

Hybridizing the West: The Active Reconfiguration of Western Imagery in Japanese Video Games

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Abstract. In this article it examines real game examples of how Japanese game makers learn from the West. It also looks on the way they modify and remake these western things on their own. From the research we know, Japanese games are not copying western culture in a simplistic way. They reconstruct the west elements with oriental thoughts and the main part is traditional Japan. This method allows Japanese games to create their own worldviews and gain recognition in overseas culture. Bhabha's hybridity theory and the balance between global and local culture are theoretical tools that can also help people clearly understand this. And it helps us understand the culture in games more easily. Different cultures mixing together makes for lotsa good stuff in Japanese games. They get great commercial value and big international influence. At the same time, they also bring this traditional Japanese spirit and aesthetic idea to people all over the world. And this kind of cultural mix would make the different cultures get along better in our present day digital society. Furthermore, exporting culture by means of game also can bring about great economic gains for Japan. The experience of Japan can serve as a useful example for the cultural industries of other non-Western countries.

Keywords: Cultural Hybridity, Localization in Game Design, Japanese Video Games, Transcultural Aesthetics, Postcolonial Critique

1. Introduction

The current world has features of intense exchange between different cultural circles across the globe, which is observable in the form of cultural products such as video games that get distributed all over the world. A distinctive feature of the worldwide gaming business is that there are numerous well-known Japanese video games filled with lots of western visuals, narratives or play elements. But this isn't all copied over, these things go through a selection process and then reinterpretation, eventually creating some kind of hybrid product that is still at its core, aesthetically, philosophically, narratively Japanese – or more broadly, East Asian. And historically, very early Japanese video games were quite bold about taking on Western tech and culture. But simple copying was not nearly enough for them to stand firm in the global market.

That raises a few good questions. How exactly have Japanese games re-established western cultural imagery? So how does all this mixing happen, and what are some signs? And also can i do a research about Japan's place and her strategy in the world's flow of culture through this? Japan is

good at taking in other cultures and making it their own unique culture, values etc. Also, it blends them in smoothly to the game. And this method has created a very attractive game atmosphere for people all over the world. So I'm gonna take Japanese video games as my main point of research. To see what is "the West" get showed and remake in East Asia's cultural creation. And try to look for how and why they do this mixing culture thing. To achieve our aim, we will build upon a theoretical frame by using Cross-cultural Communication and Hybridity Studies: And then it talks about three common game series and how they use different strategies for their culture and negotiations. I hope that through this research, it will give people a better understanding on how non-western cultural industry interacts with changing global culture form (mostly western in nature) And I want to show it's possible that they make things that locals love, and that the rest of the world accepts.

2. Theoretical framework: analyzing cultural hybridity in games

Before the study about Western imagery in Japanese video games, I have to lay down some theory ground work for it. The cross-cultural communications and culture theories used here are useful means to study the mixing of cultures in games. According to these theories, Homi Bhabha's idea of "Hybridity" gives us a way to mix Eastern and Western things in the game [1,2]. What scholars say about culture helps us figure out how to make game character that have eastern and western cultural traits known all over the world [1,2] There are some early article discussing on the relationship between culture globalization & localization. They provide some ideas on how we might explain why Japanese games are able to think globally but implement locally [3,4]. Domestic scholars have put forward some ideas from their studies of the Japanese game industry and culture as well.

2.1. Hybridity and the "Third Space": beyond imitation

Homi Bhabha's idea of hybridity is crucial to the study of Japanese games. Japanese games aren't just some mixture of different cultures, they're creative "third places" [5]. Bhabha says that when colonizers or dominant people meet directly, there is a "Third Space" [5] Here we mix up all kinds of culture for talking, explaining and rebuilding it. It ends up being a mix of the two, local and foreign. And Japanese games are an example of the third space. They're neither straight copies of western games, nor are they all about Japanese stuff. It is a creative culture product. They take an open and accepting attitude to Western impact but keep their own individuality. These games are made up of 2 cultures traditions: In the game, it is probably to take some symbolical elements from primitive western knights costumes and christs culture, mix them with Japanese bushido to make new cultural signs. These things are prime illustrations of cultural blending.

