The Global Circulation of Cultural IP: A Comparative Study of the Cross-Cultural Communication Mechanisms of Sun Wukong in China and Japan

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Abstract. Whether it's Flower-Fruit Mountain, the somersault cloud, the golden cudgel, or the seventy-two transformations, Sun Wukong has always gone beyond the scope of the classic and become one of the most popular symbolic characters in Chinese culture. With the advent of the digital age, this number has also become part of a broader circulation around the world. This article discusses two influential lines of Wukong-related cultural IP: the Japanese reconstruction (Dragon Ball) and the Chinese digital reconstruction (Black Myth: Wukong). The study asserts that the two trajectories have different communication logics based on cultural identity theory and cultural discount theory with the comparative case analysis. Chinese Wukong IP tends to emphasize cultural continuity, cultural memory, cultural philosophy, and cultural identity consolidation and then minimize cultural discount with technology mediation, immersion design and participatory interpretation. By contrast, Japanese Wukong related IP seems to be more likely to overcome cultural boundaries by detaching itself from received symbols, streamlining story frameworks, and highlighting values that are understandable around the world: growth, battle, friendship, protection. This reduces the discounting approach, allowing the sign to spread all over the world, but also reducing the cultural density of the original sign. The comparison uncovers a tension between the cultural subjectivity and the market legibility. In order to counteract this tension, the article suggests a transition from one-way cultural export to participatory cultural circulation in which the overseas audience is integrated into fan communities, user-generated content and negotiated interpretation. It is therefore desirable for the internationalization of the Chinese cultural IP to maintain cultural roots and establish open mechanisms to sustain the gradual and continuous internationalization process and avoid the initial misunderstanding.

Keywords: Black Myth: Wukong, Dragon Ball, Sun Wukong, cultural IP, cultural identity, cultural discount, cross-cultural communication, user-generated content.

1. Introduction

Digital transformation of the cultural industries is now a key policy and industrial agenda in today's China. Recently, the country's cultural resources have been digitized and traditional culture has been creatively converted and innovatively developed [2] [3]; cultural communication capacity of China has also been enhanced. In this wider perspective digital games can no longer be considered only as entertainment commodities. They have become more and more a cultural medium for the remodulation of history, mythic imagination, and national discourses for new generations of users and for a global public. In the process of policy discussions on the high-quality development of the game industry, the contents of the games have also been proposed to be beyond entertaining, and are important bearers of cultural value and historical memory, as well as the stimulators of creative imagination [4]. This change renders the game industry twofold: it is not only a new digital economy but also a new cultural communication area.

Black Myth: Wukong should be understood against this background. Based on Journey to the West, one of the four great classical novels of China, the game does not merely reuse a famous literary character for commercial visibility. Rather, it attempts to reconstruct a Chinese mythological universe through contemporary audiovisual technology, interactive storytelling, and high-intensity player immersion. Its global exposure demonstrates that traditional cultural resources can be reactivated by digital media and converted into cultural products with international appeal. More importantly, the

case raises a deeper question: in a platformized and globalized media environment, how should China narrate stories that originate from its own cultural tradition? Should these stories be simplified in order to move more easily across cultures, or should they preserve their high-context symbolic density and invite foreign audiences to approach a different cultural logic?

This question will be quite vivid when juxtaposing Black Myth: Wukong and Japanese versions and re-productions of Journey to the West like Dragon Ball. The wide-spread motifs of the tail, staff, cloud, martial-arts journey and the name Son Goku are all Wukong tradition motifs that are borrowed in Dragon Ball. But it presents for the most part these motifs without their original religious, bureaucratic, ethical and philosophical framework in the Chinese text. Through the Japanese work, Wukong is made into a global shonen hero whose significance is framed around fights, transcending himself, friendship and protecting his comrade(s). In contrast, Chinese productions like Monkey King: Hero Is Back and Black Myth: Wukong maintain greater connections to classical textual memory, Chinese mythological aesthetics, and philosophical themes dealing with destiny, cultivation, reincarnation, rebellion, moral order. The two ways render two versions of Wukong and generates two types of global reception.

The comparison is significant because it demonstrates the fluidity and volatility of cultural IP. A cultural sign is not a pure one. If the symbol transgresses linguistic, industrial and national boundaries, it is selected, reorganized, simplified, translated and even metamorphosed, until it is unrecognizable. Sun Wukong is particularly apt for this kind of analysis as he is at once literary, mythological, animated, a game character, commercial, and a transnational popular-culture sign. Throughout Chinese history, Wukong has always been linked to revolt against authority, extraordinary wisdom, supernatural strength, humorous vitality, and ultimately the tabling of the unruly desire. In Japan and subsequently popular culture, the Wukong-related elements have been reconceptualized into new narrative systems which are not necessarily linked to the cultural logic of Journey to the West.

