Virtual Worlds Apart

A Comparative Study on Digital Games in Japan and the West

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative and qualitative study of Japanese and Western digital games and gaming cultures with the focus on the Japanese video games market. The objective is to find differences between Japanese and Western games and gaming cultures, and the thesis falls into the academic fields of game studies and cultural anthropology. This study attempts to give essential information for a Western game studio attempting to create commercial success in Japan, and to researchers of digital games or Japanese culture.

The mechanics and in-game elements of 18 critically acclaimed and commercially successful Western and Japanese video games published between 1996 and 2014 are analyzed, and various other game titles of various genres are used to support or to counter the findings. To gain an understanding of game design, Japanese and Western cultural values, character design and other factors, several books, academic researches, articles, sales data, and different web pages related to the issue are studied alongside these games. Several games industry experts are also interviewed.

According to sales data studied in this thesis, Japanese and Western gamers seem to prefer different gaming platforms and game genres. In addition, according to the case studies and other games studied, there are several differences between Japanese and Western digital games regarding game-mechanics, gameplay and other in-game elements. Firstly, Japanese games use a third-person camera whereas the ratio between first-person and third-person perspective is somewhat equally divided among Western games. In most of the Western games studied the player is offered significant freedom in the form of dialogue options, avatar customization and development, and choices which changed the course of the storyline and game-world. Instead in the Japanese games researched the protagonist is pre-determined, the game offers no dialogue options, and the player is not able to affect the storyline. There are also significant differences between the pre-determined player characters of Western and Japanese games.

Furthermore, Western games seem to offer relatively photorealistic graphics and realistic or fantasy-realistic creatures and settings while the graphics in Japanese games are commonly cartoon-like and the games are recurrently situated in fantasy settings with imaginative creatures. Combat situations are also handled differently. Japanese games frequently use turn-based combat situated in a separate combat mode whereas Western gamers seem to prefer seeing the enemies on a map and issue commands in real-time. Saving mechanics also differ in that Western games commonly allow the player to save the game at any point whereas there is an equal division between saving points and being able to save freely among Japanese games. In addition, the characters in Japanese games are likely to co-operate and help other characters within the game while Western games seem to emphasize individual prowess. Moreover, there is a clear aversion to crime, graphic violence and sexual themes in Japanese games whereas some Western games include this kind of content. Finally, a lot of Japanese games seem to promote mechanics related to collecting creatures or objects, and characters suitable for cross-media commodification, making character design in these games extremely important.

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1. Introduction: Japan and the West – Virtual Worlds Apart?

The Western world has witnessed many hugely popular game titles from Japan, such as the *Final Fantasy* series, *Super Mario Bros* and *Metal Gear Solid* franchises, while having *Pokémon* showing on television and carried around on portable Nintendo consoles. Traditionally, Japanese video games and technological products have fared well inside as well as outside of Japan, and *Ryûkô Tsûshin*, a magazine revolving around Japanese cultural trends defines these products as "global commodities" (*sekai shôhin*), describing them as products that carry universal or transcultural appeal while still bearing the creative imprint of the originality of a producing nation (Iwabuchi, 2004:54). It seems like digital games are immune to what the Japanese call *Galapagos syndrome*, a concept that was originally used for a species of birds that were discovered by Charles Darwin and which could only survive on the Galapagos Islands, which is also used as a term to describe the Japanese products that fail to perform elsewhere. However, during recent years it has seemed that the gap between gaming cultures in Japan and the West has widened further, and Japanese games have performed poorly outside their country of origin.

Furthermore, it is rare to see a Western title succeed in Japan. For example, *Famitsu*, a Japanese video game magazine, has made a list consisting of one hundred top selling games in Japan in the 21st century, and it does not include a single Western game title (Cook, 2013). Theories as to why this is so range from cultural and language barriers to claims of Japanese people not trusting a product from outside of their country as well as ethnocentrism. Curiously enough, other East Asian countries have included Western games into their repertoires and they enjoy immense popularity, while Japan is a separately listed paragraph in itself when looking at global sales figures. Whereas the world champion players of Activision Blizzard's *StarCraft*-franchise are located in South Korea, a common knowledge is that Japanese people seem oblivious to the product (Ashcraft, 2010; Lu Stout, 2010; Battle.net forums, 2012). Another title from the same company, globally the most popular massive multiplayer online role-playing game, *World of Warcraft,* has been well accepted and played in China (nowadays mostly replaced by the Western *League of Legends* [Riot Games, 2009] in popularity, however), but has no presence in Japan. This seems to further emphasize Japanese uniqueness in the gaming world.

However, the mobile game industry has created some interesting success stories in Japan, and Softbank, a Japanese telecom and internet company, with its subsidiary Gungho Online

Entertainment has acquired 51% of a Finnish mobile gaming company, Supercell, for 1.1 billion Euros after Supercell's mobile game *Clash of Clans* became immensely popular globally (Griffiths, 2013). In addition, some of the other Western game titles, such as *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar Games, 2014) and *Crash Bandicoot* (Naughty Dog, 1996) have penetrated the Japanese market fairly successfully, but it does seem like besides outside influences such as localization and marketing, there are certain characteristics that make or break a game in Japan. When I discussed the topic of Japanese and Western games and game players with various gamers and with several people working in the games industry, everyone agreed that the Japanese gaming culture is different compared to Europe's and America's, and is distinctive even compared with their geographic neighbors China and Korea. Yet it was rare that anyone could pinpoint specific differences concretely. In this thesis I intend to find out what these characteristics are, and will attempt to connect some of these features to a bigger picture alongside Japan's cultural background.

This thesis is an exploratory and comparative study with the aim of gaining understanding of Japanese video games and gamers in contrast to their Western counterparts with the focus being on the Japanese market. The results are qualitative and the research approach inductive in nature while combining real life observations to draw interpretive conclusions. This thesis falls into the academic fields of game studies and cultural anthropology.

My research questions are:

- How do Japanese digital games differ from Western games?
- How do Japanese and Western gaming cultures differ from each other?

I shall look at the differences in digital game culture and products in Japan in comparison to Europe and America. While I understand that, as is with art, there are no universally applicable rules or differences, this thesis is designed to give an overview of some of the most apparent differences between these industries and audiences. The results would probably be most beneficial to Western gaming companies seeking to launch a product in Japan or to a Japanese gaming company intending to do the same in Europe or America. I also hope that scholars interested in digital games and / or Japan can find this text useful.

 I will also take a look at some of the societal aspects that affect these differences in Japan. However, given the purpose of this thesis, it was necessary to exclude important factors from the analysis, but these could be brought to further attention in later theses. Some of the interesting subjects are related to localizing, translating and publishing foreign games in Japan. Interested scholars could write about marketing games in Japan and about branding foreign games and their by-products in Japan and the West. One interesting subject is the decline in popularity of arcade gaming halls, or one could write about whether or how electronic sports

could be popular in Japan, as they are immensely popular elsewhere. Readers who are interested in the otaku gaming culture, fan cultures and related cosplay[1] and item collecting, should refer to Patrick W. Galbraith's work.

Furthermore, my research has had its limitations as I have been unable to travel to Japan while researching and writing this thesis making close interviews with Japanese gamers difficult and limiting my access to games that have not been published outside Japanese borders. However, I have played several of the games analyzed here in their original Japanese format. It is also worthwhile to note, that the market for digital and especially mobile games changes extremely fast, and the information I am able to provide in this thesis is most likely only applicable during the time of writing and the near future. Furthermore, while European and American gaming scenes are not entirely identical, with some games being popular and even published in only one or the other (such as the *Madden NFL* games in America only), they are similar enough to be used as a comparison to the Japanese counterpart as a whole. The games I have played are either Japanese or European versions.

In chapter 2 of this thesis I will introduce and define digital games as a concept and explain the terms related to gameplay, video game mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics while attempting to answer how digital games played, how they work and how they differ from other sorts of entertainment and art forms. Moreover, a distinctive game type called a social network game is introduced alongside its special mechanics, as these mechanics are disparate compared to the mechanics in other types of digital games. Finally, I shall give an overview of the most common video game genres and their definitions.

Furthermore in chapter 3 the main material used in this thesis is introduced. I shall present some of the important research done on the subject of games and on Japanese culture alongside introducing the interviewees consulted during the research of this thesis. Secondly, Japanese video gaming trends are explained alongside sales data of different game titles and gaming platforms. Finally I shall give a short introduction to the current situation of social network games and their mechanics in Japan.

In section 3.3.6 I shall delve into variations between certain notable genres in Japan and the West with the intention of further emphasizing the differences between the two digital gaming cultures. Moreover, chapter 4.1 and 4.2 are focused on case studies, introducing and analyzing 18 Japanese and Western role-playing and action-adventure games published between 1996 and 2014. In chapter 5 these games are taken into further scrutiny. I shall discuss their mechanics and systems, storyline, character design, settings, visual style and cultural elements

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[1] A hobby where one dresses up and sometimes acts like a popular media character of their choosing

alongside other factors within the game while briefly touching the issue of cross-media commodification of video games in Japan and the West. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarizing the results of chapters 4 and 5, and I shall connect these conclusions to form a bigger picture of the Japanese and Western game industries.

2. Theories and Definitions

In chapter 2.1 I shall introduce some definitions for the term video game while comparing digital games with other mass media forms and discussing how the experience of playing a video game differs from experiencing other types of games or art. Section 2.2 delves into video game mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics. Chapter 2.3 introduces the distinctive mechanics of social networking games. Finally, in chapter 2.4 I shall give an overview of the different video game genres.

2.1 Definition of a video game

Since early times people have been playing different kinds of games, from ancient board games, such as Go and Chess, to a wide variety of games we play today on different devices. Playing has always been an integral part of human behavior, and in fact, the cultural historian Johan Huizinga writes in his book *Homo Ludens* (1938) that playing is not an inconsequential activity, but instead an essential, central factor in civilization. He claims that cultural realms, such as religious rituals, sport and drama all include types of play, which can be serious activities. According to Huizinga, humans are not characterized primarily by rational thought and self-awareness (*homo sapiens*) or creativity and the use of technology (*homo faber*) but by play (*homo ludens*). He asserts that play is always separate from ordinary or real life, and it is instead '*a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own*' (Huizinga 1986 cited in Lister et al., 2009:295). Marshall McLuhan claims that games are a communication media, a popular art form and a collective modelling of society, but exist within yet distinct from the social world (McLuhan 1967 cited in Lister et al., 2009: 297).

Salen & Zimmerman attempt to define a game by writing that:

> A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004: 93).

However, I consider this definition somewhat restrictive, as not all the games have quantifiable outcomes, and not all of the games include conflicts. For example, in some simulators like *SimCity* (Maxis, 1989) there are no final winning conditions and some games such as open world games are not necessarily based around conflict, but instead have objectives that the player can approach in a manner of their choosing. Adams and Rollings

instead define a game with a very similar manner to Salen and Zimmerman claiming that a game is:

> *…*a type of play activity, conducted in the context of a pretended reality, in which the participant(s) try to achieve at least one arbitrary, nontrivial goal by acting in accordance with rules (Adams & Rollings, 2007:5).

The definition above requires that the game must have a goal or object, and it can have more than one. The goal, according to Adams and Rollings, must be nontrivial because the game must include some element of challenge (Adams and Rollings, 2007:9). These goals are often called *victory conditions*, at which point one or more of the players are declared the winners. Some games only establish a *loss condition*, which denote the end of the game by specifying which player has lost. This kind of a game can never be won, but can only be abandoned. Adams and Rollings emphasize that the concepts of winning or losing are not mandatory in games, but they make a game more exciting. A goal is essential in a game, but it does not need to be characterized by victory or defeat (Adams and Rollings, 2007:10). Every game also has rules, which act as definitions and instructions that the player accepts for the duration of the game. These rules define, for example, the semiotics of the game, the gameplay, the sequence of play and the goal(s) of the game. (Ibid.)

Roger Caillois has been particularly influential in developing game studies' play theory. He categorizes different, fundamental elements of play in his research in 1962; *agon* means competitive play which is found on sports and in games such as chess; *alea* types of games are based on chance; *mimicry* is role-playing or make-believe and *ilinx* or 'vertigo' is what he calls the particular physical sensations which are experienced, for instance, when rolling down a hill as a child. These categories are not mutually exclusive and can be found simultaneously in types of games. Card games, for example, combine both agon's skill and dedication and alea's luck. Caillois also measures the underlying qualities of types of games and play. *Ludus* denotes modes of play that are characterized by strict rules and *paidia* instead is the active and creative type of play (Caillois 1962 cited in Lister et al., 2009:296). Video games are said to be generally ludic in nature, but researcher Sherry Turkle writes about the relationship between the paidia of fantasy and the rule-bound ludic in video games. She argues that science fiction and fantasy fiction are immensely influential on the development of digital games both at the level of symbolic content (spaceships and monsters) and through the parallel tension between the imaginative, and the logical and rule-governed. According to Turkle, digital games are rule-bound rather than open-ended (Turkle 1984 in Lister et al., 2009:297). I wish to add, however, that as video game technology has progressed, newer and more open-ended, paidia-based game types have emerged. For example, open world games let the player solve objectives

fairly creatively. To summarize the above, the essential elements of a game are rules, goals, play and pretending (Adams & Rollings, 2007:4).

Lister et al. gather that games are separate from the world in time and space and that they are played within boundaries and bound by rules while being a part of the world in meaningful ways: they may figure or model their larger social context and are a part of the world in that people play them every day, being so a part of cultural activities (Lister et al., 2009:298).

This thesis focuses on video games specifically. Video games differ from their other game counterparts in that they are played digitally on an electronic hardware and the player/s is taken into a virtual reality to interact with a user interface.

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, a video game is "an electronic game in which players control images on a television or a computer screen" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Nowadays this screen is commonly found attached to a mobile device, such as a smart phone. Video games can be played on several different platforms. PlayStation consoles are manufactured by Sony Entertainment, Xbox consoles by Microsoft Corporation and Nintendo consoles by Nintendo Entertainment. Consoles can be handheld and contain their own monitors, or can be plugged in a monitor and be controlled via a specially designed controller. Personal computer systems can also be used to play video games, as can mobile phones, such as iPhones (Apple Inc.) or Android devices (manufactured by companies such as Samsung Group). Often these handheld devices, such as Nintendo 3DS (Nintendo Entertainment), PlayStation Portable (Sony Entertainment) or a mobile phone, contain a touchscreen, which reacts to the touch of a finger or a specially designed touch pen. Digital games have traditionally been sold in boxes containing disks or other physical manifestations to be inserted into a gaming device, but nowadays the games software are increasingly sold in a digital, downloadable format, which eliminates the need to produce physical products, such as discs, game cards or packages.

Games differ from other mass media formats in that they are interactive requiring an active player whose participation affects the course of events, and that they demand the player learns its interface and controls in order to play. Every response the player makes generates a reaction from the computer, which then again generates a new response (Friedman, 1995). James Newman asserts that:

> [...] the relationship between the player and the game world is not one of clear subject and object. Rather, the interface is a continuous interactive feedback loop, where the player must be seen as both implied and implicated in the construction and composition of the experience (Newman, 2002 cited in Lister et al., 2009:306).

The players can, by varying degrees, observe, explore, modify and change the experience of the game (Davidson, 2003). As Aoyama and Izushi reminiscence,

> [u]nlike cinema and televisions, which involve passive audience, videogames emerged out of older interactive entertainment such as toys and arcade games, and expanded inter-activity to a new realm by allowing players to adopt a character, function as a protagonist, craft storylines, engage in role-playing, and even interact with those from opposite ends of the world (Aoyama & Izushi, 2003: 424).

Adams and Rollings observe that play ultimately includes the freedom to act and the freedom to choose how you act, but the freedom is not unlimited as the player's choices are restricted by the rules of the game, which demands that the player must be smart, imaginative and talented in their play (Adams and Rollings, 2007:6). Playing a video game demands an understanding of its structure or complex semiotic system including elements such as non-player characters, timing of actions and levels among other things. The player must immerse themselves into the game, as they become responsible and a part of what is happening onscreen. In addition to this, the player must learn these codes and conventions within each genre of game, which each have their own variations, button combinations, rules and systems. Drew Davidson writes that a player's initial involvement is about starting the game and moving into a comfort zone in it. Within this stage, players move beyond the introductory scenes and into the playing mode in which they learn the gameplay until it becomes an intuitive act and less of a conscious one, leading to interactions becoming more engaging and the game more fulfilling (Davidson, 2003). It is during this phase that the players understand the gaming situation, the "combination of ends, means, rules, equipment, and manipulative action" required to play the game (Eskelinen cited in Davidson, 2003). At the point of immersion players have become comfortable with the gameplay by understanding how it is played and how to interact with the game world, and have chosen to continue playing, Davidson observes (Davidson, 2003). Moreover, Laurie Taylor makes a distinction between diegetic and intra-diegetic or situated immersion. During *diegetic immersion* the player is immersed in the act of playing a video game, whereas during intra-diegetic immersion "the player is immersed in playing the game and in the experience of the game space as a spatial and narrated space" (Taylor, 2002:12). He compares diegetic immersion to the same experience a reader gets when they get engrossed in a novel, or that a film-viewer might get from a movie. The reader, watcher or player "becomes lost in the text and becomes unaware of the creation and relation of the elements within the text" (Ibid.). Video games are a medium that also allow *intra-diegetic* immersion, which allows the player to become deeply involved in the game as an experimental space, since the features of the game create the illusion that the player is indeed within the space of the narrative in a different way than a movie or a book can (Ibid.), as the

player can control the main character. Adams and Rollings also make a distinction between different types of immersion: *Tactical immersion* happens when the player becomes entranced by a fast action that occupies their brain completely, but breaks if there are abrupt changes in the gameplay. *Strategic immersion* occurs when the player is observing, calculating and planning with the objective of winning the game. This immersion is broken if a player is confronted with a situation they have never seen before or if the game contains too many unpredictable elements. Finally, *narrative immersion* is the feeling of being inside a story, involved and accepting the world and events of the story as real. For this immersion to happen the storytelling and characters must be good and the gameplay should match the context of the story. (Adams and Rollings: 2007:30). According to Ted Friedman (1998) the pleasure of computer games is essentially derived from entering into a computer-like mental state: The player starts responding as automatically as the computer and processing information as effortlessly. When a game really begins the decisions of the player become easy and instantaneous and they are chosen without a self-conscious thought, which leads to an almost meditative state, and the player in a way merges with the computer creating a sense of self-dissolution (Friedman, 1998). Davidson distinguishes immersion as a third stage of playing and added that during the investment stage players have fully mastered the gameplay and have complete comfort within the world itself, so the goal becomes to finish the game successfully (Davidson, 2003). However, as Lister et al. write, each video game is a semiotic universe with each element from backgrounds to characters and objects coded and its place within the meaning of the world and its playing decided. In a video game world nothing is incidental or random, they write and compare video game environments to stage sets, that some appear to function as one would expect their referents in the real world to, but some do not, as is for example when windows and doors act only as decorative objects. This makes them paradoxically non-immersive in nature as the player must be aware of their artifice. (Lister et al., 2009: 302)

In conclusion, my definition of a game is much in line with Adam and Rollings's definition of a game, but with a few additions as I widen and restrict my definition to apply to video games. I define video game as a *digital, immersive and interactive form of a play activity in a context of a pretended reality, where the player or players attempt to achieve one or several arbitrary, nontrivial objectives within a certain set of rules.*

2.2   Gameplay, mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics

In this section I will introduce the very basics of video game mechanics and gameplay, in addition to their dynamics and aesthetics. There are various definitions and terms regarding video games, but within this space I shall only delve to those necessary within the context of

this thesis. For someone interested in game design and terms apart from the ones introduced here I recommend the book *Fundamentals of Game Design* written by Earnest Adams and Andrew Rollings (2007).

Federoff (2002) defines a game interface as "the device through which the player interacts with the game". Game mechanics are "the ways in which a player is allowed to move through the game environment;" and game-play is "the problems and challenges a player must face to try to win the game (Federoff 2002 cited in Ngai, 2005). Furthermore, the MDA framework is a tool used for analyzing and making games. It was developed at the Game Developers Conference in San Jose during 2001-2004, and it attempts to analyze the design of a game by breaking it down into the following three parts:

> •Mechanics, the basic components of a game such as rules, data representation and algorithms

> •Dynamics, the run-time behavior of the mechanics acting on player input and each other's output over time

> •Aesthetics, the desirable emotional responses evoked in the player such as joy and frustration (Hunicke, et al., 2004 cited in Askelöf, 2013: 35)

According to Adams and Rollings gameplay consists of the challenges the player must face in order to reach the object of the game, and of the actions the player is permitted to take in order to attempt these obstacles (Adams and Rollings, 2007:14). A gameplay mode, instead, "consists of the particular subset of a game's total gameplay that is available at any one time in the game, plus the user interface that presents that subset of the gameplay to the player" (Ibid.:49). A game can only be in one gameplay mode at a time, and when the gameplay available to the player or the user interface changes in a significant way, the game has left one mode and entered another (Ibid.). For example, a game can have an exploration mode, where the player can move the protagonist freely and interact with the environment and a combat mode, where the optical perspective and available actions may change completely. This kind of a change is very typical for a Japanese roleplaying game, as we can see later in this thesis.

Games can be *single-player*, *two-player competitive*, *multiplayer competitive*, *multiplayer cooperative* or *team-based.* In single-player games or modes the player is essentially challenged by the situation provided by the game. Two-player competitive playing is, as the name implies, two players competing against each other. Multiplayer competitive happens when many players compete against each other in an "everyone for themselves"-situation. Multiplayer cooperative is the opposite of competitive, and in that type of a game the players

cooperate to achieve the same goal. Team-based games divide the players into teams, which then collectively compete against each other.

Games attract players by offering enjoyable experiences through motivational goals that can be difficult to achieve, but provide rewards and feelings of success. The player's sense of flow, a state of mind where the participant feels a high degree of focus and enjoyment and loses track of time, is achieved by providing challenges that are closely matched with the skill of the participant, and as the player's skill evolves, the difficulty of the game must increase as well (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011 cited in Askelöf, 2013:34-35). These challenges can be divided roughly into three different categories: physical, social and mental. Physical challenges are based on the physical realm of hunting and gathering, such as strength and hand-eye coordination in addition to searching and gathering of resources. Social challenges are related to pre-defined storylines or interactions between players (cooperative challenges) or non-player characters (hereon referred to as NPCs) in a game environment. Mental challenges focus on the manipulation of patterns or structures, memory or knowledge challenges, exploration, strategy, tactics and logistics and so on. Most games offer a combination of all of these challenges. (Falstein, 2004 cited in Ngai, 2005:18) Challenges can be unique, recurring or continuing (Adams and Rollings, 2007:12). For example, in a driving game the continuous challenge is to stay on the road and avoid obstacles while driving to the finish line as fast as possible. In an action game a recurring challenge is to defeat multiple identical enemies, and finally a particular boss monster, which instead is a unique challenge. Challenges must be nontrivial for the game to stay interesting, but they do not have to be difficult. (Ibid.)

According to Adams and Rollings, a video game should always reward achievement. These rewards can be related to advancing the player's interests in some way, either by giving them something tangible that helps them play (money or a key to a locked area) or something that is intangible but still valuable, such as a strategic advantage. (Adams and Rollings, 2007:27). However, story rewards are just as important, and these achievements can advance the story by presenting some more of it (Ibid.). All games require progress, and a game without progress becomes stale and boring (Radoff, 2011 cited in Askelöf, 2013:43). Therefore it is important to manage and communicate the progress to the player in the game. Peter Askelöf lists the most commonly used methods of relaying progress to the players. Achievements (or badges) are rewarded to players when they fulfill the required conditions, such as playing the game in an ordinary fashion or by doing something extra, for example finding secrets in the stage. Surprise badges or achievements are something that the player is usually unaware of, since the conditions for achieving them are unknown to the player. (Askelöf, 2013:44) These achievements are most typical to social network games, but are increasingly used in other

types of digital games as well. There are also different types of points that they player can be awarded with: Experience points represent how far you or your character/s have gotten in the game by doing different types of actions. Redeemable points are a type of virtual currency, which the player can earn by accomplishing certain tasks in the game, and that can be used to buy virtual items within the game (Ibid.). Skill points are related to a specific activity within a game. These often appear in roleplaying games (hereon referred to as RPGs), where the characters have a set of different skills, each having a different score. Moreover, progress points accumulate as the player advances in the game. In role-playing games they are commonly represented by player rank or level, and in games in general player rankings are regularly based on these points. In role-playing game-based game systems, once the player has collected a certain amount of experience points, they advance to the next level. (Askelöf, 2013: 44)

Anita Ngai claims that immersion requires identification with both character and narrative elements. She continued by writing that successful communication of narrative affects players emotionally and at a subconscious level. Techniques for creating emotional depth in games include creating rich, complex, and compelling characters and natural dialogue, Ngai writes and adds that symbols can also enhance the depth of scenes and plots. Games can also offer emotionally complex situations that force the players to make choices and face consequences, Ngai observes. (Ngai, 2005:20). A game's narrative may be *linear* or *nonlinear*. A linear story is something the player cannot affect, and a nonlinear story is instead something that the player can influence by affecting future events or changing the direction of the story. (Adams and Rollings, 2007:196) A game may contain side-objectives and actions in addition to the main plot. The player may find hidden items or passageways, so-called "side-quests, which are not required to complete the game, but provide interesting rewards or insight to the game-world and its inhabitants or "minigames", which are essentially games within a game. These can be literal games that the player can play via an in-game arcade machine for example, they may be related to character relationships, collecting certain items during the game or moving the character/s through a peculiar scenario. Other types of minigames not listed in here may also be used. There can also be actions that can be taken for pure enjoyment instead of gaining benefits: For example in *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000) or *Grand Theft Auto* (Rockstar Games, 1997) the player may listen to music from an in-game device. Games may also offer chances of creative and expressive game-play, such as allowing the player to decorate their avatar's house.

In a video game the player may also save the current state of the game. A *quick-save* happens instantly when a player presses a designated button. There may also be designated areas or points when the player may save the game, so saving in other places is impossible.

Finally, the game may save itself automatically periodically or when the player passes a certain point called *checkpoint*. (Adams and Rollings, 2007:308)

In a video game the player most commonly (with the exemption of some genres) has an in-game *avatar* or avatars that they may control. While most of the games have an established character as the player's avatar, but some games, usually role-playing games, offer the player a chance to customize their characters to a certain extent. This can be related to the character's physical attributes or to their skills and abilities. According to Gonzalo Frasca there are essentially two types of characters in a game, and their personality as well as depth as avatars for the player is determined by how much freedom a player has over it. A flat character is non-complex and static throughout the progress of the story. A round character, in contrast evolves as the story unfolds (Frasca, 2001 cited in Ngai, 2005:20). The protagonist may be "silent" literally or in the way that they do not voice opinions or personality, or they may express strong personality traits or even be voice-acted. One can also analyze the complexity of non-player characters in the game by looking at their motivations, history, conversations and character development.

An interesting method a game can use to teach the player about their protagonist is the way other characters in the game act towards the protagonist. Petri Lankoski writes that at its simplest characters can describe (talk about, refer to etc.) the protagonist. For example, in *Silent Hill 2* (Konami 2003), the player will come across a letter / dialogue describing the protagonist. Other characters' actions or reactions to the protagonist's actions also describe aspects of him/her (Lankoski et al., 2010, pp.80-82). A game as a medium unlike other forms of media can offer an interesting possibility of deciding the relationship the protagonist has over other characters in the game. Some games, especially role-playing games provide a chance for the player to decide the protagonist's dialogue options or choices of action, which can affect their relationship with NPCs. In some games the player may even form virtual relationships with game characters. The protagonist may explore and combat things alone, or in some games with other NPCs, in a so-called party or with a single follower or a friend.

Furthermore, Laurie Taylor examines the different optical perspectives, in other words the point-of-views through which players see and interact in the game world, and lists several of them: *First-person*, *third-person*, *third-person trailing*, *overhead* or *top-down* (often referred to as the god mode), and *three-fourths isometric*. Each perspective supports a different level of immersion and understanding of the game world. In first-person point-of-view players see through the eyes of the character. Although such optical perspective is more intuitive and natural, as players act and perceive the game world through their avatar's eyes, it limits

contextual information on the surroundings. In third-person point-of-view the camera is centered in the playable character (in a movie-like way), and in third-person trailing the camera follows the character as the player moves him/her, so the world is, in a way, seen over the shoulder of the character. Third-person point-of-view offers a physical presence through a visual embodiment, in other words, one's character within the game world. The player can perceive more of the game world with an embodied representation in relation to objects, characters, and contextual elements. Overhead point-of-view is most often used in puzzle games like chess or *Tetris* (1984) or in simulation/strategy games such as SimCity, where the concept is based on, as Taylor explains, "the player being a force that acts upon the world of the game, rather than a force within the game that then acts on the objects and actors of the game from within", and is a distancing, abstracting point of view (Taylor, 2002:6). Three-fourths isometric point-of-view is used in party-system games or first-person games, "where the player 'sees' for the entire character-group through the 'eyes' of the screen" (Taylor, 2002:9). With this view all three dimensions can be seen at once because it allows for more information to be presented on the screen. In some games the player can toggle among the available perspectives, zoom in or rotate the camera angles during interactive play. This perspective has most often been used in games that are not fully 3D, but that appear to be so. However, designers can control the optical perspective in cinematic sequences or during certain scenes in order to convey narrative elements. (Taylor, 2002: 3-12) This type of a camera is context-sensitive (Adams and Rollings, 2007:247). The camera in games can be static or rotatable, and the player may also sometimes be allowed to change the perspective from third-person to first-person. This type of a mechanic is called a *free-roaming camera* (Ibid.).

Adams and Rollings describe two different types of tensions that can be used in storytelling within a game: *dramatic tension* and *gameplay tension* (Adams and Rollings, 2007:190-192). Dramatic tension occurs when the follower of a story senses that something important is at stake coupled with a desire to know what happens next. Gameplay tension differs from the dramatic tension in that this tension rises from the player's desire to overcome a challenge and uncertainty about whether they will succeed or fail. In multiplayer games this tension is created by the uncertainty of opponents' future actions. (Adams and Rollings, 2007:190) Ngai attempts to explain the dynamics between narrative and game-play by writing that

> [n]arrative and game-play have conflicting objectives, with game-play remaining the driver of video game design. Game-play focuses on establishing rules for the game, providing activities and experience that are unique and consistent with the plot. Narrative defines characters and plots, delivering emotional experience through storylines, dialogues, and narrative structures (Ngai, 2005:30).

Adams and Rollings define narrative as those story events that are narrated (told or shown) by the game to the player. They argue that narrative consists of the non-interactive, presentational part of the story (Adams and Rollings, 2007:188). Narrative is often conveyed through full-motion videos or cut-scenes, during which players are spectators and unable to interact with the game (Jacobs, S., 2004 cited in Ngai, 2005:30). Sometimes narrative can be hidden in conversations or objects, such as readable books. While the inner logic or messages of the game are imposed via themes and narrative, the importance and interpretation of these are influenced by the social and cultural environment of a society (Bittanti, 2004 cited in Ngai 2005:30).

Finally, video games can be realistic, focusing on life-like graphics and environments, or they can convey a fantasy-scape with their aesthetics, often by being clearly animated or exaggerated in style. A term for the attempt to capture the visual appearance of the world, people and objects as they appear to the human eye is called verisimilitude (Lister et al., 2009: 136). With computer generated imagery (CGI) these images are produced with other methods than photographic techniques, and thus this verisimilitude is created by attempting photorealism, where the creators attempt to reproduce images and graphics as realistically as possible (Ibid:137-138). On the other side of the spectrum graphics and imagery in games can be cartoon-derived in their codes of character design, action, humor and movement. The game scenarios can be realistic or unrealistic in what they contain as well: Some game protagonists have superpowers, some worlds contain magic and supernatural creatures. In this thesis I shall refer to these kinds of game-realities as *fantasy-realism*. Some games instead strive for realism with normal human beings facing challenges in a game-world that attempts to imitate reality. Games offer a chance to portray an infinite amount of stories and tricks within their virtual worlds and characters.

2.3   Social Network Game Mechanics

In this section I will introduce the particular game mechanics and dynamics of social network games (from here on referred to as SNGs), which can be immensely different compared to other digital games, which is why they required a separate section. My main source of information has been Peter Askelöf's comprehensive thesis on social network games in Japan (2013). While this chapter gives an overview of the social network game mechanics in general, I shall explore some of the differences between popular social network game mechanics in Japan and the West in chapter 3.3.4.

