

# NEWS LETTER

Sparkle *Insights*

## A JOURNEY THROUGH CHINA: OBSERVATIONS ON A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

By Iris Y

Iris and her family return to China, the country of her birth, to explore and reflect on the dramatic changes in its landscape. Through her observations and experiences, she shares a personal journey that captures the blend of tradition and modernity, offering a unique perspective on a rapidly evolving nation.

[Read More - Page 1](#)



## CHINA'S NEXT GLOBAL SHAKEUP: FROM “GENSHIN IMPACT” TO “BLACK MYTH: WUKONG”

By Brittany C

China's gaming industry is making waves globally, with hits like \*Genshin Impact\* capturing worldwide attention. Now, the highly anticipated \*Black Myth: Wukong\* is poised to continue this trend, showcasing China's growing influence in the gaming world. As Chinese developers push the boundaries of creativity and technology, these games are not only achieving commercial success but also reshaping global perceptions of Chinese entertainment. \*Black Myth: Wukong\* is set to be the next major milestone in this cultural shift.

[Read More - Page 6](#)

## THE ANCIENT ART OF QIGONG

By Caitlyn S

Qigong, an ancient Chinese practice, is rapidly gaining popularity in America for its holistic benefits, offering accessible, low-impact wellness that promotes physical health and mental clarity across diverse groups.

[Read More - Page 12](#)

## SPOTLIGHT EVENTS

Experience vibrant Asian cultural celebrations this September across the U.S., including festivals, Dragon Boat races, and business excellence events. Don't miss these enriching experiences!

[Read More - Page 13](#)



## A Journey Through China: Observations on a Changing Landscape

◆ By Iris Yim

From July 1 to 19 this year, I traveled through China with my husband and two children, visiting Xi'an, Xining, and Qinghai Lake in northwestern China; Chengdu in the southwest; and finally heading south to my hometown of Zhaoqing in Guangdong. We concluded our China itinerary in Hong Kong before heading to Taipei for the last leg of our Asia trip.



By Iris Yim

I was born in Guangdong, China, and left in 1987. Since then, I've kept up with news about China from afar and occasionally communicated with friends and family on WeChat. However, I hadn't returned to the country since 2009 for a focus group project and had never really traveled within China, particularly to culturally diverse areas like Xi'an (the starting point of the Silk Road and an international city in the 7th century), Xining, which has a mix of Muslim, Tibetan, and Han populations, and Qinghai Lake, predominantly inhabited by Tibetans. So, this trip was both highly anticipated and exciting.

## Overbuilding and a Sluggish Economy

My first impression upon stepping foot in China was miles and miles of new apartment buildings on the outskirts of Xi'an, our first stop. The airport is located an hour away from the city, but for most of that journey, I saw nothing but brand-new construction springing up from seemingly nowhere. This left me wondering: does Xi'an have a large enough population to justify these new buildings? Do people have the means to buy them? Are they even interested in living an hour away from the city?

Consider this: the one-hour car ride from the airport to the city costs around 100 RMB, while most rides within the city cost 20-30 RMB. According to fang.com, the average price per square meter in Xi'an in July 2024 is 13,617 RMB. A two-bedroom apartment of 80 square meters would cost 1,089,360 RMB—out of reach for most people with regular jobs. The situation illustrates the issues of overbuilding, over-leveraging, and the risks posed to state-owned banks, contributing to a rather bleak economic outlook in China right now. The latest youth unemployment rate for those aged 16 to 24 is 15.3%.



By Iris Yim

A driver told me that Xining, which has the highest population concentration in Qinghai Province (40% of the province's population), lost 70% of its population last year. While I couldn't verify this statistic, the gist is clear: the local economy is struggling so much that many people have decided to move out, unable to make a living. These signs partly explain why some Chinese migrants are traveling through Central America to cross the southern border into the US. Others have found more peculiar ways to cope; one cab driver in Chengdu suggested people should watch more CCTV news broadcasts to feel more content—a notion I found amusing.

