

Implications of Black Myth: Wukong for cross-cultural communication of Chinese games

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of China's strategic efforts to promote Chinese culture globally, it is of great value to realize the cross-cultural communication of Chinese excellent traditional culture with the help of games. Drawing on recent literature on cross-cultural communication in China, this article selects *Black Myth: Wukong*, a domestically developed 3A game with significant international influence, as its case study. By analyzing its specific practices in cultural borrowing, integration, and innovation, as well as its communication strategies, the study aims to offer valuable insights for enhancing the cross-cultural communication of Chinese games. The study concludes that using games as a medium, deeply embedding the essence of China's rich traditional culture, effectively utilizing international communication channels, and emphasizing the core value of intellectual property (IP) are critical strategies for achieving successful cross-cultural communication of Chinese culture.

1. Introduction

Amid the backdrop of global cultural exchange and collision, the Internet and social media platforms have accelerated the worldwide dissemination of digital cultural products, such as music, animation, online literature, and films, enabling the cultural industry to achieve cross-cultural communication. In the context of building a cultural powerhouse and promoting the international reach of Chinese culture, the 14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development explicitly emphasizes the importance of innovatively advancing global communication, encouraging cultural enterprises to explore international markets, and supporting the globalization of digital cultural products. Japanese animation, Hollywood blockbusters, and Korean pop music exemplify how cultural products can successfully facilitate cross-cultural communication. Similarly, the global success of *Black Myth: Wukong* serves as a compelling example of effectively communicating and sharing Chinese culture with the world.

In recent years, Chinese scholars have primarily focused on short videos, films, dramas, or documentaries as research objects in the field of cross-cultural communication. For instance, Bai Lu and Zhang Xu examined the cross-cultural communication strategies of the micro-short drama *Escape from the British Museum* from three perspectives: culture, creation, and emotion [1]. Tang Runhua and Ye Yuanqi explored the empathy generation mode in cross-cultural communication with the documentary series *Encounter in China* [2]. Chen Junjun and Zhai Mengdi talked about the

ritual construction of the variety show *Informal Talks* in the perspective of intercultural communication[3]. In contrast, while games are one of the key mediums for facilitating the cross-cultural communication of digital cultural products in China, scholars in related fields have paid relatively little attention to the role of games in “cross-cultural communication.” Instead, most research on game communication has focused more broadly on “cultural communication” within the context of games. The lack of research on cross-cultural communication in the field of games also reflects the fact that there are few domestic games that have been successfully exported to the sea in China, and the successful exportation of *Black Myth: Wukong* is undoubtedly a major breakthrough for domestic games. Prior to this, “*Genshin Impact* developed by MiHoYo Company, stands out as a significant example of China’s success in exporting games to international markets in recent years. As a highly acclaimed game that blends elements of Chinese culture with universal appeal, it has captured the attention of players worldwide and achieved widespread commercial and critical success. Due to its global impact, the game has become a focal point for scholars exploring cross-cultural communication, particularly in the context of how Chinese cultural elements can be effectively integrated into game design and resonate with diverse international audiences. This case highlights the potential of games as powerful tools for fostering cultural exchange and understanding on a global scale. Among them, Professor Shi Anbin analyzed the phenomenon of cultural hybridization in *Genshin Impact* from the dual perspectives of game developers and players by introducing the concept of cultural hybridization [4]. Yang Wenying and Xu Yanling emphasized the importance of the game in cross-cultural communication by analyzing the explicit and implicit communication of Chinese excellent traditional culture in *Genshin Impact* [5].

Both *Genshin Impact* and *Black Myth: Wukong* represent milestones in the global expansion of domestic Chinese games, *Genshin Impact* uses a large number of Western elements such as fantasy tropes and open-world mechanics, successfully lowered the cultural barrier for overseas audiences. By blending these familiar aspects with Chinese cultural references, the game effectively appealed to a global player base, drawing attention from regions like North America and Europe. This strategic combination helped the game attract a diverse range of players, making it one of the most successful Chinese-developed games internationally. On the other hand, *Black Myth: Wukong* stands out for its commitment to showcasing Chinese culture. The game is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese mythology, drawing heavily from classical stories and elements of Chinese folklore. Rather than adapting to Western tastes, it leans into its cultural identity, offering foreign players a window into the richness and depth of Chinese heritage. This paper attempts to explore the successful experience of “*Black Myth: Wukong*”. Meanwhile, it also aims to discuss how to use games as a new means to better spread China's excellent traditional culture across different cultures. In today's era when digital entertainment has spread globally, games have become an important tool for cultural exchange. They can immerse players in the experience and break down language and cultural barriers. Through gaming, players can easily and enjoyably explore traditional Chinese customs, values, and historical stories. This offers Chinese companies valuable ideas on using digital cultural products to share China’s excellent traditional culture with the world.

