

# Cultural Communication Effects of Black Myth: Wukong

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**Abstract:** As China's first AAA game, Black Myth: Wukong has garnered widespread global attention since its release. Through a literature review, this study systematically examines the multifaceted effects of the game on cultural communication. The findings indicate that Black Myth: Wukong successfully achieves the modern transformation and international dissemination of traditional Chinese culture through symbol production and reconstruction, interactive communication mechanisms, and social identity and sharing. Leveraging advanced technologies such as Unreal Engine 5 and high-precision modeling, the game transforms traditional Chinese cultural symbols into interactive digital experiences, creating an immersive "digital cultural landscape." Additionally, through layered narratives and internationalized symbol strategies, the game balances the uniqueness of local culture with universal themes, effectively mitigating "cultural discount." Furthermore, the game expands the boundaries of cultural communication and fosters commercial feedback through a "gaming + cultural tourism" model and cross-industry collaborations. This study also explores controversies surrounding the unidirectional nature of cultural output, reliance on classic intellectual properties (IPs), and the balance between commercialization and cultural integrity, proposing future research directions, including the impact on non-gamer audiences, technology-driven cultural communication mechanisms, and pathways for original IP development.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

As the first Chinese developed AAA game in China, Black Myth: Wukong has, since the release of its 2020 trailer, emerged as a phenomenal topic in global gaming and cultural spheres due to its exquisite visual presentation, profound narrative core, and innovative reinterpretation of Journey to the West culture. The game not only captivates global players with its surreal Eastern aesthetics and action-based gameplay—evidenced by over ten million views of its debut trailer on YouTube and sustained discussions on domestic and international social media—but also reconstructs traditional mythological symbols (e.g., "Lady White Bone" and "Seventy-two Transformations") to deeply integrate the philosophical essence of Chinese classical literature with contemporary digital art, forming a cross-media, cross-cultural communication paradigm. Its influence extends beyond gaming into fields such as film, animation, and academia, serving as a quintessential case for exploring the modern transformation and international dissemination of traditional culture.

The research value of this topic lies in its multidimensional breakthrough significance. First, amidst intensifying global cultural industry competition, Black Myth: Wukong, as China's first AAA game with international appeal, marks a shift from "following" to "original output" for Chinese cultural products, offering new pathways for telling Chinese stories. Second, the game's digital recreation of classic IPs reveals the mechanisms of traditional culture's dissemination among younger audiences, such as fragmented narratives, immersive experiences, and visual spectacles. Additionally, controversies surrounding the game (e.g., boundaries of cultural symbol appropriation, risks of Orientalist reproduction) reflect the complexity of cultural communication in a globalized context, necessitating critical theoretical reflection. Therefore, systematically analyzing Black Myth: Wukong's cultural communication effects holds significance not only for case studies in the gaming industry but also for understanding the creative transformation of traditional culture in the digital era. Prior studies provided the perspective for this paper to analyze Black Myth: Wukong's cultural communication

effects (He & Li, 2024; Li, 2024a; Li, 2024b; Li & Zhou, 2024).

This study aims to achieve the following objectives through a literature review: (1) synthesize existing research on the cultural communication pathways of Black Myth: Wukong, including symbol production and reconstruction, interactive communication mechanisms, and social identity and sharing; (2) clarify key academic controversies surrounding this case, such as the unidirectional nature of cultural output, overreliance on classic IPs, and the balance between commercialization and culture; (3) identify gaps in current research (e.g., the impact on non-gamer audiences, technology-driven cultural communication mechanisms) and propose future research directions. Through this review, the study seeks to provide a theoretical framework for the digital dissemination of traditional culture and strategic insights for the international practice of Chinese cultural products.

## 2 CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PATHWAYS

### 2.1 Symbol Production and Reconstruction

Black Myth: Wukong excels in symbol production and reconstruction, successfully transforming traditional Chinese cultural symbols into modern digital art forms through character design, scene construction, and musical narrative. This transformation preserves the essence of traditional culture while endowing it with new vitality through modern technological means, achieving widespread recognition and dissemination globally.

