

The Aesthetic Integration of Traditional Pattern Elements in Game Design: A Case Study of "Black Myth: Wukong"

Xiaozhou Wang, Boyang Cen, Xiaoxue Wei

School of Arts, Beijing Union University, Beijing 100101, China

ABSTRACT

This article explores the aesthetic integration of traditional pattern elements in modern game design and their importance for cultural dissemination through a case study of the domestic game "Black Myth: Wukong". The article points out that with the development of the gaming industry and the rise of esports, more and more games are paying attention to integrating Chinese local cultural characteristics. The success of "Black Myth: Wukong" demonstrates that traditional patterns are not only used as visual decorations, but also important tools for conveying character backgrounds, shaping images, and guiding emotions. The character design and pattern application in the game not only enrich the visual experience, but also deepen players' understanding of Chinese culture. The article emphasizes that future game design should have a deeper understanding and application of traditional patterns, while preserving ethnic characteristics and innovating to promote the development of game character costume design, enhance the soft power and international competitiveness of Chinese culture. Through the analysis of "Black Myth: Wukong", this article reveals the aesthetic value and cultural dissemination potential of traditional patterns in game design, providing a new perspective and development direction for game design.

KEYWORDS

"Black myth: wukong"; Traditional patterns; Game design

1 Introduction

At a time when the Internet and new media are booming and global cultural exchanges are increasingly frequent, science and technology, art and culture are intertwined and deeply integrated. All fields are constantly exploring and innovating to achieve self sublimation and expansion, as is the case with the game industry. On August 20, 2024, the domestic 3A game "Black Myth: Wukong" was officially released. With its exquisite graphics, unique cultural connotations, and excellent gaming experience, it quickly caused waves in the gaming industry and attracted widespread attention from players and the industry. From the sales data, its performance is remarkable: on the day of its debut, it exceeded one million sets, and within 72 hours, its sales on all platforms exceeded 10 million sets, setting a new high for overseas sales of domestic single player games; According to Steam DB statistics, the number of concurrent online users reached 37.32 million in the first week of release; According to market research firm Statista, as of February 4, 2025, the total sales have reached 25 million copies; According to the public network, as of May 7, 2025, the total revenue exceeded 7 billion yuan. Not only that, "Black Myth: Wukong" has also won a lot on the international stage. It was named the best game of its time at the 2024 Golden Joystick Awards and won two awards, "Action Game of the Year" and "Voice of the Player", at the TGA2024 Awards ceremony, known as the "Oscars of the gaming industry". It also successfully won the Best Visual Arts award at the 25th Game Developers' Choice Awards.

In the process of globalization, cultural exchange and communication have attracted much attention. The expression forms of Chinese traditional cultural elements on the international stage have been constantly innovating, and the new China-Chic element design concept has emerged as the times require. However, although the integration of traditional culture and game design has received attention, there is relatively little research on the aesthetic integration methods and characteristics of traditional pattern elements in game design, and few scholars have deeply analyzed their integration methods and characteristics. There is also a lack of research on the emotional expression of traditional pattern elements in game design, which fails to fully reveal how they can touch players' emotions and enhance the gaming experience. However, the research on its specific role in enhancing the cultural connotation of games is not in-depth enough, and its impact on cultural depth and heritage has not been elaborated in detail. These research gaps limit a comprehensive understanding of the integration relationship between traditional pattern elements and game design, and constrain the development of game design in cultural inheritance and innovation. Therefore, in-depth research on these issues is of great significance for promoting cultural innovation and theoretical development in the field of game design.

2 Black myth: wukong and traditional pattern elements

Game design, as a new cultural and creative industry, plays an important role in global cultural exchange. In the field of game design, the use of traditional cultural symbols is not only a display of visual art, but also a transmission and recreation of cultural values. For contemporary game design, how to integrate traditional cultural elements into modern

