

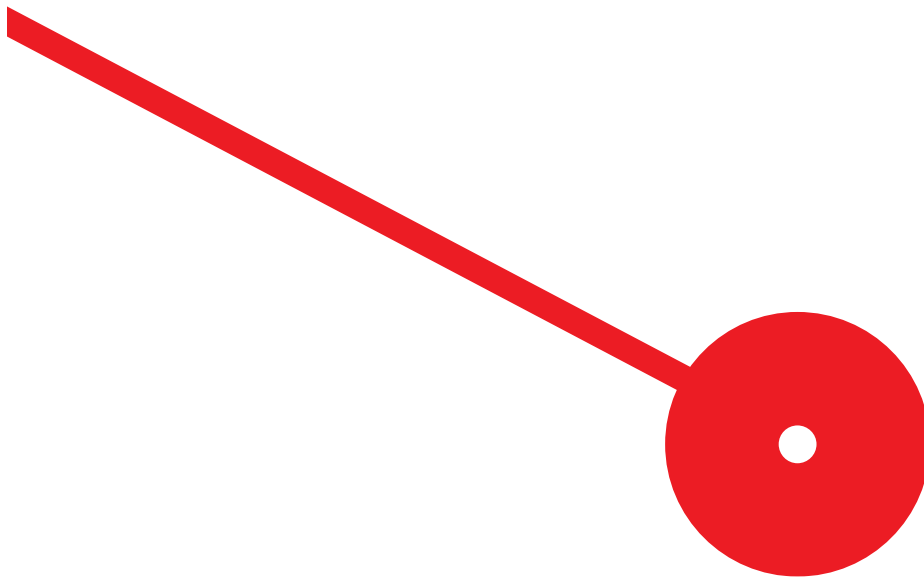


Cultural Analysis of the Video Game Industry: A Comparison Between the West and China

Filipe Daniel Abreu Lopes

Esta versão contém as críticas e sugestões dos elementos do júri

2022/2023



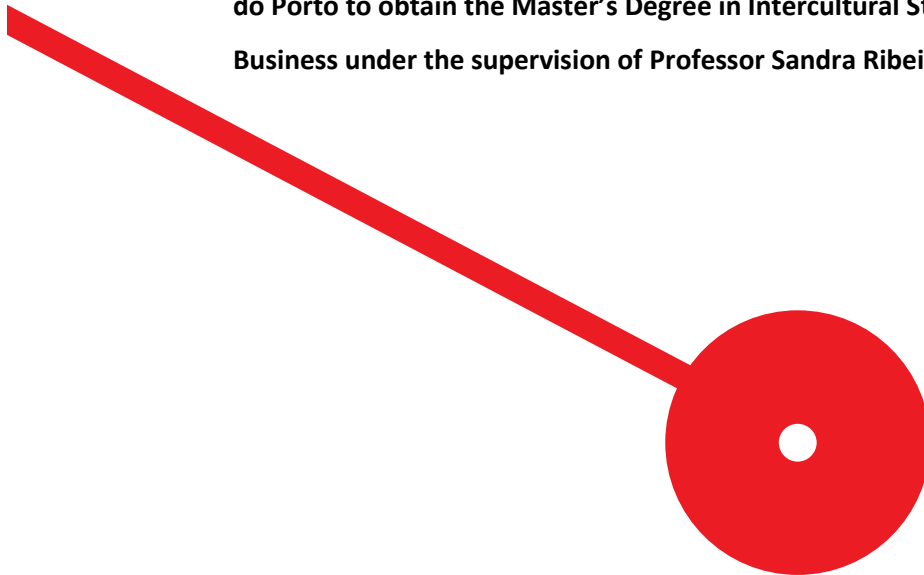


Cultural Analysis of the Video Game Industry: A Comparison Between the West and China

Filipe Daniel Abreu Lopes

Master's Degree Dissertation

**presented to Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração
do Porto to obtain the Master's Degree in Intercultural Studies for
Business under the supervision of Professor Sandra Ribeiro**



Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my girlfriend, Susana, for accompanying me for all these years and always being there to help me when I needed.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my colleague and friend Débora who has been with me and shared great memories with me and Susana since our bachelor's degree and I will never forget.

To my godmother, my godfather, and my little cousin who have been like a family to me and were always there to keep me company and share fun times during these years, and always worry if I had eaten dinner due to classes being late.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Professor Sandra Ribeiro for guiding me whenever I was unsure of what to do, especially at the beginning stage when I felt lost, she helped me find a path to follow, which allowed me to write something I like.

Abstract:

The growth of the video game industry and the recent rise of China as an economic superpower appear almost in parallel time. China has a very large video game market, with one of the largest player bases in the world. However, Chinese culture is quite different from that of the Western world, mainly due to its socialpolitical and cultural context. While the industry may look at this abundant and promising market as a guaranteed opportunity, not understanding the culture could spell failure. In the world of video games, success means hard work and adapting products to certain markets is essential.

In this context, this dissertation aims to provide a better understanding of how video games are adapted, taking into account different cultures and some existing challenges. It mainly seeks to describe the Chinese cultural context, which is extremely important for this industry, but also addresses the socialpolitical context with direct influence on the product, namely the regulations existing in China. In addition, specific cultural items and the challenges of localization will be discussed. In a practical approach, differences are presented between the international (Western) version and the Chinese version of several video games. The objective is to demonstrate that these differences do, in fact, exist, as well as to present possible explanations for this fact.

Based on the differences found and a study of the reasons why they exist, it will be possible to have a better understanding of the various reasons why these same differences exist, whether for cultural reasons, due to laws, or other reasons.

Keywords: China; Localization; Culture; Video game Industry; West

Resumo:

O crescimento da indústria dos video jogos e a recente ascensão da China como superpotência económica surgem quase em paralelo. A China tem um mercado de vídeo jogos bastante vasto, com uma das maiores bases de jogadores do mundo. No entanto, a cultura Chinesa é bastante distinta da do ocidente sobretudo devido ao seu contexto sociopolítico e cultural. Embora a indústria possa olhar para este mercado abundante e promissor como uma oportunidade garantida, o desconhecimento do contexto pode significar o fracasso. No mundo dos vídeo jogos, o sucesso significa um trabalho árduo de adaptação dos video jogos tendo em conta os diferentes mercados.

Neste contexto, esta dissertação tem como objetivo proporcionar uma melhor compreensão de como ocorre a adaptação dos video jogos, tendo em conta culturas diferentes e alguns desafios existentes. Procura descrever sobretudo o contexto cultural chinês, de extrema importância para esta indústria, mas também aborda o contexto sociopolítico com influência direta no produto, nomeadamente os regulamentos existentes na China. Para além disso, serão discutidos itens específicos da cultura e os desafios da localização dos jogos. Numa abordagem prática, apresentam-se diferenças entre a versão internacional (ocidental) e a versão chinesa de vários vídeo jogos. O objetivo é demonstrar que essas diferenças, de facto, existem, bem como em apresentar possíveis explicações para esse facto.

