

# Multimodal Cross-Cultural Communication in Black Myth: Wukong (2024)

Feihong He, Lisi Liang\*

School of Interpreting and Translation Studies, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou 510420, Guangdong, China

\*Corresponding author: [lisi.liang@gdufs.edu.cn](mailto:lisi.liang@gdufs.edu.cn)

## Abstract

With growing cultural consciousness, Chinese are increasingly exploring traditional Chinese cultural heritage, utilizing rapidly evolving digital technologies for cultural innovation and international dissemination. The “gaming plus culture” transmission model exemplifies this trend. The profound depth of Chinese traditional culture provides expansive potential for game development, and Chinese-produced games are garnering increasing international attention. As China’s first AAA game, Black Myth: Wukong, adapted from Journey to the West, leverages robust gaming resources while incorporating elements from literature, philosophy, music, architecture, and other domains, serving as a paradigmatic example of cross-cultural communication. This study employs Delu Zhang’s (2019) comprehensive framework for multimodal discourse analysis to examine the English promotional videos and main storyline cutscenes of Black Myth: Wukong (2024). The study encompasses three dimensions: cultural-loaded elements, contextual elements, and non-verbal expressions. It investigates the characteristics of translation across these dimensions, the relationships between different modalities, and how these modalities collectively construct textual meaning.

**Keywords:** Multimodal discourse analysis, Black Myth: Wukong, cross-cultural communication.

## 1 Introduction

As globalization progresses, the connections between China and the world grow increasingly interconnected, and the dissemination of Chinese culture continues to advance. The significance of promoting Chinese culture going global lies in its capacity to enhance the nation's cultural soft power and shape an inclusive and influential cultural image [1]. This cultural dissemination serves as a vital mechanism for facilitating civilizational dialogue and mutual learning. Furthermore, it functions as a bridge for value transmission, contributing to the resolution of cultural conflicts while advancing the preservation and promotion of global cultural diversity. In the era of the accelerated process of Chinese culture going global, external communication plays a crucial role in constructing the national image [2]. Unlike China, foreign countries, particularly Western nations, have not yet developed a similarly strong receptive environment for foreign cultures and literature. This necessitates careful consideration of cultivating an audience and receptive environment for Chinese literature and culture in foreign countries, especially in Western nations [3].

Meanwhile, the rapid development of digital technology has revolutionized how cultural content is created, distributed, and consumed globally. Among diverse digital platforms, video games have emerged as a particularly potential medium for cross-cultural communication, offering immersive experiences to players and effectively conveying various and complex cultural elements to global players. The evolution of gaming technology and cross-cultural communication presents new opportunities and challenges for promoting traditional cultural heritage in an increasingly digital world.

In recent years, China has taken strides in developing high-quality digital cultural products that show its rich cultural heritage. In particular, the gaming industry has demonstrated its remarkable potential in adapting traditional Chinese cultural products (like Chinese characters, poems, myths, etc.) for global audiences. This development aligns with China's objective to enhance its international cultural presence while preserving and passing down its traditional values. The success of Chinese games in international markets shows that interactive digital media can be regarded as effective vehicles for cross-cultural communication. This paper aims to apply multimodality to game localization in the popular case of *Black Myth: Wukong* (2024), intending to explore the insightful interplay between multimodal discourse analysis and the game industry that could be applicable to translation studies and beyond.

### 1.1 Contextualizing Journey to the West and its Modern Adaptation

*Journey to the West* [4], one of China's four classical masterpieces, highly represents traditional Chinese culture and values, embodying the profound heritage of Chinese classical literature. Created by the author Wu Cheng'en from Ming Dynasty, it stands as China's first romantic chapter-style novel featuring supernatural beings [5]. The novel constructs a fictional world where gods and demons coexist, narrating the story of Sun Wukong's emergence and his subsequent journey accompanying the Monk Tang Sanzang, Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing, and the White Dragon Horse on a journey to obtain Buddhist sutras from India, known as the West or Western Paradise, where Buddha and his followers dwell, overcoming eighty-one tribulations before ultimately obtaining the sutras. Based on Xuanzang's historical westward journey, the story showcases ancient Chinese philosophical thought and folk beliefs under the convergence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism during the Song and Ming dynasties [6].

*Black Myth: Wukong*, developed by Game Science<sup>1</sup> ( 游戏科学 ), uses *Journey to the West* as a foundation for its narrative. It tells the story of events following Sun Wukong's abandonment of his Buddhist status, which triggered the Celestial Court's punitive war against him and his death. The game draws on *Journey to the West*'s Buddhist cosmology and subversive themes to craft its narrative.

At the outset of the game's narrative, Sun Wukong, who has attained the title of "The Victorious Fighting Buddha," deliberately renounces his Buddhist status to retire to Mount Huaguo. This decision prompts the Celestial Court to dispatch Erlang Shen and the Celestial Army to the mountain, threatening to destroy it

<sup>1</sup> Game Science: founded in 2018, full name Hangzhou Youke Interactive Technology Co., Ltd.; Chinese game developer.



and Sun's descendants unless Sun Wukong returns. Following an intense battle that literally shakes heaven and earth, Sun Wukong is defeated. His "Six Relics" ("六根" from Buddhist philosophy, which means five sense organs and one's mind) – the first five, eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body - are distributed as rewards to five demon kings: Black Bear Guai, Yellow Wind Sage, Yellowbrow, Hundred-Eyed Daoist Master, and Bull King. The sixth relic, "mind," transforms into a mysterious stone atop Mount Huaguo, becoming a legendary tale passed down through generations of monkeys. Throughout history, countless monkey descendants have embarked on quests to challenge these demon kings and retrieve the five relics, hoping to resurrect Sun Wukong. The game's main content continues to build on this concept, telling a series of stories about the player's journey to retrieve the Six Relics.

The player assumes the role of "the Destined One" (a monkey that looks like Sun Wukong and is destined to resurrect Sun), one of those Sun's descendants. Players gain insight into the intricate relationships and narratives of various deities and immortals throughout this journey, which either continue or echo the original Journey to the West storylines. This game preserves the core cultural values of the original work while updating its presentation through modern interpretation and expression. The traditional Chinese mythological narrative has been repackaged and presented to global audiences and players in a contemporary gaming format, breathing new life into it within a new cultural context [6]. This serves as powerful evidence that Chinese traditional culture can forge new paths and achieve new successes in its international dissemination.

