

A Study of Digital Narration in *Black Myth: Wukong*

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ABSTRACT

The game *Black Myth: Wukong* made a global stir as soon as it was released. Guided by narration theories from both the East and the West, this article compares the narrative styles of *Journey to the West* with *Black Myth: Wukong* from three aspects: color narration, location narration and plot narration, and explores the special digital narrative features of latter. This article finally points out that the new modes of digital narration in *Black Myth: Wukong* has globally set a good example for dissemination of Chinese culture in the new era.

Keywords: *Black Myth: Wukong*, *Journey to the West*, Digital narration, Dissemination of Chinese culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

On August 20, 2024, a game called *Black Myth: Wukong* became a phenomenal hit due to its unique charm and profound cultural heritage. Up to 21:00 on August 20th, 2024, the total sales of the game on *Steam* and other gaming platforms have exceeded 4.5 million copies, with global total sales exceeding 1.5 billion yuan, and this popularity is still continuing (2024-09-13). At the regular press conference of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the spokesperson highly praised the game before Reuters reporter, saying that *Black Myth: Wukong* has reflected the attraction of Chinese culture; Later on, Chinese central media commented that the game has reached a new level of vivid presentation of Chinese culture and found a new access to China's excellent culture spread.

The success of *Black Myth: Wukong* is by no means an accidental event, but a success built on the close integration of Chinese cultural dissemination and digital narration. Guided by digital narration theories, this article will discuss the strategies of new digital narrative modes in *Black Myth: Wukong*, and highlight the significance of integrating Chinese culture into digital narration.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Narratology emerged as a classic narrative theory in the structuralist movement of the 1960s, and in the 1970s, French scholar Roland Barthes

conducted in-depth analysis of the structure and function of narrative. In the 1960s and 1970s, British and American scholars represented by Booth developed rhetorical narrative theory. In the 1990s, American narratologist David Herman first proposed "postclassical narratology" in 1997. At the turn of the century, the post classical turn of narratology had become a consensus in the academic community (Xu, 2024).

China has had its unique narrative system since ancient times, which mostly adopted linear narrative methods and tended towards "classical narrative" and the narrative achievements of classical Chinese literature reached a mature peak in Ming and Qing novels. In the mid-1980s, Western narration theory began to be gradually introduced to China. At the same time, significant achievements have been made in the localization of narrative research in China. Numerous researchers have enriched and developed China's own systematic narrative theory in the fields of classical literature and contemporary novels (Xu2024).

In the 21st century, with the rapid development of technology, the combination of narratology and new technologies has produced new effects. Western scholar Marie Laure Ryan(2006) strives to present the overall style of narrative theory relatively comprehensively through four focal points: "narrative definition, possible worlds, digital media, and narrative experience". In recent years, Chinese scholars such as Huang Mingfen

(2017) have also conducted in-depth research on narratology in the new digital environment, making narratology gradually develop into a discipline that transcends time, space, and culture in China.

The game *Black Myth: Wukong* is a phenomenal product of the combination of narratology and digital technology in the 21st century. However, there are not many studies in China that analyze its digital narration through a phenomenal game. Therefore, from a theoretical perspective, this article is a supplement to the research on digital narration theory; From a practical perspective, it is helpful to explore how to effectively combine the dissemination of Chinese culture with digital storytelling for better international dissemination.

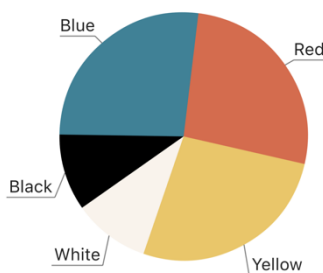


Figure 1 Color-proportion in the image of “Sun Wukong”.

The color theory system in ancient China was the "Five Colors" concept. The five colors refer to “Blue, red, yellow, white, and black”. “Blue” symbolizes “hope, antiquity, and solemnity”; “Red” is the color of life’s hair, and in folk culture, it symbolizes “auspiciousness, life, and justice”; “Yellow” comes the first in five colors, symbolizing “nobility, glory, and abundant harvest”; The image of Sun Wukong in early traditional animation was originally dominated by the three primary colors of “red, yellow, and blue”, with a Chinese rural New Year painting style. “Red” represents “justice”, “yellow” represents “hope” and “nobility”, and “blue” endows him with “resilience”, which not only conforms to the aesthetic taste of the people, but also highlights his bravery, wisdom, and loyalty.

