

Cultural Heritage in Digital Entertainment: A Case Study of “Black Myth: Wukong” and Its Implications for the Chinese Gaming Industry

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Abstract: This paper uses “Black Myth: Wukong” as an example to explore the integration of China’s gaming industry with traditional culture. The game has become a hit due to its deep exploration of traditional culture, excellent visual presentation, innovative gameplay, and high-quality production, setting a benchmark for China’s gaming industry. However, the Chinese gaming industry still faces challenges such as lagging production technology, insufficient innovation, and an imperfect industrial chain in the process of integrating with traditional culture. To achieve integrated development, efforts should be made to deeply explore traditional cultural resources, innovate integration forms and methods, focus on cultural connotation transmission, strengthen talent cultivation and team building, enhance international cooperation and exchange, and obtain policy support and industry guidance.

Keywords: Black Myth: Wukong; Chinese gaming industry; Traditional culture; Integrated development

1. Introduction

“Black Myth: Wukong”, as China’s first AAA game masterpiece, has broken the long-term monopoly of European and American countries in this field, showcasing the strength of Chinese games and the charm of Chinese culture to the world. This game quickly attracted the attention of global players with its outstanding quality and deep exploration of traditional culture. It not only demonstrates stunning visual effects and exciting gameplay but also vividly presents the mythical world from the Chinese classic novel “Journey to the West” to players [1]. The success of “Black Myth: Wukong” has set a new benchmark for China’s gaming industry. It shows us that the integration of traditional culture and modern game technology can create such a heart-stirring work. This integration not only endows games with profound cultural heritage but also revitalizes traditional culture in the digital age. It also provides valuable inspiration for Chinese game developers, encouraging them to actively explore the value of traditional culture in game creation and create more excellent game works with Chinese characteristics through innovative thinking and exquisite craftsmanship.

2. Factors Contributing to the Success of “Black Myth: Wukong”

The remarkable success of “Black Myth: Wukong” can be attributed to several interconnected factors, each contributing to the game’s overall appeal and cultural significance. At its core, the game draws deeply from Chinese cultural heritage, basing its narrative on the beloved classic novel “Journey to the West.” This foundation provides a familiar yet exciting backdrop for players, with Sun Wukong, a deeply rooted figure in Chinese mythology, serving as the protagonist. The game’s plot, while faithful to its source material, offers novel adaptations that present a fresh perspective on the familiar story. This innovative approach allows players to experience the journey anew, retracing Wukong’s steps as he collects the scattered spiritual roots of the Great Sage.

The game’s cultural richness is further enhanced by its meticulous integration of traditional Chinese elements. From architectural styles to costume designs, every aspect of the game world is imbued with authentic cultural details. Players can explore faithfully recreated landmarks, such as the pillars of Foguang Temple in Shanxi and the “Western Pure Land Transformation” of Dazu Rock Carvings in Chongqing, deepening their appreciation of China’s architectural heritage. Visually, “Black Myth: Wukong” sets a new standard for Chinese game development. The game’s art direction is nothing short of outstanding, combining the aesthetic charm of traditional Chinese art with the demands of modern gaming. Advanced 3D reconstruction and dynamic particle effects bring the mythical world to life with unprecedented realism. Minute details, from dust in brick joints to the oxidation of sculpture paint, contribute to an immersive experience that transports players into a living, breathing version of ancient China. The game’s auditory experience is equally impressive, with a soundtrack that seamlessly blends

traditional Chinese instruments like gongs, drums, and erhu with modern compositional techniques^[5]. This musical fusion not only enhances the game's atmosphere but also serves as a subtle yet effective means of cultural expression, allowing players to connect with Chinese musical traditions on an emotional level.

Beyond its technical and artistic achievements, "Black Myth: Wukong" stands out for its innovative gameplay. The game world is rich with hidden content and side quests, encouraging thorough exploration and rewarding curiosity. This design choice not only increases the game's replayability but also allows players to engage more deeply with the cultural elements woven throughout the game world. Perhaps most significantly, "Black Myth: Wukong" represents a bold statement of cultural confidence from Chinese game developers. By setting the default language as Simplified Chinese and using pinyin for culturally specific terms, the game proudly showcases Chinese culture on the global stage. This approach has resonated strongly with international audiences, sparking interest in Chinese culture and opening new avenues for cultural exchange through the medium of gaming.

