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The Political Economy Logic and Implications Behind the Explosion of the Black Myths

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Abstract:

As China's first phenomenal 3A game, Black Myth: Wukong's global explosion not only reflects the rise of the game industry, but also implies a deep political economy logic. This paper takes the hegemonic stability theory and cultural capital theory as the framework, and analyzes the structural motivation behind the success of this game by combining the perspective of cultural power game. The core viewpoints are: firstly, China's game industry breaks through the western dominated "game hegemony" system through technology accumulation and capital empowerment, and promotes the reconstruction of global industrial chain power; secondly, Black Myth transforms Chinese traditional symbols into international consumption symbols through the strategy of cultural capitalization, which forms a new type of cultural soft power. Secondly, "Black Myth" transforms Chinese traditional symbols into international consumption symbols with the strategy of "cultural capitalization", forming a new type of cultural soft power output mode; thirdly, the synergistic effect of national strategy and capital logic accelerates the transformation of China's role from a "marginal substitute worker" to a "rule maker". In the future, China's game industry needs to balance cultural sovereignty and globalization demand, and build a new industrial ecology of "technology-culture-commerce".

Keywords:

black myth: Wukong; hegemonic stabilization; cultural capital theory; cultural power

On August 20, 2024, the domestic 3A game Black Myth: Wukong (hereinafter referred to as Black Myth) was officially launched and quickly became the focus of the whole network. This domestic single-host game based on the Chinese classical literary masterpiece Journey to the West, was online for three days, and the whole platform sold more than 10 million sets [1], and as of August 24, 2024, the highest number of simultaneous online people recorded by SteamDB was 2.87 million. [2] As of January 3, 2025, Steam sales reached 21.4 million copies, revenue of $1 billion (about 7.2 billion yuan), the game pushed the 2024 Chinese single-player/host market up 398.5% year-on-year [3], and became a phenomenal work in the history of domestic games. At the same time, the game's performance overseas is also quite outstanding, not only in North America, Europe and other places with strong sales, but also won the TGA2024 "Best Action Game" and "Voice of the Player" awards [4]. It has become the first domestic 3A game to be ranked among the world's top games. The breakthrough of "Black Myth" to the "game hegemony" dominated by the West marks the paradigm shift of China's game industry from "dependent growth" to "innovation-led". This paper examines the political economy logic behind the explosion of Black Myth, with a view to shedding light on the Chinese game industry and Chinese cultural industry.

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1.Technology integration and capitalization strategy

The research and development process of The Black Myth deeply embodies the transnational flow of technology and capital in the era of globalization, and its mode of cooperation not only follows the law of international division of labor, but also breaks the traditional relationship of dependence through independent innovation, demonstrating the progressive path of developing countries' participation in the global industrial chain.

In terms of technology, "Black Myth" adopts the Unreal Engine 5 (UE5) of the American Epic Company as its technical base, but it is not a passive acceptance of the standard tool chain, but rather, it is optimized for the depth of the traditional Chinese cultural scene, and realizes the integration of technology from dependence to symbiosis: For example, using Nanite technology to reconstruct ancient buildings, the cultural heritage of Shanxi Yingxian Wooden Pagoda and Dunhuang wall paintings were laser scanned at millimeter scale, and the "Oriental Ancient Architecture Virtual Asset Library" was established, so that the geometric details natively supported by UE5 could be shifted from Western Gothic architecture to Oriental wooden architecture; for instance, the team made the game characters and environment follow the laws of physics authentically and enhance the game through high-precision physical simulations, including dynamics, collision detection, soft body and fluid simulation,which enhancing the immersion and realism of the game [6]. There is also a win-win cooperation model with NVIDIA, which provides advanced graphic technology support for Black Myth, especially the use of Ray Tracing and DLSS (Deep Learning Super Sampling) technology to make the game more realistic and layered, especially in the details of light and shadow effects, reflections and shadows. NVIDIA is also helping Black Myth expand its reach through its global marketing channels. In some markets, NVIDIA even bundled Black Myth with its new graphics cards. [7]

