

A Study of Localised Translation of Character Names in Black Myth: Wukong from the Transcreation Perspective

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Abstract: With the rapid development of China's cultural industry, the game industry has gradually become an important carrier of cultural communication. *Black Myth: Wukong*, a domestic AAA game adapted from the classic Chinese myth *Journey to the West*, has achieved remarkable success. As a domestic single-player game endowed with profound traditional Chinese cultural heritage, its outstanding localized translation has contributed to its global popularity. This paper takes the translation of character names in *Black Myth: Wukong* as the research object, focuses on the linguistic characteristics of the character names and the embodiment of Chinese cultural connotations, and explores the translation strategies for the game's character names from the transcreation perspective. It analyzes the translation methods and techniques adopted in the official English version and summarizes the localized translation strategies of the game.

Keywords: Black Myth: Wukong; transcreation; character name translation; game localized translation

1. Introduction

In the wave of globalization, games are not only a medium of entertainment but also an important platform for cultural exchange. In recent years, with the advocacy and support of the state, the global dissemination of Chinese culture has achieved substantial development. *Black Myth: Wukong*, a game based on *Journey to the West*, one of China's Four Great Classical Novels, has gained widespread recognition and acclaim internationally with its phenomenal popularity. The mythical figures, traditional customs and historical events in the game all carry profound cultural connotations. With the internationalization of the game industry, the quality of game translation has become one of the important criteria for measuring the global competitiveness of games. However, game translation is no easy task due to cultural differences and language barriers, so the selection of translation strategies directly affects the success of games in the global market and the effectiveness of cultural communication. By analyzing the textual characteristics of character names in *Black Myth: Wukong* and the translation methods and techniques adopted in its official English version, this paper summarizes the localized translation strategies of the game and puts forward improvement suggestions to promote the internationalization of domestic AAA games in the future.

2. Overview of the Current Situation of Game Localization

As the dividend of the domestic game market fades, the overseas market has become a focal point for Chinese game enterprises to compete. In today's global game market, localization has become a key factor for the successful release of games. However, domestic games face great challenges in going global; it is more than just a matter of

distribution, and the localization capabilities of various game developers have become a decisive factor for their success in breaking through the predicament. Localization is of vital importance and needs to be deeply rooted in the hearts of the people to take root in the overseas market. Nevertheless, most Chinese game developers currently focus on the domestic market and lack a global mindset and localized strategies. There are significant differences in cultural backgrounds, values, policies and regulations among different countries, such as ideological and religious stances, which lead to various difficulties for domestic games to enter the overseas market.

The huge cultural differences between different countries make it difficult to find accurate corresponding expressions in the target language for some culture-specific elements in domestic games. For example, there is no direct equivalent for the "Five Elements" in Chinese mythology in Western culture, and how to translate it accurately and convey its cultural connotations is a major challenge. In addition, each language has its unique grammatical structure and expression habits. Game translation needs to comply with the norms of the target language while maintaining the interest and appeal of the game text. Sometimes, in order to adapt to the expression habits of the target language, certain adjustments and innovations to the original text are required. Finally, the display of game text may also be affected by technical problems such as text length restrictions and coding compatibility. For instance, due to the limited display area of the game interface, some overly long translated texts may not be displayed completely, which requires translators to accurately convey the meaning of the original text while controlling the text length.

Take *Genshin Impact* as an example. In the process of English localization, *Genshin Impact* has adopted a variety of strategies to ensure the accurate transmission of game content and cultural adaptability. For example, each character's name in *Genshin Impact* either derives from allusions or contains profound meanings. Due to the untranslatability of culture-loaded words, the translation of *Genshin Impact* adopts the Pinyin transliteration strategy for the names of 16 characters related to Liyue. This not only reflects the regional attribution of the characters but also enables most foreigners to pronounce the character names naturally, improving the recognition of the character IP (Intellectual Property). For example, the ultimate skill of the character Zhongli, "Tiangong Wanxiang", is translated into English as "I will have order". This translation not only conveys the mystery and sense of power of the original skill but also conforms to the understanding habits of English players. In addition, *Genshin Impact* helps players better understand the Chinese cultural elements in the game by adding notes and background introductions. For example, when translating some festival activities and character lines with distinctive traditional Chinese cultural features, corresponding cultural background explanations are provided.