Black Myth: Wukong represents a significant milestone in contemporary gaming, earning prestigious recognition across the industry's most esteemed awards ceremonies. Its nominations and victories at The Game Awards 2024, including the coveted Game of the Year nomination and Best Action Game award, alongside its Ultimate Game of the Year honor at the 2024 Golden Joystick Awards, demonstrate the game's exceptional achievement in interactive entertainment.

The game has received high marks from the industry, with a number of prominent game publishers giving it high scores. The Chinese gaming publication 3DM Game and Imagine Games Network China (IGN China) awarded the title perfect scores, emphasizing its narrative sophistication, visual accomplishments, and refined gameplay systems. The game's international appeal is further evidenced by strong reviews from IGN's global network, with the primary IGN platform and IGN Brazil awarding scores of 8.0 and 8.5 out of 10<sup>2</sup> (until December 27, 2024), respectively, reinforcing the game's substantial impact on the medium.

Until Dec.19, 2024, Black Myth: Wukong demonstrates significant engagement metrics across major global content platforms, indicating substantial international anticipation for this Chinese mythology-inspired action game. As is shown in Figure 1, the game's official gameplay demonstration video on Bilibili, China's prominent video-sharing platform, has garnered 61.91 million views with 390,000 interactions, demonstrating robust domestic engagement. This exceptional viewership suggests intense anticipation within the Chinese gaming community.

International reception appears equally compelling, as evidenced by performance metrics on global platforms. As is shown in Figure 2, on YouTube, gameplay footage shared by content creator Thai Devil Gamer accumulated 65.75 million views<sup>3</sup> within three months, indicating substantial international interest in this culturally-influenced action title. Furthermore, Wukong's presence on Reddit, a significant gaming community platform, reveals sustained community growth. In Figure 3, the official Black Myth: Wukong subreddit (an online community of this game), established in August 2020, has attracted 501,000<sup>4</sup> members and ranks within the top 1% of gaming communities by size, suggesting robust community engagement and discussion.

These cross-platform metrics collectively demonstrate that Black Myth: Wukong has successfully cap-

2 Data collected from <https://heishenhua.com/>, Dec.19, 2024

3 Data collected from [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=black+myth+wukong&sp=CAM%253D](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=black+myth+wukong&sp=CAM%253D), Dec.19, 2024.

4 Data collected from <https://www.reddit.com/r/BlackMythWukong/>, Dec.19, 2024

tered attention in both domestic and international markets. This suggests a broad appeal for its integration of traditional Chinese mythology into contemporary gaming frameworks. The consistent high engagement across diverse platforms indicates significant anticipation for the title among global gaming players.



Figure 1. Views and danmu on Bilibili

## Not again 🐼 #blackmythwukonggameplay #wukong

6575万次观看 · 3个月前



Thai Devil Gamer ✓

blackmythwukonggameplay #wukong #blackmythwukonggameplay4k #blackmyth.

Figure 2. Views on Youtube



Figure 3. Subreddit of Black Myth: Wukong

The selection of Black Myth: Wukong as a research subject is significant for four reasons. First, the game's narrative foundation resonates with traditional Chinese cultural values. Its reimagining of Buddhist philosophy and its exploration of moral themes demonstrate the integration of cultural elements that maintain authenticity while appealing to modern sensibilities. This careful balance between tradition and innovation makes it an ideal case study for examining effective cultural adaptation strategies. Second, the game's core values align with China's cross-cultural communication objective. Its unique themes of redemption,



perseverance, and the pursuit of destiny transcend cultural boundaries while remaining firmly rooted in Chinese philosophical traditions. The game's approach to presenting these themes through interactive storytelling creates an engaging framework for introducing international audiences to Chinese cultural concepts. Therefore, it is particularly valuable for studying cross-cultural communication through digital media.

Third, BlackMyth's technical performance and artistic achievements have garnered widespread recognition from domestic and international gaming communities, as evidenced by winning awards and consistently positive review scores. This critical acclaim validates the game's quality as a cultural product and demonstrates its success in meeting global entertainment standards while maintaining its cultural identity. The favorable reception from diverse audiences suggests that the game has successfully overcome potential cultural barriers, making it an exemplary case for studying effective cross-cultural communication strategies. Last but not least, the game's substantial following across multiple platforms and regions provides a rich dataset for analyzing cross-cultural reception patterns as a supporting basis. The large and diverse audience base offers valuable insights into how different cultural elements are received and interpreted by audiences worldwide. Black Myth: Wukong's ability to attract and engage such a broad audience base while maintaining its cultural authenticity makes it particularly worthy of academic investigation.

These factors collectively establish Black Myth: Wukong as an ideal subject for examining the intersection of cross-cultural communication, digital entertainment, and cross-cultural communication. The game represents a significant achievement in adapting traditional Chinese cultural elements for a global audience through interactive media, making it a valuable case study for understanding effective strategies in cultural exportation and cross-cultural communication.

## 2 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (hereinafter MDA) serves as a critical analytical framework for examining how meaning is created through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes affluent in the case study of Black Myth: Wukong. MDA describes the interaction between socially and culturally shared semiotic modes for creating meaning [7].

The theoretical foundations of MDA can be traced back to Halliday's [8] system-functional linguistics and social semiotics [9-10]. Kress and van Leeuwen [11] pioneered the systematic analysis of visual communication by developing a "grammar of visual design". In this work, they argued that, like language, visual elements follow organized patterns that create meaning within specific social and cultural contexts. Based on this work, scholars have expanded MDA to examine how various modes work together to construct meaning: text, images, gestures, sound, and layout [12]. MDA's significance lies in its ability to integrate language with other meaning-making modes [13]. This approach enables us to examine the role of linguistic systems in meaning exchange processes and the effects produced by other non-verbal semiotic modes, such as images, music, and color. Through this analytical lens, we can achieve a more thorough and accurate interpretation of discourse meaning and finally reveal how humans strategically employ multiple modalities to accomplish their social communication objectives [14].

MDA research in China developed rapidly after Li Zhanzi [15] first introduced this field to China in 2003. After that, Zhang Delu [16] proposed a comprehensive framework for MDA that systematically outlined the relationships between different semiotic modes and their functions in the meaning-making process. Feng [9] further elaborated on the applications of this framework and the outlook of MDA in relevant fields.

Chinese scholars have widely adopted the framework above in various fields. For instance, researchers like Li [17] employed this framework in film studies to examine subtitles in *The Black Swan* (2010). Her findings showed how different modes interact with each other to construct meaning in cinematic contexts. In the field of publicity materials and cultural communication, Fan and Bai [18] applied this framework to analyze the subtitles of Chinese cultural publicity films, demonstrating how visual, verbal and audio modes collaborate to convey cultural messages across linguistic boundaries of different cultures effectively.

