

Translation and Chinese Culture in Video Games

DOUGLAS EYMAN

A primary early form of distribution of culture through gaming has been massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs). Because these games were fully global from the beginnings of the genre, they have a long history of experiencing the flows of language and culture that are brought into games by players, which in turn impacts the design of a game as it is updated and expanded. Games and gaming as rhetorical objects and practices both represent and influence local culture, and they often circulate in wider networks, both regional and global. Western companies face challenges as they export computer games to China, and this process provides avenues for Chinese culture to respond to and to some extent reshape the gaming experience, effectively reversing the exportation of cultural practices and initiating a bidirectional flow of language and culture. Much of the influence (in both directions) happens in the process of translation, but this must be understood not only as a linguistic process, but also as one that requires adjustments to cultural depictions (representations of fantasy character races, locations, and narratives), political positioning in the target market, visual design, and the interactive mechanics of the game itself.

Until recently, few games have been designed with a global player base in mind; rather, most have been developed locally and then translated to make them available outside of their original local contexts. Localization involves both linguistic translation and cultural adaptation, and because most multiplayer games now operate multinationally, a reciprocal effect

takes place as games are localized but also retain ecologies of the original game.¹ Translation studies scholars have traditionally made a distinction between foreignization and domestication, but that clear demarcation has been significantly blurred as a global community of game players has influenced our notions of the local.² In practice, translation of games is less unidirectional (translating from a source language into a target language) and more bidirectional as the process changes both the translated version and the original as design and linguistic effects are incorporated in successive iterations of the game.³

World of Warcraft (WoW) is a useful primary case for examining the interactions among policy, (self-)censorship, translation, and appropriation as it is a well-known MMORPG that was designed in the United States and made available to Chinese players and audiences. As a point of comparison, a newer game, *Genshin Impact*, clearly draws on the legacy of *WoW* but has enjoyed a much higher regard (from both Western and Chinese players) in terms of cultural representation. The multilayered translation approaches that allow these games to cross cultures include linguistic translation (text and speech), changes to visual design elements, and the adaptation or inclusion of cultural heritage representations.

Digital Games, Translation, and Circulation of Culture

The practice of translating video games and other media for new target audiences is usually described as “localization”—that is, the translation accommodates the game to the expectations and literacies of the target audience. Many of the challenges with video game translation occur because the original design process focuses on a single language and culture, so the act of translation becomes a post hoc process that doesn’t always fit neatly into the game design specifications. More recent efforts at designing games for global audiences starting from the initiation of the design process engage in a process of “globalization” in order to minimize localization requirements; some translators of video games have argued for a mediated approach described as “glocalization”—a process that “integrates the notion of the universal and the local into a strategic production structure for goods that aspire to be globally appealing.”⁴ The Mists of Pandaria expansion for *World of Warcraft* is an example of designing for glocalization: its de-

velopment was not a localization of an existing game; it was intentionally designed from the outset to appeal to and ostensibly celebrate Chinese culture in the game franchise.

Researchers in translation studies recognize four primary methods for translating games: foreignization (keeping a “foreign taste” when translating a game), domestication (translating a game to suit the characteristics and cultural standards of the destination locale), no translation (leaving parts of the game in the source language), and transcreation (creating a new text in the target language).⁵

All of these methods are practices of rhetorical translation (considering audience, purpose, and context) as opposed to literal translation, which seeks a direct correspondence between linguistic phrases and context without regard to audience expectations. The mode of cultural and rhetoric translation employed by games such as *WoW* as they are designed for global audiences does not easily fit into the four primary methods outlined above.

Starting in the mid-1990s, the field of translation studies began to shift from a theory of translation as a process that attempts to match the meaning of the original text as closely as possible to one that takes into account the rhetorical context, an approach they designated “functionalism,” which prioritizes the function a translation needs to serve for the target audience.⁶ Videogame translators have embraced functionalism as an approach because the target audience is both reading the text and using it in pursuit of the larger activity of gameplay. Because games are explicitly interactive, unlike most textual production, the practices of design and translation must account for a multimodal experience. Translation needs to address not just linguistic elements, but also visual design and cultural expectations, particularly in the context of play. Games and other media have traditionally been designed in one location or culture then translated and adapted as they are made available in other locales, mediating the culture of the original production through that of the extended audiences. While issues of linguistic translation are the most obvious challenge, design and cultural expectation revisions contribute more directly to the glocalization process than they do in other media forms and genres. The following examples show how linguistic and design translation choices are often entangled with cultural literacies or expectations.

