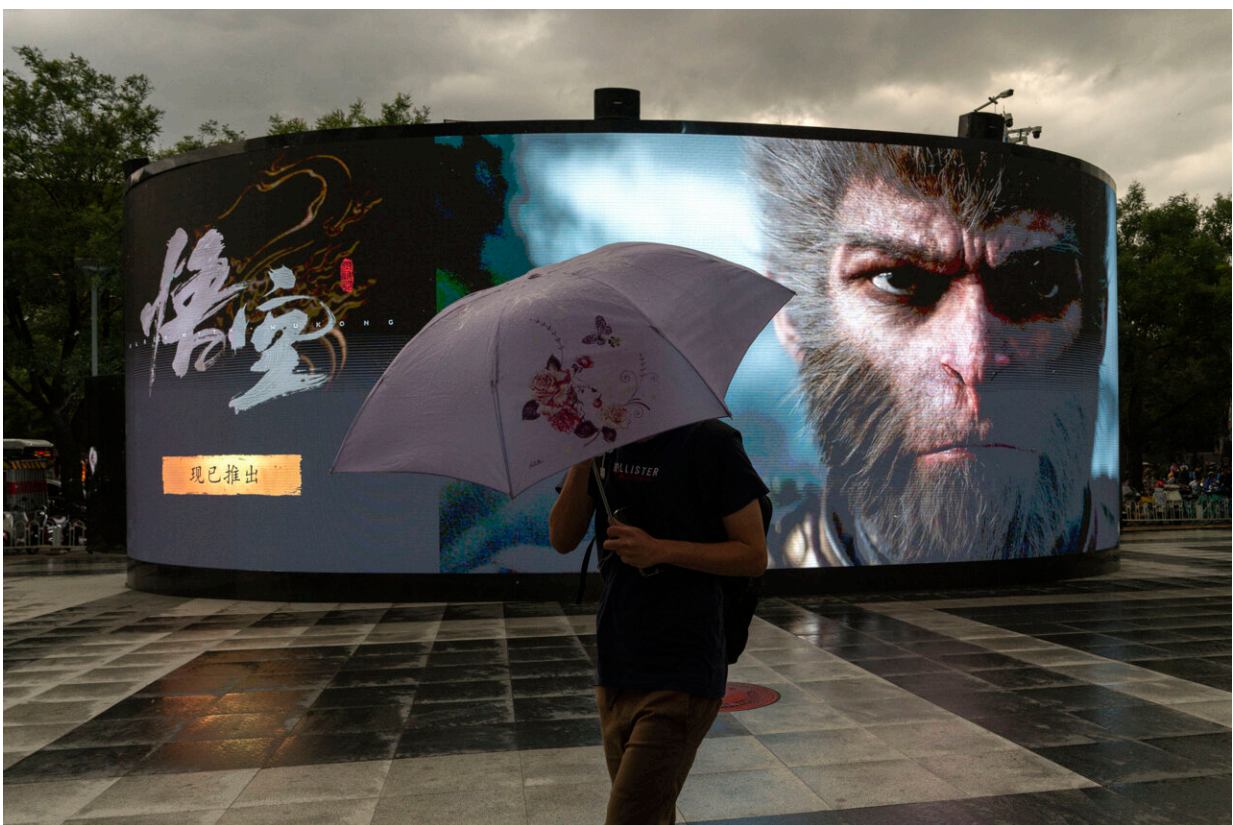


A blockbuster Chinese video game sparks debate on sexism in the nation's gaming industry

September 9 2024, by Elsie Chen



A man holds up an umbrella against the rain as he walks past an ad promoting the latest blockbuster new Chinese video game "Black Myth: Wukong" in Beijing, Friday, Aug. 23, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan

A blockbuster new Chinese video game hailed as a milestone for the country's gaming industry has put an unexpected spotlight on longstanding claims of rampant sexism in China's male-dominated gaming culture.

While some gamers are basking in the runaway success of the action-adventure title "Black Myth: Wukong," others are voicing their complaints about sexism in Chinese gaming and lodging allegations against the game's Shenzhen-based developer, Game Science, that it posted offensive messages online.

Critics posted screenshots of the messages on Chinese social media platform Weibo, with one compilation receiving over 400,000 likes. One of the posts that critics say came from founder Feng Ji uses descriptions of oral sex as a metaphor for the positive responses about the game's promotional video. Other examples include lewd recruiting posters.

AP was not able to independently verify the screenshots, though gamers interviewed reported seeing the posts. Game Science did not respond to an email seeking comment and hasn't publicly commented on the controversy.

The criticism reflects simmering anger among Chinese women in the industry who say they have long been targeted by misogynistic remarks and behavior.

Gender inequality is a global problem in the heavily male-dominated gaming industry. Despite making up almost half of the gamers globally, women made up only about 22% of the gaming industry workforce in 2020, according to [Women in Games](#), a United Kingdom-based organization.



A woman holds up an umbrella as it rains near an advertisement promoting the latest blockbuster new Chinese video game "Black Myth: Wukong" in Beijing, Friday, Aug. 23, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan

Skylar Hu, the only woman on her game engineering team of over 20 people, said her male colleagues often posted sexual jokes in work chat groups. She said when she told offenders to stop, her messages were ignored.

"Offensive jokes are so common and explicit," Hu, 23, said in a phone interview, speaking on condition she be cited by her English name out of concern for her safety online.

For Jessica Hua, a former video game operation manager, controversy

over the game reminded her of the toxic environment she experienced as a woman in the [game industry](#).

"A lot of people think it's just kidding around. But I cannot accept such misogynistic remarks," said Hua. "I take it quite seriously."

"Black Myth: Wukong" is China's first-ever AAA game, a designation for big-budget productions akin to A-list movies. The game made history when over 2.4 million people played the game simultaneously online, breaking the record for most-played single-player game on Steam, a major online gaming platform. Three days after the game's debut, over 10 million copies had been sold.

Many in the Chinese gaming industry say they regard the game as a point of national pride, promoting Chinese culture and challenging Western dominance in the industry.



People walk past an advertisement promoting the latest blockbuster new Chinese video game "Black Myth: Wukong" in Beijing, Friday, Aug. 23, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan

"There is no doubt that this is a milestone in the Chinese gaming industry," said Feng Xu, secretary of the Chengdu Cyber Game Industry Association. "It's exporting authentic Chinese culture by introducing Monkey King to the world."

China, which famously imposed limits on how long kids can play video games and sought to curtail excessive spending on online gaming, has shown full support for "Black Myth." The government of China's northwestern Shanxi province collaborated with the game's developer to promote local tourism. State media have also published a series of

articles praising the game.

Feng Xu says he doesn't think the allegations against Game Science would have much impact on the game's success. "Political correctness has nothing to do with the game," he said. "We [gamers](#) only play the games, and we only care if the game is good and fun."

Others say it was only a matter of time before addressing sexism in Chinese gaming culture gained more traction.

"Most game creators are men. You can see in a lot of games women are usually unnecessarily sexy and objectified," said Ashley Li, a cultural critic and game enthusiast. "But I think this will gradually change in the future. We need to give it some time."

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