Zou and Liu [19] examined the multimodal features of book cover designs for *The Story of the Western Wing* (1991, 2013)’s English version. In animation studies, Su and Zhang [20] applied this framework to analyze character image construction in the animated film *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child* (2019), showing how different semiotic resources shape the characters. Recent MDA scholarship has formalized analytical frameworks for video games. Li [21] conducted a multimodal analysis of the online game *League of Legends* (2011) from the perspective of its translation strategies. All these studies demonstrated how the framework can effectively decode meaning construction in digital and print media contexts. Wildfeuer and Stamenkovi [22] propose a dual-layered logic to dissect tutorial discourse in *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013) and *Batman: Arkham Knight* (2015). Their model encodes multimodal cues (interface elements, camera angles, etc.) into logical forms to infer narrative/instructive events, then links these via discourse relations (Elaboration for embedded instructions). While their approach rigorously models gameplay semantics, it overlooks cultural-contextual factors in cross-cultural adaptations. This gap aligns with Zhang Delu’s [16] culture-sensitive MDA framework, which this study adapts to analyze *Black Myth: Wukong*’s transcultural strategies.

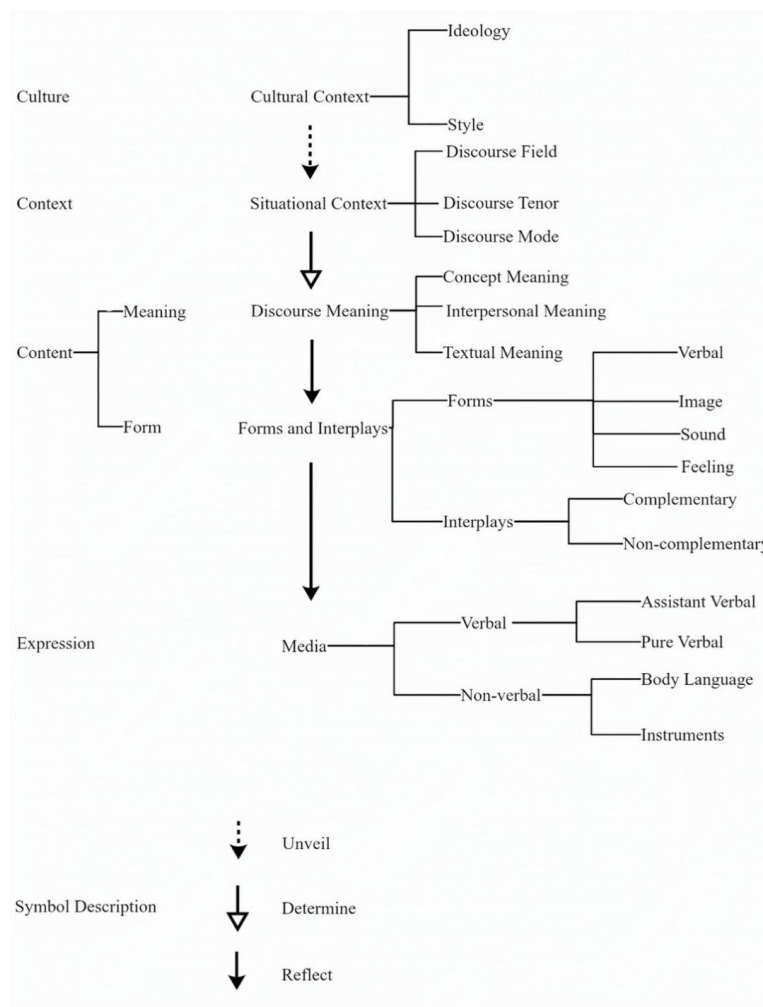


Figure 4. Multimodal Discourse Analysis Framework [16]

Recent studies from home and abroad have demonstrated the effectiveness of MDA in examining cultural communication across different media formats. In China, there are two specific pieces of research about Chinese cultural elements and gaming. First, Fan and Bai’s [18] research highlighted the importance of considering cultural backgrounds and differences while ensuring different (verbal and non-verbal) modes complement each other to form discourse meaning precisely and completely. When translating those cul-

turally-loaded contents, they found that translators may pay attention to verbal and non-verbal elements to achieve cross-cultural communication. As for Li's [21] studies, he demonstrated that game translation or localization requires careful consideration of how visual, linguistic, and audio modes interact to create a cohesive player experience. The study found that successful game localization depends on accurately translating the text and ensuring that hopefully all modes work together to preserve the intended meaning and the resonance between two or more cultures.

Also, O'Hagan [23] conceptualizes video games as multidimensional-multimodal artifacts, positioning localization as a process of techno-cultural reconfiguration. Case studies like *Tokimeki Memorial* (1995) illustrate how narrative frameworks and aesthetic designs undergo a radical transformation to meet regional expectations. The study emphasizes the interplay of interactivity (motion controls, online interactions) and multimodality (text-image-sound dynamics), necessitating strategies that merge technical precision (code adjustments) with cultural sensitivity (ideological adaptations). O'Hagan further advocates leveraging player engagement metrics to validate localization efficacy empirically. Bernal-Merino [24] argues that game localization demands creative adaptation (transcreation) beyond conventional translation. Analyzing titles such as *Final Fantasy series(I-VI)* (1987-2006), the study reveals how culturally specific elements — religious symbols, gender depictions, and language-based puzzles — require recontextualization to align with target cultural norms. The research highlights the necessity of coordinating linguistic adjustments with visual redesigns (character models), audio modifications (voice acting styles), and technical adaptations (user interface layouts) to sustain player immersion across diverse markets.

These insights from cultural publicity studies and game studies are relevant for analyzing *Black Myth: Wukong*. Publishers of this game aim to effectively communicate Chinese cultural elements to the international community through the game, which requires a coordinated use of multiple semiotic modes. The multimodal nature of video games, combining interactive gameplay, visual design, music, and narrative elements, creates a rich text suitable for a comprehensive analytical approach. The framework developed by Zhang [16] provides valuable tools for examining how different semiotic modes construct meaning in such a complex digital form. According to this framework, multimodal discourse media can be categorized morphologically into verbal and non-verbal types, and cultural and situational contexts jointly determine the information conveyed at both content and expression levels.

