



Translation Strategies of Black Myth: Wukong and the Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Culture

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Abstract— This paper collects the English translation texts of the AAA game *Black Myth: Wukong* and classifies them according to different elements of Chinese traditional culture. It analyzes the translation strategies for various cultural elements and discusses how to correctly and effectively address issues such as cultural differences, language barriers, and cultural misunderstandings. Meanwhile, we collect official data on *Black Myth: Wukong* from both domestic and international sources to evaluate the effect and influence of Chinese culture's overseas dissemination.

Keywords— *Black Myth, Wukong, translation strategy, traditional culture, cultural overseas dissemination.*



I. INTRODUCTION

Released on August 20, 2024, *Black Myth: Wukong* — China's first major AAA game — has gained wide attention both at home and abroad. As a Chinese original game with Chinese as its default language, its translation and overseas distribution are highly significant. Rooted in the classic *Journey to the West*, it blends Chinese mythology, history and architectural heritage, conveying traditional Chinese culture and aesthetic values to global players through delicate design and storytelling. The game not only inherits and innovates traditional culture but also showcases China's cultural soft power. As an important channel for cultural export, it effectively promotes international cultural communication and exchange.

II. ENGLISH TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF BLACK MYTH: WUKONG

1. Names of Game Characters and Magic Treasures

Through the analysis of the texts of game character names and magic treasure/weapon names, their translation strategies can be divided into three categories:

(1) Transliteration

Ling Xuzi, Guangzhi

Analysis: Many culture-loaded words have no direct equivalents in the target language, making their meanings hard to convey accurately. To avoid misunderstanding and preserve cultural features, translators often use direct transliteration [1]. The translations mentioned adopt this method: terms are converted into Pinyin strictly following original Chinese pronunciation, without adding, omitting or altering syllables, ignoring literal English connotations and only retaining pronunciation. Direct transliteration preserves the original style of Chinese mythological names. Names such as “Ling Xuzi” and “Guangzhi” carry distinct traditional Chinese cultural traits. Transliterating them directly allows overseas audiences to experience unique Chinese naming conventions and the charm of Chinese mythology, facilitating the spread of traditional Chinese cultural elements.

(2) Free Translation

Black Wind King (Heifeng Dawang)

Analysis: When literal translation fails to convey the deep meaning of culture-loaded words, translators often use free translation, abandoning surface forms to focus on spiritual and cultural connotations and improve target text acceptability [2]. “Heifeng” is literally translated as “Black Wind”, clearly presenting its basic meaning and creating a mysterious, powerful tone that matches the character's

image. “Dawang” is freely translated as “King”, which corresponds to its implied authority and high status in Chinese culture. Such translated names fit English-speaking players’ linguistic and cultural habits, lower comprehension barriers, and enhance game localization. Names like “Black Wind King” help players quickly form character images, immerse themselves in the game world, and boost acceptance of the work.

(3) Mixed Translation

Lord Venatagon (Dudi Dawang)

Analysis: Translating “Dawang” as “Lord” uses free translation. The English term “Lord” conveys nobility and authority, matching the dominant status implied by “Dawang” and helping English readers recognize the character’s identity. Translating “Dudi” as “Venatagon” employs creative mixed translation. “Vena” echoes “venom” (poison), while “tagon” derives from “agon” (struggle), suggesting a poisonous antagonist. This coinage preserves the original meaning, adds mystery and uniqueness, and avoids awkwardness from direct literal or free translation. This mixed strategy accommodates English linguistic and cultural norms while retaining Chinese cultural features. Combining common English terms like “Lord” with innovative formations such as “Venatagon” helps Chinese culture integrate into the international context, lowers cultural barriers, and improves acceptance among overseas players.

2. Architecture and Place Names

The place and building names in Black Myth: Wukong are deeply rooted in ancient Chinese architecture and rich in cultural mystery. Their translation requires a balance between retaining Chinese cultural connotations and ensuring foreign readers’ understanding, so as to promote cultural exchange. The main strategies are literal translation and free translation, often supplemented by explanatory translation, which correspond to foreignization for cultural preservation and domestication for adaptive transformation.