As players' requirements for game quality continue to rise, their expectations for game translation quality have also increased accordingly. Therefore, the external translation of domestic games should pay more attention to the accuracy, fluency and cultural adaptability of translation, formulate more stringent translation standards to meet the needs of players in different regions around the world, and provide support for more language versions. The success of *Black Myth: Wukong*, the domestic AAA game discussed in this paper, not only marks the emergence of domestic games in the global market but also demonstrates the importance of high-quality localized translation.

3. Classification and Linguistic Characteristics of Character Names in *Black Myth: Wukong*

Black Myth: Wukong features a large number of characters with distinct personalities and diverse linguistic styles. For example, the Chinese dubbing of *Tiger Vanguard* adopts a Northeast Chinese accent, while the characters in the *Yellow Wind Ridge* each use different dialects. This diversification of character linguistic styles not only enhances the realistic immersive experience of the game but also enriches its cultural connotations, yet it undoubtedly brings enormous challenges to the English localization translation work. For example, to echo the Northeast Chinese accent in *Tiger Vanguard*'s Chinese dubbing, the English translation of *Black Myth: Wukong* has designed a Cockney

accent for the character, thereby enhancing the character's three-dimensionality. Another example is the use of inverted sentences to highlight the old monkey's age and wisdom. When the old monkey says "Buddhahood he attained, yes", the image of a wise elderly monkey vividly comes alive in front of the players. In the process of localization translation, *Black Myth: Wukong* attaches special importance to portraying the linguistic styles of different characters. Based on the background, cultural level and experiences of each character in the game, the translators have designed linguistic styles that fit the characteristics of each character. From the selection of English dialects and the use of sentence structure and grammar to the choice of every vocabulary, the translation of *Black Myth: Wukong* has been carefully polished. The following is an analysis of the classification and linguistic characteristics of the character names in *Black Myth: Wukong*.

3.1 Classification by the Origin of Mythological Systems

3.1.1 Derived from Classic Traditional Myths

Names of characters such as Sun Wukong (Wukong) and Zhu Bajie (Pigsy) are directly derived from the original work of *Journey to the West*. Take "Zhu Bajie" as an example: the character "Zhu (Pig)" directly indicates his physical features, and "Bajie (the Eight Precepts)" originates from the Buddhist Eight Precepts, symbolizing cultivation and discipline, meaning that he must constantly abstain from desires and cultivate himself during the pilgrimage for Buddhist scriptures, overcome his flaws, and achieve self-redemption and spiritual cultivation. This name contains many plots in the original work. For example, Bajie was originally the Marshal of the Heavenly Reeds in the Heavenly Palace, who was banished to the mortal world for molesting Chang'e after drinking, and mistakenly reincarnated into a pig's fetus with the secular name "Zhu Ganglie". All these stories revolve around "Zhu Bajie", endowing the name with strong storytelling and cultural heritage. Readers familiar with the original *Journey to the West* can associate relevant stories with the name at first sight.

3.1.2 Integrated and Expanded from Folk Legends

Names such as the Keeper of Black Wind Mountain and the Keeper of the Flaming Mountains take the Keeper of Black Wind Mountain as an example: the character is responsible for patrolling and protecting the territory of Black Wind Mountain. On the basis of retaining the common characteristics of the "Earth God", a traditional folk deity, the character name indicates the region with a prefix. In folk legends, the Earth God is in charge of a local area, and the responsibilities of Earth Gods in different regions vary slightly. This naming method is simple and unadorned in language, directly reflecting regional characteristics and functionality, and implying the character's duty to guard a specific area.