*Black Myth: Wukong* is an Action Role-Playing Game (ARPG) that, as a contemporary form of new media, inevitably conveys its cultural foundations and narrative substance to players through various sensory-engaging elements, including level design, character dialogue and subtitles, background music, and character design. This multimedia approach makes the game amenable to MDA. This study analyzes how *Black Myth: Wukong* facilitates cross-cultural communication through multimodal discourse by examining verbal expressions at cultural and contextual levels, as well as non-verbal expressions at content and expressive levels.

Furthermore, this analytical framework is proven applicable in studying how traditional Chinese cultural elements are adapted and presented in contemporary media formats. Successful cross-cultural communication requires careful consideration of how different modes (textual, visual, and auditory) can be coordinated to effectively convey cultural concepts to international audiences while maintaining their essential meaning [18]. This makes MDA suitable for examining how *Black Myth: Wukong* adapts and presents elements from *Journey to the West* through the modern gaming form. Building on this foundation, this study selects the main storyline's Chinese and English subtitle texts of *Black Myth: Wukong* alongside associated audiovisual materials as its corpus, conducting case study analysis through the comprehensive analytical framework of MDA by integrating verbal and non-verbal elements.

### 3 Methodology

This study employs a three-phase approach to examine cross-cultural communication strategies in *Black Myth: Wukong*, integrating theoretical frameworks from MDA with observations from player communities. The methodology identifies cultural elements through gameplay analysis, supplemented by platform-based content screening to ensure relevance and research originality.

The research began with repeated playthroughs of the main storyline and detailed documentation of key scenes, dialogues, and interactive sequences. This immersive process aimed to capture the game's multimodal structure—integrating text, visuals, sound, and feedback. For instance, dialogues based on classical Chinese literature or visual design indicating traditional architectural styles were prioritized for further analysis.

High-visibility content from major gaming platforms was analyzed to ensure the selected examples resonated broadly with players. On Bilibili, relevant gameplay videos with millions of views and extensive viewer interactions (e.g., comments on the reinterpretation of Buddhist terms) were identified as critical case studies. Similarly, discussions on Reddit (e.g., threads debating the localization of cultural concepts) provided insights into international player perspectives. This step ensured that chosen examples reflected both domestic and global player engagement, validating their cultural and communicative significance.

The selection of case studies followed two steps to ensure analytical rigor and cultural validity. First, the first author's preliminary screening. As the primary researcher, I initially swept *Black Myth: Wukong*'s main storyline through repeated gameplay sessions, identifying segments rich in cultural and multimodal elements. This involved dialogues, visual designs, and audio sequences referencing classical Chinese literature, philosophical concepts, or traditional aesthetics. Scenes with high views—those widely discussed on platforms like Bilibili (the trailer, the scene of Erlang Shen's confrontation, etc.) or Reddit and other social media platforms—were prioritized as potential candidates.

Second, to mitigate subjective bias and enhance scholarly robustness, the corresponding author—an experienced subtitler and researcher in cross-cultural game localization—reviewed the preliminary selections. This involved: assessing the cultural representativeness of examples, evaluating translational coherence, and cross-checking against industry standards for game localization.

Discrepancies were resolved through iterative discussions, refining the final corpus to 12 verbal and non-verbal examples. Examples were categorized under Zhang Delu's MDA framework, emphasizing two dimensions: verbal modality (cultural-loaded elements and contextual elements) and non-verbal modality (audio, image and visual design).

The methodology's strength lies in integrating platform-based information and theoretical rigor. Grounding the analysis in heated player discussions and gameplay content ensures that selected examples reflect real-world cultural communication. The focus on multimodal interdependence—how text, image, and sound jointly construct meaning—provides a holistic perspective to evaluate cross-cultural communication effects, bridging theoretical ideas with practical player experiences.

While the process prioritizes widely discussed content, it may overlook subtle cultural nuances in other scenes. Furthermore, reliance on platform data inherently favors regions with active online communities, potentially overlooking perspectives from less digitally engaged player groups and players from other foreign regions.

### 4 Case Analysis: Cross-Cultural Communication in *Black Myth: Wukong*

Adopting MDA framework, this study analyzes how *Black Myth: Wukong* achieves cross-cultural communication through various semiotic modes, including verbal and non-verbal elements (audio, image, etc.). Three main aspects will be discussed: verbal expressions, including cultural-loaded elements; contextual elements, and non-verbal expressions, including music, action, and visual design. By examining these dif-





ferent modalities and their interactions, how the game effectively conveys Chinese cultural elements to international audiences while maintaining player engagement can be discovered.

The analysis begins with verbal expressions, particularly focusing on translating culturally-loaded terms and concepts. This is followed by an examination of how the game adapts specific contextual elements for international audiences. Finally, the study explores how non-verbal elements complement and enhance the cross-cultural communication process. This comprehensive approach allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies in achieving cross-cultural communication through interactive digital media.

#### 4.1 Verbal Expressions: Cultural-loaded Elements in Game Translation

Examples 1-6 are selected from the dialogue between Erlang Shen and Sun Wukong's confrontation in Chapter One. Those conversations occur against the backdrop of the Celestial Court campaign against the descendants of Sun Wukong, following his renunciation of the Buddha's position.

##### Example 1 Those High Above

(1)Description of the Scene: Sun Wukong, dissatisfied with the actions of the Celestial Court, took to the battlefield to confront the celestial soldiers and generals.

(2)Line:

Sun: 上面的天王老子信不过我, 我懂。

[The supreme authorities up the Court don't trust me, I understand.]

Translation: Those high above don't trust me. I understand that.

The term “天王” originates from Buddhist scriptures, originally denoting the creator and supreme ruler of the celestial realm. In Chinese linguistic contexts, this phrase commonly serves as a metaphor for individuals of noble status and supreme authority. Instead of attempting a direct translation that might require extensive cultural context, “Those high above” creates a more accessible concept of authority that resonates across cultures. This generalization effectively reduces cultural distance while preserving the essential meaning of supreme authority. Avoiding specific religious references allows Western players to understand the power dynamics without requiring detailed knowledge of Chinese religious hierarchy. This approach exemplifies how careful generalization can facilitate cross-cultural understanding while maintaining the original's core implications of power and authority. It also demonstrates the translator's profound understanding and flexible handling of both linguistic and cultural systems.

##### Example 2 Knuckleheads

(1)Description of the Scene: Sun Wukong, dissatisfied with the actions of the Celestial Court, took to the battlefield to confront the celestial soldiers and generals.

(2)Line:

Sun: 让你小子带些虾兵蟹将过来虚张声势 .....

