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The Digital Representation of Chinese Temples and Caves in Black Myth: Wukong

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The Digital Representation of Chinese Temples and Caves in *Black Myth: Wukong*

Zihan Qi

The Digital Representation of Chinese Temples and Caves in Black Myth:

Wukong

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Throughout history, art has played a crucial role in both preserving and interpreting the cultural heritage of human societies. Traditional art forms like painting, sculpture, and architecture not only reflect the aesthetic values of their time but also serve as a means of sharing archaeological discoveries and historical stories with the public (Smith 2006; Lowenthal 1985). For example, the detailed reliefs in ancient Egyptian tombs and temples vividly depict religious rituals, royal accomplishments, and daily life, providing modern scholars with valuable insights into the beliefs and social structures of that civilization (Robins 1997). Similarly, monumental structures such as the Parthenon in Athens or the Terracotta Warriors at Qin Shi Huang's mausoleum in China represent both artistic achievement and cultural memory, embodying state ideologies and collective identities. From ancient reliefs depicting ritual activities to modern portrayals of ancient civilizations through literature and film, these artistic forms have shaped collective memory and influenced how societies reinterpret their past (Assmann 1995; Connerton 1989).

In recent years, video games have rapidly evolved from a niche form of entertainment into a major global cultural industry. According to the 2024 Global Console Gaming Market Research Report (GameNewsTC, 2024), the console gaming market reached a size of US\$45.96 billion, representing a year-on-year decrease of 2.57%. However, the number of users grew to 460 million, marking a year-on-year increase of 4.5%. This further demonstrates the medium's ongoing ability to attract and retain audience attention, solidifying video games as a key platform for cultural creation, sharing, and international exchange. Data from Dentsu's 2024: State of Gaming Report indicates that the global gaming industry reached nearly USD 184 billion in value, surpassing the combined market size of the film and music industries. For context, the report notes that film and music industries were valued at USD 33.9 billion and USD 28.6 billion, respectively. These statistics underscore not only the industry's

swift growth but also the escalating cultural and social significance of video games. Moreover, the influence of gaming extends beyond its economic dimensions. By harnessing immersion and creativity, video games demonstrate an exceptional capacity to engage players continuously.

As an interactive, immersive, and narrative-centric medium, video games offer a distinctive means of engaging with culture. They facilitate not only the experience and participation in various cultural themes but also allow exploration of diverse identities and value systems through role-playing and simulated scenarios. In contrast to more static art forms such as painting or photography, video games encourage active engagement within virtual environments, enabling audiences to interact with culturally embedded narratives and, in the process, construct their own digital spatial experiences. As Anthropy (2012) posits, video games have evolved into a widely accessible form of participatory art, empowering creators to transcend traditional cultural platforms and to explore personal stories, cultural identities, and alternative histories.

Many contemporary video games have demonstrated their potential as tools for cultural dissemination by integrating folklore, mythology, social issues, and historical references into their design. For example, *Ghost of Tsushima* (2020), set against the historical backdrop of the 13th-century Mongol invasion of Tsushima Island, Japan, employs the protagonist's situational decision-making to interrogate the conflict between bushido traditions and pragmatic survivalism. The game meticulously reconstructs the ethos of samurai culture, Shinto rituals, and Noh theater aesthetics, while implicitly reflecting contemporary dilemmas of cultural identity. *Assassin's Creed: Origins* (Ubisoft, 2017) achieves a partial but scholarly informed reconstruction of ancient Egyptian societal life. Its "Discovery Tour" mode—developed in collaboration with archaeologists—integrates archaeological knowledge with modern visual culture, transforming gameplay into an interactive didactic platform. These cases collectively demonstrate that video games transcend mere entertainment; they function as

dynamic mediums for preserving and reinterpreting cultural narratives for global audiences.

The burgeoning role of gaming has garnered increasing scholarly interest. Researchers are now examining the capacity of video games to reconstruct archaeological and historical environments, immerse players in simulated experiences of the past, and promote public reflection on history. Through visual reconstruction, environmental storytelling, and spatial immersion, games serve as platforms that enable users to encounter stylized or hybridized representations of heritage sites. Nonetheless, most existing research has concentrated on Western contexts—such as classical ruins, medieval castles, and World War battlefields—while digital representations of Asian heritage landscapes remain comparatively underexplored. This gap highlights the urgency and importance of analyzing Chinese heritage within digital media.

In parallel, the concept of digital heritage has gained institutional legitimacy. According to UNESCO's Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage (2003), digital heritage includes "cultural, educational, scientific and administrative resources, as well as technical, legal, medical and other kinds of information created digitally or converted into digital form." This encompasses everything from digital artworks to virtual reconstructions of historical monuments. Within this framework, video games are increasingly regarded as born-digital heritage, not only due to their cultural content but also because of the digital environments, assets, and practices they generate. ICOMOS and other heritage bodies have acknowledged the role of digital media in fostering cultural continuity, especially in contexts where physical heritage is threatened or inaccessible.

Video games are extremely popular worldwide, making them an excellent tool for learning history, archaeology, cultural heritage, and more. Compared to traditional media such as books, paintings, and films, video games are more entertaining and interactive, which can stimulate players' enthusiasm. Additionally, with the

advancement of graphic technology, video games can now reproduce historical sites and artifacts with higher clarity and accuracy. However, there are also some issues. For example, in most cases, video game creators prioritise the gameplay during the creation process, which inevitably leads to misinterpretations of archaeological findings and may cause players to form misconceptions. For example, *Assassin's Creed: Origins* (Ubisoft, 2017) demonstrates high accuracy in reconstructing ancient Egyptian ruins and depicting daily life during that period. However, fictional characters and plot elements based on speculation may not accurately reflect historical reality. Despite these issues, video games remain an effective medium for disseminating cultural heritage. For example, the *Tomb Raider* series has recreated sites such as Machu Picchu (*Tomb Raider: Shadow*, 2018) and Syrian tombs (*Tomb Raider: Rise*, 2015), and the popularity of these works has to some extent sparked public interest in archaeology and cultural heritage. Following the re-release of the game in 2013, the University of York even introduced a course titled 'Tomb Raider Archaeology.'

However, these games also feature exaggerated portrayals, such as quickly solving tomb puzzles or attributing archaeological discoveries to "supernatural forces" (e.g., Queen Himiko's supernatural abilities), which undermine scientific explanations. The University of Cambridge's Archaeology department has used *Tomb Raider* as a "counterexample," requiring students to compare in-game behaviors with the principles of the Venice Charter and analyze the structural plausibility of virtual ruins.

As Reinhard (2018) argues, video games themselves constitute archaeological sites, containing traces of past player activities, digital artifacts, and evolving virtual environments. These domains—comprising player-constructed edifices, forsaken online communities, and outdated game assets—constitute a substantive digital material culture amenable to examination through adaptable archaeological approaches. Consequently, video games serve not merely as mediums of cultural representation but also as integral components of the comprehensive archaeological record, thereby enriching the material history of digital culture.

1.2 Focus of Study: *Black Myth: Wukong* and the Rise of Chinese Digital Heritage

Most academic discussions of game-based heritage have primarily focused on Western settings, such as Greco-Roman ruins, medieval castles, or World War II battlefields. The digital portrayal of East Asian cultural landscapes has received less attention. This gap has become more noticeable with the recent growth of Chinese-developed games that incorporate national mythology and historical aesthetics.

In the past decade, several Chinese game developers have released internationally acclaimed titles, such as *Genshin Impact*. These works often incorporate elements of traditional Chinese culture, mythology, and history, presenting narratives and aesthetics rooted in Chinese heritage to global audiences. *Black Myth: Wukong*, the game drawn by the Hangzhou based game studio Game Science is a seminal piece of the journey. The game is set against the backdrop of China's Four Great Classical Novels, specifically the Ming Dynasty novel *Journey to the West*. Utilizing the Unreal Engine 5, an advanced graphics engine, the game offers a faithful recreation of cultural heritage, allowing players to immerse themselves in China's ancient mythology, religion, and cultural legacy. Moreover, *Black Myth: Wukong* would be a great introduction of the Chinese traditional culture to the worldwide gamers. As such, *Black Myth: Wukong* can result as a useful research source to guide the manner in which a digital game can infuse and subvert the interpretations of the cultural space on virtual environments.

Due to the game's creative background, the temples, courtyards, and sculptures within the game are exceptionally rich. It combines the elements of the ancient civilization of China in terms of mythology and the religious architecture with the aid of modern technologies, recreating the traditional temple and caves in which the players can enjoy. *Black Myth: Wukong* has been receiving worldwide attention by game players since its launch because of such outstanding quality, cultural elements, and great game-play process. Being the first AAA video game on classical mythology

developed in China, it has already attracted a lot of attention throughout the world. It is extremely popular which contributes to its great usefulness as a case study of the interaction between video games as a sort of digital work and archaeological space, as a structure of interpretations. Stone grotto sculptures and temple courtyards are two of the most strongly-characteristic forms of religious architecture in China mainly the traditional Buddhist art and constructions. These buildings are not only venues for religious rituals but also embody the spatial structural concepts of traditional Chinese architecture, reflecting China's traditional cosmogony and philosophical ideas. According to Mircea Eliade (1959), sacred spaces are used as it forms the center of the world and links reality with the divine sphere of reality via architecture. Temple courtyards, and other archetypical structures, are usually sacred places where art, sculpt, and ceremonies meet and have some kind of a similarity to the architecture of other religious groups. Since ancient times, the places have been assembling those who subscribe to various religions. Because its source material, *Journey to the West*, describes an age where religious context was a hybrid of local Taoism and imported Buddhism, there are some peculiar aspects to the temple courtyards and cave sculptures in *Black Myth: Wukong*. In these circumstances, numerous religious buildings turned out to be the result of the influence of both religions and the landscapes of the architecture in the game *Black Myth: Wukong* appeared even more heterogeneous. The mythological figures in the game on the other hand have origins in two different religious cultures. They communicate with the architectural forms which are influenced by the cultural heritage in unison forming a united space of interactivity in the case of players. This enables the players to familiarize themselves more with these cultural heritage sites and develop an interest in the cultural heritage and archaeology among the population.

In the game, these buildings have become scenes that can be explored or used for combat, and some of them interact with the player's character. The game saves progress by the main character burning incense at land temples that can be found all

over the region. The use of incense burners during the real-life situation is still significant to burn incense, which is a prayer element by believers. Another example is that players can meditate on cushions at the vicinity of some temples or Buddha statues to replenish their stamina. This can be used to allow the players to have a break in play as they immerse themselves in the graphically recreated temple courtyard environment. This thesis will examine the way in which *Black Myth: Wukong* constructs and interprets the Chinese temple gardens and stone *cave sculptures* and the way in which the digital recreation of these cultural heritage sites is imprinted upon the game to show their cultural importance and archaeological risk. This is accomplished through a synthesis of spatial analysis, visual hermeneutics, and comparative references to heritage sites, providing important input to the current archaeogaming, digital heritage, and cultural studies of East Asia.

1.3 Research Questions

This research is guided by a central question:

How does *Black Myth: Wukong* digitally reconstruct and reinterpret Chinese cultural heritage through its architectural settings, and what tensions emerge in this process between technological authenticity, gameplay demands, and the broader goals of cultural preservation?

To address this overarching question, the study develops four interrelated sub-questions:

Q1: Architectural Elements. Which features such as dougong brackets, gateways, axial layouts, and hierarchical courtyard arrangements are replicated or adapted in the game, and how do these design choices communicate symbolic or spiritual significance?

Q2: Realism and Fantasy. How does the game balance historical realism with mythological imagination, and in what ways are prototypes such as the Foguang Temple or the Mogao Cave murals blended with imaginative distortions to support gameplay functionality and narrative world-building?

Q3: Playable Sacredness. How are sacred spaces and ritual acts transformed into interactive mechanics, for example through incense burning, temple combat, or environmental storytelling, and how does this process shape players' phenomenological experience of cultural heritage?

Q4: Transcultural Circulation. What are the educational potentials and epistemic risks of these representations as global audiences encounter Chinese religious symbols through the lens of game aesthetics?

1.4 Significance & Innovation

This thesis extends the current body of knowledge in the field of cultural heritage research to include views in the digital humanities and archaeogaming. As traditional heritage studies preoccupy themselves primarily with the preservation of physical spaces and museum displays, this study accentuates the importance of online space, and interactive media as a way of shaping cultural memory, and historical narratives. The analysis of how *Black Myth: Wukong* re-creates Chinese religious and archaeological landscapes contributes to a broader discourse on the issue of digital heritage and interactive multicultural exchange, as well as whether video games can be used to teach and express the culture. This work is not only theoretically new, but also methodologically as it uses an integrated multidisciplinary approach of visual/heritage analysis, symbolic interpretation, and comparative studies within the digital media context. Some work has been done to apply heritage and archaeological theories to the analysis of contemporary video games, in the East Asian cases including such cultural heritage. This study demonstrates how this interdisciplinary approach can provide an effective process of critically examining digital cultural products to move forward into future studies of archaeological games and digital heritage research, as well as interactive media analyses. Besides the abovementioned contributions, the research also has a minor practical application: it introduces the first insights into the possible connection between the game design and presentation of the

cultural heritage. This thesis attempts to draw some conclusions about the representations of historic temples, cave and architectural symbols in *Black Myth: Wukong* and serve as a minor point of reference in discussing how cultural elements of a traditional form can be introduced in games. Even though my thesis is not trying to establish fixed design models or guidelines, this analysis can be used as a starting point of reflection by games developers, heritage experts and cultural researchers who might be interested in the challenges of marrying digital games entertainment to cultural representation. It also shows how a popular game can be used to open avenues to mass interactivity with the less popular parts of architectural heritage in a manner that is user-friendly, as well as engaging.

1.5 Introduction to the structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized into six main chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the research background, clarifies the focus on *Black Myth: Wukong* and its architectural representations, outlines the research questions, and highlights the study's significance and innovation.

Chapter 2 reviews the existing scholarship on video games as cultural products, the dissemination of Chinese culture through gaming, the sacredness and symbolism of Chinese religious architecture, cultural representations in games, and the current academic discussions of *Black Myth: Wukong*. This chapter also identifies the research gap that the present thesis addresses.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology. It presents the research framework, theoretical foundations, interdisciplinary integration, and data sources. It also describes the analytical tools and methods applied, including software tools, visual and content analysis, and comparative analysis, while considering technical aspects and ethical issues.

Chapter 4 provides the case studies. It examines the digital reconstruction of temple and cave architecture in *Black Myth: Wukong*, focusing on two representative

examples: the Guanyin Zen Courtyard and Yellow Wind Ridge. Each case study analyzes architectural references, ludic adaptations, cultural transformations, and overall evaluation.

Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the findings. It integrates the results of the case studies, compares them with academic standards of digital heritage reproduction, and considers broader issues such as authenticity, consumerization, exoticization, secondary creation, the hyperreal dilemma of digital heritage, and the challenge that interactivity poses to authoritative narratives.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings, reflecting on its limitations, and suggesting directions for future development of digital cultural heritage.

The thesis closes with appendices and a full list of references.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

2.1 Video Games as Cultural Products and Narrative Spaces

In recent decades, video games have evolved from mere entertainment commodities to complex cultural products and artistic expressions (Juul, 2005; Sicart, 2009). As with cinema and literature, games function as narrative and aesthetic mediums capable of conveying cultural values, myths, and social ideologies (Frasca, 2003; Bogost, 2007). The increasing recognition of video games as a legitimate art form has encouraged scholarly interest in their role within cultural reproduction processes, particularly in how they re-present and reinterpret heritage, identity, and collective memory in the digital age.

Unlike static cultural media, video games offer interactive spaces where players can actively negotiate and express cultural identities (Shaw, 2010; Lizardi, 2015). Through the digital reimagining of myths, traditions, and historical events, games become tools of cultural transmission, shaping both individual and collective understandings of cultural heritage. This interactive quality allows players not only to observe cultural narratives but also to participate in them, making decisions within worlds imbued with historical, religious, or symbolic meaning.

Cameron and Kenderdine (2007) introduced the concept of digital heritage, which has since become a foundational framework for examining how digital technologies — including video games — preserve, interpret, and re-present cultural heritage. This field addresses the ethics, accuracy, and public impact of virtual heritage environments, considering how creators balance historical authenticity with the aesthetic and entertainment demands of commercial media. Champion (2015) makes a useful distinction between virtual tourism (passive visualization) and virtual re-enactment (active participation), noting that video games uniquely enable players to inhabit reconstructed cultural spaces and engage with them on an experiential level.

Existing academic literature on cultural heritage in games has primarily focused on Western contexts, often through case studies of ancient or medieval heritage sites,

such as those depicted in the Assassin's Creed series, Kingdom Come: Deliverance, or Tomb Raider. These works examine both the fidelity and the creative liberties taken in reimagining historical spaces for gameplay purposes. Reinhard (2018) introduces archaeogaming as a methodological field that studies how archaeology is represented and engaged with in digital games, bridging the disciplines of heritage studies, media studies, and archaeology itself.

Despite this growing body of research, comparatively little attention has been paid to the representation of non-Western heritage sites in AAA video games, particularly those depicting Chinese religious architecture and mythology. This underrepresentation marks a critical research gap, one that this thesis addresses by examining how *Black Myth: Wukong* digitally reconstructs and reinterprets sacred architectural spaces — such as temples and caves — and the implications of these adaptations for global cultural understanding.