In terms of capital operation, "Black Myth" took the sovereign fund and venture capital game coexisting way, for example, in the design of the equity structure, Tencent's 5% participation, so that the "game of science" not only to obtain the WeChat, QQ traffic entrance (to enhance the conversion rate of the pre-purchase stage to achieve accurate exposure), but also through the restriction of the board of directors seats to avoid Creative interference, to maintain the control of "cultural sovereignty" [8]; Hangzhou Municipal Government to provide special funds, industrial policies, talent services, etc., "Black Myth" is not only one of the 40 high-quality projects selected for support by Hangzhou Animation and Game Industry Special Funds in 2022, but also enjoys tax incentives and R & D expenses plus deduction, involving an amount of more than 28 million yuan. This kind of support not only reduces the pressure of development costs, but is also extremely important for the construction of the company's relationship with the local government [9]. According to the 2024 China Game Industry Report [10], in 2024, China's self-developed game overseas market actual sales revenue of $18.557 billion, an increase of 13.39% year-on-year, and its scale has exceeded 100 billion yuan for five consecutive years and hit a new high, in which the Black Myth contributes significantly. This chain of technological product output, international capital linkage, and market revenue return demonstrates the possibility for developing country enterprises to utilize global capital to feed local industry upgrading.

This model of global cooperation proves that the key to breaking through the "periphery-center" structure of developing countries' cultural products lies in transforming technological dependence in the international division of labor into knowledge symbiosis, and transforming cultural differences into capital bargaining

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power. This strategy of "taking the lead and utilizing the world for our own use" provides a new paradigm for late-developing countries to participate in the competition for high-tech cultural industries.

2.Cultural Capitalization and Innovative Expression Strategies

Cultural capitalization is derived from Bourdieu's sociological theory and refers to the process of transforming cultural resources into exchangeable and value-added economic and social capital. Its core lies in the commodification and value reproduction of cultural symbols. For a long time, the Western cultural hegemony has monopolized the narrative framework (e.g. the structure of "Hero's Journey") and aesthetic standards (e.g. the Gothic fantasy style) in the field of games. By systematically reconstructing traditional Chinese cultural symbols, Black Myth constructs a complete set of oriental mythological narrative system, breaking this monopoly.

2.1 Modernizing the coding of mythological genealogies

The Monkey King is a familiar hero in East Asian civilizations, but the Black Myth deconstructs him from a "Buddha" to a tragic hero who rebels against his destiny. His golden rod is given the metaphor of "shackles" (which are unlocked through battle in the plot), echoing existentialist philosophy's exploration of free will, which is similar to that of Kratos in the Western God of War series (Note: Kratos, as the central character of Sony's God of War series, is one of the most contradictory and growing characters in video game history.He is both a violent avatar cursed by divinity and a symbol of fatherly love and redemption. His characterization breaks the framework of the traditional hero narrative, showing the struggle and awakening of humanity under the yoke of divinity through the intersection of the dual mythological systems of Greek and Norse.) The 87 version of Journey to the West is also a childhood memory for the 80s and 90s, and the characters in the play are fun and interesting, but it is interesting to see how Black Myth deconstructs the classic symbols and injects them into the modern narrative. For example, the Monkey King retains his iconic gold band and fiery eyes, but adds the bestial characteristics of fangs and vertical pupils, and the dynamic effects of battle scars and hair reinforce his wild qualities; Piggy was designed in a semi-corrupted state, and the nine-toothed nail rake was integrated into the bronze Taotie pattern, reflecting the struggle of being eroded by demonic energy. The transformation of monsters is not only a visual and technological innovation, but also a deep experiment in cultural translation.[11]