2.2. Glocalization: the dialectic of the global and the local

The notion of "global localization" is a nice, helpful thing to tack onto the hybrid model. The idea zeroes in on the give and take between global influence and local culture. It can even explain how Japan managed to make their culture well known around the world by doing video games and why they did it. Between cultural globalization and localization, it's not that one will triumph over the other. Rather than one direction to the other it's more of like both evolve and grow overtime. As Chen gang and others say, we can't stress globalization's effect on world culture too much. It doesn't mean that every single culture around the world has to be carbon copies and blend together completely. Sometimes globalization even causes people to protect their own local culture and develop a new form of culture [3,4]. It is quite obvious in the development of Japanese games.

Japanese creators mix views from all over the world with Japanese culture when creating games. They use techniques that everybody recognizes and simple visuals that anyone can understand. Most of all Western Players. But they still intermingle with the deep essence and main contents of Japanese culture in their game design. Mainly includes the game's theme ideas, setting up and creating of the game's world as well as traditional philosophy. By combining western aesthetics with jinpū values it gives Japanese games a leg up in the world market. And it fuels them, too, as they grow and expand overseas.

2.3. Gaming as a site for cross-cultural identity formation

A variety of cultures mixed together and games going global can only show up because of how people experience those things for real. So video games have become like this awesome way to look at how we different cultures identify and change. A lot of people think culture is an identity that's not fixed. Not fixed and unchanging, but constantly altering via social interactions and chats [6,7]. And if a game drops in some bits from other cultures, then the player gets to dive into that cross-cultural identity stuff directly in the game. So, it's logical that we would look at those identity shifts in the games with culture identity theory. Some studies even say it's not set in stone, culture. With people continually doing exchanges and having cultural interactions, it keeps moving around, reorganizing itself, getting bigger [6,7]. Video games are among the top media of interactivity in the digital age and allow players to go through, feel out these mixed cultural identities for themselves. For instance, take it like when Western players control Japanese Samurai on fantasy adventure games, their culture is going to flex and bend. Just shows how video games act as places to test out knowing about other cultures. It breaks down walls between different cultures and makes people understand and accept mixed up, all over the world kinds of views on culture (table 1).

Table 1. Analytical frame work for culture integration on Japanese video games

Lens	Key Concept	Analytical Focus	Case Ref.	Function
Hybridity	3rd Space, Syncretism	Product Form, Symbolic Mix	Case 1	Synthesis, Symbol Creation
Glocalization	Global/Local Strategy	Market Adaptation, Strategy	Case 2	Strategic Logic
Identity	Fluid Self, Interaction	Player Experience, Reception	Case 3	User's Role, Completion

In conclusion, these three theory are the main theory support of this study. They form a solid, dependable basis on which they can analyze the Western images found in Japanese video games. The theories work differently to support all of the research. Bhabha's hybridity theory helps us understand the details about culture in games. Glocalization theory is applied to explain how these games get made and sent out into the world. Identity theories can show the effect that games have on people's experiences and consumption.

3. Case studies: three modalities of reimagining the west

Below analysis will demonstrate that we are using the above theory in practice. Japanese video games are very successful in the world. But it's not because we just took in or copied Western culture directly. It's about creatively changing western stuff into something that is full of its own culture, Then based on it, the Japanese creators combine their own cultural essence to interpret the western elements anew. 3 Games represent the way that Japan remake western image and do cultural export by creative adapt.

3.1. Aesthetic appropriation and deep localization in the Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild

Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild is an old action and adventure game. It was made by Nintendo of Japan. A western middle ages fantasy game mixed up with some Japanese core cultural values art style. Creates an interesting game that is full of beautiful things. On the visual front it's got some medieval castles, knight armor, swords and shields. They are all obvious to be medievales. But those western things are just stuff for the design to look at. It is separated from its original history, religion, and so on. People researching Nintendo games emphasize on this fact that they have changed from culturally charged signs to available pictures. Like the knight in game is not a representation of the hierarchy in European feudal society. It's just to represent a spirit of courage, an adventurous spirit.