3.2 Classification by Appearance and Ability Characteristics

3.2.2 Intuitive Presentation of Appearance

Names such as the Hundred-Eyed Daoist Master and the Skeletal Snake intuitively display the prominent physical features of the monsters. The Hundred-Eyed Daoist Master, also known as the Multi-Eyed Monster or the Centipede Demon, has "hundred eyes" depicting a terrifying image of eyes all over his body; the Skeletal Snake accurately portrays the emaciated and gloomy appearance of the snake. Such names allow players to construct a rough visual image in their minds at first sight, with vivid and graphic language and a strong sense of picture, greatly enhancing the character recognition.

3.2.2 Highlighting Ability Attributes

Names such as the Yellow Wind Sage and Searing Fire focus on emphasizing the special abilities or attributes of the monsters. The Yellow Wind Sage was originally a yellow-furred marten that attained enlightenment at the foot of the Lingshan Mountain. Its fur all over the body is golden yellow, and it can unleash the Samadhi Divine Wind that shakes the three realms. "Yellow Wind" indicates that its ability is related to the yellow violent wind, evoking the image of a powerful wind attack, which corresponds to the Yellow Wind Sage's ability to summon the divine wind. Searing Fire is a minor monster that appears in the Flaming Mountains in Chapter 5 of the game, and the character's name strengthens the heat and fury of the flame through the words "fire" and "lie lie (blazing)". The naming is concise and clear with strong functionality, facilitating players to quickly grasp the character's combat style and threat level.

3.3 Classification by Organizational Identity and Status

3.3.1 Leaders and Chieftains

Names such as the Black Wind King and the Yaksha King: the Black Wind King is the monster king of Black Wind Mountain in Chapter 1 of the game, the human form of the Black Bear Demon. Every attack is accompanied by a blue flame special effect with a wide attack range, and he can also transform into the wind to enter an invincible state to attack players. The Yaksha King is the monster king of the Flaming Mountains in Chapter 5, the second form of Red Boy. The titles of "King" clearly indicate their dominant position in the monster group. These names are solemn and majestic, implying that they possess powerful strength, absolute leadership and abundant resources, and are key opponents that players need to focus on and deal with in the game.

3.3.2 Subordinates and Minions

Names such as the Wolf Soldier and the Rat Captain: the Wolf Soldier is a guard patrolling the area where the Bull Guardian is located in the front mountain of the Grey Wolf Forest. The Rat Captain was conferred the title of Captain by the Sand King for repelling insect monsters with clever strategies, and his family was granted the hereditary title of Captain. Job titles such as "Soldier" and "Captain" indicate that they are in a subordinate position in the monster group, serving as the basic or middle-level forces responsible for executing tasks. Compared with the names of leaders, these names are more functional and hierarchical, allowing players to judge the character's position in the monster organization through the name.

4. A Study of the Translation Strategies for Character Names in Black Myth: Wukong from the Transcreation Perspective

4.1 Localized Translation Strategies for Character Names in Black Myth: Wukong

The English localization translation of *Black Myth: Wukong* faces numerous challenges, the core of which is the choice between domestication and foreignization translation strategies. The core of domestication translation is to transform cultural elements in the Chinese language into corresponding elements in English culture, which can reduce the understanding difficulty for Western players but may lose the charm of Eastern culture. Foreignization translation, on the other hand, strives to retain the original cultural elements in the Chinese language to highlight Eastern characteristics, but excessive foreignization may lead to too many obscure words, increasing the understanding difficulty and affecting the game experience.

To retain the unique charm of Chinese culture, the localized translation strategy for character names in *Black Myth: Wukong* adopts foreignization as the main approach and domestication as the supplement. This decision means that in the process of localization translation, the game will make a detailed judgment on when to adopt

domestication or foreignization strategies according to the linguistic style and cultural connotation of the character names, so as to ensure that the essence of Chinese culture can be conveyed while maintaining the playability of the game. At the same time, *Black Myth: Wukong* is also attempting to correct some erroneous domesticated perceptions of Chinese culture held by the West for a long time. For example, in translating concepts such as "Loong" and "Guai", the game does not use the erroneous domesticated perceptions long held by the West ("Dragon" and "Monster"), but instead chooses foreignization translation methods such as "Loong" and "Guai". Although this strategy may increase the understanding difficulty for players in some cases, it ensures the authenticity of Chinese culture in the game.