Fields & Cotton define social games in the following manner:

A social game is one in which the user's interactions with other players help drive adoption of the game and help retain players, and that uses an external social network of some type to facilitate these goals. (Fields & Cotton 2012 cited in Askelöf, 2013:26)

This definition proposes that a game must provide users with incentives to interact with one another, although this does not need to happen in real-time, in order to be considered a social game (Askelöf, 2013, p.26). A social network game works with either a free-to-play model or a periodic fee, and there are differences between games that provide their own social network, such as World of Warcraft, and games that use external social networks (Ibid.). One major difference between SNGs and other types of games is that SNGs feature an infinite gameplay, which means that there is no clear final goal or ending for the game, but instead the player can continue advancing and reaching higher levels endlessly (Ibid.:46). They also most often use virtual currency, which players must purchase with real-world currency or earn in another clearly defined way (Ibid: 44). With this in-game currency players are able to buy upgrades that would otherwise be slow to obtain. Social network games are most often played via a browser, but can also be on another platform, such as mobile devices.

I shall use the three stages of the ARM funnel in order to analyze SNG mechanics. The letters A, R and M stand for *acquisition, retention and monetization* (Williams, 2012). Acquisition is about reaching out and acquiring players, retention stands for keeping players around once they have been acquired by using techniques that make a game sticky and addictive, and finally, monetization is a word used for methods used in SNGs in order to obtain revenue from their users (Askelöf, 2013:26). Since SNG's are often based on the free-to-play business model, it is necessary to give players motive to pay for the product (Ibid: 26). Unlike other types of video games, SNGs usually require a large amount of players in order to be profitable, especially when using the free-to-play business model. In the ARM model, user sources are divided into viral or non-viral. Non-viral user sources comprise of advertising, offer walls and cross promotion, while viral user sources refer to new users which have been generated by existing ones. Typical viral sources include invitation mechanics or word of mouth (Ibid: 40).

Developers can advertise their games on websites or on social networks in order to acquire new users. They can also use banner advertisements, which are placed inside of other applications and games. Players can sometimes earn in-game currency and other rewards by doing certain assignments, such as installing a product or game, or signing up for a service. These are called offer walls. Once the assignment is done the player is rewarded, and the provider of the offer compensates the game developer. Developers commonly want to keep

users within their own network of games, and can insert banners and offers inside their games in order to ensure that users try out their other products as well. This is called cross-promotion. (Askelöf, 2013: 40-42)

Retention refers to the ability of a game to retain its existing users. One way to measure how well a game manages to do that is by studying player sessions, such as sessions per user and average session length. In addition one can measure the retention rate, i.e. how many players have returned to the game within a certain timeframe. Furthermore, average lifetime per user is a metric about how long players remain to play the game on average. Some techniques to ensure retention are punishment for absence, where the player gets punished for having been away for too long (for example, crops that have not been reaped have rotted), and in contrast rewards, such as free items to players who return regularly. (Askelöf, 2013:48)

Monetization focuses on how much revenue is obtained from the players. To measure the success rate of a game's monetization, developers commonly use metrics such as average revenue per user (ARPU) and average revenue per paying user (ARPPU). Because of the amount of players that only play a game a few times and then abandon it, often only the active users, i.e. daily active users (DAU) or monthly active users (MAU) are taken into account. These metrics are thus frequently called average revenue per daily active users (ARPDAU) and average revenue per monthly active users (ARPMAU). (Askelöf, 2013:41)

In contrast to regular video games, in SNGs the virtual currency is often divided into two categories called hard and soft currency. Soft currency can only be earned within the game whereas hard currency can be bought directly with real world currency (Fields & Cotton, 2012 cited in Askelöf 2013:44). Within free-to-play model, players rarely have to pay in order to keep on playing the game. SNGs however depend on certain game mechanics to motivate players to voluntarily invest currency in the game. The most common way of monetization is via the sale of in-game items, from enhancement objects that make the player stronger to avatar items that change the appearance of your in-game character. Gifts are items that the player can give to other players and can be used to express emotion and gratitude. They can sometimes be bought with real money, but sometimes exist only to increase interaction between players. Boosts and Power-Ups can be bought to give you an advantage in the game. Personalization and creativity are things that make it possible to customize one's in-game appearance, and sometimes they also act as boosts and power-ups. (Askelöf, 2013: 49)

SNGs generally limit the length of game-play sessions so that the player won't exhaust their interest in the game in one sitting and return to continue playing, improving player retention. Players are sometimes willing to pay money in order to gain more playtime, which allows the games to monetize on that. Some techniques limit the length of a playing session are energy systems, where actions cost energy and the energy bar is restored to full with time (or money),

making objects take a certain time to complete, and *cooldowns*, a time limit on how often a certain action can be performed in the game. Play Accelerators overcome session limits and accelerate the speed of how fast the player advances in the game. Furthermore, collectibles are items that belong to a collection and exist only to be gathered whereas expansions are extra content for the game that can be purchased separately. (Askelöf, 2013:48-49) Some successful games may also brand their game-related goods and sell them outside of the gaming world. In Japan, some games have been also turned into TV shows, cartoon series as well as into physical character goods.

Finally, social network games improve their chances of player retention and acquisition by including mechanics involving socialization between the players (thus the name social network games). When the game is constructed in such a way that users are willing to tell their friends about it, a viral loop is formed, leading to each new user inviting other users. For this to happen, developers often use incentives for inviting friends. Karma points are points one can give to other players in order to encourage certain behavior, such as thanking one another, among the players. Reputation points are applied to show how reliable a user is, whereas social points give a measurement on how well a user socializes. There may also be gifts, which can be exchanged between players. The game can include incentives to send invites to friends, which can act as a viral user source for player acquisition. Cooperation and competition are both elements and motivators in multiplayer social gameplay. (Askelöf, 2013: 45-47) Most social network games include some sort of a leaderboard, a ranking system with which the player can compare their progress and results with other players (Ibid: 44).

2.4   Video Game Genres

In this section I'll explain what different video game genres mean and contain. Digital games can roughly be divided into genres, which can be greatly different from each other in mechanics, dynamics and overall style. Video games can also have elements from two or several genres within one, in which case their genre is a combination of two or more.

Action games genre is defined by Adams and Rollings as games in which "the majority of challenges presented are tests of the player's physical skills. Puzzle-solving, tactical confict, and exploration challenges are often present as well" (Adams and Rollings, 2007:436). Action games genre contains many different subgenres, from which I will introduce the most common.

Shooters are a sub-genre of action games focused on targeting and shooting enemies with a ranged weapon from a long distance in a high-phased environment. Most often the camera in these games is set to first-player perspective. Due to being almost only created and played outside Japan (in home setting), I have omitted the shooter-genre from the case-studies in

chapter 4 because they are hardly developed or played in Japan. However, I will attempt to answer why exactly this is so in the conclusion of this thesis. Side-scrolling shooters are similar to first-person shooters, but they are 2-D and viewed from the top-down or side-view perspective with the main character, vehicle or other in the middle of the screen, constantly bombarded with enemies and their attacks. Interestingly, they enjoy a niche popularity in Japan. Furthermore, rail shooters which resemble first-person shooters are well enjoyed in Japanese arcade halls, and their popularity in home-setting has been increasing as of late. Some of the most notable first-person shooters include *Halo* (Microsoft Studios, 2001-2014), *Half-Life* (Sierra Entertainment, 1998), *Call of Duty* games (Activision, 2003-2014), *Wolfenstein* (Muse Software, 1981-2014).

Action-adventure games, as the name suggests, are a hybrid of two different genres: action and adventure (introduced below). They offer physical challenges, but also a storyline, various characters, an inventory system and dialog. Some iconic action-adventure games of Japanese and Western origin shall be case studied in chapter 4. Both action-adventure and horror games are very popular both in Japan and the West.

Horror games are similar to action-adventure games and sometimes first-person shooters, but they, as the name suggests, include horror elements. The following four games can perhaps be considered the most internationally acclaimed Japanese horror games: *Onimusha* series (Capcom, 2001-2012) is focused around a protagonist, who is able to wield the power of the Oni, which allows them to fight demons and fearsome enemies in feudal Japan. In *Project Zero* (Tecmo, 2001-2014) the premise of the game is about a girl who searches for her missing brother in a haunted mansion full of ghosts, and the only way to defend oneself against them is to use a mysterious *Camera Obscura*, which exorcises ghosts by capturing their spirits in a film. In the later installments of the series, other female protagonists are somehow captured in the world of old Japanese mansions and ghosts. In *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996-2015), a fictional American city is overcome by a virus, turning everyone into aggressive zombies and mutated creatures. The protagonists are a part of an elite force called S.T.A.R.S, and must find out how to stop the virus from spreading more. The protagonist of *Silent Hill* (Konami, 1999) gets into a car accident and finds himself lost in a misty American-style town filled with horrifying creatures while searching for his daughter who disappeared from the car.

Western game developers have also created interesting horror games that have sold internationally, but have not thus far penetrated the Japanese market. For example, *F.E.A.R. First Encounter Assault Recon* (Monolith Productions, 2005-2011) is a first-person shooter that combines horror elements, as it revolves around a paranormal menace in the form of a little girl. In *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) a middle-aged man and a teenage girl struggle to survive in a world, where most of civilization has been destroyed by a fungus infection that

turns people into cannibalistic monsters. Finally, in *Dead Space* (Electronic Arts, 2008), the protagonist must fight his way through a mining starship infested with alien scourge and the reanimated corpses of the ship's former crew.

Platform games are, as Adams and Rollings (2007) define, "cartoonish games where an avatar moves through a vertically exaggerated environment, jumping on and off platforms at different heights, while avoiding obstacles and battling enemies" (Adams and Rollings, 2007:439). These games are most commonly 2D side-scrolling games. Platform games are created somewhat equally both in Japan and the West, and some notable examples include the Japanese *Super Mario Bros* (Nintendo, 1985-2014) and *Sonic the Hedgehog* (Sega, 1991-2013), and the Western *Crash Bandicoot* (Naughty Dog, 1996-2010) and *Ratchet & Clank* (Insomniac Games, 2002-2014). While Japanese platform games are universally well-known, and -received, as we can see in chapter 3, only Crash Bandicoot franchise has managed to succeed in Japan.

Fighting games simulate hand-to-hand combat, usually between two fighter-avatars who use exaggerated modeled after martial arts. Commonly these games have a side-scrolling camera, but may be modeled with 2D or 3D technology. Fighting games are commonly created in Japan exclusively, but have a few iterations outside the country as well, and enjoy worldwide popularity. Some of the most famous fighting games are the Japanese *Tekken* games (Namco 1994-2014), *Street Fighter* franchise (Capcom, 1987-2014) and *Dead or Alive* series (Tecmo, 1996-2015), and Western *Mortal Combat* (Midway Games 1992-2013). While Japanese fighting games have been successful globally, the American Mortal Combat has not succeeded in Japan (more about that in chapter 5.2).

Adams and Rollings (2007) describe a **Role-playing game** as something

> (…) in which the player controls one or more characters, typically designed by the player, and guides them through **a** series of quests managed by the computer. Victory consists of completing these quests. Character growth in power and abilities is a key feature of the genre. Typical challenges include tactical combat, logistics, economic growth, exploration, and puzzle-solving. Physical coordination challenges are rare except in RPG-action hybrids (Adams and Rollings, 2007:509).

Some notable Western and Japanese role-playing game titles shall be analyzed in chapter 4.2, and compared within the analysis section of this thesis.

Moreover Adams and Rollings define a **sports game** as game as a game "that simulates some aspect of a real or imaginary athletic sport, whether it is playing in matches, managing a team or career, or both" (Adams and Rollings, 2007:543). Match play makes use of physical and

strategic challenges; the management challenges are chiefly economic. Sports games are equally represented in Japan and the West, and some of the most popular ones include the Western *FIFA* Football franchise (EA Sports, 1993-2014) and Japanese *Pro Evolution Soccer* games (Konami, 2001-2014).

Vehicle simulators include games, such as **racing games**, where the objective is to control a vehicle. These vehicles can be in the air, on the ground, on water or in space. They can be races against other players or artificially intelligent opponents, or they can involve exploration or simply the experience of using the vehicle. Vehicle games are created equally and enjoy popularity both in Japan and the West.

In **puzzle games** the primary objective is to overcome logical and conceptual challenges, and the games usually involve shapes, colors, or symbol which the player must manipulate. These games often test the player's pattern recognition, logic or understanding of a process. **Adventure games** are similar in that they contain puzzles within the game, but place more emphasis on storytelling, exploration and character interaction in the form of dialogue. Adventure games involve a player-controlled avatar in an interactive story. An interesting sub-genre of adventure games is called **visual novel**. I will introduce games of these genres in depth in chapter 4.1.

A **strategy game** is one where most of the challenges revolve around strategic conflict and the player may choose among various actions or moves in most situations within the game. There may be other types of challenges as well, but they are very rarely related to physical coordination. The player must achieve victory through planning a series of actions against one or multiple opponents controlled either by the AI or another player. Local variations of this genre shall be introduced in chapter 4.1.

Simulators are games, which attempt to copy various real life activities, originally in the purpose of teaching the player skills but nowadays also for pure amusement. The object is not to control the simulation fully, but instead to intervene within the unfolding complex developments (geo-politics, city development or fantastical evolutionary processes etc.), to shape these dynamic forces according to each game's algorithms. The player, therefore, does not 'identify' with any individual protagonist, as they might if watching a film. Instead the player often has to juggle numerous different roles at the same time. Nowadays there are various different simulators, where the player can, for example take care of a virtual pet, create virtual people and control their lives or build and manage a virtual city. What

differentiates most simulators from other types of games (excluding social network games and most sandbox games) is that they are open-ended with no strict winning or losing conditions.

In an **open world** game (sometimes referred to as a sandbox game) the player may roam freely through a virtual world choose to approach different objectives in considerably creative and independent ways. Generally restrictions are still enforced because of technical or in-game limitations. At the time of writing this thesis the most popular open world game was *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011), which has sold over 60 million copies as of October 2014, making the intellectual property worth 2.5 billion dollars.

Rhythm games challenge the player's sense of rhythm, and require the player to press, hit or play the corresponding key at the correct moment or dance stepping on the correct keys with a certain song playing on the background while an avatar dances on the screen, or to play dedicated music using a controller that resembles an instrument. Some of the most popular rhythm games are *Taiko no Tatsujin* (太鼓の達人, lit. "Taiko Master", Namco, 2001) games, where the player simulates playing a Taiko drum in time with music, and *Dance Dance Revolution* [ダンスダンスレボリューション, Konami, 1998], where the players dance on a specially designed dancing platform putting their feet on the corresponding marks dictated by a sequence on the screen. Rhythm games are commonly developed and played in Japan, but some iterations can be seen in the West as well. For example, Harmonix released *Guitar Hero* (2005), where the player/s could create a virtual rock band. This game was, in fact, based on Japanese *GuitarFreaks* (ギターフリークス), a music video game series produced by Konami in 1998.

3. Material

In this section I shall introduce the main materials and data that has been used in this thesis while also giving an overview of the video game trends in Japan compared to the West. Chapter 3.1 focuses on previous research, books and other material that have given me insight to the world of digital games and cultural factors in Japan. In chapter 3.2 I shall briefly introduce the interviewees who have provided me with their insight to the differences between the games market in Japan and elsewhere. Section 3.3 introduces the history and current situation of Japanese game market focusing on game titles, gaming platforms and social network games while comparing the preferences of gaming platforms and game types between Japan and the West and introducing a few interesting genre variations in these areas.

3.1 Previous research

In this thesis I have benefitted from the information in the following books, theses and articles related to game design, digital games, Japanese games and Japanese culture:

Salen and Zimmerman's (2004) book *Rules of Play- Game Design Fundamentals* gives the reader some eye-opening basics regarding digital games and their mechanics, as does Adams & Rollings's book *Game Design and Development: Fundamentals of Game Design* (2007), one of my main sources related to digital game design and development. Lister et al. (2009) have composed an introductory book about relatively new media formats and their studies. Laurie Taylor (2005) has analyzed the different camera perspectives, or in other words point-of-views that games use, and I have greatly benefitted from his work. Drew Davidson (2013) has instead delved into the interactivity in a Japanese game *Ico*, and written about the process of how the player gets involved, immersed and finally invested in a game. Ted Friedman (1998) has researched a similar subject researching how the interactivity in simulator games, such as Civilization eventually leads the player to a stage where they are so immersed to a game that they forget themselves and become "one with the computer". In addition, Greg Smith (2002) delves into how dialogue conventions between characters is built into a story-driven game such as Final Fantasy VII in his article for the international journal of computer game research. Peter Askelöf (2013) has written an extensive thesis about social networking games in Japan in comparison to Western ones, analyzing monetization mechanics and player preferences regarding free-to-play games in Japan. In addition, Serkan Toto, a Japan based consultant on the subject of social networking games has a very informative web page, which I have visited for news on the ever-developing situation in Japan.

Furthermore, I have used Martin Picard's article *The Foundation of Geemu: A Brief History of Early Japanese Video Games* as my main source in chapter 3.3.1 discussing the history of Japanese digital games. Aoyama and Izushi (2003) have also written about how manga and anime culture alongside skillful engineering culture has affected Japanese games and gaming culture in the past and today, which has also been an immensely informative article regarding the foundations of Japanese games industry.

Brian Ashcraft is a journalist and author currently writing for outlets such as *Kotaku*, a news site dedicated to gaming and East Asian culture. His expertise has been of immense help to me during the research and writing of this thesis. Moreover, Patrick W. Galbraith's dedication to researching otaku culture in Japan has provided me with valuable insight to the concept of *moe*, to dating simulators and visual novels, all very uniquely Japanese. He is the author of books such as *The Moé Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime, and Gaming* (2014) and *The Otaku Encyclopedia: An Insider's Guide to the Subculture of Cool Japan* (2009). David Surman has also written an analysis of the fetishism and reusing of characters in

the otaku circles as well as the expression of what the artist Takashi Murakami has coined as SuperFlatness, in the game *Katamari Damacy* in his article *Notes on Superflat and its Expression in Videogames* (2008). Anita Ngai (2005) wrote her thesis about how Western and Japanese players have different preferences regarding narrative and gameplay, and some of her analyses have been beneficial when composing this thesis. Damian Asling (2010) has instead written his work about how game styles and aesthetics communicate cultural values and exchange between Western and Eastern societies.

Martin Picard has analyzed the trans-nationality and lack of clear cultural essence in Japanese horror games in his work *Haunting Backgrounds: Transnationality and Intermediality in Japanese Survival Horror Video Games* (2009). Much to the same note, Koichi Iwabuchi (2004) claims that Pokémon's global success happened greatly because of transnational corporate partnerships and localization strategies between Japanese and Western media industries, and that Pokémon had to be "Americanized" in order for it to appeal to Western audience. He also writes about how Japanese anime and game creators tend to purposely create non-Japanese, "culturally odorless" characters for them to sell globally. While Xianyi Huang (2009) has studied the localization and reception of Japanese games in the United States alongside analyzing some interesting cases, Jérémie Pelletier-Gagnon (2011) has delved in a very similar issue exploring localization and circulation of Japanese video games in North America, focusing on game developers' localization attempts and on the fan reactions to them while pondering whether some of the cultural differences in games are in fact created by game developers' and distributers' preconceptions instead of fan expectations.

In addition, it has been important to research material regarding Japanese cultural and historical factors that can affect how a Japanese person perceives a video game or especially characters within them. Anne Allison (2006) has written a deeply insightful book *Millenial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* focusing on the features of Japanese characters and their commodification reflected on the traditional religions and history of Japan as well as on the modern capitalism of contemporary Japan. She analyzes the reasons why characters and phenomena such as Pokémon and Tamagotchi became so hugely popular abroad and inside Japan. Whereas Japanese games have received fairly little attention in the academic world, Japanese animation, anime, has been thoroughly analyzed. As the Japanese game industry borrows heavily from anime, most of the conclusions about anime characters can be used in games research as well. For example, Eri Izawa (1997) has explored the strong, hidden emotions within Japanese anime characters, and Roland Kelts (2006) has written a book about character design and appeal in Japanese anime.

3.2 Interviews: Conducting and use of data

I have interviewed representatives from Western game companies via e-mail in order to gain more insight to the theme of this thesis. The questions asked were about their experiences when publishing their games in Japan or when dealing with Japanese partners, but understandably most of them chose not to reveal much of their sales strategies or data. However, some of the interviewees gave their opinions on why Western games have thus far been relatively unsuccessful in Japan, and I shall use their comments on this thesis. The interviewees were: Antti Szurawitzki, a producer from RedLynx, a Ubisoft studio, Antti Sonninen, head of Japan offices of Rovio Entertainment, Antti Stén, the CEO of Boomlagoon, and Joonas Laakso, a producer from Remedy Entertainment. The questions I asked were somewhat modified for each interviewee to take their personal background into consideration. The questions can be found in the appendix.

I have also been able to meet and interview people from localization offices. Shintaro Kanaoya is the founder of Chorus Worldwide, a company that publishes and tailors digitally distributed Western content to Japan, and he kindly provided me with insight to the differences of Japanese and Western gaming worlds via e-mail. Furthermore, I have had a conversation with Hiroshi Ogawa, the director of Worker Bee Inc., a Japanese localization company, and he has generously agreed that I can use some of his comments in this thesis.

3.3 Japanese Video Gaming Trends

In this section I shall analyze the history of video games and gaming platforms in Japan until 2014 reviewed side-by side with sales data provided by *Video Game Chartz* database. Chapter 3.3.4 also introduces the trends regarding social network games in Japan and in section 3.3.5 I shall give an overview of some interesting genre variations in Japan and the West.

3.3.1 A brief history of Japanese games

The Japanese amusement business has its roots in the Corinthian games introduced during the Taisho Era (1912-1926) at Japanese festivals, in exhibitions and other outdoor entertainment venues, as well as in department store rooftops and pachinko parlors (Eickhorst, 2006:14-17 cited in Picard, 2013). Aoyama and Izushi explain that the Japanese game industry began in the arcade sector that was mainly created by amusement machines companies alongside consumer electronics, toys and television manufacturers companies, and add that the arcade business have gotten a momentum through overseas business collaborations. They argue that the Japanese game industry is connected to socially and historically embed foundation of imagination and creativity based on manga and animation films and skilled

engineers within the Japan's consumer electronics industry. These foundations, they explain, alongside platform developers such as Nintendo and Sony timely entering the video games industry, have been essential to the creation of the field of video games, and have resulted in a "vertically disintegrated industrial complex with hardware manufacturers" as well as a variety of small game software houses. In fact, in all arts and design schools Aoyama and Izushi surveyed, programs on animated films and cartoons are run in conjunction with ones on video games, often sharing curricula (e.g. computer grapchis, 3D animations) among them. Industry employees often serve as instructors, and some firms, such as Konami, set up their own vocational schools, which are a pathway to employment in the industry. (Aoyama & Izushi, 2003: 426-440)

Four Japanese entertainment companies have played a big role in the importation and development of video games in Japan, namely Sega, Taito, Namco and Nintendo (Picard, 2013). Picard writes that Atari developed *Pong* in 1972, and soon Japanese amusement companies took part in the game industry. For example, he continues, Taito and Sega created Pong clones for amusement spaces in 1973, and started releasing hockey and soccer games. Japanese companies began exporting their products in 1974, and Namco formed a partnership with Atari to become the official distributor of Atari games in Japanese territory (Picard, 2013). Nintendo was founded in 1889 and while it originally produced handmade *hanafuda* playing-cards and later toys, it also joined the blooming games industry in 1974 after it had an alliance with the American pioneer Magnavox to develop and produce optoelectronic guns for the Odyssey-console, which was released in 1972 (Aoyama & Izushi, 2003:427). This background as a toys and trading cards producer is clearly visible in Nintendo's game projects, such as Pokémon, which has sold a massive amount of toys and trading cards on the side.

The Japanese video game industry began not only in a context of importation, but also of strong competition and through a model of "cloning", where highly acclaimed games were quickly followed by similar products, Picard writes, and continues by telling that Japanese game companies developed several arcade games, exporting some to the United States, but they only had a modest success in Japan. The PC-8001, PC-8801, PC-9801 and the MSX standard were hugely popular, so many Japanese video game developers produced exclusive titles for these platforms, which eventually led to Taito's *Space Invaders* being developed for these platforms in 1978 (Picard, 2013). It turned out to be immensely popular both in Japan and the USA, and like many other successful games before it, it ended up being cloned, beginning the whole genre of side-scrolling shooting games (*shoot 'em ups*), which still remain a niche genre in Japan today (Picard 2013), but fairly an unknown genre in the West.

Nintendo was directly involved at the onset in the home video game industry, and through these partnerships, the company has been able to have a direct look at the industry in North

America (Gorges, 2011 cited in Picard, 2013). The production of Japanese home consoles started in 1975 with the toy company Epoch and its "TV Tennis Electrotennis", Picard writes. Interestingly, during the mid-1970s, 90 percent of Japanese consoles were made by television giants (Toshiba, Sharp, Matsushita/Panasonic), and that is why the name "*TV geemu*" (or *terebi geemu*) is used to refer to a "video game" in Japan even today (Picard, 2013). Other massive successes followed. Namco published *Pac-Man* while Nintendo created the Nintendo Leisure System as a subsidiary for its entertainment activities, and started developing clones of various existing titles while creating original titles, until Shigeru Miyamoto designed *Donkey Kong,* the most successful Nintendo Arcade game to date in 1981 (Ibid.). The "TV geemu generation" was also largely established through the contribution of a single game in 1985, which then became a series and a franchise, *Super Mario Bros* (Ibid).

Picard writes that when commercializing the Nintendo console, "razor and razor-blade" business model, in which no benefit was made on hardware but on software, was used. He adds that Nintendo also developed tactics of mobilizing "pester-power", where they offered more "mature" games (like Go and mah-jong games, sports simulations such as golf, soccer, or baseball simulators and a few educational games) during launch window in order to attract adults and sell hardware to their target audience, the kids. (Picard, 2013) He also states that

> "In order to increase and sustain the commercial success of the console, they also carefully managed an effective structure of production and consumption, from licenses to third party publishers, rigid in-house software development infrastructures, and carefully planned promotional activities that initiated a gaming culture in Japan and around the World, as they developed in-store 'World of Nintendo' merchandising displays; sponsored video game competitions; established co-sponsorships and cross-licensing arrangements with [multinationals]; and set up a network of over 250 fan clubs (Picard, 2013)"

Gonzo Digimation Holding's Shinichiro Ishikawa says that Japan was basically focused on a console market in the 1980s and 1990s while the US and Europe concentrated on the personal computers (Kelts, 2006:196). This led to a disparity in game production as Japanese developers became good at creating games for the consoles and Japanese gamers used only consoles to play those games, whereas Western gamer developers were not used to developing games on consoles. If a Western console game was imported to Japan it was commonly worse quality than its Japanese counterpart, leading to the proverb that still sometimes prevails among Japanese developers: "Western game, crap game" (*yôgê kusogê*). I shall look into the current situation regarding gaming platforms in Japan and the West in the next section, and will provide an overview of the sales data of video games in Japan in chapter 3.3.3.

3.3.2 Gaming Platforms in Japan and the West

In this section I am introducing the main differences between Japanese and Western game scene related to gaming platforms. I attempt to explain some of the reasons for these facts below while also proving my point with sales data.

According to VGChartz, which lists the total worldwide sales of gaming platforms, PlayStation 3 (PS3) has sold 9.91 million units, Nintendo Wii 12.76 million units, Nintendo DS 33.01 million and PlayStation portable (PSP) 19.97 million units in Japan as of June 2014. Xbox 360, however, has only sold a measly 1.66 million units. Instead in Europe PS3 has sold 32.98 million units, Nintendo Wii 33.75 million, Nintendo DS 52.07 million, PSP 24.14 and Xbox 360 25.23 million units. We can see that the handheld Nintendo DS alongside another handheld console, PSP are selling the most units in Japan. The Japanese Nintendo Wii and PS3 are dominating the home console market in Japan, while the Western console Xbox 360 is struggling to get noticed at all. In contrast, although Nintendo DS (and the newer 3DS) is clearly immensely popular in Europe as well, there is no clear winner or loser amongst the other consoles.

The unpopularity of Xbox and dominance of Nintendo and PlayStation could be explained with a few factors. Firstly, one could find reasoning within Japanese ethnocentrism and with the long history of Nintendo and PlayStation in Japan. As Shintaro Kanaoya, the CEO of Chorus Worldwide explains, "Xbox struggles due to the resistance to the brand, and the preference for Sony and Nintendo platforms. Japanese gamers never took to Xbox, which was seen as loud, big, and lacking relevant content vs. PS2. Xbox 360 suffered the same issue, and being pitted against Sony's PS3. When making a big investment like a new console, the power and history of Sony and Nintendo are hard to overcome in their home nation" [interview with Kanaoya, 2014]. Secondly, physical factors cannot be overlooked: The original Xbox controller is designed to be bigger to fit a (Caucasian) male hand. However, Asian hands are often comparatively smaller (Xbox has countered this, however, by offering an alternative, smaller controller S [Emery, 2002]). Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Xbox exclusive games are mostly produced outside of Japan and often have a more "realistic" tone to them, whereas Nintendo and PlayStation focus on a lot of Japanese games. As Joonas Laakso, the producer of remedy observes, "parts [of the reasons why Microsoft cannot sell in Japan] are just the alien marketing and product design, the outright rude size, the incorrectly pitched software (very macho, guy-oriented with war themes and big bulging men and drooling aliens. You do need to release on Sony and Nintendo consoles to sell anything" [interview with Laakso, 2014]. I will observe and analyze these in-game differences between Japanese and Western games in this thesis.

In addition, Japan has always been a very mobile country, and its citizens spend a lot of time on average in a public transport vehicle. Commuting can take as much as from three to five hours daily if one works in Tokyo, and according to Anne Allison nomadism through scattered locations from cram school to arcade halls and from work to home characterizes the postmodern world more than anything (Allison, 2006:67). A large number of Japanese value goods that provide a sense of security, privacy and warmth, and according to Allison, both baths and cell phones are regarded as "private heavens" and "private resorts" (Allison, 2006:86). Raymond Williams has described this as "mobile privatization" and Kogawa Tetsuo calls Japan a culture with "electronic individualism" (Williams, 1975; Kogawa, 1984 cited in Allison, 2006:86). Allison mentions a 1987 study on consumer trends composed by an advertising agency *Hakuhodô*, where respondents were asked to draw their dream house. Many of the respondents sketched single rooms or enclosed spaces that were arguably intended to be inhabited alone, and the researchers found these images to be "autistic", but bright rather than dark. The conclusion that has been tracked throughout 1990s is that this is a contemporary mind-set, where one views their self as "fenced-in paradise" and wants to protect their own space while not interfering with others' (Ibid.). For this reason it is no surprise that the first hand-held gaming devices have been developed in Japan, and that handheld consoles, such as Nintendo DS (or 3DS) and PSP (or Playstation Vita) dominate the sales figures. This brings me to another observation about the popularity of certain kinds of platforms and the rejection of others: Most of the apartments in Japan are very small, and limit the possibility of having big gaming stations around. Computers and big television screens take space, and people living in a single-room apartment can avoid the problem by having a hand-held console. A lot of the times a Japanese person will live with their parents until they get married, which also limits the choice of gaming space and technology.

Furthermore, Journalist Ryan Winterhalter claims that PC gaming was popular in Japan only during the early '80s, since before the release of the Famicom (ironically stemming from the words family and computer) in 1983 Japanese role-playing games were getting their start on these machines (Winterhalter, 2011). However, nowadays PC represents only a niche gaming platform in Japan. According to an Akihabara games shop clerk, the image of PC games in a Japanese gamer's mind is that they are either dating simulators or first-person shooters, and that they are expensive (Ashcraft, 2013). Furthermore Kanaoya asserts that "PC is more popular than ever, but a stigma exists that PC gaming in Japan was the domain of porn/female exploitation gaming. This hasn't completely gone away. It's still seen largely as the preserve of the ultra-otaku" [Interview with Kanaoya, 2014]. The PC is also perceived as a complicated machine with software installations and difficult settings compared to game consoles, which are dedicated only to gaming (Ashcraft, 2013). In Europe and America, digital download service

providers, such as Valve Corporation and Gog.com are some of the most powerful agents in the industry, and other game companies, such as Blizzard Entertainment and Electronic Arts provide digitally downloadable versions of their products on their own clients. Unfortunately for the Japanese players, only a small proportion of these games are offered in Japanese and the prices are only in Euros and Dollars, which makes it hard for those who only speak Japanese and carry yen to familiarize themselves with these systems or to play the games they offer. One can also speculate that the Japanese are distrustful of payments online or with a credit card as well as towards digital downloads, since in Japan games are most often bought as retail versions, and thus unlike in other places in the world, game stores selling physical copies of games are still relatively successful. This trend is changing, however, as nowadays one can also download games digitally on their console (PlayStation Plus-service is a popular example of this tendency).

