How Japanese is Wii?
The Reception and Localization of Japanese Video Games in America

By

C2009
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Submitted to the Department of American Studies
and the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Kansas
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.

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Date defended: June 11th, 2009

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Abstract
Xiangyi Huang, M.A.
American Studies, June 2009
University of Kansas

With control over both store shelves and consumers' consciousness, Japanese video games have dominated the U.S. and global game markets over the past two decades and continue to prosper today. This thesis positions Japanese video games' popularity in America in the global flows of pop culture, and argues that the "Japanization" of pop culture, represented by the "Japanization" of video games, has challenged the cultural globalization process that is taken for granted as hegemonized by the Western, especially American, cultural imperialism. In this thesis I examine the cultural localization process (beyond technical and linguistic localization) of Japanese video games for the U.S. releases, to further demonstrate the transnationality of Japanese popular culture. Meanwhile, I investigate the American fan base for Japanese video games and identify the differences between American and Japanese game players, in terms of cultural preferences of game genres and game play.

Contents

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been completed without the support and guidance of my extraordinary committee: Professors William M. Tsutsui, Michael Baskett, and Sherrie Tucker. As my advisor, William M. Tsutsui guided me throughout the duration of my project, discussing ideas, reading drafts, and offering exceedingly useful advices. Michael Baskett provided me with inspiring observations on the game industry and game localization. Sherrie Tucker expressed enthusiasm for my topic and gave insightful comments on my theoretical analysis.

I would like to extend gratitude to Chrystal Anderson, Tanya Hart, and Ben Chappell, whose seminars not only interested me to focus on popular culture but also laid the theoretical and methodological foundation for my research. I would also like to thank my fellow students in the four required American Studies seminars for encouraging and challenging me during the research of my thesis.

Thank you to my family for supporting me, and many of my friends, especially Aaron, Kenta, Kei, Tokuhiro, and Ai, for generously sharing their immense knowledge in video games with me.

Introduction

Japanese Video Games in the United States: Pervasiveness, Significance, and Cultural Implication

> Games are popular art, collective, social reactions to the main drive or action of any culture. Games, like institutions, are extensions of social man and of the body politic, as technologies are extensions of the animal organism.
>
> — Marshall McLuhan[1]

What McLuhan meant by "social reactions" in the above epigraph is a form of popular response to the mundane living within a society, reflective of a broader and changing culture that the "social reactions" stem. While recent literature on video games has focused on the "gaming culture," with the term "culture" referring to the cultural aura created by the games and their players — a virtual kind of sociality that departs from the actual,[2] my research is a return to McLuhan's approach of conflating games and "culture" of the traditional notion, namely a totality of live experiences in a society.[3] I also consider video games as cultural commodities, which traditionally referred to television, books, newspapers, radio, film, music, and magazines, but now also include the Internet and video games. When games are recognized as the model of culture, they embody both action and reaction of the players and their people. The game characters leap off the screen, as players imagine themselves doing so, or now, with the Nintendo Wii, literally doing so.

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1. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*, 1st MIT Press edition (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 235.
2. Jon Dovey and Helen W. Kennedy, *Game Cultures: Computer Games as New Media* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2006), 2-3.
3. J. Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Printer, 1993), 45.

Video games fit into a popular niche, and for that it has become immersed in a battle for cultural acceptance that every new form of media must fight. The cultural dynamics surrounding video games concern not only its popular visual basis, but also cultural tastes (which have been belittled by video games' mass consumption and the associated controversies in playing video games — threatening health and causing aggressive behaviors). However, as video gaming has become a common pastime for many societies around the globe today, this new media form merits more scholarly attention. In his book *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing, the Marketing of Culture*, John Seabrook argues that contemporary popular culture has undermined cultural hierarchies that used to distinguish "highbrow" from "lowbrow," because nowadays consuming power matters more than taste. More significant than that, video games are now a new type of "equipment for living," promoting a native culture through language use and cultural symbols displayed in the games.[4] Therefore video game studies not only involve issues of popular perception and reception, but also the cultural position and significance of video games in their short forty-year history.

The United States has been the leading player in historical development of video games: the first modern video game *Spacewar!* was developed by MIT in 1962; in 1967 American engineer Ralph H. Baer came up with the idea of converting television sets into monitors for the early gaming consoles; the 1970s was marked by the birth and boom of video games as an industry in the United States; America was

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4. James Paul Gee, "Why Game Studies Now? Video Games: A New Art Form," *Games and Culture* 1 (2006): 58-61. Also see J.R. Parker and Katrin Becker, "Games for Encapsulation and Promotion of Native Cultures" (presented at the IMAGINE Network Symposium, Banff, Alberta, March 2006).

the first country where video games went domestic in the mid-1970s; entering the 1980s, the American company Atari had controlled two thirds of the game industry in North America and had extensive influence in Europe.[5] However, in 1983 the U.S. game industry experienced a sharp decline, and would not be restored without Nintendo's two-year's efforts to establish its console game market in North America. This event marked the beginning of Japanese video game companies' dominance in the U.S. market for the next two decades, in terms of both technological innovation and consumption. In fact, when video games started to go global throughout the 1990s, it was the Japanese games that became internationally widespread, as in the cases of *Super Mario Bros.*, *The Legend of Zelda*, *Final Fantasy* and other games that have set the world on fire. According to the popular American video game magazine *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (EGM), the "top 100 games of all time" by the year of 2002 included 93 games that were Japanese in origin.[6] Even today, when a non-Japanese video game receives fervent reception in the United States and elsewhere, it often borrows design elements pioneered by Japanese games or is released for the Japanese gaming systems.

I round out "How Japanese is Wii?" by looking at the transnationality of Japanese video games from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s, in particular their transplantation in the United States. I ask "Who has possessed the hegemony in

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5. Simon Egenfeldt Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca, *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 50-60.
6. Chris Kohler, *Power-Up: How Japanese Video Games Gave the World an Extra Life* (Indianapolis, I.N.: BradyGames, 2005), 8. Since 2005, however, Microsoft started to share top sales with Nintendo and Sony; many American game studios also rose into power and launched popular sequels of American-developed *Halo* and *Grand Theft Auto*. On the EGM's February 2006 issue, only 65 percent of the "top 200 games of all time" were Japanese-developed.

global exchange of pop cultural commodities?" and answer the question by positioning Japanese video games' cross-Pacific popularity as part of the global cultural flows, with Americanization as the taken-for-granted hegemonic direction, challenged by the recent "Japanization" phenomenon in pop culture. I move on to examine how Japanese corporations' business strategies in marketing in North America serve the purpose of "Japanization" of video games, and seek the answer to "To which level Japanese games have been localized for the U.S. game market?" I argue that Japanese video games not only contain Americanized elements, but have experienced a strategic localization process influenced by cultural differences when marketed in the United States, more complicated than basic technical and linguistic conversion. Moreover, I investigate the U.S. fan base for Japanese games, and turn to the question "How do American players perceive and receive Japanese video games?" I intend to find out the differences between American game players and Japanese game players in terms of their game selections and gaming preferences.

There are a few points I would like to clarify. The first concerns with the terminology of game types. The definition of "video game" differs widely among scholars. Generally speaking "video game" refers to either all types of digital games including arcade, console, PC, and portable games, or specifically console-based games. Here I adopt the latter method, focusing on the console-operated games, in order to reflect the different user cultures. While PC games have found greater reception in Europe, South and Southeast Asia, China, and Korea, console games are

the most popular digital games in North America and Japan.[7] Another purpose is to avoid the confusion caused by the overlap of the standard PC games and the online games, both of which have drawn extended discussions such as virtual reality, disembodied communication, and player's second identity.

Another point that needs clarification is that, if we culturally label a game console, or a game created for that console, as "Japanese," we have avoided the places for manufacture and assembly. I consider this omission tolerable since these places and the related cultures do not significantly affect the games' redesign or reception in the destination markets. However, while it is easy to identify a game console's origin, it is becoming harder to culturally label the games created for the consoles, because of the increasing separation of roles of designers, developers, publishers, and distributors. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

The third point is that when we consider video game export as part of the larger pop cultural flows from Japan to the global markets, there are subsidiary or multidirectional flows that do not fit into the patterns that I analyze. For example, I exemplify the popularity of Japanese culture in America with sushi, something that has no counterpart in the Western cultures. Unlike eating sushi, playing video games is not culturally distant to Americans, and the Japanese manga (graphic print

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7. Aphra Kerr, *The Business and Culture of Digital Games: Gamework/Gameplay* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 3. Since specific laws protecting online intellectual properties are insufficiently reinforced in most East Asian and Southeast Asian regions, gamers in these areas find it easier to have free access to PC/multiplayer online games by illegally downloading them. Europe's underdevelopment in console game markets has been largely due to the poor conversion of Japanese/U.S. screen display standards (NTSC) into the European standard (PAL), and thus the fewer releases of Japanese video games in this region. This different screen display requirement is not an issue for personal computers, and thus the larger popularity of PC games in this region. See discussion of technological localization of video games in Chapter 2.

narratives) and anime can also be compared to the American comic and cartoon. For another instance, when I talk about popular acceptance of Japanese clothing styles in other Asian countries, I have intentionally omitted a very important current fashion model in Asia — South Korea, because South Korea can be treated as one of the Asian powers that followed Japan's path for opening foreign trade, investing in media export, and eventually accomplishing economic success. Therefore, I regard manga, anime and video games as the most representative art forms of Japanese pop for export. They have relatively similar flow patterns and levels of acceptance. More importantly, video games do not exist within a vacuum. As James Newman states, they are placed "in a web of intertextuality in which explicit and implicit references to other media forms proliferate in videogames, and in which videogames are referred to aesthetically and stylistically within other media."[8] In other words, the characters and visual styles can appear intertextually in manga, anime, and video games, as well as in ancillary media like films and music videos.

To present a brief synopsis, Chapter 1, "Introduction: The Global Flows of Popular Culture in the Context of Western Cultural Imperialism, Americanization, and Japanization" provides theoretical frameworks for my research. It encompasses the issues of cultural flows, revisiting Western cultural imperialism in the current global context and its influence on Japanese culture, and recentering Japan as a media superpower that challenges the Western dominance, especially American dominance in media culture. Chapter 2, "Production: Game Localization and Representation of

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8. James Newman, *Video Games* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 57-58.

'Japaneseness'" analyzes the transplantation of Japanese video game industry to the United States on a large scale in the mid-1980s, explains the process of game production, and presents patterns of technological, linguistic, and cultural localization of Japanese video games. Chapter 3, "Culture and Consumption: American Game Players' Perception and Reception of Japanese Video Games," provides a history of Japanese video games' fandom in the United States with the support of gamer demographics and reception data. It also highlights the cultural differences among American and Japanese game players in terms of acculturation, perception of gamer identities, and social gaming.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Context
The Global Flows of Popular Culture in the Context of Western Cultural Imperialism, Americanization, and Japanization

It used to be and still seems that Japan always looks up to the West, especially America, in many ways: its enthusiasm for doing business with American companies, its embrace of American clothing brands and fashion trends, its music and film industries which are deeply influenced by American hip-hop and Hollywood culture. However, Japanese culture in the United States, whether most Americans have noticed or not, has shifted from being an exotic threat to having more popular appeal. If Americanism is easily found being remade in modern Japanese cities, Japanism is more easily found consumed in America.

As journalist Roland Kelts articulates, the first wave of Japanophilia occurred as early as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when European artists were fascinated with Japanese aesthetics (woodblock prints and scroll paintings) for the first time. The second wave refers to the American discovery of Japanese spiritual traditions (Zen) in the late 1950s and the 1960s.[9] Today, Japanese culture is winding its way into America's consciousness in diverse forms. You can find interesting anime series shown regularly on Cartoon Network and Adult Swim. You can see more and more people showcase their chopstick skills in sushi restaurants and practicing Zen philosophy. You can hear that almost every high school and college student has experience playing Wii games with friends on weekend nights. You learn from the news about an increasing number of university students taking Japanese

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9. Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5.

language classes. But do you ever wonder why this cult of Japan has appeared in America? Do you, like some people, worry that Japanese popular culture has infiltrated American life too deeply, even though you still enjoy driving Japanese cars, watching samurai movies, and yearning to visit Tokyo after seeing *Lost in Translation*? Roland Kelts finds a softer way to describe what current cultural historians call "the infatuation of the third wave of Japanophilia" in the United States — the "Japanamerica" phenomenon.[10]

If the U.S.-produced cars are not yet as welcome by the Japanese as Japanese cars are by Americans, the two countries' mutual influences on each other's popular culture are obvious. Various Japanese commodities, such as anime, TV dramas, video games, and pop music have borrowed certain Western, primarily American, elements. Knowing the contemporary history of U.S.-Japanese relations, we can hardly doubt Japan's reputation for possessing a fascination for the American way of life. Conversely, Japan's popular culture industries have promoted their reconfigured products along with their traditional cultural relevance to the Western markets, a maneuver which has proven highly successful. In order to guarantee popular reception in foreign locations, production of cultural commodities for export aims at creating cultural familiarity for the Westerners, and thus the borrowing of Western elements. These popular cultural forms, however, are not perceived nowadays by Americans so much as "Western/American" than as "Japanese" exotica, distinctive from other Asian cultures, which accords closely with Japan's national identity in

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10. Kelts, 5, 69.

Asia and in the world.

The focus of this chapter, therefore, is the global flows of popular culture, both bidirectional between the United States and Japan, and multidirectional with other locales. Given the multilayered cultural passages of contemporary pop, is there still an imbalance of attention of the United States being dominant in global discourses? In the case of the Japan-United States exchange of popular culture, does the conception of Western cultural imperialism stand? If Japan has the media power to culturally influence other countries as America does, who really possesses the hegemony?

In addition, the United States-Japan, or East-West, binary thinking of cultural exchange is too convenient, if not too narrow, to construct frameworks for understanding the popularity of Japanese popular culture. In *Recentering Globalization*, Koichi Iwabuchi analyzes Japan's export of both its traditional culture and its Westernized modernism across Asia. Could Japanese popular culture's success in Asia be a premise for, or a result of, its ambitious entry into the American market? Alternatively, could its Americanized output account for other Asian countries' fascination with it? While Iwabuchi's work focuses on interpreting Japan's ambiguous position by placing Japan in the center of cultural globalization — which challenges the Americanization paradigm — my research follows his analysis and attempts to look at the path and outcome of exporting Japan's unique culture after modification back to the American market.

Through theoretical analysis of cultural, specifically media cultural

globalization, Western cultural imperialism, and "cultural discount" vs. "cultural proximity" theories, this chapter provides historical background for the Americanization of Japanese pop culture in a global context, as well as for the outflow of Japanese popular culture to America. From a comparative perspective, I look at the contradictory concurrence of Western hegemony, in terms of borrowing and improving American elements in Japan's pop culture production, and meanwhile the intentional "cultural discount" during the transplantation of video games to North America, in terms of the unique Japanese elements in the imported games.

I set out to answer two questions in my research here: first, in addressing the question of how Japanese global organizations' marketing strategies in America serve the localization purpose, this chapter explores the complexity of Japan's transnationalism/hybridism beyond the cultural hegemony theory, and second, in seeking to understand how American consumers make meanings from playing Japan-labeled video games, this study provides a basis for Americans' acculturation of Japanese popular culture after World War II. This chapter also seeks to answer a broader question: what relationship is there between video games and their Japanese origins in terms of their attraction for Western, especially American, audiences? To address these issues, I will conduct my research through humanities approaches, namely literature review, comparative analysis, and cultural criticism. This chapter contains three parts: cultural globalization and Western cultural imperialism; recentering Japan in global flows of popular culture; and "cultural discount" vs. "cultural proximity" in Japanese transnationalism.