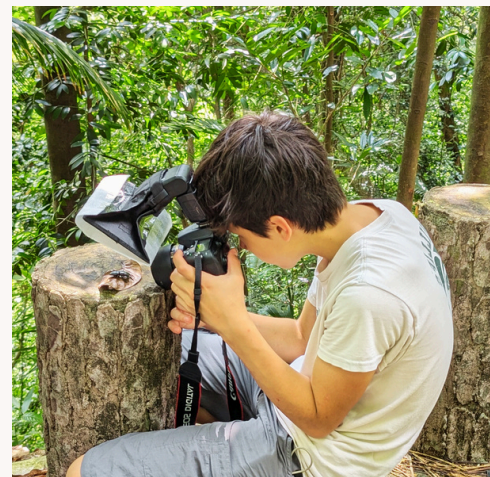


By Iris Yim

## The Ubiquity of Electric Vehicles (EVs)

Despite the sluggish economy, I was quite impressed by the penetration of electric vehicles (EVs) in China, both in terms of the number on the road and the established charging infrastructure. There were 8.1 million new EV registrations in China in 2023, compared to 1.2 million EVs sold in the US. Government policies certainly gave the EV industry in China a strong push. For example, all hired car operators must use an EV to renew their business license. In the US, range anxiety and lack of charging infrastructure are the primary barriers to EV adoption.

In China, I was impressed with the charging infrastructure. Apparently, all gas stations now have EV chargers. I asked one of the drivers in Xi'an how he charges his EV at home, given that most people in China live in apartments, and single-family houses are virtually non-existent. Charging in apartment buildings is a barrier for cities like New York, according to market research studies I've conducted related to EVs. The driver explained that you can buy a charging kit, which comes with a meter, and pay your share of the electricity to the building. A regular charging kit (for slow overnight charging) costs 2,000-5,000 RMB and typically includes installation. This allows you to charge your EV even if you live in an apartment—something the US could potentially learn from.



By Iris Yim



By Iris Yim



By Iris Yim



By Iris Yim

## Security and Crime Rates

As we passed through subway stations, train stations, and airports in China, I couldn't help but notice the high level of security checks. For example, when entering an airport, there is a security check right at the gate. A security guard scans every passenger with a metal detector, and you must place your luggage on a conveyor belt for inspection. Then, there's the usual security check after check-in that you would encounter in the US. Security checks are also conducted at subway and train stations. Essentially, you can't carry any metal objects on a subway or train. My husband had a pair of scissors in his bag and had to give them up at a train station. The security guard wanted to write up a report on this but gave up when she saw a Danish passport, as she couldn't read or write in English.

ID is required everywhere—for museums, trains, and hotels—for both booking and check-in, for every member of the party. However, the entire system is built around data entry and verification for Chinese IDs. If you're booking with a passport, some museums won't allow it simply because their system can't handle the data entry. In such cases, you'll have to purchase tickets at the door, which isn't advisable if it's a popular tourist destination, especially during the summer months.

Due to the extent of ID verification, security checks, and an extensive network of surveillance cameras, China has one of the lowest crime rates in the world.

Unlike in the US, monetary transactions in China have virtually all gone digital, even for street vendors. Until recently, foreigners couldn't use China's popular payment apps, such as Alipay and WeChat Pay, because they didn't accept foreign credit cards. Since China's vast ecommerce is primarily based on these two apps, without access to them, you couldn't book a car, pay for purchases and food, or buy museum tickets. To stimulate the economy, China has implemented some tourist-friendly policies, loosening regulations on Alipay and WeChat Pay so that foreign visitors can now link their credit cards and spend money in China.

I had different experiences using WeChat Pay and Alipay. You must upload your passport for ID verification on both apps, but Alipay was much more user-friendly.

ID verification was completed within minutes on Alipay, whereas, despite multiple attempts, I couldn't get verification done on WeChat Pay and therefore couldn't use the app during my trip. I even contacted customer service twice, but to no avail. Fortunately, Alipay worked well for the most part. I could pay for 90% of my purchases on Alipay and book all car rides through the app (which was crucial, as otherwise, I couldn't get around). The only times I couldn't use Alipay were in remote areas where WeChat Pay is more commonly used and when vendors only had personal Alipay accounts, not business ones, in which case they couldn't accept payments from an Alipay account linked to a non-Chinese credit card.

