Al-Noor Journal for Digital Media Studies
April, 2026; v3, i1, a1 (1-10)
ISSN: 3007-9853**, DOI:** https://doi.org/10.69513/jndm.v3.i1.a1

Research Article

From Game Practice to Embodied Patriotism: Aesthetics and Identity Reproduction in Black Myth: Wukong

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Received: 22/03/2026 Accepted: 26/03/2026 Published: 20/04/2026

Abstract:

The development of digital technology has enhanced the narrative capabilities of videogames, allowing players' actions to no longer be restricted by game rules and providing them with greater autonomy. Communication between game creators and players, as well as among players themselves, has become frequent and timely, breaking the traditional one-way communication paradigm.

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Game platforms now undertake more functions of cultural exchange, gradually shaping a new form of patriotism led by young people. This study takes the Chinese phenomenon game *Black Myth: Monkey* as an example to analyze the cultural dissemination power of videogames on digital platforms. It is believed that as an immersive virtual practice space, games provide a field to produce cultural identity. National culture inspires game creators, integrating it into narrative scenes, character tasks, central ideas of the games, which change from static texts that can only be observed to highly interactive content subjects. We believe that there are three paths for videogames to reproduce cultural identity: procedural rhetoric, audiovisual design, and narrative philosophy. After being visual adapted, national myths have become immersive and interactive game spaces. Long-term game practice makes abstract cultural identity recognition into concrete cultural embodied practice. Young people even, out of their passion for a certain game, study real history and culture seriously, transforming from traditional culture recipients to inheritors and re-creators. This cultural learning based on emotional resonance and value identification can shape more stable and more infectious cultural identity.

Keywords: China, patriotism, game aesthetics, identity, reproduction, Black Myth, Wukong

Introduction

1. Research Background and Problem Awareness

Driven by the process of globalization, digital technology, with its diverse characteristics, has become the infrastructure for contemporary cultural production and dissemination (Li & Zhou, 2025:100). The exquisite graphics, realistic sound effects, and captivating plots in videogames can create immersive gaming experiences and realistic on-site atmosphere, becoming a distinctive and vital cultural ritual in the modern cultural field (Huang, 2025:11). Popular videogames have become the core place for a generation to carry and shape their collective identity. With the change of cultural dissemination platforms, the emotional practice venues of patriotism have shifted from the official and public fields to the immersive and interactive digital spaces. We need to conduct a systematic interpretation of this embodied turn from a theoretical perspective. This article takes the Chinese phenomenon-level game *Black Myth: Monkey King* as the research object. It is a cultural product created by a young team and has achieved commercial and artistic success worldwide. It is very suitable as a representative case for this study.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Gaps

We have observed that scholars have developed numerous classic theories and research paradigms regarding patriotism in the digital age. Their focus has been on the characteristics and functions of digital media as a communication platform. The current research gap lies in the changes in the practice of patriotism, which are brought about by the interactivity of the digital space.

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In the research on patriotism education, scholars mainly focused on aspects such as official discourse, educational models, and content production by traditional media (Liu, 2017:163). Some scholars also noticed that the one-way communication paradigm of traditional media has continuously lost its explanatory power and appeal for the youth group. They listed the difficulties currently faced by patriotism education (Hu, 2025:105), objectively described the gap between the traditional educational model and the expectations of the youth groupand summarized various reasons for its poor communication effect.

Regarding the two research fields of digital democracy and participatory culture, researchers have argued the significance of digital media platforms as a new space for patriotic education (Wang, Zhou, & Deng, 2025:72). They believe that digital democracy is influenced by various factors such as digital media, opinion leaders, and netizens (Shen, 2024:56), resulting in diversity. Most scholars still regard digital media as a platform for information dissemination (Xu & Li, 2020:167), neglecting the productive power formed by its own interactive characteristics. Research based on the interactivity of digital media to construct the internal generation logic and experience methods of patriotic emotions has not been systematically carried out. Current research still relies on the traditional research path of textual studies, has not formed a research paradigm specific to the characteristics of digital media, thus neglecting the driving mechanism of patriotic emotions.

