

# Film-Game Integration: Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism Imagery and Gamified Visual Aesthetics in “Black Myth: Wukong”

**Jiamin Jiao**<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Art, Peking University,  
Beijing, 100000, China

\*Corresponding author: jiaojm@stu.  
pku.edu.cn

## Abstract:

“Black Myth: Wukong” is a AAA-level game that integrates Chinese Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism thought, reinterpreting Chinese traditional culture through the modern game media to construct a virtual world with rich layers and profound implications. This study analyzes how video games integrate traditional cultural elements into narrative mechanisms and visual design, exploring how the gaming medium transcends conventional frameworks to highlight its unique aesthetic value. The game’s narrative framework features fragmented, nonlinear, and multidimensional characteristics, allowing the player’s choices to directly impact the game’s progression and outcomes, reflecting a deep engagement with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoist philosophical thoughts. In its visual design, the game utilizes cinematic visual effects and rich oriental charm scene design to reproduce the natural landscape in Oriental aesthetics. At the same time, the visual rhythm and colour design embody the imagery of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism traditions, highlighting the unique qualities of Oriental colour aesthetics. “Black Myth: Wukong” demonstrates how modern digital media can bring traditional culture to life in an engaging, accessible way for younger generations, offering the gaming industry new perspectives on cultural preservation and innovation while showcasing the potential for maintaining and fostering cultural confidence within a globalized context.

**Keywords:** Film-Game Integration; Philosophical Imagery; Narrative Mechanisms; Gamified Visual Aesthetics

## 1. Introduction

As one of the most vibrant and innovative forms of contemporary entertainment and cultural consumption, the gaming industry has experienced rapid

growth in recent years. This development has been driven by the widespread adoption of internet technology and mobile devices and continuous advancements in graphics processing technology, allowing games to evolve from a singular form of entertain-

ment into a comprehensive industry that integrates art, technology, and business elements. Dutch market research company Newzoo predicts in its “2024 Global Games Market Report” that the number of gamers worldwide will reach 3.42 billion by 2024, with core markets such as China and the United States exhibiting strong performance, while emerging markets display significant growth potential.

The diversification of the gaming industry and the intense market competition indicate a promising future for this sector. On August 20, 2024, China’s first independently developed AAA title, “Black Myth: Wukong”, was launched globally, achieving sales of over ten million across all platforms within three days. This remarkable achievement set multiple sales records and garnered enthusiastic support from Chinese players while sparking a robust “Chinese style” trend worldwide [1]. The success of this game is not only reflected in its impressive market response and sales figures but also in its unique status as a new benchmark for the Chinese gaming industry.

“Black Myth: Wukong” is a pioneering work that integrates traditional Chinese culture with modern game technology. While providing players with a rich interactive experience, it also opens up a new horizon for studying gamified image aesthetics. In reconstructing the text of “Journey to the West”, the game integrates the traditional philosophical thoughts of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism into the game narrative and visual design in a unique form of expression, eliciting significant global attention and discussion. This achievement is deeply rooted in the literary masterpiece by Ming dynasty author Wu Cheng’en, offering a comprehensive showcase of the richness and diversity of Chinese thought and culture and its profound historical heritage.

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism serve as the three main pillars of traditional Chinese culture, profoundly influencing Chinese society’s ethics, thought, and artistic expressions. Confucianism emphasizes interpersonal relationships and advocates for social harmony and personal cultivation, centring on core values such as “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust.” By shaping the cultural concept of “the isomorphism of family and country”, Confucianism highlights the moral responsibilities of individuals and collective harmonious coexistence, significantly impacting the relationships between individuals, families, and the state.

Buddhism primarily emphasizes the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. It believes that ignorance and greed are the root causes of suffering in life and liberation can be achieved through practice.

In contrast to Confucianism’s focus on external harmony, Buddhism places greater importance on inner cultivation

and spiritual transcendence. Furthermore, Buddhism’s inherent concepts of karma and reincarnation provide deeper insights into Chinese philosophy, enriching its philosophical discourse.

Daoism emphasizes harmony with nature and the individual’s alignment with the natural order, advocating the principle of “governing by doing nothing.” It promotes a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world, which fosters human development and progress. In Daoist culture, “Qi” is considered the fundamental essence of the universe, while the concept of “Dao” represents both a cosmic worldview and a natural philosophy of life. This philosophy is often expressed in artistic and cultural representations through symbols such as yin-yang and the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire, earth).