This article therefore adopts a comparative case-study approach. It combines textual analysis, industrial comparison, and cultural-theoretical interpretation to examine how Sun Wukong has been reconstructed in China and Japan. The study focuses on three questions. First, how do Chinese and Japanese Wukong-related IPs differ in visual design, narrative structure, symbolic meaning, and industrial operation? Second, how can cultural identity theory and cultural discount theory explain the different communication effects of these two trajectories? Third, what strategic lessons can be drawn for the global circulation of Chinese cultural IP in the digital era?

The article does not aim to establish a simple hierarchy between the Chinese and Japanese models. Dragon Ball's success shows that a low-discount strategy can significantly increase the global circulation of cultural signs, while Black Myth: Wukong demonstrates that cultural thickness can also become an attraction when it is supported by strong audiovisual technology, gameplay design, and participatory interpretation. The core argument is that the internationalization of Chinese cultural IP should not be understood as a choice between authenticity and accessibility. Rather, it should be constructed as a dynamic balance between cultural subjectivity and global legibility. In this sense, the global circulation of Wukong is not merely a story of adaptation. It is a test case for how digital China can tell stories that are culturally rooted, technologically advanced, and open to cross-cultural negotiation [1].

2. Wukong IP and Divergent Industrial Logics

Sun Wukong is from the same literary and mythological source, but has been repackaged as quite distinct cultural product in both China and Japan. The character is typically constrained in Chinese adaptations to be associated with Journey to the West and the image of the character that has been accumulated through novels, picture books, animation, opera, television drama, film, and games. The golden chainmail armor, phoenix-winged crown, cloud-walking boots and Ruyi Jingu Bang are not just outer decorations. They are compressed cultural symbols which trigger the viewers' memory of the "Monkey King" as an entity in Chinese mythological universe [8]. Wukong is a

divine-animal-human hybrid, a rebellious hero, a disciplined pilgrim, and a bearer of complicated moral and philosophical meanings, even when this character is remade for new media.

Unless they are familiar with Chinese mythological aesthetics, the classical depiction of the appearance and movements of Sun Wukong's face, body, and gestures may seem unappealing. But to Chinese viewers, the “hairy face and thunder-god mouth” doesn't pose a problem in identification. It is part of a larger visual tradition, in which gods, demons, spirits and heroic figures appear in extraordinary ways. The hero doesn't have to fit in with today's idea of what a hero looks like. Rather, the body that is unusual becomes a symbol of power and liminality. The image of Wukong has been a shared cultural memory in some media, including the 1986 TV adaptation of Journey to the West. Thus in later works such as Monkey King: Hero Is Back and Black Myth: Wukong, the memory can be mobilised even if the tone of the story or the technology is altered.

In Dragon Ball, it's a whole other story. There are a few individual markers that are kept and employed by Akira Toriyama's Son Goku, but they're put together in the industrial grammar of Japanese manga and anime. The main character is dressed in martial-arts attire, has spiky hair, and is thrust into a world of training, tournaments, increasing fights, physical changes and serial adventures. The monkey-like and divine aspects of the Chinese original are either diminished or sublimated and the shonen notion of growth and competition prevails. The result is an easily accessible protagonist to readers of all ages around the world who have never interacted with Journey to the West [9]. Goku is a “blank” mobile hero: familiar to be imprinted by Wukong, abstracted to be mobile.

This contrast in character design suggests that there is a greater difference among industries. The first step of Wukong IP is to unite China's inner cultural identity. It requires the reader to have an understanding of the basic context of the Chinese written tradition, the logic of myth and the vocabulary of the philosophy. The emotional impact of the work is partially a function of the audience's knowledge of inherited sign. For the Chinese viewers, the golden cudgel, the somersault cloud, the Heavenly Court, the mountain temple or the motif of fate are not isolated props. They come across multiple cultural memories. These memories generate emotional resonance, as well as a high level of interpretive threshold for foreign viewers.

