

From Black Myth: Wukong to Ne Zha 2: The Transformation of Chinese Culture from 'Product Manufacturing' to 'IP Export'

Qingzi Yu

Nanjing College of Communication, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 210000, China

ABSTRACT

This paper takes Black Myth—Wukong and Ne Zha 2 as entry points to deeply analyze the phenomenon, causes, and future development paths of the rise of Chinese cultural export. By examining their extensive international attention and dissemination, it expounds on the achievements, challenges, and strategies in content innovation and communication channel expansion under the promotion of China's cultural confidence policy, aiming to provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for the sustainable development of Chinese cultural export.

KEYWORDS

Spiritual Reflection; Soft power; IP export; Sustainable development

1 Achievements in cultural export

1.1 IP effect of black myth: Wukong

Cultural Connotation Mining: The game is based on the Chinese classical work Journey to the West, deeply exploring Chinese mythological legends, philosophical thoughts, and traditional cultural symbols. The reinterpretation of the "Wukong" image in the game demonstrates the perseverance and pursuit of freedom in traditional Chinese culture. Scene design incorporates Chinese ancient architectural and artistic elements such as Shanxi Foguang Temple and Dazu Rock Carvings, allowing players to immerse themselves in the charm of traditional Chinese culture.

Technological Innovation Display: The production technology has reached international advanced levels. Black Myth: Wukong uses advanced technologies such as 3D modeling, motion capture, and physical engines to achieve cinematic visual effects ^[1]. For example, the detailed depiction of character hair and environmental details showcases China's superb gaming production technology, enhancing the international competitiveness of Chinese cultural products. After its release on the international gaming platform Steam, it quickly topped the hot-play and best-seller lists, with over 4.5 million copies sold and revenue exceeding 1.5 billion yuan on the first day, attracting global players and inspiring them to explore traditional Chinese culture. Many overseas players began learning knowledge related to Journey to the West to better understand the game.

1.2 Cultural whirlwind of Ne Zha 2

Emotional Resonance through Innovative Storytelling: Continuing the story of Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child, Ne Zha 2 innovates the narrative and resonates emotionally with audiences, deepening the theme of "resisting fate" and closely integrating emotional elements such as family and friendship with the growth story, triggering global audience empathy. The line "If heaven and earth reject me, I will reverse heaven and earth" in the film conveys positive values and is recognized by audiences of different cultural backgrounds.

Presentation of Oriental Aesthetics: The film showcases traditional Chinese oriental aesthetics through exquisite visuals and unique character designs. For example, the design of the barrier beasts is inspired by the Sanxingdui bronze masks, the Tianyuan Cauldron references the Shang Dynasty dragon-patterned flat-footed cauldron, and the scenes integrate elements of Yongding Tulou and Dunhuang murals. Modern animation technology is used to innovatively interpret traditional elements, creating a magnificent oriental mythological world ^[2].

International Market Performance: The film has achieved a global box office of over 10 billion yuan, ranking among the top three in animation history. It partnered with Sony Pictures to launch on over 3,000 screens in North America, expanding its market scale in North America by 45 times compared to the previous film, and achieved global simultaneous distribution through streaming platforms, receiving high praise from international media. For example, Reuters commented that it "transcends cultural boundaries through universal human empathy."

1.3 Joint promotion of Chinese cultural export

The success of *Black Myth: Wukong* and *Ne Zha 2* has enabled more people globally to recognize and pay attention to Chinese culture. By combining traditional Chinese cultural elements with modern pop culture forms, they have made Chinese culture more appealing to the world, enhancing its international visibility and influence. Both have opened new paths for Chinese cultural export, breaking the previous limitations of traditional art forms as the main means of cultural export. Through emerging cultural products such as games and animated films, they attract younger audiences, leverage the internet and new media platforms for global dissemination, and explore a new cultural export model of "culture + technology + market."

2 Reasons for their international achievements

2.1 Activation and modern reconstruction of cultural genes

Both works are rooted in Chinese classical myths (*Journey to the West* and *Investiture of the Gods*), deconstructing traditional narratives from a modern perspective and endowing characters with new spiritual cores. For example, *Black Myth: Wukong* reconstructs the *Journey to the West* myth through the "Bai Gu Guan" (Skeleton View), emphasizing resistance and awakening; *Ne Zha 2* reshapes the Dragon Palace as a "deep-sea purgatory" with dark aesthetics, highlighting the modern value of "my fate is mine to decide."

This reconstruction is not a subversion of tradition but a "cross-circle experiment" in youth discourse, combining traditional cultural symbols with contemporary youth values (such as individual resistance and self-actualization) to form emotional resonance^[3].