One of the best-known cases of poor linguistic translation in a video

game is that of *Zero Wing*, a Japanese game released by SEGA in the United States in 1991. The translation of the text in the game was grammatically incorrect to the point of being nonsensical—so much so that it later generated countless memes, starting with “All your base are belong to us” in 1999.⁷ While the translations are grammatically challenged, it is possible that part of the problem is also a visual design issue, as the space provided on screen for the text may not have allowed enough room for more cogent translations. For instance, a competent translation of the original Japanese text that became “All your base are belong to us” can be rendered as “With the help of Federation government forces, [the enemy] has taken over all of your bases.”⁸ However, the main issue with the translation is more likely to be that the design team did not use a professional translator—game designer Tatsuya Uemura has noted that the translations were handled internally by a team member whose English was “really terrible.”⁹ *Zero Wing* is also of interest because Clyde Mandelin, who reverse-engineered the original game programming, later discovered that while the English-language version of the game had three different post-credit endings, the Japanese version had thirty-five, many of which referenced then-current Japanese popular culture in ways that would have been difficult to translate across cultures. As Mandelin explains:

Many of the extra endings feature references to old comedy routines, music, anime, and more. A lot of this information isn’t well-documented on Japanese sites, and it’s even harder to find info on it in English. The age of the references suggests this text was written by someone who grew up in the 1960s or 1970s.¹⁰

The issue of design and linguistic translation interacting in ways that add constraints to the textual translation is one that occurs relatively frequently when games are designed solely in a monolingual context. The space on the screen allocated for text, whether dialogue, signage, captions, or narrative, is often set based on the original language. As translator Marianna Sacra explains, “I am [often] asked to not exceed the source language length by more than 10%. This leaves us poor German translators with having to find a good solution where sometimes there isn’t really one—like abbreviating words to the extreme.”¹¹

There is also the case of interplay between visual translation issues and

changes made due to the cultural expectations of the target audience. When the Japanese game *Xenoblade Chronicles X* was localized for a North American audience, the option to change the bust size of the protagonist's avatar was removed, which many American fans who had been playing the Japanese version decried as censorship; some clothing options (such as bikinis) were also eliminated from the US version.¹²

The examples above demonstrate the challenges of translating videogames across languages and cultures, but most of the examples come from single-player games that don't provide opportunities for player interaction. What happens to the process of translation when the game in question is played by millions of players across the globe, as is the case with MMORPGs?

Researching Multiplayer Games

A common feature of MMORPGs is having very large game worlds where players interact with the game environment, the procedures (or rules) that provide the mechanisms and constraints of play, and other players. Most MMORPGs provide opportunities to play in an individualized mode (PvE, or player-versus-environment), a cooperative mode (usually through joining guilds or teams), or a competitive mode (PvP, or player-versus-player, which may be individual combat or team-based).

Game analysis can focus on game design, game experience, the economics of game production, or the impact of the game on other media and performances, among many other approaches. Games function as ecologies—they have designed environments and mechanics that players interact with while they participate in aesthetic and communicative experiences within the game.¹³ Mechanics are “the underlying algorithms and procedures that determine how player actions are carried out in the game,” strategies are “the tactics used by the player to respond to a specific task or encounter,” and the interplay between mechanics (rules) and strategies (player decisions) reflects the ecological relationship between the environment and its effects on its inhabitants.¹⁴ Because the interactions of mechanics, strategies, and environment are complex, players must develop expertise in order to succeed; they effectively must develop literacies specific to each game played, although these literacies build upon more generic or foundational game-playing literacies.

World of Warcraft is tailor-made for an analysis of cultural appropriation as an outcome of globalism. Players of the initial US release of the game in 2004 found themselves competing with Chinese players who were employed to generate in-game resources that could be sold on trading sites for real-world money. Blizzard, the company that produced *WoW*, initially sought to make it more difficult for Chinese players to participate. By contrast, in 2012, Blizzard released the Mists of Pandaria expansion, which drew heavily on Asian (primarily Chinese) imagery and folklore. Blizzard has also made visual design adjustments to the Chinese versions of the game, demonstrating a limited form of reciprocal design engagement, albeit one related to the potential for censorship by the Chinese government.

