

Literary Imagination in the Convergence of Film and Gaming: Analyzing the Cross-Media Narrative of Black Myth: Wukong

Jiawen Tian*

1 Department of Chinese, Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Nanjing, China

Abstract

Black Myth: Wukong, a wonderful Chinese game, not only achieves breakthroughs on a technical level but also showcases the deep cultural heritage of Chinese gaming. This article analyzes the integrated media narrative strategy of Black Myth: Wukong and explores its artistic tension within the contexts of film-game integration, the revival of literary qualities, and cross-media storytelling. Firstly, the game employs cinematic camera language and sound design to create an immersive gaming experience. Secondly, the incorporation of literary elements constructs a rich game worldview. Finally, the article discusses the innovative practices of Black Myth: Wukong in cross-media storytelling, examining how it integrates the narrative characteristics of different media, resulting in a transition from cross-media to integrated media, thereby providing new possibilities for the development of domestic games. The success of Black Myth: Wukong lies not only in the combination of technology and art but also in Chinese culture.

Keywords

Black Myth: Wukong; cross-media narrative; film-game integration; camera language; literary qualities.

1. Introduction

Black Myth: Wukong exemplifies cross-media narrative innovation through cinematic-game-literary synergy, transcending cultural barriers while redefining China's digital storytelling paradigm.

This paper will explore Black Myth: Wukong through a case study approach, dividing the analysis into three parts: the interplay between film and gaming, the fusion of gaming with literature, and the connections bridging film, game, and literature. Through this tripartite lens, we will examine the artistic tension presented in Black Myth: Wukong within the framework of cross-media narrative.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. The Combination of Game and Film: The Film Character of the Game

In 2014, Shanghai Youzu Culture Media Co., Ltd. took the lead in proposing the concept of film and game linkage, linking the film industry with online game IPs in order to create a new ecosystem of interactive entertainment [10]. The concept of "film-game integration" (FGI) has evolved from game-to-film adaptations toward bidirectional synergy between cinematic and interactive media. Current Chinese scholarship primarily bifurcates into: 1) game-originated film adaptation studies, and 2) film gamification research examining ludic narrative structures. Notably, academic exploration of game-to-film reverse engineering - particularly regarding how game engines enhance cinematic texture (CT) - remains underdeveloped in China, largely due to historical limitations in 3A game development capabilities and insufficient R&D investment in real-time rendering technologies.

Black Myth: Wukong (BMW) represents a technological breakthrough as China's inaugural 3A masterpiece, achieving unprecedented CT through Unreal Engine 5 implementation. Its photogrammetric reconstruction of cultural heritage sites (e.g., Dazu Rock Carvings, Lingyin Temple) demonstrates: (1) micron-level asset detailing, (2) physics-based material simulation, and (3) cinematic environmental storytelling. Player reception analysis reveals significant perceptual alignment with blockbuster film experiences (e.g., "film-like shock", "perfect cinematic quality"). The title's multimodal synthesis of pure camera language (PCL), diegetic audio-visual synchronization (DAVS), and interactive spatial montage (ISM) establishes new paradigms for playable cinema, effectively merging ludic engagement with filmic spectatorship through its technical pipeline innovations. Eichenbaum once pointed out that the language of the camera is the basis of film stylistics [15]. Black Myth also tries to let the camera speak during the narrative process of the game, in which the use of scenery shot is very representative. In the first round of the game: Fire Shines on the Black Cloud, the Destiny One can meditate after ringing the bell, accompanied by the melodious sound of the bell, the camera slowly cuts to the panoramic view of the Black Wind Mountain, which is the same as the scenery described in the Journey to the West: 'Mountain grasses grow, wildflowers bloom, and cliffs and roaches are covered with cliffs and roaches; ficus grows, beautiful trees are beautiful, and steep ridges and plain hills are covered with mountains. The entry of the scenery shot in this scenery changes the in-focus perspective to a zero-focus perspective, leading the player to restore the pure original appearance of the world from a cold-eyed point of view [1]. Although Black Wind Mountain is a place inhabited by demons, the overall environment is quiet and elegant, and even shows a bit of Zen under the display of the scenery shot. The hints of the camera lay ambush in the player's mind until the end of the episode, when the metaphorical content gradually emerges. Although Elder Jinchi is a famous monk, he is greedy for foreign objects, and a few robes have become an inseparable obsession; although the Black Bear Guai is a demon (Yaoguai), after Wukong burns down the Zen garden, he overpowers the wild monsters, repairs the scriptures, and rebuilds the Zen garden. Who is a demon and who is a monk? The answer varies from different perspectives. When the Destiny One meditates and cultivates, the five senses are extinguished and the mind is born, and the scenery shot of Black Wind Mountain at that time may be a sign of the truth of the world that can be felt with the heart. There are many such scenery shots in Black Myth, such as the old withered vines in the Yellow Wind formation and the broken walls eroded by the wind and sand, who would have thought that this lifeless country once had a good time for the people to live and work in peace and happiness? When the Destiny One and Wuneng come to the Tongtian River again, the Turtle General and raging water is not different from that of the past, which seems to indicate that the journey of the Destiny One in search of the Six Relics is also the cycle of destiny. What's more, in the fourth round, when Wuneng back to the Pansi Cave, scenery shot to the corner of the courtyard rustling down the peach blossom, the wind rose, the petals in the closing animation fell into the hands of the eight ring or canopy, millions of years of space and time by a scenery shot connection, the lens to convey the emotions of the silent pavement, the love of the hopelessness of the reincarnation of the unforgettable memories.