2.2 The Dissemination of Chinese Culture through Video Games

Over the past two decades, the Chinese video game industry has undergone rapid expansion, transforming from a primarily domestic market into a major player in global entertainment. According to *Newzoo's Global Games Market Report 2023*, China has emerged as one of the world's largest video game markets, with both production capacity and export volume showing steady growth (Newzoo, 2023). Titles such as *Genshin Impact*, *Naraka: Bladepoint*, and *Black Myth: Wukong* exemplify the trend of “going global,” in which Chinese developers seek not only financial success overseas but also the transmission of cultural narratives, aesthetics, and values. This trend aligns with broader state-supported strategies such as the “Going Out” policy and the promotion of cultural soft power through creative industries (Keane, 2013).

As far as dissemination performance is regarded, one must mention *Genshin Impact* (miHoYo, 2020), which has already gained impressive success in the global market with over 100 countries where it is sold and that remains among the most

successful titles in both the App Store and Google Play. Its in-game location, known as *Liyue*, which draws on Chinese scenery and architecture, has led to much speculation among overseas players on Reddit, Twitter, and YouTube. Its cultural references were an active topic of exploration among many non-Chinese players and was further propagated through mass cosplay and fan produced works.

In a similar manner, *Naraka: Bladepoint* (24 Entertainment, 2021) made wuxia-style fighting and martial arts aesthetics a part of the global esports scene. Having millions downloads on Steam, it became an internationally popular title in esports tournaments. The game also ushered in a large amount of derivative content on Twitch, YouTube, and Bilibili, furthering its spread in Chinese culture and placing Chinese martial arts images within the broader sphere of gaming.

Black Myth: Wukong (Game Science, 2024) is somewhat of a cultural achievement in that it is the first AAA game set in classical mythology in Chinese culture. Since its initial trailer in 2020, the production of the game was followed closely across the world. With every new gameplay, it receives generated millions of views on YouTube and draws lots of publications in Western media sources with critics pointing out the purity of Eastern storytelling and mechanics made by 100 percent Soulslike percentages. The game has not only led to fans of action-RPGs being attracted to the game but offered the unknowledgeable audience to the Journey to the West an introduction to the religious architecture of China, mythological characters and its narratives.

However, there are many problems of Chinese games in spreading abroad. The lengthy and complicated nature of Chinese cultural history imposes steep market-entry costs on non-Chinese market entrants and may force game developers to reduce or even omit cultural details when making their products accessible. The market is also influenced by the likes of localization, censorship, and platform regulations which impact receptions of Chinese games in foreign markets. As an example, Genshin Impact localized costumes of some characters in specific regions that align with the

culture there, and *Black Myth: Wukong* translated narrative expressions between versions of languages to prevent misunderstandings.

How well the Chinese cultural elements can be understood and appreciated by the international audience is determined by the cultural design in a game, as well as the degree to which the culture has already been familiar to the players. Sacred buildings, such as the examples of architecture, can be re-appropriated as battle fields or the settings to perform the quest, keeping the recognizable features and altering the traditional functions. Such changes intensify immersion at the risk of losing their symbolic or ritual meaning to the players who are ignorant of the cultural context. Cross-cultural dissemination is all too frequently fraught with the danger of exoticization (Iwabuchi, 2015), Chinese games being no exception.

Overall, the international success of *Genshin Impact*, *Naraka: Bladepoint* and *Black Myth: Wukong* demonstrates that Chinese games have become influential vehicles of cultural transmission. Such works have not only brought Chinese cultural motifs into the international discourse of gaming, but they also led to a reconsideration of the role played by China in the international game industry. Concurrently, the conflict between marketability and cultural originality continues to be a theme that will dominate the future course of the game-based cultural exportation that China is involved in.

2.3 Sacredness and Symbolism in Chinese Religious Architecture

The simple question that religious and heritage scholars would pose is what makes a place sacred? Mircea Eliade comes up with a straightforward response in *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959) explaining that a sacred site means that something sacred is present. It makes a clear distinction between the ordinary life and upper world. In his opinion, a temple or shrine represent a bigger order. Such places are talked of as the axis mundi or the middle of the world (Eliade, 1959). Many later studies expand on this idea, interpreting gates, halls, and courtyards as elements of a design that guides people's beliefs and practices (Knott, 2005).

Laurajane Smith adds a critical view. In *Uses of Heritage*, she explains who shapes the story of heritage. She argues that governments and large institutions often control the main story. This story presents sacred places as if they never change. It treats them as fixed symbols of a nation or a group. Smith shows that real life looks different. Local people pray, clean, repair, and use these places in new ways. They argue about rules. They change details over time (Smith, 2006). Her framework also helps with digital work. Designers of digital media must please users and work within technical limits. They choose what to show and what to leave out. These choices can shift both visual detail and meaning (Winter, 2013).

Chinese scholarship offers further guidance. Many writers' link sacredness to cosmology and geomancy. Builders used ideas from *fengshui* and Buddhist texts to set a site. They studied the mountain's shape. They watched wind, water, and sun. They chose where the gate and the main hall to place. They tried to make buildings sit well in the land (Lagerwey, 2004). This fit, they believed, gave the place its force. The plan of a Buddhist temple shows this logic. Visitors enter the Mountain Gate. They cross one yard and then another. They end at the Main Hall that enshrines the Buddha. The path works as a lesson. Each step brings the visitor closer to the core. Pagodas reach upward and mark a link to the sky. Bell and drum towers mark time for prayer (Steinhardt, 1990). Daoist temples often sit on slopes. Builders follow rock lines and old trees. Paths turn with the hill. Streams and stones enter the design. These choices express a wish to live in step with nature (Lagerwey, 2004).

Cave sculptures add a clear example. Dunhuang, Yungang, and Longmen show how people turned cliffs into places for worship and art. A visitor walks from bright light into a cool and dark chamber. The body feels the change at once. Murals and statues fill the walls. Many images tell Buddhist stories. Feitian figures appear often. Artists show them flying in clouds or throwing flowers. The figures stand for joy and welcome. Their style shows ideas that moved along the Silk Road. Makers from India, Central Asia, and China shared forms and skills (Whitfield, Whitfield, & Agnew, 2000).

Several layers work together to make a place feel sacred. The plan matters. The images matter. The sounds, smells, and touch also matter. Incense, bells, footsteps, and wood grain help set the mood. Memory and habit matter as well. People return to the same spot to pray. People follow the same route at festivals. Over time, the place gains weight in the mind (Knott, 2005).

Digital media retell only part of these layers. A project can copy shapes with care. Artists can model Dougong and roof lines. Lighting can imitate dawn or dusk. Sound can echo, wind and bells. Yet the whole set rarely fits into one scene. A digital space must also serve clear tasks. Many projects turn a hall into a combat area. Many projects turn a shrine into a save point. Many projects turn a bell into a puzzle. The place still looks sacred, but it works in a new way (Champion, 2015; Winter, 2013).

This change raises a direct question for heritage and media studies. How can digital work keep meaning while it also keeps users engaged? The theories above offer tools to study that question. Eliade helps explain why a place feels sacred (Eliade, 1959). Smith helps explain who controls the story of a place (Smith, 2006). Chinese practice adds concrete rules for siting and layout (Lagerwey, 2004). These tools allow careful reading of form, images, movement, sound, and use. These tools also support close study of player or visitor actions as a kind of practice (Champion, 2015).

The next chapters will apply these ideas to contemporary digital media. The analysis will examine how virtual spaces use axes and courtyards. The analysis will track how light and sound build mood. The analysis will list where meanings change and why those changes occur. This approach prepares the ground for later case studies. It also frames the questions of authenticity, cultural sense, and user experience that guide the rest of the thesis (Winter, 2013).

2.4 Cultural Representations in Games

The digital game community has been keen on the representation of cultural heritage in digital games as studied by game studies, heritage studies, and media archaeology.

The games reshape, modify and re-contextualize the cultural symbols, whether in the form of architecture or mythological symbols, as interactive spaces. This research considers such processes by referring to architectural semiotics, trans-archaeogaming, and transcultural communication. Collectively, these frameworks can be used to examine how in-game spaces re-inscribe and renegotiate the sense of their real world analogs.

Architectural Semiotics

As pointed out in Nitsche (2008) in *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Worlds*, architectural textures employed in games do not only act as spatialization or navigational properties but also help in conveying narrative content as they are endowed with metaphorical meanings out of the context of their virtual ecosystems. Through spatial arrangement and the player's embodied interaction, in-game architecture constructs a situated narrative logic, often adapting real-world cultural signifiers into game-specific semantics. In this study, I extend Nitsche's framework to examine how the “climbability” or interactive affordances of culturally loaded structures—such as temple arches or caisson ceilings—in *Black Myth: Wukong* transform their semantic role. Traditionally understood like markers of spiritual transition or cosmological order, structures, become ludic tools of traversal, engagement tactics, and spatial puzzles, in the process re-negotiating their role in the digital space.

Archaeogaming

According to Reinhard (2018), in *Archaeogaming: An Introduction to Archaeology in and of Video Games*, *games* are considered virtual excavation sites at which cultural meaning can be recovered. He describes archaeogaming as critical instrumentality in addition to a mode of criticism. He unravels the concept of archaeogaming as an approach and enquiry into the digital reproduction of culture. By developing this idea further, my research further suggests that one should employ a method called a reverse archaeology, which involves searching not only the concealed

meaning within the game but also how the developers created their worlds. By comparing concept art, interviews and historical sources, one can understand how some decisions regarding architectural features were arrived at, modified and introduced, within the set of the spatial system of the game. This is an emphasis of the creative part that came up in the final representation.

Transcultural Communication

As found out by Wabuchi (2015) and other transcultural media experts, the games are taken across the cultural borders and contribute heritage to the global markets. Representation here should address the local conventions and also speak to the international communities. This is the case in *Black Myth: Wukong*. It was designed on the basis of Chinese mythology and traditions of architecture, but it is also set to attract international actors. The presence of temples, cave and religious symbols in the game generates a mixed space in which authenticity of the place meets global availability. It is through this view that the question arises of how heritage is recast when a national heritage is integrated with an international media-based product. In this perspective, *Black Myth: Wukong* is a move towards establishing some Chinese presence in the world of games which has so far been dominated by the Western narrations. Its appropriation of temples, cave, and religious motive is a kind of transcultural communication that can frame meanings differently to fit diverse audiences. The present study presents the mode of architectural semiotics, archaeogaming, and transcultural communication used to frame Chinese religious and architectural heritage in *Black Myth: Wukong* and demonstrates how the traditions of a sacred culture can be redefined as local and referential and at the same time universal and commodified media artifacts.

2.5 *Black Myth: Wukong* – Existing Discussions and Research Gap

When its first trailer appeared in 2020, *Black Myth: Wukong* became one of the most influential AAA projects in the Chinese gaming industry with a wide popular response across the whole world. The visual design, adaptation of the *Journey to the West*, its Chinese production studio have gained their attention in both popular and academic circles, but recreation of the religious architecture and its relation to cultural heritage is underrepresented by the cultural discussions focused on the game.

On public channels, Game Science Company's official website primarily introduces its currently in-development and released works, with a dedicated section for "*Black Myth: Wukong*" centered around several promotional videos. These videos are visually stunning, showcasing the game's art style and technical prowess, but their content remains fundamentally market-oriented advertising, lacking the in-depth materials required for academic research. Aside from the visuals, there is virtually no additional textual material providing researchers with detailed explanations of design logic or cultural implications, thereby limiting the value of official information for academic research.

The Steam platform is one of the discussion places at the community level of the players. At the time of writing, *Black Myth: Wukong* already has over 740,000 player reviews on the platform and such an audience turnout proves very high levels of popularity and viewership. Nevertheless, the gameplay-related aspects of these reviews reveal that game mechanics, controls and character animations, as well as their optimization in terms of performance, are of interest to the vast majority of players. Players often share their tips on level completion, comment on the difficulty level, or provide feedback on their visual presentation. Cultural heritage or reconstruction of religious architecture are hardly discussed at all, with often very few lines given to it, dazusli quite vague, impressionist descriptions such as that the temple seems breathtaking or the cave scenes are so much realistic. This phenomenon suggests that, within the mainstream community context, players' attention is primarily focused on the gaming experience, with little in-depth consideration of the cultural heritage aspects.

Outside of the academic sphere, discussions of the game are mostly confined to media articles, developer and player commentary about such fan-made works. Media reports mostly see *Black Myth: Wukong* as an advancement in Chinese videogame development, citing its AAA level production and inventive approach to the legend of the Journey to the West. The creative processes of transformation to the inspiration sources, which were Buddhist caves, temple architecture, and traditional artifacts, are often presented only at the stage of presentation and promotion. Meanwhile, while players' "fact-checking" analyses on platforms like Bilibili, YouTube, and Reddit are detailed and enthusiastic, they primarily focus on identifying real-world locations corresponding to game scenes or pointing out artistic details, falling short of the theoretical frameworks and methodologies required for academic research.

It is interesting to mention that scholarly study that approaches *Black Myth: Wukong* has recently started to appear. There is an added literature on the game as a cultural communication and globalization tool which has spoken about the success of the game as a global cultural product (Mao, 2024; Meng, 2025; Fan, 2025). The others take the imagological approaches and examine how the game transforms mythological imagery (Yuan, 2024). Even more recent research has seen use of the game as a test platform to test out artificial intelligence applications in action role-playing (Chen, Bu, Song, Gao, & Zheng, 2024). Although these discussions pull out the importance of the game in terms of cultural propagation, mythological depictions, and technological innovation, they fail to penetrate the digital reproductions of sacred buildings or cave history.

Altogether, the contemporary discourse around *Black Myth: Wukong* is vivid but inconsistent. The sources on non-academic materials help gain an idea of how the games were received and what purpose developers followed, but it is not as bright on the theoretical level. Conversely, the emergent academic literature is limited in being about communication, connotative images, or technical experiments. The issue of how the game rebuilds and reconstrues religious architecture heritage is rather neglected.

This thesis thus presents itself as one of the earliest studies to consider sacred architectural spaces of *Black Myth: Wukong* in contexts of interdisciplinary elements such as religious studies, digital heritage and game studies.

Chapter 3 : Methodology

3.1 Research Framework

3.1.1 Theoretical Foundations

This research is grounded in multiple theoretical perspectives that together provide a framework for analyzing how *Black Myth: Wukong* reproduces and transforms sacred architecture within a digital environment. First, Mircea Eliade's theory of sacred space is used to interpret how temples and caves in the game are represented as points of intersection between the divine and the mundane (Eliade, 1959). This framework highlights the symbolic function of architectural forms as carriers of religious meaning.

First, the theory that suggests the representation of temples and caves in the game as points of intersection of the divine and the mundane will be applied to Mircea Eliade, as it constitutes a great theory of sacred space (Eliade, 1959). This model raises the issue of the symbolic role of architectural forms as conveyers of religious substantiation.

Second, the model developed by Nitsche to examine the Game Space, (2008) is used to explore the functioning of digital spatial structures as a narrative device and interactive environment. Using such categories as narrative, mechanical and experiential functions, this model helps to categorize virtual spaces linked to their purpose: to drive the narrative, depending on the needs of a game, as well as to support the gameplay itself. Fourth, Reinhard's concept of archaeogaming (2018) provides a methodological lens for treating video games as archaeological sites in themselves, where cultural meaning is embedded within layers of design.

The third is an aspect of heritage theory. The notions of the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) developed by Laurajane Smith (2006) and the discussion of critical heritage and its challenge to an official discourse by Winter (2013) point to the social constructivism of a heritage narrative. Applied to digital heritage, these views elucidate the conflict that exists between history and the needs of a game. They also indicate how historical authenticity is compromised in favor of entertainment, and how cultural preservation is sacrificed to business needs.

Lastly, digital heritage and archaeogaming perspectives can be used to widen the analysis focus. Champion (2015) demonstrates how passive or active re-enacting of various elements of virtual heritage projects can differ vastly and how the interactivity of digital media is uniquely applicable. Reinhard (2018) proposes the idea of archaeogaming referring to games as the object of study as well as the area of cultural archaeology. All of these frameworks in conjunction make it possible to study *Black Myth: Wukong* as a place of intersection between architectural authenticity, reimagined symbolism, and player agency.

3.1.2 Interdisciplinary Integration

The present research uses an interdisciplinary framework, which incorporates religious studies, heritage studies, digital archaeology and game narrative theory. This can give an inclusive study that can take both the archaeological truth and cultural interpretation and blend the interests of heritage accuracy, symbolic representation and player experience.

By fusing all these fields, the study guarantees a fact that the myth about *Black Myth: Wukong* is never studied as a product of one culture; being a product on its own or as a means of entertainment.

3.1.3 Analytical Orientation

The necessary approach is case-driven. The focus of investigation is chosen to be two representative scenarios, namely, Guanyin Zen Courtyard and Yellow Wind Ridge. These examples are analyzed in relation to real-world architectural cases and interpreted in light of the outlined theoretical perspectives.

The aim of this framework is to defuse disciplinary lines and provide a ready-made approach to the analysis of the relationship between cultural heritage and digital media. Approaching the subject by fusing sacred space theory, game space analysis, and heritage discourse, with digital heritage practices, the paper builds upon a consistent picture of explaining how cultural meaning is preserved and transformed into virtual reconstruction.