By Iris Yim

Despite geopolitical tensions and some inconveniences while traveling in China, I would still recommend it. As China tries to find its place and define itself in the world in this post-pandemic recalibration, there are bright spots of innovation and growing pains amid a slowing economy. There is still much for the world to learn from the China experience, particularly in EVs and ecommerce. For me, the most important part of the trip was helping my kids connect with their cultural roots. Before the trip, my 15-year-old son kept complaining about going to China because he had heard nothing but negative things about the country from school and the news. Now, he's asking when we can visit Zhaoqing, Guangdong, and Hong Kong again to see relatives and photograph snakes (he had great luck finding rare snakes in these two places).



Source: Game Science

## Leveling Up the Game Scene: China's New Power Move!

Video games aren't just about conquering epic bosses, grinding levels, or showing off your skills against your buddies—they're also your gateway to exploring new cultures. For ages, game development was dominated by the big names from the U.S., Europe, and Japan—think Activision Blizzard, Epic Games, Nintendo, Ubisoft, Microsoft, etc.

# CHINA'S NEXT GLOBAL SHAKEUP: FROM "GENSHIN IMPACT" TO "BLACK MYTH: WUKONG"

By Brittany C

But hold your horses because China's entering the game! If you're already hooked on Genshin Impact, you know what's up. This mega-popular Chinese gacha game has totally captured gamers' hearts with its stunning worlds, chaotic character-switching, and action-packed battles. Sure, it may have heavily borrowed some vibes from "The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild" and some Japanese flair, but "Genshin Impact" is pure Chinese magic, offering a fresh dive into Chinese culture.

**Unveil the game-scape from within**  
A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE CREATIVE WORLDS OF GAME STUDIOS

INDIE	AAA
<b>TEAM SIZE</b> Predominantly under 50 employees.	<b>TEAM SIZE</b> Can range from hundreds to thousands of employees.
<b>PROJECT SIZE</b> Usually smaller scale projects.	<b>PROJECT SIZE</b> Large scale projects with extended resources.
<b>ROLE SPECIALIZATION</b> More generalist roles, team members often wear multiple hats.	<b>ROLE SPECIALIZATION</b> Specialized roles with well-defined responsibilities.
<b>WORK FLEXIBILITY</b> Greater flexibility in work hours and remote work opportunities.	<b>WORK FLEXIBILITY</b> Traditional office settings, though some AAA studios are beginning to offer more flexible options.
<b>CREATIVE CONTROL</b> Higher likelihood of having a direct impact on the final product.	<b>CREATIVE CONTROL</b> Less individual influence on the final product due to larger team sizes.
<b>DECISION-MAKING</b> Less bureaucracy and a more direct line to decision-makers.	<b>DECISION-MAKING</b> More hierarchical decision-making structures.
<b>DEVELOPMENT CYCLE</b> Shorter cycles with rapid implementation.	<b>DEVELOPMENT CYCLE</b> Longer cycles with extended timelines for development and testing.
<b>RISK-TAKING</b> More open to taking risks and trying innovative ideas.	<b>RISK-TAKING</b> Generally more risk-averse due to high stakes and investments.
<b>JOB SECURITY</b> Can be less secure due to smaller budgets.	<b>JOB SECURITY</b> Often more secure with stable funding – no longer the case, mass layoffs at big studios in 2023.
<b>EXPOSURE</b> Greater chance to stand out and make a name for yourself.	<b>EXPOSURE</b> Chance to work on high-profile games known globally.

