

Chapter 7.2

Playing as Producing: Convergence Culture and Localization of EA Digital Games in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this chapter is to explore the dynamics and interactions between foreign producers, media technologies, and local consumers in the process of globalization through a discussion of the localization of digital games. As digital games have become global entertainment products, the game industry has encountered various lingual and cultural challenges in the process. The content of digital games can be changed more easily and many game players are able to create objects or modify the game world to express their programming abilities or identities. The game industry takes advantage of digital technologies and player modding practices to overcome language and cultural barriers. Modding and other localization practices, such as translation and local packaging, imply the convergence of the global and the local cultures (i.e. glocalization) as well as the producers and consumers (i.e. prosumers).

INTRODUCTION

The global market for digital games has expanded rapidly in the last a few decades. As digital games have become global entertainment products, the game industry has encountered various lingual and cultural challenges. Yet, unlike some other cultural industries, the game industry has used

localization as an important tactic in penetrating international markets. Game designers adopt different degrees of localization practices, and some have exceeded the conventional practices of translation and packaging. These new localization practices represent a new trend toward converging local and global cultures. Thus, localization is not only an industrial practice, but also an important cultural practice worthy of further research and analysis.

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Digital games differ from traditional entertainment products, such as films and TV programs, in that it is easy to change their content using digital media technology (Manovich, 2000). More and more game players are able to create or change games to increase their enjoyment, express their programming abilities, or forge their own identities. Though scholars have explored the media practices of fans and regular digital media consumers (Jenkins, 2006; Kücklich, 2005; Postigo, 2007), few of them have extended the discussion to the realm of localization or examined cross-cultural creation and consumption in participatory and convergence culture. The purpose of this chapter is to initiate a discussion about global digital game localization through the empirical study of the local strategies or localization practices of American digital game companies in Taiwan. The biggest game company in the US, Electronic Arts (EA), is the subject of this in-depth analysis. EA established its Taipei office in 1996, and has since published and localized many of its game in Taiwan. It successfully attracted local players and built a fan community. Studying the localization practices of a world-leading game developer and publisher such as EA provides several insights into the dynamics of the game industry, digital technologies, and game players involved in the process of global circulation of digital games.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theorizing “Localization”: Localization and Global Mass Culture

The discussion of “localization” usually accompanies the greater discourse of globalization. Scholars view localization as either a part of, or a reaction to, globalization. There are three common approaches to the dynamic between the local and the global, and the overall purpose of

localization: 1. Localization maintains cultural identity and resists globalization. 2. Localization is the domestication of global culture, resulting in cultural hybridization. 3. Localization is a means through which global capitalism expands.

The first of these approaches considers the local and the global to be opposite and incompatible. The local represents the *authentic, heterogeneous, and grassroots*. In contrast, the global is *commercial, homogeneous, and rootless* (Tomlinson, 1997). From this viewpoint, the global expansion of multinational cultural industry has a negative influence on local cultural production because it dominates local markets, impairs local cultural productivity, and weakens the public sphere (Schiller, 1998). To resist the threat of the global culture, local people must rediscover and revive (lost) local cultures and traditions, and reconstruct their local identities. Many indigenous cultural movements are based on this approach, including the Ainu (in Japan) and the Hawaiian cultural movement (Friedman, 1994). Some criticize the idea that globalization is a homogeneous process as an oversimplification of the dynamic cultural exchange between the local and the global. First, whether or not the local is really *authentic and uncontaminated* remains questionable. The idea that local cultures are authentic is unrealistic, goes the argument; cultures are always hybridized (Morris, 2002). Therefore, any claim of authenticity is only a discursive act. Furthermore, in spite of some advantages that foreign cultural products have, they cannot dominate all local markets (Chadha & Kavoori, 2000).

To some, localization represents local people partly adopting, integrating, and converging their local culture and foreign cultures. The result of this form of localization is a hybridized culture. In this case, the local culture does not disappear but finds a new space and a new way to grow and survive in the process. Recent studies in cultural hybridization explore not only cultural hybridity, but also the identity formation reflected in this process of hybridization (McMillin, 2001; Kraidy,

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