Interestingly, in Japan's neighbor South Korea, PC is an immensely popular gaming platform, and the country is famous for having the most skilled e-Sports players in the world. Secondly, Blizzard Entertainment's world widely popular massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft* (2004) is commonly enjoyed in China, and the expansion published in 2011 (*Mists of Pandaria*) added iconic Chinese foods, landscapes and a race of human-resembling pandas to the game. In contrast, neither of these games are played much in Japan, and the most popular Japanese MMORPG to date, *Final Fantasy XI* (ファイナルファンタジー*XI*, Square Enix, 2002), was published on PS2 and Xbox 360 in addition to PC.

Nowadays people all around the world have largely migrated their gaming habits towards playing on a mobile phone or tablet, but the aforementioned devices (PC, PlayStation consoles, Xbox consoles and Nintendo consoles.) will not likely lose their position as platforms for "deeper" gaming experiences anytime soon. While iOS devices seem to dominate the sales figures in Japan, Japan also produces its own cell phone brands that are designed to suit the specific needs of Japanese consumers and have contracts with Japanese game publishers and mobile providers (Jones, 2013).

3.3.3   Sales data of Computer and Console Games

VG Chartz (Video Game Charts) is a business intelligence and research firm and publisher of the webpage vgchartz.com that collects sales data of video games from all around the world dividing the areas it is monitoring to USA, Europe and Japan. This data has been recorded from as early as year 1990 and has the most current figures. However, these lists have been dependent on the figures developers and video game distributers have announced, so most likely some of the information is omitted. VG Chartz can be questioned for its reliability on

using estimates instead of solid numbers, for example a predicted monthly number before the end of the month, but its figures by year are very close to the official annual figures. Most of the sales related data used in this thesis has been taken from this webpage while keeping the obvious limitation in mind and used as directional, not absolute data. I have used the data from 1990 until October 2014 focusing on top 50 of the sold games in Japan every year, and will list the consoles these games have been published on in brackets in order to give an overall idea of the popularity of platforms in Japan. I shall start by listing the Western games in those lists, and then continuing with some notable examples of Japanese games (spinning sequels or selling enormous amounts, or somehow good examples of the unique characteristics of Japanese games) in the top 50 lists, focusing on some of them in my later analysis in this thesis while trying to find common themes and characteristics between them. While this thesis is focused on the Japanese market, some example titles and themes from the European and American lists will be mentioned for the sake of comparison. The games in this chapter are from the top 50 lists starting from year 2005, as they begin in VGChartz web page, but older popular games will be examined as well in the analysis section. Due to the space limitations on this thesis, the games on those charts shall not be listed per se, but examples in here, and in the further analysis will be mostly derived from them in order to find common themes regarding the situation in the European / American and Japanese market. Interested people should definitely take a look at the charts, as they do give an interesting overview of the sales situations both in Japan and the West.

When looking at the sales figures in Japan, one thing is clear: It has thus far been extremely rare for a non-Japanese game to succeed in the Japanese market. During the 24 years of available data, only 15 Western games, sequels included, have managed to reach the top 50 games sold that year. In 1991 Maxis's city-building simulator *SimCity* (Nintendo) and its sister-game *SimEarth* (Super Nintendo Entertainment System, from here on referred to as SNES) managed to reach positions #6 and #47 respectfully alongside Bullet Proof Software's legendary puzzle game *Tetris* (Nintendo), which was the fourth most sold game for 133 weeks in a row. In 1992, SimCity was ported on SNES console and sold over 166,000 units, reaching #40 in the charts. Furthermore, the sequel for SimCity, called *SimCity 2000* was released on SNES in 1995, and stayed in position #27 for 32 weeks. In 1996 Naughty Dog released an internationally popular side-scrolling platform game *Crash Bandicoot* (PS), which managed to sell quite well in Japan as well, being the only Western game to do so in two years. Crash Bandicoot has reached rank #21 for 57 weeks in 1997, and its sequels, *Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back* (PS), has appeared in rank 28 and sold almost half a million units during that year only, and *Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped* (PS), which shortly visited rank #13, selling

around 850,000 units in 1998 were pretty much the sole representatives of Western titles, alongside Electronic Arts' soccer game *FIFA: Road to World Cup 98* (PS), which also sold around half a million units, reaching rank 31. FIFA sequel, *FIFA Soccer World Championship* (PS2) sold some figures and reached number 41 in year 2000, being the only Western game to visit the top 50 list in four years.

In 2003 Rockstar Games' open-world action-adventure game *Grand Theft Auto III* (PS2) managed to reach position #41 for 15 weeks and the platform game *Ratchet and Clank* (PS2) developed by Insomniac Games stayed in position #48 for 32 weeks, selling over 500,000 units in Japan during its lifetime. The next game to end up on these lists would be as late as 2011, when Activision's first-person shooter *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* (PS3) shortly visited rank #35 and sold 315,559 units. The next year it was followed by its sequel, *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* (PS3), which managed to reach #24, selling 346,821 units, and Ubisoft's dancing games *Just Dance Wii* and *Just Dance Wii 2* (Nintendo Wii). However, years 2013 and 2014 have by far been the best year for Western games in Japan. Grand Theft Auto series sequel *Grand Theft Auto V* sold a whopping 652,337 units, staying in rank #8 for 13 weeks. Another sequel, *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (PS3) stayed in rank #21 for 8 weeks, and Naughty Dog's post-apocalyptic third-person action adventure horror game, *The Last of Us* sold 226,941 units, staying in rank #42 for a whole 29 weeks. In addition, *Diablo III* (PS3), Blizzard Entertainment's role-playing game, managed to reach spot #45 in 2014.

What we can gather from this data is that the only Western games that have succeeded well [have ended up at the top 50 lists] in Japan have been a city-building simulator (and its sequels), a puzzle game, a soccer game franchise, two platform game franchises, an open world third-person action-adventure game franchise, a few games from a first-person shooter franchise, a single role-playing game, a dancing game and a single third-person action adventure horror game.

Another kind of a trend to observe when looking at these lists is the popularity of certain game genres in Japan compared to Europe and America. Whereas in American and Europe one can see an overwhelming preference of first-person shooters and action games, Japanese gamers seem to prefer role-playing games and simulation games. Whereas action-adventure games are made in Japan, first-person shooters are almost nonexistent. Instead Japanese role-playing games, such as Square Enix's *Final Fantasy* [PS] franchise and simulators like Nintendo's *Animal Crossing* [Nintendo DS] have been successful in the West as well, while simulation games are hardly developed in Europe and America.

According to these charts, adventure games are developed somewhat rarely both in Japan and the West, but while Western adventure games can only be found within American and

European lists, Japanese versions seem to be succeeding both domestically and outside Japan. Platform games are equally represented in the West and in Japan, as is are racing games. Alongside racing, sports games seem to cross cultural barriers, and especially soccer games are popular both in Japan and in the West, but Japan has its own particular genre centered on the nationally beloved sport baseball. The same thing applies to the strategy genre, and games such as the Japanese *Pikmin* [Nintendo: Nintendo] and the American *StarCraft* [Blizzard Entertainment: PC] can be found on the lists, although in lesser amounts than, for example, role-playing games. Puzzle games instead are clearly more popular in Japan due to the prevalence of hand-held consoles, but have been increasingly introduced in the West with the dawn of mobile gaming. Horror and survival horror games are instead developed somewhat equally in Japan and outside Japan, and seem to enjoy popularity internationally, although, as asserted earlier, Japanese market has still been impenetrable by Western (horror) games. Games, such as the Japanese *Resident Evil* (Capcom: PS, Nintendo, Xbox) have found their fans all over the world, but the Western *Dead Space* (Electronic Arts: PS3, Xbox360, PC) only succeeded in Europe and America. An interesting thing to find was that the Japanese game franchise *Silent Hill* (Konami Digital Entertainment: PS, Xbox, PC, PS Vita, Nintendo Wii) was in fact more popular in the West than in its home-country according to these lists. Finally, fighting games are produced almost solely in Japan, but enjoy popularity across the world.

3.3.4   Social network games in Japan

In this chapter I shall dwell into the social networking games (from here on referred to as SNG) in Japan, comparing the scene with the American and European counterpart. While this thesis is focused on differences between Japanese and Western video games, and business models have had to be excluded from further analysis, I feel that it is important to emphasize the uniqueness of the Japanese gaming culture by explaining the differences between Japanese and Western social network games culture. Some of the differences regarding these mechanics and player preferences can also be seen when analyzing other types of digital games and their players further in this thesis. Most of the expertise in this field is drawn from Peter Askelöf (2013), but internet sites, such as AppAnnie, Kotaku, Serkan Toto (a consultant focused on Japanese social games) and several other outlets have provided me with information regarding the issue in question.

In 2007 the Japanese internet media company GREE launched *Tsuri Star*, the world's first mobile social game (GREE, 2015). In Tsuri Star, players venture into different fishing grounds to catch different kinds of fish, and they can cooperate or compete with other players (Askelöf,

2013:17). The game is free-to-play, but the player can advance quicker, overcome time limitations or obtain free items by paying a small amount of money (Ibid.).

Nowadays SNGs are a huge phenomenon in Japan, and according to Japan Times, the market is dominated by gaming platforms GREE, Mobage and LINE as well as the social networking service Mixi (the Japanese equivalent to Facebook) (Akimoto, 2013). Although generally SNGs in Japan share the same concept with their Western counterparts, the Japanese market has some distinctive features. While both in Japan and the West puzzle games, such as *Puzzle & Dragons* (GungHo Online Entertainment, 2012) and *Candy Cush Saga* (King, 2012) are consumed somewhat equally, building and farming simulators enjoy great popularity in the West, while in Japan the card battle RPG genre is the most popular one, consisting of 70% of the social network games offered on Mobage and GREE in 2012 (Askelöf, 2013:18; Toto: 2012). Collectable card games commonly allow the player to perform quests and collect illustrated cards which can be used to battle enemies and other players. Nowadays intellectual property is licensed and used in the games, and in Japan almost all of the successful anime, game and other popular media brands have a collectable card game to their name. (Haulica, 2014). In the West strategy games, such as Clash of Clans (Supercell, 2012) have instead become more popular. Another major difference is related to the platform used to play the games. While in the West people tend to use Facebook, Japanese players play using their mobile phones (Askelöf, 2013:18). This trend is changing, however, as smartphones have become popular gaming devices in the West as well. Also, according to Serkan Toto, 80-90% of SNG player choose to pay transactions via carrier billing instead of a credit-card payment (commonly used in the West) (Toto, 2012).

There is also a difference between Western and the Japanese market in how much the average player chooses to pay for the game. According to Wall Street Journal, in 2012 the average ARPU (average revenue per user) of Japanese GREE users was 11.21 dollars per month, while Western Zynga's monthly ARPU was 33 cents (Wakabayashi & Ante, 2012). LINE, a messaging app from NHN Japan, that is immensely popular all around Asia (passing 400 million users in 2014), monetizes extremely well with its purchasable "stamps", which are cartoon characters that can be inserted into text messages, and with in-game purchases. (Hong, 2014; Arai, 2013) Askelöf writes in his thesis, that while this difference in revenue can be explained by the uniqueness of the Japanese market, some Japanese SNG developers claim that although such differences exist, the crucial difference lies in the games themselves, which monetize their users better (Askelöf, 2013: 19). Masanari Arai from VentureBeat explains that Japanese mobile users have been accustomed to paying for usage of apps since 1999, when the mobile carrier Docomo created a market for applications (comparable to an app store), and charged the users for the apps that provided services, such as email access through mobile, for which it

charged 300 yen per month. In fact, he adds, most Japanese first started accessing the Web on their mobile phones instead of a PC (Arai, 2013). Because of this the cultural assumptions regarding these apps are different in Japan, and consequently so is the revenue. Today, major online retailers such as Amazon and Rakuten get about 60 percent of their purchases from mobile Japan, because Japanese people are so accustomed to shopping via their phones, Arai adds, and claims that in Japan about 40 million of the country's population of 127 million people own a smartphone – roughly 25% of them use iOS, and 75% use an Android (Ibid.). Martin Robinson from Eurogamer magazine comments that there is a brilliant symmetry to all of this: "Japan's games industry, built on arcades that happily gobbled up 100 yen coins, is perhaps better placed than anywhere else to carve a future from micro-transactions", he writes (Robinson, 2012).

Furthermore, another major difference can be found on the mechanic that Western and Japanese SNG platforms use to form their social graphs. Facebook, which is currently the leading browser platform for SNGs in the West, implements real name registration. This means that most of the Western SNGs use the real social graph, which is composed with friendships and social connections derived from real life. In contrast, Japanese leading SNG platforms use anonymous registration, forming a virtual social graph where players are usually not connected with their real life friends. (Askelöf, 2013: 28) Serkan Toto explains that social actions such as sending messages to each other are not important building blocks in Japanese SNGs, so it is not necessary for other players to be your friends. He adds that the two leading platform providers in Japan, GREE and DeNA employ people to screen messages in order to prevent people from revealing their real identity, and to keep the platforms anonymous (Toto, 2012). Antti Szurawitzki, a producer at RedLynx, who has helped localize social network games to Japan agrees that Japanese players prefer messaging with a user name instead of a real name, and with friends they know instead of unknown people in order to maintain privacy [interview with Szurawitzki, 2015]. There are many reasons for this anonymity. One of them is to ensure player safety, Askelöf asserts, but anonymity also protects players from unwanted requests and notifications, and lets them play without their friends and acquaintances knowing about it – and about their possible addiction (Askelöf, 2013:19). According to Serkan Toto, privacy is immensely important to the Japanese to whom direct confrontation or interaction is not commonly the norm (Toto, cited in Craft, 2012). A player, Takashi Taira, plays a virtual collectible cards game with strangers using an avatar, which is very much unlike him. In gaming, he says, you can become someone else, which is appealing in Japan (Ibid.).

Furthermore, a common feature of Japanese SNGs is a gambling-like mechanism called *gacha*. The term gacha is derived from the onomatopoeia sound *gacha-gacha*, which refers to the rustling sound that capsule-toy vending machines make when their handles are rotated. They disperse random items in return for coins, and several Japanese SNGs have a virtual version of this kind of a machine. The player can spin the gacha and get a virtual item in return. Usually the player is offered a free spin once per day, but must pay for extra spins. Premium gacha only contains special rare items and require hard currency to spin. The gacha system provides the player with an incentive to return to the game daily in order to get their free spin, while also giving an opportunity to monetize from players who are motivated to pay extra for a chance of obtaining a rare item. The items in the gacha have a certain probability of appearing, which makes the gacha system resemble a type of lottery. (Askelöf, 2013: 61) These types of mechanics were for a long time unregulated in Japan, and companies could make enormous amounts of money with this mechanism (making the back then 35 years old DeNA founder the youngest billionaire in Japan). Despite online gambling being unregulated, the popular gambling facilities, Pachinko parlors are strictly controlled by the Japanese gambling law. Thus SNG monetization systems and gacha mechanism especially has been the target of harsh critique, and claims of it stimulating gambling and taking advantage of a loophole of virtual items being unregulated have been presented. (Ibid:62) The evolved gacha mechanism, called *kompu-gacha* (complete gacha) contains rare items that belong to a series, and that can typically only be received by spinning this gacha. These items are only valuable as a complete collection. The more items the player has from this collection, the stronger their motivation to keep spinning in order to complete their collection, but the odds of receiving just the final missing items decrease the closer the collection is to completion. This mechanism has been said to cause even more addiction than the regular gacha, and during spring 2012, the Japanese government made kompu-gacha illegal in all Japanese games. However, regular gacha is still allowed. (Ibid.)

Due to this regulation, GREE, DeNA, Mixi and two other platform operators formed an industry council, later to become the association JASGA. They agreed on self-regulatory measures which affect all developers releasing games on these platforms. These regulations ban kompu-gacha and similar mechanisms, and game makers are now obliged to display probabilities of winning items. (Askelöf, 2013:62) According to Gamesindustry.biz, the stocks of GREE and DeNA plummeted 22% after the regulations, but Nida Rasheed claims that in the end the effect wasn't as devastating as expected, and the profits of these companies rose around twenty percent soon after in 2012 (Rasheed, 2012; Williams, 2012). Following the ban of kompu-gacha, some Japanese game developers invented a new gacha system called *box gacha*, which is a virtual box that is unique to each player, and that is filled with items with

different desirability levels. The quantity of each item is announced to the player beforehand, and can be viewed at any moment. When the gacha is used, a random item is removed from the box and given to the player. This system ensures that if a player receives a less sought-after item, the likelihood of receiving a better item on the next spin increases, which increases the desire to keep spinning the gacha. The player is also given an option to reset the box to fill it up with its original content once more. (Askelöf, 2013:62-63)

Peter Askelöf analyzed some of the most popular social networking games in Japan in order to find unique characteristics in their mechanisms. He found out that all of the games he researched (with the exception of Tsuri Star) contained a social point system. According to Askelöf, in *Rage of Bahamut* (Mobage, 2012) and *Puzzle & Dragons* (Gungho Online, 2012) these points are called Friendship Points, and in other games they can be referred to things such as Happy Points, Cooperation Points or Bond Points. Social points exist to reward the player for performing social actions, such as helping their friends or sending a message, and can be given to the player for logging in the game daily. They can be used for different things depending on the game. Askelöf lists functions such as spinning the gacha system, where the player can win boosts, and powerups, that restore energy (in order to let the player play more even after their original energies had been depleted). (Askelöf, 2013:68) The most powerful boosts and power-ups in the can often not be bought directly using hard currency, but must be instead won in a campaign or by playing the gacha system, Askelöf writes (Ibid:76). Yuki Naitô, founder and CEO of Tokyo based SNG developer Drecom, emphasizes the use of limited time campaigns as one of the keys to success for Japanese SNGs (Naitô, 2012).

Most of the games Askelöf researched used login bonuses, which rewarded returning players accumulatively. Interestingly this kind of a system contains a stamp calendar, which clearly shows the player the rewards they can obtain by consistently returning to the game, and it's presented every day the player logs in during the login bonus campaign, and the daily reward is given immediately. Some games did not require the player to log in every day in a row, but instead during certain number of days in the course of the campaign (Askelöf, 2013:70). Although Western games often use these accumulative login bonus mechanisms, the content of the rewards is kept secret from the players, Askelöf observes. Japanese games differ in that they use this revealed reward as an incentive to keep the players coming back, provided that the reward is good enough for the player to be motivated to work for it.

Another thing Askelöf realized was that instead using the categorized leaderboard most of the Western games seem to prefer, all of the Japanese games he researched had a global infinite leaderboard of a sort (Askelöf, 2013:74). While there is a risk of losing new players that compare their scores to the strongest players when using the infinite leaderboard, the

leaderboard was shown only if the player chose to view it, and commonly only in connection with competitive campaigns. Cooperative and competitive campaigns challenge the players to collect as many certain campaign related items as they can. They are rewarded for the amount of items collected and for their placement in the ranking. There are various rewards for collecting items set at different levels, and the more items the player collects, the higher the rewards become. For lower level players the campaign becomes cooperative as the players work together with other players to obtain the desired items, and for higher level players the goal is to reach a high spot on the leaderboard, with different rewards on each level. There are variations to this sort of a campaign in order to give the campaigns their unique quirks and preventing gameplay from becoming boring and predictable, while using a format familiar to the players. For example, sometimes players battle each other for a spot in the ranking instead of collecting items. (Ibid:76)

3.3.5   Genre variations in Japan and the West

In this section I shall delve in to the genres that are somehow unique or different between Japan and the West. As these genres are sometimes immensely different from each other, altered or even absent from the other's region, I will give an overview of them in this chapter.

From puzzle games to adventure games and interactive stories

Some of the most popular games in Japan are related to learning and solving riddles and puzzles, and especially because of the mobile games industry they have become popular in the West as well. Many Japanese people, especially children, use their hand-held gaming devices for learning in several fields, and one game type unique to the Japanese audience is for learning kanji. In addition, brain-teaser games are offered, and for example, *Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training: How Old is Your Brain?* (Nintendo, 2005) DS-game has sold well in the West as well. One of the newest addition to these types of mobile games is Tokyo based startup Translimit's app called *BrainWars*, published in 2014 to iOS devices all around the world. It pits players against each other in sets of mental exercise quiz games. At the end of July in 2014 the app had already reached 3rd place in the top grossing rank of the US App Store, and curiously 95% of the players were located outside of Japan (Corbin & Horwitz, 2014).

Katamari Damacy (塊魂, lit "clump soul") (Namco, 2004] and *I.Q.:Intelligent Qube* (1997, G-Artists) both use a 3D environment as a field of puzzles. *I.Q.:Intelligent Qube* is a third-person puzzle game, where the player controls a character who must run around a platform made of cubes and avoid being knocked out of the stage by clearing certain cubes using certain game-mechanics. In Katamari Damacy the player controls the Prince, son of King of All Cosmos, who

must rebuild the stars, constellations and the Moon because his father accidentally wiped them out during a drinking spree. This rebuilding is done by collecting material with a "katamari", a magical ball that allows anything smaller than it to stick to it and make it grow.

Although rarer in the West, perhaps the most legendary puzzle game, *Tetris*, was in fact developed by a Western programmer Alexey Pajitnov in 1984. In addition one of the few, but immensely popular puzzle games created in the West is the first-person puzzle-platform game *Portal* (Valve Corporation, 2007), which uses 3D-based puzzles of moving objects and the protagonist through created portals within a 3D space. In the game, the protagonist must perform various intelligence tests for an artificial intelligence in order to receive promised cake when all the puzzles are complete.

Instead among the various highly acclaimed *adventure games* in Europe and America one can mention examples like the *Monkey Island* series (LucasArts, 1990-2010), where a comical guy, Guybrush Threepwood wants to become a pirate, and *Syberia* games (Microids, 2002-2004), where a young woman attempts to wrap up a sale on behalf of her law firm in a remote French village.

Interestingly, even though *Professor Layton* (Level-5, 2007-2014), a game franchise on Nintendo DS console that combines puzzle and adventure game genres making the player solve puzzles and riddles given by various characters in order to advance in the storyline is popular outside Japan as well, games based on riddles are hardly made in Europe or USA (with the exception of Telltale Games' *Nelson Tethers – Puzzle Agent, 2010*). Furthermore, adventure games are not commonly found in Japan, but Japanese indie developers have created an interesting sub-genre of adventure games called visual novels.

Visual novels are a genre, where like the name suggests the player follows and sometimes affects a text-based story with different visual images. These stories vary from horror games to murder mysteries or romantic to even erotic or pornographic tales. In most visual novels the game worlds are seen through the protagonist's eyes. Two-dimensional images are preferred for their production costs and because they look better than three-dimensional polygons when viewed close up (Galbraith, 2011). Backgrounds in the games are usually static, but change as the protagonist changes location, with onscreen texts describing the place and situation. The protagonist encounters characters, who appear on screen and each have unique designs from their looks to personalities. Most games offer multiple possible endings to the story, which allows the player to replay the game multiple times to unlock the different branches or extra scenes or options in the game. These endings can be affected through different dialogue options and actions offered during the game, but as researcher and author Patrick W. Galbraith asserts, the mechanics of the game system, which may include settings to proceed automatically, encourage passivity, and the player is unable to drastically impact or change the

narrative reality (Taylor, 2007 in Galbraith, 2011). Visual novels differ from Western adventure games for their first-person perspective and by their lack (or at least rarity) of logic puzzles or inventory-based puzzles, being streamlined and quite easy relying more on storytelling than challenge. Furthermore, instead of point-and-click type interface, interaction is handled through menus.

Most commonly visual novels are focused around interacting with *bishôjo* (beautiful girls). Virtual relationships can be created with love or dating simulators, which vary from visual novel types to actual virtual partners which react to different actions the player makes. In dating simulators the focus is on dating, and most commonly the main character is a pre-determined young male whose face is not shown during the game, making him an avatar for the player. He is not voice-acted, but often his thoughts and dialogue can be seen as text on the screen. There are usually multiple, voice-acted girls that the player can interact with, and the player can commonly affect the relationship with these girls through their choice dialogue options or actions. At some point of the story the girls in dating simulators might be seen nude or in erotic situations. (Galbraith, 2011)

Visual novels are not just related to dating, but explore various themes. One of the most famous visual novel adventure game franchise in Japan is the *Ace Attorney* (逆転裁判 lit. "Turnabout Trial") series (Capcom, 2011-2014) released for the handheld Nintendo devices, which revolves around different but recurring characters. The playable characters, such as the first protagonist *Phoenix Wright*, are lawyers and must solve different quirky cases by collecting evidence, interviewing witnesses and suspects in an investigation mode (first-person mode), and by cross-examining witnesses, and combining facts and items in a correct manner into solutions in a separate trial mode (third-person mode). The franchise includes elements from the adventure genre, as there are items to find and research, and some dialogue options are offered. If the player gives wrong answers (or presents non-related evidence) in the courtroom several times, they lose the case and the game is over.

The visual novel genre has inspired some Western developers as well, which can be observed by looking at games such as the *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2010) and the *Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012) that borrow some features from these choose-your-own-adventure types of games, namely an interactive story with a focus on human relationships and less of an emphasis on physical or mental challenges during gameplay. An interactive story is something that the player contributes actions for, and where they may at least somewhat affect the plot.

Heavy Rain is an interactive drama action-adventure video that was published exclusively for PS3. It sold around 27,000 units in Japan within one week, won the 2010 game designers award in Tokyo and was chosen for the annual Innovation Award by Famitsu in 2011 (Graft,

2010; Quantic Dream, 2010). In the West it has enjoyed critical acclaim and popularity as well, selling over three million copies. The game is an interactive film noir thriller centered on a mysterious origami killer who kidnaps children and drowns them during a heavy rain season, leaving origami figures containing clues behind. The story has four playable characters that the player can control during different chapters in the story, and the decisions and performance of the player changes the narrative. Any one of them can die and the story will continue leading to different scenes and endings. The game is played by moving the character and interacting with objects and non-playable characters in the story, and occasionally by responding to quick-time events which require to press the corresponding button, to move the analogue sticks or to rotate the motion-sensitive controller in a certain way. Moreover, *The Walking Dead* game is an episodic interactive drama graphic adventure derived from a famous comic series with the same name, and centers around a modern-day Georgia which has been overcome with zombies. The player controls a former university professor and convicted murderer who helps to rescue and care for a young girl in this post-apocalyptic world while trying to help other survivors and survive himself. The gameplay is focused on choosing dialogue responses and different actions from (usually timed) options and responding to quick-time events by pressing corresponding buttons. The choices the player makes during the game affect later chapters and the ending of the story. The Walking Dead has received global acclaim with several award and praising reviews, and has sold over 8.7 million episodes across all platforms.

Strategy games and tactical role-playing games

Some of the most famous Western strategy games include *Worms: Open Warfare* (Team 17, 1995-2014), where the player controls a platoon of worms across a deformable landscape, battling against another platoon of worms with humorous artillery, *StarCraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 1998-2010), where the player controls their chosen science fiction alien or human race that battles for control of a distant part of the Milky Way galaxy, and *Sid Meier's Civilization* (MicroProse, 1991-2014), where the player assumes the role of a leader that is tasked to build and manage a civilization that spans from the Bronze Age into the Space Age. All of these games include some form of warfare.

In Japan strategy games are very rarely created, and when they are they usually mix role-playing elements with strategy challenges and focus on tactical over high-level strategic gameplay. These games are called **tactical role-playing games**. In the strategy game *Pikmin* (Nintendo EAD, 2001-2004) the player controls a tiny extraterrestrial followed by even smaller creatures called Pikmin as he tries to survive and escape an uncharted planet he has crashed to. *Final Fantasy Tactics* (Square, 1997) follows the story of a young man in a fictional medieval-inspired kingdom who ends in the middle of a military conflict. The game includes a deep

storyline and role-playing elements, such as leveling, but the combat is done using turn-based tactics challenges. Finally, in *Fire Emblem* (Nintendo, 1990-2012) games there are complex stories and characters that develop relationships with each other, but the games also utilize a turn-based tactics combat system.

Simulation games

Simulators are a loved genre in Japan, but not developed as much in America or Europe, despite some exceptions. In addition, some of the all-time most sold games in Japan and in Europe have been Japanese simulators, but in contrast Western simulators (with the exception of *SimCity*) have not reached popularity in Japan. Some of the most famous simulators in Europe and America include *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000-2014) where the player fully creates and manages the lives of virtual humans called Sims. In *SimCity* (Maxis, 1989-2014) the player chooses the kind of urban environment they wish to build and maintain, in other words it is an open-ended city-building game. In *Theme Hospital* (Bullfrog Productions, 1997) the player builds and manages a goofy hospital that treats patients with hilarious diseases.

The Japanese *Tamagotchi* (1996, WiZ and Bandai) instead conquered the world by introducing a handheld device containing a digital pet that the players could take care of from birth until death, selling over 76 million units world-wide. *Harvest Moon* franchise (Marvelous Interactive, 1999-2014) combines simulator and role-playing game elements and has the player take on a role of a farmer in a town. In *Animal Crossing* games (Nintendo, 2001-2012) the player assumes the role of a human character who moves into a rural village populated by anthropomorphic animals and lives there, performing various activities and forming relationships with the other villagers. *Nintendogs* (Nintendo, 2005) instead consists of taking care of virtual dogs. Some interesting and immensely popular cases exclusive to Japan include *Monster Rancher* (Tecmo Koei, 1997), where the player captures, raises and breeds monsters and *Densha de Go!* (Taito, 1995), where the player steps into the shoes of a train driver, and tries to make sure that the train reaches each station safely and timely. To further emphasize the uniqueness of Japan regarding the simulator genre I shall introduce an interesting genre of simulators in Japan called **dating simulators** in some detail below.

According to Patrick W. Galbraith, there are about 200 makers accounting for 400 ***doujin soft*** (indie game) brands, and as few as a handful of people can easily create a game and sell several thousand copies; the most popular games sell over 150,000 copies (Galbraith, 2009). These indie game developers often create dating simulators. Galbraith estimates that there are around 200,000 to 300,000 devoted players of the genre in Japan, who are mostly male and who consistently buy games that cost between 7,000 to 10,000 yen each. They are a rather large domestic market, estimated at 25 billion yen annually. (Ibid.) Some interesting cases

include the *Idolmaster* series (Bandai Namco Games, 2005-2014), where the goal is to "raise" a girl into a pop idol as a producer (and to experience a romantic relationship with her) and *AKB1/48: Idol to Koishitara* (Namco Bandai Games, 2010), where the goal is to choose and pursue a romantic partner from the immensely popular Japanese AKB48 girl band.

There are methods these dating simulator games use to promote interactivity: Patrick Galbraith explains how an immensely popular *bishôjo* game *LovePlus* (Konami, 2009) uses technology and real-life possibilities to deepen the relationship with the virtual girl. After the protagonist has successfully completed a "friend mode" and entered "lover mode" with a chosen girl, the game becomes a set of open-ended interactions. He writes that the player earns points so he can ask his girlfriend out on a date on a certain time and to a chosen place, which they can then replicate in real-life by physically going to a similar place during these dates. In fact, he adds, the version ported to iPhone uses "augmented reality" functions by letting the users download and print off "AR markers" from Konami's website. These markers can be placed anywhere and photographed in order to see an image of this virtual girlfriend "inhabiting" the player's reality. The players can link up their DS machines in order to allow their "girlfriends" to have conversations with each other. These interactions can be shot on videos and posted online to encourage more play with these boundaries. The Nintendo DS version of the game uses touchscreen technology by implanting a "touch event", during which the player must respond with DS stylus pen to touch the girl in order to offer "physical" intimacy. According to Galbraith, "imagination is routed through bodily intimacies: touch, sound and sight all play a part in the joining of the human handler and technological companion. […] This is not a man simply manipulating a machine, but a complex interaction requiring empathy" (Galbraith, 2011).

As I have established throughout these cases, Japanese and Western game industries and cultures differ from each other greatly, but have started influencing each other regarding some genres throughout the years. Next I shall introduce some of the highly acclaimed titles among action-adventure and role-playing games, two genres which are created in Japan and in the West somewhat equally, but contain notable regional differences. In the next chapter I shall analyze the case studies of this thesis.

4. Case studies

In this section, I shall specifically focus on comparing famous Western titles with Japanese titles of the same genre with the aim of finding major differences between popular Japanese and a Western games.