REMEMBER, THESE ARE GENERAL TRENDS AND THE ACTUAL CONDITIONS CAN VARY GREATLY BETWEEN DIFFERENT STUDIOS AND COMPANIES

8Bit Game-changing recruitment

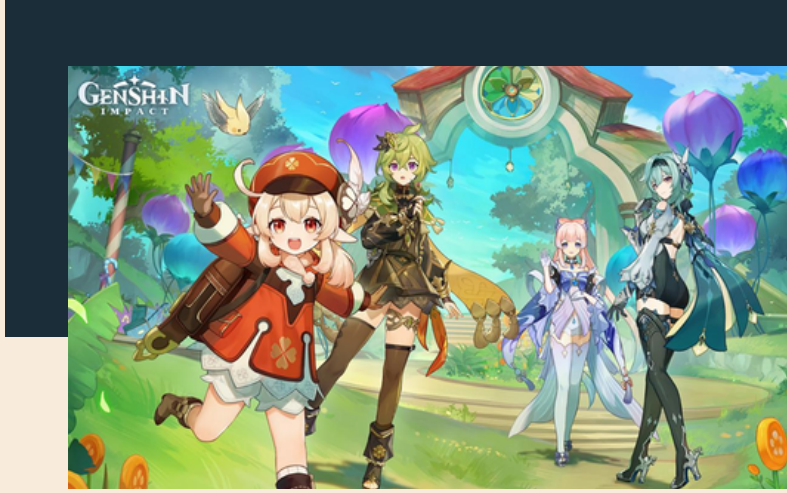
8bitplay.com

Source: 8Bit



As “Genshin Impact” continues to dazzle, Chinese developers and the government are realizing that video games can be a serious form of soft power. They’re gearing up to make China a major player on the global gaming stage, with top-tier games ready to rival the best.

In the early ‘90s, China banned foreign consoles to curb violent content, leading gamers to rely on knock-off consoles, PCs, browser games, and eventually mobile games. The ban’s unintended consequence was the rise of affordable and accessible PC and mobile gaming, which thrived on free-to-play models with in-game purchases.



Source: Genshin Impact

## Flashback: China’s Console Ban Era



Source: Ben Gilbert/Insider

The ban on gaming consoles in China was lifted in 2015, enabling companies like Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo to enter the market. However, most consoles in China are still imported because localized games face rejection due to ongoing censorship. Despite these challenges, China’s gaming industry has flourished, with sales reaching nearly \$42 billion in 2023, marking a 13.95% increase from the previous year.

Mobile games dominate in China and East Asia, with “Genshin Impact” leading globally. Released by Shanghai-based miHoYo in 2020, the free-to-play RPG earned over \$3.5 billion in its first year, surpassing “Fortnite”. Approximately 70% of its revenue came from outside China, with 20% from the U.S., making it a cultural ambassador for China.

However, the Chinese government imposed new restrictions in 2021, limiting minors to one hour of gaming per day and tightening rules on loot boxes. This crackdown, which affected Tencent’s stock and shrank the gaming market by \$100 billion, might signal a shift towards more prestigious, story-driven games like “Black Myth: Wukong”, as the focus moves away from loot box-heavy titles.



Source: miHoYo



- Release Date: August 20, 2024
- Platform: PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S, PC (Steam & Epic Games Store)
- Developer & Publisher: Game Science
- Price: Standard - \$59.99; Digital Deluxe Edition - \$69.99
- Languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Italian

Since dropping its final trailer on August 8th, “Black Myth: Wukong” has set the gaming community ablaze with its epic gameplay, jaw-dropping visuals, and intense bosses.

Smashing Records: most anticipated game on Steam, 10 million copies sold, 30 million concurrent players on Steam, PS5 sold out in China due to high demand

Maybe even Game of the Year?

“Black Myth: Wukong” pulls its story from the classic Chinese epic Journey to the West, expanding and modernizing this legendary tale. Set in ancient Chinese mythology, the game’s world is filled with mythical creatures, demons, and celestial beings. The original story follows the monk Tang Seng and his crew—Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, and Sha Wujing—on their journey west to fetch Buddhist scriptures, facing trials and foes along the way. Wukong, the Monkey King, has since then inspired similar characters in games and anime.

In the game, you play as the Destined One, on a mission to reclaim Sun Wukong’s Six Relics from formidable bosses to bring the Monkey King back to life. Sun Wukong, known for his defiance, was ultimately defeated by the forces of Heaven after rejecting their rigid hierarchical system.

The features a dynamic combat system blending traditional martial arts with modern, fluid gameplay mechanics. Wukong’s moves are quick and nimble, focusing on dodging and using spells strategically. Think of Soulslike but more “God of War Ragnarök” mixed with “Devil May Cry”.

## Black Myth: Wukong

#	Name	Top Sellers	Followers
#1	Black Myth: Wukong	#1	623,973
#2	Hollow Knight: Silksong		296,424
#3	Frostpunk 2	#454	135,647
#4	Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine 2	#12	130,821
#5	S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2: Heart of Chernobyl	#184	220,762
#6	Monster Hunter Wilds		101,079
#7	Marvel Rivals		106,889
#8	ARK 2		131,690
#9	Unrecord		121,276

Source: Steam

- **Movement & Focus:** There is no traditional blocking or parrying mechanics. Instead, the staff can deflect projectiles and the player evades melee attacks. Up to three consecutive dodges are allowed, with a recovery penalty in stamina for excessive dodging. Perfectly timed dodges boost focus, enhancing the Destined One’s attacks or enabling special abilities.