3. COLOR NARRATION: MAKING IMAGE VISIBLE

Wang Qianwen (2024) pointed out that “color plays a crucial role in traditional Chinese culture. It is not only a visual element, but also carries profound cultural connotations and symbolic meanings.” China has had a unique and perfect aesthetic system in the use of color since ancient times, and classic color narratives that use color to express emotions and meanings are common in various art and cultural works.

3.1 Main Colors of “Sun Wukong” in *Journey to the West*

As shown in the “Figure 1”, early *Journey to the West* (both in novel and animation), mainly consisted of three colors: red, yellow, and blue, while the five colors had similar proportions and positions, and the overall color scheme was colorful.

3.2 Main Colors of “Tianmingren” in *Black Myth: Wukong*

The image of “Tianmingren” in *Black Myth: Wukong* is vastly different from traditional images, and the contrast shows a significant increase in the proportion of black and blue. (“Figure 2”)

Compared with the traditional use of colors in *Journey to the West*, the scenery in the game *Black Myth: Wukong* reflects the color scheme of traditional Chinese painting, which conforms to the concept of “Five Colors”. However, at the same time, in the portrayal of character images, “black, blue, white” colors are given a large amount of space, while warm-toned “red and yellow” appear less frequently. This reflects the adjustment of color narration while inheriting traditional matching, and innovatively shapes unique heroic temperament of “Tianmingren”.

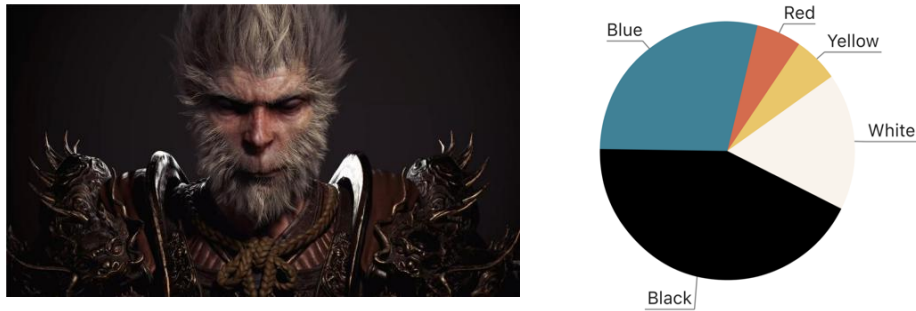


Figure 2 Color-proportion in the image of “Tianmingren”.

3.3 Special Features of Color Narration in *Black Myth: Wukong*

As suggested, the main color tone of the game graphics in “Black Myth” is “black”. The game is

created with a mysterious and heavy sense of traditional Chinese color black, which endows its overall scene style design with two distinct styles: Eastern Aesthetics and Aesthetics of Ruins. (“Table 1”)

Table 1. Color-connotation in *Black Myth: Wukong*

Aesthetic Style	Main Color	Presentation Methods	Presentation Effects
Eastern Aesthetic	Black, white, and blue(main colors) Red and yellow (decorative colors)	1. Simple color scheme 2. Clear distinction between primary and secondary 3. Point surface combination	1. Traditional Chinese Beauty 2. Divine and demonic sensation 3. Surrealist style
Aesthetics of Ruins	Black, gray, dark blue	1. Slightly cold 2. Low saturation, aging 3. The scene is dark and the color blocks are blurry	1. The desolate and desolate sense of desolation 2. Mystery and historical weight

Eastern Aesthetics is often found in traditional novel or animation , and *Black Myth: Wukong* is no exception. However, apart from Eastern Aesthetics, it endows more divine and demonic colors. *Black Myth: Wukong* emphasizes the unity of color and poor volume, maintaining an absolute unity in overall color tone, making the background of the picture more mysterious and difficult to distinguish;

Some small key elements can be “jumped out” from the overall environment color by using color contrast to guide players’ gaze to discover detailed clues. This combination of dots and surfaces, as well as the color volume difference of “abnormal harmony”, also adds some surrealist style to the picture.(“Figure 3”)