4.2 In-depth Analysis of the Translation of Character Names in *Black Myth: Wukong* from the Transcreation Perspective

The translation of *Black Myth: Wukong* adopts a variety of strategies to ensure the accurate transmission of traditional Chinese cultural elements contained in the game, including literal translation, free translation, transliteration and creative translation. The following is a classification and analysis of some translation examples in *Black Myth: Wukong* by strategy, as shown in Table 1.

Transcreation refers to the creative translation of the original text on the basis of understanding its cultural connotations and intentions, combined with the cultural background of the target language and the acceptability of the audience. In the translation of character names in *Black Myth: Wukong*, many names adopt transcreation. For example, "Black Bear Demon" is translated as "Black Bear Guai". "Guai" can better reflect the unique charm and connotation of the concept of "monster/spirit" in Chinese culture than "Monster". The reason for this translation is that in the Western cultural context, "Monster" usually refers to an odd, terrifying, huge creature that often has evil attributes, covering monsters of various forms and characteristics with no clear cultural orientation. In contrast, "Guai" in Chinese specifically refers to "monsters" and "spirits", a unique concept in the Chinese mythological and legendary system. As a monster character cultivated from a black bear, "Guai" can more accurately indicate its special identity in the context of Chinese mythology. In addition, "Guai" retains the Chinese pronunciation, allowing Western players to directly perceive that this is a unique expression derived from Chinese culture when encountering the Black Bear Demon, and it can better convey the profound cultural heritage and unique cultural imagery behind the "Black Bear Demon" compared with "Monster".

Another example is the translation of "Red-Bearded Loong" as "The Red Loong". Instead of following the previous translation convention of directly translating "Loong" as "Dragon", the game chooses to transliterate it as "Loong" to correspond to the Chinese "Loong". In the Western cultural context, "Dragon" is usually a symbol of evil and cruelty, which is essentially different from the "Loong" in Chinese culture that is sacred, auspicious, majestic and carries many beautiful implications. "Loong" well retains the pronunciation characteristics of the Chinese "Loong", avoids cultural misunderstandings that may be caused by the use of "Dragon", and better reflects the unique symbolic meaning and profound connotation of "Loong" in Chinese culture.

Compared with free translation, transcreation can better retain cultural characteristics and add appeal while conveying core information. For example, "Fire Spirit Boy" is transcreated as "Flamling", a compound word. The character "fire" in "Fire Spirit" is associated with flame, and "Flam" in "Flamling" is derived from the English word "flame". In Chinese, "Boy" refers to a young child with immature and lively characteristics, and the suffix "-ling" is often used in English to denote small, young or lovely things, such as "duckling" and "suckling". Combining "Flam" with the suffix "-ling" to form "Flamling" not only conveys the characteristics of flame but also cleverly reflects the image of "Boy", making it more vivid and interesting.

Compared with transliteration, transcreation enables players to understand the meaning of the name without too

many additional explanations. For example, "Zhu Bajie" is transcreated as "Pigsy", which allows players to directly understand its meaning instead of being transliterated as "Ba Jie", skillfully integrating the character's animal attributes and image characteristics and conveying them to players. The word "Pig" is closely related to Zhu Bajie's pig-like appearance, and the suffix "-sy" is often used in English to mean "somewhat like" or "having the quality of", such as "bossy". Therefore, literally, "Pigsy" means "pig-like", accurately depicting Zhu Bajie's pig-related habits such as gluttony and laziness. This translation conforms to English naming habits, avoids cultural misunderstandings, and makes the character easy to understand and remember for players from different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, "Pigsy" is simple to pronounce and spread, with an intuitive and memorable image, enhancing the character's recognition and appeal.