Com base nas diferenças encontradas e um estudo sobre as razões para as mesmas existirem, será possível ter uma melhor compreensão sobre os motivos a que levam a este acontecimento, seja por questões culturais, devido a leis, ou por outra razão.

Palavras-chave: China; Localização; Cultura; Indústria dos video jogos; Ocidente

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Abbreviation List

CD – Compact disk

CT – Counter Terrorist

CS:GO – Counter-strike: Global Offensive

FPS – First Person Shooter

GTA – Grand Theft Auto

MOC – Ministry of Culture

MOBA - Multiplayer Online Battle Arena

MMORPG – Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games

LAN – Local Area Network

LoL – League of Legends

PC – Personal Computer

VR – Virtual Reality

WoW – World of Warcraft

Intercultural studies are increasingly important in the world of business. Today, due to the internet, businesses more often than not operate on a global scale, there is no need to worry about selling video games on CD, so every market can easily be accessed. Therefore, understanding other cultures, customs, and norms is crucial for any business that intends to operate in markets other than their own. In the video game industry in particular, there are nuances and challenges that companies must recognize and address that include more than changing the language content, if they want to operate on this global scale.

Video games, for example, often contain cultural references, themes, and narratives that may need to be adapted or localized for different markets. Video game *localization*, more than language translation, involves adapting gameplay, graphics, and cultural references to make the game resonate with local audiences. Any cultural insensitivity may result in stereotypes, or offensive content, which, in turn, may lead to controversy and/or business losses. Understanding the cultural significance of these elements is essential for business success. Additionally, the video game industry is bound by content regulation, which includes censorship and age ratings, this happens not only in China, but all over the world. Therefore, working in this field requires knowledge of the cultural and legal aspects of the market, as every country has its own regulation.

Indeed, video games have undergone a transformative journey over the years, captivating audiences worldwide with their immersive experiences and engaging narratives. China has played a pivotal role in the industry's growth. With a massive and enthusiastic gaming community, China has been, for years, a driving force, influencing (video) gaming development and its distribution worldwide.

Beyond eSports, Chinese gaming companies have made substantial contributions which include the creation of innovative game development studios to influential publishing giants, and the creation, distribution, and monetization of games. Video games extend beyond entertainment. They serve as a platform for storytelling, artistic expression, and social interaction, reflecting and influencing political, societal and cultural values. In China, videogames have become an integral part of youth culture, shaping preferences, fostering social connections, and serving as a medium for self-expression.

Reason of Choice

When deciding on the topic of my thesis, I considered not just my personal interests but also the subject's bearing on my area of study and the accessibility of relevant research materials and resources. The topic would have to allow an adequate amount of study, meaning access to the resources necessary to back up my claims. Furthermore, it was essential for me to pick a subject that I have a strong interest in and one that would keep me motivated all the way through the process. Therefore, I was convinced that it had to be associated with China, given that I find China and Chinese culture in general to be an extremely fascinating subject. In addition to this, I wanted a challenge by exploring the Chinese culture and its peculiarities, and what impact it would have in the video games industry.

As I have studied the language and Chinese culture in the past, I was already able to understand the reasons for many differences between the two worlds. Furthermore, having lived in China, I was able to have first-hand experience of these situations. For example, I was able to see the video game *Animal Crossing* being banned in China at the time I was living there. Thus, I decided that I wanted to combine two aspects of great interest to me, namely gaming and Chinese culture. Not having easy access to the information inspired me to devote more time and energy to studying it, in order to, hopefully, shed some light on how gaming and Chinese culture are intertwined. In general, the topic selected would enable me to write a thesis that is not only instructive but also interesting, as well as one that reflects both my professional and personal interests and passions.

Objectives

The global popularity and remarkable growth of the video gaming industry have enthralled a wide variety of stakeholders. Additionally, there are significant differences between the Chinese and Western versions of video games. Thus, the primary goals of this thesis are to explore, analyze and understand the possible reasons behind the existence of distinct elements in Chinese video games in comparison to those available on the international market, namely Western version, which I will use to refer to Europe continent and American continent. As part of this study, I will explore the cultural, social, and political

forces that have played a role in the development of the video game in China, as well as how this sector compares to that in the West.

I will examine several video games and determine the cultural references and symbols that are embedded in them. Aspects such as Blood, Nudity and Gambling, Symbology, Smoking and Alcohol, Historical Inaccuracy, and Skeletons will be taken into consideration. By doing this, it will be possible to see if and how video game companies have adapted their games to the Chinese market. If the games were not adapted, it will also be possible to see the outcome, impact, or consequences that not adapting the video game to the Chinese market had on the companies or video games. Ultimately, the analysis will enable me to understand and explain which aspects led to game adaptation, whether it be cultural or social criteria, or due to government regulation.

In sum, with a focus on social, cultural factors and governmental regulations, this thesis seeks to research the underlying causes of video game variations between China and western markets. The results of this research have the potential to offer useful insights into the Chinese gaming sector and contribute to a better understanding of how cultures differ in terms of the types of content found in video games, and possibly drive future game development and marketing efforts in particular, and the culture industry in general.

Structure

The overall structure of the study takes the form of six chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter Two begins by providing an overview of the video game industry, its current state and projections, and looks into the Chinese gaming sector. Chapter Three addresses culture, cultural awareness and explores how video games and culture relate. The Fourth chapter is concerned with the methodology used for this study. The fourth section presents the findings of the research, focusing on the key themes that provide the data found, as well as the understanding and reasoning for such differences. Finally, the conclusion gives a brief summary and critique of the findings and identifies areas for further research.

CHAPTER I – THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

1 An overview of the Video Game Industry

We live in a time when people do not necessarily have to buy a physical CD to be able to play a video game. There are not only digital copies, but we also have access to free games, mobile games, streaming services such as Microsoft's Game Pass, or online distribution services like Steam or Epic Games. This gives players easier access to video games. Additionally, the fact that free games exist means that anyone can try them.

In 2020, the video game industry was projected to be worth US\$179.7 billion. (Williams, 2020); in 2023, (Statista, 2023) claims video game revenue is projected to reach US\$334 billion this same year. Mobile gaming in particular is predicted to grow by 24 percent to US\$87.7 billion, yielding the most rise, which is related to the huge popularity of mobile games in China. In 2020 game consoles were expected to reach US\$52.5 billion, which is significantly higher than PC and MAC games, which were expected to account for US\$39.5 billion. (Williams, 2020). The sector's value has increased in recent years, partly because of the growing popularity of eSports and mobile gaming. The prediction that the global gaming market would increase to US\$268.8 billion by 2025 (Rooks, 2022). has already been surpassed.

What is interesting to notice is that when compared to the video game industry, the global entertainment market, which consists of theatrical and home entertainment, was able to reach a record of \$100 billion in revenue in 2019 (Rubin, 2020), which despite quite significant, was still considerably less than the video game industry. The same happened with the global recorded music revenues which account for \$20 Billion in 2019 (Aswad, 2020).