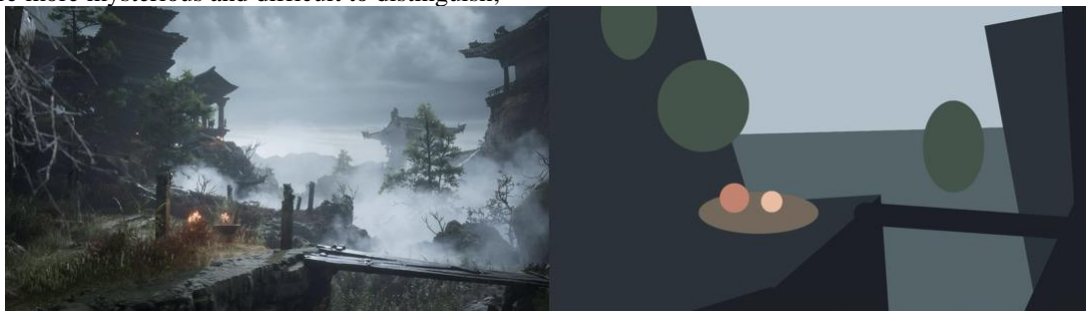


Figure 3 Color blocks in *Black Myth: Wukong*.

The “Aesthetics of Ruins” can aptly describe the scene characteristics in *The Dark Myth: Wukong*, namely the dilapidated historical sites and ruins after “gods and demons dominate” and “ritual

and music collapse”. The dark black blue background creates a sense of desolation and desolation, adding a mysterious and heavy historical filter to various things, giving players the

imagination space to fill in the past scenes, thereby enhancing the visual interaction and game immersion between players and the game screen. At the same time, the ruins scene also highlights the heroic temperament of Wukong, giving him an

independent and vivid personality, which coincides with the independent personality advocated by Western society and is more accepted by Western players.



Figure 4 Color tone in *Black Myth: Wukong*.

4. LOCATION NARRATION: MAKING HISTORY TRACEABLE

In recent years, Huang Mingfen (2017) has paid attention to the relationship between space and narrative in modern times. He pointed out that “location narrative is not only a narrative about location, but also a narrative based on the location, and at the same time, a narrative pointing to the target location.” In the research of traditional Chinese narratology, location narration plays a particularly important role in promoting the development of the plot. However, *Black Myth: Wukong* relies on innovative storytelling in terms of location to achieve better narrative effects, becoming an important means of digital narration.

4.1 Location in the Journey to the West: Being Virtual

The location and route of the traditional *Journey to the West* (in novels or animation) not only constitute an important part of the story plot, but also showcase the cultural exchange between ancient China and the West. The entire journey route is symbolic, for it is not only Tang Seng’s physical journey, but also his spiritual growth and awakening. Through experiencing various hardships and tests, the four disciples supported and grew together, ultimately achieving the goal of learning from each other. The pilgrimage route in *Journey to the West* also reflects China’s geographical cognition and the spread of religious beliefs at that time, and is a product of the integration of culture and history. However, many of these locations are derived from myths, legends, or fiction, and even if there are location prototypes, most of which are difficult to be traced today. (“Figure 5”)

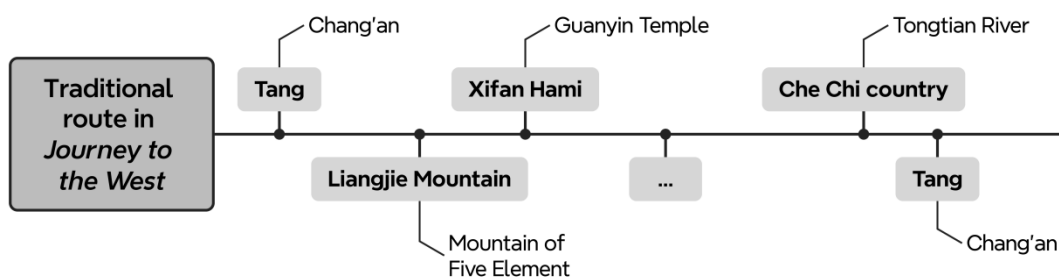


Figure 5 Journey route in *Journey to the West*.

4.2 Location of *Black Myth: Wukong*: Being Virtual But More Real

Compared with the traditional route of learning Buddhist scriptures, *Black Myth: Wukong* is a different system. It is mainly divided into six scene maps:

From the “Figure 6”, it can be seen that the location setting of the game breaks away from traditional location restrictions, selecting a few representative locations from traditional stories and adding some new locations, making the game’s rhythm more refined and compact.