Tracing history back to the rise of Buddhism during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties, Confucianism demonstrated remarkable inclusivity by absorbing the spiritual essences of both Buddhism and Daoism. By the Tang Dynasty, a cultural atmosphere emerged that respected Daoism venerated Buddhist figures, and esteemed Confucian ideals. The coexistence of these three philosophical traditions contributed to the profound richness of Chinese culture, a foundation that is splendidly showcased in “Black Myth: Wukong” Confucianism thought emphasizes interpersonal relationships and social harmony, which aligns with Bill Baudrillard’s concept of the “theme park”, effectively embodied in the game’s multifaceted world. Buddhism explores the inner self and transcendence; players gain philosophical insights through the internal conflicts experienced by characters. The natural philosophy of Daoism permeates the game’s environmental design, enhancing players’ awareness of ecology and harmony. Incorporating these diverse cultural motifs enriches the narrative subtext of the game and establishes it as a significant example of the modernization of traditional culture.

The primary aim of this study is to analyze how “Black Myth: Wukong” incorporates Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism imagery into various aspects of game design. This includes an analysis of the game’s narrative mechanisms and visual design characteristics to demonstrate how it effectively merges the essence of classical Chinese culture with modern gaming technology. The focus of this research is to explore how “Black Myth: Wukong” utilizes the unique qualities of the gaming medium to reinterpret these philosophical images in innovative ways, transcending traditional frameworks and highlighting its distinctive aesthetic value. Furthermore, the game positions traditional Chinese culture and philosophical thought as core inspirations for its creative processes. This study aims to provide insights and recommendations for the gaming

industry on adopting and innovating traditional cultural elements.

## 2. Literature Review

The rapid advancement of digital media technologies in the 21st century has fostered a significant convergence trend between games and film within the modern entertainment industry. Jamie M examines the distinctiveness of computer games as an intuitive media experience from a visual aesthetics perspective [2]. He observes that, although players maintain a certain physical distance from the game environment, graphics and sound design can effectively generate a profound sense of immersion. This immersive experience is facilitated by the nuanced application of visual perspective, sound effects—such as breathing, footsteps, punches, roars, and explosions—and dynamic camera movements. These attributes encapsulate the essence of cinematic art and underscore the deep integration of visual aesthetics across gaming and film. This analysis connects with the ecological perception theory articulated by American psychologist James J. Gibson in his seminal 1950 work, “The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception,” which provides critical theoretical grounding for understanding the interaction between games and players. Gibson posits that human perception is a direct outcome of the ecological characteristics of environmental stimuli. Within game design, this implies that the “manner” in which players engage becomes a central component of game aesthetics. This framework highlights the pivotal role of players in their gaming experience and elucidates how game design is informed by player actions and responses to shape aesthetic experiences [3].

Chinese scholars have identified several prominent academic focal points in studying the relationship between gaming and film. First, researchers such as Chen Xuguang have deeply explored the remediation characteristics of both mediums through the concept of “film-game integration,” examining their ontological, aesthetic, and technological cultural dimensions. Second, discussions have proliferated around the “gamification” perspective, addressing various topics, including “gamified existence,” “gamified narratives,” and “gamified cinema” within film and television contexts. Third, there has been a concentrated focus on the characteristics and functions of interactivity, analyzing new phenomena such as interactive documentaries and interactive film games [4]. In his 2022 article, “On the New Business Models, New Subjects, New Imagination, and New Aesthetics of Film-Game Integration,” Chen Xuguang further emphasizes the influence of gamified aesthetics on film creation. He argues that in the era of new media on the internet, virtual, speculative,

and surreal imaginaries are profoundly transforming artistic concepts, narrative styles, and cultural meanings in cinema [5]. This transformation provides fresh cultural perspectives and aesthetic dimensions for integrating film and gaming. Collectively, these studies contribute to the deepening of theoretical frameworks and the innovation of practices at the intersection of film and gaming.

The studies above extensively explore the convergence trend between gaming and film across multiple dimensions, including technology, art, and commerce. However, a more in-depth discussion remains regarding how traditional culture can be inherited and innovated within this emerging media convergence framework. Through the case of “Black Myth: Wukong”, this study aims to investigate how elements of traditional culture are embodied and innovated within video games and how these elements are reinterpreted and disseminated through film-game integration.

