

From Myth to Digital Experience: Transmedia Storytelling in *Black Myth: Wukong*

A Transmedial Adaptation of *Journey to the West*

This presentation explores how *Black Myth: Wukong* adapts, expands, and transforms the 16th-century Chinese mythological epic *Journey to the West* through interactive storytelling.

Presenter:

Zubeyde Azra Icen– MA in American Culture
and Literature
Dokuz Eylül University

This presentation is based on my MA thesis on
transmedial adaptation in literature, games, and
television.



A Myth Reimagined Through Time

Record of the Western Regions

Xuanzang, who was a Buddhist monk in China started a pilgrimage to the West to find the Indian sutras and bring them back to China in 7th century(626-645). And his translations of the sutras and the travelogue he and his students kept during the journey became one of the most important texts of early 7th Century central China. These text then inspired the novel *Journey to the West*.

Journey to the West

Journey to the West is a fictionalized version of the historical texts. It is written in 16th Century and is attributed to Wu Cheng'en. The travelogues have been mythologized with magic and new characters. One of these characters are Sun Wukong-Monkey King. It became one of the great Chinese novel and most popular literary work in East Asia.

Black Myth: Wukong

Black Myth: Wukong (2024) is a video game adaptation of all these texts. It is a new digital retelling of the mythological story of the Sun Wukong.



Transmedia and Myth Through Critical Lenses

Linda Hutcheon

“Adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary.”

While defending the reinterpretation capabilities of adaptations and arguing against viewing them as mere repetition, Hutcheon also advocates for the unique position of interactivity in video games within the field of adaptation studies.

Modes of Engagement:

- Telling (novels)
- Showing (films)
- ✦ Interactive (games)

Henry Jenkins

“Transmedia storytelling is the art of worldbuilding across media platforms, where each medium contributes something unique.”

According to Jenkins’ transmedia theory, if an adaptation does not contribute to the world-building of the ‘franchise’, it is redundant. The biggest accomplishment of transmedia is that it can extend story elements across media to ensure that all the different media contribute to the story.

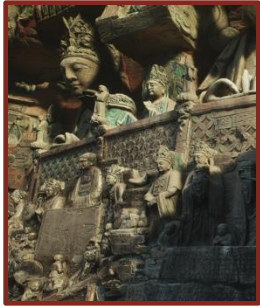
Marie-Laure Ryan

“Games shift narrative from telling to experiencing — from temporal to spatial forms of storytelling.”

“In computer games, the world is not just a backdrop for the story: it is the story.”

The game transforms and old story that some people heard through their childhood, some never heard, and some only read about to an experience that they can explore, live through and it gives them the chance of inhabiting the myth.

Narrative Through Action



Even though this is an adaptation of Journey to the West (novel), the player character is not Monkey King himself. The player controls the new characters Destined One.

The Destined One's story takes place 500 years after the Sun Wukong's journey to the West.

Destined One is assigned a mission by the first narrator the Player Character comes across-The Old Monkey. His mission is to find the Great Sage's Six Senses which are scattered around after he died. These are called Relics in the game.

Throughout the game as the Player collects these Relics learns more about the Sun Wukong, the Journey to the West and Xuanzang's old story.

Every new map in every new chapter of the game is sometimes only from the Journey to the west and sometimes Xuanzang's stories and the myths are blended with the novel. Other than the Old Monkey there are more narrators the player comes across.

