

From Literary Classics to Interactive Games: The Recreation and Continuation of Journey to the West in Black Myth: Wukong

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the transformation of Journey to the West in the game Black Myth : Wukong, focusing on how the game reinterprets and continues the narrative of the literary classic. The game borrows the classical Chinese work Journey to the West as its background setting, retaining the essence of the classic while expanding it in a new way through an interactive narrative. Combining traditional Chinese cultural symbols with modern gaming technology, Black Myth: Wukong creates an immersive experience that satisfies the cultural sensibilities of domestic gamers as well as attracting widespread attention from international audiences. By analysing the game's plot, character development, and interactive narrative, this paper illuminates how Black Myth: Wukong is a re-creation of Journey to the West. This study also examines the global acceptance of the game and its role in the international dissemination of Chinese cultural heritage, and reflects on how to maintain the depth and philosophical connotations of literary classics while entertaining them in the new media era, exploring the balance between cultural heritage and intellectual engagement.

KEYWORDS

Journey to the west; Black myth:wukong; Interactive narrative; Cultural dissemination

1 Introduction

With the arrival of the digital media era, the inheritance and innovation of classic literature have been given new possibilities and have become important topics in contemporary literary studies. This paper focuses on one of China's most iconic literary works, Journey to the West, and its re-creation and continuation in the interactive video game Black Myth: Wukong. As one of the cornerstones of Chinese literature, Journey to the West has been influential for centuries, and Black Myth: Wukong offers a fresh interpretation of this classic work, extending its story beyond the original ending to construct a new narrative framework. Set 500 years after the events of Journey to the West, the game offers an innovative exploration of the original characters and themes, retaining the essence of the original while introducing interactive elements and modern technological innovations.

Through the lens of narrative theory, this paper analyses how Black Myth: Wukong reinterprets the spiritual and philosophical themes in Journey to the West, focusing on the game's narrative structure, character development, and the ways in which it interacts with the player through non-linear and interactive narratives. By comparing the game's narrative strategy with the original text, the paper demonstrates how the game extends the narrative of Journey to the West, as well as exploring the pursuit of freedom and self-discovery in the portrayal of the character of Sun Wukong. In addition, the paper explores the impact of Black Myth: Wukong in promoting the culture of Journey to the West globally and reflects on the significance of new media in the dissemination of literary heritage.

2 Black Myth: Wukong inherits and integrates elements from Journey to the West

Black Myth: Wukong reaps phenomenal attention and achievements, inseparable from the inheritance and fusion of the original Journey to the West, the original storyline, characters, philosophical ideas and other elements of the deep excavation, and on this basis to extend and expand. For Chinese readers familiar with Journey to the West, the game Black Myth: Wukong not only retains the plot elements of the original, but also adds new meaning to the story through innovative techniques. The game's plot closely echoes the original, and the characters are more richly and three-dimensionally portrayed. For example, one scene in the game depicts the Wukong worshipping Bodhi Laozu as his master on a mural in a cave, where the player's character's life bar automatically recovers and turns blue upon entering the cave; another shows the land of Black Wind Mountain encountering a Taoist priest, who passes on a few life-preserving spells and instructs him to, "If you meet him in the mountains, pass on these two laws. I am not in a position to step forward, so I can only lend you a hand and teach him a thing or two, to complete a love affair." Unlike the original story, when Sun Wukong left, Bodhi Laozu simply said, "What kind of favour is there? You just don't cause any trouble and don't involve me," and never showed up again. Obviously, through these adaptations, the game gives a new interpretation and rendition of the characters and storyline of Journey to the West.

Black Myth: Wukong presents a story that is not a simple restoration, but one with a great deal of innovation, and can

be seen as a sequel to *Journey to the West*: Sun Wukong was appointed as the Buddha and wanted to return to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits, but 'someone could not see it', and there was a fierce confrontation with the Heavenly Court, which ultimately transformed him into a black stone. 500 years later, the player in the game becomes a monkey from the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits, the Heavenly Ordained Man. 500 years later, the player is transformed into a monkey from the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits - the Man of Destiny - and enters the mortal world. The player explores his heavenly destiny by defeating demons and monsters and collecting the six root artefacts left behind by Sun Wukong. The game has an open-ended ending, and the player's choices may determine to face two different endings in the game: one is that the Heavenly Ordained Man puts on the Curse of Tightening the Hoop and becomes the new Great Sage of Heaven; the other is that the Heavenly Ordained Man rejects the Golden Hoop, and gets the remembrance of the Wukong through Yang Jian's Third Eye. The setting of this kind of ending suggests the game's unique perspective in deconstructing the spirit of the original *Journey to the West*: Sun Wukong is not just a symbol, but any ordinary person can become the 'Great Sage of Qi Tian' through hard work, and the 'Great Sage of Qi Tian' can return to the ordinary people. The 'Great Sage of Qi Tian' can also return to his ordinary identity. However, the core of the game is the pursuit of freedom and the courage to fight. The internalisation of the original spirit in *Black Myth: Wukong* can be seen in the fact that although the game has boldly deconstructed the story structure, the cultural connotations behind the game are still universally applicable - the pursuit of freedom, justice, defiance of the system and authority, as well as the courage to go forward regardless of difficulties. This is exactly how *Black Myth: Wukong* inherits and innovates the core spirit of *Journey to the West*. In addition, each demon, leader and demon king in the game has a unique embroidered statue, judgement and a short biographical story in the style of a shiki-notebook. When combining these demon backstories, players are able to piece together detailed information that cannot be understood through the demons themselves during the push. This not only helps the player to better understand the motivations for each demon's behaviour, but also reveals the choices they make in their 'demon life'. These texts add up to more than 100,000 words, almost as much as a novel.