#### 2.1.1 Character Design

The character design in Black Myth: Wukong demonstrates ingenuity, deeply exploring and reconstructing the cultural connotations of the traditional character Sun Wukong through the triadic design of the "Destined One" through a tripartite transformation—demon, human, and Buddha. The "Destined One," the player-controlled character, retains traditional traits of Sun Wukong, such as wielding the Ruyi Jingu Bang and possessing the ability of seventy-two transformations, while incorporating modern philosophical reflections, such as perspectives on fate and the spirit of free resistance.

This design strategy preserves the cultural essence of the traditional character while endowing it with contemporary significance, aligning with the visual preferences and narrative expectations (Li & Gao, 2024; Li, 2024c). By reconstructing cultural symbols through modern philosophical reflections, Black Myth: Wukong enhances its cultural communication impact.

Specifically, the "Destined One" undergoes a transformation from "demon" to "human" to "Buddha" within the game, a process that not only mirrors Sun Wukong's growth trajectory but also deeply engages players' emotional identification and gaming experience. The character wears a Nuo mask and a Baixi costume blending ancient and modern elements, showcasing Eastern traditional aesthetics while embodying contemporary design principles. This design enhances the character's distinctiveness and conveys rich cultural connotations through detailed costume and mask treatments (Ying & Li, 2025).

Moreover, other character designs incorporate traditional Chinese cultural elements. For instance, the reimagining of classic characters such as Black Bear Spirit and Elder Jinchi allows players to experience the charm of Journey to the West while enhancing immersion and interactivity through refined character modeling and motion design. These designs not only recreate traditional symbols but also inherit and promote the spirit of traditional culture (Li & Gao, 2024).

#### 2.1.2 Scene Construction

The scene construction in Black Myth: Wukong is equally remarkable, utilizing Unreal Engine 5 technology to scan Chinese ancient architecture, such as the Yuhuang Temple in Shanxi, and integrating cultural imagery like Taoist constellations and Buddhist lotuses to create an immersive aesthetic space embodying the concept of harmony between heaven and human. The cosmology of traditional Chinese culture centers on principles such as harmony between heaven and human, yin-yang interactions, the five-element theory, and cosmogenesis. These foundational concepts emphasize a tripartite ethical framework encompassing moral cultivation, hierarchical structure, and harmonious order, ultimately promoting balanced coordination between humanity and nature, interpersonal relations, and societal governance. This scene construction enhances the game's visual impact while conveying the cosmological and order principles of traditional

Chinese culture through virtual environments (Li & Gao, 2024; Ying & Li, 2025).

Players can experience meticulously recreated elements, from Chiwen roof decorations to the five-ridge-six-beast architectural motifs, and from the ruins of ancient temples to grandiose palace structures. These scenes pay homage to Chinese traditional architectural art while stimulating players' cultural identification and emotional resonance. For example, in the temple-front constellation sculpture scene, players can appreciate the sophisticated sculptural techniques of ancient China while gaining deeper insights into the connotations and symbolic significance of Taoist constellation culture through interactive elements (Ying & Li, 2025).

Additionally, the game's lighting effects and physics simulation technologies enhance scene construction. Through precise light rendering and dynamic physics simulation, the scenes achieve a high degree of realism, conveying rich emotional and cultural connotations through enhanced visual effects. For instance, in the "Xuankong Temple" scene, ray-tracing technology creates photorealistic lighting effects, highlighting the texture of wooden structures and the intricacy of flying beams, showcasing the wisdom of ancient Chinese architectural mechanics. Physics simulation ensures realistic prop interactions, fostering an immersive experience. Together, these elements convey the charm of traditional Chinese architectural culture (Li & Gao, 2025).