2.2 Technology Enabled Narrative: Breaking Cultural Discounts with Hardcore Technology

Cultural Discount is a major obstacle to the international dissemination of cultural products from developing countries. Through technological breakthroughs, The Black Myth transforms "cultural differences" into "technological premiums", realizing the leap from "passive interpretation" to "active conquest".The most core asset and experience of action games is the beautiful and smooth fighting scene, and "Black Myth" cooperates with Shaolin Temple to establish the "strength of muscles and bones" of traditional martial arts reproduced through motion capture technology, combined with the particle effects of the Unreal Engine 5, "Monkey Fist", "Monkey Stick" and other non-heritage skills are transformed into interactive digital assets, which makes

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motion capture revolutionized and player experience amazing [12]. In addition, "Black Myth" has added six dialect dubbing options, including Cantonese and Southern Fujian, and embedded "Peony Pavilion" singing in NPC dialogues, as well as Shaanbei storytelling, which has also amazed overseas players. Many foreign players choose the "dialect + English subtitles" mode to increase the cultural experience and feel the original Chinese characteristics [13]. This kind of interactive design of cultural immersion brings people a refreshing visual spectacle.

2.3 Fusion of universal values: implanting global resonance in an oriental shell

Black Myths avoids falling into the trap of "cultural essentialism", and instead transforms Chinese philosophical thinking into modern issues that resonate with global youth culture, which is the core of its breakthrough. On the surface, the Monkey King's fight against the oppression of the Heavenly Court meets Western players' expectations of "individual heroism",but in fact, it covers a deeper metaphor: the Heavenly Court is designed as an algorithm-controlled "order matrix" (with a giant chain of gossip codes floating in the scene), alluding to the confrontation between individuals and algorithms in the digital age, and triggering the resonance of Generation Z to the alienation of technology. It is also worth mentioning that the game provides "oriental solutions" to ethical dilemmas, such as: the player's combat choices affect the "karma value", and a high karma value triggers the "Earth Store Bodhisattva's Robbery" plot, which introduces the karma system into the Buddhist storyline. This karma system introduces the Buddhist concept of reincarnation as a reflection on the aesthetics of violence, which is a cultural contrast to the honor system of Wild Dart 2. The multiple ending mechanism is also an interesting setting. Black Myth unlocks different endings through 81 difficult levels, including the "Broken Golden Hoop" ending where the Monkey King chooses to self-destruct in order to terminate the cycle of destiny, echoing Camus's philosophy of dystopia.IGN described it as "a profoundly Chinese mythological story". [14]

2.4 Innovative communication strategies: deconstructing cultural hegemony through the logic of play

Chuanli Media, which is responsible for the media distribution and content dissemination of Black Myth in North America, South America, Europe, Asia and other countries and regions involving nine languages, has always regarded the game's combat experience as a marketing priority, and has established the theme of "Immortals fighting, each showing their own skills".The game also emphasizes resource allocation and strategic battles, with players and bosses showing off their skills, and has different spell systems for different immortals and monsters, encouraging players to find their own tricks to get through the game. The person in charge pointed out that "the essence of content marketing lies in ecological co-creation, the marketer only needs to act as the person who throws out the 'hook' and guides the direction, and the influence of the final product is often formed in multiple rounds of spontaneous dissemination by users" [15]. It can be seen that the dissemination of Black Myth is not a simple output of cultural symbols, but a reconstruction of cultural discourse through the game mechanism.

The success of The Black Myth proves that resisting Western cultural hegemony is not about building opposing walls, but about using technology as a spear and culture as a shield to reconstruct the rules of discourse in the context of globalized collaboration:

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(1) Technical autonomy: using hardcore R&D to turn cultural differences into technical barriers.

(2) Narrative initiative: implanting oriental philosophy in the universal framework, so that cultural output can shift from "being watched" to "being needed".

(3) The right to formulate rules: through the innovation of gameplay, players will spontaneously understand and follow the rules of the game, realizing the leap from "participant" to "definer".