[(The Court) Let you bring some shrimp soldiers and crab generals to come over and make an empty show of strength...]

Translation: And they send you and those knuckleheads...

The phrase “虾兵蟹将”, literally meaning “shrimp soldiers and crab generals”, originally referred to diminutive soldiers and was later extended to describe individuals of insignificant status or importance. This culturally rich Chinese expression exemplifies the language's vivid imagery. In the English version, the translators opted for “Knuckleheads,” which carries a similar pejorative connotation, effectively portraying these characters' status and image within the game's narrative. Both terms share similar characteristics that create comparable reading experiences for their respective audiences: they are relatively uncommon expressions with clear derogatory connotations. A direct translation of “虾兵蟹将” as “shrimp soldiers and crab generals” would likely confuse Western players unfamiliar with the Chinese idiom. The phrase's metaphori-

cal meaning (weak, insignificant forces) might be lost, potentially evoking unintended humor or dissonance due to the literal aquatic imagery. Players may misinterpret it as literal marine-themed enemies rather than understanding its derogatory connotation toward incompetent subordinates. This could disrupt narrative immersion and character perception.

The Chinese phrase, using metaphorical imagery of shrimp and crab soldiers, and the English term “knuckleheads” both create a sense of linguistic distinctiveness that stands out from everyday language. This parallel maintains the original’s stylistic effect, as both expressions create a similar sense of distance from standard discourse while effectively conveying contempt. The translation thus preserves the semantic meaning and the rhetorical impact across cultural boundaries, allowing Western players to experience a similar level of linguistic uniqueness as Chinese audiences.

### Example 3 The Celestial Court

(1)Description of the Scene: In this instance, Erlang Shen warns Sun Wukong of the potential consequences of engaging in battle and offers him the opportunity to surrender.

(2)Line:

Erlang Shen: 这样罢，一会儿若是你败了，我带你回天庭。

[In that case, if you are defeated in a moment, I will take you back to the Heavenly Court.]

Translation: Here’s my offer. If you lose, I’ll take you to the Celestial Court.

The term “天庭” originates from Chinese Taoist culture, referring to the celestial realm where immortals reside. In folk mythology, it represents the governing seat of the Jade Emperor, symbolizing supreme authority. The translation “Celestial Court” effectively preserves the core meaning of the term, with “Celestial” conveying the divine aspects. At the same time “court” emphasizes its role as a center of governance. It creates a conceptual bridge for Western players by allowing them to draw parallels with similar concepts in Western mythology, such as Heaven or Mount Olympus from Greek mythology. While maintaining specific Chinese cultural concepts, such cross-cultural rendering helps Western players better understand the game’s cosmology and enhances their immersion.

### Example 4 All Realms and Beings

(1)Description of the Scene: Rejecting Erlang Shen’s offer, Sun shows his disdain for immortality by saying this sentence.

Sun: 长生不老……三界六道，不就毁在这四个字上？

[Immortality... haven’t the Three Realms and Six Paths been destroyed because of this word?]

Translation: Immortality... For that word, all realms and beings have ruined themselves.

“三界” (Three Realms) and “六道” (Six Paths) represent fundamental concepts in Buddhist culture. The Three Realms encompass the Realm of Desire, Form, and Formlessness, while the Six Paths refer to the paths of Hell, Hungry Ghosts, Animals, Asuras, Humans, and Devas. Together, these terms comprehensively describe all phenomena in existence. Considering Western players’ general unfamiliarity with Buddhist philosophical concepts, the translation removes explicit religious references and replaces them with more common concepts, “realms and beings”. This translation achieves effective cultural localization by transforming Buddhist philosophical concepts into more universal expressions, gaining broader cultural accessibility. It allows players from diverse backgrounds to grasp the basic logic of a complicated concept, balancing the importance of cultural specificity and universal understanding.

### Example 5 The Image of Monkey

(1)Description of the Scene: Unsatisfied with Sun’s response, Erlang Shen prepares to launch an attack.

(2)Line:

Erlang Shen: 泼猴，你受了天策，本性难改。

[Mischievous monkey, having received the Heavenly Register, yet your fundamental nature is difficult to change.]

Translation: The celestial court welcomed you, foul monkey, yet you remain untamed!

The monkey figure serves as a crucial image throughout the game, occupying a significant portion of subtitle translations. These translations address Sun Wukong and the Destined One and will be discussed in the following three examples.

The term “泼猴” (pō hóu) in the ST is a derogatory reference to Sun Wukong, stemming from his unruly and defiant nature. “天策” (tiān lù) refers to the celestial court’s favor and recognition. The translation “foul monkey” resonates with Western cultural stereotypes of monkeys as mischievous and unruly creatures while maintaining the original’s derogatory tone. This cultural communication enables Western players to understand Erlang Shen’s attitude toward Sun Wukong immediately. Furthermore, consistently using the image of monkey throughout the game establishes a stable cultural symbol system that works across both Eastern and Western contexts.

#### Example 6 The Image and The Monkey

(1)Description of the Scene: This line occurs just before the player’s battle against Erlang Shen as he leads his celestial army against Sun Wukong.

(2)Line:

Erlang Shen: 我身后有十万天威!

[Behind me are one hundred thousand soldiers of the Heavenly Court!]

Translation: Open your eyes, monkey!



Figure 5. Soldiers of the Heavenly Court

The game visually displays a vast army of celestial soldiers. Erlang Shen’s dialogue carries tremendous gravitas, delivered with a deep, resonant tone that befits his status as a celestial general and the Jade Emperor’s son.

Rather than literally translating the “十万天威”(hundred thousand celestial might), the English version opts for “Open your eyes, monkey!” This translation emphasizes visual perception, complementing the on-screen display of celestial troops while warning players to face reality. The address “monkey” conveys Erlang Shen’s contempt for Sun.

From a multimodal perspective, the original conveys overwhelming celestial might through both audio (tone) and visual modes, implying Sun’s dire circumstances. The translation cleverly converts these modes into textual form, using the visual metaphor “Open your eyes” and the address “monkey” to convey similar semantic content. While the specific number “十万”(one hundred thousand) is omitted, the visual expression of the game effectively communicates Sun’s disadvantageous position to target language players. The translation emphasizes Erlang Shen’s attitude toward Sun, achieving vivid characterization.

### Example 7 Hold Your Monkeys

(1)Description of the Scene: The Destined One and Zhu Bajie disguise themselves as cargo workers attempting to infiltrate a temple. Facing locked temple doors, the Destined One grows impatient and begins forcefully banging on them.