aesthetics to achieve a perfect fit has always been a key issue. The popularity of "Black Myth: Wukong" has presented a solution to this issue, which combines modern technology and traditional culture to showcase the visual charm of Chinese single player games. The game is set against the backdrop of "Journey to the West" and features the main character of the "destined man" Wukong. By incorporating various excellent traditional Chinese cultural symbols, it builds a magical world with Eastern colors. This game utilizes the virtual geometry system and lighting system of Unreal Engine 5, presenting the most delicate and exquisite visual effects currently available. The production team accurately reproduced authentic ancient cultural heritage such as ancient buildings, Buddha statues, stone carvings, sutras, and bronze tripods from 36 filming locations in Shanxi, Sichuan, and other regions through on-site, real-life, and physical scanning and modeling based on photographs. At the same time, the game draws on the spatial layout principles of traditional Chinese landscape painting in terms of landscape design. The game consists of six chapters, with the first five chapters using blue, yellow, white, red, and black, which represent the five elements of China, as the main colors. At the same time, the "four pests" are combined with low brightness deep tones to create a unique visual effect that echoes the artistic conception of traditional Chinese paintings. The important characters in the game and the murals in key scenes draw inspiration from many traditional Chinese cultural elements such as clothing and utensils, while also retaining the traditional painting techniques of scatter and symmetrical composition, blue-green color matching, and meticulous brushwork. The weapons, gourds, pendants, rare toys and other props in the game, whether in appearance or name, are deeply rooted in Chinese cultural heritage and have become a medium to evoke cultural memories.

With the increasing confidence in national culture, modern design often draws inspiration from traditional culture, and traditional patterns have become an ideal choice due to their beauty and adaptability. Games often incorporate various traditional elements into character costumes or prop designs, combined with exquisite artwork, modeling, special effects, and actions, to enhance the cultural attributes of the game. For example, in "Black Myth: Wukong," the "Heavenly Mandate Man" lock gold armor set features a "lock pattern" as shown in Figure 1, which is based on a herringbone shape and arranged continuously in four directions. Inspired by ancient lock armor, it symbolizes strength and safety and is often used as a base pattern for fabrics, framing, armor, and wallpaper decoration. The fish scale pattern on the battle robe is composed of scales, presented in two or three lines, arranged in a staggered and orderly manner. In Chinese culture, fish sounds like "surplus", implying abundance and prosperity. Fish scale patterns are seen as a symbol of bringing beauty and prosperity, as well as representing courage, resilience, and freedom, symbolizing the ability to overcome difficulties. Scale patterns can be traced back to ancient pottery decoration and have been widely used in fields such as bronze ware, jade carving, and textiles. In addition to clothing, different scale patterns can be seen in many places in the game. Traditional Chinese pattern design embodies the pursuit of harmony and implicit beauty, closely related to humanistic spirit and natural philosophy. Integrating traditional patterns into game character costumes and innovating them is beneficial for enhancing China's cultural soft power and international influence, promoting the inheritance of national culture, and meeting the requirements of developing national culture in the new era.

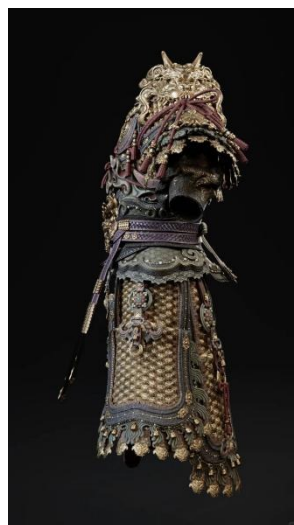


Figure 1 Lock gold armor (Image source from game science official website)

3 Practice of aesthetic integration

In recent years, more and more domestic games have incorporated traditional patterns into the design of game characters. For example, traditional pattern elements such as dragons, phoenixes, qilins, and lotus flowers are used to endow game characters with unique Chinese traditional cultural styles, combining Chinese traditional culture with modern game art styles to attract players^[2]. Tencent has partnered with Dunhuang Academy to digitize auspicious

patterns and other artistic elements from Dunhuang murals into the character design of "King of Glory", endowing game characters with unique cultural vitality and showcasing the charm of Dunhuang art. In addition, Miha Tour's Genshin Impact has a great influence on young people abroad. The wonderful Chinese clothing culture it presents has attracted many overseas players, which not only makes them feel the flavor of Chinese traditional culture from the appearance of the characters, but also inspires them to have a deeper understanding of Chinese traditional culture. The game products featuring "online games+traditional culture" have been loved by overseas players, and have also realized the export of Chinese traditional culture at a low cost. For a long time, the public's aesthetic has been dominated by the West, such as the old flower and four leaf clover in the fashion circle. It is suspected that drawing inspiration from the treasure house of Chinese patterns and integrating traditional patterns into new media is also taking back the Chinese people's own aesthetic power.

