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"Train a Scribe" card from *Lost & Found*, illustration by Annie Wong and Mimi Ace

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investigates how cultural heritage is implemented in video game narratives and utilized by game developers in Asia. Existing research, however, is limited to social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as older media such as radio, television, and newspapers. Though one of the most influential media genres, especially for the younger generation, video games have so far been overlooked. Understanding video games matters for two reasons. First, video games are already with the people. They are a popular mainstream media that pervades society regardless of age, gender and social status. Second, games are increasingly complex, interactive virtual worlds in which cultural heritage and national identities are, literally, constructed by game designers: they are 'secondary worlds' in which e.g. national identities are imagined, histories are re-constructed, and traditions are (re)invented.

Nepal: Gregory Price Grieve

This initial entrée into the relationship between Nepali video development, cultural heritage and national identity is still a work in progress and is in need of further data gathering and analysis. Yet, as a first step I ask, 'How is Nepal represented in video games?' To answer this question, I compare an AAA American video game set in Nepal, *Far Cry 4* (2014), to a game developed by a Nepali team, *polyTricks* (2016). *Far Cry 4*, developed for consoles and Microsoft Windows, is an open world, first-person shooter, which takes place in Kyrat, a fictional Himalayan country, and follows the protagonist, Ajay Ghale as he is caught up in a civil war. *polyTricks*, developed as an Android mobile application, is an endless-runner game, in which the player can tilt their device left or right to move the character to the left or right side of screen, and follows a corrupt politician as he works his way from rookie to president. Thus far, I have played through both games and analyzed player comments on several websites. I also engaged in a month of ethnography with the Arcube game design

they already knew. The game pictures Nepal not only as pre-modern, but somehow outside of time; a Shangri-la that offers, with an almost desperate longing, an untouched ancient wisdom by which the West can be redeemed. The developers see Nepal as a place in which Westerners can find themselves, by breaking from the scripted routine – late capitalism’s soul-crushing wage-labor, ant-like corporate careers, and shallow consumerism. The makers of *polyTricks* depict Nepal as underdeveloped, corrupt, and peripheral to the world economy, but a land of immense beauty (mountains), cultural heritage (temples) and potential for economic development. As Rabin Shilpakar, Arcube’s team leader said,

“The main purpose to build this game is to uplift the gaming industry in Nepal. The gaming industry can be next career building opportunities for many IT students and artists. The gaming industry can help us to present our folk, mythological stories, our history, culture, art in the form of the game. This can also educate our current generation, future generations to come and entertain them as well.”

Japan: Christopher Helland

Unlike the other Asian nations studied, Japan has one of the world’s deepest and most complex video gaming cultures. With some of the most recognizable gaming companies in the world located there, it is no surprise that it is an epicenter of game development. Although companies like Nintendo, Sega, Square Enix, Sony and Capcom dominate the gaming industry, there is a substrata of independent game designers making names for themselves. Interestingly, gaming culture and development is so large within Japan that there are recognizable levels of developers, each with their own audience and niche. Often a distinction is made between those that work for large companies as official developers, Indie developers, and “*doujin*” developers. *Doujin* is a general Japanese term for a group of people or

for a number of significant developers to emerge with large cult followings and significant cultural impact. They are creating a magical world of games and gaming that exists beyond the control of the gaming industry. As these higher profile doujin game designers become established, many are being recognized as a unique type of indie developer. A good example being ZUN (Jun'ya Ota), who has developed over 25 games in the last 20 years, some of which are classified as doujin and some of which are considered indie. Zun's creation and development of the "Touhou Project" is my primary focus of research. His work draws upon Japanese mythology and folklore, religion, culture and tradition to create a fantastic gaming genre. The first game in the series is called *Highly Responsive to Prayers* (1997) and recently Touhou 14.5 *Urban Legend in Limbo* (2015) was adapted for the PS4.

The Philippines: Kerstin Radde-Antweiler

When it comes to national identity and cultural heritage, video games in the Philippines have a long politicized history. Originally, cabinet arcade games, such as *Space Invaders* (1978) and *Asteroids* (1979), were viewed as corrupting and dangerous to the youth, and were forbidden along with pinball machines, and slot machines. In fact, the Philippines were one of the first nations to ban video games. During the Marcos regime in 1981 video games were banned through presidential decree no. 519:

"Whereas, there has been widespread use of pinball machines in amusements places all over the country; Whereas, the proliferation of these gambling devices adversely affects the moral regeneration program of the Government under the New Society, especially the youth; Whereas, it has come to my attention that there has been indiscriminate issuance of permits and/or licenses to operate pinball and slot machines and other similar devices to the detriment of the public interest"

http://www.lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1974/pd_519_1974.html

In, 1986 the ban was lifted. In addition, it is not surprising that in a country where one-third of the population is under the age of 14, that the role of digital media today is rising and video games are one of the most popular forms of entertainment (https://www.indexmundi.com/philippines/age_structure.html).