(2)Line:

Zhu Bajie: 莫要猴急!

[Don't be impatient like a monkey!]

Translation: Hold your monkeys!

In context, this line reflects Zhu Bajie's recognition of the Destined One's impatience and his tolerant, mediating role as a companion. The word “猴” (monkey) also references the Destined One's appearance, serving as Zhu Bajie's playful commentary on their adventure.

The translation “Hold your monkeys!” cleverly adapts the English idiom “Hold your horses” while maintaining the original's humorous effect. The term “monkeys” directly references the Destined One's character while implying their rash behavior, yet maintains a humorous tone. This playful teasing and genuine concern balance accurately preserves the original context and character relationships.

From the target audience's perspective, while “Hold your horses” is a familiar idiom, its modification to “monkeys” creates a novel expression without compromising comprehension. This localization strategy actually engages players, encouraging them to bridge cultural connections. The translation's concise wit also complements the game's entertainment value, enhancing players' immersion in gaming.

In the game scene, the locked temple doors and the Destined One's agitated body language create a sense of urgency. Zhu Bajie's line serves as a counterpoint to this tension, using tone modulation to defuse the situation. This creates an interplay between language and visuals, generating comic effect through contrast while developing more nuanced character portrayals.

## 4.2 Language Expression: Specific Contextual Elements in Games

### Example 1 The Rise of the Yellow Winds

(1)Description of the Scene: The Destined One proceeds to seek the second relic and enter a new area under the control of the Yellow Wind Sage. At this time, the Destined One encounters a headless monk, the incarnation of the Bodhisattva Lingji, singing a song about the story of this place.

(2)Line:

The Headless Monk:

金铁击石全无力

大圣天蓬遭虎欺

枪刀剑戟浑不避

石猴似你不似你

.....

(黄风岭，八百里，曾是关外富饶地)

一朝鼠患凭空起

乌烟瘴气渺人迹

无父无君无法纪

为非作歹有天庇

幸得大圣借佛力

邪风一时偃旌旗



哪知不测奇祸起旦夕  
 那黄毛孽畜再回籍  
 凶犯不死好得意  
 福星横尸却成谜  
 普天之下  
 父子君臣纲纪 伦常规矩天理  
 哪个说了才算 哪个放任不管  
 你瞧那鼠辈倒讲人情  
 可怎么就落得个子亡父逃尸骨寒

[Metal and iron have no strength in striking stone

The Great Sage and the Marshal of the Heavenly Reeds suffer the Tiger's mockery

Spears, knives, swords, and halberds are all carelessly dodged by you

Stone Monkey is like you, yet unlike you

(Yellow Wind Ridge, eight hundred li, was once prosperous land beyond the pass)

Suddenly rat's plague arises from nowhere

Black smoke and miasma obscure human traces

No father, no ruler, no law or discipline

Wrongdoing and evil deeds have heaven's protection

Fortunately, the Great Sage borrows Buddha's power

Evil wind temporarily lowers its banners

Who knew unforeseen strange disaster would arise in an instant

That yellow-haired evil creature returns to its domain

The violent criminal lives on, pleased with itself

The lucky one lies dead, and his death becomes a mystery

In this world

Father-son, ruler-subject relationships and moral principles, common ethics and rules of heaven

Who decides what's right? Who allows things to go unchecked?

Look how those rat-like beings now speak of human sentiment

How did it end with son perishing, father fleeing, and corpses turning cold?"]

Translation: The tiger deceived them, led them to attack a rock,

But the rock stood firm, leaving hands sore and the tiger's mock.

Did this one's deceit recall yer true norm?

A stone monkey defies harm in all forms.

...

(Yellow Wind Ridge, a mighty ole' range, once buzzin' with joy and glee.)

But the pesky rats took hold, a sudden unfold, turned it all barren and bleak.

The King got denied, rules thrown aside, evil connived, runnin' wild and free.

Wukong went to the Bodhisattva to plead, granting this land a moment o'peace.

Yet before long, another disaster struck.

The cursed beast returned on a killin' spree.

The hero, he lies there dead. With the truth hidden from ye and me...

Across all realms,  
 Fathers and sons, kings and folks,  
 The former bonds the latter, that's how it goes.  
 These rats have obeyed the rule,  
 But how come fate snatched the son, and the father flew?

This passage, or lyric, is a Shaanxi-style storytelling piece (“陕北说书”) titled The Rise of the Yellow Winds from the game, which has captured significant attention from both domestic and international communities because of its vigor and power. It encompasses much of the narrative of this chapter and employs traditional Shaanxi storytelling linguistic patterns across multiple dimensions. The narrative begins with seven-character parallel couplets (“金铁击石全无力，大圣天蓬遭虎欺，”). It uses structured language patterns to set a poetic and pessimistic tone. The narrative incorporates geographical descriptions using five-character verses “黄风岭，八百里，曾是关外富饶地，” which sets the spatial context for the second chapter's opening scene. The language gradually moves from a specific narrative to philosophical discourse about moral principles.

The English translation adopts a style of English folk narratives, using colloquial forms such as “yer” for “your” and “ole” for “old” to maintain the characteristic of folk art and dialects in storytelling. The translation of “Yellow Wind Ridge, a mighty ole’ range, once buzzin’ with joy and glee” preserves the original narrative rhythm while allowing Western audiences to experience linguistic features similar to their indigenous folk-art traditions.

It is worth noting that this paragraph is sung through the background sound, combined with the design of the game scene with wind and sand, the sense of desolation in the Chinese and English text combined with the mode of sound and image has been integrated and unified. At the same time, the collision between the Chinese singing style and the English spoken word unified the language and culture of the two different language styles and tones, realized the cross-cultural combination, and provided a new way of practice for cross-cultural communication.

### Example 2 Samsara and Nirvana

(1)Description of the Scene: After defeating one of Yellowbrow's monsters, Yellowbrow took action and knocked the Destined One out. A moment later, the Destined One regained consciousness.

(2)Line:

Yellowbrow: 入了此番轮回，就别想再轻易涅槃。

[Having entered this cycle of samsara, you do not expect to easily achieve nirvana again.]

Translation: You have chosen your way. This time, there will be no easy way out!

