From Myth to Market

Lessons From

Black Myth Wukong

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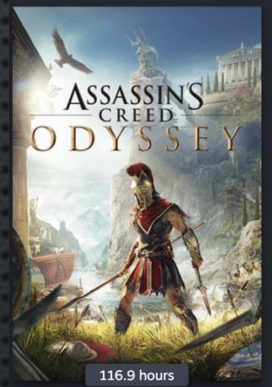
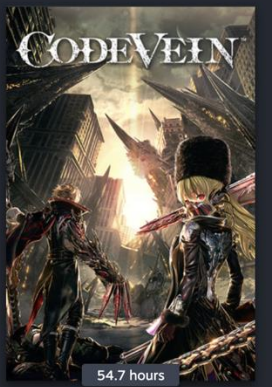
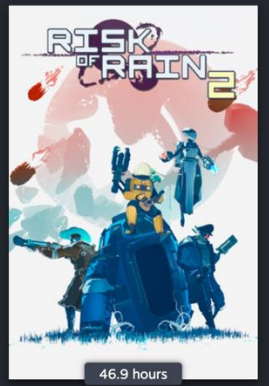
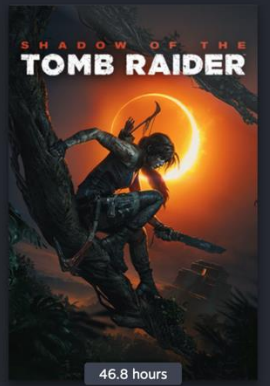
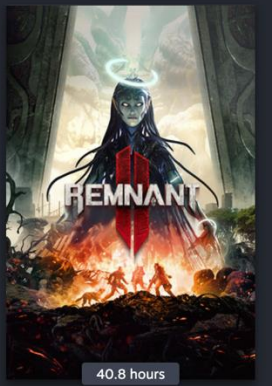
https://flint-xf-fan.github.io/