3.2 Data Sources

The study combines both digital game-related data, real-world architectural data and data related to game popularity.

3.2.1 Game-related Data

Gameplay videos and official trailers, to examine spatial design and symbolic representation.

Developer interviews, art books, and concept art, to trace design intentions and architectural references.

In-game texts and location names, to contextualize spatial meaning within the narrative.

YouTube is one of the world's most popular video-sharing websites and provides an excellent platform for cultural exchange. Collecting data on the number of views of YouTube videos related to specific terms is beneficial for analyzing the dissemination of digital heritage in the form of games.

3.2.2 Real-world Architectural Data

Academic publications on Chinese religious architecture, especially Buddhist temples and cave.

Archaeological site reports from Longmen, Mogao, and Famen, with site plans and material analysis.

Digital archives, such as the Dunhuang Digital Archive and Archnet, for comparative visual reference.

Heritage conservation guidelines (ICOMOS, National Heritage Administration of China), for authoritative standards in evaluating authenticity.

3.3 Analytical Tools and Methods

3.3.1 Software Tools

To assist in research and discussion on the reinterpretation and dissemination of digital heritage through the video game 'Black Myth: Wukong,' I collected data on the popularity of related content on YouTube. I used Python code to call the YouTube Data API v3 to extract the view counts and like counts of videos related to terms such as 'Black Myth: Wukong,' cultural heritage,' and 'architecture.' This study primarily focuses on video data related to Chinese and English content. YouTube Data API v3 is an official interface provided by Google, allowing researchers and developers to access public data on YouTube in a programmable manner.

Its main functions include (Google Developers, 2025):

Retrieving basic video data such as titles, view counts, and upload dates

Searching for videos related to keywords

Obtaining playback information such as comments and subtitles

It is often used for research related to cultural dissemination.

In this study, I primarily used the `build()`, `search()`, and `video()` functions of this API. Detailed functions, parameters, and code are provided in the appendix.

Use an Excel spreadsheet to store the data collected from videos related to the *Black Myth: Wukong* culture, including the video title, link, keywords, date, number of views, and number of likes. This will serve as a foundation for basic data analysis. Python libraries such as pandas will be used for data cleaning and statistical analysis, while matplotlib and pandas will be applied for visualization.

Photoshop is used to process game screenshots and other images to achieve a more intuitive comparison effect. Image recognition websites (such as Google Images and Yandex Images) are used to help identify the prototypes and sources of digital heritage in the game *Black Myth: Wukong*.

3.3.2 Visual and Content Analysis

The analysis of sacred architecture in the game will involve:

- Collecting high-resolution screenshots of temples, caves, and religious spaces.

- Annotating architectural and symbolic features within each scene.

- Cross-referencing annotated elements with archaeological reports and architectural studies.

For data on the number of views of videos related to the cultural background of *Black Myth: Wukong*, I use Python to analyse it, mainly using pandas to perform descriptive analysis of the data, describing the maximum, minimum, average, and variance of the number of views and likes collected, the proportion of videos collected from different keywords, and the proportion of videos with high view counts. This will help to study the popularity of topics related to the cultural background of *Black Myth: Wukong* in the community. Based on the information collected from the tables, identify and delete entries that are completely irrelevant, as well as videos with no views, which are suspected to be of low quality. This is to ensure that the final research results are not affected.

3.3.3 Comparative Analysis

A scenario-based comparative method will be applied. Selected in-game sacred spaces will be juxtaposed with their real-world counterparts to evaluate:

The degree of architectural and symbolic fidelity.

Creative liberties taken for gameplay and narrative.

How player reception (For data on the number of views of videos related to the cultural background of *Black Myth: Wukong*) aligns with or diverges from academic interpretations of authenticity.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The research conducted is within the existing ethical provisions, both in heritage as well as game research. All primary data- screenshots, gameplay footage and video, developers publications and community commentary will only be used academically. Under no circumstances will there be commercial distribution and/or unauthorized reproduction of copyrighted material. Images of temples, caves, sculptures, or ritual objects are chosen and shown in a way that gives the object a cultural sensitivity and are not presented in contexts that trivialise, distort or profane the religious meaning of the object.

In specific, the work does not replicate the images of intentional defacement or degradation of cultural heritage to preserve its integrity. Also, the work does not collect any personal information (such as Steam usernames) as the source of analysis--all information is publicly available (Steam reviews, YouTube statistics). This provides assurance of adherence to ethical principles of digital ethnography and online research.

Lastly, it follows principles that were stipulated in the IDEA Code of Ethics for Game Research, where research transparency, academic integrity, and respect to both developers and audiences are at the forefront. It is not only to analyze how cultural heritage is represented in games, but to do that in a way that preserves the dignity of the cultures and communities in question as well.

Chapter 4 : Case Study: Architectural Representations in *Black Myth: Wukong*

4.1 Case Study One: Guanyin Zen Courtyard: Temples between Heritage and Gameplay

4.1.1 Introduction of the Scene

In *Black Myth: Wukong*, the Guanyin Zen Courtyard (观音禅院) functions as a pivotal narrative waypoint during the Destined One's (天命人) first chapter journey. In contrast to Sun Wukong (孙悟空), who appears briefly in the prologue in a display of formidable strength only to suffer defeat, the protagonist is a modestly equipped monkey-like figure, repeatedly referred to by others as the Destined One. According to the storyline, Wukong's immense power, lost in his final battle, fragmented into six sacred relics, scattered across Sizhou. The Destined One embarks on a quest to retrieve these relics in the hope of restoring the fallen Wukong.

The journey begins at Black Wind Mountain, now dominated by a demon who self-styles himself the Black Wind King (黑风大王, Black Bear Spirit). Progressing along the mountain paths, the Destined One arrives at the Guanyin Zen Courtyard, where he encounters Lingxuzi (灵虚子), a wolf demon newly appointed as a local warlord by the Black Wind King. Their confrontation unfolds dramatically in the courtyard square before the temple's main hall. After this battle, the Destined One continues through the grounds, defeating elite enemies and striking three temple bells that unlock access to the hidden Old Guanyin Zen Courtyard (旧观音禅院). This temporal shift reveals the temple's past, where the protagonist confronts and ultimately releases the soul of Abbot Jinchi (金池长老). Returning to the present timeline, he advances to the Black Wind Cave (黑风洞), where the climactic encounter with the self-proclaimed Black Wind King takes place, yielding the first of Wukong's six sacred relics.

Although the chapter culminates in the climactic battle within the Black Wind Cave, this study intentionally foregrounds the Guanyin Zen Courtyard as its case study for three key reasons. First, the site holds canonical significance in Journey to the West

as the setting where the Black Bear Spirit steals the monk's robe, anchoring it in literary and cultural memory. Second, in the game the courtyard is depicted as the product of a century-long reconstruction undertaken by the Black Wind King, with the Old Guanyin Zen Courtyard providing a contrasting temporal layer that reinforces its function as a narrative landmark tied to Wukong's past. Third, the courtyard's design draws inspiration from real-world temple architecture, subsequently reconfigured to accommodate the demands of interactive gameplay. Taken together, these qualities render the Guanyin Zen Courtyard a compelling site through which to examine how historical religious architecture is digitally reimaged within *Black Myth: Wukong*.

In what follows, the analysis situates the Guanyin Zen Courtyard in relation to its real-world architectural counterparts, examining how its design incorporates historical references while undergoing adaptations to serve gameplay functions.

4.1.2 Architectural References and Real-World Prototypes

The Guanyin Zen Courtyard incorporates numerous features of traditional Chinese architecture, largely due to the design team's on-site scanning of historical buildings across China, which reflects their active engagement with architectural practice. (see aerial view) At the entrance gate (shanmen), the design employs the principle of *frame view* (框景), arranging buildings of varying heights along the central axis to create a series of nested architectural perspectives. This produces a layered visual effect characteristic of Chinese architectural aesthetics. Beyond its visual appeal, *frame view* also guides the gaze and movement of visitors through spaces of hierarchical significance. From a certain distance, the gate and the main hall visually overlap into a nested composition, reinforcing the distinctive axial depth of temple complexes. In palatial and temple architecture, a sequence of gates and courtyards along the central axis generates framed perspectives while emphasizing ritual hierarchy.



Figure 1

Front view of the main gate of Guanyin Zen Courtyard

Note. Screenshot captured by me during gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).



Figure 2

Official design draft of Guanyin Zen Courtyard

Note. Image from NO.1 教育(2024,September 20). Retrieved August 21, 2025, from https://www.sohu.com/a/810276985_121123989 Temple https://www.sohu.com/a/810276985_121123989

Before entering the main gate of the Guanyin zen Courtyard, one's attention is immediately drawn to the roof structure of the entrance gate. In the game, both the shanmen and the inner gate share the same model, built with a hip gable roof (xieshan ding, 歇山顶; see figure). Suspended beneath the eaves are decorative Flower-shaped hanging columns (chuihua zhu 垂花柱), one of the most distinctive ornamental components of traditional Chinese wooden architecture. In historical practice, these short hanging pillars both mediate the structural weight of the eaves and articulate a layered sense of spatial depth, while their colourful painting enhances the visual splendour of temple gates.



Figure 3

Example of a hip roof structure

Note. Image from 大肉兔 (2023, April 26). Retrieved August 21, 2025, from

<https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/88200300>

See Appendix C for a diagram of common roof structures in China.

In *Black Myth: Wukong*, the designers have retained this traditional element but presented it with a different tonal quality. Rather than the vivid colours of extant temples, the Guanyin Courtyard's Flower-shaped hanging columns are rendered in muted, naturalistic tones that harmonise with the surrounding verdant vegetation. This stylistic choice lends the entrance an austere yet dignified character, reinforcing the site's appearance as a solemn Buddhist precinct rather than a corrupted ruin. The visual effect is twofold: architecturally, the pillars anchor the roof structure to the gates; aesthetically, they create an atmosphere of aged authenticity.



Figure 4

Flower-shaped hanging columns at the main gate of Guanyin Zen Courtyard

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Entering the front courtyard, the bracket sets (*dougong*, 斗拱) of the side halls reveal a high degree of structural authenticity. As defined in the *Yingzao Fashi* (《营造法式》), *dougong* refers to the system of interlocking wooden blocks (*dou*, square blocks) and arms (*gong*, bow-shaped brackets) at the top of columns, collectively known as *pu zuo* (铺作). The *dou* supports either the *gong* or another *dou* above, transmitting loads and distributing pressure. The *gong* itself occurs in different forms: the first type, *hua gong* (华拱), is elaborately carved and often appears in column-top Dougong, functioning both structurally and ornamentally; the second type, *nidao gong* (泥道拱), is simpler and more utilitarian, used primarily for support. In traditional timber-frame architecture, these brackets transfer the weight of the roof to the columns above which lie beams (*liang*), rafters (*chuan*), purlins, and tiled roofing.

As shown in the game, the side halls of the front courtyard employ three main types of *dougong*: column-top brackets, inter-column brackets, and corner brackets. These not only bear structural loads but also project outward, extending the eaves and enhancing the building's visual elegance. Comparable examples can be found in Shanxi temples such as Foguang Temple, Chongfu Temple, and Yanqing Temple at Mount Wutai (see figures for comparison with South Jixiang Monastery and the in-game side halls). In addition, the side halls of the rear courtyard feature *xie gong* (斜拱, oblique brackets), where the central *hua gong* forms a 45–60 degree angle with the projecting arm. These bracket systems are consistent with historical architectural practice and appear frequently across the game's temple structures, including the five-layer bracket system of the entrance gate roof.



Figure 5

Comparison of the Dougong in the side hall of Guanyin Zen Courtyard with those in South Jixiang Monastery

Note. Top: Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Bottom: Image of South Jixiang Monastery Dougong (古建秦. 2023, September 19).

Retrieved August 21, 2025, from

http://www.360doc.com/content/23/0912/09/59736807_1096146910.shtml

Moving further inside, the main hall of the rear courtyard (see figure) closely resembles the Mani Hall of Longxing Temple in Zhengding, Hebei, or the Qingxu Guan in Pingyao, Shanxi. However, the in-game hall prominently features a projecting vestibule, a typical form of *baoxia* (抱厦). In Chinese architecture, *baoxia* refers to an attached extension built onto the front, back, or sides of a main hall, appearing as if it “embraces” the main structure; the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihe Dian) in the Forbidden City provides well-known examples. Yet, this design has sparked debate among architectural scholars and enthusiasts online. Some argue that the *baoxia* resembles the *karahafu* (唐破风) of Japanese architecture, while others suggest it resembles a *juanpeng* (卷棚, hipped-curved roof). My assessment is that this structure does not fully correspond to either. It lacks the pronounced ridge, *jikuzuka* (脊头), and thick bargeboards of the *karahafu*, and it does not replicate the inward-curving silhouette of the *juanpeng*. Moreover, extant Chinese *juanpeng* halls do not orient their gables toward the front as seen in the game. Thus, this *baoxia* is better understood as a creative hybrid—an imaginative reinterpretation rather than a direct historical replica. Its exaggerated presence underscores its role as a theatrical stage element within the game space, demonstrating the designers’ selective adaptation of architectural traditions.



Figure 6

Main Hall of Guanyin Zen Courtyard

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).



Figure 7

The annex on the left side of the main hall of Guanyin Zen Courtyard

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

4.1.3 Ludic Adaptations and Design Innovations

Although the Guanyin Zen Courtyard draws heavily on authentic architectural traditions, its spatial organization ultimately prioritizes gameplay over historical fidelity. A prominent example is the design of the protruding roof structure (baoxia) of the main hall. While historically grounded, here it is exaggerated into a theatrical device. The bauxia is no longer a merely decorative element but serves as a functional platform, allowing Lingxuzi to make his dramatic rooftop entrance. Its enlarged and ornate form exceeds historical precedent, illustrating how architectural vocabulary is reconfigured into a ludic stage set. This departure also aligns with the narrative rationale: the Black Wind Demon King explicitly claims to have rebuilt the temple over the span of a hundred years, providing an in-world justification for architectural alterations that depart from the original historical style.

This logic of “refashioning within one structure” is also evident in the side halls’ lattice doors. Their design closely resembles Ming–Qing era prototypes, a detail that would be anachronistic if understood archaeologically. Yet within the narrative frame, such dissonance functions as part of the long reconstruction process attributed to the demon king. The Guanyin Zen Courtyard is thus not a frozen snapshot of a single historical moment but an intentionally reworked edifice, where recognizable motifs are adapted to fit both story and gameplay.

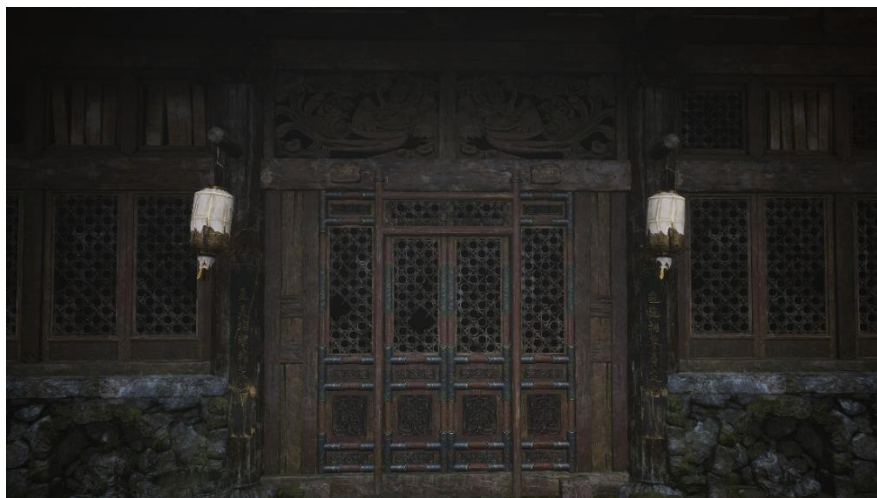


Figure 8

Lattice doors of the side hall of Guanyin Zen Courtyard

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).



Figure 9

Beijing Zhizhu Temple

Note. Image from Wikimedia Commons (n.d.). Retrieved August 21, 2025, from

[https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Beijing_\(November_2016\)_-_130.jpg](https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Beijing_(November_2016)_-_130.jpg)

The most significant departure from real-world temples, however, lies in the treatment of the central axis. In Chinese architectural planning, the axial line serves as the locus of hierarchical display, structuring successive halls that embody religious or political authority. Typically, this sequence culminates in a rear hall or dormitory (qindian, 寝殿) anchoring the axis (Steinhardt, 1990). By contrast, the Guanyin Zen Courtyard omits this terminal structure. After the main hall, the axis opens directly toward the rear mountain, leaving an unusually vacant line of sight.



Figure 10

View of the main gate of Guanyin Zen Courtyard, with all the gates lined up along the central axis.

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

This axial void resonates less with traditional Chinese conventions than with modernist spatial principles. Le Corbusier, for instance, emphasized the orchestration of layered thresholds and vistas to guide movement (Le Corbusier, 1986/2007). In the game, the alignment of successive gates functions in precisely this way, pulling the player forward until the climactic moment when Lingxuzi leaps from the rear mountain into the courtyard. The spatial progression thus mirrors a theatrical crescendo: a gradual deepening of spatial experience culminating in an abrupt boss encounter.