### 2.1.3 Musical Narrative

The musical narrative in Black Myth: Wukong exhibits a high level of artistic achievement. By adapting traditional music (e.g., Xungong Xunyun) and incorporating elements such as the yangqin and throat singing, the game conveys the philosophical core of Eastern culture through auditory symbols. These musical compositions provide beautiful background soundscapes while enhancing players' understanding and resonance with cultural connotations through specific melodies and rhythms (Li, 2024c; Ying & Li, 2025).

The classic melody of Xungong Xunyun is revitalized through modern electronic music rearrangement and production, preserving its original melody and rhythm while integrating new musical elements to showcase the unique charm of Eastern music. Other soundtracks incorporate traditional Chinese musical elements, such as the guzheng and erhu, adding a rich cultural atmosphere and emotional depth to the game (Li, 2024c).

Music serves not only as background sound but also guides players toward a deeper understanding of the game's cultural connotations and philosophical reflections through tailored melodies and rhythms. For example, at key narrative junctures, music enhances emotional shifts and narrative progression, allowing players to experience characters' emotional changes and story pacing more profoundly. This musical narrative approach elevates the game's artistic expression while strengthening players' cultural understanding and resonance through auditory symbols (Ying & Li, 2025).

## 2.2 Interactive Communication Mechanisms

Black Myth: Wukong constructs multilayered, multidimensional interactive communication mechanisms through in-game interactions, virtual community co-construction, and cross-industry collaborations. These mechanisms enhance the game's entertainment and challenge while deepening players' understanding and identification with cultural connotations through active participation.

### 2.2.1 In-Game Interactions

Through interactive elements such as combat, puzzle-solving, and open-ended narratives, Black Myth: Wukong enables players to actively participate in the reproduction of cultural meanings. These mechanisms enhance the game's entertainment and challenge while deepening players' understanding and identification with cultural connotations through active engagement (Li, 2024; Yang & Yao, 2025)).

Players advance the storyline through combat and puzzle-solving, which test operational skills and intellectual abilities while guiding deeper exploration of traditional Chinese cultural connotations and values through cultural symbols and narrative elements. For instance, puzzle-solving segments require players to find clues and solve riddles to progress, blending high entertainment and challenge with cultural symbols and narrative guidance to immerse players in the unique charm of traditional Chinese culture (Liu, 2024).

Additionally, the open-ended narrative design offers rich interactive experiences, allowing players to influence the storyline and outcomes through choices. This design enhances replayability and enables players to explore philosophical content across different narrative paths, deepening their understanding and identification with cultural connotations (Yang & Yao, 2025).

## 2.2.2 Virtual Community Co-Construction

Through global players' sharing and interactions on platforms like Reddit and YouTube, *Black Myth: Wukong* fosters a cross-cultural dialogue space. This virtual community co-construction enhances player interactions and exchanges while expanding the game's cultural communication reach through secondary creations and sharing behaviors (Li, 2024c; Liu, 2024).

Players share gameplay insights and strategies on social platforms, providing valuable references for others while enriching the game's cultural connotations and narrative layers through personal perspectives and experiences. Secondary creations, such as pixel art and commentary videos on YouTube, showcase players' creativity and talent, broadening awareness of *Black Myth: Wukong* and promoting Chinese culture through cross-platform sharing (Li, 2024c).

Virtual community co-construction, powered by collective player wisdom and creativity, serves as a robust engine for cultural communication and content iteration. For example, during the game's early release, players actively shared feedback and suggestions on social platforms, contributing to gameplay optimization and cultural detail refinement. These contributions provided critical references for the development team while enabling deep cultural interactions between the game and players, aligning the game with players' cultural expectations and amplifying its reputation and cultural influence (Liu, 2024).