Whether Japanese influence in America or American influence in Japan is more noticeable, given the history of U.S.-Japanese relations and the current competition of the two powers, the cultural exchange between the two countries is distinctive and important. To explain how Japanese popular culture developed and spread in America, let me first clarify the contemporary cultural flows between the United States and Japan. I provide a diagram below to map out the power dynamics — the bidirectional flows of popular culture between Japan and America as well as the other regions under the influences of these two economic and cultural superpowers:
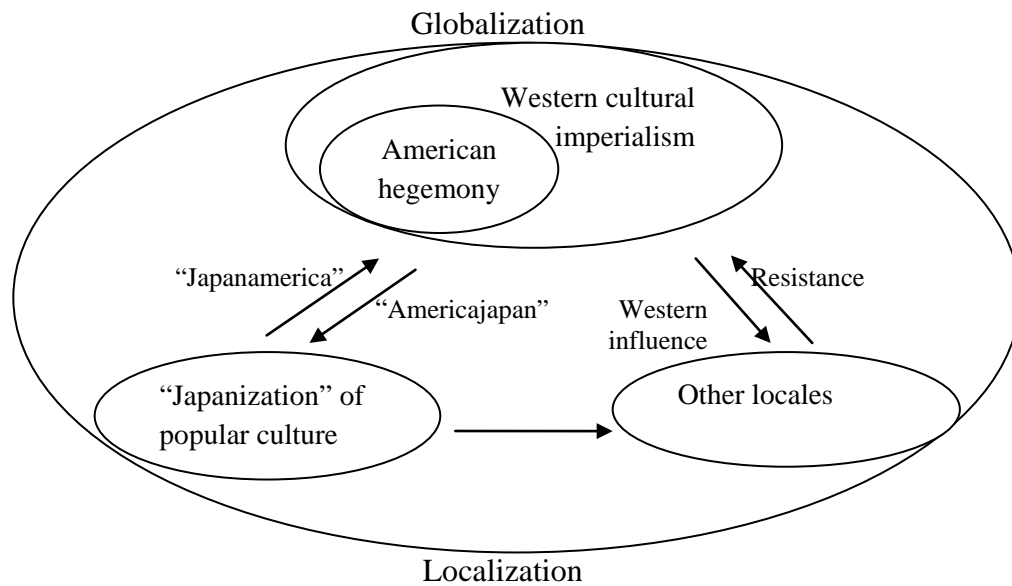
Globalization

Western cultural imperialism

American hegemony

"Japanamerica"

"Americajapan"

"Japanization" of popular culture

Western influence

Resistance

Other locales

Localization

Figure 1.1 Global Cultural Flows Centering the United States and Japan

Above all, I place cultural globalization, incorporated with localization, at the outset of global cultural flows. At the second layer, Western cultural imperialism is taken for granted as central to the globalization thesis, with American hegemony as the

most representative discourse. Meanwhile, Japanese popular culture has gained tremendous significance, with the implication that "popular culture" is itself Western-centered, thus Japanese pop culture's emulation of Western/American elements. Between the West and Japan, Western/American culture has received fervent acceptance in Japan, not only in popular culture but also in the economic and political aspects that "culture" entails, creating an "Americajapan" phenomenon. The Japanese popular culture industry then attempts to repackage its reconfigured semi-Western styles back to the West, especially America, in an unfamiliar but distinctive "Japanese" style that gives rise to Kelts's term "Japanamerica."[11] In addition, the "other locales" noted in the diagram represent the non-Western Third World countries which the West has successfully exerted its power on, and which are now being influenced by Japanese popular culture. I will elaborate the reasons for positioning America and Japan as the central elements of popular cultural flows as follows, in order to find out to what level acculturation occurs in the introduction of Japanese culture into the United States.

The dawn of the twenty-first century has witnessed the widespread impact of globalization on both the homogenization and the differentiation of cultural goods and values. Thanks to the development of electronic and subsequently digital media, as well as increasing cultural displacement through migration, multidirectional cultural flows have marked this moment of postmodernity.[12] Nowadays not only

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11. Kelts's term "Japanamerica," which refers to the invasion of Japanese popular culture in the US, inspires me to use "Americajapan" to describe the reverse phenomenon.
12. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

business, but also food, religion, fashion, and living styles, have become merchandised on a global scale. Meanwhile, globalization has shifted from conventional transplants to the foreign production and reproduction of "locality," namely the consideration of local knowledge, agency, and sociality.[13] Products from multinational corporations such as Sony, Microsoft, McDonald's, and Adidas, are easily recognized as foreign in global markets, but have also been modified for the local taste. To indicate the close relationship between the global and the local markets, Roland Robertson coins the term "glocalization" for the Japanese case, a process in which the national culture and institutions "absorb and localize foreign influence."[14] Therefore, globalization and localization are always interconnected.

However, the passages of global flows are far from being on the equal global spectrum: shaped by European colonization throughout eighteenth and nineteenth century, the conception of European supremacy, and the Western notions of industrial progress and democracy, globalization is built on a base of Western domination and Eastern subordination, that is, Western cultural imperialism.[15] Stuart Hall defines the

13. Ibid., 78.
14. The origin of the term "Glocalization" reflects a Japanese marketing strategy of incorporating foreign ideas into national culture and adapting national culture to other cultures instead of standardizing it globally. See Roland Robertson, "Globalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in *Global Modernities*, eds. M. Featherstone, S. Lash, and R. Robertson (London: SAGE, 1995), 25-44.
15. "Cultural imperialism" has no one single definition, yet is commonly considered to have its origin in European imperialist rule of Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East in the sixteenth century. When military occupation was far from sufficient for expanding the European empires and colonizing the defeated, cultural exportation became a necessity. According to Tomlinson, the cultural imperialism thesis came as late as 1960s, mainly formulated and articulated by the Western intellectuals, especially English-speaking academics. The conception entails key terms such as "power" (economic and political power in service of cultural domination), "culture" (Eurocentric notion of civilization), and "discourse" (for instance the large dumping of commercial and media products, mainly from the United States). Tomlinson, 3, 5, 8, 12.

concept of globalization as "a process by which the relatively separate areas of the globe come to intersect in a single imaginary 'space'; when their respective histories are convened in a time-zone or time-frame dominated by the time of the West. …"[16] Edward Said argues that the terms "Orient" and its subjects "the Others" exist to symbolize the alienation and interiority of the East, and to contrast with the West and its "White Men."[17] The discussion of cultural flows has always focused on either incorporation or separation of the West and the rest.

Because of fast-developing mediated technology, cultural exchange is highly dependent on mass media. In fact, discourses of "cultural imperialism" are often translated into "media imperialism."[18] Cultural domination in the form of media dominance embodies a more physical governing of ideological instillation towards the receiving cultures:

> The media are seen primarily as vehicles for corporate marketing, manipulating audiences to deliver them as "good consumers" of capitalist production… Individual media texts are mutually reinforcing in their demonstration of attraction of consumerism and the American way.[19]

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16. Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), op cit., 15.

17. Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 226.

18. This simplification has been highly debatable since Fred Fejes turned to media imperialism as cultural imperialism in 1981. Criticism includes limitation of the scope of "culture," focusing only on economic assessment of media export but ignoring political domination, and the nonrepresentativeness of media texts for daily experiences. However, Tomlinson argues that people's "lived experiences" with media are within the cultural contexts. "Culture" can be simplified as "media" as long as discussion of media is for the purpose of examining cultural discourses. That means, it is necessary not to try to find distinctive discourses of "media imperialism" that are separated from the "culture" totality. Otherwise overemphasizing the representational aspects of culture will end up with a narrow view of "culture." Tomlinson, 21-23; Fred Fejes, "Media Imperialism: an Assessment." *Media Culture and Society* Vol. 3(3) (1981): 287.

19. Herbert I. Schiller, "Transnational Media and National Development," in *National Sovereignty and International Communication*, eds. K. Nordenstreng and Herbert Schiller (New Jersey: Ablex, 1979), 21-32. This passage about the importance of capitalist media output in non-Western cultures has truth in it, though it was falsely used later in Schiller's article to demonstrate the advancing path the people

In the mist of current global discourses, economic or military, cultural or political, the United States is in the spotlight. Although America has never claimed itself to be an imperial Empire, some of its key historical moments, including slave trades, continental and overseas expansion, and current military conflicts, determine that the formation of U.S. cultures is within the context of Western imperialism.[20] Economic success (America has been the foremost economic superpower since World War II) also enable American culture to be privileged globally. As mentioned earlier, cultural imperialism serves as the "tool of capitalism." Admittedly some nations which have adopted the capitalist system have enjoyed economic progress; with wealth seems to become hegemony in cultural dominance. Being the largest commercial and media exporter in the world, America and its value system have become the mainstream in doing international business. While cultural goods require transnational channels of production and distribution, America's economic power sustains its enormous foreign trade in popular culture. Various forms of American mass media, such as cinema, TV, hip-hop music, and online video, are most exportable, and have been the agents of American ideological power on the consuming countries. While American films and music videos are perceived as the "coolest" in the world, because of the big budgets invested in them and their broadcasting easily accessible to the local audiences, the United States has shaped linguistically and culturally the identities of young people all over the world, both at the conscious and unconscious levels. In this sense,

at the receiving end experience in their capitalist encounter.
20. Amy Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, 3rd edition, eds. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 4.

America has possessed the cultural hegemony. In brief, the globalization and the Western imperialism/hegemony theories suggest that globalization essentially appears as a Westernization process and that American hegemony lies at the core of Westernization.

Cultural imperialism is not limited to discourses between industrialized countries and Third World countries. Japan's domesticating of Western culture does, to certain degree, conform to the imperial pattern of (media) cultural flows toward a Western metropole. Japan's unique and never-ending "postwar reconstruction" has been America-centered in many respects. Rising from the ashes of World War II, Japan's urbanization is the mimicry of America's global cities; today's Tokyo echoes with the imaginary of New York City or Chicago.[21] Knowing that the best way to compete with the top economy in the world is to sell its own products and culture to the competitor, Japan has actively exported high-end automobiles and electronics, internationalized its industrial and financial sectors, and repackaged the American popular cultures for circulation back to the West. Japan's America-bound transnationality was thus established upon its exportability of technology (cars, electronics, and robotics), traditional cultural practices (Zen, cuisine, and the tea ceremony), and popular culture (anime, video games, and "cute" fashion).

This enculturation in Japan is therefore deliberate. According to Youichi Ito, cultural imperialism only occurs when people in recipient countries feel compelled to

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21. For the discussion of Tokyo's loss of the idiosyncratic status of non-Western modernity that Japan is famous for, please see Koichi Iwabuchi's article "Lost in TransNation: Tokyo and the Urban Imaginary in the Era of Globalization." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol. 9 Issue 4 (Dec 2008): 543-556.

accept the exporters' standardized values injected into the cultural products.[22] Instead of being a passive audience, Japanese has displayed an enthusiastic embrace of American culture. As Joseph Tobin states, Japanese pleasure seekers play hard and consumer consume hard; but "much of what they play and consume is Western in style and spirit."[23] Beyond America's global chain stores such as Starbucks, Seven-Eleven, and Nike, numerous local stores and even vending machines in Japan's urban areas display English signs, advertisements with American models, and American food and clothes on their shelves. As Hollywood has deeply influenced Japanese modern films, many American film stars and singers have large fandom in Japan. Japan's music production has also plugged into American music trends, especially hip-hop/rap music in recent years. English is a required language class at school; business majors in college engage in mock business negotiations with American companies. As English is chosen for those who want to modernize Japan, consuming American food, entertainment, and clothing is considered by the urban elites to be the best way to westernize their life styles.

Manga, anime and video games are by far the most representative Japanese pop cultural commodities that have established considerable consumer markets in Western countries. These products and their tie-ins such as cards, toys, and films have created a kind of fanhood and identity that appeal to large segments of the Japanese population with their Western/American elements. Having a large consumer market

22. Youichi Ito, "Mass Communication Theories from a Japanese Perspective." *Media, Culture and Society* Volume 12, No. 4 (1990): 423-464.
23. Joseph Tobin, "Introduction: Domesticating the West," *Re-made in Japan: Everyday life and consumer taste in a changing society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992): 1.

at home, these "Japanese" cultural commodities are just as enthusiastically demanded by Western markets.

As the foremost buying power in Asia, Japan's consumer culture is also a result of American influence. Under significant Western influence after World War II, Japanese mass consumption gradually developed the American pattern, namely "a culture of commoditization of all experiences." [24] A widespread channel in the postwar period has been the viewing of American television programs, especially situation comedies, often followed by numerous advertisements of American products.[25] Japan's "workaholic culture" confines its citizens in strict social codes and family rules. Shopping luxuriously like Americans allows them to access the freedom and to escape from the feelings of stress and emptiness. If the "Americajapan" phenomenon is not so much a result of "imperialism," it is definitely a process of Americanization.

The Western/American hegemony thesis itself has much more contingency than active reception and adaptation, regarding the current global impact of Japanese culture. There is certain instability in Western cultural imperialism theory. As mentioned above, Western imperialism goes hand in hand with the localization process. The single-directional manipulation of Western, here especially American culture, is often not the case in receiving countries, whether they are passive or active

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24. Tomlinson, 26. In order to relate with "consumerism," here what I mean by "capitalist influence" should be in the Marxist notion, which not only discusses "production," but also a cultural totality of political, economic, and social-relational moments. Nevertheless, as Tomlinson argues, the common claim "the spread of capitalism is the spread of a culture of consumerism" still has difficulties in terms of how homogenizing "capitalism" is, as well as to what degree a consumer culture is *imposed* on the receiving cultures. See Tomlinson's discussion on Page 113.
25. Appadurai, 73.

receivers. Capitalism, at the heart of Western cultural imperialism theory, when embraced by Japan and the so-called "mini-Japans" (Japan's economic successors in Asia such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore), nurtures a new kind of capitalism that encompasses traditional Asian values and codes of conduct, such as a pattern of paternalism in employment relations. [26] Peter Matanle exemplifies the nature of Japanese capitalism with one of Company C's president's speeches, pointing out that the management in Japanese corporations is neither "strictly familistic" nor classically economically rational by Western standards, but something in between.[27] This combination of Asian paternal and Western individualistic philosophies in the business environment makes Japanese companies enthusiastic for foreign trades more adaptable to Western business culture but still unique and not traditionally "Capitalist" in their labor relations.

Moreover, the conception of Western cultural imperialism is based on the problematic premise that the West is homogeneous, with Americanism as its central representation. While the cultural products made in English-speaking countries are more transportable in the Western world because English is the *lingua franca* nowadays, it is not really the case vice versa, considering cultural exportation from France, Spain, and Germany. For instance, due to the linguistic barriers and cultural differences, one of the most popular crime series in German television history, *Derrick*, has never made to the United States; another series, *Tatort*, having been

26. Peter C.D. Matanle, *Japanese Capitalism and Modernity in a Global Era: Re-fabricating Lifetime Employment Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 46.
27. Ibid., 47.

running in both Germany and Austria for over thirty years, has just started to appear on MHz Worldview channel in America — the launch is not yet successful. Even among English-speaking countries, some popular products such as the hit British soap operas *Emmerdale Farm* and *River City* have not attracted large audiences in America. Similarly, Americanization should not be assumed to be uniform. Given its immigration history and its importation of diverse cultural representations, America is characterized by the coexistence of populations of different origins, and thus different languages, customs, and cultures. If American media has placed an absolute burden upon non-Western nations, can we really say that American hit films like *Mulan* and *Memoir of a Geisha* reflects some form of authentic Anglo-American culture? The West is not necessarily homogeneous; Americanism is beyond uniform.

