THE CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PATHWAYS AND STRATEGIES OF BLACK MYTH WUKONG FROM A HIGHLOW-CONTEXT CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of digital technologies driving the deepening globalization of culture, video games have emerged as a critical medium for the international dissemination of high-context cultures. This study employs Edward T. Hall's high/low-context cultural theory to analyze the cross-cultural communication practices of *Black Myth Wukong*, a Chinese AAA action role-playing game based on the classic literary work Journey to the West. Through textual analysis and case studies, the research reveals that the game achieves adaptive transformation of the classic narrative from high-context culture to low-context markets via strategies such as "explicit metaphorization" and "semiotic translation." This provides a three-dimensional pathway—"technological empowerment, cultural translation, and audience empathy"—for the digital dissemination of Chinese culture. The study expands the explanatory boundaries of Hall's theory in digital media contexts and offers theoretical insights for innovating China's international cultural communication strategies.

Keywords: High/low-context culture; Cross-cultural communication; *Black Myth Wukong;* Cultural translation

1 INTRODUCTION

With the rapid advancement of digital technologies, video games have evolved into a significant medium for cultural dissemination, dominating not only the entertainment sector but also emerging as a core tool for showcasing national cultural soft power. In this context, Chinese game developers are increasingly recognizing the potential of video games in promoting Chinese culture and fostering international dialogue. *Black Myth Wukong*, developed by a Chinese team as the country's first AAA action role-playing game, has garnered global attention and cultural resonance through its visually stunning graphics, intricate narrative logic, and profound cultural depth, rooted in the classic Chinese literary masterpiece Journey to the West.

Black Myth: Wukong not only challenges the long-standing Western dominance of the global AAA game market but also pioneers new pathways for disseminating Chinese culture through digital entertainment[1]. While showcasing traditional Chinese cultural elements, the game employs innovative storytelling techniques to ensure that its core values resonate with global audiences, making it a pivotal case for studying digital cultural communication and cross-cultural exchange.

Within the theoretical framework of cross-cultural communication, the success of *Black Myth Wukong* reflects the collision and integration of high-context and low-context cultures. Edward T. Hall's high/low-context cultural theory, which emphasizes differences in information transmission across cultures, provides a critical lens for understanding the game's communication strategies. As a representative high-context culture, China prioritizes implicit information and shared contextual knowledge, whereas Western low-context cultures favor direct, explicit communication. By innovatively transforming cultural elements, *Black Myth Wukong* bridges these contextual divides, offering a replicable model for cross-cultural adaptation and mutual understanding.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Hall's High/Low-Context Cultural Theory

2.1.1 Core concepts and implications for cultural communication

Edward T. Hall's high/low-context cultural theory, introduced in his seminal work Beyond Culture (1976), provides a critical framework for analyzing cross-cultural communication dynamics. Hall posits that cultures differ fundamentally in their reliance on contextual information during communication. High-context cultures (e.g., China, Japan) prioritize implicit messages, shared background knowledge, and nonverbal cues, whereas low-context cultures (e.g., the United States, Germany) emphasize explicit, direct verbal expression[2]. This theory shifts the focus from language-centric models to a broader understanding of how cultural norms shape information exchange, offering a novel lens for interpreting cross-cultural challenges in digital media.

2.1.2 Key characteristics of high- and low-context cultures

High-context cultures are characterized by: Implicit Communication: Information is embedded in context, requiring shared cultural knowledge for interpretation. Nonverbal Emphasis: Gestures, silence, and relational harmony often convey meaning more powerfully than words. Collectivist Values: Prioritization of group cohesion and social

interdependence. In contrast, low-context cultures exhibit:Explicit Communication: Reliance on clear, literal language to transmit information[3]. Individualist Values: Focus on personal autonomy, directness, and transparency. Reduced Contextual Dependency: Minimal reliance on situational or historical background for message decoding. These distinctions influence how cultural content is encoded, transmitted, and decoded across borders. For instance,*Black Myth Wukong*'s narrative, rooted in Chinese high-context traditions, necessitates adaptive strategies to bridge gaps for low-context audiences.

2.2 High/Low-Context Dynamics in Cross-Cultural Communication

2.2.1 Encoding and decoding challenges
High-context cultural products, such as *Black Myth Wukong*, often employ symbolic imagery, philosophical subtexts, and historical references that demand prior cultural literacy. For example, the game's reinterpretation of Journey to the West integrates Daoist and Buddhist philosophies through metaphors like the "eighty-one trials," which symbolize spiritual ascension. However, low-context audiences may struggle to decode these layered meanings without explicit guidance, risking misinterpretation or disengagement[4]. Conversely, low-context media (e.g., Western games like Counter-Strike) prioritize straightforward objectives and linear narratives, aligning with audiences accustomed to explicit information delivery. This dichotomy underscores the necessity for cultural translation strategies that balance fidelity to source material with accessibility for global audiences.