2. The reference and innovation of *Black Myth: Wukong*

According to the newly released January-June 2024 China Game Industry Report, the domestic mobile game market generated a real income of 107.517 billion yuan, accounting for 73.01% of the total revenue of the entire domestic game market. In contrast, the console game market only achieved a real income of 797 million yuan. These figures highlight that China’s current game market is predominantly dominated by mobile games [6]. For example, in recent years, popular titles such as *Honor of Kings*, *Eggy Party*, and *Love and Deep Space* have all been mobile games,

reflecting the dominant position of mobile gaming in China's market. In fact, due to policy, technology and other reasons, in the buyout system single-player games in this field is almost dominated by overseas enterprises [7], China has host games but the influence are limited. The emergence of "Black Myth: Wukong" not only expands China's host game market but also serves as an important attempt for domestic single-player games to go overseas.

2.1 Borrowing and innovation in game form and content

In the early development stage of the project, the game's creative team behind Black Myth: Wukong set out with the goal of creating a single-player game. For preliminary research, they chose Steam, the world's largest comprehensive digital distribution platform, to analyze market trends and player preferences. Ultimately, the team decided on the action role-playing game (ARPG) genre, which enjoys significant popularity in the overseas gaming market. To enhance the gameplay experience, the production team drew inspiration from the visual and auditory effects of world-class AAA games, striving to ensure that domestic games could deliver a comparable level of immersion and quality to players. Borrowing from popular overseas games during the game development process is also one of the reasons why "Black Myth: Wukong" has been well received internationally.

In this study of intercultural communication, Edward Hall categorized cultures into "high-context cultures" and "low-context cultures" [8]. Members of society in high-context cultures tend to use indirect expressions. On the other hand, Communication in low-context cultures emphasizes direct and explicit expression, relying on clear, straightforward language and easily understood symbols to convey meaning [9]. Chinese culture, as one of the typical representatives of high-context cultures [10], Black Myth: Wukong attempts to use visual effects to express Chinese myths directly. The developers encapsulate the essence of Chinese culture through audiovisual creation, capturing the cultural commonalities shared by domestic and international players. By shaping a grand worldview, designing exquisite scenes, and incorporating immersive background music, they aim to draw players from diverse cultural backgrounds into the world of Journey to the West, allowing them to experience and appreciate the charm of Chinese mythology. To a certain extent, this approach can effectively reduce the cultural discount caused by background differences and enable more effective cross-cultural communication. Lin Yujia (2024) proposed a conceptual model of "cross-cultural communication influencing factors of domestic games and its mechanism", which suggested five factors that have a significant impact on the cultural communication of domestic games in the process of going overseas: cultural conflict, game design, player cognition, intensity of cultural integration, and uncontrollable factors [11]. In order to reduce the impact of cultural discounts on the spread of the game overseas, Black Myth: Wukong chooses themes that are easy to understand by global players in the game content. One of the main themes is the hero's journey of personal growth, which is a universal concept that resonates with players from different cultural backgrounds. Another key theme is the idea of challenging oneself, which is deeply embedded in the game's narrative and gameplay. By focusing on these universally understood themes, the game creates a connection with players worldwide, making it easier for them to engage with and appreciate the story, regardless of their cultural background. The theme of the hero's growth journey resonates with players worldwide, while the spirit of self-transcendence transcends cultural boundaries. This not only enhances the game's universal appeal but also conveys the Chinese spirit of perseverance and self-improvement to the global audience, showcasing the depth of Chinese culture.