In addition, the Western cultural imperialism and American hegemony theses ignore the various modes of resistance to Westernization and Americanization. Although Western influence and industrial progress are trade-offs in some developing countries, today's Arab World shows relatively little Western influence, despite the long history of Western attempts to control North Africa and the Middle East. The Arab World's apparent immunity to the Western influence, deriving from its regional laws, religious rules, and traditional value system, can be considered a form of resistance to Western hegemony. Even within the Western world, a kind of cultural protectionism has been conducted by limiting the import of media products from the United States. As European broadcasting industry is seen as being increasingly taken over by cheap and popular American programs, networks in countries such as

Belgium, France, and Italy have been making efforts to limit the purchase of media programs from America, in order to avoid the "cultural suicide of European cultures," and bolster the "high temple of European culture."[28]

Western imperialism/hegemony is a form of binary thinking between the West and the rest, often situating "the rest" as the Third World. How do we treat Japan in a globe where cultural flows imply Western dominance, a world that separates into different "Worlds" enumerated in the order of economic development, instead of one whole "world"? On the one hand, Japan is one of the non-Western collectivist cultures that "fall victim to" Western/American influence (remember that going on the path of adopting foreign cultures is not truly passive in Japan's case). On the other hand, Japan is categorized into the capitalist First World and is viewed as an exception to the rest of Asia because of its high achievement of modernity and material wealth. Johan Galtung suggests a less broadly acceptable and quite ingenious way to categorize Japan into the "Fourth World," comprised by a group of Asian countries under the influence of Japan's economic success, which is quite opposite to how other economic theorists have defined the Fourth World as the "least developed countries" or the indigenous nations in certain countries.[29] Japan's dual identity as

28. Steve Lohr, "European TV's Vast Growth: Cultural Effect Stirs Concern," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1989, *sec.* A, *p.* 1.
29. Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, 5th Edition (Cambridge, England: Polity, 2006), 42. The First World, according to Giddens, includes industrialized European countries, United States, Canada, Greenland, Australasia, South Africa, and Japan.

   Richard Griggs, "The Breakdown of States," *The Fourth World Documentation Project Archive*, (1999): http://www.cwis.org/fwdp/International/statebrk.txt.

   Galtung, Johan, "On the Dialectic between Crisis and Crisis Perception," in *The Global Crisis: Sociological Analyses and Responses*, eds. Edward A. Tiryakian (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 5. Galtung maps out the Four Worlds as: First World — private/corporate capitalism; Second World — state/bureaucratic socialism; Third World — new international economic order; Fourth World — *Ichi-*

both an economic peer of Western powers and a preserver/promoter of its traditional

culture, the latter being a counteraction of the postwar American occupation,

separates Japan from neither the West nor the nations of Asia. As Iwabuchi points

out, since what counts for Japan's "positive" exceptionality in the eyes of the West is

its economic power, its past as an ex-colonialist empire in Asia has been largely

neglected.[30]

When explaining the social and historical background behind anime creation,

the foremost anime scholar in the United States, Susan Napier, states that Japanese

tend to remember selectively some of its significant historical moments, for example

they are more willing to admit their roles in World War II from 1941 to 1945, but

ignore the prior eight years of war in China.[31] This ambiguity of remembering history

is to "privilege individual reminiscence over a sense of national responsibility."[32]

Japan's emphasis on its victimhood motivates its Westernized development. Learning

from America, particularly, soothes Japan's nightmare of defeat in the war and the

American occupation; looking back to Asia means reassociation with its colonialist

history, a past that Japan wants to do away with. As Marie Morimoto puts, dominant

themes in Japan's self-representations often display "uniqueness, isolation, and

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ban (No.1). Galtung's Third World refers to South America, South and West Asia, and the Arab
World, while the Fourth World includes countries in the eastern and southern hemispheres, such as
Japan, mini-Japans, ASEAN nations, Australia, New Zealand, and Oceania.
30. Koichi Iwabuchi, "Pure Impurity: Japan's Genius for Hybridism." *Communal/Plural: Journal of
Transnational & Cross-cultural Studies* 6:1 (1998): 81.
31. Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese
Animation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 158.
32. Ibid., 158.

victimization — hence a lone nation struggling against all odds."[33] As Iwabuchi argues, the West's consciousness of Japan's exceptionality marks a difference between Japan's "self-Orientalization" and the familiar "Western Orientalism."[34] The term "Asia" continuously embodies poverty and backwardness, which reinforces the position of Japanese pop culture in other Asian countries with little resistance to its media infiltration, as I will expand below.

The globalization process does not only spread Americanized "global" mass culture, but also complicates itself with more cultural flows to different directions. Japan's popular culture industry has returned to Asian markets with various popular cultural forms since the 1990s, not only for the purpose of economic profit, but also for reasserting its cultural superiority in Asia.[35] Japanese media, for long famous for localizing the Western, especially American, imaginaries, has capitalized upon its ability to indigenize American popular culture without simply providing Asian markets "second-rated copies."[36] This characteristic, a combination of modifying the Western and introducing the uniquely Japanese, demonstrates the increasing intra-regional flows of media culture.

The success of Japan's culture return in Asia is indeed remarkable. In fact, many Asian countries (mainly in East Asia, because of linguistic and cultural affinities) are seeing the West through the lens of a Japanese version of the West, especially America. Take Japanese popular music for instance, Japanese hip-hop/rap,

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33. Ibid., op. cit., 47.
34. Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 11.
35. Ibid., 17.
36. Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 20. See Iwabuchi's elaboration of this claim based on his interview findings in Chapter 3.

a combination of linguistically revised American hip-hop/rap music and Japan's contemporary social reality in the lyrics, is a big hit in China and Taiwan, both former sites of Japanese imperialism. Other examples are American food in Japanese commercials, American values of freedom, luxury, and romance in Japanese TV dramas and music videos, and the notion of the "American dream."[37] If the Asian countries, some of which Westerners still recognize as Third World, have not yet attained the level of political-economic development to resist Western cultural infiltration, then they are certainly not prepared for the new challenge posed by the enthusiastic embrace of an accessible and appealing Japanese pop culture by local youth.[38] As Western cultural hegemony in China, Taiwan, Korea, and Malaysia is gradually being replaced by Japan's "cute power," older generations are reminding young people of their neighbor's wartime brutality, though largely in vain.[39]

Following this thought, we sense the ambiguity of Japanese culture; the Americanization process of its popular culture has become multilayered in terms of the complexity of imitation as well as negotiation with native Japanese culture, its dilemma between Westernization and nostalgia for Asian traditions, and its middle role between the West and "Asia." Japan not only provides Asia a lens to see the West, but also serves as a mediator for the West to know Asia (East Asia to be more

37. Ibid., 153.
38. Schiller argues that Third World countries do not have the economic and political power to support national development. Although Tomlinson and others argue that this thought has further distanced the Third World from the West in economic, technological, strategic, and political aspects, I understand it applicable in terms of limited social and especially cultural resources that these countries have access to. (Schiller, 27; Tomlinson, 37). Therefore, I use "political-economic" to indicate that not only the production and consumption relations structure a nation's economic power, but political behaviors, cultural preferences, and legislative perfection also support the economy for foreign resistance.
39. See Iwabuchi's further discussion of the impact of Japanese popular culture on Asian countries since 1990s in *Recentering Globalization*.

precise). As explained later in Chapter 2, many Japanese anime, video games, and films have impressed the Westerners with the splendidness of East Asian culture by using Buddhist temples as locales, Chinese characters as background inscriptions, and so on. Therefore, as Iwabuchi has put, Japan is the great "editor" of both the Western and the Asian cultures.

The popularity of Japanese culture, particularly in the United States, demonstrates Japan's ability to preserve its national culture creatively. Samurai warriors, kimono-clad women, and traditional architecture often appear not only in anime and video games, but in modern Japanese films and TV dramas. Japan's promotion of its native culture and East Asian culture does not seem contradictory to its obsession with American culture. In his article "Pure Impurity" Iwabuchi writes that the hybridism of Japanese culture is based on the nation's nature as an assimilator.[40] As Iwabuchi argues, Japan can only succeed in cultural preservation through promoting its culture overseas; and its culture can only be promoted if it contains Western elements.[41] Therefore, Japan's consciousness of marketing its national culture, the so-called "Japonisme" which nowadays symbolizes Japanese trends, images, and goods, is always collaborating with "Japanese postmodernism" — a "mechanical celebration of differences" without rejection to being subordinate under its models.[42]

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40. Iwabuchi, "Pure Impurity," 75.
41. Koichi Iwabuchi, "Marketing 'Japan': Japanese Cultural Presence under a Globe Gaze." *Japanese Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (1998): 165.
42. Lise Skov, "Fashion Trends, Japonisme, and Postmodernism," in *Contemporary Japan Popular Culture*, eds. John Whittier Treat (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 138-139. The French term "Japonisme" originally refers to the influence of Japanese arts forms on Western ones, especially

The Americanized globalization process not only can be easily confronted by the Japanization phenomenon in the United States and in Asia, but today's Europe is under Japan's influence as well. Japanese fashion design, which carries the promise of bringing down cultural hierarchies and class differentiation, not only appeals to European youth but also has gained recognition and inspired many designers in the elite houses of European high fashion. In brief, the transnationality of Japanese pop culture has challenged Western dominance in many respects and in many locales.

To explore the impact of Western/American culture on non-Western audiences, we need to revisit the conceptions of globalization and Western/American hegemony. To understand the transnational nature of Japanese popular culture, on the other hand, requires examination of the Western reception of Japanese cultural commodities. How does consumption of Japanese popular culture, something culturally distant, but now so familiar in our daily experiences, affect American culture? American influence in Japanese society has received enormous criticism as it not only "destroys" and "crowds out" traditional culture in cultural production, but has great impact on Japanese young people's behaviors and values. What about the reverse? To understand how Americans react specifically to Japanese video games (see Chapter 3), more attention needs to be given to groups and individuals who translate, interpret, and transform this foreign culture as it enters their daily experiences.

Cultural discount theory describes the loss of original meanings when a

in the late nineteenth century Europe.

cultural piece is transplanted overseas and audiences, especially audiences of a different cultural background, misinterpret it and create their own meanings. The idea often simply refers to sharp cultural differences, for instance between the East and the West, instead of cultural variations cross nation-state boundaries. Cultural discount appears unfavorable because of the diminished appeal of the original; previous scholarship has concluded that it is almost impossible to successfully transplant a foreign pop cultural product across deep cultural boundaries:

> A particular programme rooted in one culture, and thus attractive to that environment, will have a diminished appeal elsewhere as viewers find it difficult to identify with the style, values, beliefs, institutions and behavioural patterns of the material in question. Included in the cultural discount are reductions in appreciation due to dubbing and subtitling. … As a result of the diminished appeal, fewer viewers will watch a foreign programme than a domestic programme of the same type and quality, and hence the value of the broadcasters, equal to the advertising revenue induced if the broadcaster is financed from this source, will be less. ...[43]

Hoskins and Mirus further explain that, unlike news and educational programs, TV dramas suffer less from this sort of cultural discount. Therefore, the international trade in communication and media sectors is limited largely to entertainment programming.

Cultural proximity, according to Joseph Straubhaar (1991), indicates that all other aspects being equal, audiences tend to prefer programs that are closest, or most proximate to, their local culture.[44] Straubhaar utilizes this idea to explain the spread of Latin American television programs on national and regional scale, and also

43. C. Hoskins and R. Mirus, "Reasons for the U.S. Dominance of the International Trade in Television Programs." *Media, Culture, and Society* 10, 4 (1988): 500-501.
44. Michael G. Elasmar, *The Impact of International Television: a Paradigm Shift* (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2003), op. cit., 80.

attributes the success of many TV programs from other regions to their immediate acceptance in proximate countries and cultures.

The concepts of cultural discount and cultural proximity both suggest that national media are welcomed above all by their local audience; geographical and cultural distance from this local market decides the level of favorability of the transnational media products. Hoskins et al. and Straubhaar both analyze the cultural impact of American dominance in media globalization, which is an exception to these theories. Nevertheless, neither cultural proximity nor cultural discount can fully account for the case of the "Japanamerica" phenomenon. Regardless of cultural differences, Japanese popular culture, as mentioned above, has been widely and enthusiastically accepted by American audience. Although Japanese popular culture has long had the reputation of featuring Westernized characteristics, this kind of imitation does not create the cultural proximity in the eyes of Americans. Rather than an authentic "Western" style of figuration, the cultural reference is more in a "Japanese" style, which is nonetheless not authentically Japanese either. For example, characters in manga and anime often have blond wavy hair and English names, encounter or are involved in romances with Westerners, and are proud of their educational experiences in the West. Since these images do not appear to be "Western," but rather an "anime" style, American audiences tend to apply their experiences from anime viewing and game playing to their understanding of Japanese culture, and thus misinterpret this unique "Japaneseness" as the authentic "Japanese."

The designer clothing brand A Bathing Ape has become the absolute

definition of Japanese high fashion. Its stores are seen in the trendy shopping centers of Hong Kong, London, Paris, and at the heart of Los Angeles and New York City. With a unique ape mascot and the brand's own music records, A Bathing Ape promotes an urban street look, representing the distinctive American black culture and the lifestyle associated with it. That most famous Japanese iconic totem Pokémon is another good example; in fact some scholars have argued that, at last in the 1990s, Pikachu was a character better-known among American children than Mickey Mouse. Moreover, the Japanese films that rank at the top of Hollywood distribution are the animation features made by Hayao Miyazaki, who has been deeply influenced by Western writers and illustrators, such as the American science fiction novelist Ursula LeGuin and the French artist Jean Giraud. Miyazaki is celebrated for combining Western storylines of the destruction of modernity with Japanese mythology in his cinematic works.

Such example are seemingly countless. There is no a single notion for the characteristics of Japanese popular culture. However, it is this very "Japaneseness" that captivates American audiences. Japan is a society comprised of strict codes of etiquette and behavior for its citizens. These confines of space for developing individuality, however, provoke creative freedom and formation of other identities.[45] The designers and developers of manga, anime, and video games, are artisans of with creative minds. Some icons they create, such as Pikachu and Totoro (from Miyazaki's 1988 animated film *My Neighbor Totoro*), have no counterpart in the physical world,

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45. Kelts, 23.

and thus enable American audiences to decipher Japanese cartoons without linguistic or cultural prejudice.[46] The cultural distance of Japanese popular culture thus actually draws more attention and engagement from audiences across the Pacific rather than pushing them away. If the Japanese media still try hard to accommodate the American market by borrowing Western figuration, it is the cultural differences, instead of the strategic construction of proximity, that ultimately succeeds in creating "Japanamerica."

Admittedly, the discount occurs to a certain extent when these films, games, and comics are translated into another language. For example, Miyazaki utilizes Japanese folklores in his films, which contains historical and deep cultural references that would likely appear unfamiliar to foreign viewers.[47] However, this discount can be considered positively rather than negatively. Not only does the appeal of the original piece not diminish, but the unfamiliarity has the possibility of attracting foreign consumers. Creating one's own understanding, if not misinterpretation, is part of the fun of consuming Japanese popular culture. The cultural discount allows room for American audiences to negotiate with Japanese culture and to justify the reconfigured (Westernized/Americanized) elements in the cultural products, a situation which caters to the American sense of creativity.

In conclusion, "Westernization/Americanization" and "Japanization" coexist and require a balance. If Japan's acceptance of American influences is partially a

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46. Ibid., 90.
47. For example, in *Princess Mononoke* (1997), the story is set in the Muromachi period, a time of samurai upheaval, intervened by local legends of supernatural beings.

result of American hegemony, Japanization puts Japan in the spotlight of globalization. The export of pop culture commodities to other Asian countries already places Japan at the center of Asia. In America, younger generations engage with "Japaneseness" daily, and passionately. With its unique version of foreign borrowing, Japanese popular culture fascinates American audiences because it provides a kind of "fantasy escape and source for identification" so different from mainstream American media. [48] At a time when global flows of popular culture have become more complicated because of the variety of communication channels available, America's leading position in transnational cultural output is challenged by "Japanization." Meanwhile, Japan's retention of East Asian traditions is also being continuously challenged by Americanization. Without ongoing efforts to blend in cultural products for export with native culture, Japan will not be able to sustain the uniqueness which makes "Japanism" such a potent global force.