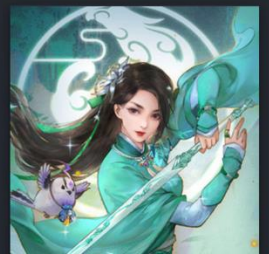


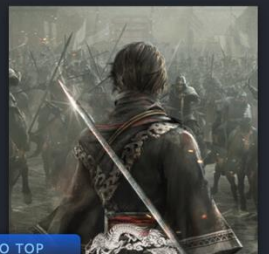








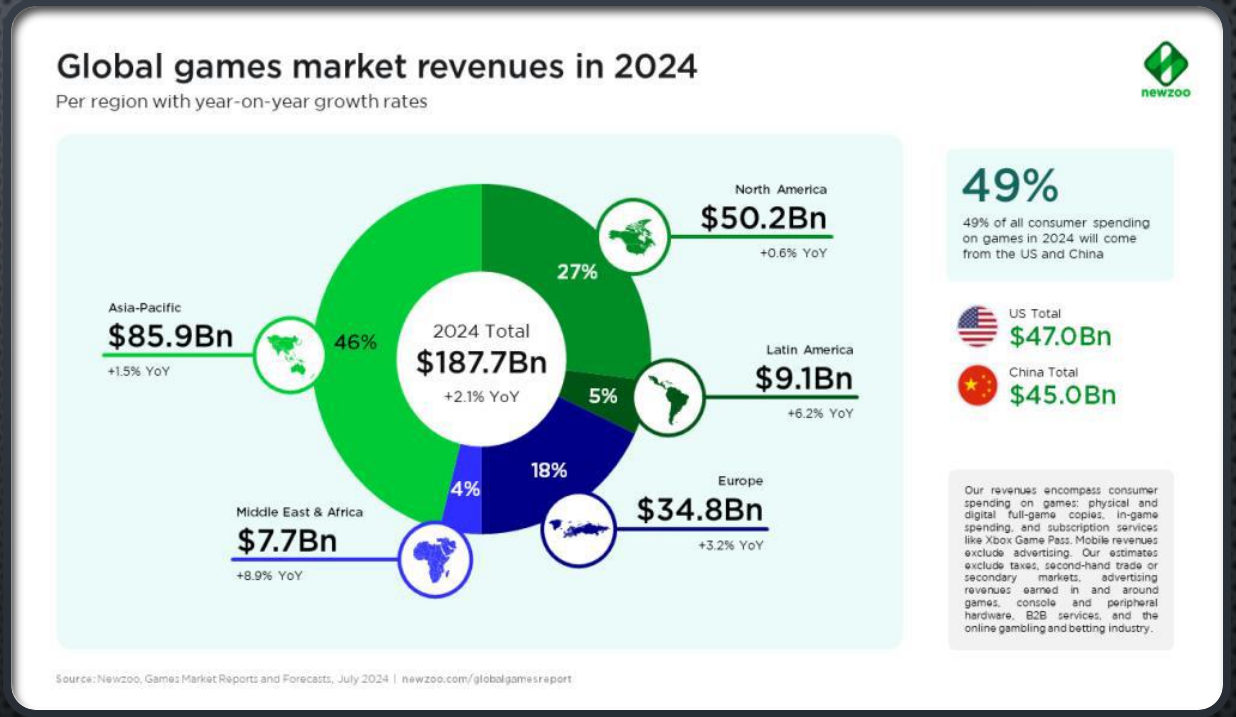




SCROLL TO TOP

THE QUESTION THAT SPARKED THIS RESEARCH

- Global gaming market: $187.7 (2024)
- Asia-Pacific leads at 46%
- U.S. + China: 49%
- Western titles:
  - God of War (Norse/Greek mythology)
  - Assassin's Creed (European history)
  - The Witcher (Slavic folklore)
  - Red Dead Redemption (American frontier)
- Yet: Where were the Chinese AAA games?



ENTER BLACK MYTH: WUKONG

- First AAA Chinese Title on 20 Aug 2024
- Sold 20m copies in its first month
- 2.4m concurrent players (peak
- The Wukong Phenomenon
  - 10x more Tourists
  - Wukong-theme gift shops
  - Praised by SM Lee Hsien Loo

SteamDB Search... Sales Charts Calculator Calendar Patches Find games

Most played games

Compare

100 entries per page. Hold Shift to sort by multiple columns. Search...

Rank	SteamDB.info	Name	Current	24h Peak	All-Time Peak	
1.		PUBG: BATTLEGROUNDS	445,221	741,592	3,257,248	+
2.		Black Myth: Wukong	36,480	42,132	2,415,714	+
3.		Palworld	31,547	35,393	2,101,867	+
4.		Counter-Strike 2	1,079,637	1,559,679	1,862,531	+
5.		Monster Hunter Wilds	11,649	18,468	1,384,608	+
6.		Lost Ark	11,672	14,449	1,325,305	+
7.		Dota 2	467,393	608,369	1,295,114	+
8.		Cyberpunk 2077	29,281	36,639	1,054,388	+
9.		ELDEN RING	36,705	49,324	953,426	+
10.		Banana	91,681	96,024	917,272	+

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Cultural Constructions

- How are cultural meanings constructed and negotiated in globalized games?

