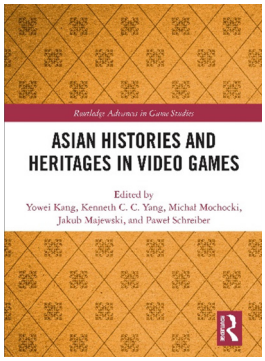

ASIAN HISTORIES AND HERITAGES IN VIDEO GAMES

Kang, Y., Yang, K. C. C., Mochocki, M., Majewski, J., & Schreiber, P. (Eds.). (2024). *Asian histories and heritages in video games*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003461319.

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With the recent renewed interest in non-western game studies, particularly with fields such as regional game studies attracting attention, *Asian histories and heritages in video games* is a timely collection of eleven scholarly articles elaborating on various issues in the field. The articles range from themes that explore politics, ideologies, colonialism, ethnicities, and identity, to more contemporary forms of gaming such as e-sport, AR mobile gaming, and gamification. Not unlike the diverse collection of authors, the editors also bring an exciting mix of various countries, degrees, and affiliations, ranging from backgrounds in communication and media studies – Yowei Kang, Kenneth C. C. Yang, and Jakub Majewski – to literary, cultural and religious studies – Michał Mochocki and Paweł Schreiber. The collection has been handpicked, and all are united by the game studies angle. Each chapter raises interesting research questions and uses various methodologies. While some require expertise in mathematics and computer science, such as understanding statistical data and percentage calculations from the reader, some others rely on interviews and close readings of the source material. The book can benefit a broad spectrum of readers from expert digital game researchers to teachers and historians who are interested in gamification and new methods of teaching in the field of serious gaming. It follows a logical path based on the trajectory of the most central discussions around digital games over the last two decades, highlighting four different aspects of discourse: political and ideological narrative, postcolonial and cultural identity, gaming and societal commentary, digital games as educational and historical tools.

The intersections of ideologies, nationalism, and political narrative are the main focus of several chapters. For instance, the second chapter authored by Süngü and Çatak, compares two Turkish games developed in different political eras, using interviews with the directors to assess how political themes are reflected in the design and storytelling. Similarly, the seventh chapter, written by McKernan and Pourtaher, conducts a narrative analysis of US media to identify the ideological discourses about Iran's past and present. While these studies use different methodologies, ranging from qualitative interviews to discourse analysis and player engagement, their findings are accessible to game studies scholars from different academic backgrounds including humanities, and offer practical approaches for future research. The conclusion reached in each study is also well-supported and justified.

Postcolonial and cultural identity is another theme elaborated on through several chapters. The study by Scheiding, on the Japanese game *Atelier Ryza: Ever Darkness & the Secret Hideout* (Gust, 2019), uses postcolonial game studies and collective memory theory to analyse how the game uses allegories in its fantasy setting, and represents exploitative historical narratives of Japan. The Taiwanese study on the game *Detention* (Red Candle Games, 2017), by the two of the editors of the book, Kang and Yang, applies a text mining technique to analyse player discussions. The method used concludes in a numerical chart, representing the most common words in the local player's feedback.

While some readers might find the technical aspects challenging to follow, the conclusion at the end of the articles helps to clarify the findings and makes an attempt to prevent confusion within the numerical data. The study on Indonesian eSport, authored by Jiwandono, also takes a unique approach. The authors conducted interviews with industry stakeholders to analyse how the evolving role of mobile esport contributes to Indonesian cultural and national identity.

The ninth chapter of the book explores how the TV series *Squid Game* (Ji-yeon & Dong-hyuk, 2021-present) and its digital game adaptation can be a tool to highlight contemporary economic anxieties and social inequality. The chapter, authored by two of the volume's editors, Yang and Kang, uses text-mining techniques on YouTube gameplay digital comments. By filtering keywords associated with fear, anxiety, and competition, the authors present a numerical chart. The research is unique due to the subject of its study being a transmedia franchise and the origin of it being South Korea.

The last two chapters of the book explore the realm of serious gaming. Chen's chapter researches AR mobile games that are designed for understanding Singapore's immigration history. Volunteers played an AR game and shared their feedback. While the conclusion suggests that AR games can enhance historical empathy, due to the small sample size, as of yet, it remains a suggestion based on a singular case study. The final chapter, written by Liu and Zhang, explores the intersection between digital gaming and cultural education. It analyses how digital game-based learning can engage learners with China's historical and cultural heritage. Focusing on the importance of the balance of entertainment with educational objectives, different game design elements that build up to pedagogical strategies are highlighted, and the potential of the systems to fill the gap between traditional education and modern technology is analysed.

Asian histories and heritages in video games is a great contribution to the emerging field of Asian game studies, which has been underrepresented in the English academic scene, particularly outside of Japanese games. The book consolidates various research and provides a comprehensive starting point for scholars interested in this geographical area. Moreover, it positions Asian game studies within the broader global context, acknowledging that local histories are intertwined with international affairs. This approach is appreciated as it moves beyond isolated regional studies to show how themes like colonialism, political influence, and cultural exchange manifest in games across different Asian nations and their interactions with the West. A notable benefit of this publication is its direct call for more localised research from Asia to be translated and made available in English, and to prevent its inaccessibility to the wider academic community. The book makes an effort to showcase the richness and variety of regional perspectives by presenting studies from countries such as Iran, Turkey, and Singapore, and tries to foster a more inclusive academic dialogue in the field. This volume goes beyond the presentation of existing research and identifies significant gaps within game studies concerning Asia. I find this self-reflecting approach as a strength, as it not only encourages further research but also guides future academia in these areas. By introducing a wide array of methodologies, the book highlights its inclusivity, and this methodological pluralism provides researchers with various tools and approaches for analysing games, history, and heritage, making the volume highly practical for scholars across various disciplines.

However, a potential shortcoming is that the book presents a collection of diverse case studies and perspectives rather than a unified narrative or a complete bibliometric analysis. Additionally, while the diversity of methodologies is a strength, some chapters might present technical challenges for readers outside specific disciplines, as certain articles require expertise in mathematics and computer science. This methodological depth in these examples could be preventing full comprehension for a broad interdisciplinary reader.

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