By contrast, IP related to Japanese Wukong starts many times in reducing cultural barriers [11]. Dragon Ball makes the search for scripture into a worldwide story of self-betterment, fighting, companionship and guardianship. It substitutes adventure for religious pilgrimage, power relations of master and disciple into companionship, and the visible and measurable power growth as audience structuring. This kind of story is less difficult to understand, because it uses prevalent, modern values instead of high-context religious/philosophical values. The viewers do not have to be familiar with Buddhist cosmology, Daoist philosophy or the bureaucratic metaphor of the Heavenly Court. They just have to know that the main character practices, fights tougher enemies, saves friends and goes beyond his/her abilities.

The distinction, on the level of industrial operation, is equally apparent. Dragon Ball now has a fully grown transmedia empire that includes not only the manga, animations and movie but also video games, toys, collectibles, international broadcast and fan works. It is easily merchandised, repeatable and simple in cultural signs. The characters, the transformation, the gestures and the power system of the franchise can be repurposed in the other media and markets. The result of this industrial design is a low-discount flow of culture products: the meanings of the products are not affected much by the shift of the objects across borders and they are de-contextualized and standardized to begin with [10].

Chinese Wukong has a strength and limitation. It has a strong cultural density. These games – Monkey King: Hero Is Back and Black Myth: Wukong – can offer foreign audiences what other fantasy video games in the world cannot easily be changed: an ambiance unique to China, unfamiliar system of gods and demons, philosophical themes of destiny and self-cultivation, and visual aesthetics of the Buddhist, the Daoist, the folk and the classical literary tradition. This is where it's weak, it's difficult to interpret. Cultural discount is more likely to occur in international markets the more unique the cultural level of a work. Symbols can catch and grasp attention of foreign audiences, and the symbolic logic which gives meaning to these images may not be easily understood [12].

It is not just a question of two different graphic designs, then, between Chinese and Japanese Wukong IP. It is a double representation of strategies of two cultures. The starting point of one approach is identity, memory and cultural subjectivity, and then towards global communication. Another begins with market legibility, with low cultural barriers and slowly introduces cultural elements. The first is likely to be hard to interpret; the second is likely to become thin symbolically. This is the structure of the tension which determines Wukong's destiny in the world.

3. Theoretical Perspective: Cultural Identity and Cultural Discount

3.1. Cultural identity and the Chinese logic of Wukong IP

Cultural identity refers to the sense of belonging through which individuals and communities recognize themselves in relation to shared history, values, symbols, narratives, and practices. At the level of cultural products, identity is not only expressed through explicit themes. It is also embedded in visual style, narrative structure, character relations, moral evaluation, ritual behavior, and symbolic detail. Sun Wukong is one of the most powerful identity-bearing figures in Chinese culture because he condenses multiple meanings at once: rebellion and discipline, freedom and responsibility, animal vitality and spiritual cultivation, comic irreverence and heroic justice.

In Chinese cultural memory, Wukong has never been only a fictional character. From the Ming-Qing novel tradition to picture books, from the 1961 animation Havoc in Heaven to the 1986 television drama, the figure has gradually become a national cultural archetype. He embodies extraordinary intelligence, resistance to oppressive order, the courage to fight evil, and a complex fusion of animal nature, divine power, and human emotion [13]. This composite identity explains why Chinese adaptations often insist on retaining his recognizable form. If Wukong were fully detached from the visual and moral grammar of Journey to the West, he would lose the cultural density that makes him meaningful to domestic audiences [14].

This identity logic also explains why Chinese Wukong-related products often respond to national cultural strategy. In the contemporary policy context, the construction and global communication of cultural IP are linked to the broader goals of cultural confidence, creative transformation, and international discourse capacity [5-7]. Sun Wukong is a highly recognizable symbol for China’s cultural presence overseas. The question of how Wukong is represented is therefore not only an artistic or commercial question; it is also related to how Chinese culture is encoded, translated, and received in global media environments [16]. The image of Wukong becomes a carrier of cultural subjectivity.

But the very characteristics that promote identity can also create communicative challenges. As regards to the cultural dimension, Chinese culture could be considered as 'high-context' culture, as a lot of meaning is conveyed in the way of implicit reference, shared memories, ritual codes and historically accumulated associations [18]. This is a very high-context system, and it is essential for the Chinese Wukong figure. The Heavenly Court hints at bureaucratic hierarchy, the journey to the West hints at Buddhist cultivation and testing; and Karma, reincarnation, fate and enlightenment play a deeper logic of action, even small actions may have a ritual significance. These signs can be easily understood by domestic viewers. They can be confusing to those outside of their country.