My analysis above serves as the theoretical background for my research on the construction and reception of Japanese video games in the United States, which will be discussed in the following two chapters. This chapter has focused on three broad conceptual discussions in cultural and media studies: globalization and media globalization; Western cultural imperialism and American hegemony; and cultural discount and cultural proximity. In an era of globalization of goods, culture, and lifestyles, flows of popular culture is most directly accessible to international markets, because of the advance of communication technology and the global sharing of media

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48. Napier, 44.

products. Just as Western imperialism plays an important role in cultural globalization, Western dominance is still salient in the international exchange of pop cultural goods. As the largest media exporter in the world, America has attained hegemony in influencing foreign cultures, especially through its Hollywood blockbusters, TV dramas, pop music, clothing brands, and fast-food lifestyle. While Western cultural imperialism theory remains the subject of debate, it is undeniable that American hegemony has had a huge impact on Japanese society since World War II, although nowadays the impact is more unconscious among the Japanese people and its legacy is strongest in the realm of popular culture. Meanwhile, Japan's global corporations have promoted various cultural products to the rest of the world. Besides the renowned automobiles and electronics, other merchandise such as anime, video games, and fashion carry more cultural traits and have found wide popularity in the American market. In spite of the cultural distance, Americans find the unique and odd "Japaneseness" captivating, thus perceiving the cultural discount in a favorable way. The fluctuating popularity of American and Japanese media products in global markets begs the question "Who possesses the hegemony now?" As I will argue in the following chapters, the complex transnationality of Japanese culture, which goes beyond the application of Western hegemony in popular culture, is evident in the business of Japan's video game export and localization in America.

Chapter 2. Production
Game Localization and Representation of "Japaneseness"

On a cold winter's night in November 2006, the doors of all retail game stores in the United States were clogged by hundreds of people. It was the occasion of the midnight release of Nintendo's new video game console, Wii, whose initial sales outpaced those of its prime competitor, Sony's Playstation 3, released only two days earlier. Three years after the launch, Wii games are now played by millions of people in households, college dorms, and even nursing homes across America. In a time of expanding consumption of video games among different age and gender groups, Japanese games continue to line the shelves of video game stores all over America; Japan still can lay claim to the title "the Hollywood of video games."

The popularity of Japanese video games among Americans is not something new. In fact the whole video game industry in America today was built upon Japanese game products. Japanese games have historically dominated video game sales in the United States. For example, the gaming console that dominated the American market in the late 1980s was the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES); Sony Playstation was one of the most recognized game systems from 1990 to 2006; since 2006, the Nintendo Wii has been intensely competing with Microsoft Xbox 360 as the top-selling consoles. According to the NPD group, by the end of 2008, Nintendo had sold 32 million Nintendo DS consoles in America, compared to 26 million units in Japan

and 96 million worldwide.[49] At the time of writing (the end of April 2009), Sony had sold 8.5 million Playstation 3 units in the United States (3 million in Japan and 22 million worldwide).[50] The sales figures in the United States have exceeded those in Japan, making America the largest consuming country for console games (measured by units sold). Japanese games like *Super Mario Bros.*, *Street Fighter*, and *The Legend of Zelda*, are among the most recognizable and popular titles even today.

The previous chapter discussed the hybridism of Japanese popular culture, a combination of indigenized Western elements and traditional features, and the historical and cultural background that contributed to this hybridism. Such hybridization also characterizes the process of video game exportation from Japan to America. Looking at Japan's multibillion-dollar video game industry and its subsidiary companies in America, how is this hybridization achieved after transplantation? What has been taken into consideration before localizing the games? What patterns of the management systems in Japan have remained and what have lost in establishing publishing and distribution lines in America? Most importantly, what aspects of the video games need to be reconfigured to fit into the local culture, and in what ways? What elements in the games reflect the game maker's culture?

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49. The sales data for Nintendo DS is borrowed from report by the NPD Group, who gathers sales figures for video game manufacturers as the official source. NPD Group, *Wikia Gaming* (April 2009): http://vgsales.wikia.com/wiki/NPD_April_2009.
50. The figures for Sony Playstation 3 are taken from VG Chartz (http://vgchartz.com), who also gathers video game sales statistics weekly and regional-specifically. Although VG Chartz is questioned for its reliability on using estimate instead of solid numbers, for example a predicted monthly number before the end of that month, its figures by year are very close to the official annual figures, if comparing its previous sales records in 2006 and 2007 with NPD's.

To approach these questions, this chapter begins by placing video games within a wider economic and media environment. I intend to conduct a social-economic analysis on: first, Japanese video game business transplants, in order to identify the special structure and organization of the Japanese video game industry as it exists both in Japan and the United States; second, the localization of Japanese games for the American game market, so as to highlight the process by which games are modified for American players' tastes, and to revisit the cultural uniqueness of Japanese video games as part of the larger globalization of Japanese pop culture. Methodologically, I approach these two analyses by drawing upon different fields of knowledge: economically, Japan's foreign trade patterns and marketing strategies aimed at the American video game market; commercially, the process and significance of game localization; linguistic dissimilarities and uniqueness of Japanese video games compared to target cultures; and textually, the promotion and stereotyping of Japanese and Asian cultures in Japanese video games.

The transfer of Japanese business systems to the United States in the 1980s and the 1990s has been most widely discussed in cross-border organizational studies.[51] It took place at the same time when Japan's economic status rose to be equivalent with that of the Western powers. Scholars have articulated a variety of interpretations to explain the domestic and global success of Japanese multinational corporations. Some argue that it was due to the close relationships between the

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51. This system includes a totality of production, factory, and management practices that are found in Japan's world-class firms. See Jefferey K. Liker, W. Mark Fruin, and Paul S. Adler, "Bringing Japanese Management Systems to the United States: Transplantation or Transformation?" *Remade in America: Transplanting and Transforming Japanese Management Systems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

Japanese government and business, and between corporate management and labor, as well as the Confucian cultural patterns that guide employees' work ethics and efficiency. Some others argue that success can be attributed to Japanese corporate mastery of the technical process of manufacturing goods, through improved systems such as inventory control, quality, maintenance, and knowledge training.

Whatever the reason was, when the organizational system that had evolved in Japan's social context was brought to a completely different cultural setting, it went through "transplantation," "adaption," "localization," "hybridization," "recontextualization," or whichever term an economist is willing to describe it with.[52] The operation of Japanese international corporations largely relies on their superior management techniques, thus the necessity of adjustment of their transplants to the American context. Since the outcome was neither a simple copy of the parent system, nor a complete adoption of local patterns, but something different, this "transplantation" of the organization, as well as of the products, becomes a "transformation."

Among the corporations that have proven capable of sustained success at home and in international competition, the most noticeable are Japanese automotive and electronics companies. Firms in these sectors have accounted for a large share of the flow of foreign direct investment out of Japan, as part of the larger project of expanding investment abroad between the late 1970s and the late 1990s. The output

52. D. Eleanor Westney, "Organization Theory Perspectives on the Cross-border Transfer of Organizational Patterns," in *Remade in America: Transplanting and Transforming Japanese Management Systems*, eds. Jeffrey K Liker, W Mark Fruin, and Paul S Adler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 385.

was a result of both the liberalization of Japan's outflow of capital and its economic prosperity domestically. Intense investment in North America and Europe also contributed to the reduction of the trade gap between Japan and the two industrial regions. In 1989, $44 billion of Japan's total foreign direct investment of $90 billion went to the United States, while $20 billion went to Europe. In 1995, of the total $50 billion, $22 billion was invested in America and $8 billion in Europe.[53] The years after 2000 have witnessed a continuous decline in Japan's U.S.-bound direct investment, partially due to the booming markets in Asia and Latin America. However, Japanese indirect investment has been increasing, including capital outflow to the service sector, real estate, finance and insurance, etc.; these types of investments continue to flow into America.

Since many Japanese firms have developed multifunctional, multiproduct, and multifocal capabilities, the Japanese entertainment industry has interfaced with world-renowned manufacturing — especially electronics manufacturing — corporations. Japan's video game industry, dominated by Sony and Nintendo, has always been heavily committed to exports. Along with other well-established firms in the mid-1980s, these companies joined the massive cross-Pacific transplant to the United States.

The first Japanese video game company that entered America was Nintendo. It was two years after the North American video game crash of 1983, whose effects

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53. Data gathered from 1989 to 2004, available on Japan Ministry of Finance, "Outward Direct Investment (Country and Region)" and "Outward Direct Investment (Industry and Region)," (2004): http://www.mof.go.jp/english/e1c008.htm.

on the American video game market were destructive and widespread.[54] Nintendo boldly took the risk and immediately took over the market by releasing a cartridge-based console, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), which was so innovative and successful that it forever changed the video game history. Following Nintendo's example, Sega established production and distribution networks in North America. Although Microsoft entered the video game market in the 1990s to compete with the new leading player Sony, generally speaking, competition on video game sales in the United States, as well as globally, has remained mainly among Japanese companies from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s.

Besides approaching the American game market with technological innovation, the cornerstone of Japanese foreign transplants since the 1980s, Japanese companies' successful entry into North America has also derived from their records of success back in Japan. In order to fit into the American business environment, Japanese firms' cross-organizational systems had been transplanted as well. According to Nielsen et al., disregarding the factory-based mechanical manufacturing of video game cartridges/discs, the game development procedure in 2004 required more than 100 specialized experts, compared to only 20 in 1989.[55] The video game industry is experiencing wider distribution of production among these contributors, for example the separation between hardware and software developers. Back in the late 1980s, Nintendo launched a strategy that was unprecedented in the failing

54. The North American video game crash of 1983 was a sudden disruption to the interconnected game industries of the West. It not only affected video game companies, but also forced numerous game stores and toy retailers into bankruptcy. The cause was mainly pressure from competition with nascent personal computers, and thus the overproduction of game console systems and their cartridges.
55. Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca, 15-16.

American game industry: to integrate the manufacture of consoles with game software, in order to avoid the lack of information exchange between hardware and software producers. However, today's video game industry operates quite differently. Like other cultural industries such as film and television, the expanding mass consumption in global game markets helps to recoup the expensive production costs, namely the cost of producing a series of game consoles of one version, which regularly totals $3-10 million.[56] On the other hand, the costs of reproduction of a game on a disc are relatively minimal. Therefore, while the design and production of video game consoles remains in Japanese companies, various kinds of games are produced by both Japanese-owned and American-owned studios, both large and small. For example, a relatively young American developer EA Los Angeles could publish the game *Medal of Honor* for Sony Playstation consoles, just as the long-standing Japanese developer Square (renamed Square Enix after merging with Enix in 2003) could design the *Final Fantasy* Series for the Nintendo consoles. It is worth mentioning that, because of the low frequency of new console release and the relatively flexible distribution of software, the few globally influential video game studios have been able to gain tremendous profit while only 3 percent of game designers all over the world are making money.[57]

Even the successful business and manufacturing transplant of Japanese game companies abroad cannot guarantee video game sales in foreign markets. The game products brought from another culture carry with them a specific cultural context.

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56. Kerr, 46.
57. Ibid., 45.

Different traditions, customs, and lifestyle can dramatically affect the patterns of consumerism in the producing and consuming cultures. The retention of the products' originality and a certain degree of adaption to the local culture where they are sold and consumed give the products a feel of hybridization. The purpose of this deliberate redesign of products, or the change of marketing/publishing methods, is to accommodate conflicts between the local and the imported patterns. In video game transplantation, in order to make the games appealing to foreign game players while not ruining their original features, localization becomes necessary. During which steps in production and marketing does the localization occur? Above all, it is necessary to understand the process of producing and selling a video game. The complete procedure involves the following institutional components:

Hardware manufacturer → Game developer → Publisher → Distributor → Retail[58]

The hardware manufacturer designs and publishes game consoles. The game developer designs and then develops a game for one or several platforms (consoles, PCs, or portable devices). While small game development studios hand over publishing and distribution to separate agencies, big companies have their own in-house publishers and distributors. In fact Japanese console manufacturers were the first to take multiple roles in the game production procedure. Nintendo in particular is noted for its high level of control over the brand identity by conducting most steps in-

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58. Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca, 16.

house, both in Japan and its American branch.[59] By going through the game proposal,

the publisher decides if the developer's project has the potential to maximize financial

return; this role is often challenged by hardware manufacturers, such as Nintendo,

Sony, and Microsoft, who are usually the leading players in the game industry, and

who are likely to demand that the publishers release the new game exclusively for

their platforms.[60] This is another reason why 97 percent of game designers all around

the world have failed. Because of the high cost of the publishers' work, and the

pressure imposed upon these publishers to produce games specific to certain consoles,

some game designers have found an alternative way to make money by making

online games, which require lower financial investment and less demanding technical

inputs.

When the contracts are signed, developers and publishers sit down to discuss

in detail the game engines, game play design, and User Interface (UI) adaptability.[61]

If the publishing company is not an in-house one, it must mediate between the

designer and the third-party developers (hardware manufacturers), and turn in the

proposal to the latter for approval. Historic sales records are also important for

determining the different levels of localization for the foreign markets.[62] Let me give

a specific example to detail the process. Take the popular fighting game *Tekken*. The

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59. Dovey and Kennedy, 48-49; Joseph Tobin, "Introduction" in *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*, eds. Joseph Tobin (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 5.
60. Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca, 16-17.
61. User Interface (UI) refers to graphics that the user must click on, menu systems that the player must navigate through and the game control systems in which player can steer or control pieces in the games. Newman, 11.
62. Heather Maxwell Chandler, *The Game Localization Handbook*. (Hingham, Mass.: Charles River Media Inc., 2005), 18.

game's design, development, and marketing were all completed by Namco (Japan). When Namco of Japan has completely finished *Tekken* in the Japanese version, in-house publishers at Namco of America would start to localize the original, undertaking technical adaptation, translation, and strategic modification. The localized version also needs to be submitted to third-party developers to guarantee the game's creative integrity. After being localized, the North American version can be now delivered for production. However, this is only the case with video game companies which have American headquarters or networked publishers in the United States. Many smaller video game studios seek localization services from specialist companies. If selling to other non-English-speaking international markets, the localization fee can be much higher and multiple localizing service companies might be necessary.

Nowadays, because of this complicated networked production, the globally dispersed hardware, development, and publishing companies, mainly headquartered in Tokyo, New York City, Los Angeles, and London, endeavor to coordinate with each other to create original and popular games for global audiences. This process of internationalizing and localizing video games, first established by Japanese companies and later followed by others, according to Kline et al., is closely related to the video game's position as "the ideal commodity of post-Fordism":

> In production, game development, with its youthful workforce of digital artisans and netslaves, typifies the new forms of post-Fordist enterprise and labour. In consumption, the video game brilliantly exemplifies post-Fordism's tendency to fill domestic space and time with fluidified, experiential, and electronic commodities. Video and computer games, moreover, are perhaps the most compelling

manifestation of the simulatory hyperreal postmodern ambience as the cultural correlative to the post-Fordist economy. The interactive gaming business also powerfully demonstrates the increasingly intense advertising, promotional, and surveillance strategies practised by marketers in an era of post-Fordist niche markets.[63]

To sum up Kline et al., in the post-Fordist capitalist society, video games, as a new media form, display features such as information knowledge, targeting consumer groups, niche markets, and space for developing postmodern identities. The Japanese video game industry is particularly important in the discussion of post-Fordism, because the postwar Japanese production system has been considered prototypically post-Fordist, a specialized production that goes local on a global scale.[64] Given these features of video games and the Japanese production system behind it, we move on now to focus on the technical, linguistic, and cultural factors that turn localization into a complex and laborious process.

Like films and TV shows, the visually and acoustically representative nature of video games requires a certain level of localization of the original products for more profitable export. However, unlike films and TV shows, video games are an interactive media art form which requires more deliberate adjustment to resolve

63. Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig de Peuter, *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 62, 75.