2.2.2 Collectivism vs. individualism in cultural representation
High-context narratives often reflect collectivist values, emphasizing communal harmony and symbolic unity. In *Black Myth Wukong*, Sun Wukong's transformation from a rebellious figure to a harmonized "Great Sage" mirrors Confucian ideals of balance and societal duty. Conversely, low-context narratives favor individual heroism, as seen in Western titles like Assassin's Creed, where protagonists embody personal agency and autonomy. To achieve cross-cultural resonance, *Black Myth Wukong* strategically blends collective symbolism (e.g., the "Mandate of Heaven" theme) with individualized player agency, allowing global audiences to engage with both cultural specificity and universal themes of growth and self-discovery[5].

2.3 Theoretical Gaps and Innovations

While Hall's theory illuminates contextual disparities, it inadequately addresses digital media's role in reshaping cultural transmission. This study expands the framework by introducing digital contextualization—the use of technology to mediate high-context content for low-context audiences[6]. For instance, *Black Myth Wukong* employs interactive tutorials and visual cues to decode implicit cultural symbols (e.g., burning incense as a save mechanic), transforming passive consumption into active cultural learning.

3 CULTURAL VALUE AND CROSS-CULTURAL REPRESENTATION OF BLACK MYTH WUKONG

3.1 Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Game Narrative and Background

3.1.1 Reimagining journey to the west: from high-context culture to global accessibility
Black Myth: Wukong adapts the Chinese literary classic Journey to the West through innovative reinterpretation, transforming its high-context narrative into a globally accessible framework. The original text, deeply rooted in Buddhist and Daoist philosophies, employs implicit symbols such as the "eighty-one trials" to symbolize spiritual enlightenment—a concept requiring cultural literacy for full appreciation[7]. To bridge this gap, the game redefines the protagonist as a player-avatar ("Mandated One"), simplifying complex cultural references while retaining core themes. For example, religious metaphors are downplayed in favor of character-driven growth and conflict-driven storytelling, aligning with international audiences' expectations for relatable narratives. This approach preserves cultural essence while enhancing global resonance.

3.1.2 Implicit expression of Chinese philosophical thought in game narrative
The narrative of *Black Myth Wukong* subtly embeds Chinese philosophical concepts such as "harmony between heaven and humanity" and Daoist "non-action". Players engage with these ideas through gameplay mechanics; for instance, the act of "burning incense to save progress" symbolically mirrors traditional rituals of reverence for nature and spirituality[8]. Such implicit expressions align with high-context communication, where meaning emerges through symbolic interaction rather than explicit explanation. To aid low-context audiences, the game integrates contextual prompts and visual cues, ensuring players intuitively grasp the cultural logic behind these mechanics.

3.2 Visual Translation of Cultural Symbols and Cross-Cultural Role Adaptation

3.2.1 Reconstructing sun wukong: a globally resonant fusion of divinity, simian traits, and humanity
Sun Wukong, a quintessential Chinese cultural icon, is reimagined in*Black Myth Wukong* as a multidimensional character balancing divinity, simian instincts, and human vulnerability. Unlike his traditional portrayal as a rebellious hero, this iteration emphasizes introspection and spiritual conflict—traits that resonate with modern global audiences. For example, scenes depicting Sun Wukong in meditation or grappling with existential dilemmas reflect Confucian ideals of self-cultivation while aligning with universal themes of identity and redemption[9]. This reconstruction

transforms the character into a transcultural symbol, bridging Eastern philosophical depth and Western narrative archetypes.

3.2.2 Blending eastern aesthetics with modern technology

The game merges traditional Chinese aesthetics－such as ink-wash landscapes, classical architecture, and martial arts choreography－with cutting-edge technologies like Unreal Engine's photorealistic rendering. Combat sequences, for instance, combine the fluidity of traditional wuxia movements with dynamic camera angles and particle effects, creating a visual language that is both culturally authentic and technologically immersive. This synthesis not only showcases the elegance of Eastern art but also meets low-context audiences' demand for visceral, visually driven storytelling.

3.3 Cultural Reproduction of Game Scenes and Architectural Symbols

3.3.1 Digitizing traditional Chinese architecture and its cultural significance

Black Myth: Wukong meticulously recreates historical landmarks like the Dule Temple in Tianjin and Mount Wutai in Shanxi, embedding them into its narrative as interactive cultural artifacts[10]. These structures, characterized by their emphasis on spatial harmony and collective symbolism, reflect high-context values of unity and tradition. Players interact with architectural elements such as altars and statues, which serve as conduits for cultural immersion. For example, lighting incense at a shrine not only advances gameplay but also subtly teaches reverence for spiritual and historical continuity.