Various Japanese and Western games have been played and pondered upon, but given the space limitations and for the coherence of this thesis, I have focused on chosen 18 titles from the chart of best-selling games in Japan and in the West. The chosen games are a mixture of Japanese and Western titles that have been decided upon solely based on their popularity and/or status (sales, amount of sequels, commercial success, topic of nostalgic conversations and cult status), and they are arranged to sections based on their genre. These cases are in no way representative of the whole catalogue offered, but can offer interesting insight into what is considered typical in Japan and the West. Each game's technical details are introduced in a separate spreadsheet, and these characteristics shall be analyzed in chapter 5 in order to compare the typical features of Western and Japanese game genres. Analysis of sports, racing and platform games will be omitted from this thesis, since I found that the Western and Japanese cases did not have enough of consistent differences to compare. Fighting games as well as shooters will not be analyzed in this chapter as fighting games are mainly made in Japan and shooters on the contrary mainly in Europe and America. Instead the reasons as to why first-person shooters are almost fully absent from the Japanese gaming scene will be pondered in chapter 6. Furthermore, the analysis of social network games in Japan compared to West can be found in section 3.3.4. While in section 3.3.6 I have given an overview of interesting variations between some genres in Japan and the West, in chapter 4.1 and 4.2 I shall study some of the remarkable games within two genres that are *produced (somewhat) equally in both Japan and the West and that contain notable regionally applicable differences*, Some of the games mentioned in chapter 3.3.6 are used later in this thesis to further emphasize some of my arguments, but the focus of this thesis is on the games introduced in chapters 4.1 and 4.2. The titles studied in this chapter are: *Final Fantasy VII* (1997), *Pokémon* (1996), *Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King* (2004), *Dark Souls II* (2014), *Ni No Kuni: Shikkoku no Madôshi* (2010), *Metal Gear Solid* (1998), *Ryû Ga Gotoku III* (2009), *The legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (1998), *Ôkami* (2006), *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011), *Fallout III* (2008), *Baldur's Gate II* (2000), *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009), *Mass Effect II* (2010), *Tomb Raider* (1996), *Grand Theft Auto V* (2014), *Thief III: Deadly Shadows* (2004), and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (2011).

4.1   Role-playing games

Whereas in Japan role-playing are the most popular game genre, they are produced less in Europe and America. Japanese role-playing games have been successful in and outside Japan, but Western role-playing games instead have not seemed to penetrate the heart of Japanese players despite some rather successful cases. Role-playing games in Japan and in the West

differ greatly from each other, and in this section I shall introduce the games analyzed in this thesis. The titles previewed here are the Japanese *Final Fantasy VII*, *Pokémon* franchise, *Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King*, *Dark Souls II* and *Ninokuni: Shikkoku no Madoushi*, which are compared to the popular Western games *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, *Fallout II*, *Baldur's Gate II*, *Dragon Age: Origins* and *Mass Effect II*. Further details regarding these titles can be found in the appendix A.

Japanese games

Final Fantasy VII

Original Title ファイナルファンタジーVII	Developer / Publisher Squaresoft
Platforms PlayStation	Tested Version European PlayStation version
Release Year 1997	Country of Origin Japan
Camera Fixed to third-person, rotatable on world-map, otherwise static.	Combat System Randomly generated separate battle mode. Turn-based.
Player Avatar pre-determined	Saving Save points. At any point when on world map
Single Character / Party of Characters party	Character Skills and Attributes Pre-determined. Can be slightly affected with items.
Game world and Storyline Pre-determined and static. Linear story	Character Relationships Pre-determined and static
Dialogue No dialogue options (except a few times during gameplay)	Graphics 3D, cartoon
Setting futuristic fantasy-environment with magic	Graphic Violence no gore, an emotional death-scene
Sexual Themes No	Crime No

Final Fantasy VII is the seventh installment of the immensely popular Final Fantasy series. It was the first game in the series to be released in Europe, and it has been said to be the most iconic Japanese role-playing game to date, with people still reminiscing it all around the world.

Pokémon (franchise)

Original Title ポケモン	Developer / Publisher Nintendo Corporation

Platforms	Tested Version
Game Boy/Color/Advance, Nintendo DS/3DS	Overview of the franchise
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
1996-2014	Japan
Camera	**Combat System**
Fixed to third-person	Randomly generated separate battle-mode, turn-based
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Pre-determined, often a choice from two options	At any point through a menu
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Single character, hundreds of Pokémon	Pre-determined Pokémon attributes and skills
Game world and Storyline	**Character Relationships**
Pre-determined and static. Linear story	Pre-determined and static
Dialogue	**Graphics**
No dialogue options	2D, cartoon (some newer versions are 3D)
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Fantasy-realism	No
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
No	No

Pokémon franchise is one of the most popular game franchises in Japan to date, and it became an international sensation in 1996. New installments of the game are introduced every few years, and cumulative sales of the video games have reached more than 200 million copies.

Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King

Original Title	Developer / Publisher
ドラゴンクエストVIII 空と海と大地と呪われし姫君 lit. "Dragon Quest VIII: The Sky, the Ocean, the Earth, and the Cursed Princess"	Level 5 / Square Enix
Platforms	**Tested Version**
PlayStation 2	European version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
2004	Japan
Camera	**Combat System**
Fixed to third-person, rotatable	Randomly generated, turn-based
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Pre-determined	Save-points
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Party	Pre-determined, distributable skill points
Game world and Storyline	**Character Relationships**
Pre-determined and fixed. Linear storyline	Pre-determined and static
Dialogue	**Graphics**
No dialogue options	3D, cartoon
Setting	**Graphic Violence**

Fantasy	No
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
No. One of the characters is hyper-sexualized	No

The *Dragon Quest* game franchise is one of those that enjoy a cult following in Japan. All of the games have been best-selling internationally, have been turned into a manga and anime series, and the games' mascot, the Slime, into different products that are immensely popular in Japan. Thus it has been important to include one of the games in this case study.

Dark Souls II

Original Title ダークソウル II	**Developer / Publisher** From Software / Namco Bandai Games
Platforms PS3, Xbox 360, PC, PS4, Xbox One	**Tested Version** European PS3 version
Release Year 2014	**Country of Origin** Japan
Camera Fixed to third-person, rotatable	**Combat System** Real-time
Player Avatar Fully customizable	**Saving** Save points
Single Character / Party of Characters Single character	**Character Skills and Attributes** Freely distributable skill points
Game world Pre-determined and fixed. Linear storyline	**Character Relationships** Pre-determined and static
Dialogue No dialogue options	**Graphics** 3D, photorealistic
Setting Fantasy-realism	**Graphic Violence** Some blood and death, no gore.
Sexual Themes No	**Crime** No

Dark Souls II is an odd one in the bunch of Japanese role-playing games in many ways, so it was important to include it in the comparative analysis. The game was published in 2014, and has succeeded commercially both in and outside Japan, and the reviews have been almost nothing but praise. Dark Souls combines RPG mechanics with action, and this is why it is categorized as an action RPG.

Ni no Kuni: Shikkoku no Madôshi

Original Title 二の国漆黒の魔導士 (lit. "Second Country: The Jet-Black Mage)	**Developer / Publisher** Level 5
Platforms	**Tested Version**

Nintendo DS	Japanese Nintendo DS version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
2010	Japan
Camera	**Combat System**
Fixed to third-person	Randomly generated separate battle-mode
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Pre-determined	Save points
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Party	Pre-determined
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Pre-determined and fixed. Linear storyline	Pre-determined and static
Dialogue	**Graphics**
No dialogue options	2D, cartoon
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Fantasy	No
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
No	No

Ni no Kuni: Shikkoku no Madôshi was published in co-operation with Studio Ghibli, a renowned animation studio internationally famous for its movies directed by Hayao Miyazaki. It was later on in 2013 adapted to PlayStation 3 and titled *Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* (二の国白き聖灰の女王, *Ni no Kuni: Shiroki Seihai no Joô*). The game has been highly acclaimed, receiving a Metacritic metascore of 85/100. Later in this thesis the name of the game will be shortened to Ni no Kuni.

Western games

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Original Title	**Developer / Publisher**
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	Bethesda Game Studios
Platforms	**Tested Version**
Microsoft Windows, Xbox 360, PS3	European Microsoft Windows version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
2011	America
Camera	**Combat System**
May be freely toggled between first- and third-person perspectives. Rotatable	real-time
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Fully customizable	Freely through a quick-save or menu
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Single character. Optional follower.	Freely distributable attribute and skill points
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Affected by player's choices	Affected by player's choices
Dialogue	**Graphics**
Several dialogue options	3D, photorealistic

Setting	Graphic Violence
Fantasy-realism	Yes
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
No	Yes

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim is a best-selling role-playing game developed by Bethesda Game Studios in 2011. It has sold around 20 million copies altogether and surprised everyone by also topping the Japanese best-selling lists. The game has been praised for its immensely rich and open world that the player can immerse themselves into for almost endless amounts of time, and it enjoys a Metacritic average score of 94/100 while having received numerous awards globally. During this thesis, the title of this game shall be shortened to "Skyrim".

Fallout III

Original Title	**Developer / Publisher**
Fallout III	Bethesda Game Studios
Platforms	**Tested Version**
PS3, Xbox 360, Microsoft Windows	European PS3 version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
2008	America
Camera	**Combat System**
May be freely toggled between first- and third-person perspectives. Rotatable	Real-time
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Fully customizable	Any time through quick-save or menu
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Single character, optional follower	Freely distributable attribute and skill points
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Affected by player's choices	Affected by player's choices
Dialogue	**Graphics**
Dialogue options	3D, photorealistic
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
realistic within an alternative universe	Yes
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
Some	Yes

Fallout III has sold over five million retail copies during its launch only and won numerous awards while having a Metacritic average score of 91/100.

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn

Original Title	**Developer / Publisher**
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn	BioWare / Black Isle Studios
Platforms	**Tested Version**
Microsoft Windows	European Microsoft Windows

Release Year	Country of Origin
2000	Canada
Camera	**Combat System**
Three-fourths isometric. Cannot be rotated.	Real-time, can be paused to issue commands
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Fully customizable	Any time via quick-save or menu
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Party	Freely distributable attribute and skill points
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Affected by the player's choices	Affected by the player's choices
Dialogue	**Graphics**
Dialogue options	2D, photorealistic
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
fantasy	Yes
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
Yes	Yes

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn has received critical acclaim, won numerous awards and sold more than two million units with a Metacritic average score of 95/100. From here on the game shall be referred to as Baldur's Gate II.

Dragon Age: Origins

Original Title	**Developer / Publisher**
Dragon Age: Origins	BioWare / Electronic Arts
Platforms	**Tested Version**
Microsoft Windows, Mac OS, PS3, Xbox 360	European Microsoft Windows version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
2009	America
Camera	**Combat System**
Third-person, rotatable	Real-time. Can be paused to issue commands.
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Fully customizable	At any point via quick-save or a menu
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Party of characters	Freely distributable skill points
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Affected by player's choices	Affected by player's choices
Dialogue	**Graphics**
Dialogue options	3D, photorealistic
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Medieval fantasy	Some
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
Yes	Yes

Dragon Age: Origins has been critically acclaimed with a Metacritic average score of around 90 depending on the version, chosen as the best role-playing game of year 2009 on several occasions and has sold over 3,2 million copies worldwide up until February 2010 (Electronic

Arts Inc.). In Japan the game did not go completely unnoticed, and according to VGChartz it has been selling around 80,000 copies.Dragon Age has also spun two sequels and one expansion up until 2014.

Mass Effect II

Original Title	Developer / Publisher
Mass Effect II	BioWare / Electronic Arts
Platforms	**Tested Version**
Xbox 360, PS3, Microsoft Windows	European Microsoft Windows version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
2010	America
Camera	**Combat System**
Third-person, rotatable	Real-time. Can be paused to issue commands
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Fully customizable	Freely via quick-save or a menu
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Party of characters	Freely distributable skill points
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Affected by the player's choices	Affected by the player's choices
Dialogue	**Graphics**
Dialogue options	3D, photorealistic
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Futuristic sci-fi	Some violence, but no gore
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
Yes	No

Mass Effect II is an action role-playing video game created by BioWare and published by Electronic Arts. It was ranked highly on aggregate websites such as Metacritic (and average score of 96 out of 100), received numerous awards and was a commercial success, selling over 3million copies. It is a direct sequel to its predecessor Mass Effect I and the second part of the Mass Effect Trilogy, which all in all has sold over 7 million units (Furtado, 2011).

4.2   Action-adventure games

In this section I will introduce four iconic Western and four equally iconic Japanese action-adventure games. The games analyzed are the Japanese *Metal Gear Solid*, *Ryû Ga Gotoku III*, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, *Ôkami*, and Western games *Tomb Raider*, *Grand Theft Auto V*, *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. Further details regarding these titles can be found in the appendix B.

Japanese games

__Metal Gear Solid__

Original Title メタルギアソリッド	Developer / Publisher Konami
Platforms PlayStation	**Tested Version** European PlayStation version
Release Year 1998	**Country of Origin** Japan
Camera Third-person	**Combat System** Real-time
Player Avatar Pre-determined	**Saving** Almost freely via a special menu function
Single Character / Party of Characters Single character	**Character Skills and Attributes** Pre-determined
Game world Pre-determined and fixed. Linear storyline except for one point that alters the ending	**Character Relationships** Pre-determined and static
Dialogue No dialogue options	**Graphics** 3D, photorealistic
Setting Alternate realistic universe	**Graphic Violence** Some violence, no gore
Sexual Themes No	**Crime** No

Metal Gear Solid has been internationally well received and has sold over six million copies. It has also scored an average of 94/100 in Metacritic, and is regarded by many as one of the greatest and most influential games of all time. There have been several parts to the series before the first PlayStation game, and several sequels and spinoffs before and after the title analyzed here.

__Ryû Ga Gotoku III__ / *__Yakuza III__*

Original Title 龍が如く 3 lit. "Like a Dragon 3"	Developer / Publisher Sega
Platforms PS3	**Tested Version** Original Japanese PS3 version
Release Year 2009	**Country of Origin** Japan
Camera Third-person	**Combat System** Real-time, separate battle mode
Player Avatar Pre-determined	**Saving** Freely via a menu
Single Character / Party of Characters Single character	**Character Skills and Attributes** Freely distributable skill points
Game world Pre-determined and fixed. Linear storyline.	**Character Relationships** Pre-determined and static

Dialogue	Graphics
No dialogue options	3D, photorealistic
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Realistic Japan	Yes
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
Yes	Yes

Ryû Ga Gotoku III has been an iconic action-adventure franchise in Japan spinning four games to date, but it has never truly caught up in the West. The series has sold 7.8 million copies as of November 2014 (Sega, 2014), and has spanned other media adaptations.

The Legend of Zelda: *Ocarina of Time*

Original Title	Developer / Publisher
ゼルだの伝説時のオカリナ	Nintendo
Platforms	**Tested Version**
Nintendo 64, Nintendo 3DS	Japanese Nintendo 3DS version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
1998 / 2011	Japan
Camera	**Combat System**
Third-person, generally rotatable	Real-time
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Pre-determined	Freely via a menu
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Single character	Pre-determined
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Pre-determined and fixed. Linear storyline	Pre-determined and static
Dialogue	**Graphics**
No dialogue options	3D, cartoon
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Fantasy	No
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
No	No

The Legend of Zelda games are possibly the most internationally famous action-adventure games ever come out of Japan. Ever since the first Zelda game in 1986 (The Legend of Zelda) 17 official games and several spinoffs have been published. In Japan, The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of time title has sold more than 820,000 copies in 1998, and during its lifetime over 7.6 million copies have been sold worldwide. It is the highest-rated game ever rated with a score of 99/100 in Metacritic, and has won numerous awards. A 3DS version was published in 2011.

Ôkami

Original Title	Developer / Publisher
大神 (literally "great god", "great spirit" or written with a different kanji 狼 "wolf")	Clover Studios / Capcom
Platforms	**Tested Version**
PlayStation	Japanese PlayStation version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
2006	Japan
Camera	**Combat System**
Third-person, rotatable	Real-time, separate battle mode
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Pre-determined	save points
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Single character	Experience points which can be distributed
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Pre-determined and fixed. Linear storyline	Pre-determined and static
Dialogue	**Graphics**
No dialogue options	2D, cartoon
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Medieval Japanese fantasy	No
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
No	No

Ôkami is an action-adventure video game mixing action, platform and puzzle game genres. It has been internationally praised as one of the best games ever created, and won several "game of the year" awards. Although the initial sales were not too impressive, the game became hugely popular after that. A high-definition port was released on PS3 in 2012.

Western games

Tomb Raider

Original Title	Developer / Publisher
Tomb Raider	Core Design/Eidos Interactive
Platforms	**Tested Version**
PlayStation, Sega Saturn	European PlayStation version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
1996	Britain
Camera	**Combat System**
Third-person, rotatable	Real-time
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Pre-determined	any time via quick-save or a menu
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Single character	Pre-determined
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Pre-determined and fixed. Linear storyline	Pre-determined and static
Dialogue	**Graphics**
No dialogue options	3D, photorealistic
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Realistic world	Yes

Sexual Themes	Crime
No	No

Tomb Raider has sold over seven million copies worldwide, received critical acclaim and has been considered as one of the most influential games in the 3D action-adventure genre spanning several sequels. Its average score in Metacritic is 91/100.

Grand Theft Auto V

Original Title	Developer / Publisher
Grand Theft Auto V	Rockstar Games
Platforms	**Tested Version**
Microsoft Windows, PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One	European PS3 version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
2014	America
Camera	**Combat System**
Can be toggled between first- and third-person views. Rotatable	Real-time
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Pre-determined avatars	At any point via quick-save or a menu, except during missions.
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
The player may switch between three characters who mostly work alone	Pre-determined character skills improve when the player performs certain actions
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Openly explorable world, but the main storyline is pre-determined and fixed.	Pre-determined and static
Dialogue	**Graphics**
No dialogue options	3D, photorealistic
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Realistic world	Yes
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
Yes	Yes

Grand Theft Auto V has received positive reviews, multiple awards and is currently the fastest-selling entertainment product in history earning and 1 billion dollars during the first three days of its release. The game has received particular praise for having a huge, detailed world that can be explored freely. It has a Metacritic average score of 97/100.

Thief III: Deadly Shadows

Original Title	Developer / Publisher
Thief III: Deadly Shadows	Ion Storm / Eidos Interactive
Platforms	**Tested Version**

Microsoft Windows, Xbox	European Microsoft Windows version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
2004	Britain
Camera	**Combat System**
Generally first-person, but switches to third-person in certain situations.	Real-time
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Pre-determined	At any point via quick save or a menu
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Single character	Pre-determined
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Pre-determined and fixed. Linear storyline	Pre-determined and static
Dialogue	**Graphics**
No dialogue options	3D, photorealistic
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Realistic medieval world	Violence, but not especially graphic
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
No	Yes

Thief III: Deadly Shadows has received positive reviews globally with a Metacritic average score of 85/100, and a sequel to the franchise was published in 2014. Later on in this thesis the title shall be shortened to Thief III.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution

Original Title	**Developer / Publisher**
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	Eidos Montreal / Square Enix
Platforms	**Tested Version**
Microsoft Windows, OS X, PS3, Wii U, Xbox 360	European Microsoft Windows version
Release Year	**Country of Origin**
2011	Canada
Camera	**Combat System**
First-person	Real-time
Player Avatar	**Saving**
Pre-determined	At any point via a quick save or a menu
Single Character / Party of Characters	**Character Skills and Attributes**
Single character	Freely distributable skill points
Game world	**Character Relationships**
Somewhat affected by player's choices	Affected by player's choices
Dialogue	**Graphics**
Dialogue options	3D, photorealistic
Setting	**Graphic Violence**
Futuristic sci-fi world	Yes
Sexual Themes	**Crime**
Suggestive themes, but no sex	Yes

Deus Ex: Human Revolution has been a commercial success and has received positive reviews in the West with a Metacritic score of 90/100. It has also spanned related media, such as a novel and a comic series. A sequel to the game was announced in 2015.

5. Discussion

In this chapter I shall discuss the results of the analysis of chapter 4 and will include the factors introduced in chapter 3.3 to the analysis. This analysis is fundamentally divided in two parts: Chapter 5.1 focuses on the analysis and discussion of game mechanics and gameplay in the Japanese and Western games introduced in chapter 4 while chapter 5.2 contains a qualitative discussion of in-game content and distinctive elements in Japanese and Western games and gaming cultures, which I will analyze using both the field of game-studies and cultural anthropology.

5.1 Game mechanics and gameplay

In this section some key game mechanics and systems of the case studied games of chapter 4.1 and 4.2 are analyzed. First I shall study the (camera) perspective in Western and Japanese games analyzed while answering the following questions: **Does the game have a first-person perspective or a third-person perspective, or is it a hybrid allowing the player to choose the camera angle? Is the camera rotatable?** Secondly I shall examine how combat situations are designed in the Japanese and Western games studied in this thesis. **Is the combat real-time or does the player issue commands on his or her own pace (turn-based)? Can the enemies be seen outside the combat situation, or are the battles randomly generated (separate battle-mode)?** Next I shall look at how the characters develop as the game progresses. **Can the player affect the abilities that the characters use in combat or in other challenge situations, in other words, can the player distribute skill points or any other measure and so choose what the protagonist or other characters are capable of?** Fourthly, I shall examine **how and when the game can be saved**. Finally, I shall research **whether the storyline of the game is linear or nonlinear, whether the game offers dialogue options for the player, whether the relationship between the protagonist and other characters is predetermined or if it can be affected and whether there are side-quests or –objectives in the game**. Since the games I have analyzed here have been made in a timeframe spanning multiple decades, the technologies used to create them have changed greatly during the years. This is why I will not compare things such as static or kinetic environments and objects in this thesis.

Camera

All nine of the Japanese games case studied in this thesis were set to a third-person perspective. In the Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time and Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King the camera could be zoomed to first-person perspective in order to see the world in more detail or to shoot with a ranged weapon, but while in first-person mode the protagonist could not be moved. Out of nine Western games researched in this thesis, four had a third-person perspective, one had a first-person perspective and three of them could be toggled between first- and third-person perspectives. In all games but one the camera could be rotated freely. These results added to the fact that first-person shooters are mainly created and sold in the West led me to the following analysis: In Japanese games, the camera acts as an object through which the player may observe character interaction and the story as it follows the hero or heroes during their adventures. Instead in the Western games most commonly the camera is a medium through which the player can become the character and enter the game world. It has been suggested that this is related to Japanese gamers' desire to follow a story and to observe and to help the main protagonist develop along the way. First-person view offers a very different viewpoint to the game, during which the player essentially becomes the character and makes the protagonist's choices.

Combat

When analyzing the combat in Japanese role-playing games I noticed that all of the titles, except Dark Souls II had randomly generated battles in separate battle modes, and the battle was turn-based. Dark Souls II provided an interesting counter-example, as the combat was based on physical challenges and demanded that the player learned the controls and timing to a skillful degree in order to survive. In Western role-playing games however all of the enemies could be seen while exploring and the combat happened in real-time, but the player could pause the game in order to issue commands to the characters, except in The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, where pausing was not an option. All of the Western action-adventure games used real-time combat in regular playing mode, as did two out of four Japanese action-adventure games. However, the Japanese Ôkami, used a separate battle mode, though real-time combat, and in Ryû Ga Gotoku III combat was carried out on pre-determined occasions after a cut-scene and during a separate battle mode, but commands were issued in real-time. According to these case studies Western players seem to prefer real-time combat immersed within normal game-play. Japanese players instead seem to prefer a separate combat-mode instead of engaging enemies during regular game-play, and in role-playing games they appear to enjoy

issuing commands to the characters in their own pace instead of desiring physical coordination challenges.

Character development

Is the player allowed to decide which direction their character develops during the game? All of the Western role-playing games used an experience point system, which led to levels and skill points, which could be distributed to the skills and attributes the player chose. In addition, one of the four action-adventure games had skill points for different skills, which greatly affected the protagonist. Three out of four action-adventure games did not allow the player to decide how to develop the playable characters, but they could find items that would make these characters more efficient. However, with the exception of Dark Souls II, Ryû Ga Gotoku III and Dragon Quest VIII, Japanese games did not utilize this system. The characters did gain experience points and levels, but their skills and attributes updated automatically, leaving the player little choice on what the characters strengths and weaknesses would become. In addition, Metal Gear Solid did not employ experience or skill points at all. These results would suggest that Western players prefer considerable freedom over their avatar or group of characters in a video game compared to Japanese players, who seem to enjoy a more pre-determined model of character development.

Saving the game

I also analyzed how and when the game could be saved during the gameplay. Eight out of nine Western games case studied in this thesis allowed the player to save the game at any moment using a quick save or by saving through a menu. In Grand Theft Auto V the player can save the game at any moment except during missions and Tomb Raider utilized separate save points. Three out of nine Japanese games used separate save points, two were hybrids allowing the player to save at any point while in the world map, but had separate save points in towns and dungeons. Four games allowed the player to save the game at any point via a menu. It would seem that Western players greatly prefer the option of being able to save the game at any point, but the issue is not as clear regarding Japanese games.

Freedom of choice

Finally, I analyzed whether the storyline of the game was linear or nonlinear, whether the game offered dialogue options for the player, whether the relationship between the

protagonist and other characters was predetermined or if it could be affected and whether there were side-quests or –objectives in the game.

In all of the researched Japanese games the storyline and the order in which a player approaches different places in the game worlds is static (in Dark Souls II the predetermined locations of the story can be accessed in any order, but the story is not affected). There are also no dialogue options that could affect how other characters perceive the protagonist. In Japanese games the ending of the story is pre-determined, and nothing the player does can affect its outcome. However, –much alike to the Western games– the Japanese games offered side-objectives, such as items and hidden locations to find. In fact, some people claim that Japanese games contain more secrets and reveals than Western games, which helps with virality surrounding the game. Players form communities around solving the riddles and secrets in the game, and game companies sell large handbooks containing detailed walkthroughs for those who want to find them all. There are some examples within the games studied in this thesis: There are huge handbooks for Dark Souls II and Ryû Ga Gotoku III, and Ni no Kuni came with a physical book containing detailed information about the second world and its inhabitants, magical language, stories and many other things. In fact, some of the riddles in the game can only be solved using the book and hidden elements within it.

What instead became apparent in Western role-playing games and in one of the action-adventure games (Deus Ex: Human Revolution) researched was that in addition to containing a variety of choices the player can make, these choices offered can be extremely difficult, and often there is no right or wrong answer. For instance, in Skyrim the protagonist can side with the Imperials or the Stormcloacks, who both have a valid reason to fight and who both are doing some rather questionable and even outright damnable deeds. In Dragon Age: Origins one must make hard choices regarding the fate of werewolves, elves, dwarves, mages and several individual characters, including themselves. In the Mass Effect trilogy some of the most memorable choices are related to either saving or completely destroying a race (applies to choices related to both Rachni and the Krogan) which is prone to aggression and war, but that is perhaps capable of change. In Fallout III the player's choices during the game affect the fate of the whole world.

In addition to these choices affecting the plot, in all of the Western role-playing games analyzed the player can affect the relationship their avatar has with (at least some) other characters in the game. This is most commonly done by choosing the avatar's reaction or line from dialogue options, but in some cases the choices the player makes during the story also affect how some of the protagonist's followers feel about them. In Dragon Age: Origins the player could also obtain certain items to give out as gifts to the followers to positively alter their relationship. Finally, in most of these games (Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, Dragon Age: Origins,

Mass Effect II and Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn) the player could also choose to pursue a romantic relationship with certain characters. The Japanese role-playing games instead did not offer dialogue options or other meaningful choices to choose from.

According to these results, in Japanese games the story is, in addition to the characters, commonly the most important thing in a game whereas a Western gamer seems to prefer a rich world to explore and affect while still enjoying story elements. Japanese games have a story that the player follows as a by-stander, whereas in contrast Western games can have tons of side-objectives to fulfill and / or dialogue options to choose. Of course the importance of a complex storyline is affected by the genre of a game: first-person shooters, for example, put less emphasis on a story, but as I have established in this thesis, first-person shooters are very rarely played in Japan. However, both in Western and Japanese games fortune tends to favor those who go out their way to find what is hidden: Bonus objects and routes are scattered throughout the games in an equal fashion, but in Japanese games these secrets and mysteries seem to be even more important.

These case studies would suggest that Japanese developers design games with a higher emphasis in narrative content. I presume that this is precisely the reason behind the differences in camera angles between Japanese and Western games: First-person perspective is popular in the West, as the character acts as a medium through which the player may act their will in the game world. In Japanese games, in contrast, third-person viewpoint provides the player a more detailed look to the story the game provides. In a way it could be said that Western games are more interactive in nature and Japanese enjoy dramatic tension as the story and character relationships unfold. This is especially apparent in role-playing games, where the storyline is increasingly important. Seems like in a Japanese role-playing game the player steps into an interactive story whereas in a Western role-playing game the player steps into a wide world they can explore.

5.2   The 6 "C"s of Japanese games

Throughout this thesis I have researched sales data and history of Japanese games alongside comparing different features of Japanese and Western games and genres with each other. During the comparison of different Japanese and Western genres and game cases, I found that some qualitative elements were distinctive in almost if not all of the Japanese games. I have divided them into the following sections, where some in-game elements are analyzed in reflection to Japanese culture in general in order to analyze the culture surrounding Japanese game development and play, and notable counter examples from the Western games will be mentioned to support or counter the arguments. This chapter is

focused on the qualitative analysis and discussion of in-game elements and patterns. For the discussion of gameplay and game mechanics please refer to chapter 5.1 above.

5.2.1   Cultural elements

As Whalen and Taylor state in their book *Playing the Past*, video games perform a salient role in communicating complex ideas, not only game ecologies and gaming experiences, but also real world history and cultural representations (Whalen and Taylor, 2008 cited in Huang, 2009: 58). In this section I shall look at the games I analyzed in chapter 4 and 3, and carefully examine how they portray cultural elements, myths, religion and lore from either their respective countries of origin or from other sides of the world. I shall also ponder how cultural values and in contrast trans-nationalism is reflected in these games and their characters while attempting to discuss the following subjects: How does culture affect the expression of horror in games from Japan and the West? Are there any characters, stories or landscapes in these games that are based on historical facts or national myths of their respective nations? How are cultural norms reflected on these games?

Japanese mythology and folklore is most often based on Shintô and Buddhism, the two major religions of the country, and to the seventh and eighth century A.D. works *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters), *Nihonshoki* (The Chronicles of Japan), and a few complementary books. The folklore includes various bizarre and humorous characters and situations including a wide variety of supernatural beings such as *Bodhisattva* and *kami* (venerated gods and spirits), *yôkai* (monsters and supernatural beings including beings such as *oni*, *kappa* and *tengu*), *yûrei* (ghosts), dragons and animals with supernatural powers like the *kitsune* (fox), *tanuki* (a mixture of dog and raccoon) and *bakeneko* (cats able to transform) (Picard, 2009:104). In Shintô, humans are a part of nature, not a center of it, and stories of independent animals circulate in folk legends (Allison, 2006:221-222). Allison also observes that Japanese have traditionally believed that if a tool or a natural thing lives long enough, it becomes a spirit or a ghost (yôkai) (Allison, 2006:222). For most of its history Japan has been isolated from the rest of the world, so Marilyn Ivy claims that "the hybrid realities of Japan today – of multiple border crossings and transnational interchanges in the worlds of trade, aesthetics and sciences – are contained within dominant discourses on cultural purity and non-difference, and in nostalgic appeals to pre-modernity" (Ivy, 1995:9 cited in Picard, 2009:101).

In Ôkami one can observe many Japanese cultural elements, of which I will list most. The art style of the game is done completely using the wood-block painting style, which gives it a

distinctive East Asian flavor throughout the game. The clothing styles of the citizens resemble historical Japanese clothing, houses are of traditional architecture in Japan. The nature all around the fictional world in Ôkami is filled with things such as cherry trees, bamboos, mountains and waterfalls, much like Japan. The player will find many items during the game, and most of them are very Japanese in nature: Different Japanese foods and drinks can be found and are explained in detail, there are Japanese food containers and dishes that are also described, alongside Amaterasu's weapons, which are inspired by the Regalia of Japan (the Reflector, the Rosaries and the Glaive). The whole premise of Ôkami is a combination of Shintô myths. Amaterasu, the protagonist of the game, is the sun goddess (kami) and the goddess of the universe according to the stories in Kojiki and Nihon Shoki. Orochi, the main antagonist of the game, is taken from the story of *Yamata no Orochi* (八岐の大蛇, lit "8-branched giant snake"), translated as the *Eight-Forked Serpent* in English, which is the legendary 8-headed and 8-tailed dragon slain by Amaterasu's brother *Susanô*, the Shintô god of storms and the sea. Susanô also appears as one of the key characters in Ôkami in the form of a swordsman. In both the original myth of Yamata no Orochi and Ôkami, Orochi devours a girl each year, and is offered sake, which intoxicates it, making it easily defeatable. In Ôkami, religious themes are everywhere in the form of Shintô gates and shrines, and the whole incident of the demon Orochi being released occurs because Susanô does not believe in the gods and legends, which can be seen as a reflection of the yearning some Japanese people have towards the pre-modern days and religious traditions.