Black Myth: Wukong is a good illustration. The ritual of saving a point by using the incense holding space, the body gestures and the temple space may be instantly familiar to a Chinese player within the cultural imagination of ritualization. It can convey respect, purification, spiritual connection or the relationship between living and sacred. For those not familiar with the cultural context, however, the same scene can be a visually interesting but semantically vague game mechanic. This is not due to technical failure. It is generated by the mismatch of a high-context (HC) symbolic system and a lower-context (LC) reception environment. As such, cultural identity and cultural discount are linked, with the more powerful cultural encoding, the more there may be a potential interpretive distance.

The Japanese reworking of Wukong further reveals this problem. When Chinese cultural signs are transformed by another cultural industry, they may gain wider visibility while losing part of their original meaning [19]. The golden cudgel, originally the Dragon Palace's stabilizing pillar and a symbol of both power and restraint, may become simply a magical extending staff. The somersault cloud, linked to supernatural mobility and Daoist imagination, may become only a transportation device. The symbol remains visible, but the cultural system that supports it is weakened. This does not mean that all adaptation is illegitimate; rather, it shows that cultural signs are vulnerable to functionalization when they enter global media industries.

The cultural logic of Chinese Wukong IP therefore contains an internal paradox. The more it preserves the thick symbolic structure of Journey to the West, the more it consolidates domestic cultural identity and cultural subjectivity. Yet the same thickness may slow down its global decoding and increase cultural discount. The central challenge is not to abandon cultural thickness, but to design communication mechanisms that help global audiences enter it.

3.2. Cultural discount and the Japanese market logic

Cultural discount theory explains why cultural products often lose value when they move from one cultural context to another. A product deeply embedded in local history, language, humor, values, rituals, or social experience may strongly attract domestic audiences but become harder for foreign audiences to understand. In global cultural industries, producers often try to reduce cultural discount by simplifying local references, emphasizing universal emotions, standardizing narrative patterns, and creating portable visual signs.

Dragon Ball can be understood as a successful low-discount reconstruction of Wukong-related materials. Rather than preserving the full philosophical and religious complexity of Journey to the West, it extracts selected motifs and reassembles them in a modern adventure framework. The result is a story that international audiences can understand through everyday modern experience: a young hero trains, makes friends, encounters rivals, protects loved ones, and defeats increasingly powerful enemies. The cultural threshold is low because the narrative does not require deep familiarity with Chinese classical literature. Its values are also easily transferable: courage, loyalty, perseverance, rivalry, and self-transcendence.

This can be seen particularly in the case of Dragon Ball, which is de-territorialized. There is a cultural background to the work; de-territorialisation does not imply that there is none. Instead, it implies some of the aspects of the Chinese cultural symbols, often considered to be "signs," are removed and so they are placed into a more general fantasy-martial-arts universe [20]. The tail, the staff and the cloud create a loose connection with Wukong with the name Son Goku. But in the world of Dragon Ball there is no moral structure of Buddhist pilgrimage or bureaucratic structure of the Heavenly Court. It's structured around martial contests, technological fantasy and alien origins and increasingly powerful systems. With this reorganization, the character is much more accessible to the international market.

Meanwhile, Dragon Ball doesn't take Asian cultural elements off the map. It features martial-arts poses, attire, architecture, and food culture, as well as Chinese and Japanese aesthetics. But these elements are placed in such a manner that they don't need cultural explanation. They are used as atmospheric, stylistic and narrational devices but not like heavy cultural codes. This selective incorporation is part of what makes this piece traveling. It provides enough variation so that it will interest the readers of the world, but not so much that they have to work hard to understand.

The industrial implications are significant. Once the Wukong-related hero is transformed into a low-discount figure, he can move easily across media and markets. Dragon Ball's power transformations, iconic attacks, tournament arcs, character rivalries, and collectible forms are highly suitable for serial production and commercial extension. The franchise's value is not limited to the original manga or animation. It expands through games, toys, films, online discussion, cosplay, fan art, and global communities. The character becomes a modular sign that can be repeatedly consumed and recreated.

Yet this success also has a cost. The low-discount strategy reduces interpretive difficulty by thinning the original cultural density. In Dragon Ball, Wukong is no longer primarily a Chinese mythological figure shaped by rebellion against Heaven, religious discipline, and the journey toward enlightenment. He becomes a heroic body of growth and combat. The philosophical tensions of Journey to the West are largely replaced by the affective pleasures of battle, friendship, and self-overcoming. From the perspective of global market circulation, this is an advantage. From the perspective of cultural subjectivity, it can be seen as a displacement of meaning.