Figure 11

“Boss” Lingxuzi’s entrance scene

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

The courtyard’s enclosure also reflects the logic of the heyuan (合院, enclosed courtyard), where side halls and walls frame a bounded arena. This arrangement serves gameplay by concentrating the player’s focus and providing a natural combat stage while retaining architectural plausibility (Knapp, 2000). Yet the absence of a rear hall underscores the designers’ deliberate departure from tradition: the courtyard is not conceived as a functioning ritual precinct but as a hakoniwa (箱庭, “miniature garden”)

battle stage (Nitsche, 2008), optimized for action gameplay rather than religious practice.



Figure 12

Wide view of the backyard of Guanyin Zen Courtyard

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Taken together, these modifications illustrate how the Guanyin Zen Courtyard negotiates between historical reference and design innovation. Unlike Yellow Wind Ridge, which collages fragments from disparate sites, the Courtyard reworks a single architectural type through selective exaggeration, narrative justification, and spatial reorganization.

4.1.4 Cultural Semantics and Transformations

The design and narrative of the Guanyin Zen Courtyard in *Black Myth: Wukong* reveal not only modifications of historical architecture in appearance but also deeper shifts in

cultural meaning. The reason for this shift may be that the design of buildings in games should primarily consider the narrative and player experience rather than religious functions.

A more gameplay based design, allowing it to better serve the storyline of this chapter of the game. In traditional Chinese architecture, the strict central axis layout is more representative of power or religious authority, while in the game, the central axis is used to guide the player's route. Unlike traditional architectural design, the player's line of sight along the central axis can directly penetrate the entire Guanyin Zen Courtyard, making the player naturally want to follow this route. Along this smooth path, players will encounter a 'boss' obstacle blocking their way at the front of the main hall. The game designers made certain modifications to the application of the central axis, resulting in a shift in its cultural semantics. While it still retains the solemnity and sacredness of traditional Chinese temple architecture, the structure serving the game's narrative now plays a more significant role.

This shift is reflected in the building design. To make this stage more dramatic, an additional exaggerated performance was added when the player encounters enemies on the central axis. As mentioned earlier, Ling Xuzhi stands on the roof of the main hall with his exaggerated physique. To achieve this effect, it was very important to find a suitable landing spot for Ling Xuzhi's exaggerated physique. Therefore, the side wings of the main hall are larger than those of the historical prototype. This change also makes the main hall, which is the most important space for Buddhist rituals, more like a dramatic 'stage.' Other buildings around the main hall no longer serve religious functions such as bellringing. Instead, they hide hidden rewards like treasure chests, encouraging players to explore this space. This interactive use of architectural space is unique to video games.

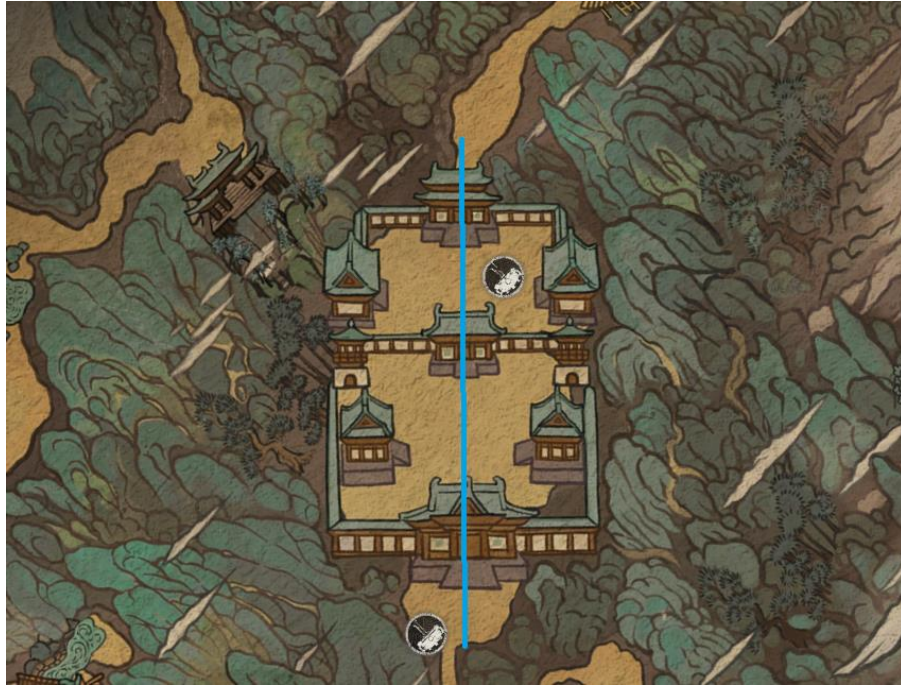


Figure 13

Central axis diagram of Guanyin Zen Courtyard

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

These cultural and semantic shifts can make the game more immersive, letting players explore and learn about the elements and culture of these buildings from different angles. But at the same time, the original sacred religious functions and cultural connotations of these temple buildings are somewhat weakened. This has to some extent impacted players' understanding and learning of knowledge related to ancient architectural heritage. These aspects highlight how '*Black Myth: Wukong*' balances archaeological cultural dissemination with gameplay when incorporating cultural heritage, providing a thought-provoking case study for the preservation and application of digital heritage.

4.1.5 Evaluation

The design of Guanyin Zen Courtyard reflects the development team behind '*Black Myth: Wukong*' striking a balance between preserving cultural heritage and adapting it to enhance gameplay. In terms of cultural heritage restoration, the design of the temple buildings and surroundings demonstrates the production team's attention to detail in ancient temple courtyard architecture. One of the most representative examples is the use of Dougong from ancient temples such as Foguang Temple, Chongfu Temple, and South Jixiang Monastery in the side halls. The use of these Dougong not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the architecture but also serves as a distinctive feature, helping to identify the architectural characteristics of temples from this period. There are many other such details that have been faithfully reproduced, and these features leave a deep impression on players, regardless of their familiarity with East Asian temple culture.

On the other side, the courtyard departs from tradition to serve the needs of the game. The missing rear hall, the enlarged baoxia on the main hall, and the open central axis are not historical mistakes. They are deliberate choices. These changes make the courtyard less like a place of worship and more like a stage for battle. The design creates open sight lines and space for dramatic events, such as Lingxuzi's entrance from the mountain. In this way, architecture is not only background. It becomes part of game mechanics.

This mix of reference and change shows both the strength and the limits of using games as digital heritage. The strength is that players can see and even "feel" cultural forms that might otherwise be unknown to them. Although the game designers have done their best to recreate traditional Chinese temple courtyards while maintaining the gameplay of the game, there are still many limitations to these designs. The courtyard no longer functions as a sacred space. The bells, halls, and courtyards are stripped of ritual meaning. They are turned into tools for unlocking new areas,

guiding movement, or setting the stage for combat. Something is gained in immersion and drama, but something is also lost in terms of spiritual depth and historical truth.

The overall impression is neither a museum reconstruction nor pure fantasy. The courtyard is a hybrid form. It borrows real motifs but reshapes them for new purposes. Players recognize the outlines of Chinese temple tradition, yet they experience it through the rhythm of combat and progression. The result is a space that feels familiar but also strikingly different.

The Guanyin Zen Courtyard therefore provides a useful lens for thinking about cultural heritage in games. It shows that digital heritage is never neutral. Every design choice carries interpretation. Historical elements are kept, but they are always reframed to fit the logic of play. The courtyard reminds us that video games can bring the past closer to players, yet at the same time they transform that past into something new. This balance between memory and adaptation is both the promise and the problem of digital heritage in games.

4.2 Case Study Two: Yellow Wind Ridge: Hybrid Landscapes of Heritage and Play

4.2.1 Narrative and Setting of Yellow Wind Ridge

As the second chapter of the game begins, the protagonist, known as the Destined One, enters a new area: Yellow Wind Ridge (黄风岭). In *Journey to the West*, this setting appears in Chapters 20 and 21. The first is titled “Tang Monk in Peril at Yellow Wind Ridge; Pigsy Rushes Ahead on the Mid-Mountain Path” (第二十回《黄风岭唐僧有难 半山中八戒争先》). The second is “The Dharma Protector Establishes a Monastery to Detain the Great Sage; Lingji Bodhisattva Subdues the Wind Demon at Mount Sumeru” (第二十一回《护法设庄留大圣 须弥灵吉定风魔》). In the original story, the Yellow Wind Demon (黄风怪) appears as a yellow weasel spirit (黄毛貂鼠精). He attacks the pilgrims with a powerful sandstorm and captures Tang Sanzang. Sun Wukong tries to fight back, but he cannot overcome the demon’s deadly “Samadhi

Wind” (三昧神风). The battle turns when divine help arrives. Lingji Bodhisattva descends from the heavens and offers the Dingfengdan (定风丹, Wind Calming Pearl). This elixir has the power to suppress the storm. With its help, Wukong defeats the demon and restores peace to Yellow Wind Ridge. In *Black Myth: Wukong*, however, Destined One arrives at Yellow Wind Ridge to continue collecting Sun Wukong’s relics. The player first encounters a cutscene in which the protagonist, pierced by arrows, lies wounded on the roadside. At this moment, a headless monk appears, carrying a sanxian (三弦, a traditional lute) and chanting verses in the style of Shaanbei ballads. His song alludes to the ruin of Yellow Wind Ridge, attributing the devastation, rampant vermin, and violent storms to the local monster—a yellow weasel demon. The monk heals the Destined One and directs the journey forward.

As the player progresses, it becomes clear that the village inhabitants have been transformed into rat-like demons, a striking visual adaptation of the original monster’s verminous associations. In this corrupted landscape, the Destined One battles deranged figures such as the king and prince-turned-rodents, encounters the subordinate Tiger Vanguard at Wolong Temple, and gradually realizes the scale of the Yellow Weasel Demon’s dominion. The headless monk intermittently reappears, offering guidance and teaching spells, reinforcing his enigmatic narrative importance.

The climax occurs when the Destined One confronts the Yellow Weasel Demon himself, who clutches a massive Buddha head and attempts to refine Sun Wukong’s spiritual relic within it. Overpowered by the demon’s storm magic, the player learns that victory requires the Dingfengdan. This triggers a temporal shift: guided by an ally known as the Yellow-Robed Yuanwai (黄袍员外), the Destined One travels back to an earlier Yellow Wind Ridge, where the demon once fought to protect villagers from the monstrous fuban (蝥蛄), a gigantic insect carrying a Buddha head upon its back. In this earlier incarnation, the Yellow Weasel Demon appears as heroic and magnanimous, bowing in gratitude after the joint victory an intentional narrative contrast with his corrupted present self.

Returning to the present with the Dingfengdan, the Destined One finally defeats the Yellow Weasel Demon. At the moment of his fall, the Buddha head slips from his grasp. The headless monk then retrieves it, placing it upon his neck to reveal his true identity: Lingji Bodhisattva, the very figure who subdued the Yellow Wind Demon in the classic novel. With this revelation, the Bodhisattva grants the Destined One one of Sun Wukong's sacred relics, thus concluding the chapter.

Unlike the temple-centric Black Wind Mountain, where architectural ensembles such as the Guanyin Zen Courtyard provided bounded spatial sequences, Yellow Wind Ridge presents a contrasting design logic. Here the desert windswept environment features scattered architectural elements—most prominently que gates (阙, monumental towers flanking pathways) and Buddhist cave shrines—rather than cohesive compounds. Even the so-called Shamen Village lacks clear boundaries or a linear progression path; its buildings appear dispersed and fragmented, offering players freedom in exploration. This decentralized design underpins the case study of Yellow Wind Ridge, focusing not on a single temple complex but on the integration and transformation of diverse architectural and sculptural elements into a unified gameplay space.

4.2.2 Architectural Quotations and Hybridized Landscapes in Yellow Wind Ridge

At first glance, Yellow Wind Ridge appears to extend the design logic already discussed in Case Study One. Just as the Guanyin Zen Courtyard reworked historical prototypes through selective modification, here too the designers draw upon recognizable sources but alter them for narrative purposes. For example, during the headless monk's ballad performance at the outset, one can already notice a monumental bodhisattva carved into the cliff face. This figure is modeled on the Weide Zizai Bodhisattva from Huayan Cave in the Anyue Cave, Sichuan. A comparison shows that, apart from the head, the body is reproduced with striking fidelity. The game designers, however, deliberately replaced the bodhisattva's head with that of the

Yellow Wind Monster—a hybrid mouse-headed figure. This substitution anticipates the chapter's central narrative motif of the displaced head: the mouse-head supplanting the Buddhahead.



Figure 14

Comparison of the Black Myth:Wukong Yellow Wind Ridge Mouse-headed Bodhisattva Statue and the Sichuan Anyue Huayan Cave Wideziza-iBodhisattva Statue

Note. Left: Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Right: Image of Sichuan Anyue Huayan Cave Wideziza-i Bodhisattva Statue (chy20100514., 2023, January 19). Retrieved August 21, 2025, from http://www.360doc.com/content/23/0119/07/27887809_1064171968.shtml

Progressing further, at a mountain gate the player encounters a pair of monumental Han que (阙) flanking the road. These are directly inspired by the Pingyang Fu Jun Que of Mianyang, Sichuan. Yet the game introduces substantial alterations. The original brackets are largely dilapidated, while in the game the ruined ones are rendered intact, and conversely, well-preserved ones are depicted as decayed. The designers also added a roof to the que, absent in the original. Small Buddhist niches under the que are faithfully retained, but overall, the visual logic is inverted to suit the atmosphere of desolation. Atop the right-hand que stands a statue of the Tiger Vanguard. Its prototype is a Tang dynasty guardian warrior statue from the Datong Museum, Shanxi. The in-game model clothes the torso and replaces the head with that of a tiger. The left-hand que once featured a parallel “Deer Vanguard” boss in the early drafts; though ultimately cut, its sculptural trace remains. These alterations highlight how que structures, originally emblems of authority and memorialization, are repurposed into narrative markers and monster heraldry.



Figure 15

The mountain gate of Yellow Wind Ridge and the Han Que on both sides

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).



Figure 16

Comparison between the Han Que of Yellow Wind Ridge and Pingyang Fu Jun Que of Mianyang

Note. Left: Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Right: Image of Pingyang Fu Jun Que (Baidu Baike, n.d.).

Further along, when entering an underground passage, the player can observe above the cave entrance a sculpture derived from the demon figures beneath the incense burner at Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou. The coloring is altered to match Yellow Wind Ridge's arid palette, but the iconographic borrowing remains legible.



Figure 17

Comparison between the monster statue in Yellow Wind Ridge and the base of the incense burner in Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou

Note. Top: Incense burner in Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou (LJW Summer, n.d., <https://ljwsummer.github.io/posts/lingyin.html>).

Bottom: Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Yet beyond these examples of quotation and alteration, Yellow Wind Ridge departs more radically from Case Study One by adopting a second, more striking design strategy: the fusion of disparate elements from unrelated times and regions. This can be observed, for instance, in a statue of a Northern Song guardian figure from

the Zhengzhou Museum (Henan), here incongruously mounted atop a weathered que structure modeled after the Gao Yi Que of Ya'an, Sichuan. The result is a hybrid monument that never existed historically, but whose visual plausibility makes it convincing in the game world.



Figure 18 *Comparison of the Han Que with a guardian figure relief at Yellow Wind Ridge with the Sichuan Ya'an Gaoyi Que and the Northern Song Dynasty Kaiyuan Temple relief guardian figure.*

Note. Left: Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Middle: Image of Sichuan Ya'an Gaoyi Gate (Wikipedia, n.d.).

Right: Northern Song Dynasty relief sculpture at Kaiyuan Temple (Redocn, n.d.).

The environment abounds in such combinations. As the player ascends toward the Earth God's shrine, cliff faces display suspended coffins—a funerary practice historically attested in multiple mountainous regions of China, here recontextualized within a northwestern loess landscape. At the shrine itself, wall paintings directly cite

the Dunhuang Mogao Cave 322 mural of Maitreya preaching, thus fusing a modest local shrine with the grandeur of Silk Road Buddhist art. Nearby, a bixi (赑屃, the turtle-dragon son of the Dragon King) supports a stele, again linking mythological symbolism with architectural setting.



Figure 19

Comparison of the land temple in the Yellow Wind Ridge chapter of Black Myth:

Wukong with the murals in Cave 322 of the Mogao Cave in Dunhuang

Note. Left: Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Right: Murals in Cave 322, Mogao Cave, Dunhuang (e-Dunhuang, n.d.).

The images on the two doors of the shrine are from the second and third figures in the mural on the right wall.



Figure 20

bixi (赑屃, the turtle-dragon son of the Dragon King) supports a stele

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Continuing along the mountain path, a stone stele appears at the end of the road. The same stele has appeared multiple times in Yellow Wind Ridge. The inscription in the center of the stele is quoted from the “*Stone Cave sculptures of the Diamond Sutra at Mount Taishan.*” Jing Shiyu has an important connection with the manuscript of the Diamond Sutra. This connection further places the items in the game within the network of Buddhist textual heritage. This stone tablet also uses the technique of merging multiple artifacts. The relief *cave sculptures* on the front of the tablet’s base incorporate patterns from the white pagoda in Hangzhou. The two merged elements originate from the southern and northern regions of China, respectively, and appear in Yellow Wind Ridge, which is clearly modeled after the Loess Plateau in northwestern China. The designers have seamlessly integrated the three elements, effectively highlighted the game’s Buddhist cultural backdrop while

added a sense of authenticity for players. Moreover, these stone tablets are mostly placed in important locations within the game, such as near treasure chests or elite enemies, serving to provide players with hints and highlighting the functional role of the stone tablets. Conversely, players frequently encounter these stone tablets while passing through important locations, which helps reinforce their impression of these artifacts and serves as a promotional function for cultural relics.