Traditional patterns are often used as accessories to express aesthetic elements such as subject characteristics, attributes, and functions. The eastern aesthetics is deeply influenced by Confucianism, Taoism and Zen. They are integrated into the ideological life of the Chinese people, penetrate each other, promote the formation and development of traditional auspicious patterns, and make them contain Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist philosophies. Confucianism emphasizes the use of patterns such as Hui and animal motifs, advocating for benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness; Taoism reveres the patterns of Tai Chi and Bagua, advocating for nature, non action, and freedom; The Buddhist emphasis on lotus patterns promotes cause and effect, compassion, and liberation^[1]. The Black Myth: Wukong "is based on Journey to the West and follows the aesthetic trends of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. As the character's attribute is a spiritual light point, surrounded by fire patterns, ancient people regarded flames as a symbol of the sun, representing natural power and civilization evolution. It is commonly used in bronze ware, murals, and handicrafts decoration[3]. Buddhism also uses it as a backlight for Buddha statues, symbolizing brightness, wisdom, and magical power. The design of spiritual light points is in line with its function and has cultural connotations. Defeating the Flame Mountain Land in the game will earn you the "Yin Yang Dharma Robe", which is a Taoist deity with a Bagua pattern on its collar. The "Yin Yang Dharma Robe" is also decorated with Bagua patterns. The Eight Trigrams pattern originates from Taoist philosophy and is a pattern of warding off evil, praying for blessings, and auspiciousness. It symbolizes balance, harmony, and the law of transformation of all things, reflecting the changing characteristics of all things in the universe. In the game, the attributes of this set vary according to health, with half of the health belonging to Yang, reducing damage but weak attack; Lacking life belongs to Yin, but increasing critical strike rate is prone to injury. These designs highlight the sincerity, high completion rate, and profound cultural background of the game. The use of traditional patterns makes the game more visually appealing and helps players experience the charm of traditional Chinese culture.

4 Pattern elements and emotional expression

The application of traditional Chinese cultural elements in games does not require direct copying and pasting. It requires a deep understanding of their cultural meanings before extracting and reconstructing traditional decorative elements. The founder of cybernetics science, American mathematician Wiener, defined information as "the content that people exchange with the external world in the process of adapting to it and causing this adaptation to have a reciprocal effect on the external world." In the field of design, design information can be understood as the content of the interaction between design and its environment, or as the exchange value between design and its environment^[3]. When designers have some uncertainty about the external environment, it may stimulate aesthetic attention^[4]. After eliminating this uncertainty through specific ways and methods, they absorb certain information, which may be a design project, theme, motivation or inspiration, or a certain design form. Similarly, when the audience of a design has doubts about a design and seeks to resolve them, it is through such information transmission that the design activity and dialogue can truly be realized. It seems that the visual expression of traditional elements in games is similar, and the visual design of game works also has the purpose of conveying information and emotions.

Therefore, character design is not limited to the construction of visual images, but also encompasses many other elements. The design of character information such as worldview background, gender, age, personality, career positioning, and experiences is an integral part of the overall content conveyed in the game. The focus of game character design is generally in the visual field. For console single player games, although players may pay more attention to deeper stories and other aspects of the game, the visual impression of the character still plays a crucial role. In "Black Myth: Wukong", the suit of the Heavenly Mandate Man and the objects on his body both affect the character's attributes and patience. The patterns on clothing have a certain relationship with defense. For example, in the first chapter, the boss, the White Clothed Scholar, is a White Snake Spirit, and the battle location is in the White Mist Marsh. The unlockable "Golden Scale Battle Robe" has the ability to slowly restore life when there is a shortage of life, and its effect in water is enhanced. Therefore, the snake pattern on the battle robe and the scale pattern on the shoulder armor complement each other^[5]. The same applies to the clothing of other characters. As the main character of Chapter 4, Purple Spider wears a red wedding dress with several classic patterns, which plays a very important role in portraying this character. Peony patterns