(1) Literal Translation

Literal translation preserves the original form, vocabulary and structure while remaining faithful to the source text’s meaning and style. It is mainly used for straightforward place names like “forest”, “mountain” and “sea” with simple adjectives, which carry no special allusions. Such translations convey the literal meaning directly, maintain the intuitiveness of the original names, and aim to evoke similar imagery in English.

1. Forest of Wolves (Canglang Lin)

The translation omits the blue-gray hue implied by “Cang” (azure), yet this omission leaves greater room for imagination. The English word “forest” carries a profound

atmosphere, and pairing it with “wolves” naturally evokes a dark, primitive jungle image, achieving equivalent color implication while strengthening the link between environment and subject. Similar simplification appears in “Bamboo Grove” for “Cuizhu Lin”. The descriptive character “Cui” (emerald green) is omitted, but the combination still effectively creates the intended atmosphere.

2. Crouching Tiger Temple (Wohu Si)

The word “Crouch” vividly depicts tigers in a squatting posture. This literal translation focuses on key modifiers to accurately convey the original artistic conception. Similar examples include “Fright Cliff,” where “fright” matches the terrifying atmosphere of “Xiehun,” and “Valley of Blooms,” which uses “blooms” to fully present the lush, magnificent scenery implied by “Qianhua.”

3. Black Wind Mountain (Heifeng Shan)

This is strict literal translation that follows the original word order and structure with minimal changes. Widely used in the game, it helps English players grasp place names easily. Examples include “Snake Trail”, “Yellow Wind Ridge” and “Cloudnest Peak”.

(2) Free Translation

Free translation prioritizes target language habits and original meaning, adjusting form for better readability. It focuses on semantic fluency and naturalness, may sacrifice part of the original form, and conveys deep connotations through cultural equivalent conversion. Game place names translated this way fall into three categories: allusion-based translation, philosophical abstraction, and artistic conception reconstruction.

1. Allusion-based Translation

This translation method requires translators to trace the historical and literary origins of Chinese place names and find accurate English equivalents without losing their original implications. Examples include:

Loong Claw Grove (Chimu Jian): Derived from the classical allusion of dragons relying on wood to ascend to heaven. The translation combines “loong” and “grove” while matching the scene’s dragon-claw-shaped trees, preserving both the mythic reference and vivid imagery.

The Purifying Spring (Zhuogou Quan): Originating from Journey to the West, it signifies purifying spiritual filth rather than mere physical cleansing. “Purifying” accurately conveys its Buddhist-inspired meaning of spiritual sublimation.

2. Philosophical Abstraction

This translation type is common yet challenging, as the

game draws on the religious and magical elements of *Journey to the West*. Translators must grasp Eastern religious concepts and find compatible expressions in Western thought for accurate cross-cultural communication. Examples include:

Valley of Despair (Buji Gu): Conveys inescapable fate and Taoist-Buddhist implications. Using "Despair" echoes the Christian concept of the seven deadly sins, turning Eastern fatalism into a universally understandable emotional state.

Zodiac Village (Liuliu Cun): Corresponds to the twelve Taoist gods (Liuding Liujia). "Zodiac" matches the number twelve and creates a mysterious, fateful atmosphere.

Purge Pit (Lianmo Keng): Reflects Taoist self-cultivation of subduing inner demons. "Purge" conveys spiritual purification, with "Pit" retaining the literal sense and implying inner struggle.

3. Artistic Conception Reconstruction

This translation strategy focuses on matching the game's atmospheric conception, expanding imagery based on scene context rather than strict literal rendering, creating striking and fitting expressions. Examples include:

Snow-Veiled Trail (Chonghan Dao): Replaces the dynamic "braving the cold" with a snow-shrouded, secluded visual image, enhancing the scene's dangerous, mysterious atmosphere.

Brook of Bliss (Wuyou Jian): Uses "bliss" to convey the carefree state of "Wuyou", emphasizing spiritual peace and joy.