- **Spells:** Access to various mana-consuming spells, categorized under different talent trees like Mysticism, Alteration, and Strand. For instance, the Immobilize spell under Mysticism can freeze enemies, making them susceptible to follow-up attacks. Stronger enemies, such as bosses, are less affected by these spells, particularly during their attack animations.
- **Shapeshifting:** Inspired by the "72 Terrestrial Transformations" from Journey to the West, the Destined One can shapeshift into various forms, providing both exploration and combat advantages. Transformations like the Golden Cicada enhance stealth and mobility, while combat-focused forms offer unique attacks and defensive boosts. Shapeshifting abilities may also unlock additional enhancements and special powers after defeating major bosses.

**Stances and Skill Trees:** The combat system features multiple stances and skill trees, each offering distinct playstyles. Key stances include:

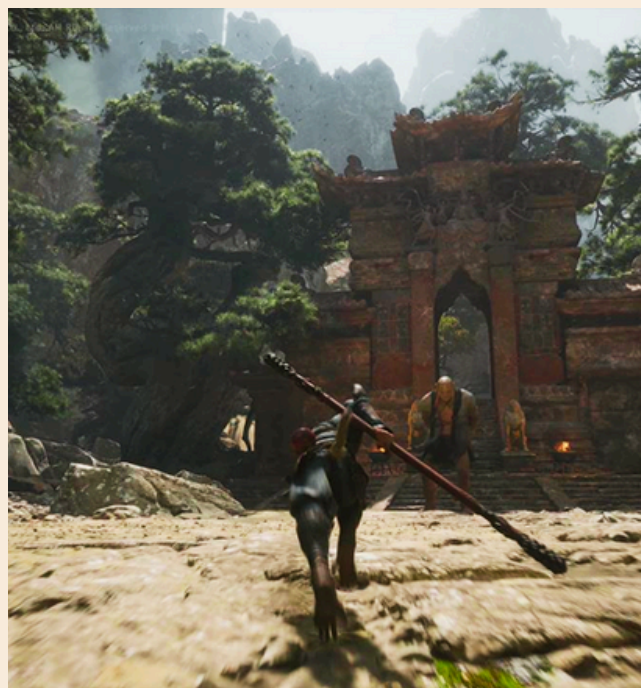
- **Smash Stance:** Focuses on powerful, aggressive attacks.
- **Pillar Stance:** Provides defensive and evasive maneuvers, including the ability to avoid ground-based attacks.
- **Thrust Stance:** Centers on defensive maneuvers and counterattacks.

Skill trees and stances are upgraded using points called "Sparks," which are earned through combat and exploration. Players can customize their gameplay by investing in specific stances or spells that match their preferred playstyle.

- **Focus Points:** These points are critical for unleashing charged and heavy attacks. They are consumed during stance-specific maneuvers and can be replenished by successfully landing hits and performing dodges.
- **Recovery and Defense:** Abilities and perks can enhance the Destined One's survivability, including increasing health recovery, stamina, and defense, which are crucial for enduring intense combat encounters.



Source: YouTube Channel Wookong



Source: Game Science

Visually, "Black Myth: Wukong" is a masterpiece. Powered by Unreal Engine 5, it delivers hyper-realistic graphics that pull you into a beautifully crafted world. The game recreates real Chinese landmarks like the Dazu Rock Carvings, Guanyin Pavilion, and Maijishan Grottoes, making them interactive and adding depth to the gameplay.