## 2.2.3 Cross-Industry Collaborations

Through collaborations with Shanxi Cultural Tourism to launch "pilgrimage check-in" activities and partnerships with brands like Luckin Coffee, *Black Myth: Wukong* expands the everyday penetration of cultural symbols. These cross-industry collaborations enhance the game's cultural influence while broadening its market and audience reach through partnerships with other sectors (Yang & Yao, 2025; Meng & Cui, 2024).

In collaboration with Shanxi Cultural Tourism, the game attracts significant tourist attention by recreating filming locations and promoting offline check-in activities. Tourists experience the unique charm of traditional Chinese culture in-game and gain deeper insights into Shanxi's historical culture and local customs through offline activities. This online-offline integrated communication approach enhances the game's cultural influence and expands its market and audience reach (Yang & Yao, 2025).

Additionally, cross-industry partnerships with brands like Luckin Coffee leverage the brand's high visibility in China to attract broader consumer attention through co-branded products and marketing campaigns. These products, characterized by high creativity and entertainment value, enhance the game's visibility and reputation through joint brand promotions (Meng & Cui, 2024). Such cross-industry collaborations strengthen the game's cultural influence while expanding its market and audience reach.

In summary, *Black Myth: Wukong* demonstrates exceptional artistic achievement and innovation in symbol production and reconstruction, as well as interactive communication mechanisms. Through character design, scene construction, and musical narrative, the game transforms traditional Chinese cultural symbols into modern digital art forms. Through in-game interactions, virtual community co-construction, and cross-industry collaborations, it establishes multilayered, multidimensional communication mechanisms. These innovative measures provide robust support for the game's widespread dissemination and profound impact while contributing significantly to the inheritance and promotion of outstanding traditional Chinese culture.

## 3 CORE CONTROVERSIES

### 3.1 Unidirectional Nature of Cultural Output

Some studies on *Black Myth: Wukong* implicitly adopt an optimistic narrative of "robust Chinese cultural output." The game's compelling presentation of traditional Chinese culture has garnered significant global attention and acclaim, drawing on *Journey to the West* and incorporating elements such as classical Chinese architecture, traditional music, and Confucian-Buddhist-Taoist philosophies, highlighting the allure and complexity of Chinese culture to global audiences. In terms of communication effects, the game achieved outstanding performance across multiple global platforms post-launch, as evidenced by overseas players demonstrating strong interest and related topics generating high engagement on international media and social platforms. Consequently, some studies view this as a successful case of Chinese cultural output, highlighting the influence of Chinese culture (Li, 2024c; Li & Gao, 2024; Liu, 2024).

However, this optimistic narrative may overlook the complexity of cultural power dynamics in a

globalized context. The Western stereotype of "Orientalism" poses a significant challenge. In Western cultural contexts, an Orientalist perspective has long framed Eastern cultures as mysterious, backward, or exotic "others," reflecting a biased cognitive framework (Yang & Yao, 2025; Ying & Li, 2025). While *Black Myth: Wukong* showcases the unique charm of Chinese culture, Western players may unconsciously be influenced by this stereotype, overemphasizing the game's fantastical elements as material satisfying their curiosity for exotic Eastern culture while overlooking the deeper connotations and values of Chinese culture.

This phenomenon suggests that Chinese culture remains structurally disadvantaged in the global hierarchy of cultural discourse, facing the latent influence of Western cultural power. Cultural communication should not focus solely on surface-level engagement and influence but also consider how to dismantle unequal cultural power dynamics, enabling Western players to genuinely understand and embrace the essence of Chinese culture and avoiding unidirectional, misinterpreted cultural output (Meng & Cui, 2024).