often appear as the main decorative pattern, presenting the state of peony blooming, symbolizing the meaning of beautiful reunion, as well as the prosperity and strength of the nation, the continuous happiness of the family, and personal expectations for the future and other life concepts. The symbolism here is that in the game plot, Purple Zhu'er and her child have always longed to reunite with Bajie and marry him. When bidding farewell to Bajie, she was still wearing the same makeup as when she first met, afraid that Bajie wouldn't recognize her. However, her face was old and things were different. In the end, she still couldn't fulfill her wish, and the two were destined not to be together. A sharp contrast has been formed, and the clothing design is very consistent with the character setting of the plot. Finally, their daughter's clothes were adorned with lotus patterns, which were imbued with purity and beauty, symbolizing Purple Zhu'er's good wishes for her daughter. The "lotus" in lotus leaves and lotus flowers is also "harmony", representing the harmony between husband and wife, family unity, and embodying her sincere and lasting love for her daughter and Bajie. The 'union' this time was too brief, and the ending was that the mother's body died and her father could not recognize her, not knowing what kind of seeds would be planted in her heart.

5 Conclusion

Black Myth: Wukong, with its unique artistic charm and profound cultural connotations, has not only achieved great success in the domestic market, but also won widespread favor internationally. Chinese traditional patterns are full of ethnic characteristics, expressing traditional art to the fullest and drawing inspiration from them in modern design. With the rapid development of information technology and the acceleration of modernization, many ancient traditional Chinese arts are gradually fading out of people's sight, and some art forms are even facing the crisis of extinction. Continuously exploring and deeply understanding traditional Chinese culture, inheriting and activating the vitality of these arts in contemporary times, is crucial for enhancing the influence and competitiveness of Chinese culture. The gaming industry is entering a new stage, and China's console game production lacks experience. Currently, it is still learning, imitating, and borrowing from Western game cases. In the current increasingly fierce competition for cultural soft power, the increasing number of Chinese players and the growing game market have also attracted the attention of domestic and foreign game manufacturers. More and more game designs have taken into account China's local characteristics and culture. Through in-depth analysis of the game case of "Black Myth: Wukong", this paper reveals the aesthetic integration and important significance of traditional pattern elements in game design. Traditional patterns are not only visual decorations, but also important means of conveying character information, shaping character images, and guiding players' emotions. The use of these patterns goes beyond simple visual beautification and becomes the key to conveying game character information, shaping images, and guiding emotions. It also allows players to have a deeper understanding and perception of traditional Chinese culture in an immersive gaming experience. Traditional patterns, as an important component of Chinese traditional culture, have been widely used in various fields such as painting, sculpture, clothing, and architecture since ancient times. Their unique aesthetic value and profound cultural connotations make them an indispensable element in game design. Nowadays, with the continuous development of the gaming industry, how to cleverly integrate these traditional pattern elements into game design, achieve aesthetic integration, and become the key to enhancing the cultural connotation and market competitiveness of games.

In summary, the integration of traditional pattern elements in the game design of "Black Myth: Wukong" has provided us with valuable experience and inspiration. In the future, with the continuous development of the gaming industry and the increasing aesthetic needs of players, we have reason to believe that traditional pattern elements will play a more important role in game design, becoming an important bridge connecting players with traditional culture. At the same time, this will also drive the gaming industry to take new steps in cultural inheritance and innovation.

About the Author

1. Xiaozhou Wang, MA student in design at Beijing Union University in China, student, research interest: design management and innovative design research.
2. Boyang Cen, MA student in design at Beijing Union University in China, student, research interest: design management and innovative design research.
3. Xiaoxue Wei, MA student in design at Beijing Union University in China, student, research interest: Cultural creativity and handicrafts research.

References

- [1] Design Aesthetics/Li Yanzu, edited by Wang Ming; Written by Xu Hengchun Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, July 2006.
- [2] He Wei, Fan Xiaozhu Rising Era: Analysis of Chinese Game Art in 2024 [J/OL]. Art Research, 1-15 [2020-01-02] <http://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/10.1622.J.20241226.1548.002.html>.
- [3] Qi Xiaohua, Li Peng Research on the Application of Traditional Cultural Symbols in Game Character Design [J]. Tiangong, 2024, (32):40-42.
- [4] Xu Lulu A Brief Analysis of the Charm of Traditional Patterns [J]. Popular Colors, 2021, (10):43-44.
- [5] Ma Yixuan, Zhong Sirun, Wang Yu The Evolution of Fire Patterns in Chinese Buddhist Statues [J]. Art Education, 2021, (04):247-250.