Even combined - theatrical and home entertainment and music, both industries still not surpass the gaming market in terms of revenue, this shows how big the video game industry is, especially if we consider the predictions for the upcoming years.

But video games are not just about revenue numbers; video games are part of today's world's culture. In his interview to The Guardian, Andy Serkis stated:

Every age has its storytelling form, and video gaming is a huge part of our culture.

You can ignore or embrace video games and imbue them with the best artistic

quality. People are enthralled with video games in the same way as other people love the cinema or theatre. (Serkis, 2010, para. 10)

Video games are seen as a modern form of storytelling and people do not play games simply for their gameplay but also for the narrative that the game provides. Video games give players the chance to get away from reality and feel as though they are the main characters in their own movie. Historically, oral communication gave way to written stories, and then written stories gave way to visual formats like movies and television. The art of storytelling has a long history in human nature, spanning several centuries. When compared to other forms of narrative, video games stand out since they allow players to influence the events that take place inside the context of the narrative (Schaefer, 2021).

Video games are so common that even during covid-19 in 2020, we saw Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the US member of congress, using video games as a way to reach out to potential younger voters. Ocasio-Cortez did that by live streaming on Twitch the very popular streaming platform at the time, a video game called *Among Us*. Her live stream at the time generated over 430,000 viewers (Rivera, 2020). In this case, the video game was used as a way for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to get closer to her audience, to interact and engage potential younger voters (Rivera, 2020).

Additionally, we are seeing popular game-related YouTubers such as PewDiePie¹, who had the same name recognition as LeBron James, one of the biggest players of the NBA, among Gen-Z (Monahan, 2021).

Another way to understand how video games are becoming more and more relevant is by taking a look at one of the most anticipated games of recent years, which was *Cyberpunk 2077*. *Cyberpunk 2077* saw the widely known actor Keanu Reeves starring in it; it also had a soundtrack formed by widely known artists such as Grimes, Sophie, and A\$AP Rocky (Monahan, 2021). This role-playing game cost a total of \$317 million to develop, which is not too far from the most expensive movie ever made, at least until 2021, which was *Avatar*, in 2009 with \$478 million (Monahan, 2021). Even though the game was received by a huge backlash when it was released due to its seizure-inducing graphics, poor performance on older consoles, and content that was considered to be culturally insensible,

¹ PewDiePie is the nickname of Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg, a Swedish Youtuber that is one of the most famous content creators on Youtube.

and which led to a lot of buyers getting their money refunded, CD Projekt Red, the developer of the video game, still saw a record profit of US\$54.2 million between July and September of 2022 (Makuch, 2022).

In 2021 the luxury fashion brand, Balenciaga, released its Fall 2021 collection in the form of a video game. In *Afterworld: The Age of Tomorrow*, users can walk around a city that looks like a store, where non-player characters are dressed with the brand's latest looks. Many of the styles come from science fiction and fantasy, just like the games themselves. For example, plate-armor shoes and boots that appear in the game, can be ordered on request (Monahan, 2021).

This brief contextualization raises other questions, namely: How did video games grow to the point where they are today? When did it all start; how did it develop into the massive industry that it is today? But most importantly, how did it become such a big part of today's culture?

1.1 History and Evolution of Video Games

Playing is a universal human behavior (Dalton and Luongo, 2019). It is a means for children to learn important life skills and a way for adults to unwind and enjoy themselves for a while. Video games are only one of several fields that have gone digital in the last few decades. The Swiss National Museum states that a staggering one-third of the global population routinely engaged in video game play in 2018, whether on a mobile device, home console, or personal computer. The video game industry's meteoric growth began in the '70s, although its origins may be traced back roughly 20 years (Rechsteiner, 2020).

Video games' development parallels that of computers. Large, room-sized computers of the 1950s could do relatively straightforward mathematical calculations. These giants could not be played games with. Despite this, clever people at American colleges and institutions have made fun and easy video games. These creations, however, were not made to amuse; they were meant to show off the capabilities of cutting-edge technology (Rechsteiner, 2020).

The first video game designed primarily for fun was *Tennis for Two*, released in 1958. The game was displayed at a three-day convention and consisted of a monitor for a piece of machinery on which two players could beat a point of light back and forth. Teens lined up

to see and try out the game. Then, for the next two decades, nobody paid much attention to *Tennis for Two*, even though it is widely acknowledged as the precursor of all video games (Rechsteiner, 2020).

Pac-Man (1980), *Ultima* (1980), *Mario Bros* (1983), *Tetris* (1984), and *SimCity* (1984) are all 1980s classics (Rechsteiner, 2020). The decade also began with a flood of new consoles and cheaper, more powerful home computers. Console sales plummeted in 1983. Many firms, including Atari, went bankrupt. Before that, Atari released *E.T.* (1982), still regarded as the worst video game ever due to its unpleasing graphics and difficult gameplay. Commodore's 1982 Commodore 64 home computer and Nintendo's NES console rose from the industry's ruins (1985). With improved technologies, games advanced in gameplay and graphics: games got characters and deeper stories. It was at this time that most genres emerged perhaps as highly-motivated Commodore 64 users could program their own games. The Game Boy, released at the end of the 1980s, brought a new characteristic – it allowed its users to play by torchlight after lights out (Rechsteiner, 2020).

The Swiss National Museum's account of the gaming industry (Rechsteiner, 2020), claims that the gaming business had, in the first half of the decade, matured like the initial players. In the second half of the decade, video game graphics became three-dimensional. Players could move three ways instead of two. These games were more realistic and intricate. Console and game makers competed for the rising market. Sony released the PlayStation in 1994, a technical and graphic leap over previous platforms. In *Age of Empires* (1997), players-built civilizations, while in *Command & Conquer* (1995), they waged war.

Game designers came up with more novel ideas, frequently inspired by history. In *Tomb Raider* (1996), they hunted historical artifacts with *Lara Croft*; in *Monkey Island* (1990), *pirate loot*. In the 1990s, violence also became a theme in games. *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) introduced first-person shooters. It was at this time that society began to question if video game violence could cause real-life violence (Rechsteiner, 2020).

At the start of the millennium, the internet was not powerful enough or widely used yet to allow online multiplayer games. LAN (local area network) parties gathered gamers, which is when players brought their own laptops to a physical space and set up a local network to play into the early hours or all night (Figures 1 and 2). *Counter-Strike* (2000), in which players play terrorists or anti-terrorists, was popular during these events.



Figure 1 - LAN party in 200 Gamekeeper6, CC BY-SA 3.0

Retrieved from:

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1851830>



Figure 2 - DreamHack LAN Party Toffelginkgo, CC BY-SA 3.0

Retrieved from:

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7380926>

Technology advanced exponentially. Powerful graphical advancements make video game worlds more lifelike. Nowadays, Artificial Intelligence allows simulated opponents to react autonomously to game events. Open-world games let players explore fictitious settings and choose their own path. Sandbox gaming lets players build their own virtual universe. Some examples are *The Sims* (2000), *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004), *Super Mario Galaxy* (2007). Indeed, in 2009, video games were already a billion-dollar industry (Statista Research Department, 2010).