The Black Myth often inserts scenery shots to adjust the rhythm at the end of an intense fight. Scenery shots not only show the famous mountains and waters in China, but also add a Chinese mood to the whole game. Scenery shots are the way to create the mood, and they are also the key link to imply the subtle relationship between human beings and the earth and sky, and the destiny and the surrounding environment [14]. After the Journey to the West, Wukong, who does not want to become a Buddha, is besieged by many forces and his immortal body is transformed into six relics. The Destiny One needs to find all the six relics in order to resurrect Wukong and fulfil his mission. According to Buddhism, human beings have six relics: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. Are the senses the way for human beings to feel the world or do

they obscure the original feelings of human beings towards the world? The answer is given in the Da Zheng Zang: In this meeting, Anaruta sees without eyes, Tru Nanda hears without ears, Jingjia Goddess smells fragrance without nose, Jao Van Batti knows flavour with a different tongue, and Shun Ruoduo God has no body and has a touch. Mahārāja meets the root of the mind that is long extinguished, and knows it clearly, and is not because of the mind[11]. The six relics and six dusts are the means by which man knows the world, or are they obscuring his original perception of the world? 'The six relics and six dusts are all illusory, and the interplay of the six relics is the state of rounded knowledge that is harvested beyond the six relics themselves. The Chinese mood brought about by the scenery shots is precisely the empty realm beyond the six relics; what the eyes see is not necessarily true, and what the ears hear is not necessarily false; eliminating distractions and being clear-sighted is the only way to see the real world of The Black Myth.

In addition to the use of scenery shots, ingenious sound design is also the key to the combination of film and game. The development of sound technology enables modern audiences to experience unprecedented complexity and subtlety of sound[12], and the perception of sound naturally constitutes one of the most important criteria for the audience to evaluate a film. The Black Myth often uses the artistic technique of sound and picture counterpoint to expand the expressive capacity of the game. The so-called sound-picture counterpoint refers to the fact that the sound and the picture should maintain relative independence, but also maintain the contrast and connection, and the relationship between sound and picture is complementary to each other or inconsistent with each other[9]. In the second round of the game, the 'root instrument' that the Destiny One needs to find is the ear, and in this round, the artistic use of sound-picture dichotomy is more concentrated. At the beginning of the second round, the voice is heard before the person is seen, and the background of the story unfolds with the unique landscape of Yellow Wind Ridge, which is eroded by wind and sand: Yellow Wind Ridge, a mighty ole range, once buzzin with joy and glee.. The simple, bright and powerful voice contrasts sharply with the desolate scenery, and the content of the voice explains the reason for this contrast. The centuries-spanning story time is condensed into a minute or so of narrative time, and the tight narrative pace quickly propels the player into a new storyline. While a sea change is but a moment in time, the heterogeneous quality of the sound and picture counterpoint prolongs the player's thinking time. Through the sound design, the changes in the universe and space-time leave a deep mark in the player's mind.