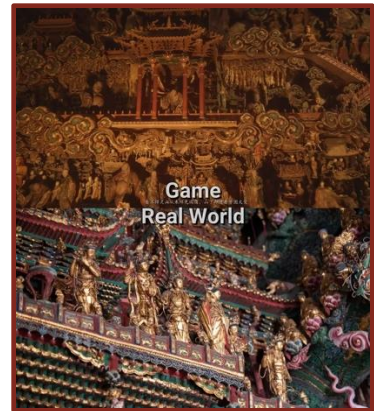
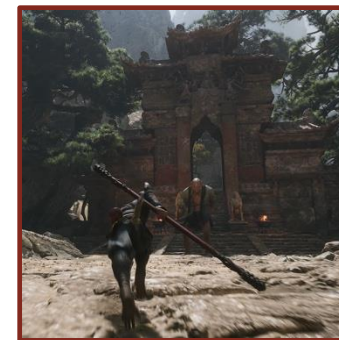
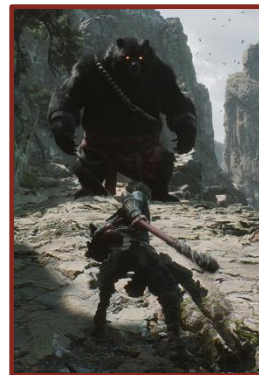


The game has blended all these old stories and added their own little details as new characters or new storylines. And gets across these narratives in combat, dialogues, portraits of characters that tells their stories and non-permanent narrators communicating with the player to help them explore this new-ancient world.

This choice in narration style makes the adaptation both a "retelling" and a new experience. Because the player both learns about the ancient myths and experiences some parts of the same myth.

They don't experience the myth through exposition, but they experience it through embodied exploration and mythical encounters.

Environmental design is a crucial part of game design. To create the best immersive experience, the setting and surroundings must be carefully considered. Black Myth: Wukong was very successful in this respect. As this game is a historical/mythical retelling, some of the surroundings are real historical places and some are mythical, magical locations. The developers went to these historical places and 3D scanned temples, pagodas and statues to create the game. This gives players a more immersive experience.

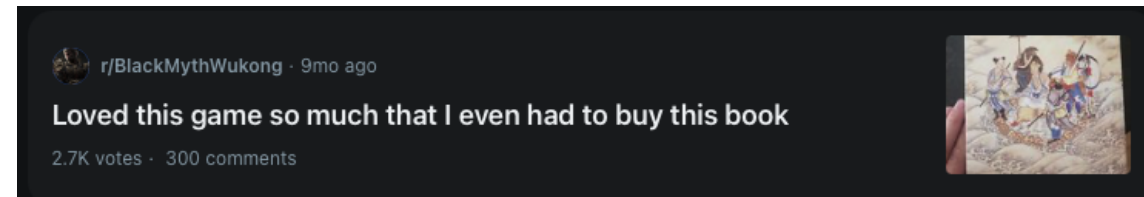
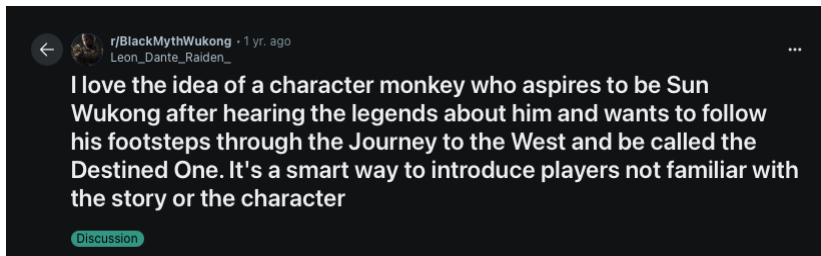
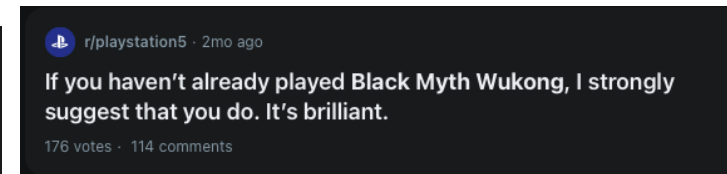
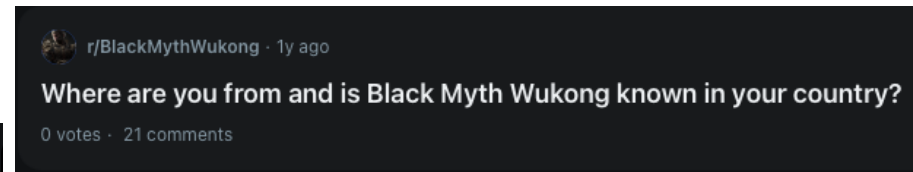
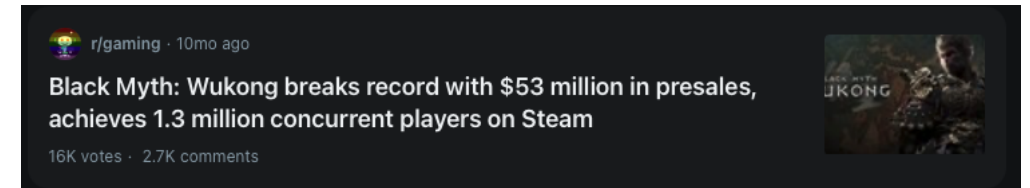
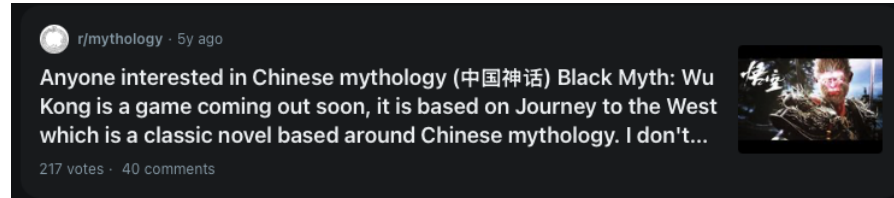
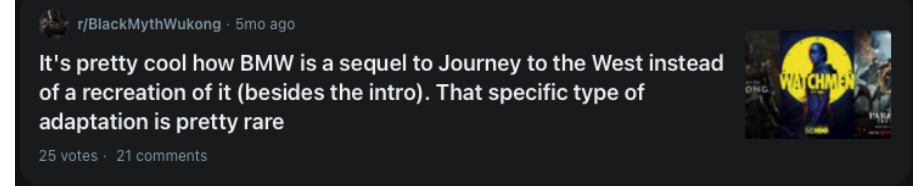
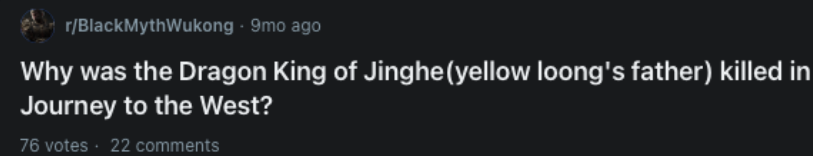