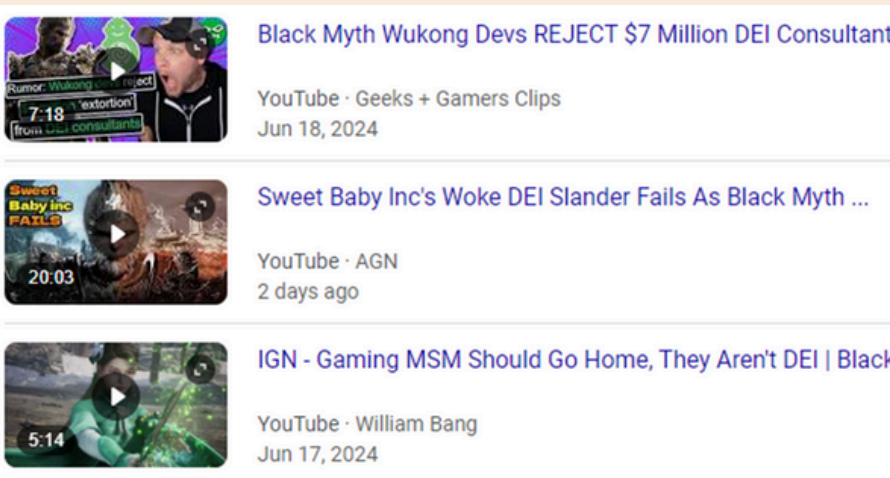
# DEI Controversy and Extortion Allegations

Source: Game Science

The controversy involving “Black Myth: Wukong” revolves around a rumor that DEI consultants allegedly attempted to extort \$7 million from the game’s developers, Game Science. According to these unverified claims, the consultants pressured Game Science to make specific changes related to gender representation and diversity in the game’s development. If these demands were not met, there were implied threats of negative media coverage and backlash.

These allegations have sparked a significant debate within the gaming community, with many gamers showing support for Game Science, viewing the company’s resistance to these demands as a stand against perceived overreach by DEI advocates. This support is evident in discussions on platforms like Reddit and YouTube, where players and content creators have rallied behind Game Science, criticizing the DEI consultants’ alleged actions as an attempt to enforce specific ideological standards within game development.

However, it is crucial to highlight that there is no concrete evidence supporting the claim of extortion, and no official statement from Game Science has confirmed these allegations. Some observers suggest that these rumors could be part of a broader attempt to discredit DEI initiatives or to generate controversy to garner attention for the game.



The image shows three YouTube video thumbnails. The first thumbnail is titled "Black Myth Wukong Devs REJECT \$7 Million DEI Consultant" and is from the channel "Geeks + Gamers Clips", dated Jun 18, 2024. The second thumbnail is titled "Sweet Baby Inc's Woke DEI Slander Fails As Black Myth ..." and is from the channel "AGN", dated 2 days ago. The third thumbnail is titled "IGN - Gaming MSM Should Go Home, They Aren't DEI | Black" and is from the channel "William Bang", dated Jun 17, 2024.

Source: Google Search



## Accusations of Lack of Female Characters

Another aspect of the controversy is the accusation that “Black Myth: Wukong” lacks female representation, a criticism that aligns with broader discussions about gender diversity in gaming. Early gameplay footage and promotional materials primarily featured male characters, leading to allegations that the game underrepresents women. However, these claims have been countered by reports suggesting that female characters do appear in the game, but they are introduced in later chapters or scenarios not shown in the initial trailers and demos.

Game Science responded to these concerns by emphasizing that “Black Myth: Wukong” is a work-in-progress and that the full narrative will include a diverse cast of characters. This inclusion aligns with the traditional Journey to the West mythos, which features various characters of different genders and backgrounds, suggesting that the game will reflect this diversity once all chapters and updates are released.

## COMMUNITY AND MEDIA REACTIONS

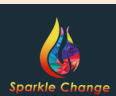


The DEI controversy, combined with the gender representation debate, has led to polarized reactions. Some argue that the focus on DEI issues detracts from the game's cultural and artistic value, particularly given its basis in Chinese mythology and folklore. Others maintain that representation and inclusivity are essential in modern gaming, and they call for more transparency from developers about their approach to these issues.

China's gaming landscape is undergoing a dramatic transformation, shifting from a history of restrictions to a vibrant realm of creativity and cultural richness. With groundbreaking titles like “Genshin Impact” and the recent sensation “Black Myth: Wukong,” the industry is making waves globally. Upcoming single-player Chinese games to watch include “Daba: Land of Water Scar,” “Swordsman Love: The Story of Xie Yun Liu,” “Where Winds Meet,” and “Phantom Blade Zero.” Additionally, notable Asian indie games like “Stellar Blade” and “Lies of P” from Korea have made a significant impact on the AAA industry. It will be exciting to see how the East continues to reshape the gaming landscape. Get your controller ready!