World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft, produced by Blizzard Entertainment, rapidly gained in popularity after its initial release in the United States in 2004. By 2006, *WoW* had over 6.5 million subscribers worldwide. Even prior to its Chinese release, it had 1.5 million subscribers in China by July 2005, increasing to an estimated 3 million in July 2006.¹⁵ At the height of its popularity, *WoW* boasted 12 million players; more recent estimates place the number of players around 5 million.¹⁶ In 2018, revenue generated just in the Asia Pacific region surpassed US\$1 billion.¹⁷ After the initial release of the game, Blizzard introduced a series of expansions that added new environments, new player classes and races, and new mechanics (sometimes making radical changes to mechanics to streamline and simplify elements of gameplay). The first expansion, Burning Crusade, was released in 2007; Mists of Pandaria, the fourth expansion, appeared in 2012. The ninth expansion, Dragonflight, was released in 2022.

Purchasing the game requires buying both the game software and a separate monthly or annual subscription that allows access to the multiplayer servers. In the initial Chinese releases, players could purchase hourly and daily tokens, which were typically used to play at Internet cafés. Players select a class (such as warrior, druid, or rogue) and a race to provide the basis for the characters they create. There are two main political factions in the game: Horde and Alliance. Certain races are aligned with one or the

other of these factions; the only exception is the race of humanoid pandas called Pandaren, introduced in the Mists of Pandaria expansion. Players tend to gravitate toward one faction, but since players can create multiple characters, many play in both factions. Gameplay includes completing quests assigned by in-game nonplayer characters, leveling skills and professions, and engaging in cooperative battles against challenging bosses and competitive battles against other players. Players can complete cooperative tasks by joining ad hoc groups or by joining a guild.

Because it is so well-known and continually expanding, many scholars have studied *World of Warcraft*. Early scholarship on *WoW* focused on collaboration among players, particularly in guilds, drawing attention from researchers in game studies, anthropology, psychology, and communication studies. As the game gained both visibility and a larger player base, researchers expanded the range of topics to include identity formation, communication practices, economics, design, and philosophy. Bonnie Nardi's *My Life as a Night Elf Priest* is perhaps the best-known ethnography of the game. Other key works that take *WoW* as an object of study include *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader*, edited by Hilde Corneliussen and Jill Walker Rettberg, and *World of Warcraft and Philosophy: Wrath of the Philosopher King*, by Luke Cuddy and John Nordlinger.

While *World of Warcraft* was not the first MMORPG to find success in China, *WoW*'s initial Chinese language release became immensely popular, partly because many Chinese gamers had already been playing on North American and European servers.¹⁸ The popularity of the game is largely responsible for the development of an entire industry dedicated to transforming the acquisition of in-game virtual resources to real-world funds through a process known as real-money trading. Every few years, Blizzard entertainment also releases expansions for the game; some expansions have gone through several rounds of censorship by the Chinese government before being approved for release. Both the gaming-as-work and the issues around censorship play a major role in the ways that gamers interpret and interact with the game, leading to distinctly different experiences as the game design is mediated through the real-world cultures in which it is played.

WoW in China

In addition to its massive subscriber base, *WoW* also began to appear in distinctly Chinese contexts, from murals to web comics and beyond. In 2008, the world's first *World of Warcraft* themed restaurant opened in Beijing. "The front doors were painted to look like the Dark Portal. Inside, TVs displayed footage of the game, suits of armor stood eternal vigil over your appetizers, and the walls were covered with some impressive murals."¹⁹ In China, 2011 saw the opening of World Joyland Play Valley, a full-scale amusement park inspired by *WoW*. While *WoW* in China was very well received, the influx of Chinese players on US servers that preceded its availability in China was accompanied by tensions between Western and Chinese players. The tensions played out most visibly in the controversies surrounding the practice of "gold farming."

