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# Untangling the web: Shifting gendered symbols of the spider demon from *Journey to the West* to *Black Myth: Wukong*\*

**Abstract.** This paper examines the reinterpretation of the spider demon as a traditional Chinese gendered symbol, from *Journey to the West* (Wu Cheng'en, 1592) to the modern video game *Black Myth: Wukong* (2024). Using cultural semiotics and monstrous-feminine theory, it compares materials from the novel and game through textual analysis and sentiment analysis of the 1,000 most-liked comments on related Bilibili videos. Sentiment analysis reveals predominantly positive reception (69 %), though criticism regarding gender representation persists. The findings show that through narrative reconstruction in the game, the spider demons evolve from one-dimensional seductresses into multidimensional figures with more humanized designs. Their characterization not only reflects deeper emotions, moral dilemmas, and self-awareness but also incorporates Tang Dynasty-inspired aesthetics to reinforce their cultural background, while still retaining certain monstrous traits and a sense of tragic fate. Moreover, the paper highlights that rather than abandoning traditional archetypes, the game reinterprets them with emotional depth and symbolic continuity, illustrating how cultural symbols can be adapted to reflect broader shifts in gender discourse and narrative complexity.

**Keywords:** gendered symbols, cultural semiotics, monstrous feminine, female monsters, gender representation, Chinese video games, transmedia narratives, spider demons, *Black Myth: Wukong*, textual analysis, audience sentiment analysis, Chinese feminine monstrosity

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\* The term *gender* in this work is used strictly in a biological sense to describe the sex and variability of traits in spiders. This phenomenon has no relation to sociocultural, legal concepts, or issues concerning the promotion of non-traditional relationships, as regulated by the legislation of the Russian Federation—*Editor's Note*.

\* Термин «гендер» в данной работе используется строго в биологическом смысле для описания половой принадлежности и изменчивости признаков у пауков. Отмеченный феномен не имеет какого-либо отношения к социокультурным, правовым концепциям или вопросам пропаганды нетрадиционных отношений, регулируемым законодательством Российской Федерации (прим. ред.).

## INTRODUCTION

Video games have evolved beyond mere entertainment into key platforms for cultural expression and value dissemination. Through transmedia adaptations of classic works, they incorporate mythological elements to reinterpret traditional culture and connect with modern audiences (Torres-Toukoumidis et al., 2024). *Black Myth: Wukong* exemplifies this trend as China's first AAA game, setting a new standard in 2024. By merging the classic novel *Journey to the West* with modern technology, it reimagines traditional narratives for a global audience (Xinhua News Agency, 2024). One of its most striking reinterpretations is the portrayal of the female non-player character (NPC) spider demons, whose intricate storytelling and design captivated social media. With Douyin hashtags surpassing 1.5 billion views, these characters have become a powerful testament to how video games reshape cultural icons in contemporary popular culture.

In Chinese culture, while spiders are considered “good luck,” spider demons, such as the “mountain spider” in the Song Dynasty's Southern Book of Stories and those in *Journey to the West*, have long symbolized seduction, danger, and evil. However, as a symbol, the spider demon has also undergone a continuous transformation in meaning due to social and cultural changes. In *Black Myth*, their portrayal shifts, adding emotional depth and complexity. This change highlights how cultural symbols evolve in modern media, where traditional narratives resonate with today's audiences.

While research on female characters in games has grown, the spider demon as a symbol in Chinese culture remains underexplored. Western representations, like Spider-Man or the broodmother (especially, in *Dota 2*), differ greatly in meaning and gender traits from the Chinese spider demon. This study's **relevance** lies in its attention to how the rarely discussed mythological figure of the Chinese spider demon is reimagined in contemporary digital media. As China's gaming industry expands globally, such reinterpretations play a key role in shaping cultural narratives and projecting soft power. Moreover, the transformation of gendered monsters in games reflects shifting norms around femininity, morality, and identity. Therefore, this study employs cultural semiotics and monstrous-feminine theory, combining textual analysis with audience sentiment data to examine how the spider demon has been reinterpreted as a gendered cultural symbol across different media and time periods, from *Journey to the West* to *Black Myth: Wukong*.

In particular, it addresses the following questions:

1. How does the spider demon in *Journey to the West* embody traditional gender symbolism and cultural connotations?

2. How does *Black Myth: Wukong* reinterpret gender symbolism of the spider demon through the narrative and character design?