In addition to incorporating the plot of *Journey to the West* and extending and developing the characters, the game also quotes language from the original story many times. For example, when the Destiny Man (the player) returns to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits with Piggy, Piggy has a monologue that reads, "Are you a barbarian from there? The monkeys under the Great Sage are all alike. Your mouth and face are all different, and your appearance is a bit thunderous, so you must be a demon from somewhere else." This passage directly quotes the original text of the thirtieth book of *Journey to the West*. In the game's story setting, which takes place 500 years after the ending of *Journey to the West*, Sun Wukong has died in his battle with Heaven. The scene in which Piggy talks to himself on a stone chair on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits profoundly shows the loneliness and emotions of the character. For example, the six 'Great Spirits' in the game are named as 'Seeing Joy, Hearing Anger, Smelling Love, Tasting Thoughts, Worrying, and Seeing Lust', which originated from the names of the six thieves in the *Journey to the West*, in which the six thieves are named as 'The Monkey King Returns to His Rightful Place, and the Six Thieves Have No Trace'. Through the presentation of the game, the original 'six thieves' not only maintain their original symbolic meaning, but also realise the cross-media transformation from literal symbols to visual symbols, so that players can experience them in a more intuitive and visual way. This shows that Wukong's reference to the original *Journey to the West* is not just a simple reproduction of the original text, but also a skilful integration of the original language into the game's plot, which gives the player an immersive reliving experience, and at the same time satisfies the nostalgia of *Journey to the West* readers.

3 Interactive narratives in black myth: Wukong

Interactive narrative, as a dynamic, multi-layered narrative structure, breaks the linear narrative with multiple branches and endings in games. In *The Theory of Online Game Interactivity*, Friedrich proposed three kinds of interactivity in video games: player-computer interaction, player-player interaction, and player-game content interaction. *Black Myth: Wukong* breaks through the fixed narrative with CG animation. As a game based on the IP of *Journey to the West*, *Black Myth: Wukong* demonstrates strong interactivity in its communication mechanism, providing a diverse and immersive gaming experience. With the help of advanced graphic engine and physics engine technology, the game presents players with smooth battle scenes and vivid environmental effects, which greatly enhances the player's sense of immersion; the NPCs in the game are designed to be more intelligent, and can react autonomously according to the situation, which enhances the game's realism and challenge; the application of AI technology not only improves the player's sense of participation, but also significantly enhances the game's interactivity, and players can get instant feedback after each decision. The application of AI technology not only improves the player's sense of participation, but also significantly enhances the game's interactivity, as the player gets instant feedback after each decision, enabling him to experience the story of *Journey to the West* in a deeper way. In addition, the game sparked extensive discussions among the player community, with players sharing experiences, tips and secondary creative works on social platforms, forming a vibrant community. Such interactions not only boosted the game's popularity, but also promoted the spread of *Journey to the West* culture.

In the game, the protagonist "Heaven's Destiny" is armed with a long stick, and the stick skill tree is divided into chopping stick, standing stick and poking stick. When fighting, players can use the light stick and heavy stick according to different needs to produce different attack effects, and block the enemy's long-distance attacks through the stick flower movement. When the player masters these techniques, rolls and moves around flexibly, and plays a set of coherent stick techniques, he can fully experience the feeling of "possession" of the Wukong. This is a unique experience that no other Wukong character in any game has ever offered. As the game progresses, players will also find that they can pull off a cold hair to transform into a doppelganger, or become a golden cicada to fly among the monsters, and even be able to freely perform the "seventy-two transformations" to transform into any monsters that they have defeated. At this point, this game-like interactive experience will let players deeply feel that "Journey to the West" Wukong's various skills have now been mastered, bringing an overwhelming sense of achievement.