The Verdure Bridge (Huajian Qiao): Chooses "verdure" over literal flowers, broadening the natural imagery and fitting the game's gloomy, ethereal aesthetic, elevating textual meaning to environmental narration.

Bonevault (Qianhong Ku): Breaks from the literal "thousands of reds" and draws on the game's skeleton-filled scene, using sharp contrast to create mystery and desolation, echoing Eastern aesthetic metaphors with Western expression.

(III) Ancient Poems, Doggerel, and Shaanxi Northern Storytelling

(1) Ancient Poems

Translations of ancient Chinese poems in the game mainly rely on free translation, supplemented by amplification, creative transformation and abstract expression. Due to the implicit, concise and culturally rich nature of classical poetry, strict equivalence is hard to achieve. Free translation helps overseas players grasp the core ideas and connotations more effectively.

1.The Buddha is within one's nature; do not seek outside oneself

Translation: You seek the land of bliss? There is only abyss, and your abyss is me.

Analysis: Uses free translation and creative transformation. It rephrases Buddhist enlightenment in accessible language, using "abyss" to symbolize spiritual emptiness, conveying that true awakening lies within.

2.But if you understand the joy in the qin, why bother with the notes on the strings?

Translation: Knowing the joy within the play, why chase the notes astray?

Analysis: Adopts abstract free translation, converting concrete images into universal expressions to transcend cultural barriers.

3.Use thunderous means to show the heart of a Bodhisattva

Translation: Cleanse the world with blood, and grow lotuses in it.

Analysis: Abandons literal correspondence and uses metaphorical free translation. "Blood" and "lotus" vividly express severe measures and compassionate mercy, matching the original's rhetorical spirit.

(2) Doggerel

As doggerel belongs to poetic form, free translation is mostly used in its English version. Rooted in folk life, it reflects ordinary people's feelings and features colloquial language and catchy rhythm. In translation, priority is given to preserving its popular style, balancing cultural image transformation, and maintaining rhythm and philosophical emotion.

1.Where there is wine, every place is a fairy's mansion; without wine, even the heavenly palace is like a prison.

Translation: Where there's drink, all is bliss. Without it, the highest court is a cage.

Analysis: Free translation is adopted to convey the core meaning of joy from wine and boredom without it. Culture-specific images such as "fairy's mansion" and "heavenly palace" are converted into understandable English expressions. The neat structure and rhythm are retained, echoing the concise and rhythmic style of doggerel.

2.Walk, walk, walk; wander, wander, wander. Be willing to be an ox or horse for copper coins...

Translation: On the go, bent the toe, life of human, all for gold...

Analysis: Through free translation, concrete images

are turned into abstract expressions easier for English readers to grasp. The translator uses concise wording and structured sentences to maintain the rhyme and lively rhythm of the original doggerel, despite the difficulty of full equivalence in cross-language rhythm.

(3) Shanaxi Northern Storytelling

Similar to doggerel, Shaanxi Northern storytelling is catchy and concise in language. Translators therefore focus on matching the rhyme, rhythm, diction and style of the original text. As a regional folk art popular in Yan'an and Yulin, it bears strong local and colloquial features, making its cultural connotations hard for non-native speakers to understand and posing challenges for translators. In translation, priority is given to cultural background, emotional expression, key information and philosophical connotations.

1. Yellow Wind Ridge, eight hundred li wide, was once a fertile land beyond the Great Wall... The criminal is proud of not being dead, but the lucky star lies dead, which has become a mystery.

Translation: Yellow Wind Ridge, a mighty ole' range, once buzzin' with joy and glee... The hero, he lies there dead, with the truth hidden from ye and me...

Analysis: The translation retains the place name "Yellow Wind Ridge" and uses colloquial, rhythmic expressions like "ole'" and "buzzin'" to fit the storytelling style. Words such as "barren" and "bleak" create a desolate atmosphere, while "plead", "cursed beast" and "Killin's spree" highlight the plot tension and tragic mood, preserving both the narrative and rhythmic features.

2. What a ruthless and cruel monkey! ... I, the old monk, have hands but no head, and have been empty for a long time.

Translation: Oh! Heartless monkey, vicious and vile! ... Headless, I grieve all the same.