3. How does this change affect the spider demon's gender traits and audience views?

By answering these three questions, the study will capture the evolution of this gendered symbol and the audience's response, revealing how traditional cultural symbols adapt and transform in new media and gender contexts.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study analyzed the portrayal of spider demons in the videogame *Black Myth: Wukong* and the classic Chinese tale *Journey to the West*, employing a range of methodologies. Comparative textual and narrative analyses were conducted to explore the depiction and transformation of characters across these works. The empirical material includes game texts and official character profiles from chapter 4 in *Black Myth* and chapters 72–73 of *Journey to the West*. Cultural hermeneutics and elements of receptive aesthetics were also applied to investigate the reinterpretation of traditional myths.

To analyze audience attitudes toward the reinterpreted spider demons, Python was used to scrape and process audience comments. The study employed sentiment analysis, using the SnowNLP library, on the top 1,000 most-liked comments from Chapter 4 gameplay videos published on the Chinese platform Bilibili.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, for visual content, the research applied semiotic and audiovisual analysis to uncover deeper symbolic and narrative layers, complementing the broader analysis of the media texts.

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<sup>1</sup> Bilibili @ Black Myth: Wukong. (2024). *Six emotions - Original animation compilation of chapters from Black Myth: Wukong* [Video]. Retrieved January 1, 2025, from [https://www.bilibili.com/bangumi/play/ep835819?spm\\_id\\_from=333.1387.homepage.video\\_card.click&from\\_spmid=666.25.episode.0](https://www.bilibili.com/bangumi/play/ep835819?spm_id_from=333.1387.homepage.video_card.click&from_spmid=666.25.episode.0).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Symbols form the foundation of cultural narratives, reflecting shared meanings that shift depending on context. Eco describes symbols as key components of semiotic systems, linking abstract cultural codes with tangible forms (Eco, 1976, pp. 3–31). Their flexibility allows them to evolve in new cultural and media settings, reshaping meanings to fit changing social and artistic trends. **Lotman's cultural semiotics** provide a solid framework for understanding the dynamic transformation and redefinition of symbols across different media and time periods. He describes culture as a *semiosphere*, a network of interconnected symbolic systems where each symbol redefines its meaning through interaction with others (Lotman, 1990, pp. 151–171). Lotman emphasizes that the translation of symbols across cultural and media boundaries often creates new meanings, reflecting the multilingual and dynamic nature of cultural systems. Additionally, his concept of the *cultural explosion* highlights how symbols, when placed in new contexts, take on meanings that carry historical significance (Lotman, 2009, pp. 19–25).

The integration of mythological figures into modern video games reflects a broader cultural process in which traditional narratives are reactivated and transformed through new media. This process involves more than symbolic reuse—it draws on the deep structure of myth as a cultural logic. As Lévi-Strauss argues, myth functions as “a kind of language” (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, pp. 430) that offers “a logical model capable of overcoming contradictions” (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, pp. 443). Myths, then, are not static stories but dynamic symbolic systems through which cultures mediate fundamental tensions. Figures such as demons or monsters often embody oppositions like purity and danger, human and non-human, or nature and civilization, which are binary structures that myth helps to symbolically resolve (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, pp. 430–440). At the same time, the repeated reappearance of mythic characters across history reveals a cyclical structure of cultural memory. Eliade (1963) describes this phenomenon as the “eternal return,” meaning that mythic archetypes are cyclically reactualized to restore contact with sacred origins (Eliade, 1963, pp. 18–19). These structures are resilient and flexible, allowing reinterpretation without erasing symbolic continuity. In video games, mythological characters are thus not merely decorative but function as adaptable carriers of cultural identity, moral imagination, and emotional resonance.

Female representation in video games has historically been constrained, often portraying disempowered or sexualized identities that reinforce traditional gender roles of dominance and subordination (de La Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina, 2024, pp. 4–6). Drawing on Kristeva's theory of *abjection* that which “disturbs identity, system, and order by not respecting borders, positions, and rules” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4), Creed introduced the concept of the *monstrous-feminine*