The transcreation strategy can grasp the cultural essence of the original text and carry out re-creation combined with the target language culture, making the translation conform to the understanding habits and aesthetic tastes of Western players while retaining Chinese cultural characteristics to the greatest extent. In the translation of character names, it can effectively enhance the attractiveness and appeal of the characters and help players better immerse themselves in the Eastern fantasy world created by the game. Transcreation enables game players to have a deeper understanding of the stories and emotions behind the characters and enhance the sense of immersion in the game. However, such translations sometimes need to be appropriately supported by English explanations and auxiliary translations to ensure the accessibility and playability of the game, allowing players from different cultural backgrounds to smoothly experience the wonderful aspects of the game. The application of this translation strategy can break the unidirectionality and untranslatability of traditional translation. An ideal translation should be diversified, balancing cultural adherence and innovative expression. In the future, the localization translation of domestic games can flexibly use a variety of methods such as transliteration, literal translation, free translation, transcreation and annotation, and adopt differentiated processing for different types of vocabulary and scenarios. Because games are not only entertainment tools but also bridges connecting and integrating different cultures and building communication and interaction.

Table 1 Translation Strategies and Examples of Character Names in Black Myth: Wukong

Translation Strategy	Examples	Analysis
Transliteration	Ling Xuzi; Guang zhi; Guang mou; Wukong; Yuan Shoucheng; Shi Gandang	Transliteration retains the original pronunciation of the character names, allowing players to associate the mystery and transcendence of the characters through dubbing and illustrations. It preserves the Chinese pronunciation characteristics, is easy for international players to pronounce and remember, and conveys the unique cultural connotations of the names.
Literal Translation	Golden Horned King; Silver	Literal translation retains the

	Horned King; Yellow brow; Black Wind King; Bull Soldier	distinctive features of the characters such as color and identity, and uses words such as "King" to endow the characters with dignity and status, reflecting the character's identity and attributes in a straightforward way.
Free Translation	Crane Immortal; Skeletal Snake	"Crane Immortal" uses words that fit Western cognitive habits to convey the image of the immortal; "Skeletal Snake" intuitively presents the terrifying and mysterious image of the snake with protruding bones through free translation, with a strong sense of picture.
Transcreation	Elder Jinchi; Golden Lotus Guai; Lush leaf; Searing-Fire; Flaming; Palestone; Centipede Guai; Croaky; The Red Loong	It creatively combines transliteration and free translation, or creates new words and compound words. It highlights cultural characteristics (e.g., using "Guai" and "Loong"), accurately conveys the core meaning of the original name, conforms to English expression habits, and is concise, creative and easy to remember, effectively integrating Chinese cultural connotations with Western linguistic characteristics.

5. Conclusion

Rooted in traditional Chinese culture, *Black Myth: Wukong* has successfully promoted the Chinese cultural stories adapted from *Journey to the West* to the world with games as the carrier. Its translation strategy has played a key role in the balance between globalization and localization, and it is an important achievement of the overseas communication of Chinese culture in recent years. In game translation, factors such as cultural differences, linguistic characteristics and player acceptability should be fully considered, and a variety of translation strategies should be

flexibly used to achieve a win-win situation of cultural communication and player experience. At the same time, the phenomenal popularity of *Black Myth: Wukong* also provides a direction for domestic games. It is believed that in the future localization process of Chinese games going global, more developers will tend to retain Eastern cultural characteristics instead of completely catering to the habits of Western players. The success of *Black Myth: Wukong* is not only a victory for the game itself but also an important attempt at Chinese cultural export.

China is never short of culture and stories, and the popularity of *Black Myth: Wukong* is just the beginning. Looking forward to the future, it is expected that more domestic AAA games can learn from the experience of excellent localized translation cases of *Black Myth: Wukong*, continuously optimize translation strategies, integrate China's rich cultural connotations into games, and tell Chinese stories well on a global scale.

Data Availability Statement

All reference data is taken from the official translation of the game *Black Myth* and is free to use, with no copyright issues.

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