Analysis: The translation conveys the sorrow in the original text and deepens emotional expression. "Fate's bitter game" reflects the cruelty of fate, and "Headless, I grieve all the same" vividly expresses the narrator's inner emptiness and helplessness.

3. Blood turns into wind, sand turns into rain; ownerless cats and mice gather together... only by not forcing to take the right path can there be a way out.

Translation: In a land o' bloodshed and chaos' sting, mice and rat mingle without a king... the right path may be a different thing.

Analysis: "Bloodshed and chaos' sting" reproduces the chaotic scene, and "mingle without a king" shows the unrestrained disorder. The translation accurately conveys

the irrationality of success and failure in the chaotic world, as well as the philosophy that one must break conventions to survive.

III. EVALUATION OF CHINESE CULTURE'S OVERSEAS DISSEMINATION

(1) Awards and Achievements

1. Sales and Revenue

The game achieved extraordinary sales and player figures: Steam concurrent players surpassed 2.22 million on launch day, a new record for single-player games. It sold 10 million copies globally in three days and 20 million in the first month. As of September 4, 2024, total global sales reached 18.1 million copies, with revenue over \$867 million, 25% from overseas. Annual 2024 sales are projected to exceed 28 million copies, worth 9 billion yuan.

2. Awards

2023 Gamescom: Won the "Best Visual Effects" award. 2024 Thailand Game Awards: Won awards such as "Game of the Year", "Best Action Game", "Best Game Direction", and "Best PC/Console Game". 2024 Golden Joystick Awards: Won awards such as "Best Visual Design" and "Stream Game of the Year". 2024 Steam Awards: Won awards such as "Game of the Year", "Labor of Love", and "Outstanding Story-Rich Game".

3. Market Impact

The success of Black Myth: Wukong has significantly boosted the Chinese game market. In the third quarter of 2024, the revenue of the Chinese game market reached 91.766 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 8.95% and a month-on-month increase of 22.96%, setting a record high. Among them, the revenue of China's independently developed games in the overseas market was 5.169 billion US dollars, a year-on-year increase of 20.75%, mainly due to the strong performance of Black Myth: Wukong in the overseas market.

4. International Media and Player Reviews

On Metacritic, the PC version of Black Myth: Wukong received an aggregate score of 82 points, with 43 out of 52 media giving positive reviews, 9 giving mixed reviews, and no negative reviews. Spanish media GamersRD gave a full score, calling it a "Game of the Year candidate", and praised its art design, graphics and soundtrack. On the Steam platform, the game has a positive review rate of over 90% in 18 out of 23 language regions, with the Italian and Thai regions having a positive review rate as high as 98%.

(2) Translation Strategies and Cultural Dissemination

Deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture, Black

Myth: Wukong's translation strategies play a key role in balancing globalization and localization [3]. The in-depth integration of its translation strategies and cultural overseas dissemination not only realizes the cross-linguistic dissemination of Chinese traditional culture but also reconstructs the cognitive logic of global players on Chinese culture through creative translation practices. The success of this translation strategy stems not only from the accurate deconstruction of cultural symbols but also from the dual empowerment of technology and art. Its communication effect can be analyzed from the following dimensions:

1. Cross-Cultural Translation: From "Monkey King" to "Wukong"

The game uses extensive transliteration, such as Wukong, Jin Gu Bang, Yaoguai. This "decontextualized" approach actively resists Western cultural hegemony, breaking the long-term Japanized or de-Chinese narrative of Journey to the West in the West. After launch, searches for "Wukong" overseas surged 300%, with some players learning pinyin voluntarily. For culturally loaded terms, a mixed translation strategy turns the game into a "cultural code converter." For instance, transliterating Dinghai Shenzhen helps players grasp its dual connotation of artifact and geographical symbol.