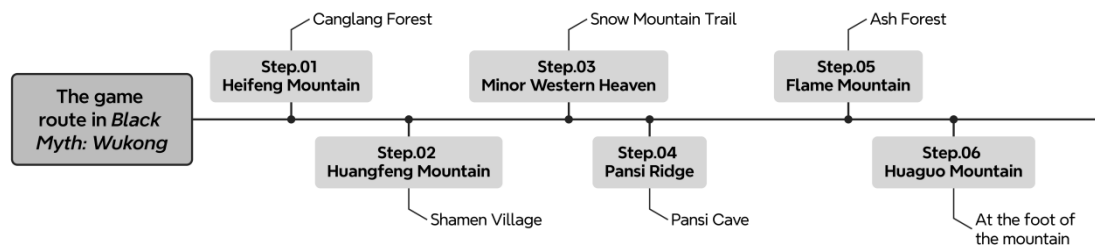


Figure 6 Game route in *Black Myth: Wukong*.

It is worth noting that *Black Myth: Wukong* also utilizes 3D technology to highly restore Chinese ancient buildings that exist in various places, making the game graphics more realistic. According to incomplete statistics, the game carefully selected 36 scenic spots nationwide as

game backgrounds, including 27 filming locations in Shanxi Province, including “Xiaoxitian” “Yuhuang Temple” “Tiefo Temple” and so on. The places are virtual in the game cyberspace but more real in reality. (“Figure 7”)



Figure 7 Real scenic spots in *Black Myth: Wukong*.

4.3 Special Features of Location Narration in *Black Myth: Wukong*

Black Myth: Wukong combines digital narrative virtual scenes with real-life cultural scenic spots, drawing attentions of numerous players and game enthusiasts to Chinese traditional culture and tourism resources, becoming another powerful medium for major cultural and tourism companies to promote Chinese local traditional cultural relics.

The real ancient buildings displayed in the game are a cross dimensional breakthrough between virtual and reality, which not only helps players experience the rich and authentic cultural connotations in the game, but also stimulates their interest in the corresponding historical relics in the real world. While driving the growth of local economy and tourism development, it can also greatly enhance cultural identity, strengthen national pride, promote the younger generation’s understanding and respect for their cultural heritage, and thus creating an atmosphere of protecting and inheriting traditional culture among a larger population.

5. PLOT NARRATION: MAKING STORY PLAYABLE

Tang Zhengyan (2018) pointed out that “In short, the plot narrative method is a combination of narration and storytelling.” In the vast majority of traditional Chinese literary stories, the storytelling is mainly linear and chronological. In the digital age, Xu Zhiwu (2018) pointed out that narrators should use digital tools to combine static and dynamic images, audio, and video to tell stories in a new practice of non-linear or interactive forms. This reflects the non-linear and interactive characteristics of digital narration.

5.1 Plot Design in *Journey to the West*

In the traditional *Journey to the West* (both in novel or animation), Tang Seng and his disciples gather for various opportunities, go to the Western Heaven, overcome difficulties, and finally return to retrieve the scriptures. The core narrative line seems to be a “heroic journey”, that is what the protagonist is summoned by an “adventure” in an ordinary world, reaches an unknown world with the

help of a “master”, completes the trial, defeats the ultimate enemy, receives a reward, and returns home. The protagonist went through hardships and ultimately achieved inner growth, which is also the

reason why traditional *Wukong* stories are widely understood and loved by readers in both the East and the West. (“Figure 8”)

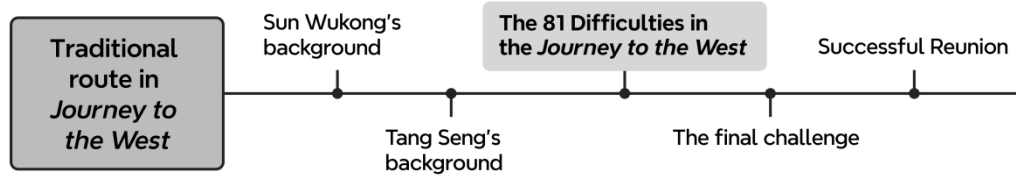


Figure 8 Linear narration in *Journey to the West*.