64. According to Mitchell Bernard, although many key technological innovations of post-Fordism took place in the United States, the more important post-Fordist organizational and political innovations developed in the postwar Japan. For example, Japanese production is typical in investing big budgets on localizing and improving imported cultural commodities and finding niche markets for them. For another instance, after World War II, Japanese workplaces have developed a kind of gender-specific "core specialists (male) — line production (female)" labor system. Moreover, Japanese companies tend to integrate and contract subsidiaries in multiple regions, in order to meet the large demand for its domestic markets, instead of integrating vertically, as found in the U.S. companies. For further discussion, see Mitchell Bernard, "Post-Fordism and Global Restructuring," in *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*, eds. Richard Stubbs and Geoffrey R.D. Underhill (Oxford University Press Canada, 2000), 153-155.

cultural differentiation in game playing experiences. To elaborate, internationalizing and localizing video games have the following elements that need adaptation:

First of all, video display standards vary in different regions. In Japan and the North America, NTSC is the standard color-encoding system for video game display; Europe and Asia standardized PAL for their game engines; most parts of Africa and Latin America use SECAM for screen display.[65] When marketing the game consoles to other regions, developers need to consider creating switchable packages for screen display within a single game. If not, localizers need to convert the display standard in order to maintain the original visuals. In this case, the United States and Japan, the foremost console game consumers, share the same standard and enjoy high quality resolution in playing games. Unfortunately, the major Japanese video game companies, Nintendo, Sony, and previously Sega, have recognized Europe and Asia as relatively less developed markets for their games, and do not intend to use PAL for their original games. These two regions have historically suffered from poor conversion, such as slower performance, lag in voiceover or music, and stretched screen frames.[66] Even today, in the case of Wii consoles, the hardware still does not support NTSC to PAL adaptability. Besides screen display, another issue with adaptability is that many game consoles are regionally locked. Take Wii for example:

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65. NTSC = National Television System Committee; PAL = Phase Alternating Line; SECAM = Sequential Color with Memory.
66. Chandler, 10, 130.

a Wii console purchased in Japan is not compatible with game discs released in the United States, nor could it access to the Internet as American ones do.[67]

Second of all, in terms of economic returns, although shipping original products in original packages to foreign locations costs less money and takes less time, the drawbacks are obvious. Games with no localization are not personalized for the foreign customers. For instance, a gaming console or its game, made in English for international distribution, might have no problem being marketed in English-speaking countries, but would not necessarily attain the same level of popularity in other countries, because of the lack of attention to specific local tastes. Not personalizing the product for export stands in contrast to the characteristics of the Japanese production and distribution systems. As Mitchell Bernard states, due to the high demand for a wide range of products in small domestic markets in Japan, Japanese companies tend to conduct small-batch production and flexible changeover for production lines and distribution networks, focusing on personalizing instead of standardizing products, distributing them to different consuming groups instead of promoting them on a mass scale.[68]

Third, if there is no translation, voice acting, or adaption of user interface (UI), the game's context can be confusing to foreign audiences, and the game-playing experience very different. These factors are the main impetus for cultural localization, which involves translatability, comprehension of original meanings, and the

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67. Wii's Wi-Fi connection provides access to the Internet, enabling game players to not only download games, but also find other game players online within the same area, for the purpose of creating multi-player environment and exchanging game weapons and fighting skills.
68. Bernard, 155.

"possibility of establishing new identities in the indeterminate space of cultural translation." [69] The language barrier is the most obvious obstacle that foreign videogame players encounter. Similar to films, for which making voiceovers for international distribution is not always necessary, video games that are marketed in small foreign markets only have subtitles in local languages instead of voice acting (that is, partial Localization).[70] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Japanese video games localized for the American market usually kept the Japanese language option. Nowadays, games released in the United States seldom have language options other than English, and the local versions often include in-game text translation, voiceover, and content readaptation (that is, full Localization), as will be elaborated later. This is due to the improved strategic alliances among developers, publishers, and distributors (either their U.S. headquarters or independent American companies), and to evolution of standardized and professionalized localizing skills. In other words, video games that are designed and developed by Japanese companies and studios are now experiencing much greater localization, for transplantation across the Pacific.

Unlike films, however, the interaction between game players and characters in games implies more complicated levels of adaptation, such as voice act following movements, as well as voice command functionality. Take the *Final Fantasy* series, for instance. This kind of complicated action-adventure game relies heavily on storytelling through dialogue between characters, in-game cut scenes, and other types

69. Francesca Di Marco, "Cultural Localization: Orientation and Disorientation in Japanese Video Games," *Autonomous University of Barcelona*, 1 (November 2007): http://ddd.uab.cat/pub/tradumatica/15787559n5a6.pdf.
70. Chandler, 43.

of instruction (for example books and notes) in the game world.[71] Since only a small proportion of games with Hollywood-like budgets, produced by leading Japanese game companies, are available in other countries, some minor games not released in America have been translated by fans, in which case the conversations are poorly dubbed. In some other games with tight budgets for localization, spoken dialogues are removed entirely, and the voice command does not function at all as it does in the original games. The only way to follow the storyline is to read the English subtitles, which can make the localized versions seem dull and inconvenient for the American audiences who are not accustomed to reading during game play. Although a poor translation would not necessarily completely ruin the reception of the game, it can convey inaccurate messages, or even nonsense, to game players, or appear confusing when players have to make choices in role-playing games. For example, the character Gisu Hawado in *King of Fighters*, who has "adopted" the Western name Geese Howard, shouts out "You not worth mah disgust!" Another Sega game *Zero Wing* is infamous for its bad translations, (tagged "Zero Wingrish" by gamers), with lines like "Somebody set up us the bomb!" and "All your base are belong to us!"[72]

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71. Ibid., 140. "In-game cut scenes" are dramatically important sequence that interrupts the gameplay to show a shift in the plot or a previous story that explains the current scenes. During the cut scenes, there is no interaction of the player. See "Glossary" in Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca, 250.
72. Usually an internationally influential game software company like Sega would not make mistranslations like this. The mistake was due to the game's poor localization before its rush release in European markets in 1991. The term "Zero Wingrish," which refers to the deliberate use of inaccurate English translation in order to create the feel of foreignness, did not become recognizable until the early 2000s, when fan translation of Japan-exclusive video games became popular in America. The confusing line "All your base are belong to us" was originally "連邦政府軍のご協力により、君達 の基地は、全て CATS がいただいた," which should be "Because of the Federal Government's assistance, CATS now has taken your entire base." The correct translation of another line "Somebody set up us the bomb!" should be "Somebody has put a bomb on our spaceship!" The mistranslations in *Zero Wing* are frequently cited to exemplify the "Engrish" phenomenon, which exaggerates the

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Since video games aim at creating an interactive relationship between players and their characters, players are critical to the protagonists' fates. The way players approach the game is unique to their personalities, which can be challenging to the localization team produce a product that arouses the same interest and energy from local players with the same energy the original game delivered. Localization therefore is not only about making sense in another language, but also about creating a locally relevant style; localizers need to be not only bilingual but also bicultural. The most difficult part of translating games from Japanese to American English is the sense of humor, because of the different concepts of "funny" and the use of puns. Since American localizers possess rather flexible freedom in game localization, they are usually able to reproduce the American version of humor in full swing: translation therefore becomes "transcreation." [73] *Final Fantasy X* shows an example of translation of Japanese play on words. The conversation is between Rikku, who makes a joke by using the noun *daijōbu* (OK) as a verb, and her brother, who corrects her grammar:

Figure 2.1. "Transcreation" of a dialogue in *Final Fantasy X*. [74]

Japanese Version [Literal Translation]	Localized American Version
アニキ: ダイジョウブか〜? [Brother: Are you OK?]	Brother: What's your status?

mistake of confusing letter "r" with "l" among English learners in Japan. See "Zero Wingrish" examples at TVtropes website http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ZeroWingrish.
73. Marco, 3.
74. Carmen Mangiron and Minako O'Hagan, "Game Localisation: Unleashing Imagination with 'Restricted' Translation," *JosTrans: The Journal of Specialised Translation*, Issue 06 (July 2006): http://www.jostrans.org/issue06/art_ohagan.php.

リック：ダイジョばナイ！ [Rikku: Were "No-K!"]	Rikku: Disasterrific!
アニキ：「ダイジョばナイ」は間違 い！「ダイジョウブではナイ」と言 え！ [Brother: "No-K" is not a word. Say "Were not OK."]	Brother: "Disasterrific" is not a word. Say 'disastrous' like the rest of Spira!

Another kind of alteration is adding American English in the dialogues. For instance, based on my friends' and my experiences of playing *Super Street Fighter II* on the Playstation 2 console, the win quotes displayed at the end of the battles are (without voice), "Oooh. Bet that hurts eh?" "Hey, lighten up, dude!" "That was a gas. Ten-hut, loser!" or "You've got some talent! Uncle Sam can use you!" Although some of them sound weird, the localizers' attempt to recreate comic effects in American English usage is obvious.

Since English is a *lingua franca* that conveys a sense of foreignness but one that is cool and chic to Japanese people, and since the dominant consumer markets of console games have remained either in Japan and North America, or Oceanic and the United Kingdom, some Japanese game studios tend to include a certain amount of English text in original versions, primarily to attract domestic players with the foreign feel, and to make their games export-friendly, enabling their games to be accessible to foreign markets even without translation. For instance, *Contra*, one of the most popular arcade games that were later adapted to Nintendo platforms, uses English words on the UI screen in its Japanese version. In the Japanese-released *Street Fighter*, the screen displays "One! Two! Three! Fight!" "You win!" and "Game over!"

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in English. Some other games, although designed and developed by Japanese studios, have included American pop culture icons. As in the case of *Kingdom Hearts* (2002), the developer Square (Japan) used many Disney cartoon characters, such as Donald Duck, Goofy, Mickey Mouse, and Simba, to show its friendship with Walt Disney for the two companies' new alliance. This mix of Japanese and English text, Japanese anime and American cartoon, is what Roland Robertson calls "glocalization" (as explained in Page 14, Chapter 1), a blending of foreign and local. It reflects how Japanese companies act transnationally by incorporating Western elements into their cultural products for domestic markets.

Beyond the above mentioned organizational, technical, and language differences, cultural factors need to be taken into account during localization. Cultural specificity gives a cultural commodity a special look and feel. To modify the product to meet local tastes while maintaining the quality of the original therefore becomes a challenge for localizers. For video games, it is important, on the one hand, to maintain the precision of the tone of speaking, the way of conveying characters' intentions, and the overall functionality and game features. On the other hand, accommodating the specific cultural preferences of local players is also necessary. Since video games constitute visual language themselves, images and symbols in the games exert different kinds of power in different cultures. Localizers who deal with game scripts and visual design might notice the different ethical and moral standards existing between source and target cultures, and find it necessary to edit the game content in order to accord with cultural mores in the relevant countries. In *Anime Explosion*,

author Patrick Drazen writes, "Some images [that] Western viewers automatically invest with a great deal of power are taken by Japanese viewers with little more than a mental shrug."[75] American audiences may find such unfavorable or unacceptable cultural content in Japanese video games that include obscenity and pornography, anti-religious symbols, and culturally subversive images.

Japanese video games are different from their American counterparts just as manga and anime are different from Disney cartoons. To see Japanese culture through Japanese video games that have been localized for Americans is to find the distinctive features of Japanese video games. In author Jason Thompson's article "J-pop Hard Copy," he states that, "Though the initial influences were translated American role-playing games . . . Japanese role-playing games [have] developed a life and subculture of their own."[76] There are differences, for example, in the art of game design in Japanese games. It is likely that in Japanese video games there is a higher occurrence of female characters because game customers have traditionally been overwhelmingly male. The game characters tend to appear to be cute and sexualized, as in anime, and differ from American-produced games that tend to portray women as femininely sexualized.[77] In *Fatal Frame* (2001), the seventeen-year-old girl Miku, portrayed in the Japanese version as Asian in appearance and frightened, was adapted

75. Kohler, *Power-Up*, op cit., 206.
76. Jason Thompson, "J-pop Hard Copy," in *Fresh Pulp: Dispatches from the Japanese Pop Culture Front 1997-1999*, eds. Alvin Lu (San Francisco: Viz Communications Inc., 1999), 41.
77. Kaze Kiri FX, "Japanese Video Games: A Model for International Popular Medias?" *J-Fan: Ultimate Japanese Entertainment Directory*, Section 3 (May, 2003): http://www.j-fan.com/edit.cgi?selected=japanese_video_games1.

for the American release into a Western looking young adult in her early twenties.[78] Her face was redesigned to look more realistic than the Japanese version, which originally featured anime-style big eyes. Her hair color was changed from black to brown, and her body proportion becomes more realistic than the original anime figuration. The Japanese school uniform also became a normal blouse and skirt to avoid appearing to be too childlike to American audiences.

This kind of modification is not new. Since Nintendo's entry into North America in the mid-1980s, American publishers have tried to blend Japanese games into American culture more smoothly. In the late 1980s, for example, localizers attempted to change Japanese game posters from anime style to a more American comic style, in order to make the games appealing to customers of different age groups, since American people might view the anime style as immature. As manga and anime gained a booming fandom in the 1990s, however, American distributors increasingly decided to retain the original Japanese cover art so as to attract American anime fans.[79] Nevertheless, the replacement of Japanese graphics for more Americanized cover art with less of an anime style can still be found today.

Since Japan is a relatively racially homogenous society, Japanese games, for which meeting the demand of the domestic market is the priority, seldom seem to have qualms about racial stereotyping. For example, in the early NES game *Casino Kid*, the only black character is a juvenile thief, whose skin tone was much lightened

78. Marco, 2-3.
79. FX, Section 3.

when the game was brought to America.[80] In another early game *Earthbound*, an "insane cultist" character's appearance was softened and blurred in the American version to obscure his identity as a Ku Klux Klan member.[81]

The variations in censorship standards for video games in Japan and American are also based on cultural and political differences between the two countries, and require visual changes in many cases. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, when Nintendo held the dominant position in the U.S. video game market, the company's American headquarters attracted controversy for its strict censorship of video games brought from Japan. Nintendo of America not only modified (or banned) video games that contained violence and images of blood, but even readapted or removed images of alcohol, smoking, and the symbol of the cross. While alcohol use is common in Japanese video game scenes, it was censored in the American versions, which often changed a "bar" to a "café," and "vodka" and "sake" (Japanese liquor) to "soda." The crosses, although symbolizing hospitals in the Japanese versions, were considered offensive to the Christian faith and thus airbrushed out completely by Nintendo of America.[82]

The Nintendo game *Bionic Commando*, which was released in the late 1980s under the original title "Top Secret: the Resurrection of Hitler," is a good example of a Japanese game with a strong political flavor. The plot revolves around a neo-Nazi group's attempt to restore Adolf Hitler's regime and ends with the defeat of the

80. Kohler, *Power-Up*, 207.
81. J.J. McCullough, "Nintendo's Era of Censorship," *Filibuster Cartoons* (2004): http://www.filibustercartoons.com/Nintendo.php.
82. Ibid..

antagonists. Considered by some to contain too much neo-Nazi imagery, everything related to Fascism in the game was edited out in the American version, including swastikas, Hitler's image, and even references to the country of Germany.

Video games are stories; most of them evoke a fictional world that we have no experience with in the real world. Some Japanese video games, especially within the action-adventure genre, are very U.S.-centered. The most representative one is *Metal Gear Solid*, ranked by IGN as the number one seller globally among all video games for Sony consoles.[83] Most protagonists in the games possess Western looks and American nationality.[84] The stories of all four episodes center on the actual regional conflicts in which America has been involved, and they narrate how the American army has accomplished four complicated anti-terrorism missions against enemies from post-Cold War Russia (in the 1998 episode), a secret foreign organization hiding nuclear weapons (in the 2004 episode), and Middle Eastern terrorists (in the 2008 episode). The missions involve not only fight scenes, but also combat plotting, strategic communication, and direct references to U.S. military organizations and their practices.

Another example is the *Resident Evil* series, originally a Japanese game created for Playstation. The seven series of the games all focus on international anti-bioterrorism organization's missions to investigate and fight zombies and secret societies that have spread the deadly viruses in African villages. Stereotypically led

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83. Imagine Games Network, "Top 25 Games of All Time — Playstation 2," *IGN* (January 2002): http://psx.ign.com/articles/080/080401p1.html.
84. See a complete list of *Metal Gear Solid* characters on Konami's (the game's developer) website, http://www.konami.jp/gs/game/mgs/character/index.html.

by several Anglo-American scientists and U.S. Secret Service personnel, all of the stories contain numerous depictions of violence against black mutants, and thus have been very controversial despite their success in the American market.

A third example, *Disaster: Day of Crisis*, although not yet released in America, is a U.S.-centered story made to appeal to domestic consumers. The game narrates a former International Rescue Team member's encounter with a terrorist organization that is trying to destroy the world. The story sets in the United States, involving characters simulating the FBI, White House, and U.S. army personnel. The scenes are also Hollywood-like, ranging from various natural disasters caused by human behaviors and catastrophes caused by terrorists, to car tracing and *24*-like rescue missions.