Interestingly, in the Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time and Dragon Quest VIII the divine entity or entities that people worship are referred to as female, which is possibly related to the worship of goddess Amaterasu.

Furthermore, Anne Allison calls the beings in Pokémon "virtualized and commodified yôkai", and explains that Japanese people are still fascinated with the monsters (bakemono) and other "strange" –supernatural, mysterious and fantastic- things that the forward-looking leadership of Japan has tried to eradicate from the belief-system of citizens during its attempt to modernize Japan (Allison, 2006:27). She calls this intermixture of the old (spirituality) and new (digital/virtual media) "techno-animism" that animates contemporary technology and commodities with spirits.

> "Different, in this sense, from the common Euro-American worldview – where humans center existence and the distinction between life and death is more definitely conceived – this also constitutes a more general aptitude in daily Japan for animating, spiritualizing, or altering the material world that is at once playful and deadly serious. Such a worldview borrows from folkloric and religious

traditions, where (theoretically) everything, even robots, is credited a spirit (Allison, 2006:21)."

Allison adds that pocket monsters are creatures that broker the border between the practical, common, capitalistic and the fantastic. They operate both as utilitarian tools (helping the player win the game) and as spirits or companions, she writes. (Ibid.) In other games, such as *Yôkai Watch* (Level-5, 2013) one can clearly observe how Japanese myths of yôkai creatures are brought to a present day (imaginary) world for the protagonist to find. Furthermore, in Dragon Quest VIII the monsters resemble yôkai and one of the monsters called "Frog Face" turns around when hit revealing an oni face on its back. Anthropologists Nakazawa Shinichi analyzes that in games like Pokémon things, thoughts, beings and spaces hover between the "real world" and beyond, and the player has a chance to connect their "primitive unconscious" (a term introduced by Lévi-Strauss) with them (Nakazawa Shinichi, 2000 cited in Allison, 2004:46).

In all of the Western games I studied in this thesis the most commonly seen "fantasy" creatures were demons, dragons and undead and the human opponents were thugs or traitors. However, in Grand Theft Auto V, the protagonists instead were these thugs, and in Thief: Deadly Shadows the protagonist was a thief, so these games provided an interesting counter-example to this trend. In the Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim the player could choose to join the thieves' guild or an organization of assassins. They could also attack any one of the characters at any point of the game (which would turn them hostile towards the player).

Besides myths and lore, history and the present also play a part in defining elements of games. In Fallout III the whole setting of the game is based on retro-America, and the game is filled with (though perhaps parodied) values and aesthetics of North America of the 1940s and 1950s, while warning about the dire consequences of war and destructive weapons. In Dragon Age: Origins, Thief: Deadly Shadows and The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim the player can see remnants of European and American past with landscapes, foodstuff, clothes and other elements resembling medieval Europe and America. Deus Ex: Human Revolution instead imagines future as it could become based on the present state humankind is in, with ever developing technological innovations and augmentations, and transnational companies becoming more powerful. While the Japanese Final Fantasy VII is not necessarily located in the realistic world per se, it plays around themes of fossil fuel usage, nature preservation and genetic experiments alongside weapons of mass destruction.

Moreover, Jamian Asling asserts that *Metal Gear Solid* and *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* are both homage to days long past and the wills of the designers to add their own cultural histories into their creations under the 'flat surface' of Hollywood, leading to Metal

Gear Solid mixing notions of Western aesthetics with Japanese mythic archetypes (Asling, 2010:35). Metal Gear Solid's creator Hideo Kojima lays bare aspects and beliefs of Japanese culture that dictated the nations own military prowess, hubris and eventual defeat by allied forces in World War II, Asling adds (Ibid:37). In the Western Fallout games there are people who worship atom bombs (Church of Atom) due to its ability to change things radically. One major decision the player must make during Fallout III is whether they trigger a huge atom bomb located in the middle of a settlement of people to explode. In the Japanese version this option was removed due to the trauma related to World War II and the atom bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Thorsen, 2008). Commonly in first-person shooters the goal is to defend the nation(s) from outside threats. The first Call of Duty games (mentioned in chapter 2.4 and 3.3.3) and all of the *Medal of Honor* (Electronic Arts, 1999-2012) games are related to World War II, and the player assumes the role of a soldier of the allied forces. Because of this, perhaps, it is no wonder that these games were originally not very popular in Japan.

Furthermore, the Ryû Ga Gotoku games are situated within (fictional) contemporary Japanese landscapes with places, foods and activities considered truly Japanese. Some of these include hostess bars, Japanese cuisine, arcade gaming halls and shops selling traditional Japanese items. Most of these activities were actually removed when the game was localized to American in Europe for being too "Japanese" for the foreign audience to understand. In contrast, the settings of the Grand Theft Auto games are all in an alternative-reality contemporary North American metropolises with everything a capitalist American city has to offer. In Ryû Ga Gotoku games these Japanese landscapes and cultural elements are celebrated, but in Grand Theft Auto games the modern capitalist American culture is parodied. Furthermore, while in Ryû Ga Gotoku the player may choose to use firearms occasionally, the emphasis is on the protagonist's incredible skills in Japanese martial arts. Instead in Grand Theft Auto V the use of firearms is mandatory, perhaps reflecting a stance on firearm politics of present America.

Another factor I noticed when analyzing different Japanese and Western game titles is that while Western games often tend to revolve around solving things with force or at least offer the player the chance to do so, Japanese games commonly encourage compassion. Violence is almost non-existent in Japanese games in order for the games to reach as wide of a player demographic as possible.

It has been speculated that one of the reasons for the small amount of war-related games succeeding in Japan is related to the post WWII trauma and to the Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. Allison writes that during the occupation, with the constitution forbidding Japan from bearing arms for anything else than self-defense, anything that resembled militarism or

patriotism was removed from public life. She claims that it is no coincidence that often in Japanese popular media battles are directed against hyper-fantastical creatures (*kaijû* 怪獣) and always as self-defense, and adds that it is notable that warriorship remained a tenacious and favored motif in the national folklore. (Allison, 2006:99-100)

In addition, player versus player mode is still not a very popular gameplay mode in Japan because of an aversion to fighting and beating random online opponents. As Kanaoya observes, it "can be traced to something in the culture that Japan does not tend to promote serious violence and offensive behavior, whereas the West likes the rebels" (interview with Kanaoya, 2014). When I interviewed Worker Bee Inc.'s director Hiroshi Ogawa, he expressed that he believes the success of games like Clash of Clans is in fact a fad created by clever marketing and people's desire to try out same things as their acquaintances. In reality, he claims, Japanese people avoid themes of war and pillaging (Interview with Hiroshi Ogawa, 2014). In addition, Akihiro Iino, the director of Cygames that developed the Rage of Bahamut made an interesting observation related to this thesis when he noticed that the Western users seem to enjoy the battle part of the collectable card game Rage of Bahamut more than the Japanese players, and that the Western players seem to play for longer sessions than their Japanese counterparts (Askelöf, 2013:58). This is likely the main reason why first-person shooters, immensely popular in the West, are traditionally not very successful in Japan.

I have established in these case studies that realistic violence and gore elements and sexually suggestive scenes are commonly absent from Japanese games (with the notable exception of horror games and the Ryû Ga Gotoku franchise). This lack of violence compared to Western games can be seen not just in Japanese games, but also in foreign games sold in Japan. Although beat 'em up games are commonly created and popular in Japan, and Japanese beat 'em up games are successful globally, the Western Mortal Combat never sold in Japan for its brutal violence and gore. Japanese beat 'em up games instead do not contain graphic violence or gore. Shinji Mikami's survival horror game *Evil Within* (Bethesda Softworks, 2014) was censored in the Japanese version in that the most extreme gore elements of the game were removed and added in as a purchasable and downloadable content [DLC] so that the game would reach out to as many customers as possible (Siliconera, 2014). Moreover, Grand Theft Auto V had its sex and violence content censored in many ways during its Japanese release. Some of the sex scenes are completely cut out, and a much discussed torture scene is removed. This is all done partly because the games are marketed to teens and adults simultaneously.

Moreover, when looking at Western role-playing games I noticed something peculiar that was absent from Japanese role-playing games in addition to sexual themes and gore: stealing

(except in separate battle modes), and especially non-player reactions to stealing. In all of the Japanese role-playing games I studied, taking items from someone's apartment was a part of the game logic, and the protagonist found the items in the same manner as they would find treasures. However, taking items from a character's apartment in any of the Western games was quickly responded to (if caught), and commonly the owner of the apartment or members of law enforcement would attack the protagonist. Curiously, in Japanese games some of the playable characters (such as *Yuffie* in Final Fantasy, *Yangus* in Dragon Age VIII and *Jairo* [eng. Swaine] in Ni No Kuni) could be ordered to steal or pilfer from enemies in separate combat modes. This did not have consequences in the morale alignment or the reputation of the group. Conversely the theme in some of the Western action-adventure games studied was in fact stealing (Thief: Deadly Shadows, Grand Theft Auto V). While the Japanese Ryû Ga Gotoku games and Western Grand Theft Auto games have been compared to each other quite often as they are both open world action-adventure games revolving around criminal activity and organizations in modern metropolises, these games are still quite different from each other because of their culture of origin. In Ryû Ga Gotoku games the player can see yakuza occupying the streets of Japan. Some of these yakuza are greedy and evil, committing petty and heinous crimes. However, throughout the game there are yakuza bosses and members who clearly follow a code of honor, striving for fair deals and fighting only those found worthy and always in a fair fight. The real yakuza of Japan call this code of loyalty and respect 仁義 (*jingi*, meaning justice and duty). The protagonist of these games is one of these honorable, if perhaps romanticized yakuza. Instead in the Grand Theft Auto games the player can choose to be or do fairly anything, from driving over people to buying sex from prostitutes, and the criminal organizations are anything but honorable. The main objective is to not get caught.

Moreover, a strive for compassion and communal spirit in Japanese culture in my opinion promotes the popularity of simulators, where the player takes care of a virtual pet, or even a town consisting of friends of different species (dogs, cows etc.). Anne Allison has researched reasons as to why the *Tamagotchi* (a handheld device containing a game in which the player has to take care of a creature from birth until death) became such a huge hit in Japan. She concludes that Japanese living conditions prevent Japanese people from having real pets and that the contemporary children are lonely, busy and pressured by school, so a toy they can interact with when they are alone and from which they can gain feedback and response is appealing (Allison, 2006:174). Taking care of a virtual pet made kids feel "relied upon", "important" or "loved" while the pet became embedded within their player's everyday routines in a portable manner. These pets also offer busy people, whether a child or an adult, a

meaningful, short break from these routines. (Ibid:186) Allison calls them *intimate play goods* or *softronics.* (Ibid:190-191).

Furthermore, Japanese and Western horror games are said to differ from each other greatly as well because of their peculiar cultural origins. Nikolas Kiej'e has written a book about Japanese grotesqueries in 1973. In his book he writes that the Japanese traditions of the supernatural depicted in literature and art are a combination of Chinese ideas of demons, Indian beliefs of the transmigration of souls and the native Shintô notions of nature and animal spirits (Kiej'e 1973 cited in Picard, 2009:104). There are several types of Japanese ghosts and spiritual beings, but the most popular are the spirits of dead people (usually bitter and full of malice towards the living); the most dangerous ones are said to be stillborn children and frustrated women. The "vengeful spirit", onryô, or the betrayed women returning to haunt those who have wronged them are the most frequent ones. Ghosts have diverse appearances, but some characteristics such as missing legs, hair covering huge parts of the face and shoulders and white clothing (the color of a funeral garb in Japan) are commonplace (Kiej'e 1973:14 cited in Picard 2009:105). The female ghosts that typically have no eyes or just one, or have a wavering head attached to a snakelike neck are considered truly terrifying. The most famous one of these ghosts is called yûrei, which is most commonly a female wearing white clothing. They have long, frequently unkempt black hair, which has its roots in the Kabuki theatre, where each character wore a particular type of wig identifying them to the audience (Ibid.).

Temco's Fatal Frame series is set in feudal Japan. It is greatly influenced by traditional Japanese culture as can be seen from the surroundings consisting of a feudal Japanese village, vengeful ghosts, Shintô gates and so on. All of the games in the series contain Shintô rituals, exorcisms and typical Japanese ghosts, such as a ghost creeping on the ground much like Sadako in the movie *Ringu*, which are most often hostile towards the protagonist. Furthermore, the Zero in the game's title is also a pun, since the character for it can also be read "rei", which means ghost. In addition, the usage of a camera is peculiar, considering that cameras used to be forbidden in Japan for superstitious reasons: According to Kiej'e the old-fashioned Japanese people thought that a camera was dangerous to the soul of the photographer (Kiej'e 1973 cited in Picard, 2009:109). Furthermore, the Onimusha ("Demon Warrior") series by Capcom features oni, which are Japanese folklore creatures such as demons, devils, ogres and trolls, and retells stories of Japanese historical figures with additional supernatural elements (Picard, 2009:109).

These myths, along with tales of honor and loyalty combined with the anxiety and agitation of the Japanese society, and Japanese concerns about mass media have affected

contemporary Japanese horror films (Picard, 2009: 107). Furthermore, they have affected Japanese horror games, which have a tendency to revolve around the psychological horror and dramatic tension and anticipation. Psychological horror relies on the characters' fear, guilt, beliefs, and emotional instability to create tension, as we can see, for example, in the case of James Sunderland and his inner struggle in *Silent Hill 2* (Konami, 2001), where his sanity is put to question during the entirety of the game (Picard, 2009:111). As Picard explains, terror is built due to the tension around the story and characters' actions, which creates discomfort by exposing common and universal psychological fears, like the fear of the unknown or the unseen as well as of the hidden self that is most often repressed or denied, and which the ghastly creatures in Silent Hill series often illustrate (Ibid.). In Project Zero, the darkness, creepy settings and the way ghosts come out of nowhere create a strong sense of psychological fear, he adds (Ibid.). As Stuart writes, in Japanese horror fear is not simply generated through surprise; the silence and suspense in-between the action is important as well (Stuart, 2006 cited in Picard, 2009:112). During the Game Developer Conference in 2005, Silent Hill's composer and producer Akira Yamaoka talked about some of the characteristics of Japanese-style horror and how they were implemented in the Silent Hill series. He compared the perception of fear in the U.S., where it is usually linked to violence, to Japan, where fear is often conveyed through sad and lonely stories. Because of this, American horror is more focused on scary creatures and monsters, whereas Japan tends to use invisible enemies that rarely appear on the screen. Furthermore, U.S. audiences prefer shocking moments and images, while in contrast Japanese people are more partial to empty spaces and shadows of things past. Yamaoka explained that Silent Hill was, in fact, designed to be a Hollywood-style horror game but because the development team was Japanese, many elements of Japanese-style horror steeped into the end product. According to Yamaoka, true horror is created by omitting key information from the narration, making the story fragmented. In Silent Hill games, the story is only partly revealed, frequently defying the laws of logic, forcing the player to "fill in the gaps" with their own theories and intuitions. Finally, he explained how in Silent Hill, music is almost suppressed in order to decline emotional cues and warnings from the player, thus helping the developers create unexpected moments. (Sánchez-Crespo Dalmau, 2005)

Japanese game industry has commonly been export-oriented, which has led to a lot of game settings and characters to be designed so that they would appeal to Western audiences as well. A lot of Japanese products are trans-national and inter-medial (Picard, 2009:113), and culturally odorless (Iwabuchi, 2004:56-58). Commonly, much like anime, Japanese games have mixtures of sceneries and cultural elements, and characters that can appear Caucasian without feeling any less Japanese. A paramount strategy to help Japanese products to be accepted and

consumed in other countries has been to localize the product. Since the American distributors, and even the Japanese ones, believe that their native customers would not necessary understand all the contexts behind the product that comes from a culture believed to be strange and eccentric, the product is usually tailored according to the cultural context of reception. Some of the games that have gone through this treatment are Pokémon and Resident Evil games. For example, in Resident Evil, action moments were increased in their Western versions (Picard, 2009:103). Onimusha is also quite different from the psychological horror offered by Project Zero and Silent Hill. The game, much like Resident Evil, is action-oriented and the settings feature famous Japanese and French sceneries and creatures, and even zombies, which are inspired by popular American culture (Picard, 2009:110). Furthermore, Square Enix was hired by Microsoft to create Japanese Role Playing Games (JRPG) on Xbox 360 so that Japanese audiences would become interested in the console. This strategy was successful, as the console sold immensely when Square Enix games *Infinite Undiscovery* and *The Last Remnant* were released in 2008, which led to Japanese games being marketed for Western audiences to a greater extent, especially after the Japanese visual style became increasingly popular in other parts of the world (Picard, 2009:99-100). According to Picard Japanese horror games are created and produced, but not necessarily distributed by Japanese companies or designers, whether the target market is in Japan, America or in other places in the world. Furthermore there are Japanese games developed in the West under a Japanese corporation and distributed worldwide for Japanese consoles, but marketed for the Western market. *Silent Hill: Homecoming* (Konami, 2008) is an interesting case, since it is a game belonging to a Japanese franchise, but developed by a Western studio Double Helix Games, and released on PS3 and Xbox 360 (Picard, 2008:101). *Silent Hill: Origins* was also developed by the British Climax studios for PSP in 2007 and then on PS2 in 2008.

Final Fantasy VII is a great example of a Japanese game that combines religious elements, myth and lore in a trans-national way. Firstly, the main antagonist Sephiroth's name refers to Kabbala's Sephirot (symbolized in the Tree of Life), which represent a path of ideas, attribute and concepts that one must realize and understand within oneself in order to reach divine perfection and Inner Christ. There are said to be ten of these Sephirah, and in Final Fantasy VII, there are ten clones of Sephiroth. Sephiroth in a way reaches godhood in the end, sprouting a black wing to replace his right arm and six white ones to replace his legs, and calling on an enormous meteor to destroy all life on earth. Even the song playing at the background during the final battle against him is called "One-Winged Angel", which seems to refer to him being a fallen angel (perhaps comparable to Lucifer). Furthermore, there are several powerful creatures the player can acquire and summon during battle, and these beings are named and resemble different gods and mythical creatures of the world's stories and religions. These

entities include beings, such as *Shiva*, *Odin*, *Leviathan*, *Hades* and *Knights of the Round Table* (misspelled in the game as *Knights of the Round*).

In addition, in Dark Souls II the setting of the game is in medieval Europe and the NPCs are Caucasian. In Ni No Kuni and Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King and The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time the NPCs and landscapes could likely be from anywhere in the world. Metal Gear Solid, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, purposely includes Western flavors (settings and characters) as well as Japanese values. According to Koichi Iwabuchi, Japanese animators consciously design characters to be "mukokuseki", stateless or without national odor in order to appeal to international audiences (Iwabuchi, 2004: 67). For example, one of the most popular game characters in the world, Super Mario, does not remind the viewer of Japan, but both his name and appearance are stereotypically Italian (Ibid.).

Picard argues that Japanese horror games may appear to be unique national products that contain specific elements defining a country like Japan, but they are primarily characterized by hybridizations and convergences (Picard, 2009:114). Despite their differences in how they approach horror, and despite being Japanese in origin, the Silent Hill and Resident Evil are both rooted in America. Silent Hill is an American city and the characters that populate it are Caucasian or Mexican. As Perron writes, Resident Evil (Capcom, 2006) and Silent Hill (Konami, 1999) both attempted to have a cinematic horror feel, but while Resident Evil has been compared to George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Silent Hill is compared to the *Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973). "Resident Evil is more action-oriented, more about quick thrill, jump scares and gory images, while Silent Hill is more psychological, more about the characters and atmosphere, and more about giving a sense of dread, anxiety and helplessness", Perron analyzes (Perron, 2006:7-8 cited in Picard, 2009:96). Alongside the Exorcist, Konami has always acknowledged the American and Western influences in the series, mainly American cinema with films such as *Jacob's Ladder* (Adrian Lyne, 1990) or David Lynch' films. According to Pruett the design team at Konami wanted to make "modern American horror through Japanese eyes" when designing Resident Evil (Pruett, 2005 cited in Picard, 2009:97). The beginning of Resident Evil is filled with American action movie stereotypes: STARS' (Special Tactics and Rescue Squad) Alpha and Bravo teams are assigned by helicopters to an American Raccoon City that relies on the multinational pharmaceutical *Umbrella Corporation* for economic stability. However, the corporation's tests on humans have had horrifying consequences on the population. In contrast, even though the first game's setting is in America, the last two are set abroad: rural Spain in Resident Evil 4 (Capcom, 2005) and Africa in Resident Evil 5 (Capcom, 2009). (Picard, 2009:97).

Conversely, in contrast Western (first-person shooter) horror games, such as F.E.A.R seem to borrow from Japanese horror cinema. In F.E.A.R the element causing terror is a black-haired

girl Alma with supernatural abilities, who resembles the very typical yûrei archetype of a ghost girl in some Japanese horror stories. Amnesia is a horror game based on creeping, psychological terror, when the protagonist is all but omnipotent and needs to escape and hide from terrible things pursuing him instead of fighting against them. The newest addition to the Japanese style psychological horror comes with the game *Slender: The Eight Pages* (Parsec Productions, 2012), where the player must navigate their way through a stage and avoid even looking at the terrifying, faceless *Slender Man*.

In this chapter I have researched different cultural backgrounds and elements alongside trans-nationalism in Japanese and Western games. Next I shall look into realism, fantasy-realism and fantasy elements in these games.

5.2.2 Creativity over reality

In this section I shall take a look at two different factors that I believe create a realistic or fantasy-realistic feeling in a game: the visual style and the setting [the world] of the game. Do the graphics of the game attempt photorealism or are they cartoon style? Is the setting in a historical period, in a present world or situated in the future (sci-fi)? Is the game-world perhaps situated in a fantasy-world or does it combine fantasy-elements, such as magic, with realism?

Out of Western role-playing games all five were created with a graphic style depicting photorealism. All four of the action-adventure games were also created with this same style, with 3D models and realistic characters. However, in almost all of the Japanese games I researched in this thesis the graphics style resembled the style used in manga and anime, and the setting was fantasy-realistic as opposed to the photorealistic style offered in most of the Western games. The only exceptions to this rule were Ryû Ga Gotoku III, Metal Gear Solid and Dark Souls II. Other examples mentioned throughout this thesis further emphasize this trend: Japanese simulators like Harvest Moon and Animal Crossing tend to be colorful and cartoon-style whereas Western simulators, such as The Sims and SimCity attempt photorealism. Western strategy games like Cid Meier's Civilization and StarCraft have a realistic graphics style, but Japanese tactical role-playing games (simulators) like Final Fantasy Tactics and Pikmin have a distinctive cartoonish style to them. In addition Western first-person shooters commonly attempt gritty photorealism. The examples are numerous.

When I analyzed the setting in these games I noticed a similar pattern. While Western role-playing games can be set in fantasy-worlds with dragons and magic, there is always something

that ties them to the real world, and thus in a way I consider their settings realistic worlds with fantasy elements (fantasy-realism). To elaborate, in Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim one can wield magic and ride dragons, and the world is filled with mythical creatures and walking dead, but the setting resembles medieval Scandinavia. Dragon Age: Origins and Baldur's Gate II are very similar, but the surroundings resemble medieval Europe. Fallout III is situated in a "what-if" post-apocalyptic retro-style America, and is gritty and realistic to the core. Mass Effect II instead is set to the future and to space with imaginative humanoid aliens, spaceships and genetic superpowers, but otherwise there is a very realistic feeling to the game. Almost all of the Western action-adventure games; Tomb Raider, Grand Theft Auto V and Thief III were purely realistic (although perhaps depicting an alternative or past version of the world as it is), while Deus Ex: Human Revolution only introduced a futuristic sci-fi setting where people could be augmented otherwise the surroundings resembled the real world.

Analyzing Japanese role-playing games I noticed that Final Fantasy VII is set in a world filled with elements both from real world (global landscapes, humanoid characters, real-life vehicles, energy consumption etc.) and from a fantasy world defying physics and containing magic and imaginative creatures. Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King is set in a world resembling medieval-Europe, but includes magic and imaginative (talking) creatures. Ni No Kuni follows the same pattern with its "second world", which has various different locations alongside magic and fantasy creatures, gigantic flowers and more. The setting of Pokémon is in a fictional universe that is based on real-life Japanese area, but is distinctive because of its imaginative creatures and a world based on capturing and training them. However, Dark Souls II seems to resemble Western role-playing games in its medieval European setting containing normative magic and fantasy-creatures. When looking at the Japanese action-adventure games I noticed that two out of four games, Metal Gear Solid and Ryû Ga Gotoku III were set in realistic universes. Instead, however, The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time is situated in a high-fantasy realm of *Hyrule* that has imaginative races and magic. Finally, Ôkami is set in a mythical medieval Japan depicted by ukiyo-e paintings, and contains talking animals, gods and magic.

Aoyama and Izushi argue that the distinct visual style and scenarios in Japanese video games originate from Japanese manga, which has a pervasive influence upon Japan's culture and society, much greater in comparison to American and European counterparts (Aoyama and Izushi, 2003, 438). The reasons behind different graphic designs in Japanese popular culture forms can be observed in what Eiko Tanaka, a former Ghibli producer commented about Japanese perspective in Roland Kelts' book *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* (2006). Tanaka explains that in Japan people have a way of looking at the

world only through lines as in the kimono or tori gates, while in Europe people were using light and shadow. Therefore Westerners have long been paying more attention to volume than flat spaces and the lines. She says that Japanese people learned how to express shapes, forms and ideas using lines while Westerners think in terms of light and shadow. She adds that if a shape is changed a bit, it still looks like the same thing, while if the light is changed, everything changes. (Tanaka interviewed in Kelts, 2006:214) Anime Style's editor Hideki Ono instead explains that Japanese expressionism is defined by subtraction. For example, a pretty or cute girl is drawn with huge eyes down to the eyelashes and hair is drawn with detail, but the ears are not shown. Things like nostrils, which are undesirable, are left out, and only parts that are wanted are drawn, he says, and adds that even though the characters are not possible in real life, they could be if real life was better than it really is. (Hideki Ono interviewed in Kelts, 2006:213). When Barbie was introduced to Japan, it got negative reception for looking too realistic. Anne Allison quotes Masubuchi Shôichi, a researcher of girls' dolls, who argues that in Japan, if a doll looks too realistic it makes people feel uncomfortable. Instead details are more important because imagination is sought out (Masubuchi, 1995:115 cited in Allison, 2006:146).

Anne Allison was often told while she was doing research that fantasy is far more valued than realism as the creative aesthetic of popular entertainment in Japan. However, fantasy needs to touch people at a deeply emotional, or what she calls "mythic" level (Allison, 2006:47). In an interview with Allison in 1997, author Ôshita Eiji confined that a distinctively Japanese aesthetic in the mass myth-making of the early postwar era until today is measured less by the realism, flashy effects or happy Hollywood-style endings, and this has touched their audiences with an emotional power that registers as "true" while still remaining a fantasy. What is crucial, though, is how the mythology is composed, or in other words how the story and its characters weave an alternative world that will evoke deep responses of yearning, fears, anxieties and desires in its audience. One of these methods is the myth of transformation (something that can be seen in games such as Pokémon, Dragon Quest VIII and Puzzle & Dragons), which realizes the universal childhood fantasy of being able to morph into an upgraded version of self. (Ibid: 43) Allison claims that combining disjuncture elements (future with the past, organic with mechanic) is a signature element of Japanese play products (Allison, 2006:21-22). Starting from Mighty Morphin Power Rangers-series and represented in today's anime as well as game products transformation is seen in many imaginative forms: Ordinary teenagers morph into superheroes battling monsters and demons. Furthermore, these beasts and demons, much like these teenagers, can have their powers rooted in ancient spirits or animals as much as cyber-technology, Allison adds (Ibid.).

One can observe a desire for escapism in these Japanese fantasy-scapes. Nakazawa Shinichi writes that Pokémon is so popular because of its potential to "heal" and because of its

portability. Healing in this case means that these kinds of kids' products offer children a way of imaginatively engaging in a world where they can adventure, meet fantastical beings, and that is beyond the one that is dictated by the rules and rationality they must commonly live by. Because these games often come in a portable form, access to these fantasy worlds is easy and personal, making it possible to dive into an alternative space of one's own choosing whenever desired. So, according to Shinichi, Pokémon is a play product that embodies (and enhances) the nomadic lifestyle of a post-industrial subject, but also miraculously "heals" the stresses of living in an environment with very little time for imagination. (Shinichi 1998 cited in Allison, 2006: 22-26). This can be applied to most of the digital games and devices that are most sold in Japan, namely the handheld consoles alongside games such as Monster Hunter and *Yôkai Watch* (Level-5, 2013).

The next chapter focuses on analyzing character design in Japanese and Western games.

5.2.3   Character design

In this chapter I attempt to explain the importance of character design in Japanese games and to introduce some archetypes both in Japan and the West.

Character branding is extremely important in Japan. In Japanese popular culture, characters dominate a whole sphere from their virtual realities to physical spaces and fantasies. According a book on the character business by the Japanese advertising agency Dentsû, the reason for this is that characters are symbols for personal, corporate, group and national identity, and that they "glue society at its root". They are used to brand commodities because their properties make them easy to bring "close" to consumers. This is done by extending a product's range of play to make it excessively intimate for fans in everyday life (from food, clothes, phones, airplanes and others) and capitalizing on the popularity of an already established character to evoke intimacy for the commodities or instances. (Dentsû, 1999 cited in Allison, 2006:91) These characters can indeed be seen anywhere in Japan, from cute police mascots to images advertising products and events. So-called by-products are sold to regular consumers and mainly to the enthusiastic fans. These products are a huge source of revenue to the Japanese companies and shop-owners, and often characters are designed with this in mind. Visuality is important and so are characteristics from cute (*kawaii*) to cool or good-looking (*kakkoii*), beautiful or sexy. The experience of appreciation and interaction with either digital or visceral goods is the driving force behind these designs, writes Surman (2008).

In fact, Alex Jones, a (Western) producer on the Japanese game DmC: Devil May Cry (Capcom, 2013) was interviewed about the differences of game design in Japan and the West

on Eurogamer in 2012. He claimed that Japanese developers tend to work from the core out, making the main character the core and slowly building a world around that protagonist. Instead, he asserts, Western game developers focus from the out in, building a world and stuff in it, and then creating a character to inhabit this world. (Robinson, 2012) I believe this is correct. While character design is of course elementary in both Western and Japanese games although being very different, as we have seen during this study, I do claim that in Japan the characters are more varied and detailed and that the design of Japanese games is more character-oriented than of Western games. Characters are what sells the game and its by-products in Japan, while Western audience is commonly enticed with advanced graphics and a rich, detailed world to explore.

Journalist Ryan Winterhalter claims that the business model for small games in Japan can only be sustained by catering to a small but dedicated fan base that is willing to pay lots of money for content. AAA titles normally sell for around 30-50 €, but smaller niche titles can be priced at over 60€. For this reason these small games publishers need to cater to their fan base, which usually means otakus who revel in *moe*. According to Patrick W. Galbraith, moe is a neologism used to describe a euphoric response to fantasy characters or representations of them. He adds that moe is primarily based on two-dimensional images, but can also include objects that index fantasy or even people reduced to 'moe characters' and approached as fantasy. (Galbraith, 2009) These moe characters are often the target of adoration of otaku men, and commonly inhabit visual novel games especially. Visual novels are focused on interaction with characters, so these games are well suited for merchandising, including character sculptures, computer accessories, hugging pillows and so on. According to Galbraith, merchandise serves to extend (and potentially expand) interactions with favorite characters and legitimate connections (Galbraith, 2011). In addition Ryan Winterhalter asserts that between August and December in 2011 35 games that were filled with young, childlike girl characters, were released. This, according to him alienates many Western fans (Winterhalter, 2011). In fact, I observed an interesting thing while playing both the original Japanese version and the localized Western version of Project Zero: The protagonist Miku was changed to look more Caucasian, her proportions were more realistic, and she had smaller eyes in the Western version. Her clothes were also changed from the Japanese school uniform to a casual blouse and skirt, most likely in order for her to not look too childish.