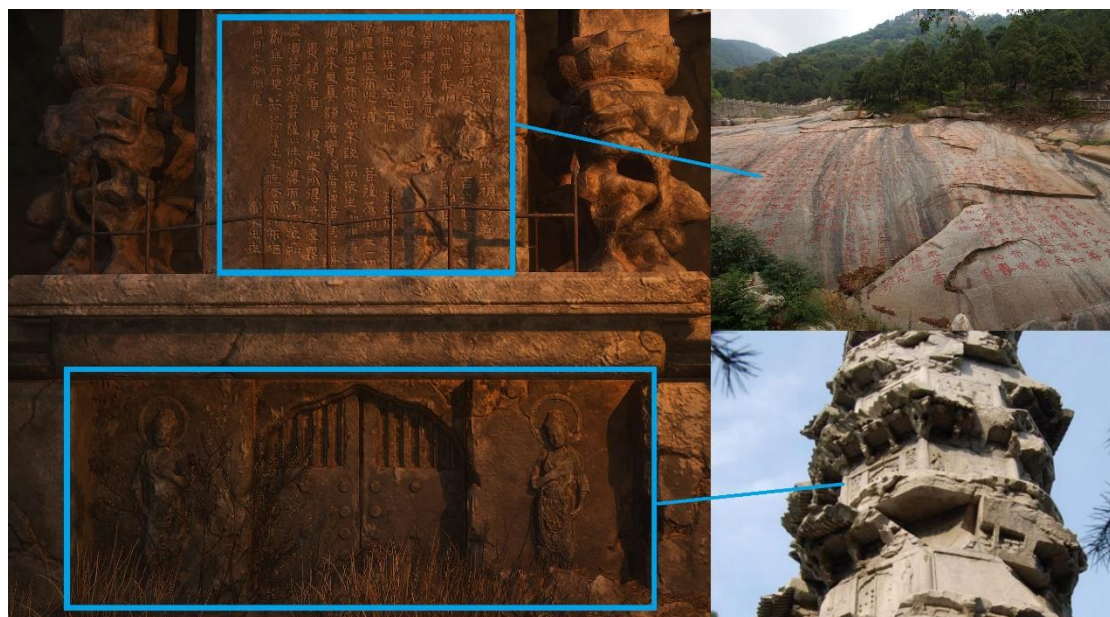


Figure 21

The Diamond Sutra of Mount Tai engraved on the stone tablet at Yellow Wind Ridge compared with the Diamond Sutra at Mount Tai and the White Pagoda in Hangzhou

Note. Left: Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Top right: Image of the Diamond Sutra at Mount Tai (Hangchow.org, n.d., https://www.hangchow.org/index.php/base/news_show/cid/6779).

Bottom right: Image of the White Pagoda in Hangzhou (China Daily, 2015, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2015-06/03/content_21192831.htm).

Finally, on a cliffside terrace stands a curious pavilion-like structure that synthesizes parts of two different monuments: the base of the Stone Pagoda at Shita Temple in Qionglai, Sichuan, combined with the pagoda's uppermost tier and finial. Unlike the modified replicas discussed earlier, this composite structure openly displays a collage logic, signaling the designers' creative freedom to assemble fragments from multiple prototypes into a single new form.



Figure 22

Pavilion in the mountains of Yellow Wind Ridge

Note. Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

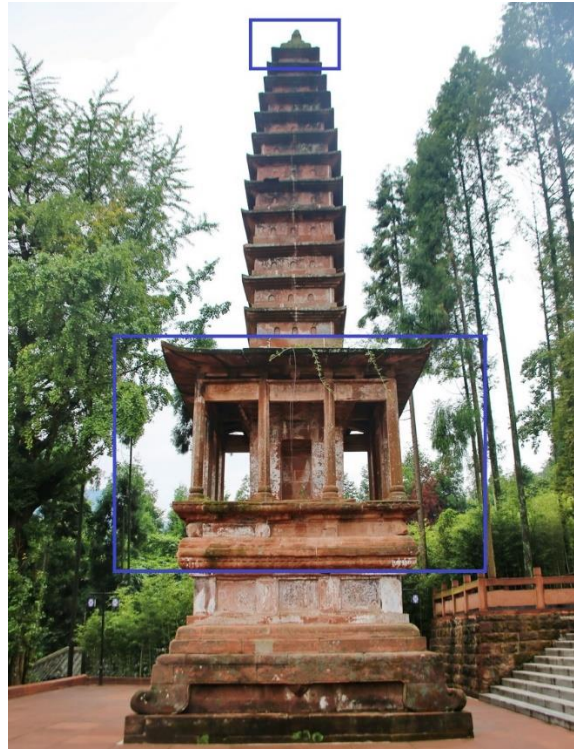


Figure 23

Stone Pagoda at Shita Temple in Qionglai, Sichuan

Note. Image from Wikipedia (n.d.). Retrieved August 21, 2025, from

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_Pagoda_Temple

Such bricolage occurs repeatedly throughout the map and illustrates how the designers employed a different mode of engaging with heritage than in the Guanyin Zen Courtyard. Whereas the temple case emphasized modification of single prototypes, Yellow Wind Ridge demonstrates a strategy of hybridization, integrating heterogeneous fragments—bodhisattva statues, que gates, murals, coffins, stelae, pagoda parts—into one coherent but fictionalized environment. This practice not only serves immediate gameplay, and narrative demands but also reveals the game’s dual commitment to cultural evocation and imaginative reinvention.

Throughout Yellow Wind Ridge, such strategies multiply. They signal a design ethos that oscillates between direct quotation, symbolic alteration, and radical

recombination. The archaeological richness of the level is not limited to built forms. The narrative, too, embeds historical references. In one textual fragment, the game states: “The king ordered the destruction of temples and the expulsion of monks, renaming the state Sahali.” This recalls multiple historical episodes of anti-Buddhist persecution in imperial China. The prevalence of broken Buddha heads across the map reinforces this theme. Later, when the Yellow Wind Monster is said to have saved the kingdom, the king enacts a “Reverence for Rats Edict.” This fantastical detail resonates with material history: the Tang dynasty woodblock print Mouse Deity Image (Shu shen tu), now preserved in the British Museum, depicts a mouse-headed anthropomorphic deity. By referencing such imagery, the game situates its fantastical narrative within a matrix of real religious transformations and visual traditions.



Figure 24

Votive panel with animal-headed deity (“King of Rats”), Tang dynasty

Note. Painted wooden panel from Dandan Uiliq (Khotan), Xinjiang. Collection of the British Museum (Museum no. 1907,1111.68). Retrieved August 21, 2025, from https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1907-1111-68

Taken together, the Yellow Wind Ridge environment exemplifies a second mode of heritage adaptation in *Black Myth: Wukong*. Whereas the Guanyin Zen Courtyard modifies a single coherent architectural type (the Buddhist temple courtyard), Yellow Wind Ridge collages fragments from diverse historical and geographical contexts into one narrative map, reshaping China's heterogeneous architectural heritage into a unified dramatic stage. This approach offers a counterpoint to the Guanyin Zen Courtyard and highlights the dual strategies through which the game engages with Chinese architectural heritage.

4.2.3 Ludic Adaptations and Design Innovations

The initial portion of Yellow Wind Ridge chapter follows some of the same design ideas we saw in the Guanyin Zen Courtyard. For example, the mouse-headed Buddha statue at the entrance is a direct modification of a traditional structure. But as the chapter moves forward, very different design choices begin to appear. If the Guanyin Courtyard was a rethinking of one clear architectural type, then Yellow Wind Ridge is built as a fragmented and open environment. The map does not try to recreate any single real site. Instead, it brings together ridges, valleys, caves, abandoned temples, and scattered grotto *cave sculptures* to form one dramatic landscape. The result feels unified in the game, even though such a place has never existed. This shift shows the designers' skill in creating a mixed stage tailored for gameplay.

One of the most important features of this design is how space guides the player's journey. At the entrance, the path is wide, and the view opens onto rolling ridges. Players immediately sense freedom and scale. But as they progress, the space begins to narrow. Valleys funnel movement into tight routes. Trees and cliffs block the view. Later, caves and ruins create a sense of confinement. These shifts are intentional. Open areas let players breathe and explore, while narrow, dark passages build tension and anticipation. The constant rhythm between openness and closure gives the chapter a narrative pulse and keeps players engaged. Battles follow the same rhythm.

Many ridges and plateaus double as combat arenas. Open terrain allows for large boss fights, while tight canyon paths force players to think carefully about movement and resources. Even small encounters follow this logic. Enemies often appear at sudden terrain shifts, using the landscape to ambush or pressure the player. Rocks and broken statues act as obstacles, while slopes create height advantages or disadvantages. In this way, architecture and terrain are not neutral backgrounds but active parts of the game system. The final battle with the Yellow Wind Demon makes this clearest. It takes place in a windswept open ground. The storm pushes players back and blurs their vision, making the field both threatening and unstable. The mix of natural forces and ruined structures creates a spectacular scene.

Another innovation is how the design uses cultural fragments. The developers did not copy a single tradition. Instead, they drew from many different sources. Scattered Buddha heads recall the destruction of real temples. Cliff coffins, usually linked to southern burial customs, appear in a landscape with more northern features. Local earth god shrines stand side by side with grotto art inspired by Dunhuang. These fragments come from different contexts, yet they are carefully arranged to feel coherent in the game. Players see a patchwork world built from broken traditions, stitched together into one stage.

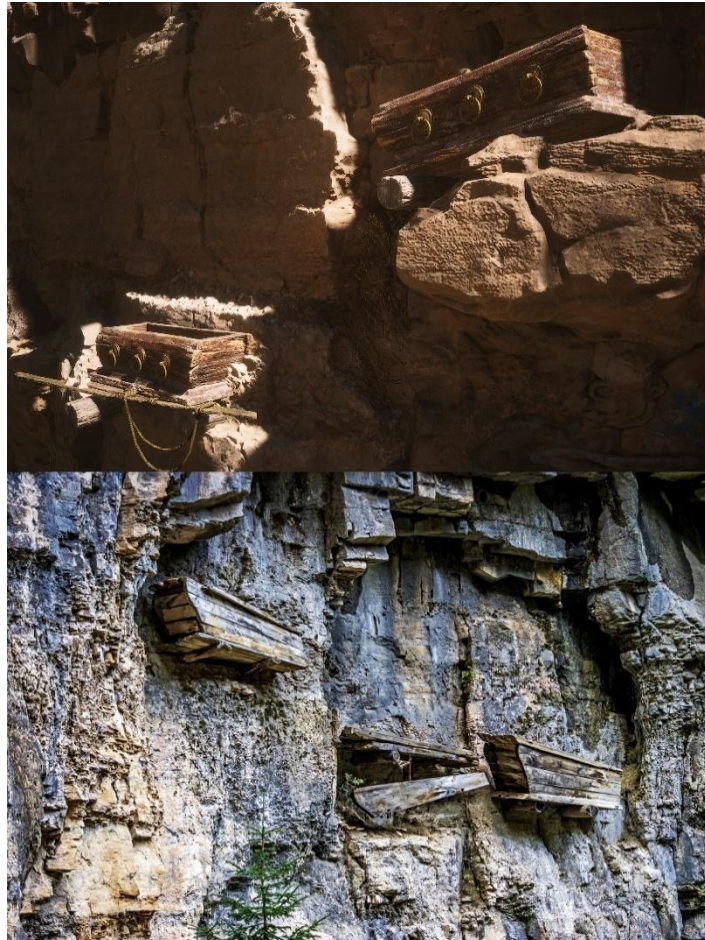


Figure 25

Comparison between the coffins on the cliff face at Yellow Wind Ridge and the hanging coffins at Shimen in Shanxi Province

Note. Top: Screenshot captured by meduring gameplay of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024).

Bottom: Image of hanging coffins at Shimen, Shanxi Province (The Paper, n.d.).

This collage strategy has strong narrative effects. It creates a mood of corruption and disorder. The fragments feel torn from different times and places, then abandoned to decay. Together, they form a symbolic landscape. Each piece hints at Chinese tradition, but the whole points more to rupture than continuity. What the player experiences is a ridge stripped of spiritual authority, leaving only ruins and remains.

Compared with the Guanyin Zen Courtyard—where the primary innovation lay in reorganizing axial symmetry into a “miniature garden” arena—Yellow Wind Ridge demonstrates a strategy of fragmentation and collage. Instead of guiding players along a linear axis, it disperses architectural and ritual fragments across an open map, encouraging nonlinear exploration while embedding narrative cues into diverse spatial encounters.

Taken together, these design innovations highlight a second mode of ludic adaptation. While Guanyin Zen Courtyard transformed a coherent temple plan into a controlled battle stage, Yellow Wind Ridge thrives on hybrid assemblage, where reconfigured fragments of heritage sustain exploration, atmosphere, and unfolding drama.

4.2.4 Cultural Semantics and Transformations

This Chapter, like the cultural heritage sites cited in Guanyin Zen Courtyard, has undergone some modifications to improve gameplay. The difference lies in the implementation. Guanyin Zen Courtyard made changes mainly in terms of space for the sake of gameplay, with cultural semantics only taking a back seat in terms of priority to gameplay and interactivity. The original cultural semantics did not undergo any major changes. In contrast, Yellow Wind Ridge chapter is different. First, there are no fixed cultural spaces, which would have limited the techniques used in the previous chapter. Yellow Wind Ridge chapter uses more techniques to transform or fuse cultural heritage itself, altering the original cultural semantics to construct a reasonable setting for the game's storyline.

For example, statues of Bodhisattvas often represent compassion and blessings, while Buddha statues represent rationality and ultimate enlightenment. In the statues referenced in Yellow Wind Ridge, the head of the former statue has been replaced with a mouse head, subtly satirizing the shift in local beliefs within the game and setting the stage for the plot of this chapter. The latter statues are scattered across

the map in a damaged state, hinting at the collapse of the once-held beliefs in this area and creating an appropriate atmosphere for the story behind the plot. Notably, there is a complete Buddha statue in a quiet corner of the map, and this location is not part of the game's regular play route. Without needing to compromise the plot, the cultural meaning of this statue can remain consistent with reality. This arrangement seems intentional on the part of the game developers, and such preservation is an excellent way for the game, as a medium, to preserve digital heritage and explain its underlying cultural value to players.

In addition to the statues, other cultural heritage references are scattered throughout the map, with broken steles and suspended coffins creating a desolate atmosphere. Even players unfamiliar with these cultural heritage elements can sense the chaos of Yellow Wind Ridge. The cultural semantics of these heritage elements have also undergone some changes due to this arrangement, collectively representing the chaos of Yellow Wind Ridge. However, such transformations also have their drawbacks: if poorly executed, they may lose their original cultural symbolism and instead become mere decorative elements in the environment.

Overall, the cultural heritage cited in Yellow Wind Ridge cannot be generalised because there is no unified cultural space. The roles played by all cultural heritage in the game and the changes in cultural semantics cannot be generalised. Although some cultural symbols have been well preserved, the vast majority still serve the game's plot and gameplay.

4.2.5 Evaluation

The Yellow Wind Ridge chapter showcases a different approach to incorporating cultural heritage compared to the Guanyin Zen Courtyard. While the former creates an immersive cultural space by constructing a coherent architectural complex, the latter directly incorporates cultural heritage elements or adapts them and integrates them into various locations across the map. The environment integrates historical site

prototypes from multiple periods and regions, including Sichuan Buddhist cave, Han-dynasty Que, Song dynasty sculptures, and Dunhuang murals, forming a unified and distinctive landscape. This design is more conducive to serving the narrative and gameplay of the game. A significant portion of the cultural heritage serves as waypoints for players (e.g., Han-dynasty Que and stone steles), providing hints about the story background, such as the Bodhisattva statue replaced with a mouse head and scattered Buddha statue remains, which construct an absurd and decaying region. Due to this arrangement, the semantic transformation directions of each cultural heritage are different.

Unlike the immersive experience of being in the overall cultural space of Guanyin Zen Courtyard, the design of the Yellow Wind Ridge gives players the feeling of being in a small 'museum.' For players with some knowledge of archaeology or East Asian culture, the game experience in the Yellow Wind Ridge is like discovering many 'surprises' scattered throughout the map. Although most of the cultural heritage references have been adapted or fused to some extent, they have retained the original appearance of the cultural heritage as much as possible. This precise recreation of the unaltered elements makes it relatively easy for me to identify their original sources during my research. This balance between gameplay, narrative, and accurate recreation of ancient heritage is a testament to the development team's efforts. Even players unfamiliar with East Asian culture can still appreciate the cultural atmosphere created by the combination of these heritage elements, as well as how the adaptations made for narrative and gameplay enhance the game's storytelling, thereby sparking interest in these cultural heritage sites.

In the two chapters, Guanyin Zen Courtyard and Yellow Wind Ridge, the production team of *Black Myth: Wukong* demonstrated different possibilities for interpreting cultural heritage. The former is a complete restoration, but with some changes made to the space for gameplay purposes, while the latter better serves the game's storyline and gameplay through fusion or partial adaptation of images. By

studying and observing these different approaches, this research lays the groundwork for further discussion. Subsequently, I will combine these examples of cultural heritage references to explore the role of video games in the recreation and promotion of digital cultural heritage, as well as the future possibilities for cultural heritage digitization.