Therefore, cultural discount theory helps explain why the Japanese trajectory achieved such wide global diffusion. It reduced the obstacles that often hinder the international circulation of culturally specific products. However, cultural identity theory helps explain why this diffusion cannot be treated as a complete substitute for Chinese cultural communication. A Wukong who circulates widely after being detached from Chinese cultural logic does not necessarily increase global understanding of the Chinese Wukong. The challenge for China is to create a different path: one that does not simply imitate low-discount de-contextualization, but learns from its communicative efficiency while preserving cultural depth.

3.3. The tension between identity consolidation and market legibility

The Chinese and Japanese cases reveal a tension common to many cultural products in globalization. Cultural identity requires continuity, specificity, and symbolic depth. Market legibility requires accessibility, emotional immediacy, and low decoding cost. If a cultural product is too deeply embedded in its original context, foreign audiences may find it difficult to enter. If it is too aggressively simplified, it may circulate widely but lose the very cultural uniqueness that makes it valuable.

Sun Wukong stands precisely at this intersection. Chinese Wukong IP gains its force from cultural memory, but it must cross cultural boundaries. Japanese Wukong-related IP gains global reach by reducing cultural density, but it weakens the original symbolic system. The global future of Chinese Wukong IP depends on whether it can move beyond this binary. Instead of choosing between cultural enclosure and cultural flattening, it must construct mechanisms through which global audiences can gradually learn, discuss, reinterpret, and co-produce meaning.

4. Case Analysis

4.1. Monkey King: Hero Is Back and the contemporary practice of cultural identity

Monkey King: Hero Is Back marked an important moment in the modernization of Chinese Wukong IP. The film brought the Monkey King back into domestic popular culture through a cinematic language that combined familiar mythological signs with a contemporary emotional structure. Its Wukong is not simply the invincible Great Sage of collective memory. He is a damaged and temporarily powerless hero who must rediscover his responsibility, courage, and selfhood. This narrative allows the classical image to be humanized without completely severing it from inherited cultural meaning[21].

Success of the film is in its capacity to mobilise cultural identity through affect. Recognizing the image of Wukong, domestic audiences were also asked to experience Wukong's vulnerability, frustration and recovery. Thus the work became the memory of culture and the identification of emotion. This was not a film that demanded viewers to immerse themselves in the entire philosophical framework of Journey to the West, but rather to bring them back to a cultural archetype that they were familiar with, via a more accessible heroic mode of storytelling. In this respect it is a kind of cross section between traditionally understood cultural identity and contemporary market-driven story-telling.

Cultural discount is also not an absolute barrier, as demonstrated by the case. The movie was well-received even by some of the foreign fans without the full understanding of the culture. They had insight into how to feel loss, how to protect and how to be a hero in a heroic return. That indicates

that Chinese Wukong IP might be able to go beyond the Chinese audience, if it could create connections between high-context symbols and easily understandable emotions. But the film's global reach was not as far-reaching as Dragon Ball's as the transmedia environment and the community of fans in the country was not as robust.

4.2. Black Myth: Wukong and the double test of cultural depth and interpretive threshold

Black Myth: Wukong is the latest and most technologically sophisticated globalisation of Chinese Wukong IP via a digital game. The game does not rely on the familiarity of Wukong as a character to be borrowed from, but builds upon a greater mythological Chinese world. Various elements of its visual world are represented, such as ruined temples, landscapes of the mountains, figures of the demon and the Buddhist and Daoist ambience, ritual objects and historical decay. The result is a rich cultural landscape that is not just a Chinese story, but a mythological space in which the player is able to move.

The significance of the game is that it doesn't take Chinese culture and just make it into a pretty little accessory. While many products from around the world use non-Western themes as a canvas for exotic decoration, Black Myth: Wukong tries to build a Chinese aesthetic and narrative thoroughness into its world. The fractured temples, the ruins of the gods, the design of monsters, the ritual movements and the destination signify cultural thickness. The player is not only faced with a protagonist, but with symbolic ecology as well. It is for this reason that the game can be viewed as self-translation of Wukong's culture from its source, rather than mimicry of previous foreign translations of Wukong.

