

Chapter 6

From Historical Narratives to Virtual Strategies: The Power of Cultural References and Visual Representation in Digital Game Design

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how cultural references are addressed in real-time tactics (RTT) games, focusing on the representation of Japanese culture in Shadow Tactics: Blades of the Shogun. It explores how military tactics, social hierarchies, and aesthetic elements from the Edo period are integrated into game mechanics. The study offers a theoretical framework for the integration of cultural values in game design, considering the unique mechanics of the RTT genre. In Shadow Tactics, it discusses how the game's innovative visualization techniques, such as Shadow Mode and isometric perspective, enhance the user experience and cultural representation. Drawing inspiration from Japanese visual culture (calligraphy, architecture, costume design), the study also proposes a methodology for representing Turkish culture in digital games.

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INTRODUCTION

With the rapid advancement of computer technologies, the world has witnessed the global rise of digital media. The widespread adoption of the internet has made digitalization a standard practice in all aspects of life. Concurrently, with the proliferation of smart devices and portable technologies, media tools have adapted and transformed their forms. One of the most significant effects of this transformation is observed in the video game industry. Arcade games of the 1970s evolved with the popular culture of the 1980s, and by the 1990s, with the widespread use of personal computers and game consoles, the gaming sector shifted into the home environment.

Today, video games transcend their role as mere entertainment; they have become an interactive narrative form, serving as a medium for transmitting cultural, artistic, and historical representations. As the game industry has grown, it has achieved an economic scale capable of competing with traditional media forms like cinema in terms of budget. For example, some states, such as China, South Korea, and Iran, are making strategic investments in the gaming sector, utilizing games as tools for cultural diplomacy and propaganda. In this context, games possess the potential to reflect nations' cultural identities, historical motifs, and artistic approaches.

The widespread adoption of the internet accelerated in the 1990s as a result of rapid advancements in computer networks, open-source software, and telecommunications. Although the internet began its use in 1969 under the ARPANET project, its global diffusion occurred in the 1990s. During this period, factors such as the relaxation of government policies, increased bandwidth, the accessibility of personal computers to home users, and the development of user-friendly interfaces expedited the mass adoption of the internet. The number of internet users worldwide, which was approximately 40 million in 1995, reached 1.5 billion by 2009. As meticulously examined by Manuel Castells in his "The Information Age" book series, this rapid increase highlights the profound transformation digitalization has brought about on individual and societal levels.

With the widespread internet access, barriers to cultural interaction have largely diminished. From the 2010s onwards, the global proliferation of digital media tools has increased content visibility, enabling even small-scale initiatives to reach vast audiences in line with the dynamics of the communication age. For instance, platforms like YouTube and Spotify have allowed local music and artworks to gain global recognition. This process accelerates the global circulation of cultural products, contributing to artworks and design products transcending their local origins to become universal cultural objects. In this context, digital media facilitates cultural representation in a much more practical and accessible manner compared to the past.

This study investigates how cultural references are addressed in the visual design of real-time tactics (RTT) games. Specifically, it evaluates how Japanese culture

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