This line appears in Chapter Two as voice-over narration by Yellowbrow. Although Yellowbrow is a demon king, he claims to be an enlightened monk who seeks to establish his realm by leading other demons, ultimately challenging Buddhist authority. When players enter Yellowbrow's territory, he delivers this line with an arrogant and mocking tone, superficially warning players of the difficulties ahead while actually demonstrating his own perceived wisdom and courage. The English translation, “You have chosen your way. This time, there will be no easy way out!” does not directly translate Buddhist concepts like “轮回”(samsara) and “涅槃”(nirvana). However, phrases like “chosen your way” and “no easy way out” convey Yellowbrow's arrogance and malice while suggesting the challenging battle ahead for players. Phrases like “chosen your way” and “no easy way out” connect with Western themes of fate and choice, making the dialogue both meaningful and accessible to Western players. This cultural transformation maintains the original's dramatic tension while ensuring the game's narrative remains coherent and engaging for international audiences.

### Example 3 Rewriting of Buddhist precepts

(1)Description of the Scene: The dialogue takes place during the confrontation between Yellowbrow and The Destined One, when The Destined One is locked in a difficult battle, with Yellowbrow's background audio reflecting his contempt and rebellious personality.

(2)Line:

Yellowbrow: 还记得孟兰会上, 世尊说过: “众生之苦, 多因不守戒律, 放情纵欲。”要我说, 放屁! 不杀生, 仇恨永无止境; 不偷盗, 强弱如我何异; 不邪淫, 一切有情皆孽; 不妄语, 梦幻泡影空虚; 不饮酒, 忧怖涨落无常; 不耽乐, 芳华刹那而已; 不贪眠, 苦苦不得解脱; 不纵欲, 诸行了无生趣。

[Remember at the Ullambana Assembly, the Buddha once said: “The suffering of all beings mostly comes from not following precepts, indulging in desires and emotions.” In my opinion, it makes no sense! Not killing - hatred never ends; not stealing - how am I different from the strong and weak; not engaging in sexual misconduct - all sentient beings are evil; not lying - dreams and illusions are meaningless; not drinking alcohol - anxiety and fear rise and fall inconstantly; not indulging in pleasure - good time is just a moment; not being greedy for sleep - suffering continues without an end; not giving in to desire - all actions lack the essence of life.]

Translation: I remember what the Buddha said at the Ullambana, “All beings suffer as they heed not the precepts and indulge.” I say: nonsense! Thou shalt kill, lest feuds instill. Thou shalt snatch, a fair play in a fair match. Thou shalt lust, before all loves turn into dust. Thou shalt boast, for prestige and legacy it doth host. Thou shalt drink, and drench unease shall sink. Thou shalt revel, prime year shan't be spent to settle. Thou shalt dream, to reach in bleak void the sole gleam. Thou shalt indulge, or life is but a scourge!

The text in this example presents philosophical implications through an ironic and rebellious rewriting of Buddhist precepts. The Chinese original sets a solemn tone with the opening “I remember what the Buddha said at the Ullambana” and systematically subverts traditional precepts through parallel structures like “Thou shalt kill, lest feuds instill. Thou shalt snatch, a fair play in a fair match.” The language maintains the gravity of Buddhist scriptures while creating strong satirical effects through contrary interpretations.

The official English translation draws inspiration from the Ten Commandments format: “Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal,” [25] echoing the source text's parallel structure with phrases like “Thou shalt kill, lest feuds instill.” By borrowing the solemn tone of the Bible, the translation maintains the original's absurdity yet solemnity while enabling Western players to understand the irony through familiar textual structures. This translation strategy successfully achieves a cross-cultural transfer of contextual meaning while preserving the original's connotation.

### 4.3 Non-verbal Expression: Music, Action, and Visuals

Games as a multimodal medium, in addition to the verbal expressions that can convey information, the graphics(image), soundtrack(sound), scene design, and many other non-verbal modalities are all involved in the multimodal construction of the game. These non-verbal expressions are as involved in constructing meaning as verbal expressions in this new medium, which makes the game connotation and other deeper cultural information realize effective transmission in cross-cultural communication.

From an audio modality perspective, Black Myth: Wukong employs dual forms of non-verbal media expression in its final boss battle. The game selects Clouds of the Celestial Palace (云宫迅音), the theme song from the Journey to the West television series in 1986, as background music. It is a choice carrying profound cultural implications. As a classic piece of Chinese film and television music, Clouds of the Celestial Palace embodies collective memories of the Journey to the West narrative for generations of Chinese viewers. When hearing this familiar melody during the scene and views of the final battle, the player feels an epic atmosphere aroused by this song and their emotional connection is evoked to the original work through musical performance. Since international players might lack a similar cultural context, the developing team rearranged this classic soundtrack by incorporating modern music elements while preserving the

original's essence. This therefore achieves a balance between tradition and modernity, and enables Western players to experience the epic quality of the background music during the combat.

Moreover, synchronizing action, visual effects, and sound effects develop a rich perceptual system. In particular, the final battle scene with the Great Sage's Broken Shell is one of the representations of this combination, where the game features a series of visually powerful and violent combat scenes. The appearance of the Boss Great Sage's Broken Shell recreates the classic image of the Monkey King in his prime faithfully. From the form of an image, this design reimages the classic hero in *The Journey to the West*; Sun Wukong's fragmented armor and weathered textures evoke a tragic aesthetic of heroic decline.

When wielding the "Golden Cudgel," Sun's famous weapon, the player's character's blocking, rolling, and counterattack movements are meticulously designed, complemented by rapidly shifting visual work and gripping battle background music. This action design not only reflects the aesthetic characteristics of traditional Chinese martial arts, which combines hardness and softness, but also allows players to tangibly feel the power of each strike through controller vibration feedback through their hands. This instance combines three forms: image, sound and feel. Therefore, western players can infer weapon weight through action genre conventions ("combat feel"), avoiding excessive cultural terminology in this fierce battle.



Figure 6. Design of the Great Sage's Broken Shell

Examining both elements together, the visual presentation of costume and scene design forms an inter-textual relationship with the background music. The perfect harmony between music and visuals enhances game immersion and bridges traditional culture with modern gaming expression. When intense battle scenes align with the uplifting musical theme, the unity of sound and visuals achieves maximum effect, delivering a dual-sensory immersive experience for players. From one of the top comments of the *Clouds of Celestial Palace* (Black Myth: Wukong Version), [Listening to the version of the 1986 drama makes me feel like I'm a god, but after listening to this one makes me feel like to fight those gods.] it can be seen that players have been immersed into the game scene with the combination of music and visual expression.



