

Research on the Skin of "Honor of Kings" from the Symbolic Interactionism Perspective: The Case Analysis of Diaochan's "Yu Jian Hu Xuan"

Leqiu Jiang

Sanda University, Shanghai, China

Abstract. Under the background of rapid development of digital culture, game skins have changed from mere virtual decorations to symbolic carriers carrying rich cultural connotations. In this paper, we take Diaochan's "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin in "Honor of Kings" as the research object, and analyse how the game skin promotes the players' identity construction of Dunhuang culture through the symbol construction, coding strategy and players' interaction practice based on the theory of symbolic interaction. The study shows that the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin stimulates players' cultural perception and interest through the precise transformation and innovative coding of Dunhuang cultural elements; and the multiple interactive practices of players inside and outside the game contribute to the dynamic generation of symbolic meanings and the continuous reinforcement of cultural identity, which provides a new practical path and example for the modern dissemination of traditional culture. This provides a new practical path and example for the modern communication of traditional culture.

Keywords: Game skins, Symbol construction, encoding scheme

1. Introduction

Accompanied by the rapid progress of digital technology, the game industry has entered an unprecedented flourishing stage. As an important virtual commodity within the game, the function and significance of game skins have undergone an obvious transformation - from a mere visual decoration at the beginning to a symbolic carrier that carries cultural values. In this process, game skins have become a new type of medium connecting players with the cultural world, opening up new possibilities for cultural dissemination and inheritance. As a popular mobile game, the collaboration between Honor of Kings and Dunhuang Culture is of great cultural significance. Dunhuang culture, as an important part of traditional Chinese culture, contains rich historical, artistic and religious values. Through the cooperation with Honor of Kings, Dunhuang culture is presented to the public in a new digital way, which not only injects the game with deep cultural connotations, but also provides a new path for the inheritance and innovation of Dunhuang culture.

The core question of this study focuses on: how do game skins construct cultural identity through symbolic interaction? This paper mainly focuses on the Diaochan "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin in "Honor of Kings" as the core research object. The skin is one of the representative works jointly launched by Honor of Kings and Dunhuang culture, and its design integrates many Dunhuang cultural elements, which has a high cultural research value. The extended object of the study covers the players of the game "Honor of Kings" and the users of social media platforms who participate in the discussion of related topics. These players and users are the actual users and disseminators of the game skins, and their behaviours and feedbacks are of great significance in understanding how the game skins construct cultural identity.

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1. Symbolic interaction theory

According to George Herbert Mead, symbols are the basis of human interaction. In the process of social interaction, individuals use symbols to understand the intentions of others, express their own ideas, and give symbols a specific meaning. The meanings of symbols are not fixed, but are constantly generated and evolved in the interaction between individuals and others. For example, in a game, a

simple action symbol, such as a character's celebratory gesture, may have different meanings for different players - for the winner, it represents joy and pride, while for the loser, it may mean encouragement and respect.

Irving Goffman's theory of mimesis compares social interaction to a theatrical performance. In this theoretical perspective, individuals play different roles on the social stage, and symbols become an important tool for individuals to perform their roles. Through the careful selection and use of symbols, individuals show their identities and images to others, and construct a specific social identity. For example, in games, players choose different styles of skins, in fact, through symbols to show their own game style, cultural preferences and personality traits.

2.2. Participatory culture theory

Henry Jenkins' Participatory Culture Theory emphasises that contemporary cultural consumers are no longer satisfied with passive acceptance of cultural products, but actively participate in the production and dissemination of cultural content. In the field of games, players reinterpret and give new meanings to symbols through secondary creations of game skins, such as making homoerotic paintings, videos and novels. The results of these creations are disseminated through social media and other platforms, further expanding the influence of game culture and forming a diverse and rich cultural ecology.

2.3. Cultural identity theory

Cultural identity, in today's globalised society, is an individual's sense of belonging to and identification with a specific cultural group, which includes recognition and internalisation of the values, symbols, traditions and other aspects of the group's culture. It not only concerns how individuals view their relationship with the group, but also influences their behavioural patterns, value orientation and interaction with others.