Moreover, in the ending animation of each episode, the game's creative team also skilfully uses voice-over to create a sound and picture counterpoint. The ending animation of the second episode tells the story of a scholar and a fox, which seems to have nothing to do with the main plot. However, in the background of the scholar walking away, the voice of Ling Ji Bodhisattva rings out as an extra-pictorial voice: 'People, beasts, Buddhas, and demons, all beings have their own roots, and they hold a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority, which can not be messed up. Is it right? Sun Wukong.' The voice-over breaks the fourth wall, seemingly asking Wukong but actually asking the player. The scholar and the fox in the ending animation are human and the beast, and the Lingji Bodhisattva and the yellow wind monster in the main plot are Buddha and Yaoguai. The Buddha, who advocates compassion and universality, has actually arranged the hierarchy of superiority and inferiority of all beings, and the equality of all beings is nothing more than a well-decorated deception. The end of the third episode is painted with the voice of the Yellow Brow. After testing humanity and finally obtaining the desired result, Golden Cicada Zi thinks that Yellow Brow is obsessed with winning and losing by pushing the cause with the effect. At this point, the picture and music fade out, but Yellow Brow's voice is unusually clear and sad: 'Hahaha If you can't win, what else is there to testify about cause and effect human hearts.' The voice is a clear hint, but also a vague metaphor, it reminds the player of the depth

of this, but does not give a straightforward answer, right and wrong are in the minds of the Hamlets.

In fact, whether it is the language of the camera or the sound design, the use of techniques is to enrich the connotation and artistic tension of the game, to expand the limited space of expression beyond the game, and to create a kind of poetic cinema that unites the implicit aesthetics of the Chinese style with far-reaching meanings. This poetic film character is in harmony with the overall style of the game, so that the film character and the game world are intertwined, and the artistic tension of media integration can be shown.

2.2. The Fusion of Game and Literature: The Revival of Chinese Literature in New Media

Since the 1980s, the Four Great Masterpieces have been successively adapted into Chinese TV dramas. Film and television adaptations have become an important way to disseminate classical masterpieces in contemporary times[7]. For more than forty years, it is still difficult to find a new way out for the adaptation of Chinese classical masterpieces. The launch of *Black Myth: Wukong* undoubtedly provides a new idea for the dissemination of literature in the new era: games can also be a vehicle for literary dissemination.

Literary elements are not rigidly embedded in the game, but are broken down and reorganised to integrate with the game format. Literature can be found everywhere in the world of *Black Myth*: poems are scattered throughout the characters' voice-overs; the soundtrack contains dozens of quotations from Chinese traditional classics; and the names of the characters' skills and weapons enjoy the rich Chinese classical charm. The game seldom quotes literary classics directly, but rather combines literary allusions with the game's plot and makes clever use of them. For example, the interlude song *hole of the cobweb of love*: 'A thousand worries weigh upon my soul, while those who don't know me wonder what I seek in grace.' is adapted from a famous line in the earliest collection of Chinese poetry: *The Book of Songs*: Those who know me say that I am worried, and those who don't know me wonder what I seek in grace[13]. The song's lyrics exhibit repetition, creating new passages of chants reminiscent of *The Book of Songs*, which features repeated chants and comparative contrasts without losing the euphonious beauty of classical poetry. The adapted lyrics intertwine with the love story of *Bajie* and the *Spider Woman*, highlighting the conflict between love and duty, akin to the entanglement of a spider's web, symbolizing emotional turmoil and the whitening of the young girl's hair. This fusion of form and content enhances the artistic expressiveness of the game's literary elements.