This cultural thickness, at the same time, gives rise to a greater interpretive threshold. The quality of the graphics, combat and dark mythological atmosphere may be appreciated by overseas players, but not everyone may be able to fully comprehend the meaning of many of the signs[22]. The heavenly mandate, the karmic consequence, the self-cultivation, the emptiness, the respect of the ritual, the elusive connection between rebellion and discipline, etc., do not always readily come to mind. The foreign player may know Wukong from Dragon Ball and not from Journey to the West. This previous recognition can attract attention, however it can additionally develop interpretive distortion. The player might want a heroic figure and not a mythological topic as such but for a particular culture.

Not all tension is bad. May turn into a productive entry point. The game's unfamiliar symbols can encourage players to be curious, conduct their own research, watch videos and discuss in the community and do comparative interpretation. Secondary communication is created when overseas viewers ask such questions as: "Why is the temple abandoned?," "Why is incense important?," "Why are the monsters in this form?," or "Why does Wukong have something to do with fate and rebellion?". The significance of the game is not limited to the actual playing experience, but rather is carried over into the social media sphere, fan forums, streaming services and explanation videos.

Therefore, Black Myth: Wukong is not only a finished game product, but also an activator to the flow of culture. The success is dependent on the degree of an early aesthetic impact converted into continuous interpretive interest. It will not be deep culture communication, foreign players will only take the game in as an exotic action game. The high context symbols may begin to be deciphered slowly when they become involved in communities of explanation, discussion and fan production. This is where the game is different from the traditional cultural export. It doesn't need to include details of the product. It can be used to extend and develop the meaning in a wider participatory system.

The case also implies that the quality of the technology is important. But products of culture rich in symbolic contents may be rejected world-wide if they are not well presented technically because the foreign audiences may not be willing to invest the time necessary to understand the culture. Black Myth: Wukong's visual design, combat mechanics and immersive world-building are all of high quality, and attract audiences to the cultural field. Technology does not kill culture, but by means of

technology culture is worth exploring. This is a good lesson to be learned by cultural IP in China: Culture depth should be supported by the contemporary media competence.

4.3. Dragon Ball as a global industrial model

Dragon Ball provides an alternate — but very instructive — model. This is the key to the worldwide success of its way of flexible use of inherited cultural symbols. Only the first sections of the work still leave clear traces of Journey to the West, but it is sufficient to link, albeit in a loose symbolic manner, with Wukong [23]. The tail, staff and cloud and the character's name are identifiable parts of the protagonist. However, the show soon veers away from the original Chinese story format and starts to create its own world based on martial arts, science fiction, alien roots, transformation mechanisms and episodic fights.

With this change, Dragon Ball has the ability to create a new Wukong all over the world. No longer the protagonist is the Great Sage Equal to Heaven of a Chinese mythological order. A passionate young fighter, all he wants is to get stronger, face some serious competition and defend friends and family. This emotional sense is extremely transferable. Does not necessarily involve the knowledge of Chinese classics. It is based on everyday experiences of competition, training, rivalry, teamwork and perseverance. The outcome is character that can be embraced by children and adults in very different cultural settings.

The other thing that Dragon Ball shows is industrial standardization. Its story is set up in a repetitive, albeit growing, pattern: a new enemy emerges, the hero learns to fight, allies are recruited, the battle intensifies, the hero undergoes a transformation, and the world is saved. This is a pattern to help long-term serialization and cross media adaptation. The transformation, battle techniques and character rankings give endless possibilities for games, toys, cards, fan debates and the like online. That is, Dragon Ball's global circulation is not just one of narrative attractiveness, but also one of an industrial apparatus which continually produces consumption and participation.

But, the effectiveness of this system also clearly shows what is being lost in the process. Wukong elements in Dragon Ball are no longer symbolic of Chinese philosophy but are instead practical devices. The golden staff is a prop, the cloud becomes a vehicle, the tail becomes part of a fantasy biology and the quest structure becomes a search for Dragon Balls instead of a journey towards scripture and enlightenment. Culture has been left behind as a trace, yet a new industrial myth has taken its place that forms a deeper symbolic network.

For China, Dragon Ball is both a challenge and a resource. It is a challenge because it shows how another country’s cultural industry can appropriate, transform, and globalize a Chinese cultural symbol more successfully than many Chinese products have done. It is a resource because it demonstrates the importance of narrative accessibility, serial design, and transmedia development, and participatory fan economies. The lesson is not that Chinese creators should copy Dragon Ball’s de-contextualization. Rather, they should understand why it worked and then develop a model that can combine Chinese cultural subjectivity with similarly strong industrial and participatory mechanisms.