GOLD FARMING

Even before *WoW* was officially released in China, a significant number of players from China joined the game. Because the game had no linguistic translation features for in-game chat, there was little communication between Chinese players and those from the United States and other English-speaking countries, which heightened the divide between players from different cultures. In addition to the language barrier, there was also a difference in play style, as a substantial number of Chinese players appeared to not be engaging with the game's narrative arcs or in its collaborative endeavors and instead were diligently collecting crafting materials and selling them for gold at the in-game auction houses. Western players described these activities as "gold farming" and argued that it disrupted the intended gaming experience for other players.²⁰

Gold farming in *WoW* is an example of what economists have designated "real-money trading" or RMT.²¹ While not specific to the genre, instances of RMT began to increase in the late 1990s.²² They were facilitated by the success of the first major MMORPG, *Ultima Online*, which launched in 1997, and the widespread availability of a digital marketplace through the online auction platform eBay.²³ Current measures of RMT are difficult to find, as

most MMORPGs have designated the selling of virtual goods in real-world markets a form of cheating, but estimates from 2008 indicated that RMT accounted for a minimum of US\$1 billion in transactions.²⁴

In *WoW*, “gold farmer” became an epithet, as many players felt that paying actual money for in-game resources (or, in a variant of the practice, paying a third party to go through the process of leveling a character) constituted a form of cheating because it was not equally available to all players.

One of the effects of the growth of the gold farming industry was an influx of Chinese player-workers, whose presence sometimes unsettled the balance of the game mechanics, which were not designed to support this kind of activity. As other players became frustrated with the impact on their gameplay, they began to lash out against the Chinese farmers. Their responses exemplify “overt racist attitudes towards Chinese farmers” but “players who harbor negative feelings toward Chinese farmers do not believe that these feelings denote racial discrimination.”²⁵ Media scholar Lisa Nakamura points out that although “players cannot see each other’s bodies while playing, specific forms of game labor, such as gold farming and selling, as well as specific styles of play, have become racialized as Chinese, producing new forms of networked racism that are particularly easy for players to disavow.”²⁶

This anti-Chinese sentiment doesn’t appear to have dampened enthusiasm for the game when it was released in China, and Chinese players still make up a significant portion of the total player population. In a way, the practice of gold farming represented an intrusion of Chinese entrepreneurial culture into a Western-designed context, surfacing the tensions that arise when game designers don’t account for cross-cultural play and performance by the players (despite the clear indications from *Ultima Online* in 1997 and onward that MMORPGs tend to have global audiences from the moment of their release). If the gold farming era of *WoW* represents an influx into the Western versions of the game of cultural practices that were not accounted for in the game design and mechanics, the next chapter in *WoW*’s relationship with China represents a kind of inverse situation, where the Chinese government forced designers to accommodate Chinese cultural norms when releasing game expansions in China.²⁷

CENSORSHIP

The first *WoW* expansion, the Burning Crusade, was released in China in September 2007, about nine months after its release in the United States. The delays included the time needed for translation, but the game's visual design was also altered in accordance with guidelines from the Chinese Ministry of Culture. Major changes were made to appearance of the player race called the Forsaken (essentially animated skeletons), hiding exposed bones with flesh. Also, when a player died, they left behind a tombstone rather than a corpse. As Andrews notes:

In the West, many assumed that Chinese culture has a taboo against skeletons or bones, but that is not the case as far as I can tell. Rather, it seems that the government agencies who police online games seek to tone down violence and death. Visible skeletons and player corpses are considered part of that undesirable content.²⁸

The next major expansion, Wrath of the Lich King, was initially denied release by the Ministry of Culture, which required extensive visual design changes. These changes and concomitant government review cycles caused an eighteen-month delay.²⁹ Design changes included replacing undead creatures with living ones, removing images of skulls and skeletons, and changing the color of blood to green.³⁰

In the cases of both expansions, the process of translation included design changes that were predicated not just on making the content accessible and understandable for users in a different language, but on issues of cultural appropriateness. The main narrative and underlying mechanics, however, were not changed, so the translation work was necessary only at the level of visual design. The next expansion, Cataclysm, followed the same design changes, and was thus approved relatively quickly. In a sense, Mists of Pandaria underwent a more significant shift in design from the outset, incorporating cultural references and actions for East Asian users not as a reaction to government mandate but as an integral element of the overall design of the entire expansion. Game journalists expected that this new expansion, featuring Chinese myths, visual design, and a new race of humanoid pandas, would be scrutinized by the Chinese government—but