The dialogue in *Black Myth* reflects an ancient style appropriate for its characters. For instance, *Ba Jie*, despite being teased by the *Spider Woman's* daughters, reveals love and regret for their mother. The youngest sister's playful remark, "It's not the third sister getting married, what's the rush?" and the third sister's annoyed retort mirror a scene in Chapter 42 of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, where sisters engage in playful banter while preparing for a painting. This exchange captures the teasing dynamic between *Baochai* and *Daiyu*, paralleling the interactions among the *Spider Woman's* daughters regarding marriage.

In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, this moment signifies the sisters' last innocence before the *Jia* family's downfall. Similarly, the second sister's actions in *Black Myth*, tying up *Ba Jie* for her mother, mark a poignant moment before the *spider spirit's* demise. *Ba Jie's* encounter with the lively daughters evokes a fleeting warmth, as he may see them as akin to his own kin. The tragic conclusion of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, where shared sorrows abound, foreshadows a parallel tragedy for the *Spider Woman's* daughters.

The literary composition of *Black Myth* creates a new intertextuality, drawing on Tang poetry, Song lyrics, and classical novels, skillfully integrating these elements without chaos. This unity across form, content, and theme contributes to its seamless execution.

Among the literary elements in *Black Myth*, the adaptation of the original *Journey to the West* is particularly significant. The main narrative explores "What happens after the *Journey to the West*," extending the timeline both before and after the original story. This approach integrates character memories and advances the plot surrounding the Six Relics of Destiny One, ultimately leading to the resurrection of the Great Sage. The structured narrative unfolds the grand arc of Pre-Westward Journey, Westward Journey, and Post-Westward Journey in an organized manner.

While Wu Cheng'en's *Journey to the West* is a traditional chapter book with a multitude of characters, it often lacks depth in its portrayal of minor figures. In contrast, *Black Myth* utilizes the game's characteristics to present minor characters through detailed portraits, reflecting the creative team's humanitarian concern. Characters previously overlooked in the epic narrative become vivid and three-dimensional, prompting players to engage emotionally, even as they face inevitable demise at the hands of Destiny One.

For instance, the monk Guangzhi, who is briefly mentioned in the original text for his plot against Elder Jinchi, receives a complete backstory in *Black Myth*. Originally a wolf demon, Guangzhi becomes a monk out of a longing for kindness and is mentored by Elder Jinchi. His guilt over the Zen garden fire he accidentally caused drives him into isolation, illustrating the game's depth in character motivation.

This narrative technique is not unique to *Black Myth*; it echoes historical Chinese literature, such as Du Fu's war record poems and contemporary works like *White Deer Plain*, which focus on individual experiences and emotions within historical contexts, moving beyond politically dominated narratives. Together they provide an insight into the relationship between history and literature, and history and the individual[2].

Based on the fusion of literary elements and poetic-historical narrative, the literary resurrection in *Black Myth* is more like a humanistic spirit rooted in literature, which stirs literature into mud, mixes it with games, and shapes a new form. According to Professor Zhang Fugui, one of the important purposes of literary education is to cultivate humanistic spirit, modern consciousness, rich emotion and elegant temperament [3]. The *Black Myth* is a game, but its intention is much higher than entertainment. Each three-dimensional minor character is like every ordinary person in busy life, perhaps not recorded in history, but vividly constituting history. These common Yaoguais in *Black Myths* are just like us, and they inspire our deepest emotions, revealing the warm care of humanism. The plot of *What to do after the Journey to the West* is similar to that of *What to do after Nora's departure* based on *A Doll's House*, in which modern thinking spreads imagination within the traditional narrative space, and the unconventional plot brings about a reflection on orthodoxy. The anti-conventional plot brings about a reflection on orthodoxy. The addition of literary elements and the use of white and white language make the game more elegant. To a certain extent, *Black Myth* undertakes the mission of literary education.

In recent years, the marginalization of literature has become a salient topic of discussion among scholars in the liberal arts in China. The onset of the new millennium has witnessed a remarkable surge in the film and television industry, as well as the emergence of new media platforms that have transformed the landscape of mass entertainment. This proliferation of media has contributed significantly to the decline in the status of literature, resulting in a diminishing social influence that warrants thorough examination. Scholars argue that this shift prompts critical questions regarding the future trajectory of Chinese literature in an age dominated by visual and digital narratives.

