



## The Monkey King's Playground

Black Myth: Wukong is a 2025 action RPG that reimagines *Journey to the West*. Instead of playing as Sun Wukong, you control the **Destined One**, a young warrior from Mount Huaguo tasked with resurrecting Wukong by recovering six relics tied to his senses. The game is in the *Soulslike* genre, offering challenging combat and intricate boss fights, balanced with rewarding exploration and storytelling (Juul, 2013). This genre, known for its high difficulty and emphasis on player skill, creates an engaging experience that keeps players invested in the game's world and narrative.

The Destined One wields a magical staff inspired by the legendary Ruyi Jingu Bang, which adapts to different combat situations. While combat is a core part of the experience, the game's true strength lies in its world-building. The journey is divided into six chapters, each set in a distinct location inspired by real Chinese landmarks, such as the Yungang Grottoes and Kaiyuan Temple. These areas are filled with yaoguai (supernatural beings) and gods from Chinese mythology, creating a rich, immersive world (Liu, 2020). Memorable bosses like the Black Bear Guai and the Yellow Wind Sage, each with unique backstories, add depth to the game's cultural roots. NPCs such as Zhu Bajie (Pigsy), a former companion of Sun Wukong, further bridge the gap between the game's cryptic narrative and its mythological inspirations (Zhang, 2018).

The story is intentionally cryptic, with each chapter ending in reflective cutscenes exploring themes like love, grief, and Chinese philosophy. While the narrative doesn't explain everything, it piques curiosity about Chinese mythology, acting as a gateway for players to explore *Journey to the West* and its cultural roots. This approach makes the game both engaging and a compelling introduction to Chinese mythology (Jenkins, 2006).

# From Myth to Mastery

*Black Myth: Wukong* excels in immersing players in a world steeped in Chinese mythology. From the intricate architecture of ancient temples to the serene beauty of bamboo forests, every detail feels authentic and thoughtfully crafted. Meditation spots offer cinematic views of the environment, encouraging moments of reflection that enhance the game's atmosphere. These elements sparked my curiosity about the historical and cultural significance of the places and figures depicted, such as the Dragon King and the Jade Emperor, leading me to research their roles in Chinese mythology.

This level of immersion makes *Black Myth: Wukong* a strong candidate for scenario-based learning, where students can explore a virtual world and engage with its cultural and historical elements. The game's environments and characters could serve as a springboard for discussions about Chinese history, philosophy, and art. For instance, a module on Chinese mythology could use the game to introduce figures like Sun Wukong, Guanyin, and the Bull Demon King, while a course on architecture could analyze the game's stunning recreations of traditional temples and palaces (Wolf, 2012).

However, the game's potential as a serious game is limited by its cryptic storytelling. While the mysterious narrative kept me engaged, it often required external research to fully understand the plot and its cultural references. For example, the scrolls scattered throughout the game provide snippets of lore, but without prior knowledge of *Journey to the West* or Chinese mythology, their significance can be easily missed. This lack of context means that players unfamiliar with the source material may struggle to appreciate the game's educational value without additional guidance (Gee, 2007).

To address this, the game could incorporate a codex or glossary explaining key terms, characters, and historical references. Optional narrative summaries or historical notes could provide context for the story and its mythological elements, making the game more accessible while preserving its sense of mystery and discovery (Squire, 2011).

## Educational Applications

*Black Myth: Wukong* could be particularly effective in courses on Chinese literature, history, or mythology. For example, a literature class studying *Journey to the West* could use the game to bring the story to life, allowing students to explore its world and characters interactively. Similarly, a history class could use the game to discuss the cultural and historical context of the Ming Dynasty, when *Journey to the West* was written, and how the novel reflects the values and beliefs of its time.

The game could also teach broader skills such as critical thinking and cultural analysis. Students could analyze how the game adapts *Journey to the West* for a modern audience or compare its portrayal of Chinese mythology with other interpretations in literature, film, or art. These activities would encourage students to think critically about the relationship between culture, storytelling, and media (Jenkins, 2006).

## **Adaptations for Serious Play**

To fully realize its potential as a serious game, *Black Myth: Wukong* could benefit from more radical adaptations. For example, a “serious mode” could feature guided tours of the game’s environments with commentary on their historical and cultural significance. This mode could also include interactive quizzes or challenges testing players’ knowledge of Chinese culture and mythology.

Another possibility is the addition of multiplayer or cooperative modes, where students could work together to solve puzzles or complete quests based on Chinese folklore. This would not only make the game more engaging but also encourage collaboration and teamwork, skills valuable in both academic and professional settings (Gee, 2007).

## **Beyond the Journey**

After countless hours in the world of *Black Myth: Wukong*, I can confidently say it’s one of the most engaging and visually stunning games I’ve ever played. However, its potential as a serious game for teaching Chinese culture is more nuanced.

### **Fun Factor (5/5)**

In terms of pure enjoyment, I’d give the game a 5/5. The combat is satisfying, the difficulty is well-balanced, and the world is so beautifully crafted that I often stopped just to admire the scenery. The game’s Soulslike mechanics are accessible enough to appeal to newcomers while offering depth for veterans. I was completely hooked, and I know others who have never played a Soulslike game before but still found themselves drawn into the world.

### **Educational Value (2/5)**

That said, if I were to rate the game purely on what you can learn from it without external resources, I’d give it a 2/5. The cryptic storytelling and lack of context mean that players who want to fully understand the cultural and historical references will need to do some research outside the game. While this sparked my curiosity and led me to learn more about Chinese culture, it also highlights a missed opportunity for the game to serve as a self-contained educational tool (Gee, 2007).

### **Replayability and Recommendations**

Would I play it again? Absolutely. The game’s fun factor and immersive world make it a joy to revisit. Would I recommend it to others? Yes, but with the caveat that players should be prepared to dive into external resources to fully appreciate the cultural depth. For educators, *Black Myth: Wukong* could be a valuable supplementary tool in courses on Chinese culture, but it would require additional materials or adaptations to fully realize its potential as a serious game (Squire, 2011).

## Final Thoughts

What sets *Black Myth: Wukong* apart is how much it inspired me to learn about Chinese culture on my own. While it may not be a perfect serious game in its current form, it has the potential to be one with a few thoughtful additions. For now, it remains a visually stunning and deeply engaging action RPG that offers a tantalizing glimpse into the rich world of Chinese mythology (Zhang, 2018).

## Bibliography

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