(Creed, 2023, p. 5), arguing that female monsters are a mix of fear and desire, acting as both challenges for male protagonists and opposites of cultural morality. Abjection, as “neither subject nor object” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 135), challenges the symbolic order—often equated with patriarchal structures—through the female body’s ambiguity, transgression, and horror. For example, Medusa’s ability to turn men to stone with her gaze represents a threatening female power that exists outside male control. Building on this, Stang examined female monsters in *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Dragon Age*, identifying them as expressions of patriarchal anxieties that reinforce misogynistic norms (Stang & Trammell, 2020, p. 11). In the Chinese context Wu analyzed the shift of feminine and monstrous traits from the game *Gujian 3* (2018) to its fanfiction. Wu introduced the term *Chinese feminine monstrosity*, noting that female monsters’ monstrous traits arise not from sexualization but from their deceptive beauty, deadly tendencies, and abject-transformative forms, while paradoxically emphasizing their voluntary alignment with the patriarchy, which ultimately weakens their monstrous nature (Y.H. Wu, 2024, p. 3). However, recent studies, such as those by Albino and Zhang, highlight a growing trend of female monsters that challenge gender norms while retaining feminine traits (Albino, 2020, pp. 544–550; M. Zhang, 2024, pp. 395–398). This trend is exemplified by characters such as Kerrigan in *StarCraft* series, whose forced transformation into a powerful monster becomes a source of agency and resistance, redefining the *monstrous-feminine* (Blomquist, 2021, pp. 890–893). These cases illustrate that female monsters in video games are complex, contradictory figures that evolve in response to shifting societal norms.

### TRADITIONAL GENDER SYMBOLS IN JOURNEY TO THE WEST

*Journey to the West* follows Tang Sanzang and his disciples on their quest for Buddhist scriptures, blending mythology, religion, and folklore. Adapted over centuries—from Xuanzang’s historical journey to Yuan dramas and Wu Cheng’en’s Ming classic—*Journey to the West* became one of China’s Four Great Classical Novels. Modern retellings include literature, film, TV (notably the 1986 series), and video games. While Wukong has been reimaged in many ways, side characters like the spider demon and White Bone Spirit are often remain confined to the trope of female seduction.

The spider demons in *Journey to the West* symbolize temptation and danger through personification, metaphor, and hyperbole. Descriptions like “silver-like

Table 1

**Analysis of the portrayal of spider demon characters  
in the Chinese classic Journey to the West**

Analysis dimension	Analysis of <i>Journey to the West</i> (symbolism)	Relevant texts/plot (symbols)
<b>Character traits: monstrous nature</b>	Dangerous; Trial-setters, temptresses, traps	"Flung him to the ground" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 322), "[...] let's go back and have that fat monk steamed for food" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 325), "They also pan-fried some freshly gouged human brains, which they then cut up to look like pieces of bean curd" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 321); "All seven of the fiends at once loosened their clothes and exposed their snow-white bellies to exercise their magic" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 339); "Then they darted into the caves, all naked, and ran past the Tang Monk, giggling and still covering their private parts with their hands" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 330).
<b>Character traits: human nature</b>	Sisterly bond, maternal instincts, loyalty	"An orchid nature fine like spring, a womanly mind firm as stone" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 318); (Spiders say) "Children, where are you?" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 330); (Spiders say) "If Elder Brother wants to fight, we'll help you" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 336).
<b>Appearance</b>	Seductive, sexualized, feminine	"Undoing their buttons and clasps, untying their sashes of silk. Their bosoms were white like silver; Their bodies all resembled snow. Their limbs appeared gilded in ice; Their shoulders seemed kneaded with dough. Their bellies looked soft and yielding; Their backs were both shiny and smooth. Their knees and wrists were round and small; Their feet, no wider than three inches. Desire ringed their midsections, showing their apertures of love" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 326).
<b>Scenes</b>	Spider web cave: dangerous, repellent and deceptive  Cleansing pool: feminine and private	Spider cobwebs: "It's the bogus immortals' reclusive place; No other household takes its neighboring space" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 320).  Cleansing Pool: "Hot ripples like a boiling cauldron's; snowy waves like newly made soup [...] A good sign of auspicious land, truly it's Heaven's creation, where beauties wash their smooth and ice-white skins: all dirt removed, their jadelike frames renewed" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 326).
<b>Psychological traits</b>	Cunning, greedy, fearful, ashamed	"The fiends were frightened out of their wits. Going to their knees in the water, they cried" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 329); "With arms and legs flailing, with their heads bobbing up and down, the spiders cried, 'Spare our lives! Spare our lives'" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 340).
<b>Characters' relationships</b>	Power imbalance; gender opposition; humiliation, insult	"[...] he raised with both hands to smash to pulp those seven spider spirits" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 340); (Wukong says) "A man does not fight with a woman" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 327); (Spiders say) "By the seventh year, a man and a woman are not to sit on the same mat.' How could you bathe in the same pool with us?" (C. Wu, 2012, p. 328).