### References

- GamesIndustry.biz:** “Chinese Switch Sales Expose Failure to Counter the Ever-Present Import Market” [Link](#)
- GameSpot:** “Black Myth: Wukong Is a Speedy Souls-Like Where You Can Transform into Your Enemies” [Link](#)
- ZLeague:** “KhrazeGaming: Everything You Need to Know About Black Myth: Wukong” [Link](#)
- Rock Paper Shotgun:** “Black Myth: Wukong Release Date Details & Everything We Know” [Link](#)
- ASO World:** “Everything You Should Know About Black Myth: Wukong” [Link](#)
- Fextralife:** “The Mythical Origins of Black Myth: Wukong” [Link](#)
- YouTube Video:** “Black Myth: Wukong Gameplay Overview” [Link](#)
- YouTube Channel:** “Black Myth Game” [Link](#)
- New Lines Magazine:** “Video Games Are China's Next Soft Power Grab” [Link](#)





## The Ancient Art of Qigong: Nurturing Mind and Body in the Modern World

By Caitlyn S

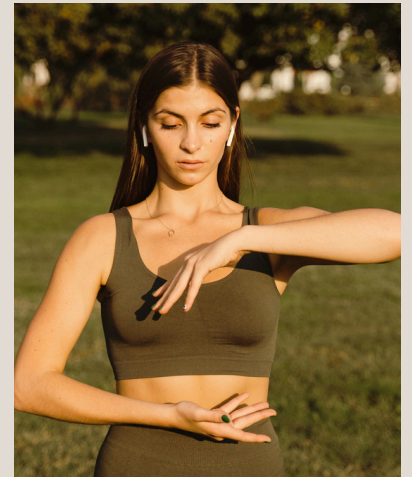
In today's fast-paced society, where stress and sedentary lifestyles have become the norm, an ancient Chinese practice is gaining popularity as a holistic approach to health and wellness. Qigong, pronounced "chee-gong," is a centuries-old system that combines gentle movements, controlled breathing, and meditation to cultivate and balance qi, or vital energy, within the body.

Rooted in traditional Chinese medicine and Taoist philosophy, qigong has been practiced for over 4,000 years. Its name is derived from two Chinese words: "qi," meaning life force or vital energy, and "gong," referring to skill cultivated through steady practice. Unlike high-intensity workouts, qigong's gentle, flowing movements make it accessible to people of all ages and fitness levels.

The practice of qigong offers a multitude of benefits for both mental and physical health. On the mental front, regular practitioners report significant reductions in stress levels and improvements in overall emotional well-being. The meditative aspects of qigong help calm the mind, enhance focus, and promote a sense of inner peace. Many find it an effective tool for managing symptoms of anxiety and depression, as it encourages mindfulness and present-moment awareness.

Physically, qigong's gentle movements and postures improve flexibility, balance, and body awareness. The controlled breathing techniques support cardiovascular health and enhance lung capacity. Many practitioners, especially those dealing with chronic conditions like arthritis, report a decrease in pain and an increase in mobility. Some studies even suggest that regular qigong practice may boost immune function and improve sleep quality.

One of the reasons for qigong's rising popularity is its versatility. It can be practiced individually or in groups, indoors or outdoors, and requires no special equipment. This makes it an ideal addition to any wellness routine, whether you're a busy professional, a retiree, or somewhere in between. Qigong also complements other forms of exercise and medical treatments, making it a valuable tool in integrative health approaches.



Many workplaces are now incorporating qigong into their wellness programs, recognizing its potential to reduce stress and improve employee well-being. Community centers and parks often offer group classes, fostering a sense of connection among practitioners.

Whether you're seeking stress relief, pain management, or simply a way to enhance your overall health, qigong presents an accessible and effective option. By dedicating even a few minutes each day to this practice, you may find yourself embarking on a transformative journey towards greater physical vitality and mental clarity.



# SPOTLIGHT EVENTS

## Knox Asian Festival - Asian Culture Center

Location: Knoxville, TN  
Event date: September 7th - 8th, 2024

For more information

[click Here!](#)



## 9th Annual Asia Fest with Dragon Boat Racing

Location: Koka Booth Amphitheatre and Symphony Lake in Cary, NC.  
Event date: September 28th, 2024

For more information

[click Here!](#)

## Asian Moon Festival and Business Excellence Celebration

Location: Brookfield Conference Center, Brookfield, WI.  
Event date: September 15th, 2024

For more information

[click Here!](#)