The translatability of video games is more complex than organizational system transplant, technical adaptability, and language translation. The kinds of cultural localization noted above (visual readaptation, censorship, and storytelling) require localizers to be capable of identifying cultural dissimilarities and reconstructing merchandise to accord with the expectations of local audiences. It is a process that is expensive, laborious, and, in the eyes of fans who seek originality in Japanese video games, perhaps even unnecessary. However, it does exemplify the globalization of Japanese pop culture, in the form of the Westernization of game character, customization for American cultural and sexual mores, and compromising for American racial and political viewpoints.

Japanese video games not only have been localized, but they are not separated on game store shelves in the US, which makes it difficult and unnecessary for most American gamers to distinguish between a domestically produced game and a foreign one. Unlike games that can be easily identified with a particular cultural practice or a media franchise (for instance, Medal of Honor, which has direct relevance to American culture), general sports games and racing games can hardly be related to any country of origin. Can these demonstrate that Japanese games are gradually losing their original cultural traits? Are Japanese video games becoming less focused on the domestic market than before, and are they being targeted primarily at the American market for better financial returns and smoother global acceptance? By looking closer more closely at what makes Japanese games specifically "Japanese" even after the complex full localization process, one must be skeptical of this assertion.

As I state in the Introduction, although Japanese video games do not seem to have the same Japanese cultural specificity as anime almost always seems to, manga, anime, video games, and films can be intertextual and their characters can appear cross-media. A Japanese video game can become a cult success along with its media franchise that comes from Japan, and thus is viewed to be culturally relevant to Japan. As Susan Napier states in *Anime*, Americans often first come across anime in computer and video games.[85] For example, the best known game of this kind is one of the top ranking media franchises in the world, *Pokémon*, by Nintendo. The characters

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85. Napier, 247.

appeared in the *Pocket Monster* video game before being utilized in a wide variety of printed and digital media; thus the term "Pokémonization" of America (and the world), which refers to the creation of integrated Japanese media franchises built on commodities of play.[86] The first Godzilla video game *Godzilla: Monster of Monsters*, became popular when released in America in 1988, even though it was a chess-like game and did not satisfy game players who yearned to destroy metropolises like in the Godzilla films. The tie-in video game's popularity was due to the monster's international fame brought by the Godzilla film series' long record of success in prior decades. Other long-running Japan titles that have set America and the world on fire, such as *Legends of Zelda* and *Pac Man* in the 1980s, and *Street Fighter* and *Final Fantasy* in the 1990s, were all followed by other media forms like manga and animated films.[87] These games are undeniably perceived as "Japanese" and linked by global consumers with the culture that creates imaginative comics, animation, and video games.

As Whalen and Taylor state in the book *Playing the Past*, video games perform an important role in communicating complex ideas, not only game ecologies and gaming experience, but also real world history and cultural representations.[88] As I also state in Chapter 1, although Japanese pop creates a trajectory of cultural hybridism, a unique style called "Japaneseness," by domesticating the West, it promotes traditional Japanese and East Asian cultural practices and values along the

86. Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 235.
87. Kohler, *Power-Up*, 10.
88. Zach Whalen and Laurie N. Taylor, "Playing the Past: An Introduction," *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), 2.

way. The exotic feel of "Oriental" imagery is one of the reasons for the success of Japanese pop culture among American audiences. Therefore, those Japanese video games that stay "Japanese" after localization are games that communicate with, promote, or even stereotype Japan's national culture. The *Way of the Samurai* series, for instance, is consistent in using traditional elements, such as samurai uprising storylines, feudal costume design, and celebrations of the samurai spirit. Although based on the film *Seven Samurai* (1954), the video game *Seven Samurai 20XX* is a jumble of pre-industrial Japanese villages and futuristic architecture, warriors in samurai attire and anime-style characters. Despite the different representations of samurai stories, both of these games are popular in the United States and are admittedly fun to play. Another game that has represented Japanese and Asian cultural practices is *Street Fighter*. The game contains various fighting skills such as kung fu, judo, and sumo, as well as traditional architecture such as Buddhist temples, Chinese restaurants, and religious statues in the background. Among all the characters of various national origins, one of the most stereotyped ones in the game is the sumo wrestler E. Honda. He wears *kumadori* make-up, a kind of face painting for Japanese kabuki actors (which is ridiculous but inauthentic for a sumo wrestler, but fun to watch), and goes on his journey to enhance his strength, seek other fighters with different fighting skills, and eventually show the world that sumo wrestling is the greatest fighting art in the world. Games of this kind typify Japan's obsession with the uniqueness of its culture. They have not only commodified the imageries of

Japanese and Asian cultures, but also reinforced the stereotypes of Japanese pop culture's selling of its modified "Orientalism" to American fans.

In sum, this chapter encompasses Japanese games' localization from many perspectives, examining how American culture and Japan's cultural uniqueness have affected decisions made by American game localizers. Understanding the business and culture of Japanese world-class companies' transplantation of products to the United States is important in explaining the successful establishment of the Japanese video game industry in America. Nintendo's entry into and dominance of the American game market in the mid-1980s do not make it a rare case, but followed a typical pattern in a period when numerous Japanese businesses flowed into America. Video games fit into a new media niche and display many significant patterns of post-Fordism, whose development has been exemplified in Japanese systems of production and organization, which makes Japanese video games global in nature, and successful worldwide.

Unlike other forms of Japanese pop culture, video game's inherent interactivity demands deeper levels of localization for foreign markets. The increasingly globally dispersed institutions which make the original game and its export versions have made the localization process more professionalized, specialized, and thus more complex and tedious. Factors taken into consideration for localization are multilayered. There are technical issues such as regionally different screen display standards and regionally locked console systems. There are also huge financial returns from localizing games for foreign markets, which accords with the strategic

path that the transnational Japanese products always trace. The translation of game scripts is the cornerstone for game localization, especially story- rather than action-driven games. There have been intentional and unintentional "mistakes" made in translating game scripts from Japanese into English — the unintentional "transration" caused by unprofessional localizers and the intentional "transcreation in attempt to recreate the same comic effects in American versions. Beyond technological and linguistic differences between source and target countries, video game transplantation, according to researcher Francesca Di Marco, is also about "unsettling, recombination, hybridization, 'cut and mix.'"[89] American cultural references have deeply influenced the localization process of Japanese games, including the customization of character figuration, changes in iconography and the renaming of controversial characters, and the adaptation of unacceptable racial or political elements. On the one hand, Japanese video games, especially action strategy games, can be U.S.-centered in terms of storylines, which showcases Japanese culture's Americanized characteristics. On the other hand, other Japanese games have been based either purely traditional or hybrid (Western and Eastern, postmodern and realistic) representations, which is a compelling demonstration of Japan's enthusiasm for promoting its national and traditional culture.

Video games are cultural objects. Culture affects the way they are dislocated as they move to markets across national boundaries. Game players, brought up in and accustomed to certain culture, observe another culture through video games, and

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89. Marco, 6.

develop a model of acculturation of that foreign culture, as well as new meanings of fan identity. In the next chapter, I will turn to the American game players' perception and reception of Japanese video games in the United States to explain how culture interacts with, and how cultural localization influences, American fans of Japanese games, as compared to game players in Japan.

Chapter 3. Culture and Consumption
American Game Players' Perception and Reception of Japanese Video Games

As cultural commodities, video games are meaningful. As the author Steven Jones states, video games not only provide the social, economic, and cultural evidences for the globalization process, but they are also "a form of cultural expressions worthy of scholarly attention."[90] The meaning of video games often refers to their functionality as people gain experiences from playing games. The meaning also varies according to how players interpret the games with their local knowledge and cultural background. According to psychologist Richard Jackson Harris, in media studies there are two ways to relate cultural products in mass media with "reality," that is, the culture, social interactions, and individuals in an audience's society: one views media as a vehicle for reflecting the world, "a sort of window on reality"; the other considers media products to be able to not only reflect, but also construct, social reality around consumers.[91] In Chapter 1, I examined how global flows of popular culture intervene with each other and thus become hegemonized, though simultaneously locally specific. In Chapter 2, I analyzed how video games serve as vehicles for revealing the culture behind them, as well as what impact cultural specificity has on these transplanted products. When we turn our attention to Japanese video games from the recipients' — the American game consumers'

90. Steven E. Jones, *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textural Strategies* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1.
91. Richard Jackson Harris, *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*, 4th Edition (New York: Routledge, 2004), 48-51.

perspectives, what meanings do these game players make from their gaming experiences?

This chapter is designed to investigate what Terry Flew called "the market of audiences/readers/users," namely the interaction between the reception of the media content and the overall changes of that media industry.[92] Particularly, it is concerned with the changing nature of fandom and how fans deal with the cultural differences in these games, as well as how their perception and reception of these games have influenced Japanese games' market share in the United States.

Methodologically, as I framed the first two chapters within the fields of cultural studies and textual analysis respectively, this chapter will focus on "game play," that is to say, the totality of game players' experiences that awaken different interests, values, norms, and even languages in them by playing video games.[93] The chapter begins with a discussion of the emergence, development, and demographics of Japanese games' fandom in the United States. Understanding how game fandom grows over time, knowing who the gamers are, and how gender and age groups divide, can help us better understand the position of Japanese video games among American game players in general. As for interpreting the meanings of game play, I set out to look at three aspects: acculturation, identification, and social gaming.

First of all, I will explore how American fans encounter Japanese culture in playing Japanese games. In particular, can they culturally label the games that they play? Have they experienced cultural distance or familiarity in Japanese games? Are

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92. Terry Flew, *Understanding Global Media* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 9.
93. Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca, 148.

they aware of the localization changes made to the original Japanese games? Second, I will examine the differences in public perceptions of game fans in the United States and Japan. Third, I will investigate American and Japanese fans' preferences for competition, collaboration, and the freedom a game ascribes to a player. From these three approaches, this chapter provides evidences for the "Japanamerica" phenomenon as in the dominance of Japanese video games in the US, in comparison to the game production and localization processes (which target the American market) under the influence of "Americajapan."

Video game consoles, as the major gaming platform I focus on in my research, have become a profitable mass market for the global popular culture industries. According to an international report in 2002, more than half of the households in the United States and Japan combined owned at least one game console.[94] The study shows that this trend would be accelerating with introduction of more new or updated game consoles. In retrospect, the soaring consumption in recent years of the Nintendo Wii, Sony Playstation, and Microsoft Xbox consoles in America has met this forecast.[95] By the end of March 2009, NPD reported that Wii sales totaled 50 million units worldwide, with 23 million units in the United States; Nintendo DS sold 101 million units worldwide, with 32 million sold in America.[96] As for software sales

94. Spectrum Strategy Consultants, *From Exuberant Youth to Sustainable Maturit: Competitiveness Analysis of the UK Games Software Sector* (London: DTI, 2002), 13.
95. On the contrary, studies show that the video game industry in Japan since 2000 has overall slumped in revenues, from $13.25 billion in 2001, to $5 billion in 2002, and to $7 billion in 2008. Chris Kohler, "Game Devs Plan to Save Japan," *Wired* (June 2005): http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2005/06/67976.
96. NPD Group, "2009 Fiscal Year Sales Table," *Wikia Gaming* (April 2009): http://vgsales.wikia.com/wiki/2009_fiscal_year.

related to these two consoles, Wii games and Nintendo DS games led the total sales figures among all gaming platforms in America, with 165 million and 178 million units sold, respectively.[97] The assumption is that this kind of popular reception of Japanese-developed consoles and games in a market outside Japan is part of the "Japanophilia" that results from the broad interest in Japanese pop culture, especially manga and anime. This proposition is supported by observing how far game fandom has come in America and how much the most popular Japanese video games have contributed to the growth of their internationally renowned media franchises. It is also debatable, however, if we take into account how diverse the game themes are, as well as how unrecognizable these games' cultural label can be to American fans (for example, the American football game *Tecmo Super Bowl*, which has an obvious American cultural indication, was actually designed by Japanese studios). To support this, I will review the demographic changes in order to determine the connection between the fan base of Japanese games and the flows of Japanese pop culture to the United States. I will then move on to discuss game players' experiences of cultural encounter, identity, and social aspects in game play in order to point out the uniqueness of American consumption of these games that are distinct from other media forms.

Although there have been extensive studies of video game history that focus on technological and industrial changes, local histories of video game fandom have

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97. VG Chartz, "American Chart for Week Ending 28th March 2009," http://www.vgchartz.com/aweekly.php?date=39901&boxartz=1.

been scarcely discussed.[98] The little that is known is based on historical statistics on game sales, supported with cultural preferences among the consumers. To begin with, this account will be structured by decades and followed by an overview of gamer demographics: prior to the mid-1980s, the late 1980s, the 1990s, and 2000 to present. The significance of this periodization is due to the following factors: the tidal waves that Japanese games (especially Nintendo games) have generated in the United States and the Western world since the mid-1980s; Japanese video games' continuous dominance in the U.S. game market throughout the 1990s, with increasing association with other "Japanamerica" phenomena like manga and anime; Japanese video games' technological innovations in the new millennium and the growth of some competitive American game companies during this period.

The early Japanese games that were first introduced to American game players in the late 1970s and the early 1980s included *Space Invaders* (1978), *Donkey Kong* (1981), and *Pac-Man* (1980). They had already enjoyed immense success in Japan before they received fervent reception in America. When the largest American game manufacturer, Atari, led the North American video game industry to its grave in 1983, these Japanese games survived the collapse and became even more popular when their Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) versions came out in 1985. During this time, the transnational fan base for Japanese video games emerged in the United States. The simple graphics of *Space Invaders* and the animated cartoon figures in

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98. See the most cited accounts of video game history in David Sheff, *Game Over: How Nintendo Conquered the World* (Vintage, 1994); Steven L. Kent, *The First Quarter: A 25-Year History of Video Game* (LA, CA: BWD Press, 2000); and Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca, *Understanding Video Games*.

Donkey Kong and *Pac-Man* attracted a broad American audience, reaching a wider demographic than the typical kids and teenagers, the whole generation of Gen-Xers (born 1961 to 1981).[99]

However, the fan base of Japanese games in the United States did not mature until the second half of the 1980s, a time when Japanese hardware and software manufacturers started to build their subsidiaries and their transnational networks in the United States, and when the technology of gaming platforms, which used to be limited to arcades, Atari consoles, and Apple computers, experienced innovative breakthroughs. Two years after the dramatic North American video game crash of 1983, in the world of the resurrected video game industry, thanks to Nintendo's arrival and penetration, all the hit games in America were coming from the Japanese development community. Since there was no market segmentation between the U.S. and Japanese gaming products at the time, games that had considerable popularity in Japan were rapidly localized for American release and enthusiastically received by American game players.[100] Games that were popular prior to the 1983's crash now had sizable fandom in America because they could be played on NES, the revolutionary gaming console that fueled Nintendo's rapid rise into dominance in the United States and globally. In fact, as Japanese companies quickly controlled the American game market and established licensing agreements with American entertainment companies, their game icons started to appear on TV programs, clothes,

99. William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Millennials and the Pop Culture: Strategies for a New Generation of Consumers in Music, Movies, Television, the Internet, and Video Games* (Great Falls, VA: LifeCourse Associates, 2006), 46.
100. There were exceptions for this. In particular, games such as *mahjong*, *shogi*, and *go* were the games that did not make it after being introduced to America. Kohler, *Power-Up*, 231.

and food packages; game music was also widespread on music networks. This was a big step forward from Japanese companies' initial efforts to gain a share of the game marketplace in America in the early 1980s, a time when classic Japanese games (including *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man*, and *Donkey Kong*) were widely recognized in America but were not successfully marketed beyond media boundaries. Now that the U.S. audiences were more frequently exposed to these games through other channels, many more Americans became loyal fans who played games and purchased tie-in products.