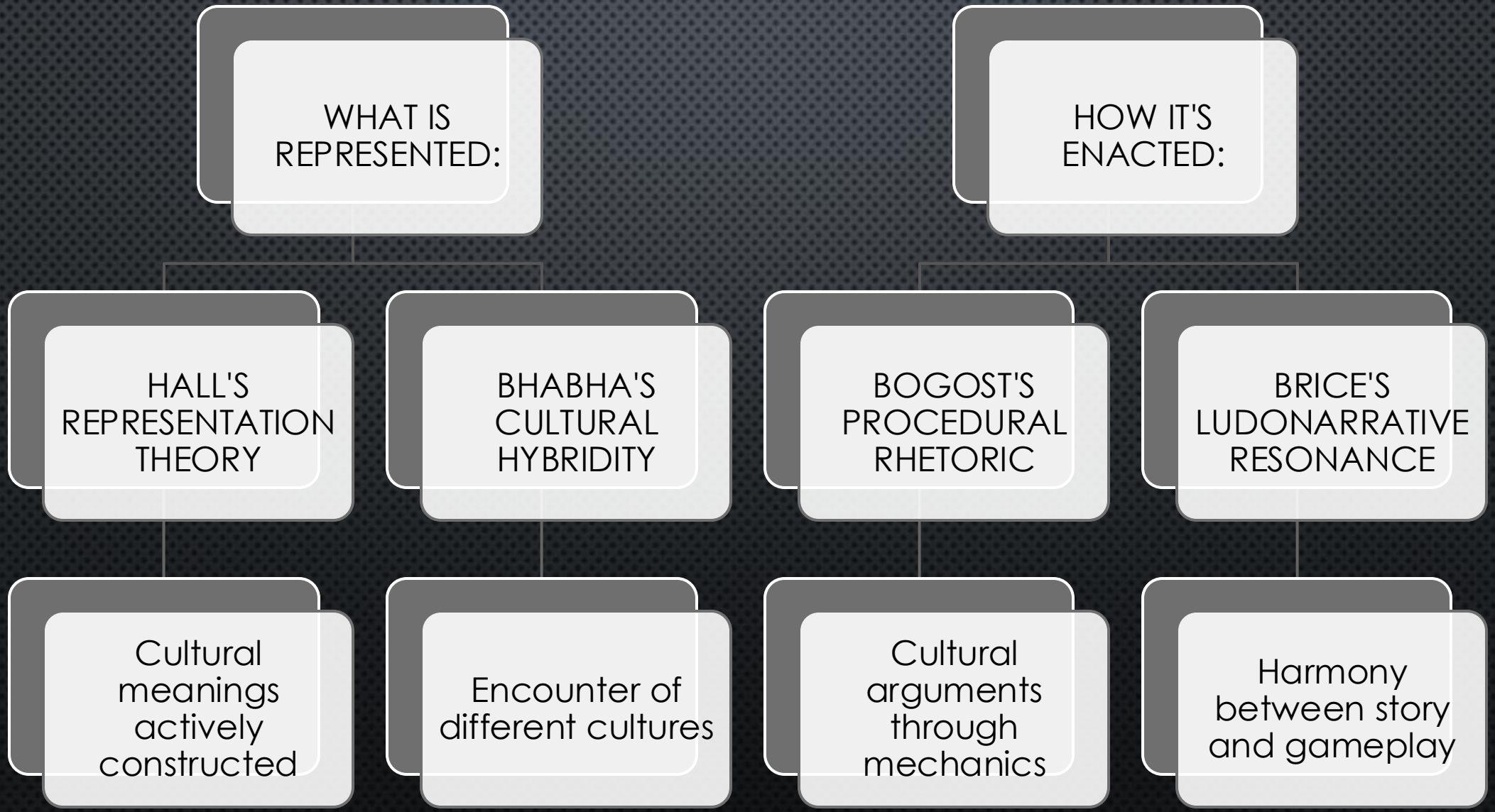
Technological mediation

- How do technology and procedural systems shape cultural interpretation?

Social-Economic Impact

- What are the effects of successful cross-cultural gaming products?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – THE FOUR LENSES



STUART HALL'S REPRESENTATION THEORY

The Constructionist approach to Representation:

- Meaning is built through shared cultural codes

BMW uses the CONSTRUCTIONIST approach:

- Cultural meanings are actively produced
- No "authentic" Chinese culture exists to simply reflect
- Instead, BMW constructs new meanings through selection, emphasis, and reinterpretation

ACTIVE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION

Classical image of Sun Wukong

- Mischievous trickster
- Static mythology

Journey to the West, CCTV, 1986

Reconstructed image of Sun Wukong

- Complex moral figure
- Dynamic reinterpretation

Black Myth: Wukong, Game Science, 2024

ACTIVE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION

- A character on a spiritual journey toward **redemption**
- A figure embodying themes of **rebellion** against oppressive systems
- Themes resonate universally while maintaining deep cultural authenticity