The comparison among Monkey King: Hero Is Back, Black Myth: Wukong, and Dragon Ball shows that Wukong’s global circulation is shaped by the relation between cultural coding and industrial mediation. Cultural coding gives a sign depth, identity, and historical value. Industrial mediation gives it visibility, repeatability, and participatory life. Without cultural coding, the sign becomes thin. Without industrial mediation, it remains locally meaningful but globally limited. The future of Wukong IP depends on integrating these two dimensions.

5. Path Innovation: Toward a Global Collaborative Ecology

5.1. From cultural export to cultural empowerment

One of the challenges of cross-cultural communication is the change of meaning that happens when a product moves from its original context. Cultural products are not containers which have fixed

meanings that remain unchanged from their production to their reception. They are read, misread, misinterpreted, reinterpreted, altered, and remade as they circulate. As soon as a symbol like Wukong finds its way to the international media, it gets in touch with viewers who have varying memories, values, aesthetic preferences and interpretive systems [24]. The strategic task is thus not so much the elimination of all misreading but its facilitation toward deeper engagement.

This entails a transition from “cultural export” to “cultural empowerment,” which is to say, traditional thinking about export is to assume that something is produced within the cultural space of China and then translated and sent abroad; at the end of the process is the foreign viewer, who is supposed to “get” the message. The audience is seen as a recipient and success is the accurate delivery of the original message. But the digital media culture is no more that. Players, viewers, and fans comment, remix, subtitle, stream, parody, explain, debate! Meaning is created within the piece as well as surrounding the piece.

But Black Myth: Wukong is not a fully-fledged cultural message to be deciphered exactly as it was meant to be read, from this point of view. It should not be thought of as an enclosed cultural arena. Images, characters, myths, and story spaces can serve as a means of global participation. Producers are free from cultural objectivity and audiences can participate in the act of interpretation. This does not imply giving away control of cultural significance. It suggests that in the digital world, influence is not necessarily a one-way street but is as much about guiding participation as it is about explaining.

The notion of participatory culture has long been a boon to Japanese IP. Fans don't just watch anime and read manga; they make fan art, talk about what makes those characters related, make up memes, and maintain online communities. This fan economy prolongs and expands the life of cultural symbols and increases their circulation [25]. There are lessons to be learnt from this participatory mechanism for Chinese cultural IP in order to maintain its own cultural roots. The idea is not to "de-Chinasify" Wukong. The aim is to ensure that Chinese Wukong is more discussable, re-interpretable and emotionally accessible for the global participants.

5.2. Incorporating overseas audiences into the cultural cycle

The first is a practical tool for building a community. An overseas player and viewer should not be a one-shot consumer, who gets a product without having to be involved with it again. They want places to explore cultural questions, to discuss, and to form attachments. The official or semi-official communities can perform this role, such as Discord, Reddit, YouTube, Steam, Bilibili international communities, etc., or localised fan forums. Only promotion management is not acceptable in these communities. They should involve translation, explanation of background, discussion of lore, interviews with creators, showcasing by fans and intercultural dialogue.

The second one is user generated content. UGC can help diminish the psychological distance from a product of a certain culture to people of other cultures, as it makes abstract culture tangible, familiar and emotionally appealing [26]. The process of becoming part of everyday digital life is aided by fan drawings, short videos, memes, dubbing, walkthroughs, plot analysis, character interpretation, cosplay, music remixes, and essays, which are all forms of fan works. Players are not just sharing a product when they create and share content related to Wukong. They are involved in the process of re-constructing meaning.

To make UGC work, producers should aim to create cultural IP with “open seams.” They need not give a work everything, but rather leave something out. This can leave gaps in the narrative, symbolic elements, and unanswered questions that can allow room for interpretation. Many characters, places, objects and philosophical hints are present in the mythological world of Black Myth: Wukong; it is particularly suitable for having such room for fan explanation. The challenge is to provide sufficient cultural resources to enable responsible interpretation, not make culture a textbook. Some short official movies, digital glossaries, annotated concept art, behind the scenes materials and multilingual lore notes may be beneficial to help enter audiences into the Chinese symbolic system incrementally.

The third mechanism is broadly speaking translation. Translation should not be restricted to translation of language. Should not be a one-way transfer and should involve cultural mediation. Words like “Heavenly Court, ” “karma, ” “cultivation, ” “destiny, ” “demon, ” “immortal, ” and “enlightenment” might have to be localized carefully, as they have other connotations in different cultures. Literal translation may be word to word, but not effective at the interpretive level. Cultural translation needs to be therefore accurate and readable. It should not wipe out Chinese ideas nor should it lead foreign readers astray.