2. Aesthetic Localization: From Chinese Classics to Poetic English

The highest realm of ancient poem English translation is to present its aesthetic art and inherit the poet's soul [4]. The game's classical poem translations are a model of cross-cultural narrative: for example, "The world all knows that immortals are good" is translated as "Their minds yearn to ascend", conveying the obsession with immortality and Taoist philosophy; "Use thunderous means to show the heart of a Bodhisattva" becomes "Cleanse the world with blood, and grow lotuses in it", turning Buddhist compassion into a visual image that fits Western "violent redemption" aesthetics. In character language, the team achieves cultural adaptation via dialect transplantation: Tiger Vanguard's Northeast accent corresponds to London Cockney, retaining street humor; the old monkey's classical Chinese uses archaic English grammar to fit its identity and create an epic sense. This "language style mirror transplantation" lets Western players feel Eastern narrative charm through familiar language.

3. Immersive Tech Communication: From Text Translation to Sensory Narrative

Translation extends beyond words to cross-cultural sensory symbol translation:

Visual: Game dragons use "Loong" instead of

"Dragon" (with Pinyin) to distinguish Eastern auspicious beasts from Western evil dragons, combined with ink wash textures to reshape Western cognition of Eastern auspicious symbols.

Auditory: Chinese bangzi and pipa music are converted into "oriental percussion" in English, retaining national musical timbre for easy Western recognition.

Interactive: "Jindou Yun" prompt uses Chinese bamboo flute glissando, contrasting with English "Dash" pronunciation for a novel audio-visual experience. Technical means (e.g., dynamic subtitles switching fonts by dialect) enhance cultural perception, increasing Western players' recognition of cultural differences by 40%.

4. Participatory Community Communication: From Passive Reception to Active Decoding

Translation strategies have sparked overseas players' secondary creation:

Cultural Textual Research: Reddit's "Black Myth Terminology Textual Research" column sees players comparing "Yaoguai" and Japanese "Yokai" etymologies, triggering cross-cultural academic discussions.

Fan Translation: Vietnamese team "Black Myth VN" localized in-game murals, scriptures and Shaanxi Northern storytelling, achieving a 99% positive review rate on Steam Vietnam.

Cultural Communication: TikTok's "Black Myth Translation" topic (120M+ views) has players interpreting "Golden Cudgel" and "Jingu Bang" symbolic differences, turning the game into a globally co-created cultural encyclopedia.

5. Industrial Ecology Paradigm Innovation: From Cultural Export to Standard-Setting

Black Myth: Wukong's translation practice has established three paradigms for Chinese games going global:

Technology + Art: AI-assisted translation paired with a team of archaic English scholars and digital media experts ensures cultural accuracy and artistic presentation.

Global + Local: Preserves core cultural symbols such as Wukong while enhancing acceptance through localization like Cockney-accented voice acting.

Official + Folk: Opens MOD tools for custom fan translations, building an "official release + grassroots creation" communication matrix. This paradigm greatly boosted cultural communication: within a month of launch, overseas players posted 230,000 cultural research threads on Steam, effectively creating a modern commentary on *Journey to the West*.

IV. CONCLUSION

The translation and cultural export of Black Myth: Wukong is essentially an implicit game of cultural sovereignty. Taking digital games as the medium, it embeds Chinese cultural codes into the Western-dominated entertainment narrative system. Through creative translation, it has achieved an identity transformation from a "cultural other" to a "co-creator of meaning", providing an important case and proposition for game translation and cross-cultural communication. The game transforms Journey to the West into interactive cultural symbols, and translation endows these symbols with the possibility of cross-cultural circulation. It enlightens us that the key to the modern transformation of traditional cultural IP lies in building a playable and experienceable symbol system. This is an attempt to rebuild the "cultural Babel" in the digital age, proving that creative translation can cross language and cultural barriers. However, it also exposes in-depth challenges: we need to guard against the risk of "meaning emptiness" of cultural symbols in global circulation and avoid the loss of cultural essence. True cultural confidence does not lie in clinging to the "original flavor", but in cultivating a new cultural form in cross-cultural collisions. This is precisely the value of Black Myth: Wukong — allowing the world to see the vitality of Chinese culture in the virtual world and the common imagination of global players. (This paper is an achievement of the 2024 National Innovation Training Program Project of Yangtze University, Project No.: Yz2024297).

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