What marked this unprecedented success of Japanese video games in the late 1980s were *Super Mario Bros.* (1986), *Ice Climber* (1985), and *The Legend of Zelda* (1987), just to name a few. These games' sequels continue to be published today in multiple gaming platforms, perpetuating Japanese games' phenomenal popularity in the world. In particular, *Super Mario Bros.*'s warm reception in the United States resulted in 40 million units sold (on the NES) up to 2003, when Nintendo discontinued production of NES software. Even today, *Super Mario Bros.* remains the single best-selling video game of all time.[101] Players often found themselves strongly attached to the game characters — mustached plumbers Mario and Luigi, Princess Peach and Mushroom Toad, ice climbers Popo and Nana, and the legendary Link. These likable icons provided alternative imaginaries to American cartoons and American pop culture, and they are still many people's "fantasy escape" today.

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101. "Mario Sales Data," *GameCubicle*. http://www.gamecubicle.com/features-mario-units_sold_sales.htm.

While Japanese video games were gradually changing the American pastime, the niche markets for Japanese manga and anime were also rapidly expanding. This positive reception for manga and anime came years later than that for the Japanese games, which had already captured numerous fans' hearts since the early 1980s, when people lined up in front of all the arcade machines in shopping malls and pizza places. The public awareness of the inflow of Japanese popular culture grew. As game fandom continued to absorb larger populations, some other people viewed Japanese games to be "bizarre cartoon games" or "too Japanese" and needing modification.[102]

Into the 1990s, Japanese video games permeated deeper into the American game culture. With the advent of new consumer phenomena like *Final Fantasy* (1990), *Sonic the Hedgehog* (1991), and *Pokémon* (1998), the more complicated storylines and cinematic effects in game design required higher levels of localization, and thus catered to the local tastes to a greater extent. Companies like Nintendo of America and Midway quickly learned to create less cartoonish and anime kinds of images for the American versions (as discussed in Chapter 2). Despite their efforts, game fans showed preferences for keeping the original feel in the Japanese versions intact. On the one hand this is due to the manga and anime cult that swept across America and the globe in the 1990s. These waves made manga, anime, and Japanese video games more familiar and gave rise to many more kinds of collectible tie-in products. For instance, fans who first encountered Pikachu in Pokémon games could now enjoy anime series and films that featured their favorable character. Another

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102. Steven Bloom, *Video Invaders* (New York: Arco Publishing, 1982), 181.

factor is that more American game companies were competing for a share of the profits from the billion-dollar American game industry with Nintendo, including Microsoft Game Studios, Electronic Arts, and LucasArts. Even though many of their games became hits, they were heavily based on elements and effects pioneered by Japanese-developed games, as in the cases of *Star Wars: Dark Forces* (1996) and *Medal of Honor* (1999).[103]

If video gaming before the arrival of the millennium was only a fan culture, it has become an intrinsic part of daily lives in the United States in the twenty-first century. The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) reports that U.S. computer and video game sales combined have skyrocketed from $2.6 billion in 1996 to $9.5 billion in 2007.[104] The game player demographic has changed over time as well. A survey from 2003 indicates that game players continued to age, with only 38 percent of console game players and 30 percent of computer game players less than 18 years old. By July 2008, according to the ESA annual report, 65 percent American households were playing computer or video games. While 25 percent of game players were under 18 years old, 26 percent were over 50, making the average age 35 years old.[105] These findings suggest that, first, the average age of American video game players has risen and there has been a wider range of age groups who engage in

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103. Microsoft Game Studios only made PC games in the 90s and did not start console game development until its own console Xbox came out. The most successful game Microsoft has made so far is the *Halo* series since 2001. (See more discussion in Jones, 69). LucasArts produced a series of Star Wars games after *Dark Force*. But the ones made in the 90s were nowhere near the later successful *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (2003). These suggest that games developed by top American companies could not yet break out the Japanese dominated U.S. game market in the 1990s.
104. Entertainment Software Association (ESA), "2008 Sales, Demographic and Usage Data: Essential Facts about the Computer and Video game Industry," *ESA* (2008): http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2008.pdf.
105. Ibid..

playing games; and second, that young "Millennials" are still a concentration group among game players in the United States.[106]

As the global consumer markets for video games expand, some American and British gaming companies have risen to power in recent years. Although on a small scale, Japanese games have been losing fans in America during the past decade, because the slow decrease of game sales in Japan in the past decade has affected the transnational distribution of games, and because popularity of online games has been increasing among Americans, which has never been a proud category for Japanese producers.[107] In the public eye and in the minds of teenagers, games like *Grand Theft Auto*, *Halo*, and *Guitar Hero* have gradually come to overshadow Japanese companies' efforts to dominate the U.S. game market with their releases of mostly new sequels of the established popular games (especially Wii games that are sequels of the classic Nintendo games, such as *Super Mario Galaxy* and *Mario Kart Wii* from the original *Super Mario Bros.*, *Metal Gear Solid* series from the early *Metal Gear* series), and thus are perceived as games of nostalgia instead of representations of fast-paced, advanced modern design. This kind of perception is currently held by very young Millennials, as compared to adult Millennials who grew up with Japanese pop

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106. "Millennials," as Strauss and Howe define, were people born in 1982 and after. Prior to them are Generation Xers (born, 1961 to 1981) and Boomers (born, 1943 to 1960) who have aged with videogaming over time. Strauss and Howe, 45, 46, 57, 114.

107. According to a report from Internet Association Japan (IA Japan), although online gaming market continues to grow in Japan, by the end of 2006 the sector revenue was only 50 million Japanese Yen. In addition, most online game titles released in Japan are from South Korea, the United States, and China. Seon Meyong Heo, "Current Online Game Status in Japan," *IA Japan* (April 2006): http://www.iajapan.org/abs/pdf/7th_3-2.pdf.

since the late 1980s, and a portion of Gen-Xers who were college-aged when they first encountered Japanese games.[108]

As for gender specific gamer demographics, adolescent males were the core market for video games in the United States during the late 1980s.[109] Because men traditionally dominated the gamer market, and because the existing employee pool for the game industry has been overwhelmingly male, games supposedly appeal to men more than to women. In 2001, however, as a commissioned research study from ESA showed, among the 60 percent of American men and women who regularly played video and PC games, women made up 43 percent and their average age was 29.[110] The findings show that video gaming has become a widespread leisure activity in America for both sexes. As Rebecca L. Eisenberg notes, "For the millions of women who grew up playing video games like *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man*, *Frogger*, *Pong*, *Tetris*, and *Centipede*, the 'fact' that girls don't play games should come as quite a surprise."[111]

There were two kinds of video games, according to James Newman, that demonstrate the strategies used by the industry to capitalize the female gamer market. One is the "crossover" games with a wide appeal and gender-neutral elements, while the other is called "games for girls," or "pink games," which target directly the female

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108. Strauss and Howe, 114.
109. Newman, op cit., 53. This is due to the fact that for the 20 plus years since the first video game *Spacewar!* was invented in 1962, video game genres were limited to action, adventure, and strategy games, which gave rise to the traditional view of playing video games as performing a type of masculinity. See more discussion of masculinity in game play in Chapter 4 in Derek A. Burrill, *Die Tryin': Videogames, Masculinity, Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 74.
110. Kerr, op. cit., 107. Kline et al. also cite this source in their book but pointing out that how "regularly" the subjects play and the duration of play were not explained. Kline et al., 266.
111. Rebecca L. Eisenberg, "Girl Games: Adventures in Lip Gloss," *Gamasutra* (February 1998): http://www.gamasutra.com/features/19980213/girl_games.htm.

market.[112] I argue that this difference of strategies is one of the points where Japanese

video games and American/Western games separate. Japanese video games comprise

a large portion of "crossover" games available in the current U.S. game market, as in

the cases of *Super Mario Bros.*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Enemy Zero*, *PaRappa the*

Rapper, *Final Fantasy VII*, etc.. Many of them are designed in Japanese anime style;

their fan bases are never limited to a certain age or gender group, just like the very

diverse anime fandom and the even broader fandom of Japanese visual style

(traditional arts, fashion, and the Visual Kei music genre led by X-Japan).

On the other hand, video games exclusively for girls are dominantly American

made (seldom marketed in Japan); they often aim at American young girls and

include titles inspired by existing pop culture franchises such as Barbie (*Barbie*

Fashion Designer), Hannah Montana (*Hannah Montana: Spotlight World Tour*), and

High School Musical (*High School Musical: Sing It!*). Ironically, even though

American publishers are noted to be conscious about gender representations in

localizing Japanese games, by focusing on fashion and popularity, this strategy

adopted by American companies does little to redress any gender imbalance in gamer

demographics.[113] In fact, as Ernest Adams argues, it does not even make sense to

place "for girls" or "for boys" onto the boxes. Because the majority of video games

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112. Newman, 55.
113. American companies have strict rules for localizing the more explicit gender references in
original versions. These include gender biased language, erotic images, and even anime-looking school
girls who can be perceived as highly sexualized.

are not designed with only one sex in mind, or not marketed only for male or female, "games for girls" only ghettoizes themselves: "It's not empowering, it's limiting."[114]

To understand video games, it is not just important to know about gamer demographics. Other factors regarding the quality of game play also need to be taken into consideration, specifically acculturation, identification, and social gaming. How do American game players make meaning from playing Japanese games? How much do they know about Japanese culture through video games? What do they think of the localized American versions? How do their gaming behaviors differ from their Japanese counterparts in terms of self-identification?

When a game player immerses himself into the game world, and when the game, linguistically and culturally localized, starts to "talk" to him at all levels, the language and place of origin for developing that game will be out of his mind. The difficulty of retaining a faithful representation of the game while simultaneously customizing for local tastes also seems to be irrelevant to the game experience itself. Why then look at the mutual influences between video games' and video gamers' cultural backgrounds? Playing video game is in itself consuming a cultural product, which involves different levels of engagement in the constructed social contexts in the game world. Video games' inherent interactivity means that game play involves a lot of brain activities, physical reactions, and creativity of experiences. These different modes of involvements reflect a certain level of social and cultural reality;

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114. Ernest Adams, "Designer's Notebook: Games for Girls? Eeeeewwww!" *Gamasutra* (Feburary 1998): http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3253/designers_notebook_games_for_.php.

their processes go beyond "consuming" and become "appropriating," "decoding," "shaping," and "reproducing."[115]

Above all, do Americans encounter Japanese culture when playing Japanese video games? As I mentioned in Chapter 2, video games on store shelves are not separated by country of origin. And because of the increasingly specialized production lines and cooperation of cross-national teams who develop and publish game consoles and software, it is becoming difficult to culturally label video games. Furthermore, there is no necessary reason for American fans to distinguish between American games and foreign games, as the immense U.S. game market has no problem accepting the world's best games and providing more than what the customers need. For today's 80 million American Millennials, who grew up at the peak of Japanese video games (the 1980s and 1990s), "the best games are always Japanese" is a common comment. However, when they were asked to list all the Japanese games they know, *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders*, *Donkey Kong*, *Mario*, *Zelda*, *Dragon Quest*, *Final Fantasy*, *Pokémon*, *Metroid*, and *Street Fighter* were pretty much it. Some who have been regularly playing video games can name *Soul Calibur*, *Castlevania*, and *Metal Gear Solid*.[116] On the contrary, American game players have traditionally distinguished between domestic and foreign hardware.[117] This common association between a gaming platform and its cultural origin is largely due to the recognizability of the very few but most popular consoles in the history of Japanese

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115. Kerr, 104.

116. This information is the result of talking to at least eight American game players, who are also my friends, all male, between 17 and 28 years, from December 2008 to May 2009, just to exemplify some Japanese console games that Americans Millennials would commonly know.

117. FX, Section 2.

video games' establishment in the United States, such as NES, Sega Saturn, (Super) Nintendo DS, Playstation, Xbox, and Wii. It is also due to the fact that PC games available in America are almost devoid of any Japanese titles. For instance, the most played online computer games so far, *World of Warcraft*, *Counter-strike*, *StarCraft*, and *Call of Duty*, are all developed by American studios; Korean titles, such as *Lineage 2* (2004), *Fiesta* (2007), and *Secret of the Solstice* (2008), have also rapidly grow in popularity in the U.S. online game market in recent years. Therefore, most American game players are able to make the U.S.-Japan dichotomy only based on the popularity of a few games and platform titles.

In Chapter 2, I discuss some patterns of the transplant of Japanese video games in America: for example, on the one hand, some Japanese games are originally created with English content to appeal to the domestic market and create export friendly versions and some have U.S. relevant storylines and biases influenced by American hegemony; on the other hand, some other games that follow the anime style of design or contain elements offensive to American cultures and identities have undergone visual modification; moreover, translation is more than conversion from one language to another, but involves maintaining the same effects of the play of words, the tone of speaking, and the sense of humor. These efforts to assimilate Japanese games into the American market receive disparate reactions from American game players. As interest in manga and anime grew rapidly in the United States during the 1990s and has continued to increase up until today, the American game fandom that used to reject the traits of "Japaneseness" in games now welcomes the

"Japanese" features. Some fans even wish games to be released in the original Japanese voices with English subtitles, for the purpose of learning Japanese language as well as getting a feel of authenticity, although such preferences have not yet had an impact on American publishers' decisions.[118] While Japanese video game developers adopt Western elements in their games to attract domestic audiences and create export-friendly versions for Western markets, American fans are fond of the Japanese traditional cultural elements in the games. The highly repetitive references to East Asian cultures in American media, such as samurai, ninja, sumo, karate, Zen, Buddhist temples, etc., contribute to game players' basic knowledge about Japan and Asia and also arouse their interest in seeing those culturally different subjects again in their favorable games. In fact, some American game developers farsighted enough long ago to realize this niche and released games like *Mortal Kombat* (1992) and *Shogun: Total War* (2000) that draw heavily East Asian imagery and Japanese historical events. Nevertheless they could not compete with the Japanese titles.

In both the U.S. and Japan game content and level of play is strongly associated with game players' identities. In his research on gamer demographics, Aphra Kerr highlights the problem with gamer surveys: some people are disinterested in video games because of their unwillingness to describe themselves as "gamers," because being labeled as such has certain social costs.[119] He found from a survey that a lot of women did not classify themselves as gamers because of the term's

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118. Annie Manion, "Discovering Japan: Anime and Learning Japanese Culture" (MA thesis, University of Southern California, 2005), 5; FX, Section 3.
119. Kerr, 112.

association with hardcore male gamers who play more frequently and who are obsessed with purchasing hardware and software.[120] This need to expand our terminology has been addressed by Arthur Asa Berger, who distinguished between "game centrics" from the more common term "game players" by defining the former as people who play games as a serious hobby and the latter as people who have fun playing games.[121] Although the industry has never recognized this distinction (talking instead about "serious gamers" and "casual gamers"), the two terms necessarily stress the different levels of engagement in game play.

Among fans, however, to indicate the socially awkward personality of those die-hard "centrics," the Japanese term "otaku" is gradually replacing "geek" or "nerd." In Japan, "otaku" refers to fans of any kind who have extreme fan behaviors, with game fans in particular being addressed as "gemu otaku." It also appears more often in pop culture, as in the cases of "cosplay," in which fans dress as their favorite manga, anime, and game characters, and the "densha otoko," a media franchise with its protagonist now representing a group of stereotypically unsociable male geeks who have trouble associating with girls or finding dates, and who are actually very kind deep down and intelligent in nature. The images of otaku have been traditionally stereotyped in Japan since the 1980s. They are typically men, wearing glasses and backpacks, and, if in Tokyo, would wonder around Akihabara with printed paper bags from Akihabara's manga, anime, and game stores in their hands. There are also

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120. Kerr, 112.
121. Arthur Asa Berger, *Video Games: A Popular Culture Phenomenon* (Transaction Publishers, 2002), 58.

highly recognizable women "cosplay otaku." Some dress up for fan gatherings; some others put on French maid costumes and serve as waitresses for male otaku customers in "maid cafés," restaurants built on the concept of fulfilling the otaku's fantasies. The otaku identity, which has been historically perceived to be negative, distanced by mainstream sociality, and attacked by media critics in Japan, generates different meanings in the United States. While there is no exact equivalent for the term "otaku" in English, the marginality of otaku identity is dissolved in America with the foreignness of its concept. Also because of the increasing popularity of Japanese pop culture nowadays, being addressed as "otaku" is attached to "Japanese cool" in the eyes of American fans of manga, anime, and video games. While video game cosplay is not commonly seen in daily life in the United States, it has become much more popular within the past decade. The idea of cosplay and related fan activities in Japan have inspired similar practices in America and fueled the growth of video game exhibitions, fan clubs, and workshops. Cosplay is joined by science fiction costume-dressing in the United States.[122] Each year game fans wear costumes to attend conventions like Otakon, Nekocon, and E3 Expo. The transfer of a negative and marginalized form of identity, otaku, from Japan into an acceptable and increasingly popular title in America, embodies the significance of cultural influences on pop culture consumption in a foreign locale. It is worth pointing out that not only in Japan, but in the present-day Western societies, video games hold a contested cultural niche. Although they continue to appear to be mainstream because of the sizable

122. W. Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York and London: Continuum, 2002), 11-16.

demographics of gamers, they are also accused of threatening children's health, creating aggressive teenagers, and further marginalizing anti-social adults. The continuous growth of Japanese game fandom in the United States and the comparatively open-mindedness of otaku identity barely signify an ending of the suspicion of playing games. The acceptance of Japanese video games is in itself the acceptance of the once exotic and obscure Japanese visual culture in the American mind.