For game skins, as an emerging carrier of cultural symbols, they can influence players' cultural identity in a unique way. First of all, the visual design and symbolic elements of game skins can intuitively show players the characteristics and charms of a specific culture. For example, the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin integrates elements of Dunhuang culture, such as the lotus pattern, pipa, and Hu Xuan's dance posture, so that players can feel the unique charm of Dunhuang culture during the game. Secondly, the interactive nature of the game allows players to interact with the cultural symbols in an active way. When using the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin, players can experience and feel the elements of Dunhuang culture through the release of skills, character control and other behaviours, thus deepening their understanding and recognition of Dunhuang culture. Finally, the communication and sharing of the game community also provides an important platform for the formation of cultural identity. Players share their opinions, experiences and creations of the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin in the game community, interacting and exchanging with other players to further strengthen their sense of identity with Dunhuang culture through collective discussions and creations.

2.4. Literature review

Through keyword searches of academic databases such as Zhi.com and Wanfang, this paper systematically combed through the existing research results in the field of game skins, and found that the current research mainly focuses on the economic value and aesthetic design of game skins. However, under the framework of symbolic interaction theory, there are only a few in-depth studies on the relationship between game skins and cultural identity, and there is an obvious research gap in this field. Although most of the existing studies have explored the market potential, visual effect, and technical realisation path of game skins, they have not yet conducted systematic and in-depth research on the deeper cultural significance of game skins as a carrier of cultural symbols and their role in cultural inheritance and dissemination. In particular, there is a lack of theoretical analyses and empirical studies on the key issue of how to influence players' cultural identity through symbolic interaction. This study aims to expand the application of symbolic interaction theory in the field of

digital culture. Introducing symbolic interaction theory into the study of game skin helps to deepen the understanding of the mechanisms of symbol production, dissemination and meaning construction in digital cultural products, and enriches the research connotation of symbolic interaction theory in the emerging cultural field. The results of the study provide practical references for the youthful dissemination of traditional cultural IPs. By analysing the successful case of "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin, it can provide a reference path and method for the fusion communication of other traditional culture and digital games, and help the inheritance and development of traditional culture in the digital era.

3. Research Methods

This study adopts a mixed research method, combining quantitative analysis and qualitative exploration to systematically explore how the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin in "Honor of Kings" constructs players' cultural identity through symbolic interaction. A variety of research methods are used, including the literature method, interview method and questionnaire survey method.

3.1. Literature survey method

Through searching the databases such as "Zhi.com" and "Wanfang", a large amount of literature on the theory of symbolic interaction, cultural communication and game skin design has been collected, which lays a solid theoretical foundation for the study.

3.2. Interview method

This study conducted interviews with 10 active players of Honor of Kings from April 19th to April 21st, 2025, with the aim of understanding their perception of the cultural elements contained in Diaochan's "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin, their cultural identity, and their interaction practices, and then exploring the cultural communication and identity mechanisms behind the influence of symbolic interaction. The interviews were conducted on the basis of their perceptions of the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin. The interviewees were divided into an owner group and a non-owner group based on their ownership of the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin, with five people in each group (see Table 1 for details). In the selection of interview subjects, age, game duration, professional background and other factors were taken into account, and a group of players covering forestry, electronic information engineering, marketing and other majors was finally identified.

Due to the dispersed distribution of players, all 10 players were interviewed online, and each interview lasted about 25 minutes. The interviews were based on the purpose of this paper and centred on the players' identification and perception of Dunhuang cultural elements in the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin, the path of cultural identity formation, the impact of interactive practices on cultural communication, and the construction of cultural resonance and collective memory. In the pre-interview, two players were randomly selected to communicate with each other, and the outline was adjusted according to the feedback. During the formal interviews, the outline was used as a guiding framework, while allowing for flexible adjustments based on the actual interviews, in order to explore the players' views and feelings in depth. In order to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the information in the interviews, audio recording devices were used to record the interviews with the consent of the interviewees. This design and preparation provided a solid foundation for the data collection and analysis of the study.

Table 1 List of interviewers

| Interviewee No. | Whether or not you have the skin of "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" | Age | Sexs | Specialized field | Length of gameplay |
|-----------------|---|-----|------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| P01 | Yes | 21 | F | Forestry | Over 10 years |
| P02 | Yes | 20 | M | Electronic Information Engineering | 9 year |

| | | | | | |
|-----|-----|----|---|--------------------------------|-------------|
| P03 | Yes | 21 | M | Marketing Urban Railway | 5 year |
| P04 | Yes | 22 | M | Operation Management | Over 5 year |
| P05 | Yes | 20 | F | Journalism Urban Railway | 4 year |
| P06 | No | 22 | M | Operation Management | Over 5 year |
| P07 | No | 20 | F | Financial Accounting | Over 5 year |
| P08 | No | 21 | F | Business German Information | Over 1 year |
| P09 | No | 21 | M | Security | 8 year |
| P10 | No | 21 | F | Fashion And Apparel Design | 2-3 year |