Video game narratives are built on their interactivity, enabling traditional narrative models to be extended and innovated in games. In digital environments, the subject's existential experience directly affects the success or failure of the game, and therefore a key principle of game design is to enable players to engage deeply. Through the substitution of a character or agent, players are able to be transformed sensually and emotionally, which enhances their sense of identification and loyalty to the work. *Black Myth: Wukong* demonstrates the diversity and uncertainty of narratives from a deconstructionist perspective. In a narrative comparison between games and literature, the game breaks the traditional representation of a single ending in classic literature by laying clues and ambushes, recreating the plot, cycling through multiple weekly episodes, and setting up multiple endings. Many players can continue to explore new content and hidden eggs even after completing the second weekly challenge, reflecting the openness and exploratory nature of the game's narrative in both form and content.

The game consists of six chapters - Fire Shining on Black Clouds, Wind Rising at Dusk, Night Born White Dew, Curving Purple Ducks, Sunset Red Dust, and Unfinished. The main quests throughout each chapter are the six root organs that are visualized by the death of the Great Sage, which correspond to the six roots cultivated in the original text - the eyes to see joy, the ears to hear anger, the nose to smell love, the tongue to taste thought, the body to worry, and the opinions to see desire. The dual identity of the game player is manifested as the "participant" and "narrator" of the game, who influences the direction of the narrative through his actions, and whose tasks are, firstly, to collect all the Six Roots, secondly, to collect equipment for upgrading, and thirdly, to understand the truth of abandoning the Buddha's position and the fruits of the Way. This shows that the game construction has been separated from the story line of "Journey to the West", which is a brand-new narrative built by the creators based on the digital experience for the experiencers.

4 Cultural reinterpretation and global reactions

4.1 The black myth: wukong reinterprets traditional Chinese cultural symbols

In *Black Myth: Wukong*, the game skillfully incorporates elements of Chinese culture into richer and more intuitive forms of expression, such as images, animations and sounds, and the visual effects of many scenes can be described as a wonderful presentation of Chinese aesthetics. From the cloud-covered South Heavenly Gate, to the green mountains and forests, to the yellow sandy deserts, to the snow-covered plains and mountains with rolling lava From south to north, from west to east, *Black Myth: Wukong* includes a large number of famous domestic Buddhist statues and temples, scriptures and wall paintings, as well as ancient buildings and cultural relics with Chinese characteristics, which are scanned and modeled in the field by digital technology, and reproduced with Chinese aesthetics. By means of digital technology, field scanning and modeling, the high-definition panoramic images of dozens of ancient buildings and a large number of cultural relics in China are reproduced, and their light and shadow and materials have a sense of authenticity close to the real world. Such as Jinan Lingyan Temple Tomb Pagoda Forest and the Four Gate Pagoda, Shanxi's Xiaoxitian and Jade Emperor Temple, Sichuan's Anyue Mingshan Temple, Chongqing's Dazu Rock Carvings, and Hangzhou's Lingyin Temple, etc., are all digitally restored to reproduce the three-dimensional sense of immersion in a very strong spatial scene, so that the player has a sense of immersion. At the same time, the game's soundtrack combines a variety of Chinese folk music styles, either majestic, melodious and moving, or popular and fast, strongly rendering the theme of the plot and creating a dramatic atmosphere. The game's "Yun Gong Xun Yin" and "Quit the Net" sample Chinese folk instruments such as suona, flute, guzheng, etc. The lyrics of the soundtrack are also quoted from Chinese folk music. The lyrics of the soundtrack also cite a lot of allusions, for example, in "Quit the Net", the phrase "empty silk, etc." is a reference to Li Bai's poem "Wine will be advanced", "Do you not see the high hall mirror sad white hair, like green silk, twilight into snow". The game soundtrack runs through every process of the game and combines with the game content, giving the game a vigorous national vitality.

In addition, in *Black Myth: Wukong*, the interaction between players and the game scene not only allows them to more intuitively feel the charm of the excellent traditional Chinese culture, but also inspires deeper emotional resonance. The

game can deepen players' knowledge of the excellent traditional culture through the "symbolic realm" of audio-visual aesthetics, the "knowledge realm" of humanities and geography, and the "value realm" of thoughts and customs. Subconsciously let players realize, change and shape their cultural values. For example, when the player needs to archive the game, he or she should guide the character "Heavenly Fate" to burn incense at the "Land Temple" in the game scene; and when the player needs to recover, he or she should meditate in a specific place and enjoy the surrounding scenery. This kind of scene interaction not only provides players with a rich multi-level sensory experience, but also enhances their enjoyment of the game and strengthens their sense of identity with the Chinese cultural elements in the game scene.

4.2 Global market acceptance

The success of *Black Myth: Wukong* cannot be separated from the unique symbolic charm of *Journey to the West*, a cultural IP. *Journey to the West* not only displays a strong Chinese style, incorporating many ancient Chinese philosophical ideas and regional cultures, but also features exotic flavors, magical colors, and universal human emotions. There are images of gods, devils and demons as well as ordinary human beings in the work, and its complex plot and diversified characterization are precisely the themes that foreign audiences are happy to accept. These elements make *Journey to the West* a bridge in cross-cultural communication.