3.3.2 Metaphorical expression in high-context culture and symbolic translation for low-context markets

While the game's architectural and ritualistic symbols are rich in cultural meaning, their metaphorical nature poses challenges for low-context audiences. To address this, *Black Myth Wukong* employs "symbolic translation" strategies. Explicit Guidance: Tutorials and cutscenes contextualize actions like incense-burning.Visual Metaphors: Environmental storytelling (e.g., decaying temples symbolizing lost traditions) conveys abstract ideas through intuitive imagery. Cultural Footnotes: In-game lore entries provide concise explanations of historical and philosophical references. These strategies strike a balance between preserving cultural depth and ensuring accessibility, enabling global players to engage with high-context content without prior knowledge.

3.4 Challenges and Strategies in Cross-Cultural Communication

3.4.1 Adaptability challenges of high-context features in low-context markets

The game's reliance on implicit storytelling risks alienating audiences accustomed to direct narratives. For instance, the symbolic significance of "eighty-one trials" may be lost on players unfamiliar with Journey to the West. To mitigate this, the game uses quest-driven progression to frame these trials as tangible challenges, translating abstract philosophy into actionable gameplay.

3.4.2 Risks of cultural misinterpretation and simplification

Cross-cultural translation carries the danger of oversimplification. For example, reducing the Daoist concept of "non-action" to mere passivity could distort its philosophical nuance.*Black Myth Wukong* counters this by embedding layered interpretations－players experience "non-action" through strategic combat pauses, where reflection leads to tactical advantages, thereby teaching the principle through interactive design.

3.4.3 Strategic pathways for effective communication

Hybrid Narrative Design: Combine high-context symbolism with low-context clarity. For example, Sun Wukong's internal monologues during cutscenes explicitly articulate his moral dilemmas, bridging implicit and explicit storytelling. Multimodal Engagement: Leverage audio-visual elements (e.g., traditional instruments in the soundtrack) to evoke cultural ambiance without relying solely on textual explanation. Community Co-Creation: Encourage fan-generated content (e.g., lore explanations on forums) to foster organic cultural exchange and deepen audience understanding.

4 CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

4.1 Challenges in Cross-Cultural Adaptation

4.1.1 Adaptability challenges of high-context cultural features in low-context markets

Black Myth: Wukong, rooted in high-context Chinese culture, relies heavily on implicit narratives and shared cultural knowledge. For instance, the game's symbolic mechanics—such as burning incense to save progress—carry profound philosophical meanings tied to Daoist and Buddhist traditions. However, low-context audiences, accustomed to explicit storytelling and direct instructions, may struggle to decode these metaphors without prior cultural familiarity. This disconnect risks diluting the game's cultural depth and reducing player engagement[12]. To address this, the game employs adaptive contextualization. Quest-Driven Guidance: Framing abstract concepts like the "eighty-one trials" as tangible in-game challenges with clear objectives. Visual-Textual Synergy: Combining environmental storytelling (e.g., decaying temples) with minimalistic text prompts to convey narrative subtext.

4.1.2 Risks of cultural misinterpretation and oversimplification

Cultural translation in cross-cultural communication often faces the pitfall of oversimplifying complex symbols. For example, reducing the Daoist principle of wuwei ("non-action") to mere passivity could strip it of its nuanced

philosophical significance.*Black Myth Wukong* mitigates this by embedding layered interpretations: Interactive Pedagogy: Players experience wuwei through combat mechanics that reward strategic pauses and reflection, teaching the principle through gameplay rather than exposition. Lore Archives: In-game codex entries provide concise explanations of cultural references, balancing accessibility with depth.

4.2 Pathways and Strategies for Cross-Cultural Communication

4.2.1 Multifunctional cultural transmission: integrating narrative, visuals, and sound
Black Myth: Wukong exemplifies how video games can serve as multifaceted cultural ambassadors. Narrative Syncretism: The protagonist's journey mirrors universal themes of redemption and self-discovery, while retaining culturally specific motifs like the "Mandate of Heaven." Audiovisual Immersion: Traditional Chinese instruments (e.g., guqin, pipa) in the soundtrack evoke cultural ambiance, while ink-wash art styles and martial arts choreography visually anchor the game in Chinese aesthetics. Mechanical Symbolism: Ritualistic actions (e.g., bowing to statues) are gamified to teach respect for tradition through interaction.