IP such as *Journey to the West* and *The Legend of Ne Zha* have a cross-generational cognitive foundation, lowering the acceptance threshold for audiences and inspiring cultural pride among Chinese at home and abroad.

Both works use technical means to visually express traditional culture. For example, *Black Myth: Wukong* integrates elements such as Dunhuang murals, Northern Shaanxi storytelling, and ancient architecture into game scenes, and restores 36 Chinese ancient buildings through high-precision 3D scanning technology, creating an aesthetic experience that blurs the line between reality and fiction.

Ne Zha 2 uses self-developed technologies such as the "Qiankun Fluid Engine" to present classical mythological artifacts (such as the "Coiling Dragon Ice Hammer") and scenes (such as Yuxu Palace) with high-precision special effects, with meticulous details sparking audience discussions.

2.2 Technological breakthroughs and industrial system upgrades

Black Myth: Wukong comprehensively uses technologies such as Unreal Engine, panoramic ray tracing, and AI motion capture to achieve cinematic visuals, with its rendering cycle significantly shortened due to the deployment of a national computing power network.

Ne Zha 2 involved a production team of over 4,000 people, completing more than 1,900 special effects shots, with a single shot polished over three years, achieving technical standards on par with international first-class animated films.

The success of the game and film reflects the maturity of China's cultural industry chain. For example, the 3D scanning technology in *Black Myth: Wukong* relied on the "China Vision Valley" industrial cluster in Hangzhou to achieve domestic breakthroughs in hardware and algorithms; film rendering leveraged computing resources like Huawei Cloud, compressing the original multi-year production cycle into months. This adaptation and research of domestic operating systems and GPUs mark a shift from technological dependence to independent innovation.

2.3 Youth creative forces and craftsmanship spirit

In 2024, over 2,700 Chinese films were approved for production, and the number of animation studios tripled compared to five years ago. Technologies like AI and cloud computing are accelerating integration with content production, providing resources and platforms for young creators.

The lead teams behind both works (e.g., Feng Ji for *Black Myth: Wukong* and Jiaozi for *Ne Zha 2*) are mostly post-80s and post-90s, combining traditional cultural literacy with global perspectives. They dedicated themselves to creation with an "all-or-nothing" attitude—for instance, Director Jiaozi insisted on having the core special effects of *Ne Zha 2* completed by a domestic team, refusing to outsource or compromise.

3 The significance of cultural export

Foreign scholars began researching cultural export earlier, focusing on cultural communication theories and cross-cultural communication. For example, Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory^[4], provides a framework for understanding cultural differences, emphasizing that cultural export must consider cultural distance. In cultural product export, the successful experiences of U.S. Hollywood films and Japanese anime are often studied, identifying strong creativity, mature industrial systems, and global distribution channels as key factors. For Chinese cultural export, some foreign scholars have noted the recent rise of Chinese cultural products in international markets but argue that Chinese culture still faces challenges in bridging cultural differences and adapting to international market demands. In China, research on cultural export began in 2012. Over the past decade, with policy support and continuous efforts from all sectors, initial achievements have been made.

Policies and Actions for Chinese Cultural Export :

(1) The proposal and connotation of cultural confidence policy

Since entering the new era, cultural confidence has been elevated to a national strategic level. The policy emphasizes confidence in China's excellent traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and socialist advanced culture, reflecting full affirmation of its cultural values and firm belief in its vitality. Its connotation includes cultural inheritance and innovation, requiring the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture while preserving its essence. This policy provides a solid theoretical foundation and spiritual impetus for Chinese cultural export.

(2) Specific actions by cultural departments to promote cultural export

Cultural departments have introduced a series of policies to boost cultural export. In financial support, special funds for cultural industry development have been established to subsidize outstanding cultural projects, such as funding the creation of animated films like *Ne Zha 2* to enhance production standards. In talent cultivation, universities and enterprises collaborate to offer professional training in cultural industries, nurturing composite talents versed in both culture and market operations. In international exchanges and cooperation, cultural exhibitions, art performances, and other activities are actively organized to showcase Chinese culture on the global stage—for example, hosting traditional Chinese art exhibitions overseas to display paintings, calligraphy, and handicrafts.

(3) Preliminary achievements in cultural export driven by policies

In recent years, Chinese cultural export has achieved remarkable results under policy guidance. In cultural product exports, the global market share of Chinese films, TV dramas, animations, and games has gradually increased. For instance, Chinese TV dramas have expanded their influence in Southeast Asia, Africa, and other regions, with some high-quality works being introduced and broadcast by overseas TV stations. In cultural activities, branded events like "Happy Chinese New Year" have been successfully held in multiple countries and regions, showcasing Chinese Spring Festival culture and folk customs to the world and attracting massive participation from overseas audiences.