Mists of Pandaria became the first expansion to get approval without delay, launching just a few days after the Western release.³¹

Mists of Pandaria

Previous expansions typically offered new locations for players to explore. The original release of the game featured an earth-like planet with two continents surrounded and separated by vast oceans; subsequent expansions added a sundered planet called Outland and the new continent Northrend and made massive changes to the original contents and new elemental realms. Mists of Pandaria (MoP) introduces the new continent of Pandaria as well as the Wandering Isle (which is atop the giant turtle Shen-zin Su). Expansions introduce—along with new locales and their associated lands, histories, folklore, dungeons, and activities—new species of creatures, new allies, and new enemies. In addition to the new Pandaren player race, the expansion adds, among others, the aquatic jinyu, the ape-like hozen, and the Sha, a physical manifestation of negative energy.³²

Game studies scholar Kurt Squire has argued that digital games provide designed experiences “in which participants learn through a grammar of *doing* and *being*.”³³ Recognizing the game world as a designed ecology that serves a specific purpose and that facilitates both doing and being for the game player highlights the importance of accounting for and evaluating the environment—not just player action and interaction—as a critical element of the game ecology.³⁴ Pandaria clearly borrows visual elements as well as narrative and mythological premises from Asian culture, primarily from Chinese culture. Reviewers generally praised the visuals, most noting the cultural references: “The east Asian designs are wonderfully vibrant and vivid,” according to one.³⁵ Another wrote, “Drawing heavily on ancient Chinese culture and myth, the zones are filled with temples and lush countryside where dragons soar through the sky. Affable natives are happy to tell you stories about their past in exchange for a little help.”³⁶ Religious studies scholar Robert Geraci argues that the “Chinese mythology underlying the 2012 Mists of Pandaria expansion is a reaction to the extraordinary popularity of *World of Warcraft* in China and a desire to ensure that even more players have a cultural stake in the game’s mythos.”³⁷ This approach is not just an appeal to the market, however, as it is through the mythical

narrative that player decisions are made and the narrative is thus intrinsic to the function of the game.³⁸

Much was made of the choice to introduce anthropomorphic pandas as the new playable race. As reviewer Sophie Prell notes:

The Pandaren have taken a lot of flak for looking like Kung Fu Panda rip-offs and, while you can defend their existence as a legitimate piece of lore that predates the Dreamworks films, it's clear that the race has undergone some changes since their introduction. . . . [Now] every Pandaren has a belly, and they remark constantly how they love to eat, very similar to Po from the Kung Fu Panda franchise.³⁹

This change in appearance was the result of an intentional appeal to globalization on the part of the game designers, highlighting an element of cultural translation that more specifically locates the basis of the design in China. As game designer Matthew McCurley points out, "The panda is inherently Chinese, but the samurai armor and styles" of the original sketches "had the trappings of Japanese culture." Eventually, the design shifted to "traditional black and white Chinese linen garb and conical straw hat" that would be more acceptable to a Chinese audience.⁴⁰

In addition to the environment, which includes temples, villages, and landscapes evocative of Asian locations, the game also added literal farming as a game interaction and a new source of renewable in-game resources: the Chinese gold farmer had, in a sense, been replaced by the more traditional farmer in this expansion. The inclusion of farming as an activity can be linked to the success of games like *Farmville*, which debuted on Facebook in 2009, but it can also be read as an acknowledgment of the importance of farming in Chinese culture and economics.

Not all reviewers and players found the design choices effective, however. Reviewers like Sophie Prell at NBC News found the Pandaren too "cute" to be taken seriously; others, such as *The Red&Black's* Tiffany Stevens, described the new design as "borderline racist."