bosoms” and “snow-white bellies” show their seductive roles as obstacles to Tang Monk and his disciples. A similar depiction can be seen in the portrayal of the spider demon in the 1986 TV series (Fig. 1). This is similar to traditional narratives like stories *The Beacon Fire for a Smile* / *烽火戏诸侯* and *The Fox Spirit Da Ji* / *狐妖苏妲己*. In them, feminine beauty is both alluring and destructive. Their maternal instincts and sisterly bond hint at humanity. However, they are dismissed in interactions and face a tragic fate through betrayal and Wukong’s attack. Despite showing care and sisterhood, their good traits are overshadowed by their villainous image. This narrative pattern reflects what Campbell conceptualized as the “hero’s journey,” a structure centered on a young male protagonist whose maturation is achieved by overcoming trials, often represented by monstrous or seductive figures (Campbell, 1973, pp. 89–137). This model tends to marginalize other archetypal characters, such as mothers, witches, or female spirits, by reducing them to narrative functions rather than treating them as autonomous agents (Bowman, 2024, pp. 160–173).



**Fig. 1. The depiction of the seven spider demons in the 1986 TV series *Journey to the West*, directed by Yang Jie<sup>2</sup>**

These portrayals reflect Ming-era views on femininity, oscillating between reverence and suspicion. Rooted in Confucian ethics, this aligns with Confucius’s remark: “Women and servants are particularly hard to manage: if you are too familiar with them, they grow insolent, but if you are too distant, they grow resentful” (Kong & Slingerland, 2013, p. 211). Female beauty was often seen as a danger, reflecting fears of chaos and corruption. In this context, the spider demons show society’s mixed feelings about women: they are attractive but also deceitful, seductive, and violent, threatening the male-dominated order.

<sup>2</sup> See the image source: <https://news.qq.com/rain/a/20240930A0591Q00> (25.01.2025).



The spider demons resonate with broader cultural and theoretical frameworks, representing the contrast between beauty and monstrosity: delicate appearances paired with brutal actions, such as plotting to cook Tang Monk for immortality. This shows the coexistence of monstrosity and sincerity, highlighting the paradoxical humanization and demonization of female figures (Chang, 2024, pp. 102–104). As dynamic cultural symbols, they move between dualities—seductress and caregiver, victim and villain—illustrating Lotman’s theory of symbols’ multiple meanings and mobility. Their story of beauty, betrayal, and destruction highlights patriarchal fears and reinforces moral lessons about the dangers of desire.

### REINTERPRETING THE SPIDER DEMONESS IN BLACK MYTH: WUKONG

*Black Myth: Wukong* builds on *Journey to the West* while integrating elements from adaptations like *A Chinese Odyssey* (1995, directed by Jeffrey Lau). The narrative introduces the *Destined One* (the player) as the protagonist, tasked with collecting six spiritual roots to resurrect Wukong. Chapter Four explores the seven spider demons, focusing on Bajie and Violet Spider’s tragic love. Former lovers, they reunite when Violet Spider stages a wedding to force Bajie into marriage. Bound by duty, Bajie rejects her and their daughter, leaving in tears. Betrayed by the Hundred-Eyed Daoist, Violet Spider meets a tragic end.

Compared to the original novel, the spider demon in *Black Myth: Wukong* has a diminished monstrous nature and is portrayed as a more nuanced and multidimensional female character. With intricate dialogue, deep emotions, and Tang dynasty-inspired designs (Fig. 2), they evolve from symbols of seduction into richer figures. Violet Spider shows maternal care and inner conflict, while her sisters display traits like independence, elegance, and curiosity. No longer just temptresses, they act as both obstacles and helpers in the protagonist’s journey, showing more agency. Their interplay of love and resentment, betrayal and loyalty make them more three-dimensional, moving beyond *Journey to the West*’s simplistic depiction of women punished for their femininity or moral failings. Notably, the spider demons in the game still retain their demonic nature and tragic fate from the original work, largely due to the constraints of adapting a pre-existing story. However, their more humanized portrayal adds emotional depth and creates more multidimensional characters. This contradiction is similar to Wu’s concept of Chinese feminine monstrosity, especially in the balance between monstrosity and obedience to patriarchy.