Beyond cultural encounters and perceptions of identity, social gaming is also an important issue addressed in consumption studies of video games, because social interaction and community construction in game play add pleasure to the game itself. According to T. L. Taylor, sociality is multi-layered with both in-game aspects in playing online games (e.g. bulletin boards and online chatting), and out-of-game aspects in playing console games (e.g. talking and competing, swapping games with friends).[123] While there is a great deal of literature focusing on the online community and identity formation in its virtual spaces, I intend to discuss the culturally specific sociality — competition, collaboration, and freedom — in game play.[124]

Regardless of how competition is structured in the game design, there are culturally specific styles and strategies in game play. A study for differences in game preferences in the United Kingdom and Japan found that it is social interaction that influences and constrains Japanese game players' selection of games and game genres,

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123. T.L. Taylor, "Multiple Pleasures: Women and Online Gaming." *Convergence* 9 (1) (2003): 25.
124. Erickson (1997), Schott and Kambouri (2003), Nordli (2004), and Mileham (2008) have all provided insightful research findings on how game play is shared by people who interact with each other through engaging in the online games.

whereas competition was the priority for choosing games among the British participants. The study also discovered remarkable differences between the two groups when playing racing games, with Japanese players trying to cross the finish line with their competitors by slowing their vehicles down near the end.[125] Although the representativeness of Japanese fans' gaming tastes in this research is open to question because most of the participants were teenagers, the preference for social aspects in gaming among Japanese can be demonstrated by other evidence.

Statistically, the top selling genres in Japan since 2005 are, in order, role-playing games, brain training games, fighting games, and "active games" (the Wii games).[126] The American chart released by ESA, however, shows the best selling categories as action games, "family entertainment" (platform games like *Mario*, mostly on Wii), sports games, and shooter games.[127] Comparing the two groups of data, we can see that while the family-friendly Wii games are popular in both countries, Japanese fans prefer strategy, racing, and classic fighting, while Americans favor action, sports, and shooting. Although it is hard to say which group of fans takes competition more seriously, it is apparent that the data reinforces the stereotypes of the two peoples, the "smart" Japanese and the "active" Americans.

Video games are not only a social space, but also a laboratory where gamers make countless maneuvers to reach a goal. Since game design varies in the degree of freedom that a game ascribes to the player, there has always been a struggle between

125. Kerr, 118.
126. "Japanese Game Sales and Demographics: A Study of Influence of Culture on the Video Game Market," *Computer Gaming and Animation in Japan*. 9. (2008): *http://*facweb.cs.depaul.edu/noriko/JapanTrip08/pretrip/StudentPresentations/finalPres.ppt.
127. ESA, 5.

the game player and the flexibility with which he can apply with his own style. As James Newman states, "the players' exploratory and navigational freedom is often severely limited in order that particular types of game play can be enacted."[128] In other words, games are always restricted within their types of game play. Although players can "construct" their characters and choose various strategies that lead to different results, they can only do so within what has been programmed. *Super Mario Bros.* provides only a lineage path in its gold-coin-filled world, with the screen pushing the character to move forward. Even though you can run around freely and kill 1000 enemies in *Metal Gear Solid*, there is no way to exceed the limit of places and number of characters. Paper-and-pencil board games (mostly in the adventure role-playing genre), although invented in 1973 and still a kind of play on the cutting edge today, solves this problem by providing the player with extensive freedom for imagination of his own plot, setting, strategy, consequences of actions, and the story's ultimate ending. There are rules, but they are designed for characters' "class," strength, and broad categories of objects and weapons.[129] With this high level of freedom, paper-and-pencil board games have attracted many young adults in the United States, even though there is only a very small population of them compared to video game fandom.[130]

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128. Newman, 122.
129. "Class" in the game world means race or creature. For example, elf, dwarf, human, and angel are separate "classes."
130. The fandom for pen-and-pencil game is made up by mostly young adults because of the random occurrence of rules for very abstract strategies in the game. Participants usually need to read a lengthy guide book in detail before they can play the game.

Among all the video games with a certain level of manipulation in game design, according to research on the freedom of game play, Westerners preferred games that provide more freedom, while Japanese players did not care as much.[131] This is again linked to the local gaming tastes. Just like Japanese animation that "merits serious consideration as a narrative art form and not simply for its arresting visual style,"[132] Japanese video game is narrative-oriented in its visual representation. As Chris Kohler's interviews with Japanese game designers and developers indicate, Japan's domestic gamer market privileges games with stories rather than intense action,[133] which is why role-playing games (e.g. *The Legend of Zelda*, *Final Fantasy*, and *Monster Hunter Freedom*) are typically at the top of the sales chart. As American game players favor action games with fast-rewarding screens rather than good stories that they have to play for a long time, freedom during game play is more important to American gamers than their counterparts in Japan. While American gamers wish to create their own experiences in game play, Japanese gamers, who are noted for their strong brand loyalty, would rather try to explore and experience the designer's thoughts in order to beat the game within a range of established strategies. Based on these observations, we can conclude that, generally speaking, American game players emphasize practical results, whereas Japanese gamers are relatively more process-oriented.

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131. Kerr, op cit., 114-115.
132. Napier, 10.
133. Kohler, *Power-Up*, 5, 91.

Games have gone from a nerd's niche to a popular global phenomenon, and today gaming in the United States has grown into a multi-billion dollar industry, both thanks in large part to Nintendo and other Japanese companies' continuous efforts to bring the best Japanese games to America and to the world over the last two decades. Be a plumber in *Super Mario Bros.*, a racer in *Speed Racer*, a kung fu fighter in *Street Fighter*, a soldier in *Metal Gear*… Everyone loves Japanese games in some way. Even though their market share continues to decline in today's U.S. game market, their beloved characters and the memories associated with them will always occupy a special spot in many American game players' hearts.

Conclusion

As the boundaries that set highbrow and lowbrow cultures apart continue to be dissolved, and as media technologies continue to advance, the discussion of cultural globalization is inseparable from the discussion of global flows of popular culture. Whereas Western imperialism has historically played an important role in directing cultural flows, and America's economic wealth and successful media exports have contributed to the country's cultural hegemonic position, today's globalization process is becoming multidirectional, with participants ranging from Western societies to non-Western ones. The unique case of Japan as an Asian country and the uniqueness of Japan's cultural presence have challenged the great divide between the East and the West. In fact, Japan's power of cultural penetration in other locations is now perceived by many as an uncontroversial truth.

Among the various contemporary pop cultural forms, Japanese video games, whether released inside or outside Japan, compose a cultural industry in their own right. They have been setting global trends and driving changes for more than two decades, and continue to occupy a position as the undisputed market leader. Their journey in the United States is unique, in that they have penetrated the U.S. game market so deeply and so long that many American people do not even realize they are Japanese, and that they are always among the best games American game players can name. Japan has created some of the best role-playing games (*Final Fantasy*), action games (*Space Invaders*), "simulation" games (*Gran Turismo*), and horror games

(*Resident Evil*). Not to mention the various series of Mario and Pokémon games released every year even today.

Although Japanese video games are not obviously culturally specific, the industry is still regionally separate. As long as game designers are from Japan, translation and "localization" is still needed so that game players' experiences are consistent from place to place. Localizers not only work to guarantee the practical aspects such as the games' technical adaptability and translation, but also provide their knowledge of local culture to modify some games in language use, visual presence and suitable cultural references. While some games have domesticated American elements, some other have promoted Japanese traditional culture. This struggle between authenticity and customization in cultural representation in Japanese video games demonstrates the "Japaneseness" that is common in Japanese pop culture, which is either a jumble of cultural markers, or a lack of them.

Game fans in the United States are lucky enough not to worry too much whether the Japanese games they play are poorly dubbed or odd-looking, because the U.S. game market offers them the best of what Japan has to offer and thus the games are all carefully translated and localized. Ever since the arcade era of *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*, Japanese video games have been received enthusiastically by American game players. American fans prefer action, fast and flashy rewards, and freedom in game play, while their Japanese equivalents are fonder of strategy, a good story to follow, and beating the game by rules.

A further concern is the stylish design trend that Nintendo Wii pioneered. The Wii seems not to fit in the prime decades of Japanese games' absolute domination because it was introduced in November 2006, when Microsoft's Xbox 360 had already been on the market, and proven a success, for a year. Nevertheless, at the time of this writing, the Wii is sharing the market leadership with Sony Playstation 3 and Microsoft Xbox 360, thanks to its quick success at initial release, and steady growth in the years since. More importantly, the Wii and Wii games display an assembly of features characteristic of Japanese video games that I have talked about. First of all, the Wii is not an exception to Nintendo's continuous efforts to infiltrate the U.S. consumer market, especially at a time when American companies are sharing the same ambitions. Nintendo adopted the marketing approach "Blue Ocean Strategy" for the Wii's launch, which opened a new and popular niche.[134] Second of all, followed immediately on GameCube, Nintendo 64, SNES, and NES, all of which have brought awe-inspiring technological innovations over the past two plus decades, the Wii system launched the revolutionary introduction of Wiimote (the game controller). The design of the Wiimote requires a great deal of physical movement, turning "gaming" into "performing gaming."[135] Third, more than half of the Wii games released in America are adapted from Nintendo's classic games (*Mario Kart*, *Super Smash Bros*.

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134. "Blue ocean strategy," according to Chan and Mauborgne, aims at opening new market space rather than joining the existent competition. In the crowded "red ocean," companies fight by rules and try to outperform competitors, and thus the bloody red ocean. In the "blue ocean," however, competition is less relevant and products are created beyond industrial boundaries and beyond set competitive rules of the game. See W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne, *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition Irrelevant* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 4-5.
135. Jones, 149.

Brawl, *Need for Speed*, *The Legend of Zelda*: *Twilight Princess* and *Wii Sports*), enabling game fans to reexperience the nostalgic association with their favorite characters, which reestablishes the long-lasting cultural significance of Japanese video games. Fourth, the Wii's design does not follow the assumption that always drives console advancement: increasing power, higher definition, more realistic graphics, etc..[136] Instead, it has largely reduced the level of skill required by recent game systems. The Wii is a return to the kind of simple fun that Nintendo is famous for as a brand. Consequently it has significantly influenced the gamer demographics, attracting more female and elderly game players. While the console game market overall had been experiencing a slower growth since 2000 because of the increasing popularity of PC/online and portable games, the successful release of Wii has contributed to the revival of the market and enhanced the ongoing global popularity of Japanese video games.

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136. Jones, 131.

Format: *Title*, Year (North American release), Developer, Publisher

Action Games (each of the four subgenres can also be a separate main genre):
    Fighting/Beat-'em-ups:
King of Fighters series, 2008, SNK Playmore, SNK Playmore
Mortal Kombat, 1992, Midway, Midway
Seven Samurai 20XX, 2004, Dimps, Sammy Studios
Soul Calibur, 1999, Namco, Namco
Spacewar! 1962, Steve Russell et al., N/A
Street Fighter series, since 1987, Capcom, Capcom
Tekken series, since 1995, Namco, Namco
    Maze:
Godzilla: Monster of Monsters, 1989, Compile, Toho
Pac-Man, 1980, Namco, Namco (JP) and Midway (NA)
    Platform:
Donkey Kong, 1981, Nintendo, Nintendo
Frogger, 1981, Konami, Sega
Ice Climber, 1985, Nintendo, Nintendo
Sonic the Hedgehog series, since 1991, Ancient, Sega
Super Mario Bros., 1986, Nintendo, Nintendo
Super Mario Galaxy, 2007, Nintendo, Nintendo
Super Smash Bros. *Brawl*, 2008, Sora, Nintendo
    Shooter Games:
        First-person Shooter (FPS):
        Call of Duty, 2004, Gray Matter, Activision
        Counter-strike, 1999, Valve, Vivendi
        Medal of Honor, 1999, DreamWorks, Electronic Arts
        Star Wars: Dark Forces, 1996, LucasArts, LucasArts
        Shoot-'em-ups:
        Centipede, 1980, Atari, Ed Logg
        Contra, 1988, Konami, Konami
        Space Invaders, 1978, Taito, Taito (JP) and Midway (NA)
        Zero Wing, 1991, Toaplan, Sega

Action-Adventure Games:
Bionic Commando, 1988, Capcom, Capcom
Castlevania series, since 1987, Konami, Konami and various
Disaster: Day of Crisis, TBA (released in Japan in 2008), Monolith Soft, Nintendo
Enemy Zero, 1997, WARP, Sega
Fatal Frame, 2001, Tecmo, Tecmo
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, 2002, Rockstar, Rockstar
The Legend of Zelda, 1987, Nintendo, Nintendo
The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, 2006, Nintendo, Nintendo

Metal Gear series, since 1988, Konami, Konami (JP) and Ultra Games (NA)
Metal Gear Solid series, since 1998, Konami, Konami
Metroid series, since 1986, Nintendo, Nintendo
Resident Evil series, since 1996, Capcom, Capcom
Way of the Samurai, 2002, Acquire, Spike (JP) and Bam Entertainment (NA)

Music Games:
Guitar Hero series, since 2005, Harmonix, ReOctane
High School Musical: Sing It!, 2007, A2M, Buena Visual Games
PaRappa the Rapper, 1997, NaNaOnsha, Sony

Racing Games:
Gran Turismo, 1998, Polyphony Digital, Sony
Mario Kart Wii, 2008, Nintendo, Nintendo

Real-time Strategy Games (RTS):
Shogun: Total War, 2000, The Creative Assembly, Electronic Arts
StarCraft series, since 2000, Blizzard, various

Role-playing Games (RPG):
Dragon Quest series, since 1989, various, Enix (JP) and Nintendo (NA)
Earthbound series, since 1991, APE Studios, Nintendo
Final Fantasy, 1990, Square, Square (JP) and Nintendo (NA)
Final Fantasy X, 2001, Square, Square
Kingdom Hearts, 2002, Square Soft, Square Enix
Lost Odyssey, 2008, Mistwalker and Feelplus, Microsoft
Monster Hunter Freedom, 2006, Capcom, Capcom
Pokémon Red and Blue, 1998, Nintendo, Nintendo

> **Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG):**
> *Fiesta*, 2007, Ons on Soft, various
> *Lineage 2*, 2004, NCsoft, NCsoft
> *Secret of the Solstice*, 2008, DNC, DNC
> *World of Warcraft*, 2004, Blizzard, Blizzard

Sports Games:
Pong, 1972, Atari, Atari
Tecmo Super Bowl, 1991, Tecmo, Tecmo

Other Genres:
Barbie Fashion Designer, 1996, Digital Domain, Mattel Interactive
Casino Kid series, since 1989, Sofel, Sofel
Hannah Montana: Spotlight World Tour, 2007, Avalanche, Disney
Tetris, 1985, Alexey Pajitnow, various

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