The existing research has provided a certain theoretical basis for analyzing patriotism education and cultural identity in the digital age. The reconstruction path of the patriotic education paradigm in the digital communication ecosystem is currently a research gap. To fill this research gap, we attempted to use theoretical grafting research method, which introduce relevant theories such as procedural rhetoric and embodied cognition from game studies into the dialogic research on digital media and patriotism education. The researchers conducted an observation of the immersive gaming behavior of players of the game *Black Myth: Monkey*, summarized the path through which videogames utilize the interactive communication characteristics of digital platforms to generate embodied patriotic identities based on personal experiences.

Methodology

This study mainly employed qualitative research methods, integrating various approaches such as literature review, case analysis, and digital ethnography. It systematically analyzed the generation path of the internal-driven cultural identity of the *Black Myth: Wukong*. The researchers introduced the procedural rhetoric which is classic game research theory into the game's ontology analysis, providing an innovative research perspective. Through the analysis of the game rules, game scenes and game narrative of *Black Myth: Wukong*, this paper systematically explained how videogames pioneered a new

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paradigm of patriotic education through interaction design and feedback mechanism (Zhang, 2012:113). It concludes that cultural identity can be achieved through embodied practice.

The digital ethnography research was conducted based on the researchers' participatory observation over more than six months on such as game platforms, streaming platforms, and player communities etc. Game live streaming, secondary creation and game communities are the main research objects of this study. The researchers observed and recorded the important behaviors and interaction contents of gamers. During the participatory observation process, the researchers made detailed records of the process by which the players formed their cultural identities on the interactive media platform. This study employed the mentioned research methods to ensure a balance between theoretical depth and practical effectiveness in the research conclusions.

Results

1. Procedural Rhetoric

The term procedural rhetoric was coined by Ian Bogost in his book *The Persuasive Game: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. He defined procedural rhetoric as "the art of persuasion through rule-based representation and interaction, rather than through speech, writing, images, or moving pictures" and "the art of persuasively using processes" (Ian, 2007:9). *Black Myth: Wukong* is adapted from the classic Chinese literary work *Journey to the West*. The core game rules of the game are derived from the story background of the original novel, that Sun Wukong assisting Tang Sanzang on his journey to the Western Heavens to obtain Buddhist scriptures. In the original work, Tang Sanzang team overcame eighty-one difficulties on their journey to the Western Heavens. The game designs an eighty-one difficulties achievement system for players. Its game mechanics draw inspiration from the settings of soul-based games. Videogame has achieved the screen adaptation of mythological stories. Gameplayers gain cultural experiences in the games, reducing the time cost required for cultural learning. The games have managed to transform the abstract cultural core spirit into concrete gaming experiences. The core loop of *Black Myth: Wukong* is observation, failure, learning and overcoming. Players are required to follow the game rules to achieve victory. Ostensibly, the game players take specified tasks within the game space through procedural behaviors. In fact, it conducts procedural persuasion on players. The player's behaviors in the game are conceptualized as *cultivation*, that is a term deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy. Without the users' awareness, they understood Chinese national cultural symbols.

To defeat the boss, the *Black Myth: Wukong* players not only need to complete the necessary exercises to enhance attack power, but also need to realize the bosses' weaknesses to develop a battle strategy. The game’s Bosses

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have prototypes in the original work. Many players, driven by their competitive spirit, diligently study the novel. Their findings actively shared with other players in the game community. The interactive feature of videogames reduces the difficulty of understanding the high-context culture as China. Its procedural rhetoric simplifies the lengthy and tedious process of cultural identity formation.