The main design thought of this game is to achieve cultural change: Its worldview was clearly shaped by Japan's Kantō aesthetics. In this traditional garden art idea there is no limit to interaction. It's based on the aesthetic idea of seeing the big picture by means of small details. Breath of the Wild's big game world is made up like the Kantō parts are linked. Each one has different ecological theme, each has its own story clue. Players may look around and come across these [7,8]: The sandbox-style open world contains the game and also introduces a lot of Japanese culture to design very complicated mechanical puzzle games. For example, the mechanism in the temple is made based on the pattern and artifact design from the Jōmon period around (14000-300BC), like this: They are also intertwined with various other traditional Japanese cultural patterns. Also make it more fun to play this game. Also let people from all over the world to appreciate the beautiful of ancient Japan.

The story is all about Link in the game. It's heavily influenced by the coming of age storytelling style of Japanese shonen manga. The plot and picture symbol are very close to the games' world. It has a great deal of localization. Western hero epics mostly revolve around big stories, great destiny. But it is more about the individual trip and self discovery. This goes along with Japanese cultural values where they believe it's what you do and not the outcome. Though there will be certain cultural barriers for the western players, they can also get an immersive feel. By doing so, The Legend of Zelda would achieve what I call "unfamiliar familiarity" effect. Use a kind of visual language which western players can accept easily to represent Japanese culture's core. It meets the aesthetic expectations of the whole world and at the same time keeps its own cultural features. It's an important reason why it's so popular around the whole world.

3.2. The philosophical inversion: dark souls and the eastern core in a western shell

Soul like game genre is the FromSoftware's Dark Souls series. These games are on the surface with western gothic art style. But it's full of deep Eastern philosophy on the inside. From the outside, it is clearly a Western game. It is very dark, very gloomy medieval gothic building and knights armor. The big and sad stories are from the Norse gods' stories.

In the buildings of these games, there are tall, pointy tops on all sides, round domes with supporting structures. The character designs as well as their weapons and equipment also have classic European weapons and armor from different eras. It is easy for these designs to make Western players feel very close and familiar with this game. But in fact, the main feeling about Dark Souls comes from old Japanese aesthetics as well as Buddhism. This important idea comes from medieval Japanese literature and stresses an easy, vague sort of attractiveness. In the game Dark Souls it shows up in all parts of the game. It's not really stated in the story, you have to put together pieces of info from short item descriptions, scene design & NPC conversation. Players have to assemble these fragments themselves in order to understand the game world. And the gamers also

want to discover the story together. And it can also increase the discussion on the plot of the game, making people more willing to understand cultural details about characters and items. It shows that this game adheres to some Eastern aesthetical thoughts about empty space and implication. This is also very different from the western style where they like telling it clearly. Moreover, it is well known that such kinds of games are very difficult and test people's patience and tenacity. Games, it's not failure if you die, but instead a process of learning and progress. The players would keep trying and learning from errors as they play more. It's obvious that this is about growing through hard times, trying your best to become a better version of yourself. It's quite much like how the Japanese people are devoted and believe in meditative reflection. Some people say that Japanese games reflect on expressing a concept which is improving spiritual level by doing repeatedly and practising [1,2,9]. Finally, it's the world design of 'Dark Souls' also contain the Buddhist ideas of constant change. In a Dark Souls world, you can light the worlds fire, or you could make it dark, but in the end you will never leave that loop. This is the Buddhist idea that everything is not permanent. System of repeatedly spreading fire represents the unceasing change of every existent thing. It's telling players that nothing lasts forever, everything changes. This is the game with the western shell but eastern spirit which is different. When Western people experience the world of Dark Souls, they can not only appreciate their own familiar western culture but also feel the eastern philosophy. Cultural hybridity has made Dark Souls break through national boundaries, and it is very popular all over the world, and it has become a fashion in the game industry.

3.3. Critical mimicry and narrative subversion in Metal Gear Solid

Hideo Kojima's Metal Gear Solid series is also a complicated mimicry of criticism; The film-language and conventions borrowed from hollywood cinema but it carries with critique about the west and their modernity/militarism in its very heart. In terms of many aspects there are evident Westernized elements in the games: Cinematic language, pace is like big blockbusters movie, character design is perfect, military equipment resembles Western military archives' real thing, plot structure follows Euro-American action-spy genre's convention. Strategic packaging makes these games easy to be accepted in the world. And this kind of westernization does not mean blind copying, but an occupied position on overseas market, which contains some criticism towards Western modernity and military power in its main plot.