The success of "Black Myth: Wukong" in overseas markets demonstrates the universal appeal of well-crafted narratives rooted in specific cultural traditions. By presenting Chinese mythology and culture through the lens of high-quality, modern game design, the developers have created a product that both honors its cultural roots and pushes the boundaries of the gaming medium. In doing so, they have not only created an entertaining game but also a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy, enhancing the global influence and appreciation of Chinese culture.

3. Challenges in the Integration of China's Gaming Industry and Traditional Culture

The integration of China's gaming industry with its rich traditional culture faces several significant challenges, despite the recent success of games like "Black Myth: Wukong". One of the primary obstacles is the lag in production technology. While China has made strides in digital technology in recent years, narrowing the gap with Western countries, it still falls behind in key areas crucial for game development. Specifically, technologies such as 3D scanning tools and motion capture, which are essential for creating photorealistic renderings of cultural elements, remain underdeveloped in the domestic industry.

This technological gap has had tangible consequences for the Chinese gaming industry. Prior to "Black Myth: Wukong", many domestic games struggled to deliver high-quality graphics and immersive experiences, despite incorporating a wealth of cultural elements from Chinese mythology, classical poetry, traditional music, local customs, and ancient architecture. The technical limitations often overshadowed the cultural richness these games sought to convey. In contrast, Western game developers have leveraged their technological advantages to create highly detailed and realistic representations of their cultural heritage in AAA productions. Games like "Assassin's Creed" and "Red Dead Redemption" have effectively showcased European and American cultural elements, contributing significantly to the global spread of Western culture through gaming^[4].

Another critical challenge lies in the industry's insufficient innovation capacity. Despite China's all-encompassing cultural heritage, with each historical period and region offering unique cultural essences preserved through various forms of cultural expression, many domestic game manufacturers have fallen into the trap of arbitrary interpretation and misrepresentation. In their quest to attract more players, some developers incorporate cultural content that deviates significantly from historical facts, sometimes even distorting history or mocking cultural elements as gimmicks. This approach not only threatens cultural security but also risks conveying inaccurate cultural and historical views to players. Compounding this issue is the prevalent "copying" mentality in game production. Many manufacturers, driven by a low-cost, high-return operational model, are reluctant to invest in cultural research and creative development. This has led to a proliferation of "copycat games" and a severe homogenization of domestic game content. The Chinese mythology game genre, for instance, has seen a surge in recent years, but most of these games fail to deeply explore the rich connotations of mythological themes in their game logic. Instead, they often merely stack mythological elements without truly capturing the spirit and essence of the cultural heritage they draw from.

The final major challenge stems from the imperfect industrial chain in China's gaming sector. The successful integration of traditional culture into games requires a multidisciplinary approach, involving cultural creators who can identify, deconstruct, reorganize, restore, and innovate based on China's rich and diverse cultural heritage. This process demands expertise across various aspects of game development, from design and planning to operation and promotion. It necessitates a workforce with a comprehensive understanding of both game development and the spiritual essence of traditional culture. However, the current state of China's game industry reveals a significant gap in this area. There's a notable lack of attention to talent introduction and education in cultural and creative fields within the industry. Most production personnel in game companies come from technical backgrounds in computer science, resulting in a severe shortage of professionals with deep cultural knowledge and creative skills. This imbalance limits the industry's collaborative capacity and hinders the creation of culturally rich IPs with widespread social influence.