Take the skill system design of the game's protagonist *The Chosen One* as an example. In the original *Journey to the West*, Sun Wukong possesses the ability of *Seventy-Two Transformations*. It refers to Sun Wukong can change his physical appearance. Although Sun Wukong frequently used this magic during battles in original *Journey to the West*, the author did not elaborate on the way this magic was released, nor did he clearly specify the ability referred to. This poses challenges for crosscultural players in terms of cultural understanding. Videogames offer a framework for cultural learners by their design of the mythological characters' actions and skills. In *Black Myth: Wukong*, the game team interpreted Sun Wukong's skills as skill set. In the game space, players need to choose one of these skills in battles. The game directly incorporates cultural symbols into its game mechanism. During the immersive game practice, players have gained an intuitive understanding of Chinese national culture.

2.Audiovisual Aesthetics

Kant believed that the sublime pertains solely to rational concepts. Although a perfectly matched form of expression is unavailable, rational concepts still allow for sensory imagery to suggest it. The pleasure it brings is not direct, but rather indirect, through a momentary sense of stasis (Kant, 1790:128).This game creates an immersive and profound gaming experience for players with its unique audiovisual aesthetics. Unlike previous films and TV series adapted from original work, this game adopts a hardcore realist audiovisual style. The game's creative team used technologies such as 3D laser scanning, tilt photogrammetry modelingand holographic imaging to successfully precisely restore 36 ancient Chinese architectural complexes mentioned in the original novel. This game combines realistic scene construction with an internal dark aesthetic, presenting a unique Chinese-style aesthetic style that integrates splendor and horror. This once again confirms Kant's view that, from the perspective of aesthetic practice, the sublime can be divided into splendor, magnificence, and terror. Ancient Chinese architecture is presented in the game scenes, allowing players to more intuitively appreciate its beauty becoming an aesthetic symbol with interactive features. Moreover, the design of the game characters is based on anatomical principles, their combat actions and body depictions are more exaggerated, forming a unified and harmonious dark aesthetic style.

The sound aesthetics of *Black Myth: Wukong* includes the sound effects and background music. As a more effective medium for cross-cultural

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communication, sound brings players a more attractive aesthetic experience. The game team meticulously designed and recorded the sounds of weapon collisions during battles, the energy vibrations generated by skill releases, environmental sounds such as wind and rain, creating an acoustic environment with a sense of physical oppression. This acoustic environment prompts players to form subconscious cultural identification. Overseas players showed great interest in the ethnic music in this game. The game music designer combines national Chinese classic instruments with symphony arrangements (Zhou & Zhang, 2025:24).It brings an astonishing gaming experience. The music arrangement in Huangfengling, featuring the *North Shaanxi storytelling* enhances the epic sense in the game narrative, helps overseas players overcome the barrier of text understanding, achieve emotional resonance directly.

This game has achieved the digital transformation of Chinese traditional cultural symbols (Lou & Zou, 2025:114), giving traditional cultural architectures digital life. The digital cultural space is a realm for players to explore (Xiang &Li, 2025:41). After completing the tasks of defeating sublime objects, players make an emotional connection with cultural elements from a first-person perspective experience. The cultural identity formed in the game space stems is not from external patriotic education now. It is from the players'personal and genuine emotional experiences.

3. Narrative Aesthetics

Black Myth: Wukong reinterprets the original *Journey to the West* into a modern perspective. The game dark aesthetic style inherently contains serious cultural examination. It reconfigures the classic Chinese literary culture across different texts (Gérard, 1997:229). Unlike the didactic function of the original work, the game's narrative selects fate and cultivation as the core narrative driving forces.It presents players with a dialectical philosophical thoughtful issue. Young people are in game space for critical interpretation of cultural identity (Zhang, 2010: 179). Game practice breaks away from passive reverence of traditional cultural symbols. The players developed an internal cultural identity within personal loyalty.