2.2 Integration of science and technology with culture and innovation

The Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee emphasized the pivotal role of scientific and technological innovation in driving high-quality development. It underscored the importance of actively advancing the integration of scientific and technological innovation with industrial innovation, fostering synergy to enhance overall economic and industrial growth. In the field of cultural industry, Scientific and technological innovation also serves as a crucial driving force propelling cultural products onto the global stage. Digital media games, as a supporting force in the cultural industry chain, is precisely one of the media that can apply the achievements of scientific and technological innovation to the cultural industry. As a matter of fact, Journey to the West, as a classic IP deeply rooted in Chinese culture, has always been an important source of inspiration for the creation of video games in China. However, Black Myth: Wukong takes this literary masterpiece to new heights by applying 3A-level development technology for the first time. By utilizing the cutting-edge Unreal Engine 5, the game seamlessly combines advanced technology with cultural heritage to create an exceptionally lifelike and immersive world inspired by the world of Journey to the West[7]. This innovative approach makes it stand out among a host of games based on Journey to the West.

With strong technical support, Black Myth: Wukong deeply integrates modern technology with Chinese culture, creating a digital world that reflects reality. By doing so, it shows both China's urban landscapes and historical monuments to players around the world. With the help of the game, China's cultural monuments can be disseminated to global audiences, thereby achieving a long term impact of "cultivation" by promoting and preserving the nation's rich heritage on an international scale. American scholar George Gerbner puts forward the "cultivation theory", which believes that the media subtly and gradually shape people's subjective reality. The reproduction of scenes in the game can continuously enable overseas players to enhance their understanding of our city's culture within the game space. In addition, "Black Myth: Wukong" can also achieve the "concretization" effect of the game's communication, thereby building overseas players' knowledge of Chinese myths and conveying China's culture and core values. The game displays various characters such as monsters, gods and goddesses, Buddha and other characters from China's mythological Journey to the West, so that global players can gradually accept and understand the worldview constructed by the game. At the same time, it sparks the interest of foreign players in Chinese myths and stimulates them to explore Chinese culture more deeply. The game's narrative and characters embody core values such as courage, wisdom, unity, faith, and perseverance. These values subtly permeate the players' gaming experience. As an integral component of Chinese culture, they will, over time, foster a deeper sense of identification with and respect for Chinese culture among overseas players.

3. Enhancing communication through international channels

3.1 Accelerate the international dissemination of domestic games with the help of foreign streaming platforms

Transformations in communication technologies have revolutionized the global information network and reconfigured the spatial dynamics of international information flow. As a "global medium," the platform serves as the "central nerve" in the endeavor of international communication [12]. The immediacy, interactivity, and extensive global coverage of social media platforms have substantially accelerated the dissemination and amplified the influence of cultural products. Western social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and X, command vast user bases across the globe. In the global landscape, Western social media platforms dominate as the primary channels for digital communication and cultural exchange. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube,

and X (formerly Twitter) have amassed substantial user bases worldwide, facilitating rapid dissemination of information and cross-cultural interactions. “Black Myth: Wukong” achieves overseas dissemination through cooperation with “foreign media”, thus building a bridge between domestic games and gamers from other countries. As early as 2020, Black Myth: Wukong established official accounts on the world’s leading video-sharing social media platforms, YouTube and X, as well as other overseas social media platforms. In 2021, the official account released a nearly thirteen-minute gameplay test video, which marked the first time that Black Myth: Wukong entered the international spotlight. In 2022 and 2023, respectively, an additional six-minute in-game over-the-top animation and a plot promo were released, further captivating the attention of the global audience. By leveraging mainstream overseas social media platforms prior to the game’s official release, the company continued to strengthen overseas audiences’ awareness of the game’s brand. This approach accumulated a certain base of fans for Black Myth: Wukong.