HOMI BHABHA'S CULTURAL HYBRIDITY THEORY

The Third Space

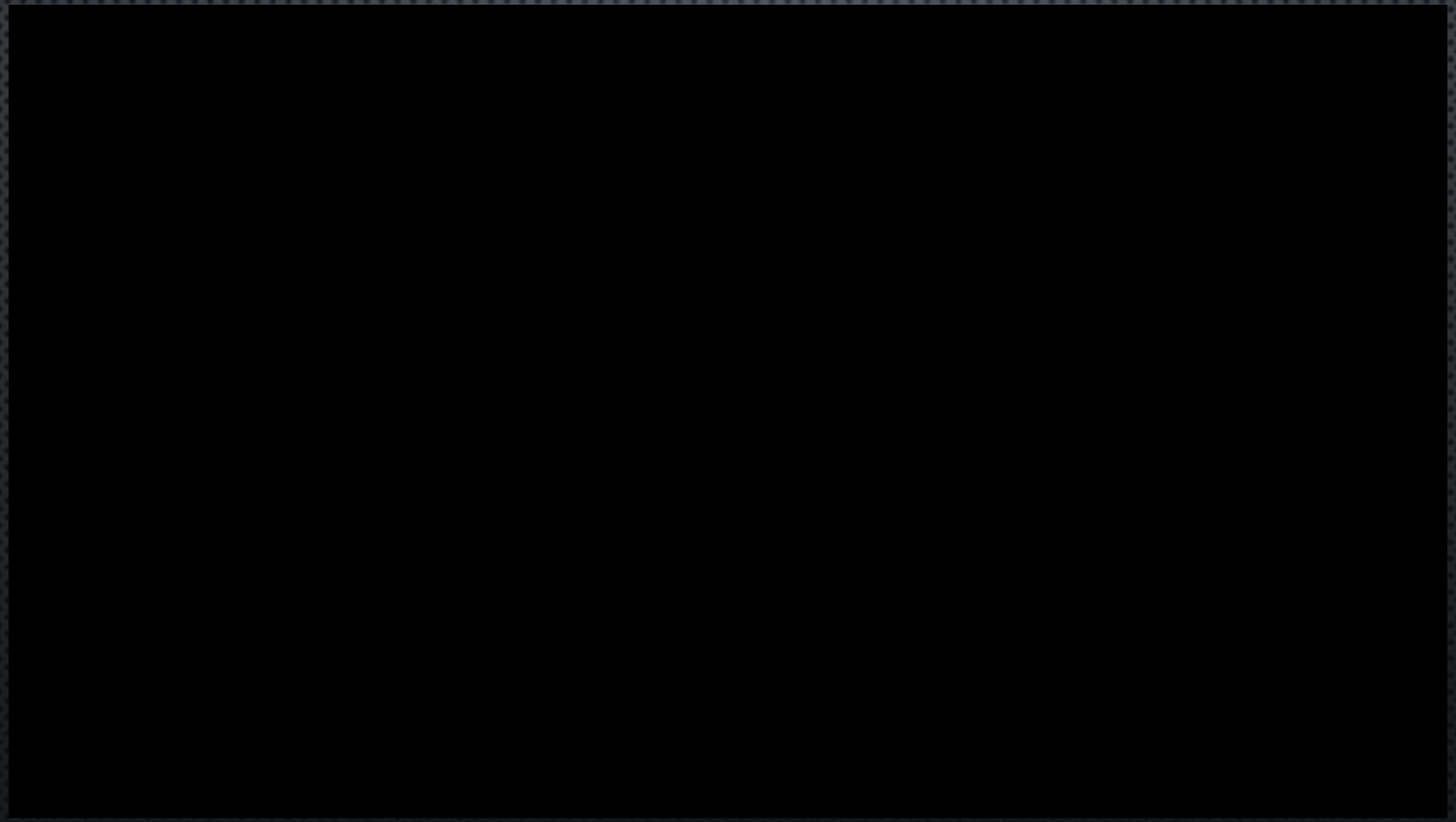
- Where cultures meet and create new forms
- "almost the same but not quite"