4 Challenges facing Chinese cultural export

4.1 Cultural differences and cross-cultural comprehension barriers

Huge disparities exist in cultural backgrounds, values, and aesthetic concepts across countries and regions, often leading to misinterpretations of Chinese cultural products in international communication. For example, some overseas players struggle to grasp the complex mythological systems and philosophical ideas in *Black Myth: Wukong*; translating the lines of *Ne Zha 2* while preserving their oriental charm remains difficult, causing loss of cultural connotation during dissemination. This has limited the acceptance of Chinese cultural products in international markets^[5].

4.2 Restrictions on international communication channels

Western media dominates international communication, resulting in low exposure of Chinese cultural products on overseas mainstream media platforms. In international film/TV distribution and game promotion, Chinese cultural products face restrictions from Western distribution channels, struggling to obtain high-quality promotion resources and screening schedules. Meanwhile, social media algorithms tend to prioritize local cultural content, further hindering the global spread of Chinese cultural products.

4.3 Insufficient competitiveness of cultural industries

China's cultural industry lags behind developed countries in creativity, production standards, and market operations. Some cultural products suffer from homogeneous content, rough production, and weak commercial capabilities, lacking internationally influential cultural brands and enterprises. In global cultural market competition, they struggle to compete with mature industries like Hollywood films and Japanese anime, affecting the scale and quality of Chinese cultural export.

5 Sustainable development proposals for chinese IP export

5.1 Strengthen cultivation of cultural content innovation talents

Innovation is the driving force for development. In product creation, it is essential to deeply excavate the essence of traditional Chinese culture, integrate modern societal values and international market demands, and innovate cultural content. Creators should be encouraged to break free from traditional mindsets and develop culturally unique products with a global vision—for example, integrating Chinese traditional culture with internationally popular genres like sci-fi and suspense. Meanwhile, strengthening cultural industry-related disciplines in universities is crucial: optimizing curricula, emphasizing practical training, and cultivating composite talents proficient in culture, markets, and technology. Holding cultural creativity competitions and international exchange activities can provide platforms for cultural talents to showcase their abilities and broaden their global perspectives.

5.2 Expanding international communication channels and cooperation

New media platforms serve as vital channels for cultural dissemination today. Fully leverage social media, short-video platforms, and international streaming services to promote Chinese cultural products. Establish official overseas accounts, devise targeted communication strategies, and enhance global visibility through content marketing and fan engagement. For example, use TikTok to release short videos about Chinese culture to attract overseas audiences. Meanwhile, strengthen international collaboration by partnering with global cultural enterprises and media organizations to co-produce and distribute cultural products. Through such partnerships, leverage foreign resources and channels to improve the acceptance and dissemination of Chinese cultural products in international markets. For instance, Chinese film companies can collaborate with Hollywood studios to produce films incorporating Chinese cultural elements for global release.

5.3 Enhancing cultural industry competitiveness

Improving the Cultural Industry System: Governments should increase policy support and financial investment in cultural industries, enhance infrastructure, optimize industrial layouts, and promote cluster development. Strengthen the construction of cultural industry parks to provide favorable environments and resource-sharing platforms for cultural enterprises.

Building Cultural Brands: Encourage cultural enterprises to focus on brand building and cultivate internationally influential cultural brands. Enhance brand awareness and reputation by improving product quality and innovating marketing approaches. For example, the Palace Museum Cultural and Creative Products have created widely influential brands through innovative design and marketing models^[6].

6 Conclusion

Through the analysis of *Black Myth: Wukong* and *Ne Zha 2*, this paper demonstrates the rising momentum of Chinese cultural export driven by the cultural confidence policy. Both works have achieved remarkable success in excavating cultural connotations, technological innovation, and global dissemination, providing a new paradigm for Chinese cultural export. However, challenges such as cultural differences, limited communication channels, and insufficient industrial competitiveness still exist. By strengthening cultural content innovation and talent cultivation, expanding international communication channels, and enhancing cultural industry competitiveness, it is expected to drive the sustainable development of Chinese cultural export.

In the future, with the enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength and cultural confidence, Chinese

cultural export will embrace broader development prospects. It is hoped that more outstanding cultural products like *Black Myth: Wukong* and *Ne Zha 2* will emerge to shine in the international cultural market. Meanwhile, academic circles are encouraged to deepen research on Chinese cultural export, providing more theoretical support and innovative ideas for practical dissemination, and helping Chinese culture achieve broader and deeper global reach. Let "Made in China" transform into "Created in China," and let Chinese IPs go global.

About the Author

Qingzi Yu (born in May 1984), female, Han ethnicity, a native of Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. She holds a master's degree and currently serves as an associate professor at the School of Cultural Management, Nanjing College of Communication. Her research interests include film and television music, cultural projects, and television media planning.

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