Given this context, a pressing inquiry emerges: What avenues exist for the revitalization of Chinese literature in the contemporary cultural milieu? Notably, the interaction between the video game "*Black Myth: Wukong*" and literature serves as not only a testament to literature's

capacity to transcend traditional forms but also a profound illustration of literature's potential to rediscover and amplify its inherent charm. This convergence offers valuable insights for domestic game developers and narrative creators seeking to integrate literary elements into interactive media.

Black Myth: Wukong exemplifies how narrative depth and literary richness can significantly enhance the gaming experience, bridging the gap between visual storytelling and literary frameworks. The game's adaptation of elements from classical Chinese literature, particularly the iconic "Journey to the West," allows players to engage with familiar cultural narratives while also providing an innovative platform for exploring complex themes and character development.

In this light, "Black Myth: Wukong" represents a vital pathway for the rejuvenation of Chinese literature, as it demonstrates the potential for synergistic relationships between diverse media forms. By adopting literary techniques and storytelling methods, video games can help reinvigorate literary discourse and foster a renewed appreciation for literary works within contemporary society[8]. This symbiotic relationship not only enriches the gaming experience but also affirms the enduring relevance of literature in a rapidly evolving cultural landscape, inviting further exploration of how literature can adapt and thrive in the age of multimedia engagement.

Thus, as scholars and practitioners reflect on the challenges facing Chinese literature, it is imperative to consider the transformative possibilities inherent in innovative media interactions. Through the lens of "Black Myth: Wukong," we can envision a future where literature finds new life, engaging audiences in ways that transcend traditional boundaries and affirm its significance within the broader cultural narrative.

2.3. To Bridge Film, Game and Literature: Insights from Cross-Media to Integrated Media

According to VG Insights, as of 18 September 2024, Black Myths had sold 19.8 million copies on Steam, generating total revenues of more than \$948 million (approximately RMB 6.72 billion). Renowned analyst Daniel Ahmad said in a social media post that Black Myths is one of the fastest-selling games of all time, with sales even exceeding those of Eldenfalcon and Legacy of Hogwarts during the same period. Not only did Chinese players praise the game, but the positive reviews from abroad were equally high, with many players stating that Black Myth showed true Chinese culture.

In fact, there have been many film-as-game and game-as-film at home and abroad, but only a few cross-media attempts that have really caused a stir. Many scholars believe that the boundaries between films, TV dramas and games are still clear, and cross-media mutual borrowing, complementing and even proliferating resonance is still the key to breakthrough [6]. Behind the great success of Black Myth, it may be a leap from cross-media to integrated media.

So, how does Black Myth achieve integration of media? In my opinion, one of the most important reasons is to integrate the experience into the narrative and to serve the theme of the medium. The medium of the game lies in the immersive interactive experience, and players need to fight with monsters to get more relics through their own efforts in order to unfold the real face of the story. However, mechanical fights inevitably lead to uninteresting repetition, so creative team of this game always devises a variety of plots to make the fights meaningful for players. Black Myth is derived from Journey to the West, which is a story that requires one to go through huge difficulties to obtain the scriptures. Every calamity of the four masters and disciples and every fight between Wukong and Yaoguai in the original story are all for the sake of obtaining the scriptures, which is the ultimate ideal. The Journey to the West has a high national popularity, and Sun Wukong's fight against demons for justice and ideals has been the

consensus of every Chinese and even foreign readers. On top of that, the Destiny One takes over the mission of resurrecting the Sun Wukong, and every time he fights a demon, he gains a relic, which brings him one step closer to his ultimate ideal. This narrative mode gives players a strong sense of mission, and the experience of fighting Yaoguais is accompanied by an implicit expectation that they will not get tired of fighting for the sake of their buddhist destiny.