The series questions the Western-led modernization and its consequence from different aspect. It first criticizes the military-industrial complex. Through game design, they show that wars are rarely caused by states fighting each other; rather it is military industrial conglomerates trying to get richer. An ordinary mission is to go into an enemy's home and then find out that it's not a country or anything, just some private military company for profit who stirs up conflicts. War Economy System is an example of it, it shows that PMCs earn their money by making wars and keeping the same going. In Metal Gear Solid 4, a global battle field is controlled by artificial intelligence named Sons of Patriots (SOP). They are given to various private military companies as their task so that war becomes a well-planned business [6,10]. In this way, it moves far from an interstate confrontation, it also lays bare the economic side of today's war.

Second is deconstruction of the scientific discourse: genetic destiny. In game it looks into Genetic Determinism which questions the deterministic in Western scientific thought. Like Solid Snake who was the result of an Eugenics program and it's believed that his future is already set. But looking at all of the game processes, what determines his heroism is not the genetic codes he has; rather it was personal decision like combats, or his relationship with environment and memory. Protagonist's

growth narrative, it's a kind of philosophy about self-creating, challenge the mainstream science talk with other words.

But most important of all are "the others", the characters such as Snake, every major figure, they were depicted as subversives that see and exposes truths about global powers from marginal positions. During this game you're playing a lone infiltrator who's out there in the world facing off against or blowing up these sort of society/military type system that represent western tech and management logic (outer heaven, patriots). These characters embody the lone wolf archetype--people who are completely cut off from any kind of established system --and this is the core gameplay.

As a developed non-Western nation, Japan has been both an ally of the West and a protector of its own culture [11] Hideo Kojima uses soft deconstruct game to question the western modern value. By way of language known by the players, it expresses anti-western modernity via particular missions, characters, core gameplay parts. Thus it makes Metal Gear Solid an inquiry into the ethics of war, technological morality, political conspiracy, and it's impact is much greater than just within the realms of the game.

Critical absorptive, Japanese culture formed a mature attitude towards international interaction: to absorb the nutrients of western culture but maintain its own flavor; take an active part in world-wide cultural exchanges and dialogues, yet keep a certain amount of criticism. And this is the main reason that Japanese games have dominated the world market.

Breath Of The Wild, Darksoul, metal gear-solid these all have different modes of Cultural Reimagination: Appropriation; Inversion; Critic subvert this three can link to each other. Analysis of the above 3 case shows that Japanese games does not go for an all Western model or reject complete foreign culture, but they have different ways depending on genre and theme. As a whole, the foreign culture represented in Japanese games has the dominant position of its own country's indigenous culture, and it transforms western elements in creative ways to spread its own culture. Japanese game in coping with western culture gives some implication to the developement of China's and others which is not western, its cultural industry.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Summary of findings: three modalities of reimaging

After analysing, we can see that the "west" in Japanese games is the "other", which was actively chosen, processed and transformed. Different from the true western world, it's full of dehistoricized features as well as philosophical and aesthetic abstract ones. It comes from Japan's special history of modernization and cultural subjective, which is different from traditional western model. So it turns out that eastern countries are no longer passive absorbers of western culture; rather they have become active exporters of cultural goods.

4.2. Theoretical implications: beyond passive reception

Japanese games' ability to surpass western ones in popularity is due to the fact that they utilize something like 'familiarity with unfamiliarity' Japanese people add visually appealing symbols that westerners are accustomed to seeing and mix in eastern culture as well, so they make for very attractive pieces. This way, it would be Japan's culture to go global. And it shows us that what we really need is originality, not just copying others, and adapting creatively. Thus, the Japanese gaming industry can be an empirically convincing and elaborative explanation on hybridity. The guidebooks

will also show us, how Third spaces are constructed through various GLOCALIZing strategies realized through play. And so it becomes a living guide book to the third world players of Cultural Industries who want to be present on the global stage.

4.3. Practical significance and limitations

But it still has some limits. Future study will focus mostly on Japan but also includes Korea and possibly some other Asian games culture to have a kind of "more East Asian" perspective. Also, it's currently mostly based around qualitative case studies so more in the future can be done with quantities like a survey to measure how accepted someone is across cultures in games. In the end, it is clear from Japanese video game development that within today's cultural economy, influence does not come through copying hegemonic forms; rather, it comes via the capacity for creative and critical reinterpretations.

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