Table 2

Analysis of the portrayal of spider demon characters in the game *Black Myth: Wukong*

Analysis dimension	Analysis of <i>Black Myth: Wukong</i> (symbolism)	Relevant texts/plot (symbols)
Character traits: monstrous nature	Violence, vengeance, obsession, obstructors	<p><b>Text:</b> "This monkey that you love. I'll chop his heart. Slice his liver!"</p> <p><b>Plot:</b> Violet Spider, a monster, captures Bajie with violence and deceit. She forces him into her wedding trap.</p>
Character traits: human nature	Promoter; strong familial bonds and sisterly affection, loyalty, mutual protection, distinct personalities, and humanized traits	<p><b>Text:</b> (The fourth sister saves the destined one) "I've led your path for you... We're both on our own"; (Sisters' attitude toward their mother's love: supportive despite not understanding) "But try to think from her position. We're her children. This is what we do"; "We never witnessed her past. That's why we can't understand her obsession today."; "Mother has grown soft with age..."; (Sisters' interactions) "The two sisters bickered and quarreled..."; "She usually spent her time with her elder sisters, who were all very nice to her."</p> <p><b>Plot:</b> Violet Spider is devoted, persistent, soft-hearted, and maternal. Each sister has distinct traits: gentle and steady, independent and decisive, sophisticated, straightforward yet adventurous, lively and curious.</p>
Appearance	Graceful, noble, with Tang dynasty-inspired aesthetics	<p><b>Text:</b> "With powdered face and hair in a twist, a slender waist adorned with jade amidst"; "Rosy face turns into grey hair"; "Enemy blood stains the black robe high"; "Orioles are charming, swallows love to play."</p> <p><b>Plot:</b> Smoky makeup shows their monstrous nature. It pairs with elegant Tang Dynasty styles, like red rouge, huadian, tinted lips, and ruqun robes.</p>
Scenes	Mysterious, gloomy, restrained, combined with traditional Chinese architectural elements	<p><b>Text:</b> "We're bound to this ill place, one generation after another—even you like this farce?"; "Tell me, monkey, what's it like out there beyond these mountains?"</p> <p><b>Plot:</b> Dark tones and desolate settings, inspired by landmarks like Zhu Family Courtyard (Shisi Temple) and Spider Cave (Mei Ancestral Hall).</p>
Psychological traits	Resentment, longing, conflict, pity, regret; love, joy	<p><b>Text:</b> "Every day, trapped in this hollow, I missed and dreamed, waiting for the day to eat you right after we met, so I could heal"; "Monkeys! The bane of my life! Why do you always have to ruin my plans? And in what way am I any less than monkeys?"; "What would this marriage change?"</p> <p><b>Plot:</b> Violet Spider's conflicted emotions reflect her tragic longing and her inability to escape her past with Bajie. While the sisters' interactions reflect love and joy between family members.</p>
Characters' relationships	Complex relationships, intertwined love and betrayal, ending up in tragedy	<p><b>Text:</b> (Dying, Violet Spider said to Bajie) "You haven't changed a bit, you fool..." (Bajie turned away, tears in his eyes).</p> <p><b>Plot:</b> Violet Spider's "love yet cannot be" with Bajie is strained by his identity. She feels betrayed by her ally and dies with unfulfilled desires.</p>

The reinterpretation of the spider demons' symbolism reflects the changing dynamics of cultural symbols in a semiotic framework. Symbols are no longer static; they adapt and reconfigure through new cultural and narrative contexts. In *Black Myth*, the spider demons have complex human traits that reframe their traditional mythological essence. This process aligns with the change of cultural symbols in digital media. There, traditional forms are deconstructed and reassembled with new signifiers, like aesthetic elements and narrative roles (Yan & Luo, 2019, p. 168). Like how historical figures in Chinese games like *Honor of Kings* (2015) are re-signified into contemporary icons, the spider demons in *Black Myth* reflect modern emotions and relationships (He & Li, 2024, pp. 163–192). This adaptation transforms them from a moral dichotomy into multifaceted characters, bridging tradition and contemporary audience expectations.



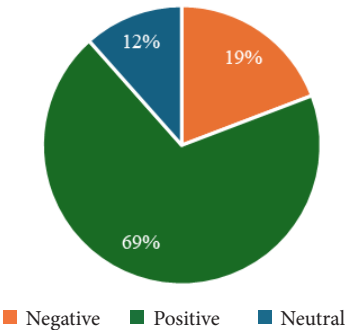
**Fig. 2. The depiction of the spider demons in *Black Myth: Wukong*: from left to right: Violet Spider (Mother), followed by the eldest to the sixth sister<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup> Image source: Original collage by Xiaoting Chen, created from in-game video screenshots (25.01.2025).