3.2 Enhancing the Effectiveness of Intercultural Communication with the Help of “Foreign Mouths”

Some studies have shown that the trust of platform users in institutional media has diminished. Meanwhile, key opinion leaders (KOLs) emerging from the grassroots level have been able to carve out a share of the discourse power that was once predominantly held by the so-called elites [13]. Li Li also pointed out in his article that the dependence of individuals on organizations and institutions in global digital platforms is gradually weakening, and the circle network formed on the basis of interpersonal communication has become the intermediary field for the international public to access resources [14]. Therefore, in the cross-cultural communication of digital products, leveraging key opinion leaders (KOLs) in foreign countries as the central pivot can facilitate the overseas dissemination of China’s digital cultural products. By doing so, these products can effectively penetrate and engage with international audiences, thereby achieving a ripple effect of communication and expanding their influence abroad. Black Myth: Wukong actively cooperated with overseas opinion leaders during the game’s pre-launch phase. The game’s official team collaborated with Smough Town, a well-known overseas blogger who specializes in analyzing myths and legends. This collaboration aimed to facilitate a deeper understanding of the game’s content among foreign players by elucidating the rich backstory of Black Myth: Wukong. Through this partnership, the intricate narrative and cultural context of the game were made more accessible to an international audience, enhancing their engagement and appreciation of the game’s unique offerings. In addition, the game development team also places great emphasis on interacting with foreign players. Two months prior to the game’s official release, Black Myth: Wukong initiated a video submission campaign on overseas social media platforms such as X and Instagram. The aim was to enhance understanding of Chinese mythology among the international gaming community. Participants had the opportunity to win official game peripherals or secure collaboration opportunities by creating and submitting videos that explained the epic tale of Journey to the West and other Chinese mythological narratives. This interactive approach not only fostered a sense of community and involvement but also significantly amplified the game’s visibility and appeal in the global market. The sharing mechanism of overseas local users and opinion leaders has undoubtedly laid a good foundation for the further expansion of the influence of “Black Myth: Wukong”.

4. Diversified linkage to promote synergistic development of industries

Before the game’s official release, Black Myth: Wukong collaborated with the domestic coffee brand Ruixing Coffee to launch a limited-edition beverage called “Teng Yun Americano”. This unique offering quickly gained traction and was sold out in a remarkably short period of time

following its launch, demonstrating the game's significant pre-release impact and its ability to create engaging cross-brand promotions. This cross-industry marketing initiative not only enabled Black Myth: Wukong to tap into Ruixing Coffee's extensive customer base, thereby strengthening brand awareness among consumers, but also provided a significant boost to Ruixing Coffee's sales, exemplifying a mutually beneficial collaboration.

On October 20, 2024, Black Myth: Wukong has entered into a global strategic partnership with BYD, a domestic new energy vehicle brand, with the goal of "jointly guarding historical monuments and spreading Chinese culture". This strategic move not only demonstrates the game's commitment to narrating China's stories with world-class quality but also aims to amplify the global influence of both brands. By engaging in such a cross-industry partnership with a domestic automotive powerhouse, the initiative seeks to foster synergistic industry development and achieve a win-win cooperation, thereby elevating the international profiles of both entities involved. The success of Black Myth: Wukong has also significantly boosted local tourism in China. During the game's development, the production team carefully selected numerous attractions across the country, using digital technology to bring the stunning natural landscapes and cultural landmarks of Chinese regions like Shanxi, Chongqing, and Zhejiang to a global audience of players. Most of these locations are from Shanxi Province in China. After the release of the game, the influence of Black Myth: Wukong has made local attractions, such as the Zhenguo Temple, Xiaoxitian scenic area and the Buddha's Light Temple in Shanxi a new hit spot, driving fresh growth in the local economy. The Shanxi Culture and Tourism Bureau has capitalized on the popularity of "Black Myth: Wukong" to vigorously promote local culture. They launched initiatives like the activity "Follow the Wukong Tour of Shanxi", which aims to enhance the visibility of Shanxi through a cultural and tourism linkage. Therefore, the realistic depiction of scenes in the game enables global players to gain a deeper appreciation of ancient Chinese architectural art while creating new opportunities to promote China's cultural tourism industry on an international scale.

5. Implications of the Black Myth for the Cross-cultural Communication of Domestic Games

5.1 Technology Enablement: Enhancing the Gaming Experience

In his seminal work, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McLuhan posited that games are a form of communication media and an extension of collective perception. The relentless advancement of digital media technology has, in turn, provided a powerful impetus for innovation in the domestic gaming industry. On the one hand, the visual effect is the first impression that a game leaves on its players. With the support of high-quality digital media technology, games present more realistic scenes and more exquisite images, which can quickly attract the attention of overseas players. On the other hand, Sound possesses a remarkable ability to penetrate and engage the senses. Well-chosen game background music and high-quality sound effects can significantly enhance players' immersion, drawing them deeper into the gaming experience. Owing to their intrinsically cross-cultural and cross-linguistic nature, sophisticated visual and auditory effects can, to a certain extent, diminish the impact of cultural barriers on players from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the game development team should focus on the overall game experience during the production process, adhere to high standards of game production, and commit themselves to delivering a truly high-quality experience for players.