The interactive gaming experience in *MythBlack: Wukong* has had an even more profound impact on the spread of *Journey to the West* overseas. For many foreign players, their initial knowledge of *Journey to the West* is usually limited to the image of "Chinese monkeys" in various translations. In fact, *Journey to the West* was introduced to Europe and the United States at the end of the 19th century, and has been spread overseas through a variety of textual and non-textual forms. However, the interest of many overseas readers in this ancient Chinese literary work often remains superficial, and not many readers really understand and love the *Journey to the West*. In contrast, *Black Myth: Wukong* has rapidly promoted the global dissemination of the *Journey to the West* culture through the form of a game. Numerous foreign players have become interested in this game full of Chinese elements, following the storyline, exploring the charms of the characters, and being curious about the game's magnificent world of gods and demons, strange spells and incantations, and the magical music of the spell of the past life. As the game's popularity continues to climb, more and more overseas players have begun to trace the origins of the original *Journey to the West* and dig deeper into the cultural connotations behind it. At present, a number of overseas communities have gradually become a hot spot for learning and discussing *Journey to the West*, and the culture of *Journey to the West* is being more widely disseminated globally through this innovative game format.

4.3 Problems and reflections of interactive games for the dissemination of literary classics

The rise of new media has brought a new look and structure to the dissemination of contemporary literary classics, and while this change has broadened the path of literary dissemination, it has also brought hidden worries to the production and dissemination of literature. First of all, the intervention of the new media has intensified the capitalization of literature, and the penetration of capital has made the production, dissemination and consumption of literature gradually enter into the logic of the market, which has led to the de-historicization and entertainmentization of the textual narratives, and prompted the literary narratives to become more and more tended to be pictorialized. Take *Black Myth: Wukong* as an example, its "excellent graphic performance" has become the unanimous evaluation of the game by domestic and international game platforms, which also reflects that modern users are more easily attracted by visual symbols. Through gamification, visualization and social media, the audience of literary works often pays more attention to the surface information conveyed by visual and auditory symbols, and the stimulation of the senses often makes them neglect the deeper thoughts and cultural connotations contained in the original text. Secondly, the new media provide a convenient "fast food" mode of proliferation for literary production, which makes the production and dissemination of literary works more rapid, but also leads to the fragmentation of the content and form of dissemination. For example, in 2024, Oxford University Press selected "brain rot" (referring to the deterioration of mental state caused by excessive intake of useless information) as the word of the year, a phenomenon that undoubtedly reflects the problem of fragmented information brought about by social media represented by short-video platforms and exposes the global scrutiny of the content and form of information dissemination through social media. This phenomenon undoubtedly reflects the problem of fragmented information brought about by social media represented by short video platforms, and also exposes the global scrutiny of the content and methods of social media information dissemination. In order to maximize the audience's attention, the presentation of literary works is often edited and spliced into fragments, and this fragmented mode of communication has a great impact on the wholeness and depth of the works.

For *Black Myth: Wukong*, although the classic story and characters of *Journey to the West* have been presented to global players through interactive gameplay, it is also during this fragmented and entertaining dissemination process that the cultural connotation and depth of thought of the work has suffered compression. The game attracts a large number of

players through beautiful graphics and intense battle scenes, but it is difficult for players to deeply understand the philosophical thoughts and cultural background of *Journey to the West*. Therefore, how to maintain the cultural depth of literary classics in the new media environment while avoiding excessive entertainment and fragmentation has become an important issue in the current dissemination of literary classics.

5 Conclusion

By analyzing the re-creation and continuation of *Journey to the West* in *Black Myth: Wukong*, this study reveals the path of transformation and dissemination of classic literature in the new media environment. As an interactive medium, the game provides a new way of interpreting *Journey to the West*. Through its unique narrative structure and player interaction, it not only perpetuates the cultural essence of the original, but also adds modern entertaining elements, which enables the literary classic to gain a wider dissemination globally. However, with the entertainment and marketization of literary classics, how to maintain the depth and philosophical connotation while catering to the needs of modern audiences remains a major challenge in the dissemination of literature in the new media era.

Although *Black Myth: Wukong* has successfully attracted the interest of global audiences and promoted the dissemination of *Journey to the West* culture, its shortcomings in the in-depth interpretation of the original text should not be overlooked. Future research should delve into how a more balanced approach can enable classic literary works to maintain their intrinsic ideology and cultural depth while being digitized and made more interactive. In addition, literary communication in the new media era still faces the challenge of fragmented information, and how to effectively avoid this phenomenon while enhancing the depth of cultural inheritance will be a key direction for future research.

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