3.3. Questionnaire method

Based on the theoretical framework of symbolic interaction, a closed-ended questionnaire containing 29 questions was designed, covering the dimensions of player background information, cultural perception, symbolic interaction experience, cultural identity and behavioural influence. The questionnaire adopts a five-point Likert scale (1=completely disagree, 5=strongly agree), and 227 samples were collected through the online platform Questionnaire Star, with 152 valid questionnaires. To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, the following tests were conducted:

Reliability test: internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's α coefficient, the questionnaire contained 25 items, and the α value of the total questionnaire was 0.833 (N=152), indicating good reliability;

Table 2

| Sample Size | Number Of Projects | Cronbach. α Coefficient |
|-------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 152 | 25 | 0.833 |

Validity test: eight factors were extracted by exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a cumulative variance explained of 56.82%, a KMO value of 0.812, close to 1, and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity, which indicated that the data were suitable for factor analysis and that structural validity was achieved.

4. Research results

4.1. Results of questionnaire analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis shows that there are 227 respondents in the sample, players are mainly male, accounting for 57.71%, age is concentrated in 18 - 25 years old, accounting for 47.14%, and the game experience is longer, 41.85% of the players have been playing the game for more than 5 years. Players are more interested in Dunhuang culture or traditional culture as a whole, and generally believe that the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin is related to Dunhuang culture. Among them, the design elements such as the skycloth belt, pipa, and lotus flower pattern were more likely to remind players of Dunhuang culture, with the skycloth belt design having the most significant cultural association effect. In addition, the symbol design had a positive effect on players' interest in or identification with Dunhuang culture, but players' behavioural willingness to actively learn about Dunhuang culture was relatively low. However, skins had a stimulating effect on players' interest in

exploring Dunhuang culture in depth, although their effect on enhancing cultural identity in in-game interactions was more general.

In the correlation analysis, there is a significant positive relationship between cultural perception, symbolic interaction and cultural identity. The correlation coefficient between cultural perception and cultural identity is 0.610 ($p < 0.01$), and the correlation coefficient between symbolic interaction and cultural identity is 0.640 ($p < 0.01$), which suggests that the stronger the players' perception of the cultural elements of the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin is in the game, the higher the players' sense of cultural identity is. Meanwhile, the correlation coefficient between symbolic interaction and cultural perception is 0.489 ($p < 0.01$), which indicates that symbolic interaction in skin design (such as visual elements, action design, etc.) is able to effectively convey cultural connotations, and thus enhance players' cultural perception. This result provides empirical support for the theory of symbolic interaction, indicating that game skins are not only visual decorations, but also carriers of cultural symbols.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis

| | Cultural Awareness | Symbolic Interaction | Cultural Identity |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Cultural Awareness | 1 | | |
| Symbolic Interaction | 0.489** | 1 | |
| Cultural Identity | 0.610** | 0.640** | 1 |

Notes: *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$, ***, $p < 0.001$

The regression analysis further verified the direct effect of cultural perception on cultural identity. The model results show that the regression coefficient of cultural perception on cultural identity is 0.28 (Beta=0.61, $p < 0.001$), and the adjusted R-square is 0.368, indicating that cultural perception can explain 36.8% of the variance in cultural identity. This result suggests that the deeper players perceive the Dunhuang cultural elements in the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin, the stronger their identification with this culture. Dunhuang culture is perceived and internalised by players through the symbols in the skin design (e.g. costumes, dance movements, etc.), thus forming a cultural identity. This reflects the core idea of "symbols convey meaning" in the theory of symbolic interaction.

Table 4 Regression Analysis Between Cultural Perception And Cultural Identity

| Implicit Variable | Independent variable | Model Coefficients And Tests | | | | Model Parameter | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|------|-------|--------|-----------------|-------------------|--------|--------|
| | | B | Beta | P | R | R-square | Adjusted R-square | F | P |
| | (Constant) | 1.278 | | 0.000 | 0.610a | 0.372 | 0.368 | 88.917 | 0.000b |
| Cultural Identity | Cultural Awareness | 0.28 | 0.61 | 0.000 | | | | | |

The mediation effect test revealed the mediating role of symbolic interaction between cultural perception and cultural identity. The total effect was 0.2797 ($p < 0.001$), with a direct effect of 0.1789 ($p < 0.001$) and an indirect effect of 0.1008 (95% confidence interval [0.0586, 0.1485]), indicating that symbolic interactions partially mediated the effect of cultural perception on cultural identity. This result suggests that the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin not only affects players' cultural identity through direct cultural perception, but also indirectly strengthens this process through symbolic interactions (e.g., players' experiences when interacting with the skin). Symbolic interaction as a mediating variable further highlights the applicability of symbolic interaction theory in the study of game skins, i.e., players construct cultural meanings through symbolic interaction.