Figure 7. Comments on the Background Music



Visual modality is a crucial factor in determining whether audiences will remain engaged with the game [26]. The game's scenes extensively reference traditional Chinese architecture, with 36 real Chinese locations studied and recreated in-game, such as the Jade Emperor Temple and Kaiyuan Temple, shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9. Even though international players may not have visited these locations personally, the game conveys Chinese architectural aesthetics to domestic and international players through faithful scene recreation. Beyond architectural reproduction, the game incorporates artistic expressions like murals and ink paintings, communicating traditional Chinese religious philosophy and romantic expression to foreign players through these forms.



Figure 8. Jade Emperor Temple



Figure 9. Kaiyuan Temple

The analysis reveals that *Black Myth: Wukong* achieves cross-cultural communicative effects through successfully combing several multimodal modes—culturally-adapted verbal modes (e.g., “泼猴” to “foul monkey”), recoded audiovisual symbols (e.g., the remix of “Clouds of the Celestial Palace”), and sensual feedback (e.g., controller vibrations mimicking the hitting feedback of the Golden Cudgel). These strategies validate Zhang Delu’s “cultural-contextual” constraints on multimodal meaning-making and highlight the games’ pivotal role as new media for cross-cultural communication by enabling players to decode foreign cultural symbols (e.g., spatial demonstration for “Three Realms”) within familiar cognitive frameworks; they construct progressive pathways for cultural comprehension. The following discussion will elaborate on these findings’ implications for MDA theory and game localization practice.

## 5 Conclusion

Our analysis reveals that *Black Myth: Wukong* achieves cross-cultural resonance through procedural multimodal combination, where gameplay mechanics dynamically align linguistic, visual, and interactive modes.

This strategy leverages players' sensory immersion to compensate for cultural gaps. Such findings extend Zhang Delu's framework by considering players' interactivity as a meaning-making mode. From the perspective of MDA, this paper examines representative examples of dialogue subtitles, scene design, and background music in the game, classifying them into verbal and non-verbal expressions and evaluating their effectiveness in achieving cross-cultural communication. The study finds that in translating specific cultural and contextual elements, the game employs translation strategies such as literal translation and transliteration to realize its purpose of cross-cultural communication better. To a certain extent, this preserves traditional Chinese cultural concepts while leveraging existing or similar cultural concepts, idioms, or sentence structures from Western culture, allowing foreign players to experience the game content while appreciating traditional Chinese literature, philosophy, aesthetics and other cultural elements with the help of their cultural background.

### 5.1 Theoretical Contributions and Recommendations

This research makes several theoretical contributions to MDA and game localization studies. From the theory perspective, Zhang's framework is further extended by demonstrating its applicability to the gaming form, showing how players' interaction adds a new dimension to the traditional multimodal analysis. Also, game mechanics function as a distinct semiotic mode, working with conventional modes like text and visuals to construct meaning. Such findings expand current theoretical understanding by considering interactivity as an essential component of the multimodal meaning-making process in digital contexts. Besides, the study develops our understanding of how cultural elements can be effectively translated across different modalities, showing that a comprehensive integration of visual, auditory, and interactive elements by publishers and designers is the prerequisite for successful cross-cultural communication in games.

The findings of this study also show implications for game developers and localizers to deal with those culturally-rich contents. The localization strategies identified in *Black Myth: Wukong* stands as a pioneer in adapting traditional cultural elements for the international community successfully. For instance, the study shows that effective cultural translation often requires moving beyond literal translation to find creative equivalents that create a connection with target audiences while preserving core Chinese cultural meanings. Also, the game's approach to visual design and music adaptation demonstrates how cultural elements can be presented in ways that balance authenticity and accessibility. Based on this, three major recommendations to replicate this successful gaming practice are provided:

(1)Pre-Release Playtesting Integration: Trial translations alongside complementary non-verbal cues. For example, test localized terms like “十万天威” with scene-specific audio effects (e.g., thunderous orchestral crescendos) and environmental animations (e.g., overwhelming soldier crowds) to convey scale without literal translation.

(2)Context-Sensitive Tactile Feedback: Deploy vibrating controllers or other tactile forms when players encounter battles or high-context scenes. For instance, synchronize weapon vibrations with foreign epic-themed soundtracks during mythological boss fights to reinforce cultural gravity.

(3)Genre-Driven Modality Mapping: Reserve text localization for genre-conventional mechanics while assigning high-context cultural terms to scene-specific audiovisual combinations.

Besides, as an important component of multimodal media [1], the game's background music and scene visuals complement the textual modality of verbal expressions, presenting Chinese and foreign players with a grand traditional Chinese epic story adapted for modern times. However, some elements in the game lack absolutely equivalent concepts in Chinese and foreign contexts, and some scene designs and dialogues lack



background story introductions, posing challenges to the game's cross-cultural communication to a certain degree. From a broader perspective, this study illuminates the significant role that interactive digital media can play in fostering international cultural exchange. The success of *Black Myth: Wukong* demonstrates how video games can serve as an effective medium for cross-cultural communication, offering immersive experiences that allow players to engage with traditional cultural elements in meaningful ways. By successfully adapting classical Chinese literary works and philosophical concepts for a global audience, the game establishes a new paradigm for cultural communication that transcends traditional language and cultural understanding barriers. This achievement is particularly significant in the context of China's ongoing efforts to share its rich cultural heritage with the world, as it demonstrates how modern technology and traditional culture can be integrated to create engaging, accessible experiences for international audiences.

## 5.2 Limitations and Future Studies

However, this study still has several limitations. First, while the analysis introduces and analyzes multiple aspects of the game's multimodal elements, it primarily focuses on certain culturally-loaded scenes and dialogues rather than discussing the entire game. In the future, researchers could conduct a more extensive analysis of how different modalities work together throughout the complete gaming experience and the game's background. Secondly, the study's findings are based on one game, which may limit the generalizability of the conclusions. This partial coverage may overlook nuanced multimodal interactions in untested segments. To address this, future research should expand the analysis to the complete narrative and compare strategies across multiple samples. For example, contrasting *Black Myth: Wukong*'s approach with Japanese mythology-adapted games or other games with myths as background. Such efforts would enhance the generalizability of the conclusion while mitigating possible sampling bias. Additionally, while the study analyzes the game's cultural translation strategies, it does not directly measure their effectiveness through player reception studies with data analysis. Future research could incorporate player feedback and reception analysis with quantitative data (e.g., player feedback, usage statistics) to understand better how international audiences interpret and engage with those translated cultural elements.

Overall, *Black Myth: Wukong* represents a successful experiment in bringing Chinese culture overseas, providing experience and reference for the form and path of future outbound transmission of Chinese culture.

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