The future seems to be even more thrilling for the video game industry as the next big innovation seems to be virtual reality, the so-called VR gaming. Although this has been tried before by companies such as Nintendo, which failed, things seem to be different now as consoles are getting constantly better and offer much more than just gameplay. They have developed into hubs for entertainment, giving access to live TV, movie-watching apps, and even social media (Stash Team, 2018). This also has led to another level in the Video gaming industry. Before players used to bring their own PC to LAN parties; since then, these have become massive events that gather thousands of people in so-called eSports events.

1.2 What is eSports?

Video game competitions, commonly called eSports² or electronic sports, put professional players against one another for cash awards. Game developers, eSports leagues, or other groups are in charge of organizing these events, which might happen offline or online. eSports can be played solo or in teams and are frequently shown on television or online platforms (British Esports, 2016). Unlike traditional sports, eSports rely on electronic devices, such as computers and gaming consoles, to play the games instead of a player's physical presence. *League of Legends*, *Dota 2*, and *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* are amongst the most well-known eSports games.

eSports competitions and leagues have gained popularity because of the investments made by numerous sizable businesses and organizations. This resulted in the development of professional eSports teams, which are made up of players who engage in structured competitions with one another. These tournaments haven't draw millions of people online or on television because they frequently offer significant cash awards (British Esports, 2016).

eSports have started to appear at international sporting events like the Asian Games and the Southeast Asian Games in addition to regular tournaments (Venkat, 2021). This shows that eSports is becoming increasingly well-liked and accepted as a legitimate form of competition. Dedicated esports stadiums and leagues, akin to traditional sports leagues, have been formed due to the constant growth in the number of eSports players and viewers. This resulted in the development of professional esports teams, which are made up of players who engage in structured competitions with one another.

One example of the eSports industry in action is the video game *League of Legends*, where we see different regions having leagues³ where different organizations compete against each other. For example, in Europe, there is the LEC (League of Legends EMEA Championship), where teams compete weekly in Berlin in a single studio. However, in LPL (League of Legends Pro League), which is the Chinese Professional League, some teams

² eSports traces its origins back to 1972, when home consoles first became common. Retrieved from: <https://www.siue.edu/esports/about/history.shtml>

³ There are major league regions such as LEC, LPL, where the best teams of the region plays, and there smaller regional leagues. Retrieved from: <https://www.redbull.com/int-en/league-of-legends-esports-beginners-guide#18-are-there-leagues>

have their own stadium, in their own city, such as the LGD team, which has a stadium in Hangzhou, similar to any other team for any other sport (The Straits Times, 2018).

Overall, the eSports sector is expanding quickly and provides distinctive entertainment and competitiveness. Although the industry might still be in its infancy, it has already drawn a sizable and devoted fan following and a sizeable investment from important businesses and organizations. It is expected that the sector will continue to develop and thrive in the future as technology develops and eSports' popularity soars (Insider Intelligence, 2023).

1.2.1 eSports in China

China is regarded as a powerhouse in the eSports industry. The country hosts major eSports tournaments and has a large and passionate esports fan base. eSports teams and players from China have also achieved international recognition and success. China alone accounts for almost one fifth of the market. According to Statista (Gough, 2022), in 2022, the global eSports market was valued at just over US\$1.38 billion and is expected to grow to as much as US\$1.87 billion by 2025. Meanwhile, taking only into account China, its eSports market Revenue grew 14% in 2021 with \$403.1 million in revenue in eSports (Kharpal, 2022).

The rise in purchasing power of Chinese consumers and investments by Chinese digital companies, which have boosted gaming entertainment, have made China the largest single-country market in the world with a revenue of over US\$400 million in eSports in 2021 (Kharpal, 2022).

China was also one of the first nations to adopt eSports on an official level. eSports was officially recognized as a sport category by China's General Administration of Sports in 2003. eSports is also set to make their debut as one of the official sports to be played in Hangzhou for the Asian Games of 2022, which was later delayed to May, 2023 (Wu, 2022).

Considering that China's esports market is the biggest in the world, it is not surprising that it is where most money is generated. When it comes to the salaries of some eSport players, some of the best players from the Chinese League of Legends players were rumoured to be earning over US\$6 million per year (Xu, 2022). Meanwhile, in the European league, the average salary is around US\$60,000 per year (Jacobsen, 2023).

The video gaming industry has evolved exponentially, in parallel with technological development. It is global and extremely profitable, and forecasts estimate its continuous growth in the years to come.

1.3 Digital Distribution Platforms on PC

The term "digital distribution" refers to a technique of providing video games to the public that is both convenient and gaining in popularity. Steam, owned and operated by Valve, and Origin, owned and operated by EA, are two of the most well-known digital distribution platforms that give gamers instant access to a wide variety of games (Computer Hope, 2020).

The selling point of this strategy is that prospective clients need simply link their account to a credit card or PayPal account to be able to purchase virtually anything they come across on the website.

Since there are different types of digital distribution platforms in the market, it is important to be aware of who they are, and what they can offer because every platform has its own advantages and exclusive content.

- **Steam**

The Valve Corporation created the digital distribution system for video games, Steam. It was initially launched in 2003 as a distribution channel for Valve's games, but it has since grown to include a sizable library of games from independent developers. Linux, macOS, and Windows all support Steam. Steam provides multiplayer gaming, video streaming, social networking capabilities, and game distribution. Games can be bought on Steam, downloaded, installed, and played on a computer (Penn Live, 2021).

Additionally, the platform provides community services, including user reviews, forums, game groups, and in-game transactions. With millions of daily active users and a robust online market for user-generated products like mods and skins, Steam has a sizable and engaged user base. Additionally, the platform is easy to use and is updated frequently with new functions and enhancements. In summary, Steam is an all-encompassing platform that provides a practical and centralized location to buy, play, and communicate with other players.

But Steam is not like any other platform. Steam alone accounts for 50% to 70% of all downloads of PC games around the globe, and with almost 75% of the global market, Steam is the most popular video game distribution platform (Chang, 2023). Every day, it draws about 20 million players. In 2020 it had 120 million monthly active users. In 2021 the most played games on the platform were *CS:GO*, with a peak of over 1 million players simultaneously. Followed by *Dota 2* and *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*. Such games as *CS:GO* and *Dota 2* are Steam exclusive, so you need Steam in order to play them (Chang, 2023).

- **Epic Games Store**

Epic Games Store, which debuted in December 2018, provides a service that provides games in a manner comparable to Steam. Most people know Epic Games through the popular battle royale game *Fortnite* and Unreal Engine.

