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Local visitor at the India Gaming Show South 2018, Bengaluru / India. Photo by Xenia Zeiler, 20 January 2018.

Video Game Development In Asia: Voices From The Field

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Abstract

Introduction to the Special Issue "Video Game Development in Asia: Voices from the Field".

Keywords: video game development, Asia, cultural heritage, national identity, gameenvironments

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Recent political and societal developments point at worldwide transformations of societies. Such developments, including re-negotiations of societal and cultural themes such as national identity, cultural heritage or religion, are not restricted to certain "Western" world regions. On the contrary, shifts in political systems and emerging re-definitions of cultural and religious values are currently to be found especially in Asia.

For instance, national identities are not an attribute of a *conditio humana*, but rather are communicatively constructed (Knoblauch 1995). Under the influence of economic, political, and cultural globalization, nation states lost much of their legitimation, and identity formation has become an increasingly important, active, open-ended and contested process. It no longer merely concerns a small political elite, but has become a collective 'social practice' or form of 'cultural labour' performed by ordinary citizens. Collective identities are expressed in cultural materials, such as "names, narratives, symbols, [and] verbal styles. . . ." (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285). Media play a prominent role as they function as a major model of

and *for* national identity construction (Jenkins 2008). Media narratives are not only powerful vehicles for conveying the covert or overt meanings of national identity, but they also shape and reshape identity building processes. In times of *deep mediatization* media are inseparable from all aspects of social life (Hepp 2016), and this entails viewing media as instrumental in constructing and conveying national identity, which can lead to nationalism and populism.

The role of media in the construction of national identities is already well accepted and researched. However, the research on the relation between media and nationalism has so far been limited to studies of mass or social media (Erikson 2007) or cyber-nationalism. For Asia, a number of publications discuss the role of mass media in constructing national identities (e.g., Brosius 2005).

Yet, the role of video games, though one of the most influential media genres, especially for the younger generation, so far has been overlooked. Indeed, video games are woven into our everyday lives and stimulate the emergence of new patterns of social interaction, communication, and shared meanings. They are increasingly complex, interactive virtual worlds in which national identities are imagined, histories are re-constructed, and traditions (e.g., religion, art, and overall, culture) are (re)invented. Video games actively contribute to the construction of perceptions of norms, value systems, identities and, in general, society. Whereas most blockbuster games are developed in the USA for global audiences, many smaller (“indie/independent”) gaming companies successfully develop regional games.

card and casino play. But there are also games which are set in Indian cultural and social contexts, at times having an educational character. In this issue, we give a voice to actors in the field, and so, four game developers from India speak about their work and their games, and how they do or do not relate to video game development and games played elsewhere in the world.

Japan

Japan has been at the forefront of the video game industry for generations. As their gaming industry developed, they created both a market for their consoles and products as well as the support infrastructure to train a workforce dedicated to this billion-dollar industry. This developed into a multi-leveled gaming industry within the country that ranges from Triple A companies like Nintendo, Sega, and Sony to various forms of indie game development and hobbyists passionate about video game creation. Among the indie developers and hobbyists (*doujin*) there is a constant push to develop games that reflect the complexity of Japanese culture rather than to create games for overseas audiences and sales. In "Geemu On: A Preliminary Study of Indie and Doujin Game Development in Japan," Helland originally explored the religious and spiritual dimensions of Indie games. However, after conducting fieldwork and interviews with developers, he found they often did not consider the Western frame or classification of religion and spirituality in their game creation but rather incorporated aspects of tradition and values that reflected broader aspects of cultural hybridity and even cultural conflict.

Nepal

How is Nepal represented in video games? To answer this question, Grieve compares an AAA American video game set in Nepal, *Far Cry 4* (2014), to a game developed by a Nepali team, *polyTricks* (2016). Thus far, Grieve has played through both games and analyzed player comments on several websites. He engaged in a month of ethnography with the Arcube game design team, interviewed fifty people about game play in Nepal, and interviewed twelve game designers in Nepal. In his research, Grieve asks: What is the difference between how Nepal is depicted in *Far Cry 4* versus *polyTricks*, and what role do cultural heritage and religion play? Using the theory outlined by Arjun Appadurai (1990) in "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," Grieve argues that in the North American game, Nepal is depicted as "Shangri-La," as a spiritual place outside of time, while in the game designed in Kathmandu, there is a keen awareness of Nepal being on the edge of global culture, and a desire to display Nepal's natural beauty and culture.

Philippines

What do the constructions and interpretations of national identity in video games show about the Philippine's cultural heritage? More than other nations, video games play a prominent role in the Philippines because half of the population is under twenty-four years of age (cf. (Index Mundi 2018). In the past, the majority of Filipinos played mostly North American or European games. However, due to the incredible increase in the number of mobile phones, today there are many Indie gaming companies in the Philippines (Steamspy n.d.). Many of these games refer to the nation's current politics. An example of a popular mobile game is *Go Duterte* (2016) by Kulit Games, where the gamer has to play the Philippine president Duterte and