5.2 Plot Design in *Black Myth: Wukong*

As shown in the “Figure 9”, the plot design of *Black Myth: Wukong* breaks away from the traditional cycle of “Tang Seng is captured - Wukong fights monsters - Tang Seng is rescued”. The game adopts a non-linear narrative style, is mainly divided into two plots: “defeating monsters” and “completing tasks”. At the same time, there are

many hidden plots in the game, adding uncertainty to the plot. This means that players can experience multiple side stories simultaneously while exploring the world, providing more choices and freedom. The subplots and main storyline are intertwined and not entirely narrated by time, allowing players to understand and participate in the story in different ways, thus making the plot more impressive.

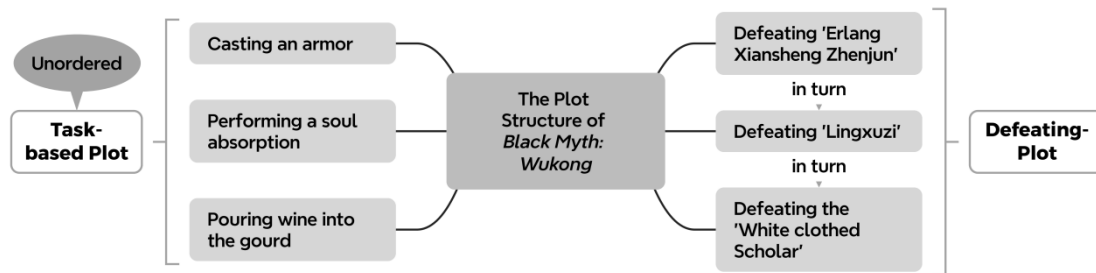


Figure 9 Non-linear narration in *Black Myth: Wukong*.

5.3 Special Features of Plot Narration in *Dark Myth: Wukong*

Compared with the traditional story of *Journey to the West*, *Black Myth: Wukong* enhances interaction with players through “non-linear” digital narration.

As for the narrative order, the game reorganizes the classic stories from the original work, preserving the coherence of the story while avoiding lengthy narration, allowing players to experience the charm of the original work and enjoy the freshness brought by the game in an immersive way. The plot construction in the game is also full of suspense and surprises. In the meantime, the developers cleverly set multiple plot turning points, allowing players to maintain curiosity and anticipation throughout the game, thereby generating strong emotional resonance.

As for the narrative rhythm, the game is compact but varied: in combat scenes, players need to make quick decisions and engage in intense battles with enemies; In character dialogue scenes, players need to listen to the characters’ inner monologues and feel their emotional fluctuations. This compact narrative rhythm keeps players in a tense and exciting state, increasing the attractiveness of the game.

The unique non-linear narrative structure presented in *Black Myth: Wukong* makes the game both narrative and playable.

6. CONCLUSION

From what we have discussed above, we can safely draw a conclusion that the game *Black Myth: Wukong* provides us with a new way of thinking and direction through in-depth exploration and modern interpretation of traditional Chinese culture,

allowing us to better understand and grasp the connotation and value of Chinese culture.

From the perspective of inheritance, the precise grasp and modern interpretation of the Chinese classical masterpiece Journey to the West in *Black Myth: Wukong* undoubtedly represents a continuation and development of the Chinese narrative system. The game revolves around "Tianmingren", and through a completely new portrayal of his character, it retains classic elements from the original work while incorporating modern aesthetics and technological means, giving this ancient story new vitality in the digital age. This kind of inheritance and promotion of traditional culture not only allows players to appreciate the charm of Chinese traditional culture in the game, but also invisibly spreads Chinese aesthetic concepts and value systems.

From an innovative perspective, the innovation in color narration, location narration, and plot narration in *Black Myth: Wukong* is also an expansion and deepening of China's digital narrative system in the new era. The game's new color style, new ideas for location setting, and non-linear narrative approach reorganize and present classic stories from the original work, allowing Chinese and foreign players to experience the charm of the original work while enjoying freshness, naturally immersing themselves in it and feeling the charm of Chinese culture.

The success of *Black Myth: Wukong* not only provides a new direction for the development of China's local gaming industry, but also offers new opportunities for the dissemination of Chinese culture and the development of digital narration.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Both Xuanze Chen and Rufe Liu contributed equally to the work. Xuanze Chen, undergraduate student in Wuhan University of Technology, is responsible for the material collection, theory-analysis and the whole process of writing. Rufe Liu, Phd, Associate Professor in Wuhan University of Technology, is responsible for the topic-selection, structure design and the whole process of revising.

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