The restricted selection of excellent titles the Epic Games Store offers sets it apart from Steam. They primarily provide AAA titles⁴ (high budget games) and their own developed games. See more below. With the Epic Games Launcher, you can add friends and connect to social networks (such as Facebook and Steam).

The Epic Games Store has a particularity: it offers free games on a weekly basis. Although those free games are often not appealing to most players, there are times when the games offered by the platform are huge hits, thus leading to a huge increase in new users. Such as the example, in 2021, the store offered the widely known *GTA V* for free to every player for a limited amount of time. This limited offer led to an increase of more than 7 million new users to the platform (Peters, 2021). *GTA V* is their most popular video game on the platform. Epic Games had done this before with games such as *Civilization 6*, which led to almost 2.5 million new users (Peters, 2021).

Since Epic Games is still a recent platform, this is a way for them to attract new customers, although they spend a lot of money on the free games they offer, for example, spending \$1.5 million on *Batman: Arkham series* to offer it for free (C, 2022). So, the company spends money and offers free games as a marketing strategy, as in the end, users

⁴ The term "AAA Games" is a classification used within the video gaming industry to signify high-budget, high-profile games that are typically produced and distributed by large, well-known publishers. These games often rank as "blockbusters" due to their extreme popularity. Many are part of successful franchises, with new installments building on the success of previous games. Retrieved from: <https://www.arm.com/ja/glossary/aaa-games>

will pick up their platform to grab those free games and can potentially keep on using and buying other games.

- **Origin/EA App**

EA Play is a subscription service that provides "all-you-can-eat" access to Electronic Arts' back catalogue of games, as well as timed trials and early access to new games. It was formerly known as EA Access on Xbox One and PS4, and Origin Access on PC. Additionally, you receive a 10% discount on any future or new game purchases (Henderson, 2022).

With an additional EA Play Pro membership available for Windows PC owners who add the option to play games as they are published as part of an increased subscription, the PC experience differs slightly from the console experience.

For a single monthly cost, EA Play is accessible on PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, and PC. It is a free standalone option or an Xbox Game Pass Ultimate part (Henderson, 2022).

Since Electronic Arts own EA Play, the platform offers content such as *FIFA*, which EA App users get early access on release. The platform also offers games such as *Madden NFL*, *The Sims*, the *Battlefield* game series, and *Need for Speed*.

- **Blizzard Battle.net**

The renowned video game developer and publisher Blizzard Entertainment created the online gaming network Blizzard Battle.net. It acts as a focal point for all of Blizzard's games, making it simple for users to play with friends, manage their game accounts, and buy and download new titles.

To allow users to play Blizzard's classic titles, such as *Diablo* and *World of Warcraft*, online, Blizzard Battle.net was launched in 1996. It has become a completely online platform over time that supports a variety of Blizzard titles, including *World of Warcraft*, *Overwatch*, *Diablo III*, *Hearthstone*, and *Heroes of the Storm*, among others (Blizzard, n.d.).

The social side of Blizzard Battle.net, which enables users to connect with friends, join groups, and participate in cross-game conversations, is one of its standout features. Additionally, players get access to a number of features like customer service, forums, and

game updates. Players can also buy cosmetic items, expansions, and other in-game material from the platform's in-game store.

Since these platforms are mainstream nowadays, you can find all kinds of different games that you can buy and download. Those platforms often provide access to a lot of video game genres, which can also be a reason for their success, as people can enjoy very different genres of video games on the same platform.

1.4 Video Game Genres

Video games are categorized into genres based on their gameplay mechanics, plot, and visual aesthetic. Each gaming genre provides a distinct experience with its own set of difficulties and game mechanics. Players can choose the games that best suit their interests and preferences by understanding the many video game genres.

- **MOBA**

MOBA is an abbreviation for Multiplayer Online Battle Arena. It is a video game genre that blends aspects of real-time strategy and action games. Players in a MOBA game often control a single character or hero who battles against a team of other players on a big arena-style battlefield (Plarium, 2022). A MOBA game aims to collaborate with your team to defeat the opponent team's base while defending your own. Players must travel the arena, kill computer-controlled enemies, and acquire experience and resources to level up their hero and purchase new items and powers along the way. Popular MOBA games include *League of Legends*, *Dota 2*, and *Smite*. MOBAs are well-known for their rich strategic gameplay, high levels of competition, and devoted fan bases.

- **FPS**

First-person shooter, or FPS, is a category of video games that emphasizes shooting and battle from the perspective of the player's character. In a first-person shooter (FPS) game, the player controls a character who sees the game world via the character's eyes and uses weapons to defeat enemies and complete various tasks (Rouse, 2011). An FPS game's gameplay is frequently brisk and action-packed, with players scurrying around stages while dodging enemy fire and fighting fiercely. Several first-person shooter games include a wide range of weapons and other tools, like grenades, mines, and special powers, that can be utilized to eliminate enemies and accomplish objectives. *Rainbow Six Siege*, *Battlefield*, and *CS:GO* are a few well-known examples of FPS games. FPS games are renowned for their

compelling narratives, fast-paced action, and online multiplayer features that let players compete with one another.

- **MMORPG**

MMORPG means Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game. It is a video game genre that lets players control a customized avatar and interact with many other players in a virtual world. Players can accomplish tasks, fight computer-controlled opponents, and talk with other players in an MMORPG. Experience points, levels, and new abilities and equipment are earned as players progress through the game (Rouse, 2017). MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft*, *Elder Scrolls Online*, and *Final Fantasy XIV* are popular. Immersive gameplay, social features, and player community are hallmarks of MMORPGs. These, usually take a long time to complete and require subscriptions or in-game purchases to unlock new material.

- **Battle Royale**

Battle Royale games have grown in popularity. In this multiplayer game mode, 100 or more players are thrown onto an island or other map and must fight to be the last player or team standing (Bennett-Cohen, 2022). Battle Royale players must find weapons, gear, and supplies while avoiding environmental hazards and other players. The play area shrinks, driving players closer together and increasing combat. The last player or team alive wins. *Fortnite*, *PUBG*, and *Apex Legends* are popular Battle Royale games. Battle Royale games require quick thinking, smart decision-making, and fierce competition. They often involve building structures or using particular skills or equipment.

CHAPTER II – CULTURAL CONTEXT

2 Culture

People from different countries around the world have different definitions of Culture. For Rosy Greenlees, the previous Executive Director of the World Craft Council between 2006 and 2022 from the United Kingdom, culture is how we express ourselves as individuals and groups through our traditions, customs, expressions, clothing, and more. The stricter definition of culture is our artifacts, which reflect our values and worldview and include ceramics, paintings, music, and other things (Pier, 2023).

For Amitava Battacharya, the founder of Banglanatak.org from India, culture is a skill that communities possess that has the potential to evolve into a business. That business can potentially produce resources that communities can use to expand. Because culture establishes a community, culture is crucial. We are all doomed without culture. In fact, it breathes new life into the planet, the community, the village, and the individual. Therefore, fostering culture is crucial (Pier, 2023).