## 3. Content analysis of “Black Myth: Wukong”

This study employs a content analytical framework, focusing on the successful case of “Black Myth: Wukong”, which effectively integrates the philosophies of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, thereby reflecting the intrinsic value of cultural diversity. To thoroughly examine the process and significance of this integration, the following analysis will be conducted primarily from the perspectives of game narrative mechanisms and visual design characteristics. Through this research, we aim to gain deeper insights into the transformation and dissemination of traditional culture within modern entertainment media while offering strategies and perspectives for maintaining and developing cultural confidence in globalization.

### 3.1 Analysis of Narrative Mechanisms

As a profoundly philosophical virtual space game, “Black Myth: Wukong” skillfully intertwines the philosophical ideas of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism to create a richly layered and significant virtual world. Unlike traditional AAA titles, the narrative of “Black Myth: Wukong” draws ingeniously from the chapter-based structure of the classical Chinese novel “Journey to the West,” establishing a narrative system that is independently distinct and tightly interconnected. The core storyline follows a “Destined One” who, deceived by the Heavenly Court, bears the heavy responsibility of defeating the Demon King. However, upon completing this task, he unexpectedly enters a new cycle of trials, which serves as the main plotline. This central narrative functions like a string of

beads, closely linking each chapter to weave a grand and intricate tapestry of storytelling.

In the specific context of the game, “Black Myth: Wukong” features a narrative framework characterized by high fragmentation, non-linearity, and multidimensionality, allowing for multiple interpretations and interactive choices. Players’ decisions directly influence their personal experiences and outcome selections within the game. This starkly contrasts traditional linear narrative forms; as Mikhail Bakhtin has noted, modern narratives require more flexible and open approaches to accommodate audience participation and personalization. The segmented, fragmented narrative strategy lets players follow the main storyline while exploring subplots and hidden quests. These subplots and hidden tasks function like disjointed puzzle pieces, gradually assembling a comprehensive picture of the game world. This design significantly enhances gameplay and exploration depth. It encourages players to gather information and analyze character relationships, ultimately uncovering the profound philosophies embedded within the game, thus achieving a perfect integration of gameplay and intellectual depth. “Black Myth: Wukong” cleverly integrates classic gaming narrative strategies by offering players the option to restart after completing the game, enabling them to achieve dual improvements in character levels and personal gaming skills through repeated encounters with various monster bosses. This process, transcending mere entertainment, also fosters deepening and growth in players’ spiritual experiences. This design significantly enhances the game’s playability and replay value, resonating profoundly with the Buddhist concept of the Six Paths of Rebirth. Through continuous rechallenges, the game conveys to players a deep philosophical reflection on the concept of “reincarnation,” thereby integrating far-reaching cultural implications and intellectual depth into the gaming experience. Unlocking hidden endings symbolizes the practitioner’s ultimate attainment of transcendence from the cycle of rebirth, achieving Nirvana. This aligns seamlessly with the Three Marks of Existence in Buddhism – “All compounded things are impermanent, all phenomena are without self, and Nirvana is peace” – emphasizing that everything in the world is constantly changing, that there is no permanent “self,” and that transcending the cycle of birth and death is the ultimate goal of spiritual practice.

Regarding narrative perspective, the theory of “internal focalization” proposed by the renowned French narrative theorist Gérard Genette, vividly embodies this type of game design. By adopting the perspective of specific characters, the game effectively immerses players in the virtual world constructed by the narrative, fostering a deep emotional resonance between players and the char-

acters they embody. This connection motivates players to interact more profoundly with the game environment through role-playing, positioning them as active participants and co-creators in the unfolding story. The relationships among game characters are intricately complex. For instance, in the interactions between “Wukong” and the NPC Zhu Bajie, players’ choices are influenced not only by Confucianism familial ethics and Buddhist concepts of compassion but also directly determine the characters’ destinies and the progression of the game, subtly reflecting the players’ moral values.

The game transcends traditional temporal structures using flexible narrative techniques such as flashbacks and foreshadowing. For example, after an intense battle with the Black Bear Spirit, players gradually realize that the truths they perceive are not absolute and that the Black Bear Spirit’s desired truth is not the sole answer. The narrative line “Entering all forms, breaking all forms” emphasizes the harsh reality that “when the false appears true, the true also becomes false.” Moreover, the game thoroughly explores the background stories of its monsters from diachronic and synchronic perspectives. This not only significantly enriches the character backgrounds but also enables players to gain a deeper understanding of the evolution of the monsters’ stories and character transformations, thereby enhancing the narrative depth and complexity of the game.

