

# Role-playing for Good: Designing Transformative Jubensha

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## Keywords

Jubensha, Transformative Game, Game Design

## INTRODUCTION

Jubensha, known as Chinese LARP, is one of the most important social ways for the young generation in Chinese society. It has become the biggest LARP business in the world. According to iiMedia Report, until 2021, it is a \$239.8 billion, 30,000+studios industry. Transformative role-playing uses immersive narratives and detailed character development to promote personal growth, empathy, and self-awareness (Bowman 2015; Bowman, Hugaas 2019; Bowman 2021). The concept of "bleed" allows emotions and experiences to transfer between player and character, enhancing emotional engagement. The "magic circle" creates a safe boundary for exploring different personas and social dynamics, while "alibi" reduces performance anxiety. This structured environment supports emotional resilience, communication skills, and transformative insights, making role-playing a powerful tool for personal and social development. In this study, we want to explore how to create transformative role-playing experience in Jubensha.

In our previous study (2023), we explored a popular branch of Jubensha known as emotional Jubensha, analyzing its format, player experiences, and transformative potential. We examined players' motivations, transformative experiences, and their perceptions of the game, as well as potential risks within the game process. In this study, we will build on the results of our previous research to further explore the transformative potential of Jubensha.

## METHODOLOGY

The whole procedure of this study is shown in Figure 1. The study consists of three parts. Initially, we conducted participatory observations and semi-structured interviews to understand emotional Jubensha and its players in China. Next, we plan to run two workshops with Chinese Jubensha designers to discuss how to design transformative Jubensha and to co-design an example. Finally, we will invite experts in areas such as social work and drama therapy to evaluate the example and obtain

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their perceptions of utilizing Jubensha for transformation and potential mental well-being interventions.

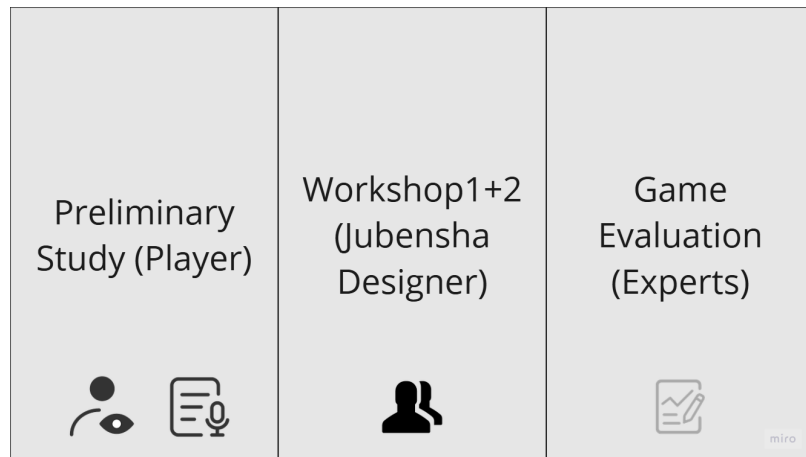


Fig1: The procedure of this study

### **PRELIMINARY STUDY**

We explored the player's community of emotional Jubensha in China through participatory observation and semi-structured interviews. Our participatory observation involved attending both offline and online Jubensha games to experience and observe players' interactions and emotional engagement. We also conducted semi-structured interviews with seven players, who had between two to five years of experience, to understand their motivations, emotional responses, and potential personal transformations. Our findings revealed that players are primarily motivated by curiosity, social interaction, and the desire for profound emotional experiences. Emotional Jubensha offers significant opportunities for emotional release and self-discovery through complex narratives and immersive role-playing. However, we also identified potential emotional risks.

### **FOLLOW-UP STUDY DESIGN**

We plan to run two workshops with Jubensha designers in China. In Workshop 1, we are going to introduce the topic of our study and our findings from preliminary study. Then we will showcase some transformative role-playing game (Stark et al. 2016). Based on the information we provide, designers are encouraged to discuss around three questions:

Q1. How to design a transformative Jubensha for Chinese players, what themes would you recommend and why?

Q2. What process to follow when designing transformative Jubensha?

Q3. How to keep the whole playing process safe?

From this discussion, we want to form a design guideline for transformative Jubensha design.

In Workshop 2, following guidelines we obtain from Workshop 1, the same group of designers will co-design a Jubensha example. Then, several experts will evaluate the example based on their professional background and provide feedback.

## **CONTRIBUTION**

In this study, we will collaborate with Jubensha designers to develop guidelines for designing transformative Jubensha. We will also discuss with experts in relevant fields how to apply it to the mental health domain. This will help players explore transformation through role-playing in a safe and supportive environment.

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