For Anado-Mclauchlin, an Assemblage Artist from Mexico, culture is a byproduct of sentient creatures coexisting, and it is also their essence. There is a culture of yogurt, a culture of ants, and a culture of humankind, but it is never clear what will appear. But when it comes to human culture, according to the artist, it is always described in terms of various climes and mentalities. It results from individuals sharing a living space (Pier, 2023).

As we can see, all three given definitions are not the same. Defining culture is not an easy task. Maybe, what makes it so challenging is that, at the moment, a universal understanding of culture does not exist (Hatton, 2022). Therefore, instead of focusing on defining what Culture is, we will address culture-specific items, as these are elements that are present in the video game industry.

2.1 Culture-Specific Items

More than understanding culture, it is important to understand what culture-specific items are. Some concepts, such as flora, fauna, food, clothes, housing, work, leisure, politics, law, and religion, are specific to certain cultures and may not exist in others. This is a crucial point to consider when translating texts that use culture-specific items, as it may be difficult for people unfamiliar with those concepts to understand their meaning.

Persson (2015), notes that due to globalization, many culture-specific items are becoming more well-known in other cultures. This means that using such items in a translation may not be problematic, as many people may already be familiar with them. However, the author acknowledges that there may be situations where a lexical gap exists, meaning that words or phrases are unknown or do not have equivalents in the target language and culture. In such cases, using culture-specific items in a translation can cause problems.

Culture-specific items are concepts that are specific to a certain culture. These concepts can refer to domains such as flora, fauna, food, clothes, housing, work, leisure, politics, law, and religion, among others. For example, words like koala, espresso, and sari are all culture-specific items that exist in a particular culture and not in others. Due to globalization, many of them are also known in other cultures. Therefore, the choice to use those words to translate a text into another language would not be problematic as most people are already familiar with these concepts. However, if there is a lexical gap, i.e. if words or phrases are not known or when lexical equivalents do not exist in the target culture and language, such culture-specific items cause problems in translation (Persson, 2015, p. 1).

Javier Franco Aixelá, as cited in Xinyan and Jianguo (2019, p. 231), defined Cultural Specific Items as “certain items in source texts whose function and connotation involve translation difficulties in their transference to target texts, because of nonexistence of given items or their different textual status in the cultural system of the readers of target texts”. Aixelá suggests that specific items in the source text may have a particular function or connotation, which can create difficulties in their translation to the target text.

Similar to Persson, Aixelá also implies that these translation difficulties can arise for two main reasons. Firstly, the referred item may not exist in the target text's language, making it difficult to find an equivalent translation. Secondly, the item's cultural significance may differ from the target text's cultural system, which can lead to difficulties in conveying its intended meaning and connotation. It also emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness and understanding in effective translation.

2.2 Cultural Awareness for intercultural communication

A fundamental aspect of effective communication is understanding different cultures. It requires two qualities: first, an awareness of one's own culture, and second, an awareness of another culture. Having both of these qualities is essential. To put it another way, it requires us to be able to take a step back from our own perspective and develop an awareness not only of our own cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions, but also of those that are unique to other cultures (Zhu, 2011).

When people communicate with those of different cultures, it is essential for them to have cultural awareness. People have different ways of perceiving, interpreting, and evaluating the world around them; consequently, what is considered appropriate in one culture is likely to be inappropriate in another; as a result, communication between people can lead to misunderstandings (Zhu, 2011).

For instance, a Chinese person's first impression of an American is likely to be of someone who is always working, dresses casually, consumes fast food, drinks Coca-Cola, and discusses business while having lunch. These impressions more or less reflect that the meaning that people give to certain activities, such as having lunch or dinner, could be different in contrast to certain cultures. For example, having lunch or dinner could be seen as a social obligation in some cultures. Lunch, dinner, or a get-together for tea has a social connotation in China, a country where relationships are highly valued; therefore, people get together for these meals to talk and relax, and most importantly, to form more personal connections with one another (Zhu, 2011).

Misinterpretations occur most frequently when we are unaware of the behavioral norms, we impose on ourselves and then project those norms onto other people. When we lack awareness of other cultures, we have a propensity to incorrectly interpret the verbal or non-verbal behavior of the people with whom we interact.

2.3 Localization

In 2011, Chandler and Deming stated that “Localization is the actual process of translating the language assets in a game to another language” (Chandler and Deming, 2011, p. 4).

However, time and businesses have showed that for successful game localization, “there is not only a linguistic transfer but also the adaptation of cultural references, humour and irony” (Odacıoğlu et al., 2016, p. 676). As the authors “emphasized, translation is not only linguistic and even the cultural transfer but also it requires the adaptation of graphics, images and even the re-design of the source material or production in the target setting” (p. 677) and other elements for a successful market engagement and business success.

As stated previously, video games often contain cultural references, themes, and narratives that may need to be adapted or localized for different markets. Video game *localization*, more than language translation, involves adapting gameplay, graphics, and cultural references to make the game resonate with local audiences. Any cultural insensitivity may result in stereotypes, or offensive content, which, in turn, may lead to controversy and/or business losses. Understanding the cultural significance of these elements is essential for business success. Additionally, video game industry in China, for example, is bound by content regulation, which includes censorship and age ratings. Therefore, working in this field requires knowledge of the cultural and legal aspects of the market.

Localization is adjusting a game to a new culture by carefully examining the game's fundamental presumptions, values, ideologies, beliefs, and designs to determine whether it complies with regional cultural norms. To guarantee that it appeals to the intended audience and does not violate cultural conventions or beliefs, this process entails altering the game's plot, characters, language, and gameplay mechanics. It is crucial for a game to be successful on a worldwide scale (Altagram, 2021).

While the in-game translation takes up much of the work during the localization process, culturalization focuses on the game's linguistic and non-linguistic aspects, including the plot, use of color, graphics, character names, and the game scenario (such as music, promotional banners, and UI). To make sure they are all respectful, suitable, and meaningful to the local culture (Altagram, 2021).

Unfortunately, not every player enjoys playing culturally specific games. Several people prefer the uniqueness and foreign ambiance of the original games. So, it is crucial to strike a balance between maintaining the original game's concept and culturally modifying it. This can be accomplished by conducting in-depth research and learning about the preferences and

cultural norms of the target audience. To achieve a good adaptation, it is also essential to get feedback from new audience that is the main target (Altagram, 2021).

2.3.1 Challenges of Localization

When it comes to putting into practice these strategies, according to (Teixeira, 2017) it is important to consider the following:

- **History**

One of the most delicate topics for regional markets is historical authenticity. Any alternate or erroneous history may provoke strong, emotional backlash since many civilizations are fiercely sensitive to their historical heritage and origins. History is an interesting subject, but it is rarely possible to provide a game's players with the whole context of a historical event. But discussing recent history can be quite sensitive because people still vividly recall the events and results, which can also be challenging.