Another example related to character commodification can be seen when looking at the controversy in the West surrounding Hideo Kojima, the creator of Metal Gear Solid-game franchise after he revealed one of the characters in *Metal Gear Solid V*, a scantily dressed sniper, *Quiet*, and telling in an interview that the character is designed to be sexy in order to sell more figurines and encourage cosplay (McWhertor, 2013; Davis, 2013). Furthermore, a

recent example related to character design and importance in Japan and the West is related to the game *Left 4 Dead* (Valve Corporation, 2008). When the game was released in arcade halls in Japan in 2014, the original characters consisting of a middle-aged motorcycle biker man, an old Vietnam Veteran male, a female university student and a black-skinned around 30-year old Account Manager were replaced by a Japanese schoolgirl, a male university student, a young Caucasian former navy member now bartender male, and a young Caucasian tour guide female (Plunkett, 2014). All of the replaced characters also have beautiful and handsome faces and clean clothes in comparison to the rugged characters of the original version. In fact, there are words in Japanese language to describe a beautiful male or a beautiful female character, which in themselves are an archetypical character type in Japanese digital games. *Bishônen* literally means "beautiful youth", but is used to refer to a beautiful man. *Bishôjo* is used to refer to the female counterpart.

In comparison, the Western characters I researched, such as Lara Croft from Tomb Raider, Commander Shepard from Mass Effect, Adam Jensen from Deus Ex: Human Revolution, Garrett from Thief III and the protagonists from Grand Theft Auto V were often profoundly realistic, even rugged despite their commonly idealized body proportions. Coolness is an adjective I would also use to describe all of the pre-determined Western game protagonists researched in this thesis. Furthermore, all of the pre-determined avatars were also Caucasian. In addition to this, in several Western role-playing games the player is allowed to create and customize their own characters with a character creator. This allows the player to relate to and become the protagonist while letting them practice creative and self-expressive game-play. However, these kinds of characters cannot be easily commodified.

As Allison recognizes, in Japan there is a tendency to see the world as animated by a variety of beings, both worldly and otherworldly, that are "complex, (inter)changeable, and not graspable by so-called rational (or visible) means alone" (Allison, 2006:20). Because of Shintô, traditionally everything from rocks to raccoons and to the river is believed to have a spirit. This has influenced Japanese character design, and big proportion of the most iconic game characters are something else than human entirely. These characters most commonly epitome cute characteristics. Cuteness is associated with the qualities of *amae* – sweet, dependent, and *yasashii* – gentle and girlishness, she explains (Allison, 2004:38), and adds later that cute characters are not only defined by their physical attributes (big head, small body, and huge eyes, small or even absent nose) but by the relationships people form with them (Allison, 2006: 205-206). She states that these characters are cute because this is something associated with innocence, dependence and freedom from the pressures of adult world that is connected with childhood, and thus they are "companions soothing in the postindustrial times of

nomadism, orphanism and stress" (Allison, 2006:91). Allison adds that children find relief in these characters that offer them absolute and personal love (Ibid.). She also borrows from Walter Benjamin (1999) and states that this is a business of enchanted commodities (Ibid:16).

In Pokémon the true protagonist is not *Red* (or any of the later playable characters), but the Pokémon he collects. Furthermore, the franchise was purposely made cuter when the animated series was developed in order to extend the audience of Pokémon to girls, younger children and their mothers. While not the most notable Pokémon in the original game, the yellow pocket monster *Pikachu* became the mascot for the whole franchise. Pikachu was chosen as the mascot because its shape was recognizable from a distance, its color was yellow (and not red, which signals competition) and it had a face that could "pleasantly" display a range of emotions (including tears) (Allison, 2006:225-226; Iwabuchi, 2004:63-64). Furthermore, *Super Mario* from Super Mario Bros might be a chubby Italian plumber with moustache, but he is also tiny and cute with huge eyes and a friendly personality. *Sonic*, the wide-eyed hedgehog combines cute features with cool characteristics.

In the Dragon Quest franchise, the group of playable characters change every game, but the imaginative creatures keep the franchise recognizable, most famous of them being the franchise's mascot, the *Slime*, with a round shape, big eyes and a wide smile. Also, one of the main characters of the game is until the very end a horse (*Princess Medea*), who might not speak but whose eyes tell stories. The protagonist also carries with him a mouse-like creature *Muchie*, who has a meaningful role in the game. While all of the characters from Final Fantasy VII can be considered iconic (and the protagonist Cloud has often been named one of the most beloved game characters of all time), the playable characters are different in each Final Fantasy game. However, there are some creatures that are famous throughout the whole Final Fantasy franchise: *chocobos*, *moogles, tonberry* and *cactuar* to name some. None of these characters are humanoid, and all of them are characterized by cute features. In Final Fantasy VII, one of the playable characters called *Red XIII* is a talking and wise animal that resembles a mixture of a lion and a wolf, and another group member consists of a talking, feeling and independently thinking robot cat, *Cait Sith*. Amaterasu, the protagonist of Ôkami is in the form of a white wolf, and she has a sprite-like creature *Issun* accompanying her during her journey. Amaterasu also meets various talking and cute animals along her way. In Ni no Kuni some citizens combine humanoid characteristics with animalistic features (talking cat-people), and the world is filled with imaginative familiars that can be captured and taken care of (they can be pet, brushed, played with and fed). The Legend of Zelda's world of Hyrule is filled with imaginative creatures from octopus-creatures to rock-people. In addition, the most popular simulators in Japan (and even globally) are filled with cute animals: Animal Crossing, Nintendogs and Harvest Moon all focus on taking care of friends and friendly creatures.

While a lot of the iconic characters in Japan are something else than human or even creatures resembling human, these kinds of characters are rarer in the West. Disney characters such as Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck are animals, but function, as Saito argues, metaphorically "as fictional equivalents to human beings", and this quasi-humanness restricts their cuteness (Saito, 2000 cited in Iwabuchi, 2004:71). Moreover, J. Pelletier-Gagnon analyses an interesting change in the localized version of the Japanese game character *Kirby*. When the Kirby games (Nintendo, 1992-2015) were brought to America, the pink hero was drawn to have angry eyebrows, making it look aggressive and active instead of innocent and cute (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011:44). In addition, Nintendo's Satoru Iwata claimed in an interview by Gamasutra that when Pokémon was brought to America people said that Americans would never accept cute monsters, and some even suggested that Pikachu should be made more muscular (Rose, 2013). In fact, as Iwabuchi claims, cuteness can be interpreted as lack of coolness in America, as happened with Pokémon (Iwabuchi, 2004: 70).

A common characteristic for Japanese game characters is that they might be or appear to be physically or mentally weak in the beginning of the story, but they grow stronger as the story progresses. Roland Kelts interviewed a Japanese otaku Hideki Ono, who explained that *Sailor Moon*, a famous anime heroine, is small and fragile but powerful, which he thinks is very Japanese. He also believes that the emphasis on female and child characters is Japanese, as is having diminutive characters performing heroic feats (Kelts, 2006:166). For example, Pikachu is cute, but its exterior hides tremendous power. Oliver in Ni No Kuni is a famous child character helping others and fighting against evil. Additionally physically and sometimes mentally weak characters are very typical for a Japanese horror game. In most games in the Resident Evil franchise there are one or more playable female characters, *Silent Hill 3* has a female protagonist, all of the *Clock Tower* (Human Entertainment 1995-2002) and Project Zero games have females as lead characters. Commonly the characters are also troubled. Cloud in Final Fantasy VII goes through depression and despair once he deals with his past, and many of the other playable characters in the game also have mental issues to deal with. Hiroshi Ogawa beliefs that Japanese people enjoy helping a weak character grow both mentally and physically stronger during their quest (in role-playing games). This is why Japanese protagonists are most commonly humane and fragile at the beginning of their stories, and the camera is set to third-person view in order to enable watching the characters (Interview with Hiroshi Ogawa, 2014). According to Kanaoya, Japanese games differ from Western games in that they often contain strong role-playing game elements meaning that action leads to improvement and harder enemies. The player building the character towards becoming stronger and then using their new skills to keep driving towards a goal permeates almost every game in Japan. Instead in a

lot of the Western games, he observes, the character gets better weapons, but remains the same from a stats point of view (Interview with Shintaro Kanaoya, 2014). One can observe this tendency of the protagonist remaining static in the action-adventure games studied in this thesis as well as in first-person shooters. Lara Croft from Tomb Raider might be a female character instead of a buffed and macho male, but she is physically strong and mentally tough from start to finish. Her skills do not improve, but she gets more effective by finding better weapons. Garrett in Thief III: Deadly Shadows and Adam Jensen in Deus Ex: Human Revolution are incredibly strong and skillful from the very beginning of the game. While Adam Jensen may be improved with skill points, he can very well stand on his own without further augmentations. Garrett may get some magical abilities to enhance him with further skills, but much like Adam Jensen, he is a skillful hero without them as well. In Grand Theft Auto V, the characters' skills in things like driving might slightly improve, but in the end better cars and weapons make the protagonists more effective.

However, not all of the famous game characters in Japan can be characterized as cute, beautiful or weak. Solid Snake represents another kind of an archetype in contrast to the cuteness: the loyal, hard-working hero. This archetype closely resembles Tezuka Osamu's *Astro Boy* (Tetsuwan Atomu, 1952-1968), the very first manga character, and the inspiration for many mass media character archetypes to come, whose most important attributes are his strive to work hard and his human-like kind heart. All of these characteristics were promoted by the state as part of its national reconstruction policy in the early postwar period (when Tetsuwan Atomu was aired): Hard work, industriousness – whether as a worker, mother or student – was a national mantra, Allison observes (Allison, 2006:59). According to Damian Asling, Metal Gear Solid's Solid Snake "aims to serve as an allegorical caricature and reiterated form of another form of classical Japanese hero. This hero is the 'Tormented Lord', a character archetype seen routinely in period films and later Japanese works of the Edo period" (Asling, 2010:31). At the time of the game's release in 1997, the Japanese 'bubble' economy had just burst, and Snake is a character which embodies that of power through service, Asling analyzes, and compares Solid Snake to a "loyal retainer"-archetype: "The feudal Japanese who were so strong in martial terms were just as stalwart in their servitude; thus, Snake serves as a reminder to players of the time (especially Japanese) as an embodiment of resilience and undying loyalty. By being loyal to the mission or job at hand, one will be successful", Asling writes (Ibid:34.). On the same note, perhaps, self-sacrifice for greater good is a common element in Japanese games. In Final Fantasy VII, *Aeris* sacrifices herself in order to connect with the life-stream and to cast a holy magic to protect the planet, *Zack* has sacrificed his life to save the game's protagonist Cloud and *Cait Sith* offers its life for the common good. In

Dragon Quest VIII, *Princess Medea* steps in front of her father when villagers throw stones at him. In Ni No Kuni, Oliver's mother jumps to the river to save her son. In Ryû Ga Gotoku the protagonist Kazuma Kiryû has taken blame for his yakuza boss's death in order to protect his loved ones, and in the third game Ryû Ga Gotoku III, he has founded an orphanage, serving those who are in need of help. Furthermore, Kazuma's former lover, *Yumi*, takes a fatal bullet wound instead of him in the first Ryû Ga Gotoku-game. These kinds of examples can be observed in games other than the ones analyzed in this thesis as well.

In addition to being self-sacrificing and hard-working these characters are somehow different from others. Many of the characters in Japanese games fight secret battles beneath composed exteriors. As Eri Izawa observes, they might live unusual lives touched by the "lone wolf" brush, and often they are burdened with hidden powers or knowledge or scars that distinguish them from others (Izawa, 1997). She writes that "trying desperately to fit in, to understand, to change, to save others; these people fight fervently for the right to exist as what they are, or were meant to be" (Ibid). Cloud in Final Fantasy VII is the lone hero who acts cold and apathetic towards everyone else and the world around him. He prides himself for being a former first class member of an elite group called "SOLDIER", but at the same time this is precisely the thing that separates him from other people. Once confronted by his childhood friend, *Tifa*, Cloud agrees to start protecting her, which gives him an initial purpose in the story. Ryû Ga Gotoku's Kazuma Kiryû is a former yakuza, famous for his skills in martial arts, and this separates him from the Japanese society. However, protecting children is what gives him a direction to follow.

The loss in WWII and the collapse of the paternal authority, which included desacralizing the emperor and condemnation of the military leaders that had led the country to a disastrous war, helped create a fantasy construction of "unstable and shifting worlds where characters, monstrously wounded by violence and the collapse of authority re-emerge with reconstituted selves" (Allison 2006:11-12). Sephiroth, the main antagonist of Final Fantasy VII starts out as an idolized mentor for Cloud, and he leads his unit of elite military division called SOLDIER into missions in an attempt to help people. However, once he finds out that he is a result of a genetic experiment by the same corporation that supervises him, he feels betrayed and decides to take control of the planet, believing it to be his destiny. He manipulates Cloud by telling him that Cloud himself is also a result of these experiments and a failed clone of Sephiroth, and because of this Cloud falls into despair. However, Cloud ultimately dismisses this deceit and becomes a stronger person for it, while Sephiroth is the game's antagonist because he fails to become stronger and use his powers to help, and instead channels these traumas into destructiveness. Solid Snake's story is very similar to Sephiroth's and Cloud's as he, too finds out that he is the result of cloning operations (The *Les Enfants Terribles* project)

done by the government he serves. In fact the whole reason he was sent to his mission was to retrieve a government weapon intact while unknowingly destroying the genetic creations (including himself) of the project with a virus. Solid Snake destroys the weapon intended for destruction and escapes from the government, but continues living without giving up despite now being infected with this deadly virus. Ryû Ga Gotoku franchise's Kazuma Kiryû serves his yakuza superiors at first, but is ostracized by those he serve and even betrayed by his best friend. However, even after being betrayed he keeps on fighting against those who threaten others, loyally protecting his adoptive daughter. Izawa Eri (1997) reaches the heart of this archetype when she beautifully analyzes Japanese characters (in anime):

> "Circumstances are cruel; victories come with penalties; and our heroes stumble and fall into fits of despair, anger, and apathy; sometimes they die. Yet they fight. And often, the character finds that he must conquer himself before he can take on the world. It is this dynamic, passionate, continuing struggle of the individual characters that gives these stories life; it is this struggle that not only keeps the audience intrigued, but also encouraged. Never give up, no matter what happens (Izawa, 1997)."

Finally, Japanese characters are often not clearly good or evil whether they are the heroes or the enemies that the hero(es) need to defeat. Roland Kelts claims that it is these gray areas that distinguish Japanese anime [and in this case, games, which borrow heavily from anime]. There is an absence of easily definable dilemmas, moralities or resolutions, he writes and adds that Japan is a nation without a morally prescriptive central religion or a holy book that provide commandments for moral behavior. What is important instead is context; how one should behave in a given situation or circumstances. (Kelts, 2006:46) Anne Allison explains that the children's fantasy in Japan and the United States differs, as in the USA the trend is for greater realism and clear-cut borders, especially in stories with battles between good and evil. Instead in Japan the emphasis is on greater phantasm and ambiguity. (Allison, 2004:44) In Dragon Quest VIII the heroes have to fight against various opponents during their journey, but what I observed was that commonly they had a valid reason for their behavior. *Geyser*, the first boss monster in the game, lives in a cave underneath a water fall, but gets mad after one day a crystal ball falls on his head and makes his head confused and wobbly, leaving his capabilities of vocal expression damaged as well. He calms down after being defeated in the battle and confines to the heroes that he thought they were the ones who dropped the crystal ball on his head, but now he feels better and hopes that the heroes ask the guilty partner to never drop items down the waterfall again. Another boss monster, *Khalamari*, attacks the heroes, but is in fact manipulated to be aggressive via evil magic by the main antagonist. After he is defeated he is cured and becomes kind once more. In Final Fantasy VII one can understand the motivations behind Sephiroth's corruption and destructive behavior. After all,

he felt orphaned and betrayed. In Metal Gear Solid the main antagonist, *Liquid Snake*, is a victim of genetic experiments done by the government, and later on of their attempt to murder him, so there is a reason for his actions. In Ni No Kuni some of the characters that the party must fight are in fact plagued by nightmares that control them, or are missing an important piece of their heart and Oliver must in the end heal them instead of defeating them.

Instead in most of the Western games I played the antagonists were clearly definable as inherently power-hungry or intending to destroy the world, so defeating them was both necessary and justified. This can be claimed of *The Hag* in Thief: Deadly Shadows, the *Darkspawn* and the *Archdemon* in Dragon Age: Origins, of *Alduin* in The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, *Larson Conway*, *Pierre Dupont* and finally *Jacqueline Natla* in Tomb Raider, of *Irenicus* in Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn and the *Reapers* in Mass Effect II. Additionally, when Pokémon was imported to America, ambiguous content related to good and evil was changed into black-and-white confrontation between characters (Iwabuchi, 2004:69).

5.2.4   Co-operation

Underneath this title I conclude that the lack of first-person shooters and amount of role-playing games where the player controls a whole group of characters instead of a single protagonist in Japan shows that Japanese players and game characters are likely to co-operate instead of working solo, while in contrast Western games seem to highlight individual prowess. I will also analyze other forms of co-operation and helping between players and characters demanded or encouraged in Japanese games.

Even though the contemporary Japan is fully capitalist, the national culture has long been oriented towards the collective, in other words groups, co-dependency and communalism (Allison, 2006:216). Anne Allison recognizes that the trend of adding a team of heroes instead of one into works of popular culture began around the same time as the television drama *Go Renjâ* (1975-1977) was broadcasted. It had a team of male and female cyber-warriors in mecha suits fighting together, and working collectively as a unit they gained a unique battle ability of morphing together into a giant robot or creating a mega-tool out of their separate weapons. According to Allison, Go Renjâ represented a new concept in super-heroism based on two principles: A team force composed of ordinary people whose positive spirit sets them apart and rangers who have individual powers but who work together as a team in order to achieve superheroic goals. Since in this concept these powers are dispersed among all of the team members in spirit, weapons and various strengths, this heroism is collective and multisided, and as Allison adds, more democratic. Because the strength of the team is a sum of hard work,

team spirit and good mecha everyone, including women, is empowered, Allison writes (Ibid:96-99). Furthermore, Kelts asserts that the story and characters in a very popular anime *Kagaku ninja-tai Gatchaman* (1972-1974) represent fundamentals that appeal right to the heart of Japan's cultural values, and states that,

> "the "hero" is in fact a team, whose members must rely upon one another and not stand out as individuals; while there are distinct villains, a sense of evil tends to permeate the atmosphere, as though evil could emerge from anywhere, even from within the flawed and sometimes selfish heroes themselves; the ramifications of war are tragic (the father of one of the characters dies); and the heroes' ultimate mission, to defend the earth from complete annihilation and restore peace and stability, justifies their need to fight (Kelts, 2006:12)."

This tendency can be seen in video games as well. In most of the Japanese games themes of friendship, family and cooperation are illustrated with the protagonist never working alone. In Final Fantasy VII the protagonist, Cloud, has a whole group of friends fighting alongside him. The protagonist is never alone in Ni No Kuni or Dragon Quest VIII either. In Pokémon the whole concept of the game is based on the protagonist depending on other creatures' power instead of his/her own. In another immensely popular role-playing game franchise, *Kingdom Hearts* (Square Enix, 2002-2014) the protagonist meets Disney's famous characters *Donald Duck* and *Goofy*, who join him and help him save the world. Furthermore, in Ôkami Amaterasu carries on her a sprite-like creature Issun, who eventually saves her. Finally, even though he works alone most of the time, Link would not be able to overcome some challenges without the help of Princess Zelda or the fairy, *Navi*, that follows him around in the Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time.

Additionally, Harry Holmwood, the CEO of MAQL Europe analyzes social network games in Japan and asserts that,

> "[m]any [Japanese] people are much more likely to pay to benefit not just themselves, but their friends and team mates. Games which allow players to team up, permanently or just for one mission, typically monetize much better than single player, or simple player versus player one (Holmwood, 2012)."

In social network games, such as Puzzle & Dragons the player may earn extra friendship points for giving gifts and helping out other players. Furthermore, in *Bravely Default: Where the Fairy Flies* (ブレイブリーデフォルト フライングフェア,リ Silicon Studio, 2012), a role-playing game for Nintendo 3DS, players can recruit other players' characters to their team to help them pass a particularly difficult battle. Moreover, in Pokémon games the only way to acquire all of the available Pokémon is to exchange them with other players, and thus

cooperating with other players is mandatory in order to complete the final main objective of the game. Even in a game such as Dark Souls II, where the protagonist ventures alone, the only way for the protagonist to leave its hollow state and become human again is to help other random players in defeating bosses.

In contrast to this Western game protagonists often work alone, as is the case in most first-person shooters. Furthermore, all of the action-adventure games analyzed in this thesis, namely Thief III: Deadly Shadows, Tomb Raider and Deus Ex: Human Revolution have lone protagonists. Even two out of five of the role-playing games examined either have a lone protagonist, or only one follower without a clear personality. Western social network games also often promote competing against other players instead of co-operating with them, as can be observed when looking at games such as *Clash of Clans* (Supercell, 2012) and *Trials Frontier* (RedLynx, 2014).

Helping out others is embedded in a lot of the storylines of Japanese games. In Ni No Kuni, almost all of the side-quests are related to helping someone and often Oliver and his friends are not able to continue their journey before helping out some key characters. In the Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Link helps others by, for example, finding items that they need or have lost. In Ôkami Amaterasu helps out children, talking sparrows, a sake brewer and other humans and creatures of the land. Finally, the whole premise of Ryû Ga Gotoku III is about helping people that are in direst need, whether it be a child or a host in trouble.

Instead in most of the Western games I analyzed the player could choose to help the other characters in their respective game-worlds, but what made the concept of helping different from the Japanese counterpart was that the character or characters themselves were initially strong enough to survive without the help of other people. The players or characters could also choose not to help (altruistically), and still be able to proceed in the story.

5.2.5   Collecting

In this section I shall analyze the elements related to collecting in Japanese games.

Games revolving around collecting different, imaginative creatures are still amongst the most commercially successful types in (and sometimes outside) Japan, and the most popular social network games in Japan are collectable card games. Some of the most popular video games related to collecting in addition to the already studied Pokémon are Nintendo 3DS's *Yôkai Watch* (妖怪ウオッチ, Level-5, 2013), *Monster Hunter* (モンスターハンター, Capcom, 2004), *Yu-gi-Oh!* (遊☆戯☆王, lit. "Game King", Konami, 1998-, and collectable card games, such as Rage of Bahamut. Even games not focused on collecting per se, such as the studied Ni

No Kuni, often include collecting creatures such as familiars or items, so they abide to this principle. For example, in Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King the player collects monsters in a special *Monster Arena* mini game, which is not mandatory to complete the game, but has tangible rewards. Data regarding monsters the protagonist's group fights against also get added to a special monster book, depicting them in detail. In Final Fantasy VII the only way to reach some bonus areas with tangible rewards is to capture, raise and breed chocobos. Furthermore, collecting characters seems to be the most popular element in f2p (free to play) iOS and Android games in Japan: In Aeria Mobile's *Pirate Maidens* (海賊ファンタジア lit. Pirates Fantasia, 2014) the player collects cute and/or scantily dressed pirate females and makes them battle against each other, Puzzle & Dragon's most important mechanic is collecting and fusing unique creatures which can then battle against AI enemies in the game, *The Idolmaster: Cinderella Girls* (アイドルマスターシンデレラガールズ, Bandai Namco Games, 2011) involves collecting and raising idols, each of them represented by a unique card. The examples are numerous. The social network games that feature collecting utilize the Japanese gacha-system, introduced in chapter 2.

In an Asahi Shinbun article, which Anne Allison cites in her book, the reporter wrote about the transactions children engage in while playing Pokémon, and noticed that regarding the collectible cards based on the Pokémon video game, kids enjoy collecting them more than playing with them because they are excited about their "cash value", which they could find out in dedicated magazines. The value in these collectible cards is based on rarity, a feature that Nintendo built into the availability. However, even when these cards were the most valuable (during the height of the fad), most children did not sell their cards, although there were hobby shops and dealers willing to buy them. Instead they organized play trades, where this value was the (imaginary) currency of transaction. The reporter pondered the reason for the collecting of these cards in the same way as people used to collect insects or stamps, and analyzed that in the accumulation and exchange of these cards there is an "arousal of *ningenkankei*" (human relationships), which is the foundation of traditional culture and gift exchange (Takanarita, 1994 cited in Allison, 2006:217-218). In Japan there is a long history based on gift exchange, and these rituals are still very much alive and practiced today.

The whole idea behind most of these games is continual acquisition. Anne Allison observes that in Pokémon the objects one obtains are both objectified (economically valued) and personalized (inducing affection, attachment and love) (Allison, 2006:197). This can be applied to other games of this type as well. The settings and mechanics in these games can be expanded endlessly with sequels and new things to collect. As Allison analyzes, the players have a continual desire to keep acquiring objects that form the core of the fantasy, whether it is more pocket monsters, more action figures or more virtual pets. Capitalism appears in the

clothes of limitless play and possibility, but there is no ultimate closure or satisfaction in the desire to expand further by acquiring more powers, more collectable creatures, more cards etc. There is always more to obtain and attain. (Allison, 2006:26) Collecting itself is a physical challenge that appeals to the basic instincts of hunting, gathering and trading.

As we can see in the next section, this also promotes commodification of these characters.

5.2.6 Cross-media Commodification

While I found that game franchises with their numerous sequels are equally important in Europe and America, I also realized that these franchises are often created and used in a different manner. In this section I will analyze how game franchises and characters are used in other forms of mass media and products in order to increase their popularity and profitability.

Anne Allison writes that the Japanese capitalism began in the post-war period, which changed militaristic Japan into a country of industrial production with the goal of providing material abundance for Japanese (Allison, 2006:14). She explains that in the 1950s and growing exponentially in the later decades manga and anime producers started producing media characters into toy merchandise. The phenomenon was called *masukomi gangu* (mass communication toys) and *masukyarâ* (mass characters), and it was kindled by shows, such as *Urutoraman* with its special effects and the sheer number of characters involved. Each week the protagonist would battle a new set of enemies, mutated beasts called *kaijû* that were distinguished by a huge amount of body parts, powers and tools. (Allison, 2006:61-62) The toy culture in postwar Japan was built on this principle, and even now there are specialty Urutoraman shops in Tokyo. Battle and transformation scenes in games, anime and manga are used as the trigger for toy merchandise (bodies, body parts, costumes, weapons…), which toy companies promote (Ibid:113). This same effect is gained by promoting games where the goal is to collect imaginative creatures, cards or other types of things.

Picard explains that "media mix" is a native industry term used to describe the video game media in Japan, which is a component of a broader media ecology that includes anime, manga, trading card games, toys and character merchandise (Picard, 2009:98). Furthermore, Roland Kelts claims that the word *monozukuri*, literally translatable as "thing-making" sums up Japan's marketing approach (Kelts, 2006:89). For example, when Pokémon first came out in 1996 as a serialized manga, it was soon followed by trading cards, anime, toy merchandise and a movie. In addition there were visible service campaigns, such as the launching of Pokémon-painted air carriers. Pokémon is a great example of a game that has permeated children's media and everyday lives, and every product is reminds the observer of to the Pokémon world and other

related products. As Ishihara Tsunekazu, one of the producers of Pokémon asserts, Pokémon is a product that can easily be expanded perpetually and connected with other media (Tsunekazu cited in Allison, 2006:197). As Anne Allison observes, "whether a child is playing the game or following the story through manga, anime or movie, the structure of an encounter with wild and fantastic creatures is replayed through the ritual of "pocketing" the Other". (Ibid)

According to Lister et al. Trans-medial 'entertainment supersystems' or convergent 'media mixes' are created around huge franchises (Lister et al., 2009: 292). Game franchises such as Pokémon, Dragon Quest, Final Fantasy, Resident Evil, Metal Gear Solid and The Legend of Zelda occupy multiple mass media formats and physical products at the same time. This convergence works the other way around as well, so there are mobile games based on popular anime series (almost every successful title has one) and based on console game franchises. As Kanaoya asserts, "[o]n console, being attached to a license or a franchise is still what propels you to the top. The top 7 best-selling titles in Japan across all platforms were on [Nintendo] 3DS, and were all franchise offerings (the most "original" was Puzzle and Dragons Z, a conversion from mobile). This speaks to Japan's gaming history and the dominance of incumbent franchises" (Interview with Kanaoya, 2014). This most likely encourages a Japanese game developer to focus on a catching narrative which can be expanded to multiple media outlets, unlike in the West, where this narrative is commonly affected by the player's choices.

While most commonly Japanese video games, cartoons, animation films and physical products are commonly linked with each other to boost sales of one another, in the West game franchises are most often kept separate from other mass media forms, but particularly successful franchises sell because of their expected guarantee or genre and quality. However, sometimes famous characters from other mass media can appear in games as well, as can be seen when looking at examples such as Disney license games and *Batman* games. Nevertheless, commonly this does not happen "from games out". There are some (rare) cases when this has occurred, as two live-action movies were created from the Tomb Raider game series, and *Mortal Combat* and *Alone in the Dark* games have also had live-action movies made out of them. Adam Jensen from Deus Ex games appears in comics and novels, and there are several movies revolving around popular game worlds coming out in the near future. In addition, Rovio Entertainment has purposely commoditized their *Angry Birds* characters by creating a whole line of different products and animated series around them. This is perhaps the most notable case of the phenomenon outside of Japan.

The dissimilarity can be explained with historical differences in the industrial structure between Japan and the rest of the world. Unlike in Europe and America, in Japan media industries are closely affiliated with each other. As Davis and Yeh explain in their work "East Asian Screen Industries",

"Japanese companies are *keiretsu* (interlocking) structures, with firms tightly conglomerated through cognate businesses, and through shared board members across different, affiliated companies. The screen industry is a gigantic enterprise with complex links between film, video, television, telecommunication, animation, publishing, advertising and game design… Without much segregation or autonomy in Japanese media structure, each branch is expected to support the whole. Thus, these media giants are vertically and horizontally integrated corporations with direct control of their production, distribution and sales. (Davis and Yeh, 2008:64-65 cited in Benson, Anya, 2013: 27)"

Japanese companies thus use this connection to benefit each other financially, and this media-mix is an expected norm rather than a possible outcome of a successful franchise. I conclude that storytelling, character design and elements, such as collecting activities are an important, if not the most important elements in commercially successful Japanese games and need to be realized in ways that make them connectable to a bigger mixture of tangible and intangible concepts and products.

6. Afterword: Bridges and Barriers between the Virtual Worlds

When I started researching and writing this thesis I had no idea how complicated it would be to form coherent theories about the differences between Western and Japanese gaming cultures. The issue is as complex as it is diverse, and in the middle of great changes. In this thesis I have introduced some of the theories that have been formed about digital games and gaming. I have also shortly introduced some of the monetizing methods found in social network games around the world, and compared the differences between them in Japan and the rest of the world. In chapter 4 I studied numerous digital games from Japan and from Europe and America, paying close attention to their visual style, setting, character design, gameplay and mechanics, stories and themes alongside other cultural aspect,s and finally I have briefly discussed how Japanese game franchises are connected to a wide range of mass media and products in order to gain and maintain popularity and presence in people's minds. Based on the case-studies in this thesis, as well as other research material and things I have observed in various games I have played during my life, I have attempted to find universal differences between Japanese and Western games surpassing boundaries between genres, and tried to connect some of these differences to their respective cultural backgrounds.

What I did find, however, was sometimes contradictory to my expectations. I had assumed some things were universally applicable, so I had not initially placed enough emphasis onto differences between game genres, and these did skew my comparative analysis a bit. For

example, story and characters are often not as important in action games as they are in role-playing games, so on spreadsheets it would seem that character design is equally important in Japan and in the West. However, one must take into consideration the relative popularities of genres between these areas: In Japan, role-playing games, simulators and collectable card games are by far the most favored genres, while in the West first-person shooters and action-adventure games constantly dominate the lists. One can also not grasp the differences in character design or cultural aspects by looking only at quantitative results, so creating qualitative categories and long analytic texts was mandatory in order to grasp a bigger picture.

In this thesis I have intended to answer the question **"how are Japanese and Western games and gaming cultures different from one another?".** As I have listed in this thesis, there are some features that make a game particularly "Japanese" or "Western", and in doing so are commonly more approachable to the players of their respective cultures.