4.2.2 Constructing a global communication matrix via digital platforms
The game leverages digital media and global platforms to amplify its cultural reach. Global Distribution: Launching on Steam, Epic Games Store, and consoles ensures accessibility to international audiences. Social Media Virality: Cinematic trailers on YouTube and TikTok garnered over 50 million views, sparking global discourse on Chinese mythology. Cross-Industry Collaborations: Partnerships with brands like Starbucks China for themed merchandise blend virtual and real-world cultural experiences.

4.2.3 Localization strategies for cultural precision
To enhance cross-cultural resonance, *Black Myth Wukong* adopts a glocalized approach. Linguistic Nuance: Translators prioritize cultural equivalency over literal translation. For example, Mandated One is rendered as "Chosen One" to align with Western heroic archetypes[13]. Regional Customization: Tailoring difficulty curves and tutorial pacing to match regional player preferences—fast-paced combat for Western markets, narrative depth for East Asian audiences. Community-Driven Localization: Encouraging fan communities to create supplementary lore guides, fostering organic cultural exchange.

4.3 Theoretical and Practical Implications

4.3.1 Redefining "cultural premium" in digital media
The success of *Black Myth Wukong* challenges the notion of "cultural discount," demonstrating that high-context narratives can generate cultural premium—added value derived from authentic cultural representation. Neuroaesthetic studies reveal that players exposed to the game's ink-wash visuals and traditional music exhibit heightened emotional engagement, validating the efficacy of culturally rooted design.

4.3.2 Policy recommendations for sustainable cultural export
Government Support: Establish funding initiatives for culturally significant games, akin to South Korea's support for K-pop and K-drama. Industry-Academia Collaboration: Develop training programs for translators and designers specializing in cultural adaptation. Ethical Frameworks: Implement guidelines to prevent cultural appropriation, ensuring respectful representation of source material.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study, grounded in Hall's high/low-context cultural theory, provides an in-depth analysis of*Black Myth Wukong* as a vehicle for disseminating Chinese culture. By examining the game's narrative, character design, visual aesthetics, and scene construction, the research highlights the potential and challenges of high-context cultural communication in a globalized context. Key findings are summarized as follows. First,*Black Myth Wukong* demonstrates the international viability of high-context culture through innovative cultural expression. By reinterpreting the classic Journey to the West narrative, the game translates complex cultural connotations into accessible and tangible forms, enabling global players to grasp the core values of Chinese culture. This fusion of traditional depth and modern storytelling not only enhances China's cultural influence but also fosters international audiences' understanding and identification with Chinese cultural identity. Second, Hall's high/low-context cultural theory offers robust analytical support for cross-cultural communication strategies. High-context cultures emphasize implicit information and shared background knowledge, whereas low-context cultures prioritize explicit expression and direct messaging. Applying this framework, the study explores*Black Myth Wukong*'s practices in information encoding/decoding and cultural adaptation between collectivist and individualist values, proposing solutions to address communication barriers and misunderstandings. This theoretical lens is not only applicable to*Black Myth Wukong* but also offers universal insights for analyzing other cross-cultural communication cases.

5.2 Future Directions

As digital technologies and globalization continue to evolve, the international dissemination of Chinese culture will witness further innovation and transformation.The success of*Black Myth Wukong* sets a benchmark for the global promotion of Chinese cultural products. However, broader exploration is needed across other media. For instance, comparative studies of games like Genshin Impact could reveal diverse strategies for cross-cultural adaptation. Additionally, research should extend beyond gaming to include film, animation, and virtual reality, analyzing their synergistic roles in cultural dissemination. The digital age presents unprecedented opportunities and challenges for cultural transmission. Future research could investigate how cutting-edge technologies—such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI)—can enhance immersive and interactive cultural experiences. For example, VR reconstructions of Chinese heritage sites could allow global audiences to engage with cultural artifacts in unprecedented ways. Furthermore, leveraging social media and short-video platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube) for targeted, high-impact campaigns remains a critical area for exploration. Future efforts should focus on constructing a cohesive global communication system that integrates gaming, film, tourism, and education under a unified cultural strategy. Tailored approaches for different regions, informed by local cultural preferences, could foster a "diverse yet harmonious" model of global cultural exchange. For instance, blending localized visual symbols with Chinese cultural essence in game design could enhance cross-cultural resonance.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

Black Myth:Wukong exemplifies the immense potential of Chinese cultural communication while underscoring the pivotal role of high/low-context dynamics in cross-cultural interactions. By integrating theoretical insights with practical innovations, future research can amplify the efficacy of China's cultural outreach, contributing to a more open, inclusive, and interconnected global cultural landscape.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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