has "plasticity, sensibility and extensibility", and has "the historicity of being continuously accepted by readers in

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different societies and different historical periods". The so-called "classic" only exists and has value when it is accepted.0 online games precisely provide a new form and medium for the dissemination and development of classic literature, allowing players to experience and explore the connotation and value through interactive ways.

6. Conclusion

Through the medium of games, the elements of the Three Kingdoms can allow players to deeply experience the culture and values of the Three Kingdoms period. Examining the game from a semiotic perspective can reveal the rich layers and cultural connotations embedded in it, giving new life to traditional culture in the field of modern entertainment. The game provides an opportunity for players to interact with the history of the Three Kingdoms, allowing people to better understand this important historical period. Using games as a career can not only bring excitement and fun to players but also better attract the attention of young people and foreigners, thus promoting the inheritance and promotion of traditional culture and showing the world the charm and heritage of Chinese culture.

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