Firstly, I analyzed gameplay and mechanics in Japanese and Western role-playing and action-adventure games. I have concluded that the player's perspective in the Japanese games analyzed was set to third-person instead of first-person whereas in Western games the ration between these perspectives was more equally divided, and could often be toggled. In all of the Japanese role-playing games studied here (with the exception of Dark Souls II), as well as in two out of the four Japanese action-adventure games examined, battles are randomly created and/or are conducted in a separate combat-mode, whereas Western gamers prefer to see the enemies on a map and issue commands either in real-time or by using a pausing option offered in some role-playing games. Furthermore, in the Western role-playing games researched the player could freely customize their protagonist, but in Japanese role-playing games the protagonist and other playable characters were pre-determined. Again, Dark Souls II proved to be an exception to this tendency. However, in action-adventure games the protagonist was always predetermined regardless of the country of origin. In addition to having pre-determined character builds at the start, most of the Japanese games did not give the player the option of customizing character abilities when progressing in the game. However, there were some exceptions. Ryû Ga Gotoku III allowed the player to choose where to distribute the protagonist's experience points, as did Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King and Dark Souls II. In contrast, skills and/or attributes were fully customizable in Western role-playing games and in the action-adventure game Deus Ex: Human Revolution. In the other three action-adventure games analyzed the characters either had predetermined skills which improved by repeating certain actions, or the protagonists became more effective by obtaining new weapons. Furthermore, saving mechanics also differed in that Western gamers seem to

prefer the option of saving the game at any point whereas there was an equal division between saving points and being allowed to save at any time among the Japanese games.

There were also clear differences in settings and character designs between Japanese and Western games when the player characters were pre-determined. Whereas in Western games all of the playable or otherwise important characters were either humans or humanoid (with the exception of some antagonists who could be demons, dragons or alien machines), in Japanese games imaginative (and often cute) creatures commonly played an important part, and were sometimes even in the role of the protagonist. Furthermore, while Japanese characters could be often described as either beautiful/handsome or cute, physically weak or mentally torn while being led by duty and honor, Western characters were commonly gritty, strong and masculine, surviving in harsh conditions. In addition while Japanese characters tended to work in groups or benefit from the strength of others, Western character design seemed to emphasize individual prowess. I have pondered the reasons for these differences and archetypes in chapter 5.

In addition, while in Japanese games the story and dialogue had to be advanced in certain order and could not be affected via different options, Western games were in most cases open world games, which could be explored in any order, or the storyline could be affected via different, often difficult choices and dialogue options. Moreover, character relationships were predetermined in all of the Japanese games, whereas in most Western games they could be affected somehow (commonly with dialogue options). Finally, extreme violence (gore) and sexual themes, were absent in Japanese games (with the exception of Ryû Ga Gotoku III), whereas in Western games violence was somewhat realistic and some games offered possibilities to engage in or observe sexual or sexually suggestive activities and crime.

As mentioned in the beginning of chapter 4, I chose to not include first-person shooter games in the case studies because they are not generally developed or sold in Japan, but by looking at the results of this thesis, theories as to why first-person shooter games have historically not succeeded in Japan can be formed as sort of an anti-thesis to support the findings.

First of all, as can be observed in chapter 5, Japanese games use a third-person camera instead of a first-person perspective whereas first-person shooters, as the name suggests, use a first-person point of view. Secondly, Japanese games have a tendency to avert violent solutions, but instead it is often important to help other characters the protagonist meets, or to find the hidden motivations behind some of their unacceptable actions. One can ponder whether this is more because of a general promotion of a *"yasashii"* ("kindness") culture or because the games are targeted at players of all ages, from children to elders. In contrast, in

first-person shooters the goal is to shoot fast and effectively, and the characters the protagonist fights against are most often (masked) copies of one another without any perceived personality. Thirdly, Japanese protagonists have different, detailed visual designs, and are often complex and physically or mentally weak and/or cute, but develop as they gain experience, whereas the heroes in first-person shooters are commonly physically strong, butch in character and obtain more effective weapons instead of evolving themselves. Because of the first-player camera, the protagonist is not commonly seen on screen in shooters. In Japanese games it is also common to see characters that are not human or even humanoid, whereas in shooters this is most likely not the issue, at least when it comes to player avatars.

Furthermore, the settings in first-person shooters are almost always realistic and gritty in nature, depicting war, terror and survival situations, photorealistic 3D character models and visual violence and gore. One can also look at the surroundings in Western first-person shooters, which imitate European or American landscapes. Instead Japanese game worlds are often clean, colorful and imaginative, commonly situated in more or less of a fantasy world with different creatures and supernatural elements, or are very clearly Japanese in nature. In addition, in first-person shooters the stories, character relationships and dialogue are not as emphasized as physical challenges, and the player is required to have quick reflexes in order to become good in these games. In contrast, in Japanese games narrative elements and character dialogue is highlighted virtually notwithstanding the genre. Finally, as we have established, Japanese players are not particularly into player versus player gaming, and prefer to instead play with each other in the same physical space or by co-operating in some other way. First-person shooters' re-play value is in player versus player gameplay, and players may compete against each other via an internet connection.

There is a counter-side to this coin too, however, as Japan has a rich shooter culture in their arcade halls featuring extremely popular Japanese shooters, such as the *The House of the Dead* (Sega, 1996-2013) franchise, where the player can shoot zombies and other creatures while holding a gun replica controller in their hands. One of the most popular arcade hall games lately has been *Gunslinger Stratos* [ガンスリンガースタロス] (Square Enix, 2012), a third-person shooter, which uses two light gun controllers that can be physically combined in different ways to change them into different weapons in-game (Ashcraft, 2012). An anime adaptation of the game is set to premiere in April 2015 (Anime News Network). Importantly, though, the game is very different compared to a Western First-person shooter with its character design, visual style, camera angle and setting.

However, while these findings are of significance, it is also important to note that localization and the choice of gaming platform affect the availability and popularity of any

specific game worldwide. In some of the cases I noticed that a localized and, more importantly, translated version of the game was never published outside certain regions, and in other cases the product was distributed, but never marketed to its full potential while taking the receiving country's cultural background into consideration. Commonly, however, a Japanese game is not published outside Japan, and Western game developers do not dare to invest into bringing their games to the risky Japanese market. For example games, such as *Parasite Eve* (パラサイトイヴ, Square, 1998) was never published in Europe, even though European fans of Japanese games have voiced their displeasure about it, and the first Fire Emblem games were never released outside the Japanese borders. Furthermore, in other games, such as World of Warcraft, an increasing amount of emphasis has been put on content that I think would interest a lot of Japanese players. To illustrate, collecting and raising various types of virtual pets that can battle against other players' pets closely resembles the concept of Pokémon, Monster Hunter, Yôkai Watch and some other popular Japanese games. In the *Mists of Pandaria* expansion Blizzard Entertainment added East Asian landscapes and emphasized cooking different kinds of foods (although the focus was on China). Finally, blood elves, a playable race introduced in an expansion in 2007, are similar to the character archetype of bishônen and bishôjo (introduced in chapter 5.2.3). However, World of Warcraft still has only a niche position in Japan for two very obvious reasons: It is only played on PC and it was never translated to Japanese (Poisso, 2014), even though a Chinese version exists with full translation and graphical localization.

Localization of games, whether it has been Japanese games to Europe and America or vice versa, has often been criticized for being sloppy or for not being done at all. For example, when *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (Activision) was brought into the Japanese market in 2009, players were disappointed when the game was dubbed into Japanese, breaking the "American feeling" of the game. The next release instead had subtitles in Japanese, which pleased the players. (Ashcraft, 2012) As mentioned in the above paragraph, games such as World of Warcraft were never translated to Japanese, making them hard for the mainstream player to follow. In addition, when Ryû Ga Gotoku 3 was released in the West as Yakuza 3, its mini-games based around Tokyo's hostess clubs were removed because the localizers were concerned that the Western audiences would not understand the references or would find them misogynistic. However, players complained about these omissions, leading to *Yakuza 4* being closer to the original *Ryû Ga Gotoku 4*. Only a quiz closely tied to Japanese general knowledge was removed. (Robson, 2011) Shintaro Kanaoya lists a few important localization efforts in his interview explaining that Electronic Arts added Japanese-looking characters to The Sims, as well as Japanese locations into SimCity. He also emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity in the process of localization, mentioning that Chorus Worldwide changed

Glyph Quest's (2014) spell name *Tsunami* into *Surge* in order to avoid using the word in a trivial manner due to the disaster in 2011 (interview with Kanaoya, 2014).

While I cannot delve too much into marketing within the space of this thesis, I think that it is important to recognize the differences between Japanese and Western mass media and marketing cultures. I will mention some key differences here. Firstly, while in a Western commercial it is common to see an expert advertising a product, in Japan celebrities (such as idols) sell things (for more about this subject readers should refer to Galbraith, P. and Karlin, J., 2012). One should pay attention to differences in the popularity of social media channels as well: Facebook is not nearly as popular in Japan as it currently is in the West, since Japanese people prefer to use pseudonyms over real names online, and particularly for this reason Twitter is favored in Japan (Emoderation Social Media Management, 2014). Additionally, in Japan television is still a popular mass media outlet, and game publishers and companies invest large amounts of money in television advertising.

Cross-promoting products and other games within a game or in another mass media format is most likely one of the most profitable ways to enter the Japanese market. One of the interesting ways games and other products are cross-promoted in Japan can be seen in Translimit's short promotional campaign with a Tokyo-based lunch bentô (packed meal) delivery startup Bento.jp, where the player could receive a complimentary lunch delivery from Bento.jp in case they won a quiz in BrainWars against Translimit's official account. Even when the player lost the game, they would receive a 10% discount coupon for the lunch service. (Ikeda, 2014) This kind of campaign is very typical for a Japanese mobile application. In addition one of the most discussed cross-promotions of recent years has been Supercell's and GungHo's cross-promotion of their respective products (Clash of Clans and Puzzle & Dragons respectively) within their games, transcending cultural and physical limits between Finland and Japan.

I have also explained how Japanese mass media products surpass media barriers, and work as trans-media superpowers. For example, a popular game can inspire an anime series, which then becomes a movie, and game characters can become merchandise in the form of figures, mascots advertising products or used in many other, imaginative ways. This is just one of the many reasons why good character design and clever use of products and media channels is paramount for a successful game in Japan. Finally, as Antti Szurawitzki analyses, one needs to understand the Japanese game industry as a whole. He mentions that fan culture in Japan is a lot deeper than in the West, so marketing addresses these desires in a different way. In Japan, the key is not delivering a new product, but developing a long-term trust (interview with Antti Szurawitzki, 2015).

Even though the games industry in Japan used to be the most influential and powerful "game center" in the world, some Japanese and Western gamers, game developers and analysts have predicted dark times for the Japanese games industry in the shadow of declining revenues, and have claimed that the Japanese games industry has stopped innovating aesthetically and technologically. Things are not as black and white, however. Western and Japanese games industries have thus far focused on different areas and inventions. Whereas European and American developers walk hand-in-hand with the advances of technology installing better graphics and improving user interfaces, cinematics and game mechanics, Japanese developers are famous for delivering imaginative stories and game worlds alongside innovative gaming systems (such as the Nintendo Wii and Gameboy). While the West is only now reveling in the popularity of mobile games, Japan has produced handheld gaming consoles from as early as 1989 when Nintendo released GameBoy, and I can hardly think of any reasons why Japanese gaming companies would not excel at producing quality games for mobile phones in the future as well. On the contrary, Japan's mobile game industry is in rigorous health producing hefty amounts of revenue, and while its console games figures may not be growing per se, Japan still has a mature, stable games market (Fahey, 2014). As Kanaoya comments in Fahey's article, "[i]f we're talking about the Japanese market for gaming, it's healthier than ever - the appetite is there, and being sated mostly on mobile and tablets by the same kinds of games that used to be popular on console" (Kanaoya's comment in Fahey, 2014). Also, according to Holmwood, service culture in Japan has led to Japanese mobile game developers offering a continuous flow of game content, exceptional customer support and in-game events, which are mandatory in order to succeed in the demanding Japanese games market (Holmwood, 2012).

I believe that we have entered an era where Japanese games are more influenced by the gaming cultures of Europe and America and vice versa, and a lot of the innovations are of mixed heritage. For instance, as I have claimed earlier in chapter 5.2.1 of this thesis, Western horror games such as Slender: The Eight Pages and F.E.A.R have been influenced by Japanese horror tropes, and Japanese games such as Resident Evil and Silent Hill have instead taken elements from Western horror, becoming increasingly trans-national. While Ubisoft Entertainment, one of the biggest game publishers in the West developed and published a purposely JRPG styled game *Child of Light* in 2014, the upcoming *Final Fantasy XV* (Square Enix) is said to be nothing like the previous titles in the franchise and to resemble a Western game more than a Japanese one. Furthermore, one of the topics of discussion lately has been the change in gamer demographics in Europe and America. While in Japan, a big proportion of the games have always been catered to a wide range of gaming audiences of different ages, in

the West the games have been directed to straight 16 to 35 year old male gamers. However, latest researches show that the average gamer is not limited to a straight male, and games have further increased their appeal amongst other demographics (Jayanth, 2014). This has affected the design of some games in the last years. Some Western game studios have started putting more emphasis on character design and complex stories. An increasing amount of protagonists or important NPCs are now female, and in some games one can play a character who is something else than human entirely. Meanwhile some Japanese game studios have started using more "realistic" graphics in their games. While Square Enix has always been one of the pioneers regarding beautifully rendered game graphics, there are also games such as Dark Souls II that prove a photogenic visual style can be adopted in Japan as well.

In addition to all of this Western games have increased their popularity in Japan, and in my survey to Japanese gamers several of the respondents voiced their opinion on Western games often being more interesting than the Japanese games they had played. In fact, Yoichi Wada, the CEO of Square Enix claimed in an interview on the Edge magazine in 2010 that it is not the Japanese players that are biased against the Western games, but instead retailers have prejudices and refuse to procure foreign games. He adds that *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (Eidos Interactive, 2009) is an example of a Western game that caters to Japanese tastes, being in his opinion an evolved version of Metal Gear Solid. (Edge-Online, 2010) Surprisingly, Square Enix, known to be the most revered Japanese RPG maker, began to acquire the Japanese publishing rights to Western first-person shooter games, such as Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 after the game's publisher Activision closed its Japanese branch down (Ashcraft, 2012). All of the industry people I interviewed forecasted that mobile games are one of the key pathways for a Western studio to reach the Japanese market, as long as localization and design is done well, and the popularity of mobile games such as Candy Crush Saga and Clash of Clans seem to indicate so. Although, as Remedy Entertainment's producer Joonas Laakso adds, "the mobile market is more mature than anywhere in the west; they are years ahead in mobile use and spending. If anything, the mobile market is even harder to break into as a western company, because we're so far removed from their user experience and mobile lifestyle" (interview with Joonas Laakso, 2014).

However, cultural barriers and preconceptions still exist. When approaching a Japanese market it would be wise to research those features that have thus far been attractive and familiar to Japanese gamers, as well as consider what are in contrast found unappealing. The Western industry and gamers could benefit from receiving more Japanese game titles that are currently published only domestically in order to immerse into different types of worlds and character design, and Japan could learn from Europe's and America's methods of supporting independent game studios in order to prevent becoming stale in their innovations. In both

Japan and the West bigger studios are careful about taking risks, and in doing so are on a road to producing no more than sequels to big franchises like Call of Duty and Final Fantasy.

While I do not claim that the conclusions of this thesis are applicable to all of the Japanese or Western game titles, I have chosen some of the most popular and highly acclaimed games to analyze in order to reach results as accurate as possible. In addition to this, the games I have analyzed here are artworks created within two decades. Some of them are restrained by the technological limitations of their times, so categorizing and comparing them proved to be challenging. The video game industry is in constant evolution, heading in various directions, and what might have been a definition of a genre or a style might change radically in a relatively short time. Innovative gaming platforms and products, such as the Nintendo Wii, mobile gaming devices and *Oculus Rift* offering virtual reality glasses, are constantly developed, and alongside them aspects like graphics evolve. Much like with other mass media forms, with games imagination is the limit, and game makers innovate disregarding national borders.

Furthermore, treating video games as important cultural products I felt that it was important to analyze some of the societal, religious and historical symbols, nuances and other elements in the games studied, but could only scratch the surface of this fascinating subject. This could be an interesting topic of research for an enthusiastic anthropologist, and I wish to read more about it in the future. The business models of this industry worth billions in Japan and the West are also a subject of importance, as is localization and marketing of games in these cultures. One could also delve deeper into the changing trends of the Japanese gaming culture.

Games are a form of interactive art. They give players keys to doors through which to dive into different worlds and become virtually anything. Games are also a wonderful medium through which to experience and research societies and different viewpoints and I feel that through playing games I have been able to consider cultural facets that I would not have otherwise thought of, although sometimes pinpointing those aspects proved challenging. I hope that this thesis proves helpful to those intending to design or publish a game to the Japanese market, or to researchers of digital games or Japanese culture.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Appendix A: Game Analysis – Role-Playing Games

Japanese games

Final Fantasy VII* (ファイナルファイナルファンタジーVII***)** (Squaresoft) was published on PlayStation in 1997, and is the seventh installment of the immensely popular Final Fantasy series. It was the first game in the series to be released in Europe, and it has been said to be the most iconic Japanese role-playing game to date, with people still reminiscing it all around the world. The version analyzed here is the European version of the game.

The game is situated in a futuristic fantasy-environment with magic, summonable god-like creatures (resembling and named after our world's mythical characters, such as Shiva and Knights of the Round [sic]) and zeppelins. The amount of dialogue is immense, and there are movie-like cut scenes to further the plot. The story tells about the protagonist Cloud Strife's and his group of friends' struggle against the world-controlling mega-corporation *Shinra*, which is draining the life force of the planet in order to use it as an energy source. As the game progresses, the group becomes involved with another source of threat to the world: the main antagonist Sephiroth, who plans to summon meteors to annihilate the planet for reasons that are gradually revealed. Although the player may complete some side-objectives, the storyline is fixed, and the player may not affect its course or the dialogues. Saving the game is handled through fixed save-points, except when walking on the world map, during which saving can be done at any point through the character menu.

All of the nine characters have clear motivations for doing what they do and joining in the group. For example, one wants to protect the planet for his daughter, one wants to find out what he is and where he is from, one is the childhood friend with a long one-sided love towards the main protagonist while also passionately wanting to stop Shinra from destroying the planet. Another finds his dreams of flying to space destroyed, and initially joins the party out of desperation, but as the story progresses, his motivations change. Not all of the characters are human: One is a lion-like creature who is able to speak and another is a fortune-telling robotic cat. The game features some memorable side-characters as well with interesting stories to tell. Cloud Strife is clearly the main protagonist of the story, and most of the time the player controls him instead of the other characters. However, the during the story some of the other characters become controllable for a little while as Cloud himself is unavailable. Also some of the creatures the group has to fight against or meets along the way are designed with detail and some of them have become iconic, seen throughout the franchise and made into different merchandise. Such characters include the *chocobo*, *moogle*, *cactuar* and *tonberry*. In Final Fantasy VII chocobos can be captured, trained to race and bred into different, better species.

In Final Fantasy, the camera is set to third-person point of view. When walking on the 3D world map, the camera can be rotated to look around. During battle scenes the camera switches to three-fourths isometric in order to allow the player to issue commands to the whole three-membered party. The battles are randomly generated as the player moves around the world, and are turn-based. The characters gain experience points for winning a fight and progress through levels, and gain increases in their stats and abilities automatically, but they may equip more effective weapons and different combinations of *materia*, which provides the characters with magical abilities.

The visual style of the game is anime-like, but the game is the first one in the series to use 3D graphics with pre-rendered characters and backgrounds. The story is forwarded with many cut scenes that were praised because of their advanced, movie-like graphics. During the game the player witnesses death scenes and fights monsters and other humans, but blood and gore is absent. Sexual themes and suggestions are also omitted.

Pokémon (***ポケモン***) [Nintendo Corporation] franchise is one of the most popular game franchises in Japan to date, and it became an international sensation in 1996. It was originally released for Gameboy, and newer installments can be played on Nintendo 3DS. New

installments of the game are introduced every few years, and cumulative sales of the video games have reached more than 200 million copies.

 In the first games the main protagonist is Red, a young boy, but in the later establishments the player can choose between a girl and a boy character. The major characters in the games are of course the "pocket monsters" that the player tries to catch (in the first game there were 151 of them, but as the universe has expanded so has the amount of Pokémon as well. Currently there are supposedly 719 Pokémon in the franchise.), but all of the rival trainers and side characters also have their own personalities, motivations and looks. For example, the player's rival in Pokémon Gold, Silver and Crystal is *Silver* (シルバー), who tends to see the Pokémon as tools, and steals his first Pokémon from Professor Elm to use it as he pleases. If certain prerequisites are met, he will reveal his reasons for hating *Team Rocket*, the evil crime organization of Kanto. Later he realizes his wrongdoings and starts to treat his Pokémon and even the player with respect. Most of the characters change somewhat during the story, and could be defined as round, but a lot of them serve the story of the main character without being affected by it themselves, thus being flat characters. In Pokémon, the main protagonist acts as an individual, even though in the anime series that was made out of it he is joined by two other people. However, it is important to notice that the protagonist helps other characters he meets and is helped by others as well.

The player is set into the shoes of a Pokémon Trainer, who sets on a journey to capture and train every existing creature called Pokémon. These Pokémon are then made to battle against each other in order to designate the best Pokémon and the best Trainer (Pokémon champion) in the world. The major subplot of each Pokémon game is to defeat an evil criminal organization, which tries to take over the world by misusing Pokémon. The setting of Pokémon is in a fictional universe that is based on real-life Japanese settings: the first games in the series are set in "Kanto Region" that is based on Kantô region in Japan, the second continent is based upon Kansai and Tokai areas of the country and so on. Storywise, the games contain many conversations (dialogue) as the player meets other trainers and completes events. The storyline is fixed alongside the dialogue, and the player does not have an option to affect them. There are no side quests besides the main goal of capturing every Pokémon. Completing the main storyline opens up new areas and features in the game, and the game remains open-ended with the goal of the player capturing one of each of the different species of Pokémon. An interesting thing to notice is that the player may not obtain every Pokémon without exchanging Pokémon with another player with a different version of the game (Red / Green / Blue). Thus cooperation with other players is mandatory in order to accomplish the main objective of the game.

Pokémon may be saved at any point through the menu. The perspective in the Pokémon games is third-person and the protagonist is mainly at the center of the screen. The camera angle is fixed and cannot be rotated. During battle the screen changes into a separate battle mode, which is also portrayed in third-person viewpoint with the player controlled Pokémon in front of the screen and the opponent located at "the back of the screen" in front of the controlled Pokémon. The battle is turn-based. Along the visual indicators, a separate text field announces the events of the battle. The Pokémon gain experience points and eventually levels, sometimes gaining new skills or evolving into different, more powerful versions of themselves. Even though the game's main mechanic revolves around battling, the battles are non-violent in nature and end up with the Pokémon either fainting or being captured. There are no blood or sexual themes in the game. Visually Pokémon resembles anime and graphics have been 2D up until the very latest installments.

The **Dragon Quest** game franchise is one of those that enjoy a cult following in Japan. All of the games have been best-selling internationally, have been turned into a manga and anime series, and the games' mascot, the Slime, into different products that are immensely popular

in Japan. Thus it has been important to include one of the games in this case study. The version analyzed in this study is the European version of the game.

Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King (*ドラゴンクエスト VIII 空と海と大地と呪われし姫君* lit. "Dragon Quest VIII: The Sky, the Ocean, the Earth, and the Cursed Princess")[Level 5: PS2, 2004] starts with the kingdom of *Trodain* in trouble: An evil jester *Dhoulmagus* steals an ancient scepter, turns *King Trodain* into a monster, his daughter, *Princess Medea* into a horse and the castle's inhabitants into plants while causing thorns to overrun the castle. Only a single young guardsman, our main protagonist named by the player, survives this attack and escorts the king and the princess to safety. They all start a journey to find the jester and to release the king, princess and the kingdom from its curse and are joined by other companions along the way. The storyline is very linear and cannot be affected. There are no side quests and no side objectives, but the player may find hidden items or monsters.

The main protagonist is silent and without opinions (no voiced or expressed thoughts) or real dialogue options, but he seeks to protect the good king and princess and to restore the kingdom to its former state. All of the characters (besides the main hero) express personality, have a history and motivations as well as develop during the story. The notable side-characters also have personalities and histories. Not all of the characters are human: The hero has a mouse, *Muchie*, in his pocket, and this mouse can be controlled in certain situations. The princess is until the very end a horse, who shows clear personality traits and has expressive eyes. For example, in a scene where villagers throw stones at his now monster-like father, Medea steps in front of him to protect him, which shows that she is brave and loving. The most famous characters in the Dragon Quest series are not human, but smiling Slimes, who can either fight against the group or be talked to during the journey. Many of the game's enemies can be recruited and used during the Monster Arena mini-game and during battle.

The setting of Dragon Quest VIII is in a medieval European-like world with magic and monsters. It has religious themes with churches dedicated for the Goddess, a recurring deity and creator in several Dragon Quest games, in every town. The game's story revolves around many themes, such as love, meaning of family, courage, friendship and helping others, and has religious undertones. For example, the motivations and background stories of most of the notable characters are related to their families. In the first town, for instance, the heroes meet *Kalderasha*, a former fortune teller who feels guilty about causing the death of the parents of his adoptive daughter *Valentina,* and has thus thrown away his crystal ball. However, Valentina wants his adoptive father to forgive himself and sends the heroes to fetch the crystal ball.

The camera follows the hero in third-person point of view, and it can be fully rotated. The player can also choose to view the world in a first person perspective, but during it the character cannot be moved. It is simply designed to view the world in more detail. During the separate fight modes the camera mode switches to three-fourths isometric, where the whole party can be viewed. The battles are randomly generated and turn-based, and the player issues commands to the whole party via a menu. The Dragon Quest games also feature a text field announcing the events of the battle. After the battles the characters receive experience points and gold, which can be used to buy items and weapons at in-game shops. With enough cumulated experience points the character gains levels, which automatically raise their attributes and give skill points that the player may distribute freely among the four special skills each character has. The game can only be saved in certain, pre-determined locations, usually at a church in a city.

The graphics in the game are 3D, anime-like and very colorful. The story is forwarded with cut-scenes made with the same game graphics, but with voice-actors for other characters than the main hero. There is no visual violence with blood and gore omitted, and sexual themes, with the exception of Jessica's sex appeal, is non-existent.

Dark Souls II (*ダークソウル II*) (From Software: PS3, Xbox 360, PC, PS4, Xbox One) is an odd one in the bunch of Japanese role-playing games in many ways, so it was important to include it in the comparative analysis. The game was published in 2014, and has succeeded commercially both in and outside Japan, and the reviews have been almost nothing but praise. Dark Souls combines RPG mechanics with action, and this is why it is categorized as an action RPG. The version analyzed here is the European PS3 version of the game.

In Dark Souls II the player assumes the role of a customizable male or a female Undead human, who is known as the "bearer of the curse". They have nearly lost their mind and gone "hollow" (which can be described as becoming a mindless zombie) while searching for a cure. The setting of Dark Souls II is a medieval one with elements of magic, and the game is situated in the world called *Drangleic*, where the main character travels because it is rumored to be a home for powerful souls that can assist Undead gain back their humanity and avoid becoming hollow. S/he is advised to seek out four ancient beings with powerful souls alongside *Vendrick*, the king of Drangleic. In the village of *Majula* within Drangleic, the protagonist can talk to the villagers, who have lost all hope because all the people have either died or become hollow. The characters he or she meets have some personality traits, but their histories are not really revealed, nor do they change remarkably during the story. They have voice actors, but very little dialogue (most of them mainly greet the protagonist). The character may find or buy better equipment during his or her journey, and the gear is visually shown on the protagonist.

The friendly NPCs in the game help the protagonist by selling him or her equipment and by letting the protagonist exchange claimed souls for skill points, which improve his or her skills and attributes. These souls can be collected from other Undead and unique (detailed) boss monsters that the player must defeat. The battle is real-time and action-oriented, and often excruciatingly difficult, dying in a battle is harshly punished by the protagonist becoming Undead again and having to travel back to their place of dismay in order to regain the souls they have collected before dying. The player can become alive by using certain, extremely rare items or by helping other players defeat boss monsters. Being alive permits the character to have a full health bar, which declines every time the character dies and thus becomes hollower.

Some themes in the storyline revolve around all-consuming love, betrayal, loss and despair. The protagonist does not voice out their thoughts or opinions, nor are they expressed in any ways, and there are no dialogue options. The storyline itself in Dark Souls II is fixed, and no action the player takes will change its outcome. A few minor details can be affected, however, as can be the order in which the player meets the powerful souls he/she is sent to meet. There are no side objectives per se, but hidden items and pathways as well as optional bosses can be found if the player looks closely enough. The game can be saved only in pre-determined locations, which are marked as a bonfire. An interesting mechanic of Dark Souls II is the possibility of cooperating or fighting with other players, even though the game is a single-player game. The player may offer two other players the chance to come and help them in a difficult boss fight in exchange for them becoming alive again (one of the only ways to obtain the alive state). They may also leave simple messages warning about dangers and alerting about treasures, which can be seen by the other players roaming the world. Other players may also see echoes of other players' actions and how they have died, so they have hints on the things to be aware of nearby. Finally, the players can invade other players' worlds and try to kill them in exchange for powerful items

The graphics in Dark Souls II are very realistic, and it uses a 3D world fully to its advantage. The camera follows the protagonist with a third-person point of view, and it can be freely rotated. Violence is somewhat realistic, with blood splatters on the floor and somewhat violent combat system, but gruesome, detailed acts of gore are omitted. There are no sexual themes or suggestions.

***Ni no Kuni: Shikkoku no Madôshi** (二の国漆黒の魔導士 lit. "Second Country: The Jet-Black Mage,* the English version being *Ni no Kuni: Dominion of the Dark Djinn)* [Level 5: Nintendo 3DS] was published in 2010 for Nintendo DS in co-operation with Studio Ghibli, a renowned animation studio internationally famous for its movies directed by Hayao Miyazaki. It was later on in 2013 adapted to PlayStation 3 and titled *Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* (二の国白き聖灰の女王, *Ni no Kuni: Shiroki Seihai no Joô*). The version analyzed in this thesis is the original Japanese Nintendo DS version. Further down the analysis and later in this thesis the name of the game will be shortened to Ni no Kuni.

The protagonist of Ni no Kuni is a small boy, *Oliver* (オリバー) who loses his mother when she dies of heart attack right after saving Oliver from drowning. The tears of Oliver cause the doll he had received from his mother to become alive, revealing itself as a fairy named *Shizuku* (シズク). Shizuku tells Oliver that he is from another world where an evil wizard, *Jabô* has taken over, and that there are "soul mates" sharing links with someone from this world in Shizuku's world. He tells Oliver, that his mother looks like a great sage Alicia (アリシア), who was captured by this evil Jabô. Oliver sets out to rescue his mother's soul mate to this other world hoping that this will bring his mother back in his world. Oliver gathers a group of friends that will accompany him during his adventure.
Ni no Kuni, as the name suggests, has two different kinds of worlds. Oliver's home world is a realistic town that by the looks of it could be from Europe, Japan or America. The second country, in which the characters spend most of their time during the story, mixes settings from Middle-East, beach towns, old Europe and many other real-life locations, but the citizens can be humans or talking cats, for example. The world is also separated from the more realistic world by the existence of magic and by the different imaginative "monster" creatures the protagonist and his group must battle along the way. All of these creatures can be collected and raised to fight alongside the hero as familiars with treats, experience gathering and care (brushing, playing etc.). These creatures also evolve into different, stronger versions after certain conditions are met. During the game Oliver gains a magical pot with a genie, which enables him to cook food and items from different ingredients. Some of the food can be used as treats for the familiars.

All of the protagonists he brings alongside him have clear motivations in joining him, show strong personalities and develop during the game. Maru, for example, is at first a passive, melancholic girl whose heart Oliver heals, bringing back her cheery, brave personality. Healing hearts that an evil wizard Jabô has broken by stealing pieces of them is one of the most important game mechanics in Ni no Kuni: Among the people that Oliver meets there are those that either have an attribute in their heart missing or an excess amount of it. These attributes are things such as courage, kindness or enthusiasm, and Oliver has the power to draw, with the permission of the person, some of the excess attribute in a person, and to give it to the one who is missing a piece. Sometimes these characters are haunted by nightmares, which the player must defeat in order to heal the characters. Helping others is in the most important role in Ni no Kuni, and while the player can complete bonus errands to help citizens, in most cases helping is mandatory in order to progress in the game. The characters can obtain better equipment, but changing gear does not visibly show on the character.