In the design of narrative roles within the game, the character of the “Destined One,” played by the player, is rooted in the original image of “Sun Wukong” as the “Stone Monkey,” particularly emphasizing the most abstract aspect of “intention” among the six sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind). This approach cleverly positions players as carriers of intention, highlighting its central role in exploring the game world and advancing the plot. It reflects a deep engagement with the philosophical ideas of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism—where Confucianism introspection, the Buddhist concept of enlightenment, and Daoism non-action achieve harmonious unity at the level of intention. This design also underscores modern society’s emphasis on individual spiritual worlds and inner experiences. The game’s iconic narrative line, “Exchanging the death of the physical body for the perpetuity of intention,” profoundly reveals the immortal value of intention and its dual role in driving the plot and enhancing the player’s personal experience. Within the game’s narrative context, Sun Wukong has attained Buddhahood.

Additionally, the game employs a mechanism of “mutual shaping of character and context,” integrating multidimensional narrative techniques such as visual and auditory elements. This includes intricate portrayals of the internal

struggles and conflicts of the characters, as well as carefully designed sound effects, significantly enhancing emotional resonance and immersion for the player. The title “Black Myth: Wukong” carries profound connotations; the use of “black” not only reflects a profound reflection on the various confusions, deceptions, and challenges of the natural world but also intricately explores eternal themes such as the essence of life, the roots of suffering, and pathways to liberation, all within the context of contemporary societal conflicts and novel interpretations.

### 3.2 Analysis of Visual Design

“Black Myth: Wukong” is a paradigm of deep cultural integration and exceptional gameplay. It is a realm where the essence of Eastern aesthetics is intricately fused with the cultural imagery of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. The game employs cinematic visual effects and richly designed Eastern-themed environments to create a fantastical, ethereal, and tangible world for players.

The cinematic quality of the visuals in “Black Myth: Wukong” is primarily attributed to the sophisticated application of game engine technology. Specifically, Unreal Engine 5 is a core driving force in game development, playing a crucial role in this achievement. Leveraging the advanced capabilities of Unreal Engine, the scientific team’s expertise, and innovative exploration in artistic design, the game attains exceptional visual representation and optimization standards for personal computer performance. The visual construction of the game integrates a dynamic lighting system, high-precision physics simulations, and advanced environmental rendering techniques, collectively creating an immersive and vividly lifelike depiction of the “Journey to the West” world. By employing techniques such as high-resolution texture mapping, detailed vegetation rendering, and complex particle systems, the game successfully reproduces natural landscapes characteristic of Eastern aesthetics, including serene mountainscapes, swirling mists, and tranquil temples, offering players a dreamlike immersive experience. The scene design is grand and intricate, while the character models are crafted meticulously. The richness and realism of the colours further enhance player immersion, transporting them into a tangible world of “Journey to the West.”

Additionally, the game’s lighting and shadow effects are rendered with cinematic finesse, due to the clever application of the Lumen dynamic global illumination system. This system can respond to changes in the scene and light sources in real time, providing artists and designers with the technical support needed to create vibrant and life-like dynamic environments. In “Black Myth: Wukong”, whether depicting morning forests, ancient towns at dusk,

battles under daylight, or nighttime exploration scenes, the real-time lighting shifts and nuanced transitions of light and shadow create a visual feast, offering players a cinematic aesthetic experience.

The design strategy for visual rhythm in “Black Myth: Wukong” deeply draws on cinematic techniques, constructing a layered, fluid visual rhythm system that significantly enhances the game’s visual dimension and aesthetic value. From the opening sequence, where Sun Wukong transforms into a bird, transitioning from a bird’s-eye view to a close-up of his eyes, this imaginative design foreshadows the character’s transformation. It uses cinematic, eastern poetic language to gradually unveil the mysteries of the Journey to the West world for players. In subsequent chapters, the visual design’s artistry becomes progressively apparent. Chapter One opens with a close-up of a peach, guiding players to appreciate the intricate details of the game world through a micro-focused approach. In Chapter Two, asynchronous sound and visual cues, such as NPC voices preceding a black screen, resemble film trailers, sparking players’ curiosity about the upcoming storyline. Entering Chapter Three, panoramic aerial shots showcase the story’s setting, with Wukong appearing small against a towering Buddha statue. This elevation in perspective grants players a god-like view, enhancing visual impact and exploration. Chapter Four employs window-framed compositions that introduce Zhu Bajie’s backstory, deepening the spatial perception and symbolizing the boundary between the in-game world and external reality, adding a nuanced layer to visual storytelling. By Chapter Five, the game incorporates cross-cutting montage techniques through rapid alternation between close-ups and wide shots. This method efficiently conveys narrative information, creating a compact and impactful visual rhythm that immerses players as if within a meticulously choreographed action film, offering a dual feast of visual and emotional experience.