The Pandaren speak in near "Engrish," the dialogue is ripped straight from a midnight kung-fu film and some Pandaren have Fu Manchu mustaches. Five levels into play, I'm already encountering lazy yin-yang themes that draw heavily on spirit worship and ancestor references.⁴¹

Takeo Rivera saw the expansion as a continuation of the game's "preexisting tendency toward non-White dehumanization into the real of the Asiatic, producing essentialist cybertypes that are at once legible, inhabitable, and targetable," arguing that the expansion is situated in "both a system of racial legibility and a Euro-American colonial fantasy of Columbian discovery."⁴²

While there has to date been no formal study of Chinese players' response to the aesthetics, mythos, and narratives of Mists of Pandaria, several offered their opinions on various gaming community discussion boards. As one anonymous gamer explains:

I'm a Chinese player and I feel like pandaria captures the image that I think people looking from the outside into the culture would see. They use a lot of tropes like martial arts and Asian spirituality. I feel like it has a silly portrayal, especially when lorewalkers drop into a martial arts stance.⁴³

Another Chinese player complained that "the translated names are just cheesy beyond belief, as Blizzard literally translated many words/names directly," a sentiment that was echoed by several of the Chinese players on the discussion board.⁴⁴ The question of names and naming in translation appears in several online community discussions. On the official Blizzard discussion forums, user Snow asks, "What will you name your Pandarens in MoP? Well I got the name Qilin for my pandaren shaman. . . . It's a mythological Chinese beast, so I'm quite happy with that name" (2012). User Wathley adds, "I have Mushi reserved. It's the English translation of the Chinese word for Priest" (2012). But a later discussion thread appears in 2013 called "Stop giving your Pandaren Japanese names," where user Ryena argues that "There is nothing Japanese about Pandaria, if anything it's Chinese" (2013). Tellingly, most of the discussion of character names on the official Blizzard discussion boards appears to be generated by Western players, rather than commentary by Chinese players.

Genshin Impact

If *World of Warcraft* represents a successful exportation from the United States to China, albeit not with such specific intention from the base game and initial expansions, Chinese companies are now beginning to export

Chinese-produced games to global audiences. Unlike *WoW*, however, many of the more recent offerings from China are designed with a global player base in mind from the initial point of development. At the time of this writing, one of the most popular Chinese-produced games is *Genshin Impact* (known as *Yuanshen* in China), released by the Shanghai-based game development company miHoyo in September 2020.

Genshin Impact is not quite an MMORPG, as it is primarily a single-player game, although it does feature a limited co-op mode for collaborative gaming and allows for multiplayer chat while playing. The game can be played on PC, console, and mobile platforms, which makes it one of the first open-world games to work seamlessly across nearly all devices. During beta testing, many Chinese players found the design and mechanics functioned too much like the immensely popular *Breath of the Wild* game.⁴⁵ But the game became very popular when it was first released, despite these initial critiques.⁴⁶ As can be seen in other chapters in this volume, many games take prior narratives as their starting point, including the widely known *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Journey to the West*; *Genshin Impact*'s reliance on a rather direct evocation of *Breath of the Wild* seems to me in line with this tradition. Moreover, the open-world maps, the quest mechanics, and even some of the narrative storylines also echo key procedures in *WoW*, so both games feature in the genealogy of *Genshin Impact* to some extent.

Players in *Genshin Impact* begin in the realm of Monstadt, one of three realms currently available. Monstadt, based on its architecture, cuisines, and names, would not be out of place in central Europe. The more developed realm, however, is Liyue, which is clearly and distinctly Chinese in character.

Perhaps as a result of the highly publicized challenges faced by *Honor of Kings*, the Chinese myths, legends, and designs in *Genshin Impact* are evocative of Chinese culture more generally, rather than based on existing history or literature; unlike the cases of *World of Warcraft* noted above and *Honor of Kings* (see Jiaqi Li's chapter in this volume), *Genshin Impact* had been subject to relatively little censorship from the Chinese government until early in 2022 (although certain words and phrases, such as "Hong Kong" and "Taiwan," are banned from use in the in-game chat function).⁴⁷ In early 2022, however, miHoyo released an update that provided new costumes for many of the playable characters—costumes that were far more

modest than the original designs. These new designs are optional for global players but mandatory for Chinese players; whether this was demanded by the Chinese government or was a preemptive attempt to avoid additional scrutiny by the game designers is unclear. In 2021, the Chinese government cautioned game design companies to avoid including “obscene and violent content and those breeding unhealthy tendencies, such as money-worship and effeminacy.”⁴⁸ One journalist noted that the *Genshin Impact* character Venti, a principal male character in the game, was cited by a government auditor as an example of the effeminacy problem in the game industry.⁴⁹ The game has thus far survived despite these critiques and become very successful, bringing in US\$2 billion in revenue in its first year.⁵⁰ Much of that success has been attributed to the visual design and use of Chinese cultural references.