### 3.2 Overreliance on Classic IPs

Many studies on *Black Myth: Wukong* focus on the adaptation potential of the *Journey to the West* IP. As a masterpiece of Chinese classical literature, *Journey to the West* enjoys high recognition and rich cultural connotations, providing a culturally resonant and narratively rich foundation for the game's creation. By leveraging the story background and character imagery of *Journey to the West*, the game constructs a fantastical Eastern world, attracting a wide player base. Level designs and character portrayals closely align with *Journey to the West*, with the "Destined One" modeled after Sun Wukong and players encountering numerous demons from the original text, evoking memories and interest in the classic story (Li, 2024c; Li & Gao, 2024). From a cultural communication perspective, utilizing classic IPs rapidly captures audience attention, evokes cultural memories and emotional resonance, reduces communication barriers, and enhances dissemination effects (Li, 2024c; Yang & Yao, 2025).

However, this overreliance on classic IPs has sparked controversy, criticized as "nostalgic innovation." Overdependence on classic IPs may limit the pluralistic and original of cultural communication. On one hand, concentrating resources on classic IP adaptations may hinder exploration of original cultural IPs, which could

showcase more diverse cultural content and creativity, opening new domains and perspectives for cultural communication. On the other hand, creating original IPs is inherently challenging, requiring innovation, market insight, and the construction of expansive, logically coherent systems, compounded by intense cultural market competition and promotion difficulties. Balancing diverse cultural and contemporary characteristics further increases creation complexity, making original IP development scarce. Overreliance on classic IPs may constrain the development space for original IPs, impeding the cultivation of innovative and distinctive cultural products (Ying & Li, 2025).

Moreover, long-term reliance on classic IPs may lead to fixed thinking patterns and creative formulas. For example, adaptations of *Journey to the West* may remain confined to the original story framework and character settings, lacking new interpretations and innovative expressions of cultural connotations, failing to meet the increasingly diverse cultural demands of contemporary audiences. This not only affects the game's development but also risks trapping cultural communication in a singular paradigm, unable to fully showcase the richness and diversity of Chinese culture (Meng & Cui, 2024). Therefore, while leveraging classic IPs for cultural communication, emphasis should be placed on developing original cultural IPs to promote the diversification of cultural communication.

### 3.3 Balancing Commercialization and Culture

As a commercial game, *Black Myth: Wukong*'s profit-driven logic has sparked debates about balancing commercialization and cultural integrity. The game employs various profit strategies, with co-branded marketing being a prominent approach. Collaborations with Luckin Coffee and Shanxi Cultural Tourism have launched co-branded products and tourism activities (Yang & Yao, 2025; Ying & Li, 2025). From a commercial perspective, these collaborations have achieved significant success, enhancing the game's visibility and influence while generating substantial economic benefits. Luckin's "Tengyun Americano" became a popular offline product, and Shanxi's related scenic spots saw significant increases in tourism search interest and visitor numbers due to their association with the game's filming locations (Yang & Yao, 2025; Ying & Li, 2025).

However, some perspectives argue that such commercial activities may compromise the purity of

cultural expression. The primary goal of the game is cultural dissemination, and excessive commercialization risks reducing cultural expression to a tool for commercial profit. In co-branded marketing, cultural elements may be simplified or distorted to align with market and consumer demands. Some co-branded products may superficially apply game imagery or symbols to commodities without deeply exploring their cultural connotations, turning cultural elements into commercial gimmicks (Li & Gao, 2024; Liu, 2024). This may lead to consumer misunderstandings or misinterpretations of cultural elements, adversely affecting cultural communication outcomes.

Furthermore, the profit-driven nature of commercialization may prioritize short-term economic gains over the depth and quality of cultural content. If the game pursues commercial interests through continuous commercial activities without focusing on cultural connotation exploration and innovation, it risks losing its cultural soul, ultimately undermining its cultural communication effectiveness (Li, 2024c; Meng & Cui, 2024). Thus, finding a balance between commercialization and cultural expression—achieving commercial profitability while preserving cultural purity and depth—is a critical issue for game developers and researchers to address.