Table 5 Mediation Effect Test Result

| Test Path | Type Of Effect | Effect Value | Standard Error | Lower Limit Of 95% Confidence Interval | Upper Limit Of 95% Confidence Interval | P-Value |
|---|-----------------|--------------|----------------|--|--|---------|
| Cultural Awareness → Symbolic Interaction → Cultural Identity | Aggregate | 0.2797 | 0.0297 | 0.2211 | 0.3383 | 0.000 |
| | Direct Effect | 0.1789 | 0.0297 | 0.1203 | 0.2376 | 0.000 |
| | Indirect Effect | 0.1008 | 0.0226 | 0.0586 | 0.1485 | |

4.2. Interview analysis results

There were 10 interviewees, mainly aged between 20 and 22, with a wide range of game lengths and professional backgrounds. The results of the interviews show that players in the owner group are experienced in the game, pay high attention to the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin, can accurately identify the Dunhuang elements in the skin, and believe that its visual effect is excellent, its voice lines are distinctive, and their knowledge of Dunhuang culture has increased before and after using it, which stimulates their interest in Dunhuang culture and encourages them to actively understand and explore Dunhuang culture. They also felt that their knowledge of Dunhuang culture increased before and after use, stimulating their interest in Dunhuang culture and encouraging them to take the initiative to understand and explore Dunhuang culture. Players in the non-owner group also have rich gaming experience, and have a certain understanding and aesthetic standard of in-game elements and skins, and are able to evaluate and compare the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin from different perspectives, and some of the players also noticed the Dunhuang elements in the skin, and rated the visual effect of the skin highly.

In terms of cultural identity and interaction, many owners have a strong interest in Dunhuang culture because of the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin, and take the initiative to learn about Dunhuang culture through a variety of channels, while secondary content on social media enriches their understanding of the skin's cultural significance, which further strengthens their identity with Dunhuang culture. Some of the non-owners are also interested in Dunhuang culture because of the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin, and the secondary content they see on social media influences their views on Dunhuang culture or "Honor of Kings", recognising that the game can be a vehicle for cultural communication. In terms of interactive practice, owners actively displayed the special effects and movements of the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin in the game, and some players participated in "Yu Jian Hu Xuan"-related creative activities to actively spread Dunhuang culture. Although non-owners did not actually use the skin for in-game interaction, they paid attention to "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" related discussions and content through social media channels, indirectly participating in cultural dissemination. In terms of cultural resonance and collective memory, many owners said that they felt a cultural sentiment and collective memory when using the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin, while non-owners were relatively weak in terms of cultural resonance and collective memory, but they recognised the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin's role in connecting players with traditional culture. However, they recognised the potential value of "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin in connecting players with traditional culture.

In summary, all three hypotheses were well tested. The "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin stimulates players' cultural identity through the integration of traditional cultural symbols and digital interactive design, and players' interactive practices play a key role in the dynamic generation of cultural identity. The theory of symbolic interaction can effectively explain the mechanism of negotiating and reconstructing symbolic meanings in virtual scenes.

5. Discussion

As a carrier of Dunhuang cultural symbols and digital interaction, the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin has a meaning that goes beyond the surface. Most players, regardless of whether they own the skin or not, can identify Dunhuang cultural elements such as the lotus pattern, lute, and the heavenly garments, and recognise their unique cultural aesthetics. This fully demonstrates that the game designers have successfully integrated traditional cultural symbols into the digital design, enabling players to perceive Dunhuang's cultural charm through the medium of the skin. This cultural transmission not only relies on visual presentation, but also deepens players' knowledge and understanding of Dunhuang culture by virtue of the cultural connotation and historical significance behind the symbols.

The interactive practice of players is a key path to the dynamic generation of cultural identity. Players who own skins take the initiative to display special effects and movements in the game, and perform cultural exhibitions through kill effects and special movements to convey Dunhuang's cultural elements and values to other players. Some players also participate in video production, painting and other secondary creative activities, enriching the skin's cultural connotation and expanding cultural dissemination channels. Players who don't own skins pay attention to related discussions through social media, indirectly participating in cultural dissemination and exchange. These interactive practices break the virtual boundaries of the game and form a diversified and active cultural communication network in the real scene.