The popularity of *Genshin Impact* has prompted the publication of several gaming and fan sites that provide tips on gameplay, but there are also many sites that focus on the meaning of the Chinese character and place names (including YouTube guides to pronunciation), as well as more general considerations of Chinese culture as represented in the game.⁵¹

Players’ interest in the cultural aspects have led to many postings by fans on Reddit and other social media sites. For instance, several players noticed that a particular character’s constellations (a series of additional attack moves or abilities, represented as a constellation of stars) had an unusual naming convention: most constellations feature two Chinese characters that are then translated into English as individual words or short two-word descriptions; however, the Chinese descriptions for Hu Tao (the manager of a funeral home in Liyue) were much longer (although the English versions were much shorter, so the difference is only in the original Chinese description). Players worked on their own translations and theorized that the original version is a poem that follows the pattern of a *yuefu* long-short verse based on the line length. The poem itself can be interpreted as a reference to the character’s profession, and indeed Chinese poetry makes an appearance through the narratives of both characters and enemies throughout the game.⁵²

Players have also paid close attention to the visual design of the game. One Chinese American player who provided a close reading of the design of two of the main playable characters noted that “because they are using

Chinese design elements that I am more familiar with” the architectural and visual design of the city of Liyue “feels more like home.”⁵³ As noted above, visual design is as important to game translation and circulation as text, and players have noticed the ways in which the design in *Genshin Impact* evokes Chinese themes and motifs without relying on direct representation. Players have also specifically noticed the way the cuisines of each area are represented, and one fan of the game has made an extensive document comparing the in-game descriptions and visual designs of recipes to the actual Chinese dishes that inspired them.⁵⁴

Because the game has only been out a little over one year as of this writing, academic research focusing on *Genshin Impact* has yet to be published, but I hope that the above descriptions will encourage scholars of game studies and Chinese culture to consider it a worthy object of study. Additionally, since the release of Mists of Pandaria, very little research has examined how different player communities experience the representation of Asian cultural heritage, a project which warrants more in-depth study to consider linguistic, design, and cultural references within a game as part of the investigative framework. The complex interplay of culture and language in the translation process, and the questions surrounding the fine line between homage and appropriation, will continue to be an issue as game design and development become increasingly globalized. Of note for future research is the rise of Chinese-designed games that are glocal-ized for Western audiences, such as *Genshin Impact*, and the bidirectional translation (and in some cases, transcreation) processes that support the global circulation of Chinese culture through games and gameplay.

Notes

1. Clara Fernández-Vara, *Introduction to Game Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 75.

2. Alberto Fernández Costales, “Analyzing Players’ Perceptions on the Translation of Video Games: Assessing the Tension between the Local and the Global Concerning Language Use,” in *Media Across Borders: Localising TV, Film and Video Games*, ed. Andrea Esser, Iain Robert Smith, and Miguel Bernal-Merino (New York: Routledge, 2016), 197.

3. Usually, this translation process is the sole responsibility of the game design company without input from players; it is strictly translation and not transcreation.

4. Miguel Bernal-Marino, "Glocalization and Co-Creation: Trends in International Game Production," in *Media Across Borders: Localising TV, Film and Video Games*, ed. Andrea Esser, Iain Robert Smith, and Miguel Bernal-Merino (New York: Routledge, 2016), 213.
5. Fernández Costales, "Translation," 187.
6. Fernández Costales, "Translation," 187.
7. For an overview of the game and a description of the "all your base" meme, see Colin Milburn, *Respawn: Gamers, Hackers, and Technogenic Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 1–16.
8. Clyde Mandelin, "Zero Wing Had 32 Weird Secret Endings in Japan," *Legends of Localization*, 2016, <https://legendsoflocalization.com/zero-wing-had-32-weird-secret-endings-in-japan>.
9. Bryan Mosley and Gene Dreyband, "Out Zone with Guest Tatsuya Uemura," in *Pixelated Audio*, episode 76, podcast, 1:40:00, March 2017, <https://pixelatedaudio.com/out-zone/>.
10. Mandelin, "Zero Wing."
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