Due to the existence of boundaries between different medias, the combination of games and films often leads to a separation between visual appeal and playability. This divide arises from the conflict between the player's physical perspective and their psychological perspective[5]. The so-called physical perspective is the game content and screen that players actually see; the so-called psychological perspective is the resonance, emotion and thinking that players experience with the game narrative and game characters. Only when there is the scene to look at provoke player's thoughts and feelings, the physical perspective can be connected to the psychological perspective, and only after the psychological perspective has been successfully shaped can the interactive experience of the game be considered playable. Most games have difficulty in completing this connection process, which is why cinematography only stays in the simple splicing of film techniques and game animation. For example, in *Starry Night* a game released on steam in 2023, the interstellar graphics are based on the cinematic quality of a blockbuster film, but the cinematic graphics are reduced to the backdrop of a spaceship fight. *The Black Myth*, however, does a good job of interacting with the film and the game, linking the player's physical and psychological perspectives, and is both watchable and playable. This is because, between the watchable and the playable, the literary narrative serves as a buffer bridge. Literature establishes the theme of this game, and the theme game is also the space where the language of the camera unfolds. When the image serves to imply the theme, the camera is no longer meaninglessly piled up, but has spatial continuity. Literary theme accommodates playability. The theme of success through hardship in the *Journey to the West* fits with the adventure game of fighting with Yaoguais for upgrading. The first Yaoguai in the game is hard to destroy, but the repetitive fighting doesn't discourage the players, instead, they reassures themselves: 'We are the man of destiny, and how can we be successful if we doesn't go through trials and tribulations'.

Then, why can literary narrative become a bridge connecting film and travel? As Mr Qian Gurong said, 'Literature is anthropology'[4]. Literature is modern because it cares about modern people. The literary narrative of *The Black Myth* reflects the thinking about the state of existence of modern people, which coincides with the thoughts of modern people. *The Black Myth* deconstructs the traditional hero, and the one who carries its ideal mission is not the Great Sage, but a nameless monkey. At first, the little monkey does not know that he has the responsibility of the Buddhist destiny, he only fights for the goal of bringing Wukong back to life, and after the ordeal, the Buddhist destiny is revealed. This is the story of the little monkey, but also the story of every ordinary person who strives to live a life with firm ideals and beliefs, and quietly cultivate, may open up the life of an accident but meaningful plot. In addition to encouragement, *Black Myth* also has a pioneering thinking of anti-sublime, incorporating the thinking of personality liberation into the game. In the original story of *Journey to the West*, gods and buddhas are the unquestionable authority and representatives of absolute goodness. If you challenge the rules, you have to be pressed under the Five Finger Mountain without freedom like the Sun Wukong, and you have to accept the rules and be disciplined, and it is the destiny of the rebels to fetch the scriptures and become a Buddha. *The Black Myth*, however, begins with the Sun Wukong's resignation from the Buddha and his return to his hometown being hindered by the Heavenly Court, and ultimately his six relics are dispersed. Modern people live in an environment of great social pressure, where the constraints of social rules and the influence of other people's expectations cause people to have too many moments when they can't help themselves. The world of *Black Myth* is like a border city in life, some people are eager

to squeeze into the city of Buddha, living a long life and gaining respect; while some people are trying to jump out of the city by all means. Should they meet the expectations and accept the rules and regulations, or should they insist on expressing their individuality? This is an eternal reflection. The literary narratives of writing, reflecting, and writing have caused strong resonance with the players, and the emotional resonance has bridged the gap between the film and the travelling.

From cross-media to 'fusion' media, *Black Myths* brings inspiration not only in terms of technology, but also in terms of the attitude of art creators: rooted in reality, made with heart, promoting culture, and demonstrating the humanitarian spirit in order to forge excellent works.

3. Conclusion

Amidst rapid AI advancement, traditional humanities and arts confront existential challenges while gaining transformative potential. *Black Myth: Wukong* exemplifies how cultural heritage can thrive through digital innovation, preserving irreplaceable humanistic values – emotional depth, cultural nuance, and creative intentionality – that resist algorithmic replication. The discipline must strategically engage emerging media (VR, interactive platforms) to enhance public engagement and revitalize expressive forms. This synergistic integration enables traditional arts to maintain ontological authenticity while acquiring contemporary relevance, ultimately redefining cultural stewardship in the digital intelligence era.

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