In this game, the player's character is not selectable. Everyone who enters the game has only one identity. They are all *The Chosen One*. The player is not the original Sun Wukong, but a new identity with the same abilities and similar tasks as him. This identity design provides young people a rich space for imagination. In the game's narrative setting, the player can independently choose his moral stance(Yu & Zhou, 2024:93). The open narrative strategy enables different players reach different endings. Players make choices at uncertain plots following their own will. This practice prompts them to comprehensively reflect on the logic behind *The Chosen One*'s behaviors. Gérard's theory on the transformation mechanism in transtextuality points out

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that creative transformation of classic texts can deepen the possibility of critical interpretation (Gérard, 1997: 229). The game experience guides players to cultivate critical loyalty of cultural identity based on personal experience and rational thinking (Deng & Zhao, 2025:96). This narrative aesthetics, which creatively applied in patriotic education practices, is a practical application of a culture identity with distinct modernity and subjectivity.

Discussion

1. Theoretical Contributions and Enlightenment

This study draws on classic game research theories, attempts to analyze the formation path of cultural identity in game practice. It confirms the crucial role of interactivity in patriotic subject education (Shao & Fan, 2010:16). The research provides a new distribution path for traditional patriotic education, arguing that the interactivity of digital media has both content and form persuasive advantages. It is an efficient method for achieving young people's cultural identity recognition.

The study takes the media space of China, an emerging power, as its research object, proposes a paradigm for patriotic education for young people. The traditional patriotic education model, which relies on tragic revenge narratives, is difficult to elicit emotional resonance from young people due to the lack of immersive experience. The cognitive loop of challenges, victories, and identification achieved through game practice is more in line with the contemporary youth’s aesthetic expectations and acceptance habits. The digitalized achievements of videogames in representing traditional cultural symbols can enrich the theoretical content of patriotic education and achieve the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage indirectly.

2. Research limitations and prospects

The conclusion of this study is based on qualitative research conducted on a single case, has limitations inevitably. The proposed construction path for the cultural identity of the youth group in the study requires comparative verification and cross-research through more diverse videogame research subjects (such as *Genshin Impact*, *Naraka: Bladepoint* and *The Legend of Sword and Fairy etc.*). Furthermore, there is still room for improvement in researchers' use of digital ethnography methods. The scope and sample size of the observational research can be further expanded to conduct a more in-depth study on the dynamic formation and evolution of cultural identity.

Future research is expected to be conducted from two aspects: cross-cultural comparative studies and the mechanism of algorithmic. Researchers will attempt to apply the research methods to case studies of videogame works in other countries and regions, then analyze the mechanism by which game aesthetics affects cultural identity. The big data mechanisms in digital media will also become another research focus. We will systematically explain the

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impact of the dissemination strategies on the effectiveness of patriotic education, attempt to propose universally applicable dissemination path of patriotic education paradigm.

Conclusion

This study investigated the practical application methods of the Chinese phenomenon videogame *Black Myth: Wukong* in promoting young people's patriotic sentiments. The research concluded that the videogame guides players to engage in immersive practices through three aspects, that is procedural rhetoric, audiovisual design, and narrative aesthetics, that gradually cultivating cultural identity. We believe videogame's interactivity has an unparalleled advantage of inheriting traditional culture. The game mechanism, which integrates cultural identity cognition into repetitive immersive experiences, persuades players effectively. The audiovisual design of the game transforms traditional cultural symbols (Lin & Li, 2024:24) into screen adaptation forms. This design gives cultural architectures digital lives. By challenging the sublime figures, players leap the aesthetic gap in cultural identity, that deepens their emotional understanding of national culture. The game team integrates Chinese classical philosophical thoughts into the narrative, guiding players to think critically the inheritance of cultural identity. Young people can internalize their patriotic sentiments based on personal experiences and rational thinking. That is a more modern and subjective process of cultural identity formation.

This study urgues that *Black Myth: Wukong* has successfully guided players to form a cultural identity in the digital age. The patriotic practices led by young people are no longer a one-dimensional narration relying on official narratives, but rather an immersive interactive game practice. This educational paradigm better conforms to the aesthetic expectations of the youth group. The game narrative can enhance the appeal of traditional culture and achieve the internal cultural identity of young people based on emotional resonance.

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ISSN: 3007-9853**, DOI:** https://doi.org/10.69513/jndm.v3.i1.a1

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