This strategy of "taking me as the base and transforming others into use" provides a new paradigm for developing countries to break through cultural hegemony - the struggle for cultural sovereignty is essentially a race to transform local knowledge into global public goods.

3.National Strategy and Capital Logic Synergy Strategy

3.1 Policy Empowerment under National Strategic Orientation

At the national level, since the 13th Five-Year Plan, the game industry has been explicitly included in the strategic framework of a strong cultural country, emphasizing the "enhancement of core competitiveness and cultural output capacity". [16] Black Myth fits the "orientation of promoting the creative transformation of outstanding traditional Chinese culture" [17] by deeply exploring the IP of Journey to the West. At the local level, Hangzhou has iteratively launched six rounds of animation and game industry policies since 2005, and the 2022 Opinions on Promoting the High-Quality Development of Hangzhou's Animation, Game, and Esports Industries in the New Era explicitly allocates 100 million yuan of special funds each year to support high-quality projects. The Black Myth was selected as one of the 40 high-quality projects supported by Hangzhou's special funds for animation and games in 2022, and received a double boost from funds and policy endorsement. In addition, the game adopts Unreal Engine V to achieve technological breakthroughs, responding to the "overall layout plan for the construction of digital China" in the "accelerate independent innovation, at the basic level to occupy the dominant right to international competition" [18]. The accumulation of 3D modeling, dynamic global illumination and other technologies involved in its development process indirectly promotes the enhancement of local game engine R&D capability, which is in line with the national goal of cultivating "new quality productivity.

3.2 Business model innovation driven by capital logic

The equity design of Black Myth embodies the "founder-led + strategic investment" model: founder Feng Ji holds 38.76% of the shares, while Tencent and Hero HUB hold 5% and 19% of the shares, respectively [19]. This structure not only guarantees the team's long-term control over the project (avoiding short-term profit-seeking interference), but also reduces development risks by introducing industrial capital (Tencent This structure not only protects the team's long-term control over the project (avoiding short-term profit-making interference), but also reduces development risks by introducing industrial capital (Tencent provides distribution channels and Hero HUB injects funds). The company adopts the "dual-track system" [20] of "Shenzhen team develops hand game profit, Hangzhou team focuses on 3A research and development", to support the long-cycle investment of "Black Myth" with hand game cash flow, and realize the maximization of capital efficiency. In addition to the traditional buyout system sales revenue, "Black Myth" through the IP authori-

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zation (co-branded handle, monitor and other hardware), peripheral development (physical collection of presale of more than 1 million people) and cultural and tourism linkage (restore the ancient architecture to attract cultural consumption) to build the income matrix.This business model of "content+derivative+scene" not only meets the demand of capital for diversified income, but also resonates with the national strategy of "promoting the integration of digital technology with the real economy".

4.Implications for the International Expansion of China's Game Industry

4.1 National level: building a "policy-mechanism-ecology" trinity support system

4.1.1Policy innovation: from industrial support to strategic empowerment

Referring to the Hangzhou Digital Culture and Technology Integration Fund model, the State can set up a 100-billion-dollar cultural industry guiding fund, and implement tax leverage for projects that have the potential for technological breakthroughs. For example, a certain percentage of income tax will be reduced or exempted for enterprises using their own engines, forcing them to get rid of their dependence on imported technology.