5.2 Games as a medium: carrying the cultural core

The creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture through video games have shifted perceptions of gaming from mere "dangerous entertainment" to significant

“cultural carriers.” This evolution is evident in how games now serve as mediums for cultural representation and transmission. Incorporating Chinese cultural elements like traditional musical instruments, architecture, and landmarks into video games enhances the gaming experience for international players and helps them better understand Chinese culture. This approach allows players to engage with and appreciate Chinese culture in an interactive and entertaining manner. Games that embed cultural kernels can not only more effectively disseminate excellent traditional culture to the world but also transform the singular perception of games as merely “entertainment-oriented”. Therefore, we should closely integrate games with culture, so that the gaming industry is regarded as an important force for cultural inheritance and innovation.

5.3 “Digital platforms: empowering culture to sail the seas”

Integrated marketing communication theory holds that in the process of maximizing communication effects, cross-media and cross-platform communication strategies should be adopted. In terms of the international dissemination of Chinese culture, the development of an all-encompassing communication matrix that integrates both online and offline channels can significantly enhance the effectiveness of cultural outreach[15]. On the one hand, relevant enterprises should actively leverage high-usage overseas streaming media platforms to facilitate the international expansion of domestic games. At the same time, it is essential to carefully select platforms that are well-suited for disseminating corresponding cultural content based on the unique characteristics of each platform. Additionally, engaging key opinion leaders and strategically placing advertisements can further amplify the reach and impact of these cultural products. On the other hand, enterprises should enhance cooperation and promotion with domestic streaming media platforms that have already established a significant overseas presence, such as TikTok. Of course, in the context of decentralization, China should also accelerate the development of more globalized digital platforms that can command a certain degree of international influence. This will enable the connection between Chinese users and the rest of the world through a communication ecosystem that transcends borders and fosters universal engagement.

5.4 Cross-border synergy: capitalizing on brand Intellectual Property

Once products have entered the international market, how to effectively manage and leverage brand IPs to achieve greater industrial synergies and communication has become a crucial issue for enterprises. In this paper, we propose that the visibility and influence of game IPs can be further enhanced through the following three approaches. First, by leveraging the “fan effect,” companies can design game-related peripherals and cultural derivatives, such as blind boxes, refrigerator magnets, and other creative products. This strategy not only attracts fans to engage in consumption but also generates economic returns. Second, combining brand IP with cultural tourism to create theme parks, cultural neighborhoods and other projects, thereby expanding the influence of IP. Third, engaging in cross-border collaborations with industries such as film and comics, adapting game brand IPs into diverse artistic formats, and re-disseminating them through the channels of these other industries to enhance their popularity and influence. In summary, in today’s globalized economic landscape, going international is merely the first step. To achieve long-term success, enterprises must continuously explore and innovate to grasp the core value of their IPs. They should also gain a deep understanding of overseas markets, develop brand IPs that resonate with local audiences, and ultimately realize sustainable brand development.

6. Conclusion

China's gaming industry has transitioned from a phase of passive introduction to one of active innovation, reflecting the enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength and the rise of new cultural industries. With the advancement of media technology, games, as an emerging form of media, are increasingly becoming a powerful vehicle for promoting China's cultural outreach. They play a vital role in facilitating the international dissemination of China's rich and excellent traditional culture. However, it is also crucial to recognize the significance of cultural cores and social media platforms in cross-cultural communication. Enterprises should delve deeply into the cultural connotations of their digital cultural products, leveraging traditional cultural elements to imbue their brands with unique cultural identities. At the same time, they should effectively utilize social media platforms to build a following overseas. Once their products have entered international markets, companies should actively harness the popularity of their IPs to enhance their industrial influence and achieve synergistic development with other sectors. In this way, China's digital culture can go global and achieve sustainable development.

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