4.3 Audience Reception through YouTube Video Analysis

In the previous two chapters, I focused on discussing the two different ways in which *Black Myth: Wukong* presents ancient cultural heritage at Guanyin Zen Courtyard and the Yellow Wind Ridge. To explore whether *Black Myth: Wukong*'s presentation of cultural heritage can spark players' interest in the cultural archetypes within it and in archaeology, I conducted some video-related data analysis. First, I used Google's official YouTube Data API v3 to collect video data related to specific keywords on YouTube using Python. I used bilingual keywords in Chinese and English: '*Black Myth: Wukong* Cultural Research (CH)', '*Black Myth: Wukong* Architecture Prototype (CH)', '*Black Myth: Wukong* Temple Prototype (CH)', '*Black Myth: Wukong* Buddha Prototype (CH)', '*Black Myth: Wukong* murals Prototype (CH)', '*Black Myth: Wukong* cultural analysis', '*Black Myth: Wukong* myth origins', '*Black Myth: Wukong* temple', '*Black Myth: Wukong* Buddha statue', '*Black Myth: Wukong* Mural Painting', Since extracting videos with a large number of sources may affect the accuracy of extraction, I selected a relatively appropriate number of videos based on their view counts. A total of 487 videos were extracted, with their titles, links, keywords, dates, view counts, and like counts recorded. After cleaning the data, I conducted basic data analysis on the extracted data.

Results:

First, I conducted a descriptive analysis of the data on likes and views, as shown in table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive analysis of data on likes and views

Statistic	Number of Views	Number of Likes
Count	487	487
Mean	351673	13344
Std	1877084	60998
Min	1	0
25%	212	4
50%	4559	122
75%	62180	2402
Max	33568735	842113

Data was collected from YouTube on August 20, 2025. Table created by me.

It is evident that videos related to *Black Myth: Wukong* on YouTube remain highly popular, with the most viewed video reaching an astonishing number of views and the average view count also reaching a respectable figure. Although the number of likes is not as high as the view count, it is still sufficient to demonstrate the significant impact that *Black Myth: Wukong*, as a video game, has had on digital heritage and culture.

Table 2

Counting different keyword types

Keyword	Count
<i>Black Myth: Wukong</i> myth origins	250
<i>Black Myth: Wukong</i> cultural analysis	145
<i>Black Myth: Wukong</i> Cultural Research (CH)	45
<i>Black Myth: Wukong</i> Architecture Prototype (CH)	22
<i>Black Myth: Wukong</i> Buddha statue	14
<i>Black Myth: Wukong</i> Buddha Prototype (CH)	5
<i>Black Myth: Wukong</i> Temple Prototype (CH)	4
<i>Black Myth: Wukong</i> murals Prototype (CH)	2

Data were collected from YouTube on August 20, 2025. Table created by me.

I have visualized the data, including the percentage of videos with over 10,000 views and the percentage of videos collected from different keywords.

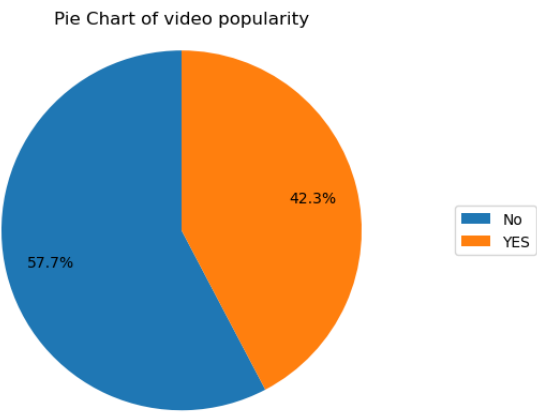


Figure 26

Pie chart of the proportion of videos with high views

Note.Data were collected from YouTube on August 20, 2025. Table created by me.

I believe that videos with over 10,000 views have already gained significant popularity. Among videos related to the Black Myth culture, those with over 10,000 views account for 42.3%, which is a significant proportion. This indicates that even though many people are creating related videos, the videos created by content creators on the Black Myth Sun Wukong culture are of very high quality.

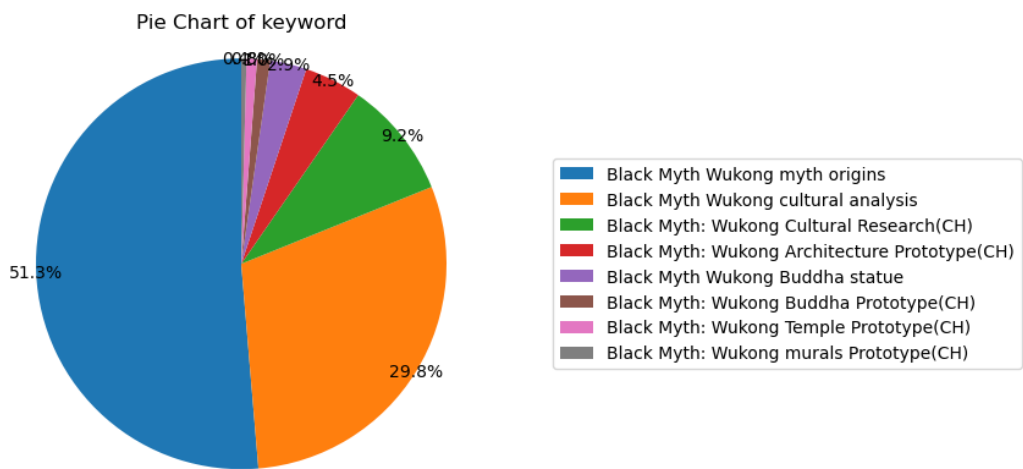


Figure 27

pie chart of Keyword pie chart

Note.Data were collected from YouTube on August 20, 2025. Table created by me.

It is immediately apparent that the keyword with the highest proportion is “myth origins,” indicating that, as a medium, video games—due to their gameplay and dramatic elements—appeal more to players interested in the mystical aspects of Eastern mythology. The mythological characters, stories, and religious narratives within these games effectively convey the core elements of the game's cultural expression. The second and third most common keywords are related to comprehensive cultural research. These videos often combine the religious and mythological backgrounds of the game, the origins of its characters, and the cultural

heritage referenced in the game into a single video. These videos are typically of high quality, effectively deconstructing and explaining the cultural heritage featured in the game, thereby promoting cultural heritage and archaeology among the public. This is an indirect influence of games on cultural dissemination. Compared to these two categories, videos that focus on a specific field are the least numerous.

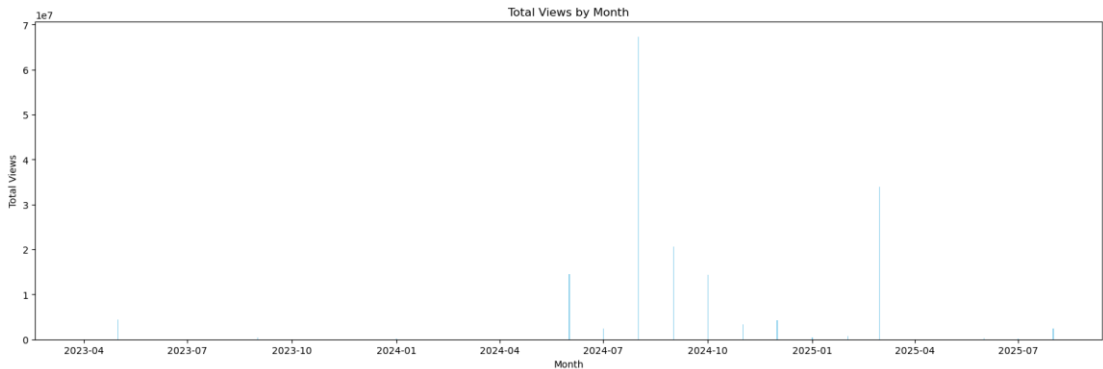


Figure 28

Bar chart of total Views

Note. Data were collected from YouTube on August 20, 2025. Table created by me.

The chart above shows the total number of views for videos related to the cultural background of *Black Myth: Wukong* over time. The most notable time point is August 2024, when such videos reached their peak, as this was the release date of *Black Myth: Wukong*. As time progressed, the total number of views gradually decreased, which is a natural trend. However, around February 2025, the total number of views saw an increase. I speculate that the underlying reason is that a significant portion of players did not have enough time to complete the game upon its initial release. As a result, after some time had passed, many players became aware of the game or completed it, sparking their interest in its cultural background.

The data I extracted is solely sourced from a single platform, which imposes certain limitations on the analysis of the cultural popularity surrounding the background

of *Black Myth: Wukong*. Some of these videos not only introduce the cultural context but also provide detailed explanations of the cultural heritage featured within the game, making it challenging to assess the contribution of the game's digital recreation of ancient Chinese temples and stone grotto sculptures to the dissemination of cultural elements within the game.

Overall, *Black Myth: Wukong* has played a very positive role in promoting and popularizing the cultural heritage featured in the game. A significant portion of players have developed an interest in cultural background and cultural heritage after playing the game. It is worth noting that the popularity of these videos may also expose non-gamers to Chinese ancient architecture and grotto sculptures, thereby sparking their interest in these areas. This represents the indirect impact of video games as a medium for digitally recreating traditional cultural heritage.

Chapter 5 : Discussion

5.1 Integrating Case Study Findings: Dual Strategies of Architectural

Adaptation

Through an in-depth analysis of the two core cases, Guanyin Zen Courtyard and Yellow Wind Ridge, it can be clearly seen that the *Black Myth: Wukong* is not a single path, but rather two mutually complementary strategies adopted in digitally recreating China's architectural heritage. These two strategies are “the re-creation of a single architectural type” and “the environmental construction of a fragmented collage”. They both demonstrate the complex ways in which the game deals with historical and cultural heritage and respond to the central question of this study - that is, how the game achieves balance and innovation between authenticity, entertainment and cultural transmission.

The design of Guanyin Zen Courtyard builds on the well-defined architectural type of Buddhist temples. The game makers did not attempt to fully restore a specific historical temple, but they constructed a highly symbolic, yet logical Buddhist temple space by drawing heavily on elements from real buildings.

For example, the Guanyin Zen Courtyard retains the typical central axis layout, with elements such as halls, Dougong and roofs visually reflecting the stylistic characteristics of a prominent Buddhist temple building. Although there are some local structural adjustments, such as abandoning the back hall and directly accessing the back mountain for the sake of the consistency of the player's battle experience, or setting up a holding building in front of the main hall that is more suitable for battles and performances, the overall spatial logic is still able to allow players who are familiar with Chinese architecture to instantly recognize its religious background.

The Guanyin Zen Courtyard embodies a kind of “archetype-based re-creation”. It does not pursue complete historical authenticity but allows players to naturally feel the religious atmosphere and spiritual symbols embedded in Buddhist architecture when entering this scene via maintaining the overall consistency of the architectural

context. The temple is both a stage for the narrative and a medium for the transmission of cultural heritage. Its “authenticity” does not come from the accurate reproduction of reality, but from the overall recognizability of architectural logic and cultural semantics.

This model responds to the research question by demonstrating how games can reconcile “authenticity” with “entertainment”. The Guanyin Zen Courtyard is sufficient to convey a sense of historical and cultural richness, while making way for combat and narrative through localized transformations. This strategy preserves the core features of the cultural heritage while keeping the game playable.

Unlike Guanyin Zen Courtyard, Yellow Wind Ridge does not rely on a single architectural type or a specific historical site. It employs a collage design logic - combining architectural, sculptural, and geomorphic fragments from different historical periods and cultural traditions to form a unified, yet non-existent, dramatized environment.

In the map of Yellow Wind Ridge, players will see elements such as Buddha head statues, cliff coffins and abandoned villages at the same time. These symbols originally belonged to very different contexts in real history, but in the game, they are placed within the same scene, together creating an overall atmosphere of dilapidation, chaos, and loss.

This collage is not randomly piled up but has a clear narrative purpose. The fragmented composition of the scene reinforces the theme of “corruption and collapse”, making Yellow Wind Ridge not only a geographical space, but also a symbolic mirror image of the destructive existence of the Yellow Wind Demon. Heritage here is no longer a symbol of continuity, but a metaphor for rupture. As the player explores, they experience spatial shifts from open ridges to narrow canyons to dimly lit caves, and these environmental changes themselves convey a strong sense of narrative rhythm.

Compared to the “typological reproduction” of Guanyin Zen Courtyard, Yellow Wind Ridge represents another strategy, namely “fragmented collage”. It does not emphasize maintaining the integrity of the architectural context but rather creating a

new staged landscape for narrative and play through the recombination of cultural symbols. This approach emphasizes “re-semanticization”-that is, stripping elements that originally belonged to religious, funerary, or natural landscapes of their original meaning and giving them new functional and emotional connotations.

From the perspective of the research question, Yellow Wind Ridge clearly demonstrates the “creative deconstruction” that the game adopts in reproducing cultural heritage. Instead of pursuing authenticity, cultural heritage is used as a source of narrative and mechanics, transformed into a tool for conveying emotions and promoting combat.

The contrast between Guanyin Zen Courtyard and Yellow Wind Ridge reveals the dual strategy of *Black Myth: Wukong*. The differences are not contradictory, but rather complementary. The Guanyin Zen Courtyard, through its typological reproduction, provides the game with clear cultural roots, allowing the player to enter a “believable” historical context through familiar architectural symbols. Yellow Wind Ridge, on the contrary introduces drama and tension tell the narrative in fragmented collages enabling the player to have a more profound effect emotionally when out of it confusion.

Coupled together, they form the pliability of games when reproducing digital heritage in terms of their capacity to establish atmospheres of transhistorical closeness to the truth as well as by their capacity to tear apart the context in the name of narrative and game play. Such fluidity proves that the history of video games cannot be viewed as a fixed copy but rather a living re-construction.

The replication of heritage in games is multi-pronged and there are various ways of accomplishing this, depending on narrative and game mechanical requirements. Guanyin Zen Courtyard emphasizes integrity and cultural atmosphere, while Yellow Wind Ridge emphasizes fragmentation and emotional tension. Guanyin Zen Courtyard shows a kind of “compromise authenticity”, which not only maintains the cultural logic, but also makes concessions for gameplay; while Yellow Wind Ridge

directly abandons authenticity and realizes an emotional narrative effect with fragmented collage. Not only is the game a reproduction of the heritages, but it also involves redefining its semantics and tasks, which demonstrates the level of creativity of digital heritage in the interactive media. This two-prong approach also exposes the danger - that heritage can be reduced to a subject of background visual consumption as opposed to being interpreted as a conveyor of a particular history and culture. This is reflective of the current scholarly discussion of how digital heritage can be authentic or consumerized.

In summary, the central feature of *Black Myth: Wukong's* reproduction of cultural heritage is the dual pursuit of authenticity and entertainment through two different strategies: “type reproduction” and “fragmented collage”. This not only shows how the game functions in terms of cultural expression, but it also gives us some new thoughts to comprehend the role of digital heritage in interactive media.

5.2 Games vs. Academic Standards of Digital Heritage

In academic discussions, the interpretation of cultural heritage sites is generally guided by a well-defined set of principles. These standards emerge from interdisciplinary work in archaeology, architecture, and heritage conservation. Their central aim is to communicate the original form and meaning of cultural heritage in digital environments as accurately and transparently as possible. International frameworks such as those developed by UNESCO, ICOMOS, and the London Charter have all provided guidance on how heritage should be interpreted and represented.

One of the most influential texts is the ICOMOS *Enane Charter for the Interpretation of Cultural Heritage Sites* (Revised Third Draft, 2005). These draft outlines seven key principles:

Access and understanding. The appreciation of cultural heritage sites is considered a universal right. Public discussion of their significance should be

supported by effective and sustainable interpretation, engaging diverse communities, visitors, and stakeholders.

Information Sources. Interpretation must be grounded in evidence collected through accepted scientific and scholarly methods, but it may also draw on living cultural traditions.

Context and setting. Heritage interpretation should situate sites within their wider social, cultural, historical, and natural contexts.

Authenticity. Interpretation must respect the authenticity of heritage sites, in line with the *Nara Document on Authenticity* (1994).

Sustainability. Any interpretive strategy should be sensitive to its natural and cultural surroundings, with social, financial, and environmental sustainability as long-term objectives.

Inclusiveness. The interpretation of heritage sites must actively involve local communities and relevant stakeholders in the process.

Research, Evaluation, and Training. Interpretation is not a static act but a continuous process of explanation and understanding, supported by ongoing research, evaluation, and professional training.

Together, these principles define the basic framework for heritage interpretation in both physical and digital contexts. They stress that heritage communication should not only safeguard accuracy and authenticity, but also foster inclusivity, sustainability, and long-term cultural value. Comparing these academic standards with the practices in *Black Myth: Wukong*, it is clear that although the game does not have cultural heritage interpreting as its primary purpose, the design of the game as a media for the presentation of digital cultural heritage, in terms of the impact it has achieved, is to a certain extent in line with the academic standards of digital heritage. The game's official disclosure of many of its locations, all of which were obtained by scanning real buildings, and the sustainable preservation and

development of these buildings through the game and subsequent dlc development have been widely discussed by gamers both at home and abroad.