Productive Ambiguity

- Hybridity disrupts binary thinking
- Traditional/modern, east/west

- Global gaming conventions (Culture B)

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY: THE "THIRD SPACE"



CULTURAL HYBRIDITY: BEYOND SIMPLE TRANSLATION

Cultural Hybridity in BMW

- Not preservation
  - Not freezing “authentic” Chinese culture in amber
- Not simple translation
  - Not just explaining Chinese culture in Western gaming language
- But accessible transformation
  - Creating new cultural forms that global audiences can engage with while being challenged by

The lesson:

- True accessibility comes through creative hybridity, not cultural simplification

IAN BOGOST'S PROCEDURAL RHETORIC

Games make arguments through rules and systems, not just words or images.

Instead of telling players about Chinese philosophy, BMW makes them experience it through interactive mechanics.

PROCEDURAL RHETORIC IN ACTION

Case study: Yin-Yang Fish Boss Fight

- Daoist principle of balance and complementary
- Boss alternates between Yin and Yang states
- Players too
- Attacks deal more damage if opposing states, otherwise reduced

PROCEDURAL RHETORIC IN ACTION

Chinese philosophical arguments - Daoist

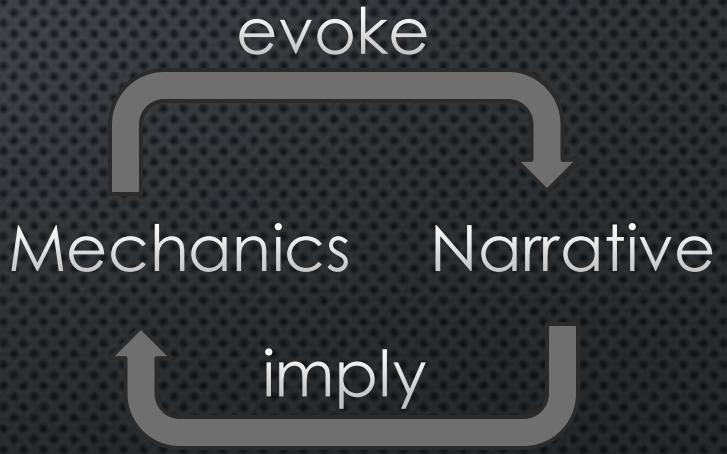
- Harmony over conflict
- Balance over extremes
- Wisdom over brute force

Embodied through hands-on experience
- the persuasive power of a game's rules.

MATTIE BRICE'S LUDONARRATIVE RESONANCE

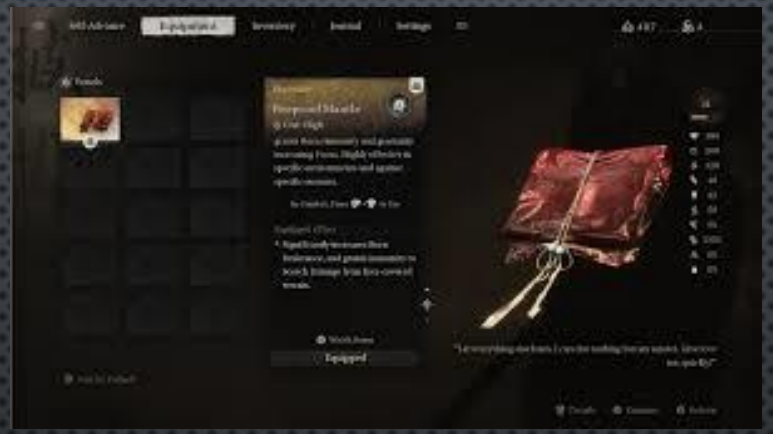
Unified player experience

- Gameplay mechanics and narrative elements work together harmoniously
- Gameplay doesn't just serve the story, it IS the story