Fourth is Cultural adjustment with data. Digital platforms provide producers with insight into what international audiences talk about, misinterpret, adore or reject. Cultural signs can be determined to be attractive or challenging through comments, fan videos, search trends, forum discussions and player feedback. That is not a change of the fundamental culture of the product to meet all markets. It isn't about that, however, but about developing better supplementary materials, future narratives, localized communication, and community activities with audience response. Thus, UGC and fan data is integrated into a cultural feedback loop.

5.3. Treating misreading as an entry point rather than a failure

Hard cultural symbols often generate misreading. Overseas audiences may compare Wukong with Prometheus, Hercules, Marvel heroes, or the Goku of Dragon Ball. From a purist standpoint, these comparisons may appear inaccurate. Yet in cross-cultural communication, analogy is often the first step in understanding [27]. When audiences encounter an unfamiliar symbol, they place it within a familiar cultural map. This initial placement may be partial or even distorted, but it creates a starting point for further explanation.

Misreading must not merely be assumed to reflect the lack of communication in a negotiated-meaning framework. Can become a productive mediator. If an overseas player states that Wukong is similar to Prometheus, (who is defiant against the gods), then this can spark a conversation on the difference between rebellion in Chinese mythology and Chinese philosophy. If Black Myth: Wukong is approached from a Dragon Ball perspective, this can be an opportunity to talk about the ways Chinese source materials have been altered by Japanese popular culture, and the difference between Wukong and Goku. In both instances, the first misreading is a chance to further clarify the cultures.

This also alters the cultural authority. Chinese cultural communication should not push foreign audiences to agree with the author's interpretation immediately, but promote multiple interpretation. They might first be engrossed in the visuals, then the game itself, then the emotions of the characters, then the mythological context, then the philosophical implications. This is a step-by-step process and not assuming full cultural understanding on initial contact. It also takes into account the way digital audiences learn: in pieces, in discussion, in contrast, and through repetition.

The goal is to transform Wukong IP into a public text that can be co-interpreted by global participants while remaining rooted in Chinese culture. “Public text” does not mean that ownership of cultural origin disappears. It means that meaning becomes socially active. The cultural root remains Chinese, but the process of interpretation becomes transnational. Such a model can turn cultural barriers into curiosity, curiosity into participation, and participation into longer-term recognition.

6. Conclusion

A comparison of the comparative trajectories of Chinese Wukong IP and Japanese Wukong-related IP, shows two different types of cross-cultural circulation mechanism. The cultural continuity, textual memory, philosophical depth and identity consolidation are the focal points of Chinese adaptations. This approach maintains the cultural subjectivity and enables the domestic audience to have a strong emotional resonance. But it can also make the interpretation of meanings more difficult for foreign audiences as many meanings rely on high-context cultural knowledge. Japanese adaptations, such as Dragon Ball, focus on de-contextualization, simplification of the narrative and low discount global

circulation. This approach allows for the Wukong image to become extraordinarily popular in foreign countries; however, it also removes a lot of the philosophical and mythological richness of the original Chinese image.

Thus, the issue of Chinese cultural IP is not a simple one of authenticity vs. accessibility. Reflecting on the cultural authenticity alone will keep an audience on the other side of the world from being able to access the work. If a work is only aiming to be accessible, it could end up lacking any cultural uniqueness and become indistinguishable from other products around the world that are fantasy. Participatory legibility should be developed in conjunction with cultural thickness as part of a sustainable global strategy. Black Myth: Wukong demonstrates that high-context Chinese mythology can be interesting to the international community if backed by decent technology, graphics, mechanics and atmosphere. The next step would be to create a larger ecosystem where audiences are more curious, more interpretive, more consuming, more co-creating, and less partially misunderstood, and more culturally engaged.

The process of "our own stories" is not the process of fixing their meanings once and for all with regard to the digital age. It implies the maintenance of cultural roots but the transportation, negotiation and regeneration of meanings within communities. The fact of Sun Wukong's worldwide circulation demonstrates that cultural IPs from China cannot be solely interpreted as the export of symbols. It needs to be built up as a long-term cultural ecology which intertwines the national cultural subjectivity, industrial professionalism, transmedia operation and global participatory communication. Only in this ecology, can Chinese cultural products "go out," continue to live, to spark dialogues and to resonate in the cultural life of the world in the long term.

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