The design of the game does not follow the academic emphasis on ‘verifiability’ or “completeness”, but it retains the core feature of ‘contextualisation’. For example, the design of Guanyin Zen Courtyard meets the academic criteria for digital heritage to a certain extent. It is not an exact replica of a specific temple, but its overall spatial layout, Dougong and roof structures, as well as the creation of a religious atmosphere, are all based on authentic Buddhist architectural traditions. As a result, players will intuitively feel a sense of ‘authenticity’ when they enter the scene. However, this authenticity is a compromise. In order to meet the needs of combat and narrative, the developers have made intentional changes to the spatial layout. For example, the missing rear hall and the open centre space clearly deviate from the structural logic of the historical temple. This kind of alteration destroys the ‘integrity’ but enhances the gameplay. From an academic point of view, it does not meet the strict criteria of heritage restoration, but from a game point of view, it achieves ‘functional authenticity’: that is, the space does play its proper role in the interactive logic of the game.

In contrast to Guanyin Zen Courtyard, Yellow Wind Ridge is an even more drastic departure from the academic standards of digital heritage restoration. Instead of attempting to recreate any specific location, it collages elements from different traditions, such as cliff coffins, cave and abandoned temples, to form a fictional stage. This approach directly contradicts the requirement of ‘integrity’ and completely ignores ‘verifiability’.

At the same time, however, the collage design of Yellow Wind Ridge gives the game a strong narrative and emotional tension. Broken statues, toppled shrines and howling winds convey a kind of ‘symbolic authenticity’: it allows the player to feel the ‘fragmentation and loss of culture’, even if these elements do not correspond to any specific historical site.

In short, although the design of the game does not follow the academic emphasis on 'verifiability' or 'integrity', it is a good example and model of a for-profit entertainment product that has played a significant role in the presentation and dissemination of cultural heritage. It is a good example and model. This approach is a 'failed restoration' by academic standards, but a 'successful reinvention' in the context of games. It highlights the freedom of video games as cultural products: heritage elements can no longer be the object of accurate restoration, but rather the medium of emotion and narrative.

Comparing the two cases, it can be seen that *Black Myth: Wukong* does not follow the academic standard of digital heritage but creates a new logic: authenticity is replaced with immersion, integrity with functionality; contextualisation is transformed into re-semanticisation; educational value is transformed into experiential value and so on.

This suggests that the needs of games and academia are inherently different. While academia demands that digital heritage reproduction maintains rigour and verifiability, games demand emotional impact and gameplay support, and are not intent on meeting academic standards, but rather on serving the logic of play through the reuse of cultural heritage.

Returning, then, to the question of this study, 'How does *Black Myth: Wukong* digitally reproduce and reinterpret Chinese cultural heritage?' The answer is further clarified here: it does not follow the standards of restoration in the academic sense but creatively deviates from them to develop the game's own logic of cultural expression. This deviation is both a limitation and an opportunity: it allows cultural heritage to be accessed and experienced by a wider range of players, but it can also lead to simplification and even consumerisation of heritage.

Thus, *Black Myth: Wukong* offers a new research perspective: we cannot judge heritage in games only by the standards of academic restoration but should recognise that games as interactive media have their own creative logic. They may not be a

substitute for academic restoration of digital heritage, but they can transmit cultural memory in a broader way.

5.3 Rethinking the Communication Power of Game Culture: Authenticity, Consumerization, Exoticization, Secondary Creation

In the world of video games, the recreation of cultural heritage is never a simple replication of real-world objects, but rather an imaginative process of reinterpretation. By analyzing the Guanyin Zen Courtyard and Yellow Wind Ridge scenes in *Black Myth: Wukong*, we can see how the game constantly balances and harmonizes authenticity and entertainment, historical recreation and commercial logic. This process of cultural representation not only shapes players' immersive experiences but also reveals the unique power and limitations of game culture as a medium for cultural dissemination. When discussing the feasibility of games as a medium for presenting cultural heritage to the public, a more in-depth understanding of this phenomenon can be achieved by exploring the following four aspects: authenticity, playability, exoticization, and secondary creation.

First is authenticity. The academic community generally emphasizes authenticity as one of the core standards for digital heritage restoration, but in games, authenticity often has to give way to playability. For example, in *Black Myth: Wukong*, we analyzed the Guanyin Zen Courtyard section, where details such as the Dougong and cave sculptures reflect the developers' research into traditional architecture, but at the same time, the spatial layout has been simplified and the central axis has been reinforced to serve the combat scenes. The situation in Yellow Wind Ridge is even more extreme: cliffs, gorges, cave sculptures, and abandoned temples are collaged together to form a composite stage that does not exist in reality. Authenticity here no longer refers to "faithful reproduction," but rather the ability to evoke a "deja vu" cultural atmosphere. In other words, authenticity is transformed into immersion, making players feel that "this truly resembles a traditional Chinese environment," even if specific details may

not correspond to any real-world sites. This shift indicates that authenticity in a game context does not pursue strict archaeological accuracy but achieves cultural recognition through selective preservation and reconstruction.

Second is playability. Once digital heritage enters a game system, it inevitably becomes an object in the gameplay process. The solemn Buddhist imagery of Guanyin Zen Courtyard has been redesigned as the backdrop for battle stages; the scattered Buddha heads and broken sculptures in Yellow Wind Ridge serve as props to convey a sense of desolation. These symbols are stripped of their original religious or social meanings and transformed into visual and emotional resources for players to consume. Players' interactions with heritage through “fighting monsters” and “exploration” are not necessarily negative. They give heritage new vitality and channels of dissemination, allowing more young people to come into contact with elements of Chinese culture in a relaxed way. However, at the same time, there is a risk that cultural heritage symbols will be simplified into mere “visual spectacles,” their cultural connotations weakened or even lost, and eventually reduced to decorative items that satisfy the curiosity of players.

Third is exoticization. The cultural environment in the *Black Myth: Wukong* is an exotic experience to many of the non-Chinese players. Busted Buddha figures, pilgrimage sites, abandoned temples and yelloing winds do not remind a certain religious or historical context anymore but seem to evoke a mysterious Eastern landscape. This form of exoticization has twofold influence. On the one hand, it assists Chinese culture to go through geographical barriers and become planetary. The game uses this sense of foreignness to spark players' curiosity, encouraging them to actively explore and learn. Conversely, it is also possible that exoticization sparks such “Orientalist” interpretations, over-simplifying a complex cultural tradition into a bizarre, ancient and mystical impression. Such imagery draws attention, but does not always help to learn more about the culture.

The last is secondary creation. In the modern culture of gaming, players no longer constitute consumers but active reproducers. Already before the actual release, screenshots and gameplay footage of *Black Myth: Wukong* were highly shared and resulted in a wave of secondary production. The extent to which cultured content was produced regarding the game by various players after it was released was at large. The use of walkthrough videos over social media or the development of fan-art as well as story rewrites using game resources are just a few examples demonstrating how cultural symbols have now acquired lives outside the game. Guanyin Zen Courtyard can be viewed by the players as a figure of Buddhist spirituality and Yellow Wind Ridge can be viewed as the symbolic figure of disorder and corruption. These interpretations may even surpass the developers' original intentions. Secondary creation not only extends the limits of cultural dissemination, but also makes the limits of authoritative interpretations permeable. Cultural property is dismantled into the free symbols in the game environment and awaits players to build up again and make their own interpretations.

Overall, these four dimensions collectively reveal the dual nature of video games in the dissemination of cultural heritage: they can provide a platform and convenience for cultural heritage dissemination, but they also face the risk of losing their educational value due to the adaptation of cultural heritage. The authenticity of cultural heritage interpretation is redefined in games, as cultural heritage is imbued with new vitality while also facing the risk of simplification; cultural adaptation facilitates cross-cultural transmission but may also lead to stereotyping; and fan-created content demonstrates the agency of player culture while challenging the authority of heritage narratives. These discussions provide further answers to the core question posed by this study: how does *Black Myth: Wukong* use architectural scenes to digitally recreate and reinterpret Chinese cultural heritage? The game does indeed “recreate” heritage, but this recreation is not a one-way replication; it is a process filled with change and reinterpretation. Cultural semantics are constantly deconstructed and reorganized,

ultimately forming new paths of dissemination. This is precisely the unique power of video games as cultural products.

5.4 The hyperreal Dilemma of Digital Heritage

French sociologist Jean Baudrillard introduced the concept of hyperreality in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981/1994). Baudrillard argued that when symbols and images no longer serve as direct representations of reality but instead detach from their original context through replication, reorganization, and recoding, society enters a state where “simulacra replace reality” (Baudrillard, 1981/1994). According to his understanding, modern society is filled with the replication of symbols and images. When these symbols are constantly replicated, reorganized, and detached from their original real-world context, they no longer serve as representations of reality but instead generate a new form of simulacra. In this context, audiences may even perceive simulacra as more real than reality itself, blurring the boundaries between the real and the virtual. In the context of cultural heritage, this concept is especially useful for understanding the expressive nature of video games. Video games do not present facts directly like archaeological reports, nor do they aim to showcase the most original remains like museums. Instead, they often create a new cultural landscape by blending history, legend, and creativity—a cultural space that players can enter and experience firsthand. This space may closely resemble real heritage, but it can also differ significantly from the original. However, players often feel a strong sense of realism during immersive experiences, and this realism is actually created by hyper-realistic technology and art, rather than history itself.

In *Black Myth: Wukong*, Guanyin Zen Courtyard and Yellow Wind Ridge represent two distinct hyper-realistic paths. The overall design of Guanyin Zen Courtyard closely reflects the layout of traditional Chinese Buddhist temples. For example, the arrangement of the central axis, the use of bracket systems, and the

proportions of the halls all create a sense of familiarity and authenticity for players. Though it is not a replica of a particular real temple, the designers clearly borrowed and appropriated the different elements of heritage in order to create an ideal temple space. Players have an opinion that they are in a real temple of a distant past by simply moving through it. However, this experience is actually a reimagining, blending real architectural knowledge with the game's narrative needs, ultimately creating a digital scene that feels more real than reality itself.

Unlike Yellow Wind Ridge, there was no attempt to recreate an archaeological site at the moment in question but rather a collage of a fragmented landscape with integration. Diverging elements in the game were merged into a composite platform in the game. That is to say, Yellow Wind Ridge created an entirely unreal world with no real-world equivalent, but which seems to have the potential to exist.

This hyper-realistic design is compelling. First, it greatly boosts the player's sense of immersion. Whether it's the grand layout of a temple or a battlefield battered by strong winds on a mountain ridge, players can instinctively feel the essence of Chinese cultural heritage. Such experience may be more interesting than perusing academic papers and reports of archaeologies and even museums to those players who are not very conversant with Chinese history.

Second, hyperreality develops culture communication. It doesn't require players to have extensive knowledge of historical background but instead conveys meaning through atmosphere and visual intuition. At places like the tiled altar and the broken Buddha head of Yellow Wind Ridge, although they may have no knowledge of the exact history, players can still get a sense of decay, chaos, and loss. This is a universal emotional expression, and it provides a new way of cultural heritage to converse among players who are spread across the globe.

Nonetheless, there are also obvious dangers to hyperreality. To begin with, it leads to distortion of heritage. Players virtualize physical history when its depictions in the Guanyin Zen Courtyard appear as a faithful simulation of historical sites in the

game world. This misunderstanding is particularly critical when it comes to the cross-cultural communication. The virtual environment would be the only exposure that would inform players who are not acquainted with the Chinese culture about Chinese culture. This leads to the simplification and freezing of heritage that loses the ambiguity it used to have. Second, hyperreality has a tendency to kill interest in real heritage sites. Players may feel that experiencing heritage through a game is enough and overlook the complexity and conservation issues of real sites. For example, true cave often faces problems such as weathering, restoration, and controversy, which are completely ignored in the hyper-realistic game version. Finally, hyperreality might lead to the decontextualization of heritage. At Yellow Wind Ridge, the southern custom of cliff coffins coexists with northern stone cave combination impossible in reality. However, in the game, this mismatch is hidden and replaced with a visually appealing and narratively consistent environment. While this design enhances the gaming experience, it erases the regional differences and cultural traits of the heritage.

Returning to the research questions, when discussing how video games address the tension between authenticity, narrative demands, and game mechanics in representing cultural heritage, we find that *Black Myth: Wukong* uses hyper-realistic techniques to turn heritage into a more visually impressive and interactively engaging stage. This process is both creative and potentially risky. It creates a new type of heritage experience that can both recreate authentic temple spaces through adaptation and build unprecedented fantasy landscapes through collage. This flexibility broadens the scope of heritage sharing, allowing players around the world to engage with Chinese culture in entirely new ways. However, it can also cause dilution or misinterpretation of heritage meaning, leading players to mistakenly see game scenes as historical reenactments, which can obscure the complexity of heritage. It can also bring cultural heritage down to the level of entertainment with the erosion of their cultural heritage and scholarly imperativeness.

Therefore, hyperreality is both an opportunity and a challenge. It shows the great potential of video games as cultural and interactive media, but it also reminds us that, while aiming for immersion and visual impact, we need to consider how to prevent overconsumption or misinterpretation of heritage—a question that digital heritage studies must constantly address.

5.5 The Challenge of Game Interactivity to Authoritative Narratives

Where interpretations of heritage are disseminated there are frequently the purview of archaeologists, historians, or cultural institutions employing the means of exhibition, the publication of scholarly works, or guides to help people see a coherent picture of what cultural heritage is and signifies. In this model, audiences receive what is presented to them and what they get to hear and comprehend is more or less controlled by professional institutions. The advent of video games, however, has changed this into one-way manner of communication. Being quite an interactive medium, the games provide players with a considerable amount of freedom. The implication of this freedom is that heritage no longer must be passively observed; it is something that can then be actively reproduced by the player.

This interactivity is particularly evident (and traceable) in *Black Myth: Wukong*. Players are free to explore in their own chosen directions, choose to view the details of the temple architecture or merely see it in the background and concentrate on battle and the story. For the same scene, different players may interpret it completely differently: some might notice the Dougong, gate towers, and cave sculptures, even making connections to historical prototypes; others may overlook these details entirely, viewing them as just part of the game's levels. This diversity of interpretations goes against the background of the traditional concept of having one correct way when other people share cultural heritage.

This interaction has a number of pitfalls. First is the multiplicity of interpretation. Architectures, sculptures, and symbols when introduced in the game world become deprived of their fixed meanings. These words will have different implications given by

various players in different contexts. Taking the three bells that can be rung in the given game, these initially referred to religious ceremonies and temple order, but the game players use them as a means to open certain hidden areas. This shift removes elements of the culture out of their religious space and integrates them into the rules of the game. The second difficulty is possible misinterpretation. This picture can make some players associate the temple ruins with monster fights because they may think that these ruins were the battle fields during history. These misinterpretations in design in their turn create the lure between reality and fiction in the spreading of the information. And finally, there is undermining of cultural authority. In the conventional sense, academic institutions and cultural organizations have the power of interpreting cultural items. However, in games, this authority is continually diluted by developers' reinterpretations and players' secondary interpretations, marginalizing the original academic perspectives.

Other individuals believe this is one of the methods of popularizing the cultural heritage, making it more palatable to a wide range of individuals, so everyone can learn and relate to the traditions. Such democratization of interpretation can expand the readership of cultural heritage to make it an attribute of popular culture. Some are afraid that such an approach will corrupt heritage. Participants will be presented with heritage scenes which have been doctored, collaged or even fantasized. Guanyin Zen courtyard or Yellow Wind Ridge need not be based on real Buddhist architecture or cave sites, which they recall.

This is particularly evident in the case of *Black Myth: Wukong*. Players' experience in the Guanyin Zen Courtyard is not one of quiet observation, like visiting a museum, but rather one of constant combat with enemies, repeated failures, and attempts to overcome them. The architectural elements of the temple e.g. mode of bracket and halls etc. are generally used as stages of a battle or the plot itself and are not necessarily used as a cultural or religious heritage themselves. Such experience renders the cultural heritage easily recalled but also results in far-separation of its

historical origins. Similarly, at Yellow Wind Ridge, elements like Buddha statues' heads, suspended coffins, and broken stone *cave sculptures* are reassembled to serve as narrative tools that evoke a sense of corruption and chaos. Players' attention is focused on combat and exploration, with cultural heritage primarily functioning as environmental storytelling.

Thus, the interaction in games that poses a challenge to authoritative texts is both affirmative and negative. On the positive side, it broadens the ways in which cultural heritage is shared, allowing more people to participate and sparking players' interest in culture. Through the game, even foreigners who have no knowledge of Chinese culture in terms of history and religion can come into contact with visual representation such as temples and cave. The downside to this expanse of freedom of interpretation and re-depiction is that such practice can lessen or even nullify the cultural value of heritage. The architectural and artistic works created at the expense of religion or socialization may be reduced to mere backgrounds or systems without referring to further cultural implications of the creation logic of consumption of entertainment.

To conclude, interactivity of games presents a fundamental challenge to the cultural heritage narrative of culture. It alters the role of players into co-authors of the narrative, eliminating unidirectional channels of interpretive construction, and allowing cultural symbols to be reassembled through exchange and participation over time. This leaves a possibility of new chances of sharing heritage but also exposes a possibility of commodification and entertainment. *Black Myth: Wukong* raises a compelling question: in interactive media, how can we balance players' freedom to explore with the need for accurate cultural representation? In what ways can we both discourage overconsumption and misinterpretation and not force creativity and entertainment into a corner? This is one of the challenges faced by game developers and primary concern that digital heritage research must continue to grapple with in future. Nevertheless, authoritative storytelling and interactivity are not two wholly incompatible things.