The case of Sun Wukong, a character featured in hundreds of games including "Black Myth: Wukong", "Honor of Kings", and "Fantasy Westward Journey", illustrates this challenge. While these games have contributed to the promotion and innovation of traditional cultural elements, they often lack cohesion and fail to build a comprehensive industrial chain comparable to that of the Marvel Universe in the United States. The scarcity of popular derivative products further limits the global cultural influence and export potential of these well-known domestic cultural elements. Addressing these challenges – technological gaps, innovation deficits, and industrial chain imperfections – will be crucial for the Chinese gaming industry to fully harness its rich cultural heritage and compete effectively on the global stage. As the success of "Black Myth: Wukong" demonstrates, there is immense potential in the fusion of traditional Chinese culture with modern gaming technology. Overcoming these hurdles could pave the way for a new era of culturally rich and globally competitive Chinese games.

4. Analysis of the Integration Development Path of China's Gaming Industry and Traditional Culture

The integration of China's gaming industry with its rich traditional culture presents a multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive approach. At the core of this integration lies the need for an in-depth exploration of traditional cultural resources. China's cultural heritage, with its long history and profound depth, offers a vast array of themes for game developers to explore. From mythology and historical stories to literary masterpieces and philosophical thoughts, the potential for creating engaging and culturally rich gaming experiences is immense.

Game developers can draw inspiration from classic works like "The Classic of Mountains and Seas" and "Investiture of the Gods" to build fantasy worlds, or create strategy games based on pivotal historical periods such as the Three Kingdoms and Sui-Tang dynasties. Moreover, the integration should go beyond mere thematic adoption, delving into the unique cultural elements such as architectural styles, costume features, art forms, and traditional festival customs. These elements can be ingeniously woven into various aspects of game design, from scenery and characters to props and tasks, creating a deeply immersive cultural experience for players. To truly capitalize on this cultural wealth, innovative integration forms and methods are crucial. This involves combining traditional culture with novel game mechanics to create unique gaming experiences. For instance, developers could design battle formation systems based on ancient tactical thinking or develop simulation management games that allow players to experience traditional craft production processes like papermaking or ceramics production. The use of cutting-edge technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR) can further enhance the immersive experience, allowing players to feel as if they are truly present in ancient battlefields or palaces.

Narrative techniques also play a vital role in this integration. Breaking away from traditional linear storytelling, developers can adopt multi-threaded, fragmented narratives to add layers of mystery and depth to cultural stories, stimulating players' curiosity and desire to explore. Simultaneously, incorporating modern emotional elements and values can make these traditional cultural stories more relatable to contemporary audiences, evoking stronger emotional resonance. However, the integration should not be superficial. There needs to be a focus on transmitting the core cultural connotations and values embedded in traditional culture^[3]. This includes Confucian principles of benevolence and righteousness, Buddhist concepts of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, and Taoist ideas of nature and harmony. These values can be conveyed through game plots, tasks, and character development, subtly cultivating players' moral concepts and character. The success of this integration heavily relies on talent cultivation and team building^[2]. There's a pressing need for professionals who understand both game development and traditional culture. This can be achieved by incorporating traditional culture courses in game-related university programs and encouraging cultural experts to acquire game development skills. Game development teams should be diverse, including not just technical experts but also cultural consultants who can ensure the accurate and in-depth presentation of traditional culture in games.

International cooperation and exchange form another crucial aspect of this development path. Collaborating with renowned international game development teams can facilitate the learning of advanced technologies and concepts while providing opportunities to showcase Chinese cultural elements on a global stage. Such collaborations, like developing a game based on the Silk Road, can help expand the international market for Chinese games while promoting cultural exchange. Finally, the role of policy support and industry guidance cannot be overstated. Government departments should introduce policies that encourage the integrated development of the game industry and traditional culture, offering incentives such as tax breaks and financial support. Industry associations should establish standards and norms to guide game enterprises in maintaining quality and cultural authenticity, preventing the distortion or abuse of traditional culture in games.

In this era of growing cultural confidence, the path of integration between China's gaming industry and traditional culture is set to broaden. Through concerted efforts from all sectors, China's gaming industry, empowered by its rich cultural heritage, is poised to create more excellent games with distinct Chinese characteristics. These games have the potential to become shining examples of Chinese culture, achiev-

ing greater success in the international market and enhancing China's cultural influence globally. This integration not only promises economic benefits but also serves as a powerful medium for cultural preservation and promotion in the digital age.

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