The plot in Ni no Kuni is very linear and cannot be affected: The player may venture from the road in order to complete some bonus errands and to find hidden items and familiars, but the story needs to be completed in a certain order. There are no dialogue options to choose from. The game can be saved at certain pre-determined points only. During battles, the game switches to a separate battle mode, where all of the playable characters and their opponents are visible, and the battle itself is turn-based. Once the battle is won, the characters gain

experience points, which when gathered to a certain point, raise the level and skills of the characters. These skills are pre-determined and cannot be affected. The camera is fixed on third-person point of view, and cannot be rotated. The visual style of the game is anime-like and colorful and they are presented in 2D.

Western games

Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim is a best-selling role-playing game developed by Bethesda Game Studios in 2011. It has sold around 20 million copies altogether and surprised everyone by also topping the Japanese best-selling lists. The game has been praised for its immensely rich and open world that the player can immerse themselves into for almost endless amounts of time. The game was published on PC, Xbox 360 and PS3. The version analyzed here is the European PC (Microsoft Windows) version. During this thesis, the title of this game shall be shortened to "Skyrim".

Skyrim sets place in the land of *Skyrim*, a province of the empire on the continent of *Tamriel* that is in the middle of a civil war between two factions. *Stormcloaks* are made of Skyrim's native Nord race rebelling against the *Imperial Legion*, the military of the Empire. In Skyrim the player steps into the shoes of a fully customizable protagonist, who finds him- or herself being transported to be executed, but this operation is interrupted by a huge dragon, which destroys the town. After helping to kill the dragon later in the game, the protagonist absorbs the dragon's soul which grants them the ability to use magical Dragon Shouts. The protagonist is informed that s/he is a *Dragonborn*, a mortal with the soul of a Dragon, who are anointed by the gods to help defend the world against the threat of the Dragons.

The setting of Tamriel is a realistic, 3D world with almost life-like graphics. It has landscapes from wintery mountains and forests to swamps and cities, the sky and weather change depending on the day or night. Even though there is a clear major plotline it is only a tiny fragment of the stories and quests hidden within Skyrim. Choices the player makes during the story have consequences, and they change the world and how its inhabitants react to the protagonist: The player may choose to join a faction, which are organized groups of NPCs, or the player may choose to destroy them. Some of the characters have deep background stories and motivations, and some of them can be helped or destroyed, changing their character and outcome. Most often crimes, such as stealing or murder have consequences: guards will arrest the player, who then must pay a fine or spend time in jail. There are several dialogue options when talking with the NPCs, and they may either become to love or to hate the protagonist. Some of them may be recruited as followers, who then help the player to fight against enemies, and some of them can even be married. The protagonist may also freely choose to attack an NPC, and killing one removes them from the game permanently. There are hundreds of characters that the player may meet during their travels, and they are all voice acted (admitted that most of them have recurring voice actors and actresses). The player can complete all of the side quests in any order and explore the world for as long as they like before completing the main story, and even after that the game continues with the player being able to explore more.

The game is completely "real-time" with everything from walking around to fighting happening in the same mode space. The player must move, aim and issue commands by pressing the corresponding buttons. Using a skill rewards the player with experience points, which then accumulate into levels and skill points. The player can then choose to distribute these skill points into their preferred abilities, such as magic, bows or sneaking. The camera angle can be toggled from first-person perspective to third-person perspective at will, and the camera can be fully rotated. The game may be saved freely at any point. There are some violent scenes in the game with the camera zooming in and slowing down on a particularly

brutal kill in a battle. Sexual themes are omitted, and even though the player may sleep besides their spouses, the screen will fade into black once that happens. The avatar may consume alcohol during gameplay if the player so chooses.

Fallout III is an action role-playing open world video game developed by Bethesda Game Studios in 2008 for PS3, Xbox 360 and Microsoft Windows. The version analyzed here is the European PS3 version.

The game is situated in an alternate universe in the year 2277, where the 1940s and 1950s aesthetics, design and technology have advanced to the directions that were imagined during the time resulting in laser weapons, gene manipulations, artificial intelligence, wide use of atomic power and vacuum tubes. However, this retro-style America ravaged is by a destructive nuclear war, where life and natural resources are scarce and some creatures and humans are mutated in horrible ways because of the radiation that pollutes the planet. Everything has become a wasteland and life a battle for survival. The only people who have not experienced the most devastating consequences of the radiation are people that have been located to live inside underground vaults built to protect from the effects of nuclear war, but the vaults have been closed from the outside world for two hundred years.

The player takes on the role of one of the people who have been born and raised inside one of these vaults, but who is forced to flee from it to this world that they have never experienced. The avatar is fully customizable, and the player is able to decide what they will become in this world with distributable skill points that they accumulate with experience points. The game can be explored freely, contains tons of side-objectives and quests, and the choices and dialog options picked affect the storyline, other characters and the eventual fate of the whole world alongside how people react to the protagonist. For example, the player can choose to either protect a settlement or to detonate a nuclear bomb in the middle of it. Crimes, such as stealing or murder have consequences if the player is caught doing them, and killing an NPC removes them from the game permanently. The protagonist mostly works alone, but can recruit a single follower and rescue a dog that help them in battle, but those characters express very little personality or function besides that. The opponents can be seen on the map and the battle is a hybrid between a real-time combat and turn-based combat, as the player can pause the game to issue special commands that consume action points. Otherwise the combat resembles first-person shooters. The camera is set at first-person perspective by default, but may be set to third-person perspective as well. The game may be saved at any point either by using a quick-save mechanic or via a menu.

The graphics in Fallout III are photorealistic and 3D, and all of the characters are voice-acted. It contains brutal violence and sexual themes and the avatar may also consume alcohol and drugs.

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn was developed by Bioware and published for Microsoft Windows in 2000. It's a sequel to Baldur's Gate. The game has received critical acclaim, won numerous awards and sold more than two million units. The game analyzed here is the enhanced edition released in 2013.

The setting of the game is in a high fantasy realm of *Faerûn* that resembles medieval Europe, but contains fantastic creatures and magic. The player is set in the role of a fully customizable protagonist, who is a descendant of *Bhaal*, the God of Murder. The game starts with the hero and some of their friends being captured and experimented upon by a mysterious wizard named *Irenicus* without any memory of how they ended up as his prisoners. Followed by a distraction the protagonist manages to escape with their friends and ends up in an unknown city of *Athkatla*, where the wizard fights against unknown attackers. One of the protagonist's friends angrily attacks Irenicus with magic and gets captured alongside with him

by a group of people for an unsanctioned use of magic in the city. Now the protagonist must find both their friend and this mysterious wizard within an unknown land.

The world of Baldur's Gate is filled with side-objectives and quests, which the player may choose to complete, and the player's choices affect the storyline and how non-player characters react to the protagonist. There are several companions the player may recruit to their group and they can have six of them with them simultaneously. The rest will wait at a designated location to be recruited again. All of the companions have personalities and histories with personal quests the player can opt to complete. They also react to the player's choices and can become friends, enemies or sometimes even lovers. All of the important NPCs are partly voice-acted, meaning that some of their comments are voiced while the rest is written in text. All of the opponents can be seen during regular playing mode, and there is no separate combat mode. The combat is real-time, but the player can pause the game in order to issue commands. The characters gain experience and levels, and accumulate points, which can be distributed among different attributes and skills. The game can be saved at any point either by using a quick-save mechanic or via a menu.

Baldur's Gate II is 2D, but is designed to look as if it was 3D. The camera is set in a three-fourths isometric perspective allowing the player to see the whole party simultaneously. The graphics attempt photorealism. The game includes some graphic violence, as defeated opponents can be blown to pieces. There are also some optional sexual encounters in the game, but they are not graphic in nature (screen fades to black). The protagonist may consume alcohol if the player chooses.

Dragon Age: Origins (from now on referred to as Dragon Age) is developed by Bioware and published in 2009 by Electronic Arts. It was released on Microsoft Windows, Mac OS, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. It has been critically acclaimed (with a Metacritic average score of around 90 depending on the version), chosen as the best role-playing game of year 2009 on several occasions and has sold over 3,2 million copies worldwide up until February 2010 (Electronic Arts Inc.). In Japan the game did not go completely unnoticed, and according to VGChartz it has been selling around 80,000 copies.Dragon Age has also spun two sequels and one expansion up until 2014. The game analyzed here is the European PC (Microsoft Windows) version.

Dragon Age is set in a medieval European *Fereldren* with magic and other supernatural elements, one of the countries that are a part of a continent of *Thedas*. Thedas is now swarmed by demonic creatures, the *darkspawn* that rise to the surface during movements called Blight and are commanded by an *Archdemon*. Ever since the first Blight, Thedas has relied on a legendary order of warriors called the *Grey Wardens* to drive away the darkspawn. The player assumes the role of a freely customizable hero, who becomes a member of the Grey Wardens through a dangerous ritual called Joining. After the ritual the player and the Grey Wardens are sent with the king of Fereldren and his army to lure the darkspawn into attacking a fortress, where they would instead be attacked by the king's father-in-law's, *Loghain*'s army. However, instead of going along the plan, Loghain abandons the battlefield with his army, leaving the king and the Grey Wardens to be massacred. The darkspawn thus seize control of southern Fereldren. The only surviving Grey Wardens are the hero and their companion *Alistair*, who must now gather an army against the Archdemon. They must enlist many different factions across Fereldren, but unfortunately all of the factions are faced with problems which the player must help resolve in order to ensure their allegiance. To make matters worse, Loghain uses the Grey Wardens as scapegoats, blaming them for abandoning the battlefield, while outlawing the order and sentencing all the remaining Wardens to death. He also seizes control of the kingdom, becoming a tyrannical leader and igniting a civil war.

The player is able to pretty much fully affect the outcome and the order in which they go through the story of Dragon Age. The player is faced with difficult choices that change what

happens to different factions and characters, and in the end even to the whole of Fereldren and the protagonist. During their travels the hero meets a lot of characters that they can recruit to their party or controllable characters, and with whom they will build different kinds of relationships. The characters will also change according to the things they experience during the game (and especially during their optional "personal quests" the player may complete). The NPCs can either approve or disapprove of the hero's actions or dialogue choices, become friends, lovers or even leave their party or end up turning on the protagonist. All of the characters have strong, different personalities and motivations with personal histories the player may choose to explore. The protagonist's personality is fully reflective of the choices the player makes in dialogue and quests. Dragon Age is fully 3D and the graphics style is realistic. The battles are real-time which the player can choose to pause in order to issue commands to their party members. All the party members gain experience points by doing quests and by winning battles, which then accumulate into levels. When leveling up the characters gain skill points, which may be freely distributed among their abilities. The camera is set to third-person perspective, which can be freely rotated around the active character. In the PC-version the game views can also be changed by zooming in or out to a detailed overhead view or to a three-fourths isometric view. The game may be saved at any point.

The game includes somewhat graphic violence with blood and death scenes, and sexual themes in the form of a few tactfully depicted sex scenes should the player choose to pursue them, but no explicit sex, nudity or gore.

Mass Effect II is an action role-playing video game created by BioWare and published by Electronic Arts in 2010 for Xbox 360 and later on to PS3 and PC as well. It was ranked highly on aggregate websites such as Metacritic (and average score of 96 out of 100), received numerous awards and was a commercial success, selling over 3million copies. It is a direct sequel to its predecessor Mass Effect I and the second part of the Mass Effect Trilogy, which all in all has sold over 7 million units (Furtado, 2011). The version analyzed here is the European PC (Microsoft Windows) version.

The setting of Mass Effect trilogy is situated in a futuristic world in 22nd century, where different races from all around the universe have based colonies all over the galaxies. Technological artifacts called *Mass Relays*, rumored to be built by an extinct alien race known as the *Protheans*, make it possible for spaceships to travel nearly instantly between star clusters and systems. A body of governments called the *Citadel Council* controls a large percentage of the galaxy and is responsible for maintaining law and order among races of the galactic community. The player steps into the shoes of a freely customizable protagonist with the name *Commander Shepard*, who has in the first Mass Effect been named the first human Spectre, a peacekeeper of the council, and who has helped defend against a highly-advanced machine race that harvest organic races and calls itself the *Reapers*. In the beginning of the game Shepard dies in an attack against his/her spaceship. His/her body is recovered by *Cerberus*, a shady organization led by the mysterious *Illusive Man* and known for experiments on humans and other races, terrorist activities, sabotage and assassinations. They resurrect and restructure Commander Shepard, who wakes up two years later when the research station is attacked by its own security *mechs*[2]. Shepard escapes with two Cerberus members, and s/he is brought to meet with the Illusive Man, who tells Shepard that entire populations are disappearing all over the galaxy. Upon research Shepard finds out that the Reapers are working through an insectoid race called the *Collectors* to attack these colonies. S/he must now work for Cerberus and collect a crew to help him/her stop these Collectors.

In the Mass Effect trilogy in general the player has much to say on how the story progresses and eventually ends. The player has to make difficult choices which determine what happens

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[2] A science-fiction term for robots or machines controlled by people

to a certain person, to a whole race and eventually to the galaxy, and the choices carry on to the sequel, Mass Effect 3. By doing side missions Shepard may find new equipment, resources to upgrade their ship or key items that may help or destroy others in the game. The player may also somewhat affect the order in which they go through the game, but there are limitations. Furthermore, the player may change how NPCs in his/her party or all around the game-space react to them with dialogue options and choices during missions and quests. Certain NPCs may become their friends, lovers or enemies depending on what the player has chosen Shepard to become. These choices also determine who will be in Shepard's crew in the end of the game. All of the characters that may become Shepard's crew members are complex characters with histories, motivations and personalities that may change even drastically during the game(s). The player may choose to complete their "loyalty missions", which shed new light to their pasts and to their personalities.

The camera is locked to third-person point of view, but is freely rotatable. During combat the player can zoom with some gun types (sniper rifles) and so change the camera to first-person view, but in general the "combat camera" follows Shepard from behind the character. These battles are real-time, but may be paused to a separate command menu, where the player can issue commands for the whole party. Completing quests or winning combats alongside some predetermined objectives grant Shepard and his/her group with experience points, which eventually cumulate into levels. When a character gains a level, they also get a certain amount of skill points which they can distribute among their skills, which are dependent on their class. The game may be saved freely at any point.

The graphics in Mass Effects are completely 3D and realistic, reflecting real life. There is some violence in the game, where anyone can be shot with a gun, but it is not particularly graphic. There are also sexually suggestive scenes, should the player choose to pursue them, and the game features erotic (female) dancers in tight clothes.

8.2   Appendix B: Game Analysis – Action-Adventure Games

Japanese games

***Metal Gear Solid* (**メタルギアソリッド**)** is an action-adventure stealth video game published by Konami Computer Entertainment for PlayStation in 1998. It has been internationally well received and has sold over six million copies. It has also scored an average of 94/100 in Metacritic, and is regarded by many as one of the greatest and most influential games of all time. There have been several parts to the series before the first PlayStation game, and several sequels and spinoffs after the title analyzed here. The version analyzed here is the European version.

The game is set to 2005 to a realistic, but alternative universe, where a genetically enhanced, renegade Special Forces unit calling themselves the *FOXHOUND* leads an armed uprising at a nuclear weapons disposal facility in Alaska. Their leader, and the main antagonist of the game, *Liquid Snake*, threatens the U.S government with a nuclear-capable mecha in order to gain the remains of a "legendary mercenary" within 24 hours. The player controls a character called *Solid Snake*, a legendary infiltrator, who is sent to neutralize this threat while helping hostages escape the facility. The player may not affect the story in any way, nor are there dialogue options to choose from. The game also has to be played through in a predetermined order. All of the characters in the game are human.

The gameplay of Metal Gear Solid revolves around sneaking and avoiding being detected by enemies, but Snake is also armed with different weapons that he can use in case he gets caught. He will soon get overwhelmed and killed, however, so avoiding direct fight is recommended. The combat is fought in real-time during regular playing mode. Snake can crawl underneath objects, use items as cover, hide behind walls and use items to distract his

enemies. There are also several boss fights in the game, in which the player must figure out the enemy's weakness and use that to defeat it. Snake does not gain experience or change during the course of the game, but may find some better weapons to help him. The game can be saved at any point by calling a certain character with a codec radio.

The camera in Metal Gear Solid is in third person, but the angle changes situationally in order to allow the player a better view of the surroundings. The graphics are 3D and photorealistic. There are no sexual themes in the game, but the game contains some violence, despite not being particularly graphic (no blood, no gore).

Ryû Ga Gotoku III (龍が如く 3 lit "Like a Dragon 3", Known in the West as **Yakuza III**) was developed by Sega and published on PlayStation 3 in 2009. In Japan it has been an iconic action-adventure franchise spinning four games to date, but it has never truly caught up in the West. The version analyzed here is the original Japanese version.

In Ryû Ga Gotoku series the protagonist is Kazuma Kiryû, a famous member of a yakuza family, who in the first game takes the blame for the murder of his boss to protect his best friend, thus becoming imprisoned for ten years and marked for death by the entire yakuza community. The events of the first game have led him to solve the murder of his boss, but ending up losing his best friend and his childhood love, whose daughter, *Haruka*, he has then adopted. In the third installment of the franchise Kazuma runs an orphanage with Haruka in Okinawa, but is caught up in yakuza issues after his friend, a yakuza boss, is murdered, and the government starts planning a resort on the same land that also contains Kazuma's orphanage.

Kazuma Kiryû is a fully pre-determined protagonist characterized by his sense of honor and duty, and by his strength and prowess in martial arts. However, the player is able to choose where to distribute the skill points obtained through experience gained in fights and via some other means, changing the character's strengths and weaknesses as the player wishes. Kazuma works alone, although Haruka also has a big role in the story. All of the main characters in the story are human. The storyline of the game is fixed and there are no dialogue options, but there are a lot of side-activities and mini-games the player may choose to do. A lot of these side-activities, such as the hostess bar, were removed from the Western release for being "too Japanese" for the Westerners to comprehend. Fighting is done in a separate battle-mode by pressing the corresponding buttons related to Kazuma's martial arts moves in real-time. The game can be saved at any point (with the exception of cut-scenes and battles) via a menu.

The graphics in Ryû Ga Gotoku are photorealistic and fully 3D. All of the characters in the game are fully voice-acted. The camera is set in third-person perspective, but the player can take photos with their cell phone camera in order to learn new skills ("revelations"), which momentarily allows the player to look at the world in first-person. The game contains graphic violence and sexually suggestive scenes, even prostitution. The protagonist may also drink alcohol.

The Legend of Zelda games are possibly the most internationally famous action-adventure games ever come out of Japan. Ever since the first Zelda game in 1986 (The Legend of Zelda) 17 official games and several spinoffs have been published. ***The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (**ゼルだの伝説時のオカリナ**)** was developed by Nintendo Entertainment Analysis and Development division for Nintendo 64 video game console in 1998. In Japan, more than 820,000 copies were sold in 1998, and during its lifetime, over 7.6 million copies were sold worldwide. It is the highest-rated game ever rated with a score of 99/100 in Metacritic and has won numerous awards. A 3DS version was published in 2011. The version analyzed here is the original Japanese 3DS version.

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time is situated in a high-fantasy realm of *Hyrule (*ハイラ ル*)*, which acts as the main setting of the whole series. In all of the Zelda games the protagonist is a young man called *Link*, who wears a green tunic and a pointed cap. There are various Links throughout the series, but a particular feature about Link is that he is always humble, hardworking and brave, and because of that he is able to use the *Triforce of Courage*,

a part of an omnipotent sacred relic called *Triforce*, which represents the essence of the *Golden Goddesses* who created the realm of Hyrule. When two of more Triforce bearers come into proximity, those symbols will glow, and when all of the three are together, the entire Triforce can potentially be recombined, which will allow its owner to make and be granted as many wishes as they want. Other important characters besides Link in the whole Zelda series are *Princess Zelda*, princess of Hyrule and the carrier of the *Triforce of Wisdom*, and *Ganondorf*, the main antagonist of the stories. In Ocarina of Time, Ganondorf pursues the complete Triforce in order to attain control of Hyrule. He reaches the Triforce in the *Sacred Realm* (a holy world connected to Hyrule), but because his heart is imbalanced, the Triforce splits and leaves him with only the *Triforce of Power*. However, eventually he manages to steal Link's and Zelda's Triforces, transforming Hyrule into a land of darkness filled with monsters. Link must travel through time and different dungeons as a young Link and an adult Link to awake five sages who can seal Ganondorf away.

The storyline of Zelda: Ocarina of Time has to be played in certain order, and the outcome is predetermined. The player is not given dialogue or plot options. There are, however, hidden passageways and items, and the game has some mini-games, such as fishing. There are also important, but optional side-quests, which can lead to Link obtaining some powerful items. Some of the inaccessible areas may become accessible after receiving certain items. The game contains 3D puzzles that have to be solved in order to move forward, and real-time combat, including powerful boss monsters. The combat demands a bit of hand-eye coordination, but the enemies can be auto-targeted with a button, allowing Link to always face them Heart pieces increase his maximum health and better weapons make him more efficient in combat. There are no skill points to distribute, and no levels to gain. Instead character development happens when the player finds certain items which make Link more powerful, but there are no skill points or levels. The game itself is fully 3D with colorful graphics resembling anime-style. The camera is positioned behind the character in a third-person view, and is generally rotatable, but also zooms in first-person mode when aiming with a ranged weapon. The game can be saved through a menu at any point of the game, but once the player exits the game, they always return to either the starting village or a specific temple. There is no visible gore in the game, and no sexually suggestive themes.

Ôkami (*大神* literally "great god", "great spirit" or written with a different kanji *狼* "wolf")** [PS2] is an action-adventure video game mixing action, platform and puzzle game genres, created by the Japanese Clover Studios and published by Capcom in 2006. It has been internationally praised as one of the best games ever created, and won several "game of the year" awards. Although the initial sales were not too impressive, the game became hugely popular after that. A high-definition port was released on PS3 in 2012. The game analyzed here is the original Japanese PS2 version.

The game is set in a folklore Japan that visually resembles ukiyo-e paintings, and the art of the game is done using the ink-wash painting (*墨絵*) style. It begins with a flashback to 100 years ago, where a village swordsman and a white wolf seal away an eight-headed demon *Orochi*. The wolf is wounded in the battle and eventually dies, but the villagers or *Kamiki* village (*神木村* lit. God-tree village) build a shrine to it. Exactly 100 years later a descendant of the swordsman, a self-proclaimed swordsman *Susanô*, breaks Orochi's seal due to not believing in the legends and wanting to prove them false, and releases the demon. Orochi curses the lands, sapping the life of every living being. *Amaterasu*, accompanied by an artist *Issun* - a small fairy-like creature, sets forth to restore the land to its former state in the form of a white wolf.

The storyline of Ôkami is fixed, and the player has to go through it in a predetermined order, although there are some secret items to find. There are some situations, where Amaterasu has battle, and the game switches into a separate combat mode. These battles are real-time and reward Amaterasu with yen with which she is able to purchase items or new battle techniques. Amaterasu can fight using a weapon (inspired by the Imperial Regalia of Japan), or a so-called

celestial brush, with which she can do different things to affect her surroundings. 12 Celestial Gods (closely resembling the animals of the Chinese zodiac) that Amaterasu locates each teach her a different technique to use with the Celestial Brush. When the player switches to a brush mode, they can draw certain symbols and lines, which cause different things to happen: For example, drawing a circle to the sky causes the sun to rise, drawing a circle on a withered tree instead makes the tree bloom. A horizontal line can cut things, another kind of a line can cause things to connect with each other. There are numerous things to do with the brush, and it is a necessary mechanism to reach places, to fight certain demons, to change the time of the day or to restore the land to its former beauty. When Amaterasu does certain things, such as makes trees bloom, feeds animals or helps out people she receives Praise (幸 sachi, literally meaning happiness, fortune), which is an equivalent to experience points. The player can distribute these points to Amaterasu's health, number of ink wells for Celestial Brush technique, purse size and extra lives.

The storyline and dialogues between all of the characters are fixed, and there are no options to affect them. The camera in Ôkami is fixed to third-person view, but can be freely rotated. There are no violence or sexual themes in the game.

Western games

Tomb Raider was developed by Core Design and published by Eidos Interactive in 1996 for PlayStation and Sega Saturn. It has sold over seven million copies, received critical acclaim and has been considered as one of the most influential games in the 3D action-adventure genre spanning several sequels. The version analyzed in this thesis is the PlayStation version.

The game is set to the present day photorealistic world, and follows the adventures of a smart and tough British female archaeologist *Lara Croft*, who is hired by a successful business woman, *Jacqueline Natla*, to recover a mysterious artifact called the Scion from a lost tomb in Peru. However, as the story progresses, it becomes obvious that this artifact is something much more than just a decorative piece, but contains mysterious powers and is alongside two other Scion artefacts mandatory for Natla to realize her sinister plans for power.

The storyline in Tomb Raider is predetermined, and the player must advance through it in a certain order. There are some small secrets to find in the game, which usually reward the player with an item, but no side-quests or objectives per se. There are also no dialogue options to choose from. Moreover, the protagonist is pre-determined, and there are no skill points to distribute, but Lara may find better weapons to help her be more effective. The camera is set to third-person view and is rotatable, and the graphics are photorealistic and 3D. The player must guide Lara through a series of locations (levels) while collecting objects and solving puzzles and killing dangerous animals, creatures and occasionally human opponents. However, the emphasis of the game is not on fighting, but instead solving puzzles and performing trick jumps. All of the combat situations happen in real-time and during regular game-play mode. The game may be saved at any point using a quick-save or via a menu.

The game contains some violence, as Lara shoots enemies and may die herself in various visual ways. There are no sexual themes in the game, although Lara herself can be considered a hyper sexualized character

Grand Theft Auto V is an open world action-adventure game published by Rockstar Games for PS3, Xbox 360, PS4 and Xbox One in 2013. It has received positive reviews, received multiple awards and became the fastest-selling entertainment product in history earning and 1 billion dollars during the first three days of its release. The game has received particular praise for having a huge, detailed world that can be explored freely. The game analyzed in this thesis is the European PS3 version.

The story of Grand Theft Auto V is set in a fictional American state of San Andreas which resembles San Fransisco. The player steps into the shoes of three protagonists, Michael De Santa, Trevor Phillips and Franklin Clinton, who are all criminals that attempt to commit heists

while under pressure from a government agency. The gameplay is divided into missions, which mostly consist of heists and into time between these missions. During missions the gameplay consists mostly of driving and fighting challenges with firearms, melee weapons and explosives, while the time in between can be spent however the player wishes while they roam the fictional state, completing mini-games and side-objectives, socializing, driving around and doing various other things. The combat is done in real-time and during regular play mode, and the player may also choose to complete some missions using different strategies, such as stealth. If the player gets caught committing crimes, they will be chased by the law enforcement, and if the protagonist's health bar depletes, they will respawn at hospitals. The player is able to switch between each of the three characters during and in between missions. All three of the playable characters possess unique special skills that improve in case the player performs certain actions. The player cannot decide, however, what these skills are, but they are predetermined per character. Although in general there are no dialogue options to choose from or the player cannot decide how the main storyline advances, one major decision in the game decides how the game eventually ends.

The graphics in Grand Theft Auto V are photorealistic and fully 3D, and the camera can be toggled between first-person and third-person view. It may be saved at any point via quick-save or menu in between missions but not during them. The game contains graphic violence and sex scenes.

Thief III: Deadly Shadows is developed by Ion Storm and published by Eidos Interactive for Microsoft Windows and Xbox console in 2004. It has received positive reviews globally with a Metacritic average score of 85/100, and a sequel to the franchise was published in 2014. The version analyzed here is the Microsoft Windows version of the game.

The game franchise is set to a medieval city, where the player takes on a role of a master thief Garrett, who is a predetermined character with a cynical and mysterious personality. He has a noble heart, but uses his extraordinary talents for some questionable deeds, stealing from the rich and giving to himself, and he is commonly described as an antihero instead of a traditional hero. Besides having the master thief skills, Garrett has a mechanical eye, which allows him to use a zoom vision. Even though at first Garrett is only hired to steal valuable items he is soon pulled into a more sinister plot surrounding these items.

The gameplay consists of first-person and third-person sneaking. Generally the camera is set to first-person, but changes to third-person view when Garrett is pressed against a wall in order to allow the player to view the surroundings better. The player may also change the camera angle to third-person. The player may distract guards, attack them or knock them unconscious. They may also mug innocent people for loot and steal from locked rooms and chests after completing a lock-picking mini-game. The gameplay is divided into different missions with objectives the player needs to complete in order to pass them, after which the game will reward them with a cut scene related to the story. The player can approach the objectives of the missions in various ways. In addition the game offers various side quests, which reward the player with tangible rewards (loot) or allies from different factions in the city. These allies will not follow the protagonist, but might help him against guards. However, there are no dialogue options to choose from, nor do the decisions of the player affect the story. There are no experience points or skill points to distribute, but Garrett may find items or even magical items to help him along the way. The game may be saved freely at any point using a menu or via a quick save.

The graphics in Thief: Deadly Shadows are fully 3D and photorealistic. The player may commonly choose whether to attack or knock out non-player characters, and the violence in this game is not particularly graphic. There are no sexual themes.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution is a first-person action role-playing game developed by Eidos Montreal and published by Square Enix in 2011 for PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. It has been a commercial success and has received positive reviews in the West. It has also spanned

related media, such as a novel and a comic series. The version studied here is the Microsoft Windows version.

The game is set in the year 2027 in a cyberpunk themed environment, where multinational corporations have become much more powerful than governments. The player is set to the shoes of a security manager, Adam Jensen, who works at a biotechnology firm. The firm is attacked by terrorists, and Adam is caught in their way, getting mortally wounded. However, his life is saved by surgeries that replace some of his body parts with advanced prostheses. Six months later Adam returns to work and must find those responsible for the attack while being involved with a web of politics regarding human enhancement.

While Adam is a pre-determined character, the player is able to distribute skill points to different augmentations after gaining experience, which changes Adam's skills and thus the approach the player is able to take in situations. Adam's personality also reflects the choices the player makes during conversations. The plot is also affected by the player's choices, and NPCs (all of them human) react to the player's chosen dialogue options. There are also lots of side-quests and objectives the player may choose to complete in order to gain tangible or intangible rewards. The gameplay of Deus Ex consists of combat, stealth, hacking and social challenges. The combat is done in regular playing mode and in real-time using guns and some special abilities, but the player can also opt to avoid conflict and sneak instead. In fact, the player may choose to play the game without killing a single non-player character, which rewards them with "the pacifist" achievement. The player may also find or upgrade weapons and ammunition.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution can be saved at any point via a quick-save or a menu. All of the characters in the game are fully voice-acted, and the game's graphics are fully photorealistic and 3D. The camera is always set to first-person. The game contains violence and sexually suggestive themes, but no nudity or actual sex.

8.3   Appendix C: Interview questions for game industry professionals

1. Why do you think that Western games rarely succeed in the Japanese market? Do you think that it's precisely because they are not Japanese, or because of other game-related issues that make them unapproachable for Japanese players?

2. When comparing, why do you think that some Western games have been selling well while some haven't? For example, The Last of Us, GTA V, Skyrim and Clash of Clans have been relatively popular while games like Assassin's Creed, World of Warcraft and BioShock: Infinite have not.

3. In what ways do you think that the choice of a platform affects how the game sells in Japan (for example, Japanese gamers use PlayStation and Nintendo instead of Xbox and PC)? Do you think that the situation has changed after the introduction of mobile gaming?

4. What do you think are the key factors that make a game successful in Japan?

5. What do you think about the importance of social elements in games for a Japanese player? (For example, personalized messages, leaderboards, instant messaging etc.)

6. How should one approach marketing and PR in Japan?

7. Do you think it is beneficial to use a Japanese publisher, distributer, localizer or another kind of a partner? How about co-branding with a Japanese company? Please elaborate.

8. While working in and with game companies, have you localized any characters / stages/ game mechanics etc. when selling your game/s in Japan? (For example, Japan-themed stages, graphics or censoring of "taboo-subjects") Do you recommend localizing in general? If so, what things do you consider important?

9. Has localizing games in Japan been problematic somehow, for example when dealing with language and culture barriers? How have you tried to solve these issues?

10. Are there any ways to see the results on how a localization has affected the games reception?

11. What do you think about the future of Western games in Japan?

12. Japan used to produce some of the most successful games and brands, Western sales figures included. Now there is talk of Japanese game design and innovation falling behind when compared to Western games and the focus on multiplayer and social play. What do you think about the current situation? Do you think that Western and Japanese markets are polarized even more than in the past or has the situation changed in another way?