## 4 CONCLUSION

### 4.1 Key Research Findings

This study systematically analyzes the cultural communication effects of the Chinese AAA game *Black Myth: Wukong*, exploring how the game leverages technology empowerment, symbol reconstruction, cross-cultural communication strategies, and the synergy of economic and cultural effects to promote the modern transformation and international dissemination of outstanding traditional Chinese culture. The findings are summarized in three key aspects:

#### 4.1.1 Technology Empowerment and Symbol Reconstruction Drive Cultural Communication

*Black Myth: Wukong* utilizes advanced technologies such as Unreal Engine 5 to digitally reconstruct traditional Chinese cultural symbols, creating immersive cultural experiences. This technological application enhances visual expressiveness and

lowers cultural comprehension barriers, enabling traditional culture to reach global players in a vivid, intuitive manner. The game's symbol encoding and decoding processes facilitate cultural transmission, affirming the critical role of symbolic interaction theory in game-based cultural communication.

#### 4.1.2 Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies: Balancing Locality and Universality

The game employs "post-Journey to the West narratives" and spatial traversal practices, skillfully blending the uniqueness of local culture with universal themes. Through layered narratives and internationalized symbol designs, it constructs a cross-cultural dialogue space, effectively reducing cultural discount and enhancing players' emotional resonance and cultural identification, thereby broadening and deepening cultural communication.

#### 4.1.3 Effects

Through the "gaming + cultural tourism" model, cross-industry collaborations, and derivative product development, *Black Myth: Wukong* achieves commercial feedback and expands the boundaries of cultural communication. Its success not only highlights cultural value but also validates the role of commercial empowerment in promoting cultural dissemination, providing a practical model for cultural industry synergy.

These findings systematically reveal the multifaceted mechanisms of *Black Myth: Wukong* in cultural communication, offering theoretical references and practical pathways for the innovative dissemination of traditional culture.

### 4.2 Future Research Directions

Based on the current state and gaps in game cultural communication research, future studies can explore the following three key dimensions:

#### 4.2.1 Influence Mechanisms and Cultural Penetration Pathways for Non-Gamer Audiences

Existing research primarily focuses on gamers, necessitating systematic studies on non-gamer audiences (e.g., cultural scholars, general audiences). Key areas include (1) analyzing non-gamer audiences' acceptance mechanisms and evolving attitudes toward game cultural communication; (2) exploring how game-derived content (e.g., film, literature,

merchandise) influences public cultural cognition through cross-media narratives; (3) developing a "game-derived content-non-gamer audience" cultural influence model to elucidate its role in broader societal cultural development.

#### 4.2.2 Technology-Driven Cultural Communication Innovation Systems

With the iterative advancement of digital technologies, research should focus on: (1) how technologies like Unreal Engine 5 and AI Generated Content reshape digital expression paradigms for cultural symbols; (2) the immersive cultural experience scenarios created by VR/AR and the metaverse, and their communication effects; (3) the synergistic innovation mechanisms of "culture-technology-commerce" under technology empowerment, including the transformative impact of dynamic narratives and intelligent NPCs on cultural communication.

#### 4.2.3 Strategies for Building Original Cultural IP Ecosystems

Addressing the issue of classic IP reliance, research should explore: (1) incubation pathways and value assessment systems for original cultural IPs; (2) innovative expression paradigms for traditional cultural elements in modern gaming contexts; (3) developing a "content originality-technology support-industry synergy" IP ecosystem model, distilling replicable methodologies for original IP development through case studies.

These research directions will advance the theoretical framework of game cultural communication and provide systematic guidance for cultural industry practices. Future studies should integrate interdisciplinary approaches, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses to establish more rigorous cultural communication effect evaluation frameworks.

### 4.3 Research Significance

Through a systematic review and analysis of the multifaceted cultural communication effects of Black Myth: Wukong, this study enriches the research content of game cultural communication while providing theoretical references and practical pathways for the modern transformation and international dissemination of traditional culture. Additionally, the proposed future research directions offer valuable insights and references for researchers

in related fields, contributing to the deeper development of game cultural communication studies.

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