Many Filipinos play blockbuster games developed in Europe, America or Japan. The Philippines as such are not a common theme in AAA video games. Only in the two *Medal of Honor* instalments *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* (2003) and *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2010) the Philippines as an American military base is mentioned.

However, in recent years, there is also the tendency to develop games explicitly for a Philippine audience. This is an interesting development in itself, since normally foreign products – not only media but products in general – are given more quality and judged more positively. An early example for a video created by Filipino game developers is *Anito: Defend a Land Enraged* made for Microsoft Windows. Anino Entertainment is an independent video game company based in Manila, Philippines. The game is set in the 16th century on an Asian island called Maroka, and deals with tribes’ internal power issues and external dangers by colonization. The game picks out elements of the Philippine’s history explicitly such as colonization and in line with that Christianization and ancient Tagalog elements. However, games integrating historical and cultural elements seem to be an exception.

New mobile technologies created a surge in indie gaming companies in the Philippines which has heightened primarily the relationship between politics and national heritage. In fact, at present, many of the games propagandize for political figures. A prominent example is the game *Go Duterte* (2016) by Kulit Games, where

studios in 2012 (Handrahan 2012).

How does Indian game development relate to Indian culture heritage? The short answer is: in a number of ways. Most games produced in India currently do not make use of cultural heritage. Most focus on movies, sports, as well as card and casino play. There are also games which do not explicitly build on cultural heritage but which are set in Indian contexts and have an educational character, such as *Missing* (2016), winner of Nasscom Indie Game of the Year award in 2016.

But, there are also many games that explicitly engage Indian culture. For instance, among the Indian games that make use of both narrative and aesthetic aspects of Indian culture are *Asura* (2017) and *Raji: An Ancient Epic* (forthcoming). *Asura* is a Hack 'n' Slash game which, as the name indicates, is inspired in its narrative and game characters by Hindu mythology in which "Asura" denotes a demon-like figure.

But, what makes *Asura* interesting is that the game goes beyond the simple implementation of mythological figures and some Indian aesthetic (in the game's case: architectural) elements. Moreover, on a procedural level, the game not only refers to contents but also literary structures from Indian classical mythological literature, by implementing both in the game's rule system.

Another example for a game developed in India and building intensively on Indian cultural heritage is the forthcoming *Raji: An Ancient Epic*. The "video game set in ancient India" (*Raji: An Ancient Epic* 2017) draws intensively on Hindu mythology in its narrative, and underlines the storyline with prominent musical instruments of Indian classical traditions, such as tablas (a specific form of drums) and ankle bells (which are essential in Indian classical dance), and with dress styles, colors, and architectural forms which are "inspired by the medieval architecture of Rajasthan, which was the pinnacle of architectural achievement during the medieval era of

India” (Kickstarter campaign *Raji: An Ancient Epic*). All these elements are clearly inspired by Indian cultural heritage (see e.g. *Raji: An Ancient Epic - Game Teaser 2017*) – and this is not accidental but rather a conscious decision by the Pune based game’s developers who state “We are working on the game we always wanted to make, a game which reflects lore, myths and stories from our motherland” (NoddingHeadsGames 2017). Currently, the game has released a demo on Steam and at the time of writing this report had initiated a kickstarter campaign (running until 12 Dec 2017) to secure funding and the future development work. Whatever the outcome of this will be and however the development process is taken further from the beginning of 2018 onward, *Raji: An Ancient Epic* is “a project that speaks to both the inventiveness of a community too often regarded as a back-up workforce, and the art, culture and history of a country that is seldom represented in video games” (Evans-Thirlwell 2017).

Conclusion

We have now completed an initial explorative study on video game development in Asia, cultural heritage and national identities, which focused on four comparative settings in Asia: India, Japan, Nepal, the Philippines. Each of us is a specialist in our region, and we interviewed and engaged in participant observation with game developers. This insured systemized, coordinated data collection and analysis, as well as the comparability of the data and analysis results, making them usable as case study information for theory building beyond the four researched national contexts. As can be seen from our initial research, there are similarities and differences in game development and its relationship to cultural heritage in India, Japan, Nepal, and the Philippines. As became apparent, while Japan has a long history of game development, it was not until the mobile phone that video games exploded on the

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