**REDEFINING GENDERED SYMBOLS:  
AUDIENCE RECEPTION AND CULTURAL IMPACTS  
OF THE SPIDER DEMONS**

As feminism and social equality grow, media has moved from simple gender stereotypes to more complex, humanized characters. In *Black Myth*, the spider demons still have traits of female monsters—seduction, beauty, violence, and tragedy—but now also show human emotions. By reshaping their narrative, the game reinterprets them from symbols of temptation into complex, subjective characters. This shift breaks away from static binary gender narratives, aligning with contemporary audiences’ higher expectations for female characters.

From audience feedback, the game’s reinterpretation of the spider demons has been largely positive. This study used Python to collect the top 1,000 comments on gameplay videos from the official *Black Myth: Wukong* account on Bilibili, a Chinese platform. The comments were based on likes. Sentiment analysis with the SnowNLP library showed 69 % positive, 19 % negative, and 12 % neutral comments (Fig. 3). Additionally, the Douyin hashtag “#BlackMythPiggySpiderDemonTragicLove / #黑神话八戒蜘蛛精意难平” has garnered over 3 million views, reflecting audience approval of the game’s integration of traditional culture with modern narrative techniques, particularly its depth of storytelling and nuanced character development.



**Fig. 3. Sentiment analysis of user comments on platform Bilibili**

However, some voices have questioned the narrative’s underlying biases (C. Zhang, 2024). Some say Bajie is “irresponsible”, while others criticize Violet Spider as “too emotional.” They argue the game excuses Bajie’s detachment (blaming it on the Celestial Court) while romanticizing Violet Spider’s suffering. This shift focuses from her choices to Bajie’s struggle to protect his family. She faces

harm, raises her child alone, and dies tragically, her story reduced to a footnote in Bajie's narrative. This has led to debates on whether the game continues to sideline women in traditional stories.

Despite some criticism, *Black Myth*'s reinterpretation of the Spider Demon has cultural significance. Through new storytelling and character development, the game transforms the Spider Demon from a simple symbol of beauty and seduction into a complex figure with deeper emotions. This *dynamic reinterpretation* modernizes traditional culture while enriching the game's story and connecting with players. Though it does not completely break away from traditional gender symbols, it adds depth and variety through media innovation, making them more nuanced and multidimensional.

## CONCLUSION

This paper examines the evolution of the gendered symbolism of the spider demon in *Journey to the West* and *Black Myth: Wukong* through cultural semiotics and monstrous-feminine theory, focusing on character traits, appearance, narrative contexts, and relationships. The analysis shows that in *Journey to the West*, the spider demon embodies traditional gender symbols, representing temptation, danger, and moral opposition to male heroes. In *Black Myth: Wukong*, however, the spider demon is reimagined with emotional depth, moral complexity, and maternal instincts, transforming from a one-dimensional antagonist into a multifaceted character while still retaining some monstrous traits and a tragic fate. The audience's strong emotional engagement with this transformation revitalizes her cultural significance.

The evolution of the spider demon from a simple embodiment of seduction and danger in traditional storytelling to a nuanced character with emotional depth in contemporary media mirrors broader cultural shifts in symbolic representation. While Chinese folklore historically portrayed the spider demon as a dangerous temptress, *Black Myth: Wukong* transforms this archetype by maintaining its core symbolic elements while adding psychological complexity and moral ambiguity. This approach demonstrates that meaningful cultural evolution occurs not through abandoning traditional symbols but through recontextualizing them within contemporary values and narrative expectations. By preserving the fundamental essence of these cultural archetypes while adapting them to modern sensibilities, *Black Myth* achieves a balance that resonates with diverse audiences.

while honoring cultural heritage. Game developers now face the specific challenge of balancing authentic cultural representation with evolving sensibilities about gender and identity. Through this delicate negotiation between tradition and innovation, video games emerge as significant platforms for cultural expression, allowing traditional symbols to find new meaning and relevance in a globalized world. This reimagining of traditional Chinese mythological figures also serves as a powerful cultural ambassador, offering international audiences a nuanced entry point into understanding Chinese cultural heritage through interactive storytelling that transcends linguistic and cultural barriers.

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## **Author Contributions**

Xiaoting Chen developed the theoretical framework, formulated the research problem, collected and analyzed the empirical materials, drafted the manuscript, and drew the general conclusions.

Denis M. Turunov contributed to conceptualizing the research problem, analyzing empirical materials, writing the article, and editing the text.

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