- **Religion and Belief Systems**

Creators of video game material must be aware of the fundamental cultural norms of the countries where their games will be sold. Because they adhere to what they perceive to be a higher standard than human judgment, societies built on sacred rules are typically less adaptable and yield to the context in which information appears. Consequently, if the problematic content does appear at all, regardless of context, there is a risk of backlash.

- **Ethnic and Cultural Problems**

In addition to the more contentious topics of history and religion, numerous more concerns fall into a wide category that deals with various types of conflict, misunderstanding, attitude, and continuous hostility between cultural groups. The most prominent of these is the application of racial and/or cultural stereotypes and the perception of inclusion and exclusion with prejudice towards a certain group.

- **Geopolitical Situations**

National governments frequently use digital media, such as online maps and video games, to reaffirm their local worldview and the scope of their geographic sovereignty. This involves a scenario in which the government asserts sovereignty over specific territories and demands that those territories be represented as integral to their country on any map, including virtual worlds created for video games (hence the term "geopolitical imagination," as the representation they are demanding does not accurately reflect reality). There is no opportunity for error with some regimes, such as China and India, since they uphold rules that specify how national maps must appear or how their local political condition must be shown.

2.4 Law as Culture

Although law is a dynamic and an ever-evolving system, it is affected by its cultural past. Law in China is deeply influenced by the country's culture and history, political, and social factors.

According to Devlin (1959), law should be used to enforce the norms of a society's culture. It "holds us together" as a society by enforcing the invisible links of common thought, and this "basic agreement" in turn gives law legitimacy. Hence, law is seen as the branch of a cogent preexisting culture, which is the ultimate source of society's identity and power (Post, 2003).

(...)society means a community of ideas; without shared ideas on politics, morals, and ethics no society can exist. Each one of us has ideas about what is good and what is evil; they cannot be kept private from the society in which we live. If men and women try to create a society in which there is no fundamental agreement about good and evil they will fail; if, having based it on common agreement, the agreement goes, the society will disintegrate. For society is not something that is kept together physically; It is held by the invisible bonds of common thought. If the bonds were too far relaxed the members would drift apart. A common morality is

part of the bondage. The bondage is part of the price of society; and mankind, which needs society, must pay its price. (Devlin, 1959, pp. 137-138)

Robert Post suggests that “the Devlin model of the relationship between law and culture is pervasive within our modern legal system” (Post, 2003, p. 486), because law frequently sees itself as upholding “the common sense of the community, as well as the feeling of decency, propriety, and morality which most people entertain.” The local community's "experience" and "custom" are explicitly embodied by the common law (Post, 2003). According to the author, the government frequently uses the legal system as a social engineering instrument to achieve its desired political outcomes. In the contemporary administrative state, this is a common use of the law. The logic of instrumental rationality, which differs from and at times is opposed to the logic of cultural values, is used to justify laws intended to put out urban fires, avoid traffic accidents, or advance market efficiency. Furthermore, Post also claims that “law is sometimes used to revise and reshape culture.” (Post, 2003, p. 488).

Post presents the example of Catharine MacKinnon⁵, who pushed for legislation to ban pornography as an example, her goal was to utilize the law to break the connection between female subjugation and sexuality, which she saw as prevalent in American culture (Post, 2003). In this case “law does not merely reflect the norms of a pre-existing culture but is instead itself a medium that both instantiates and establishes culture.” (Post, 2003, p. 489).

Weisbrod (2009) states:

One relates to the point that law creates the conditions of culture to some degree.

Another notes that law, as a cultural product, has something in common with other cultural products. In the anthropologist’s definition, laws are part of culture. Still another focuses on the point that while law is to some extent a mandarin text, it is itself a subject of popular culture (Weisbrod, 2009, p. 2).

This tells us that, first, to some extent, law creates the conditions for culture, implying that a society's culture is shaped by its values, norms, and practices, which in turn are shaped

⁵ An American feminist and professor of law, an influential legal theorist whose work primarily took aim at sexual abuse in the context of inequality. Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Catharine-A-MacKinnon>

by the law. Second, because law is a cultural product, it has elements in common with other cultural products. This shows that culture and the law are intertwined rather than existing independently. Weisbrod concludes by saying that law is a topic of popular culture. This implies that the law is subject to the impact of popular culture because it is not only a text created by legal experts but also a component of people's daily experiences.

With this in mind, it is relevant to take a closer look at Chinese regulations regarding video games, not only to understand the obstacles that companies face when trying to access the market, but also to understand how and why certain Chinese laws exist.

2.4.1 Chinese Law in video games

In China there are a set of laws that companies must follow in order to publish their games in the country. In 2020 the Regulatory body in China introduced a new age-based rating system for video games. It stated that games would be divided into three different age categories, represented by a color +8 (green), 12+ (blue) 16+ (yellow)⁶. All games must display these labels on their website (Dealessandri, 2020).

Video game regulation in China is not new. The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China (2012) released a list of forbidden content in video games, namely:

- 1) those opposing the basic principles established in the Constitution;
- 2) those endangering the unification, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State;
- 3) those divulging secrets of the State, harming national security, or impairing the honor and interests of the State;
- 4) those inciting enmity, discrimination of nationalities, jeopardizing the unity among the various ethnic groups, or violating the customs and habits of minority nationalities;
- 5) those spreading cults or superstitions;
- 6) those disturbing social order and destroying social stability;
- 7) those inciting pornography, gambling, violence or instigating a crime;

⁶ This law allows people older than 16+ to play any game. Contrary to the initial idea from Tencent to create an 18+ category. Retrieved from: <https://www.gamesindustry.biz/china-introduces-new-age-rating-system>

- 8) those insulting or libeling others, violating the lawful rights and interests of others;
- 9) those endangering social moralities or fine national cultural traditions;
- 10) other contents which are prohibited by laws and administrative regulations or by the State.

Considering the abovementioned list, many games needed to adapt their content to suit the Chinese market. Otherwise, they would have their game banned and be unable to profit operate in China. Additionally, in 2018, China's State Administration of Press and Publication (SAPP), was formed and was responsible for the approval of new games in the country. SAPP created new regulations (Niko, 2019), with the most impactful being:

- Promote games with traditional culture + historical accuracy;
- There shall be no images of dead bodies or pools of blood in any game;
- Developers may not change the color of pools of blood to accommodate.

Apart from these new rules, regulation against the rising Loot Boxes⁷ grew as they were seen as a form of gambling, so some new rules were introduced (App In China, 2020). These include:

- Loot boxes cannot be purchased using either real or virtual currency;
- Loot box contents must also be acquirable through other means.

With these new rules, game publishers were forced to make new game changes.

2.5 The Growing Influence of China and Its Culture in the Gaming Industry

It can be difficult to understand from the standpoint of the player the growing influence of Chinese companies in the gaming industry and why they are having impact on video games and what we see in video games. Chinese businesses are investing in game development, publishing and distribution and therefore have influence over decisions made by foreign businesses and can also culturally influence the decisions on what players have access to.