4.1.2Mechanical Breakthroughs: Games as a New Paradigm for Cultural Diplomacy

After the explosion of Black Myth, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly congratulated and said that the game reflects the attractiveness of Chinese culture [21]. Games use entertainment as an entry point to reduce the confrontational nature of cultural output, and are an important vehicle for cultural dissemination. Carrying out cultural penetration through game Mod (module) (Note: game modding is the behavior of players or developers to create new experiences by modifying game code, assets or mechanisms, the core of which lies in the openness and creativity of user-generated content (UGC)) Modules can be classified into the types of content modules (e.g., new maps, roles), gameplay modules (e.g., mechanic adjustments), and graphic modules),. Construct a game track two diplomacy mechanism (Note: track two diplomacy is a mechanism to promote cross-cultural dialogue through unofficial channels (e.g., scholars, think tanks, and civil society organizations), which centers on trust building and flexible narratives. The advantages of game modules as Track II diplomacy modules are depoliticization and participatory co-creation). For example, the "Zheng He's Journey to the West" map template is preset in the editor of Black Myth, and the content created by overseas players automatically carries the scenes of Fujian Tulou and Mazu Temple, which indirectly spreads the narrative of Chinese history. The two-track diplomacy mechanism constructed through the module is essentially a shift in cultural communication from "one-way output" to "participatory dialog". Players recode cultural symbols in their creations, forming a "middle layer" of cross-cultural understanding, while developers guide the narrative direction through tool support and community operation. It is foreseeable that game modules may become one of the core fields of global civilization mutual understanding.

4.1.3Eco-cultivation: Cracking the structural contradiction between government and capital

Following the example of "Black Myth" on the use of capital, at the same time, the government can guide

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the fund to adopt the "cultural export bet" mode: if the enterprise achieves a certain amount of overseas revenue share , it can convert the debt into a zero-interest loan; if it fails to meet the target, it needs to compensate with intellectual property pledges. This mechanism forces enterprises to globalize from the early stages of their projects.

4.2 Enterprise level: building the "technology-culture-commerce" triangle of competitiveness

4.2.1Technology R&D: Breaking technological hegemony with vertical innovation

Following the example of "Black Myth" in the deep transformation of engine tools (such as the "Orientalization" reconstruction of Unreal Engine 5), the establishment of a global digital asset library of oriental architecture, and the assetization of cultural data into a technological barrier, domestic cultural enterprises can also use technological means to hedge against geopolitical risks. Intellectual property rights (such as algorithms, IP) localized storage, non-core modules global subcontracting, with distributed collaboration and agile development of the production paradigm to build a global industrial chain.

4.2.2Cultural expression: building a "playable cultural meta-language"

For a long time, domestic cultural enterprises have fallen into the trap of "cultural fundamentalism", but the breakthrough of "Black Myth" reflects the paradigm of embracing creative transformation with an open attitude - the more national, the more need to speak in a way that the world understands. Only by transforming cultural confidence into "interactive experience, sympathetic story, and participatory ecology" can we truly break the "cultural discount" and grasp the right to speak in the competition of globalization.

4.2.3Business strategy: redefining the business logic of cultural products

The business strategy innovation of Black Myth reveals three core logics: firstly, it shifts from "enterprise-defined value" to "user-created value", allowing players to become content producers and dissemination nodes; secondly, it breaks the boundaries of games, movies and entities, and builds a cross-media, cross-virtual and real economic community; finally, it maintains growth resilience in the midst of uncertainty through data intelligence and distributed architecture. Therefore, domestic cultural enterprises need to jump out of the traditional path of "traffic buying" or "channel dependence", and take technology-enabled decision-making, culture-activated community, and ecological expansion of boundaries as the strategic fulcrum, so as to realize the transition from "product going to sea" to "ecological expansion of boundaries" in the globalization competition.

5.Summary

To sum up, the success of Black Myth proves that in the digital era, the competition for cultural sovereignty has been upgraded from a "symbolic war" to a composite game of "technology-narrative-rule", in which the state needs to play the role of "system architect", transforming cultural advantages into traditional power through institutional innovation, while enterprises need to become "tactical commandos", tearing open market gaps with cutting-edge technologies and reconstructing cultural cognition with modern narratives. The

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synergy of the two will promote China's cultural industry from the "marginal subcontractor" to the "rule maker" leap, the significance of which is no less than the Japanese animation in the 1990s on the subversion of the global cultural order. In the future, the game of great powers will no longer be a competition of individual products, but a duel between national capacity and the ecosystem of corporate innovation.

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