Chapter 6 : Conclusion

The starting point of this study is to explore how *Black Myth: Wukong* re-presents and transforms China's temple and cave heritage in a digital context, thereby revealing the complex relationship between authenticity, playability, and cultural transmission. Throughout the argument, I rely on the theoretical framework provided by the literature review and combine it with case studies of Guanyin Zen Courtyard and Yellow Wind Ridge to gradually examine the interactive relationship between games and cultural heritage. Through the analysis of representative cases such as Guanyin Zen Courtyard and Yellow Wind Ridge, this thesis demonstrates the multiple strategies employed by games in inheriting and transforming cultural heritage. Building on this foundation, this chapter will address each research question in turn, summarize the research findings and limitations, and finally propose the author's vision and recommendations for the future development of digital cultural heritage.

First, the central question of this thesis is: How does *Black Myth: Wukong* digitally reconstruct and reinterpret Chinese cultural heritage through its architectural settings, and what tensions emerge in this process between technological authenticity, gameplay demands, and the broader goals of cultural preservation? Research shows that *Black Myth: Wukong* draws heavily on elements of real-life heritage in its architectural design, such as Dougong, Caisson ceilings, axial layout, and cave sculptures. This borrowing is not a simple replication but rather a process of reinterpretation through digital technology and artistic adaptation, reintegrating heritage elements into the game's contextual framework. These elements endow virtual scenes with visual and spatial authenticity, reflecting the developers' meticulous research and creative reimagination of China's architectural heritage. In this way the players will learn to navigate through the forms and the aesthetic details of the Chinese architectures by experiencing it in an immersive interactive environment making the game a resplendent means of sharing the heritage of the Chinese culture. The case demonstrates that through the creators' work, real architectural forms and symbols are

reborn in the virtual space, while adjustments to their spatial layout reflect a prioritization of gameplay mechanics. Such relationship between the real and virtual is a major feature of digital heritage recreation.

It has been shown that *Black Myth: Wukong* is not based on the wholesome restoration but on the symbolic element pick and choose of heritage. Such an example is the architectural features of the Dougong in the Guanyin Zen Courtyard and cave sculptures on the Yellow Wind Ridge Pass that convey the real-world and digital images in a mediation process. The theory is reflected in the balance between the historic truthfulness and the mythological adaptation of these architectural elements, as their extraction guarantees cultural identification of the players with minimal cost and a decrease in the cognitive load. As is the case with the Guanyin Zen Courtyard, the spatial composition and the decoration might bear the influence of Buddhist temple building traditions in the Shanxi province and elsewhere, nevertheless, the overall design is architecture that suits combat. For instance, the removal of the rear hall, expansion of the main hall's porch, and the opening of the central axis are not mistakes but deliberate choices to create a stage that aligns with the game's narrative and mechanics. Similarly, the Yellow Wind Ridge level incorporates elements from cave art and funerary traditions but constructs a composite space that blends historical authenticity with a virtual aesthetic through fantastical storytelling and monster design. This shows that *Black Myth: Wukong* is not pursuing historical accuracy in its description of cultural heritage but a translation where its re- texts and re-contextualizes the source of cultural forms.

To answer how sacred spaces and rituals are transformed into interactive mechanisms in games, the study found that temples and cave are not merely narrative backgrounds but are endowed with playability. Incense, statues, and cave murals are not only things to be viewed but can also trigger battles or advance the plot. Sacredness is thus transformed into playability, and the player's gaming experience

becomes a new way to understand cultural heritage. However, this transformation also raises concerns that religious meaning may be undermined.

When it comes to global dissemination, the question of how games construct and export China's cultural image is addressed through the Steam platform and global distribution channels. *Black Myth: Wukong* brings China's temple and cave heritage to the world stage. For international players, the architectural symbols in the game serve as an entry point to Chinese culture. However, this dissemination process inevitably carries the risk of cultural simplification and sensationalization, which may lead to a one-sided perception of Chinese culture. As a result, games assume a dual role: they are both cultural transmitters and participants in the reinterpretation of cultural meaning.

This study uses case analysis to validate the unique role of video games in the reproduction of digital heritage, expands the academic discussion on the interaction between digital heritage and games, and provides a new perspective on understanding the embodied relationship between players and cultural spaces. The study emphasizes the potential and challenges of video games as a medium for cultural communication, particularly their impact on cross-cultural audiences. This perspective contributes to the internationalization of digital heritage research.

However, this study focuses mainly on textual and visual analysis and lacks on-site interviews with players and acceptance surveys, thus failing to systematically present the interpretations of the audience. The scope of the case study is limited, analyzing only a few temple and cave scenes in the first two chapters of the game, which does not cover all the heritage elements in the game and may lead to a one-sided study.

As a researcher, I believe that the development of digital cultural heritage should move toward multi-layered, interdisciplinary, and open approaches. Based on the insights from this study, I would like to propose the following visions and recommendations:

First, the potential of digital heritage in education and tourism deserves further exploration. Through video games, virtual museums, and interactive platforms, students and the general public can gain a more immersive understanding of historical heritage, rather than relying solely on textbooks or display cases. This requires the establishment of long-term collaborative mechanisms among disciplines such as archaeology, architecture, game design, and computer science. Game developers can engage in dialogue with scholars during the creative process to ensure that cultural representations are both creative and academically sound. In the future, integrating such digital reconstruction outcomes with school curricula or museum education could not only enhance learning interest but also foster cross-disciplinary cultural understanding. Similarly, digital heritage can complement the tourism industry: after experiencing cultural heritage in the virtual world, players may become interested in visiting real-world sites, thereby driving cultural tourism and local economic development. For example, the popularity of *Black Myth: Wukong* has significantly boosted tourism in Shanxi Province, China, which features many locations from the game. Digital heritage is not merely the product of developers but should also be a collaborative process involving the public. Therefore, I believe future digital projects could explore player-driven co-creation models to make cultural dissemination and preservation more interactive.

Second, for international audiences, architectural symbols alone may not be sufficient to convey cultural significance. Games and related platforms should provide multi-layered cultural explanations through annotations, narratives, and databases to avoid oversimplifying heritage into visual spectacles. Game companies need to strike a balance between market goals and cultural responsibility. The reproduction of digital heritage is not merely a marketing tool but a cultural responsibility that should ensure the diversity and depth of cultural expression within a commercial framework. In the future, it may be possible to combine game scenes with digital museums and virtual

classrooms to create a virtuous cycle between academic research, educational outreach, and public entertainment.

Finally, the integration of VR and AR technologies will open new frontiers for digital heritage. For example, many tourist attractions have already launched projects where visitors can use mobile devices or glasses to see reconstructed buildings, murals, or ritual scenes while visiting historical sites. If these technologies are combined with gamified storytelling, they can not only enhance interactivity but also elevate heritage research beyond the levels of “display” and “appreciation” to ‘experience’ and “participation.” In this model, the public will no longer be passive observers but active participants in the narrative of cultural heritage.

In summary, *Black Myth: Wukong* demonstrates the dual nature of digital heritage reproduction: it not only gives Chinese temples and caves a new lease on life in the virtual world but also reveals the complex tensions of digital heritage through transformation and gamification. This study analyzes architectural elements, interactive mechanisms, and cross-cultural communication to identify the challenges and potential of digital heritage in the contemporary context. The future development of digital heritage should be understood as a dynamic process of negotiation, whose value lies not in reproducing the original, but in constantly seeking a balance between authenticity and creativity. In this process, I believe that digital games have the potential to become an important bridge connecting academic research, cultural heritage, and public experience.

Appendices

Appendix A: Functions used in the YouTube Data V3 API in the thesis

Build () is a generic function in the Google API used to call specific API parameters, which are the API name and version number. In this study, we used build (youtube, v3).

The search () function is the most used method in the YouTube API and is primarily used to search for videos. Parameters:

q: Search keyword

part: The data to be returned, most commonly 'snippet' (including title, description, publication time, etc.)

type: Search type

maxResults: Number of results to return (maximum 50)

publishedAfter / publishedBefore: Set the time range

The videos () function is primarily used to retrieve detailed information about one or more videos, mainly statistical data such as play counts, likes, etc.

Parameters:

Part: The information to be returned, commonly used options include:

'snippet' → title, description, publication time, channel information

"statistics" → view count (viewCount), like count (likeCount), comment count (commentCount)

'contentDetails' → video duration, definition (HD/SD), subtitle availability

Id: The video identifier

Id: Video identifier

Appendix B: Python code for collecting data

```
# STEP 0: IMPORT PACKAGES

# Import the CSV module to handle writing data into CSV files

import csv

# Import the build function from googleapiclient.discovery to create a YouTube
API client

from googleapiclient.discovery import build

#Call the API requested from Google

#The content in quotation marks is the API key requested from Google.
API_KEY = "ApiKey from google"

#Call YouTube data v3 model

youtube = build("youtube", "v3", developerKey=API_KEY)

#Keyword list

#Used to store keywords that may be used to search for videos.

keywords = [

    "黑神话 悟空 文化考据",

    "黑神话 悟空 建筑 原型",

    "黑神话 悟空 寺庙 原型",

    "黑神话 悟空 佛像 原型",

    "黑神话 悟空 壁画 原型",

    "Black Myth: Wukong cultural analysis",

    "Black Myth: Wukong myth origins"

    "Black Myth: Wukong temple",

    "Black Myth: Wukong Buddha statue",

    "Black Myth: Wukong mural painting",

]

# The maximum number of results returned each time

Max_number = 50
```

```

# Create a CSV document for storing output
OUTPUT_FILE = "youtube_blackmyth_videos_allpages1.csv"

# STEP 1: Create a function to extract video playback and like counts.

# Create a function to extract video playback and like counts.
# The parameters used are the keywords for searching and the maximum
number of pages to extract.

# Too many pages will affect the accuracy of the search.
def get_videos_for_keyword(keyword, max_pages=5):
    # Create a list to store the results.
    results = []

    # Parameters for page turning
    next_page_token = None

    # The initial value of the page number is 0.
    page_count = 0

    # Judgment statement: if the number of extracted pages is greater than or
equal to 5, end the loop.
    while True:

        # Build a YouTube API search request to find videos based on the
keyword

        request = youtube.search().list(
            # The search query keyword
            q=keyword,
            # Specify which parts of the resource should be included in the
response

```

```

        part="id,snippet",

        # Restrict results to videos only

        type="video",

        # Maximum number of results per page

        maxResults=Max_number,

        # Token for retrieving the next page of results (if any)

        pageToken=next_page_token,

        # Order results by view count

        order="viewCount"

    )

    # Execute the search request and get the response

    response = request.execute()

    # Iterate through each video item returned in the response

    for item in response["items"]:

        # Extract the video ID

        video_id = item["id"]["videoid"]

        # Extract the video title

        title = item["snippet"]["title"]

        # Extract the channel name

        channel = item["snippet"]["channelTitle"]

        # Extract the published date

        published = item["snippet"]["publishedAt"]

        # Build a request to get video statistics (views, likes, etc.)

        video_request = youtube.videos().list(

            part="statistics",

            id=video_id

        )

```

```

# Execute the statistics request
video_response = video_request.execute()

# Get the statistics object from the response
stats = video_response["items"][0]["statistics"]

# Get the view count (default to 0 if not available)
view_count = stats.get("viewCount", 0)

# Get the like count (default to 0 if not available)
like_count = stats.get("likeCount", 0)

# Append the extracted data to the results list
results.append([
    keyword, title, channel, video_id,
    f"https://www.youtube.com/watch?v={video_id}",
    published, view_count, like_count
])

# Update the next page token for pagination
next_page_token = response.get("nextPageToken")

# Increment the page counter
page_count += 1

if not next_page_token or page_count >= max_pages:
    break

return results

# STEP 2: Call the constructor function and store it in a CSV document.

# Main programm
all_results = []

#Execute the newly constructed function on each element in the list.
for kw in keywords:

```

```

videos = get_videos_for_keyword(kw, max_pages=5)

all_results.extend(videos)

# Save the results to a CSV file.

with open(OUTPUT_FILE, "w", newline="", encoding="utf-8-sig") as f:

    writer = csv.writer(f)

    writer.writerow(["Keywords", "Title", "Channel", "Video ID", "Link", "Posting
time", "Views", "Likes"])

    writer.writerows(all_results)

print("Done")

```

Appendix C: Common roof styles in ancient China

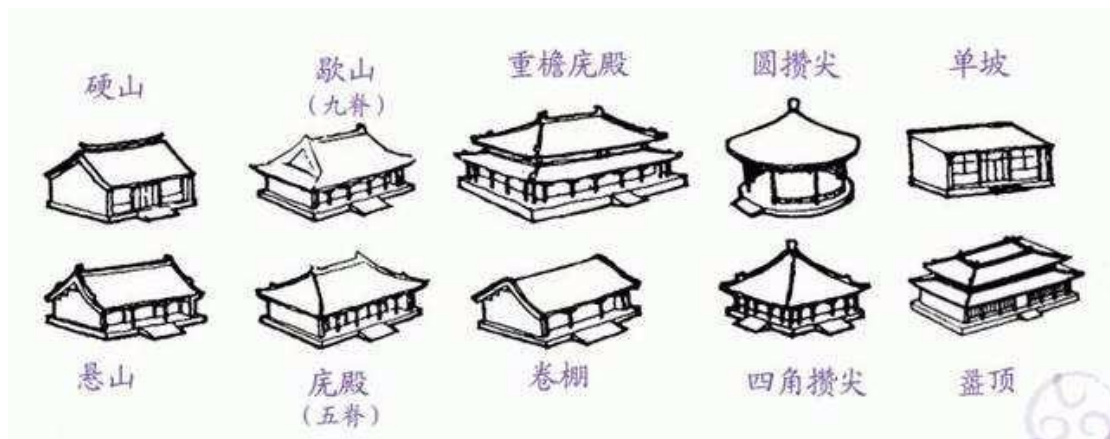


Figure C

Common roof styles in ancient China

Note. Image from 大肉兔 (2023, April 26). Retrieved August 21, 2025, from

<https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/74582293>

Table C

Common roof styles in ancient China English translation table

Gabled roof	Hip gable roof	Double-eaves hip roof	Pointed roof	Pent roof
Suspension roof	Hip roof	Pyramid roof	Conical roof	Square hip roof

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on *Black Myth: Wukong*, a Chinese AAA video game, and how it uses digital means to reconstruct and transform the traditional heritage of temples and cave, as well as how this process reflects the connections and contradictions between authenticity, playability, and cultural interaction. Although *Black Myth: Wukong* has begun to be regarded as a medium for the dissemination of ancient Chinese culture, academic research on its architectural elements has not yet been systematized. This thesis explores the dual nature of video games like *Black Myth: Wukong* as both effective mediators for the transmission of cultural heritage and as platforms for the reinterpretation of cultural heritage.

The study follows an interdisciplinary approach that brings together the input of religious studies, game studies and digital heritage studies. The theoretical basis is formed by Mircea Eliade theory of sacred space, Nitsche model of game space, and notions of the archaeological and architectonical semiotics. Methodologically, the approach of the work consists of scrutinizing the in-game environments through visual and lexical examination, with the significant help of literature on comparative research of historical sites in real world, supplemented by archaeological reports. Two sample cases Guanyin Zen Courtyard and Yellow Wind Ridge are selected to further investigate them. It is also examined how the audience receives it by analysing Steam reviews and YouTube video statistics, the latter with the help of Google API.

These results show that *Black Myth: Wukong* resorts heavily to actual structural features, including dougong, axial plans, and cave sculptures, but adjusts them to the needs of the storytelling plane and battle systems. guanyin zen courtyard depicts how temple structures are simplified and converted into useful battleground, and the yellow wind ridge is an example of decollage of different cultural materials into a surrealistic wilderness. These illustrations show that authenticity in games is not a matter of archaeological presence but a pocket of a cultural ambience that creates a sense of familiarity without being truth similar to the past.

The audience analysis also brings to the fore the two ways in which heritage is received in digital games. The reviews on Steam are largely characterised by the gameplay mechanic as the main criteria of assessment of the players. According to the information on YouTube, almost twenty percent of most presented videos attract over ten thousand views, and videos about mythological and cultural background are the most popular ones. This implies that the type of people complementary to the players- those who interact most with heritage as an interactive environment- have an attraction to the story and culture of heritage.

The thesis indicates what is possible about the use of video games as mediums to reproduce digital heritage, and the constraints involved. On the one hand, games give the cultural symbols new energy and make it possible to communicate cross-culturally through the interactive and total immersion experience. On the one hand, they will risk to turn heritage into visual spectacle or exoticized picture detaching symbols of their temporal and religious contexts. The thesis is also aware of its limitations, such as the limited amount of sources used and no interviews with any players whatsoever.

Finally, this thesis will leave a mark on the development of the scholarship exploring the preservation of sacred architectural spaces in digital contexts because it reveals where the dominant means of preserving these spaces to date, video games, replicate but also transfigure the sacred spaces. *Black Myth: Wukong* illustrates that digital heritage is not nearly as much about restoring anything accurately as about balancing between maintaining authenticity, creative work, and playability. In this negotiation lies the practice of games linking academic research, cultural heritage and the experience of the general population, with useful implications in the future of digital heritage in education, tourism and the cross cultural exchange.