In terms of the principle of symbolic interaction, the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin triggers players to negotiate and reconstruct symbolic meanings. Owners become interested in Dunhuang culture and take the initiative to learn about it in the process of using the skin, which transforms the cultural meaning of the skin from a virtual symbolic carrier to a part of the actual cultural cognition. The differentiated interpretation of the skin by different groups of players reflects the plurality and dynamism of symbolic meaning. Some players felt "cultural sentiment" and "collective memory" in the game, indicating that the symbolic interaction is not only limited to individual cognitive and emotional experience, but also extends to cultural resonance and identity at the group level, which strengthens the players' sense of belonging to Dunhuang culture and the game community. This strengthens the players' sense of belonging to Dunhuang culture and the game community.

However, the study also found that there is still room for improvement in players' willingness to actively learn about Dunhuang culture. Although the skins stimulated some players' interest in exploration, there were shortcomings in behavioural transformation, which may be related to the insufficient depth of in-game cultural dissemination and the lack of systematic guidance and incentive mechanisms. In addition, players who do not own skins have a relatively weak experience of cultural resonance and collective memory, and may find it difficult to deeply feel the cultural significance and emotional value carried by skins due to the lack of direct in-game interaction.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we took the "Honor of Kings" Diaochan "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin as an object and explored the mechanism of constructing cultural identity through symbolic interaction in game skins. It is found that the skin not only stimulates players' interest in Dunhuang culture and their willingness to actively explore in the transmission and reconstruction of cultural symbols, but also plays a key role in the formation and strengthening of cultural identity through players' interactive practices. The success of the "Yu Jian Hu Xuan" skin shows that game skins are not only virtual commodities, but also "digital containers" of cultural symbols. When traditional cultural elements are deeply integrated with players' interactive behaviours and social practices, symbols go beyond visual representations and become the key to activate cultural identity. This provides an empirical path for "telling China's story through games": focusing on the interactivity and productivity of symbols, allowing players to complete the identity change from "cultural bystanders" to "cultural co-creators" in the interaction. This study contributes to the understanding of the role of game skins in culture. This study provides new perspectives for understanding the role of game skin in cultural communication

and cultural identity construction, and also provides useful references for the deep integration and innovative development of games and traditional culture in the future.

The limitation of the study is the lack of sample diversity, which mainly focuses on college players and has limited geographical scope. This may affect the generalisability of the results, making it difficult to fully represent all player groups. In the future, we can expand the sample to compare the differences in perception and identity of players from different regions, ages and cultural backgrounds, so as to reveal more comprehensively the role of game skins in cultural communication. At the same time, it is necessary to further explore the mechanism of cross-cultural communication to understand the spread and acceptance of game skins as cultural symbols globally, so as to provide more targeted strategies for the international dissemination of traditional culture. In addition, the study has not sufficiently explored the players' willingness to actively learn about Dunhuang culture, and future research can further analyse how to effectively enhance the players' interest in and exploration of traditional culture through game design and cultural communication strategies, so as to enhance the effect and influence of cultural communication.

References

- [1] Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. University of California Press.
- [2] Chen Heng. (2023). Strategies for the Promotion of National Trend Brands in the New Media Environment. <https://m.gmw.cn/baijia/2023-01/12/36298639.html>
- [3] Consalvo, M. (2007). *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*. MIT Press.
- [4] Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2009). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*. McGraw-Hill.
- [5] Gee, J. P. (2007). *Good Video Games + Good Learning: Collected Essays on Video Games, Learning, and Literacy*. Peter Lang.
- [6] Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday.
- [7] Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. NYU Press.
- [8] King, G., & Krzywinska, T. (2006). *Screenplay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*. Wallflower Press.
- [9] Liu Wenjuan. (2021). *Emoticons in Interaction: Performance and Expression* (Master's Thesis, Inner Mongolia Normal University). <https://link.cnki.net/doi/10.27230/d.cnki.gnmsu.2021.000701>
doi:10.27230/d.cnki.gnmsu.2021.000701.
- [10] Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, Self, and Society*. University of Chicago Press.
- [11] Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- [12] Wang Meitong & Li Wei. (2023). Semiotic Interpretation and Cultural Inheritance of Patterns in Dunhuang Murals. *Ceramic Science and Art*, 57(11), 90-91. doi:10.13212/j.cnki.csa.2023.11.113.