The colour design in “Black Myth: Wukong” profoundly reflects Confucianism, Daoist, and Buddhist imagery, highlighting the unique charm of Oriental colour aesthetics and creating a sophisticated yet distinctly Chinese visual style. The colour scheme aligns with Confucian ideals of harmony and order. Through a unified primary palette, the game creates a harmonious visual experience that resonates with Confucian values of societal order and human relationships. Additionally, variations in colour tone and saturation add visual depth, employing traditional Chinese colours such as jade green, white, and black to evoke a subtle yet richly Chinese aesthetic, immersing players in a vivid landscape akin to traditional ink and wash paintings. The Daoist philosophy of natural harmony is elegantly expressed through colour. Drawing inspiration

from the natural world, the game incorporates natural hues into its virtual realm through fine detailing in form and shadow, recreating the familiar landscapes of Chinese natural scenery. This reverence for nature, central to Eastern philosophy, allows players to experience traditional colour beauty immersively, from the depths of ancient forests to the expanse of desert sands and the serene beauty of snow-covered landscapes. Buddhist notions of beauty in imperfection are also woven into the visual design. Many of the game's buildings and sculptures bear the marks of time, embodying the Buddhist concept of "Zen of all things," which celebrates the essential and unadorned. This aesthetic of imperfection honours the natural world as it is, eschewing excessive ornamentation and echoing Buddhist teachings on impermanence, selflessness, and emptiness. It imparts a contemplative, serene, and humble beauty throughout the game's visual experience.

#### 4. Conclusion

"Black Myth: Wukong" constructs a richly layered narrative universe by blending Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism philosophy. Its narrative mechanism borrows from the chapter structure of "Journey to the West," employing nonlinear and multidimensional narrative techniques that grant players decision-making power, thereby influencing the game's progression and outcomes. The game's storytelling forms an intriguing correspondence with the Buddhist concept of the Six Paths of Rebirth, conveying profound philosophical reflections to players through continuous challenges and growth. Furthermore, the ingenious conception in narrative perspective and character design also reflects a deep exploration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism philosophy, as well as modern society's emphasis on individual spiritual worlds and inner experiences. Visually, "Black Myth: Wukong" merges the essence of Oriental aesthetics with cultural imagery from these philosophies to create an ethereal yet tangible fantasy world. Through cinematic visual effects and richly designed environments, the game successfully reimagines Eastern landscapes, both natural and cultural. Its unique approach to visual rhythm and colour design brings Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism to life, emphasizing the distinctive charm of Oriental colour aesthetics. As a game that deeply integrates these philosophies, "Black Myth: Wukong" offers players a world richly infused with Oriental mystique and closely aligned with modern aesthetics. It exemplifies the renewed vitality of Chinese traditional culture in the digital age and embodies cultural confidence in its global reach.

Despite the achievements of existing research, certain

limitations remain. This study primarily focuses on the narrative mechanics and visual aesthetics of "Black Myth: Wukong", leaving the representation of traditional culture unexplored in other similar games. Future research could broaden its scope to include a broader range of games, providing a more comprehensive understanding of gamified visual aesthetics. Moreover, this study needs to address the cultural diversity of the game's audience sufficiently; future research could investigate user experiences across different cultural backgrounds. The digital transformation process offers new opportunities for disseminating and developing traditional culture. "Black Myth: Wukong" exemplifies how modern technology can present traditional culture to younger generations engagingly and dynamically. This also suggests that game developers may increasingly collaborate with cultural scholars to design content with more excellent educational and cultural value. Furthermore, integrating games with intangible cultural heritage may become a vital trend, enhancing users' cultural engagement.

As an emerging cultural medium, games demonstrate unique potential and value. "Black Myth: Wukong" is an exercise in cultural preservation and innovation and provides a new perspective on the transformation and dissemination of traditional culture within modern entertainment media. It highlights the possibilities for maintaining and developing cultural confidence in a globalized context. Future research and practice should continue exploring the intersection of games and culture, fostering the innovative development of traditional culture in the digital age.

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