Myth Goes Global

Despite being one of China's first AAA games, *Black Myth: Wukong* became a global success, contributing to the introduction of Chinese culture and myths to a wider audience, and with a wider global audience Monkey King becomes trans-cultural.

Apart from being a good retelling of an age-old myth, this introduction to a global audience also features environmental design elements that have helped China's tourism industry, became a cultural ambassador.

While the people who are familiar with Sun Wukong's story also got a chance to engage with the myth in an immersive and interactive medium, non-familiar audiences engage not just with the game, but with the mythology behind it for the first time.



Reanimating Myth Through Play

The period between the historical records and the novel saw many adaptations of this story. The list of adaptations of Journey to the West is also very long, with many different versions having been made over the years. Xuanzang's pilgrimage was an important journey with significant religious and cultural implications, inspiring folk tales and legends and leaving a grand cultural impact.

Now with Black Myth: Wukong the myth is retold, reimagined, relived, reexperienced. This is not just a game but a living archive of cultural memory. Its impact is no small matter for game studies, adaptation and transmedia studies and digital humanities.

By carrying these texts, myths, stories to digital media as playable dreamscapes the game gives the player a chance participate in meaning-making.

As myth-making evolves in digital contexts, the relationship between storyteller and audience shifts. Digital mythmaking transforms storytelling into an interactive, participatory process — an act of co-creation shaped by both creators and users.



“For storytelling is always
the art of
repeating stories, and this
art is lost when the stories
are no longer retained.”
— *Walter Benjamin,*
The Storyteller: Reflections
on the Works of Nikolai
Leskov



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