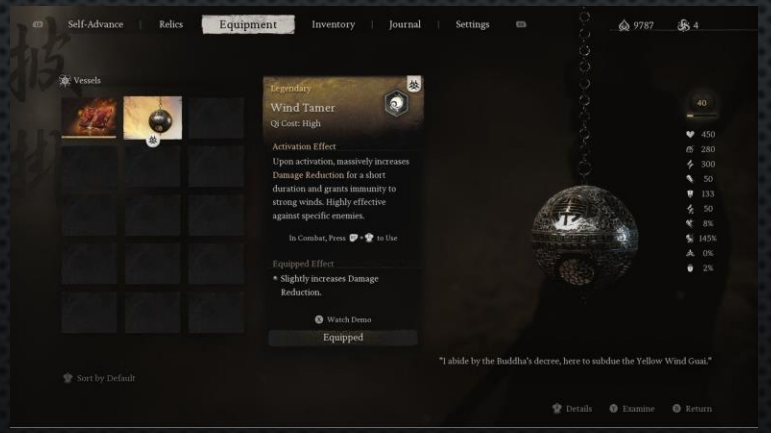
THE VESSELS SYSTEM

hidden region



secret vessel

advantage vs. specific boss



THE VESSELS SYSTEM

evoke

Seeking Vessels — Journey to the west

imply

hidden region — secret vessel

evoke

Mechanics — Narrative

imply

advantage vs. specific boss

THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS: FROM CONSTRUCTION TO EXPERIENCE

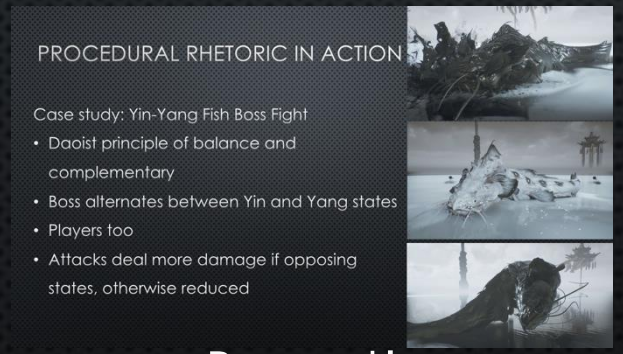
Representation

Hall's

Local x global

Bhabha's

Persuade through rules



Bogost's

Gameplay x story

Brice's

LESSONS – FOR INDUSTRY

Differentiate through depth

- Culturally rich games can stand out and scale globally without flattening local identity

Local X Global = Advantage

- Partner with regional experts while applying AAA production pipelines

Dialogue drives new markets

- Enabling cross-cultural exchange spawns fresh engagement, tourism, and merchandise opportunities.

LESSONS – FOR DEVELOPERS

Actively construct meanings

- Co-author narratives with local experts rather than simply "translate" heritage

Cultivate a creative Third Space

- Embed modular cultural assets (art, music, lore) in flexible pipelines so communities and global co-create new meanings

LESSONS – FOR DEVELOPERS

Embed Culture in Rules

- Turn cultural values into gameplay mechanics – so design choices themselves "argue" for heritage concepts

Align mechanics & narrative

- Ensure story beats and systems mirror each other so players literally "live" the cultural journey

FUTURE WORK

Deepen the analysis of each lens

Comparative studies with other titles

- Apply the four-lens framework to other culturally rooted titles (e.g. God of War, Red Dead Redemption).

Player-centered metrics

- Surveys, behavioral logs, or eye-tracking to quantify how mechanics shape cultural understanding.

FUTURE WORK

Toolkits & best practices

- Develop modular pipelines (asset metadata schemas, co-creation workflows) to help teams operationalize a "third space."

Long-term impact

- Track downstream effects on tourism, education enrollment, and cultural preservation.

Thank You

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