⁷ Paid reward system; a consumable virtual item which can be redeemed to receive a randomised reward of uncertain value purchased with real money (Ash et al., 2022).

In 2013, Epic Games, the owner of the previously mentioned Epic Games Store and owner of the Battle Royale *Fortnite*, saw 48.4% of the company being acquired by the Chinese gaming company Tencent (Crecente, 2013). Furthermore, Tencent also bought 93% of Riot Games, the owner of *LoL* back in 2011, and four years later, they bought the remaining 7%, meaning that Tencent owns the entire company, and with this, owns the most popular PC game in the world.

Tencent also owns 11.5% of the company Bluehole, the owner of *PUBG*, 5% of Ubisoft, the owner of the famous *Assassin's Creed* franchise video game, and 5% of Blizzard, the owner of *WoW* (Messner, 2020). This makes Tencent the third biggest gaming company in the world, only behind Sony and Microsoft with \$13.9 billion in gaming revenue.

Tencent is not the only case as the next example are also Chinese companies. The company NetEase recently bought the French game developer Quantic Dream and is currently developing a game based on Disney's movies Star Wars. Finally, the video game company, miHoYo the creator of the 2020 hit MMO video game called *Genshin Impact* gathered more than 62 million players in 2022 (Twinfinite Staff, 2022).

Tencent, NetEase, and MiHoYo together either own or have shares in today's most-played video games. This shows the impact and the influence that Chinese companies have in the video game industry and their activity regarding foreign gaming companies. This explains why some video game content is heavily influenced by China and China's culture.

In conclusion, the cultural aspects discussed until now are crucial for understanding the path taken in this dissertation. The cultural context and research methodologies outlined here are essential for comprehending the vision of this work.

This connection becomes especially pertinent when considering the influence of Chinese companies on the gaming sector. Chinese businesses have made substantial investments in game development, publishing, and distribution, impacting decisions made by foreign gaming companies. For example, Tencent, a leading Chinese gaming company, acquired a significant stake in Epic Games, the creator of *Fortnite*, and has invested in other major gaming companies. These developments showcase the significant influence of Chinese gaming companies on the global video game industry.

Understanding the cultural context allows us to consider societal norms and values that may have influenced research outcomes. It also helps uncover potential biases or limitations in the study. Additionally, understanding research methodologies aids in replicating and building upon studies, ensuring the reliability of insights. Thus, the combination of cultural context and research methodologies provides a comprehensive understanding of the research and its significance in the field, particularly when analyzing the profound impact of Chinese companies on the video game industry and their role in shaping gaming content worldwide.

3 Methodologies

This thesis intends to explore the cultural, social, and political forces that have played a role in the development of the video game in China, as well as how this sector compares to that in other nations. In practice, several video games will be analyzed and the cultural references and symbols that are embedded in them will be identified.

Indeed, when it comes to writing a thesis, conducting research is an essential part of the process. How to research is another concern.

Initially, it is crucial to understand the differences between two types of research-qualitative research and quantitative research (McLeod, 2023) - because only by understanding the differences, is it possible to choose the most appropriate approach and ensure that the research methods align with the research questions and objectives.

Qualitative Research

The process of gathering, examining, and interpreting non-numerical data, such as language, is known as qualitative research. To comprehend how a person interprets and lends meaning to their social experience, qualitative research might be performed. Non-numerical information such as text, music, video, or pictures is referred to as qualitative data.

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 2)

Denzin and Lincoln define qualitative research as a versatile, multimethod approach that focuses on deciphering and comprehending subjective experiences and viewpoints of people in their natural environments. This enables researchers to interact and observe people in their daily lives in order to better understand how they interpret their experiences. Instead of applying their own biases or assumptions to the data, qualitative researchers try to understand and interpret the meanings that individuals attach to their experiences. The researcher can utilize a variety of techniques to gather empirical data, including interviews, direct observation, document and artifact analysis, use of visual resources, and personal experience. To develop a thorough understanding of the phenomena being examined,

qualitative researchers often combine several methods of data collecting, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Quantitative Research

In contrast to qualitative research, which involves gathering and examining non-numerical material (such as text, video, or audio), quantitative research focuses on gathering and analyzing numerical data (Bhandari, 2022).

Testing causal links between variables, making predictions, and extrapolating findings to larger populations are the objectives of quantitative research. The goal of quantitative research is to identify general principles governing behavior and phenomena in various contexts. Research is utilized to put a theory to the test and determine whether or not to accept it (Mcleod, 2023).

3.1 Chosen Methodology

Given the objectives established for this research, namely:

- explore, analyze and understand the possible reasons behind the existence of distinct elements in Chinese video games in comparison to those available on the international market.

a qualitative approach was considered more appropriate.

In sum, with a focus on social, cultural factors and governmental regulations, this thesis seeks to research the underlying causes of video game variations between China and western markets. The results of this research have the potential to offer useful insights into the Chinese gaming sector and contribute to a better understanding of how cultures differ in terms of the types of content found in video games, and possibly drive future game development and marketing efforts in particular, and the culture industry in general.

Different versions of the same video game in the Chinese version and in the Western versions were analyzed. Cultural references and symbols embedded in the games, including Blood, Nudity and Gambling, Symbology, Smoking and Alcohol, Historical Inaccuracy, and Skeletons, were identified. This involved collecting and analyzing data from multiple sources, such as images, as well as government regulations, to adopt an interpretive approach to make sense of the data.

By analyzing video games in different cultural and regulatory contexts, there is an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which culture and regulation shape how the video game is presented in a different country and culture such as China.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

To carry out the intended research, it was necessary to have access to various versions of different video games in both Chinese and other cultural contexts, to analyze, compare and interpret data from multiple sources.

First, in the search for academic articles about the topic and then to find relevant information regarding the cultural adaptation of video games for the Chinese market, drawing on government regulations on video games. These documents were analyzed. However, it was not enough because the studies lacked the video games themselves. Therefore, it was necessary to extend this search beyond the academic field, which led to the search for comparison videos of video games on Websites such as Youtube or Bilibili (a website similar to Youtube).

Several videos on Youtube showed side-by-side images of the original version of the video games and the Chinese adaptations, which provided a better understanding of the changes made to appeal to the Chinese audience. Additionally, the access to online forums and social media groups where Chinese and non-Chinese gamers discussed their experiences with these adaptations, provided valuable insights into their preferences and expectations. Data was also collected from these communities.

As a gamer, personal knowledge enabled easier access to video games banned in China was not a very difficult task to do, as there are many and thus, this information could easily be found in specialized forums where players usually discuss game related content, and news articles. Data was also collected from these communities.

As the practical focus was on the video game *League of Legends*, it was also necessary to find older images of characters' splash art (the first thing players see when they start up the game) and in-game models, which proved to be accessible. However, finding recent in-game images and splash art was more difficult. Furthermore, as the Chinese version of the game is not accessible outside of China, being in Portugal, it was not possible to open the in-game client and check. Visiting the Chinese version of the video game website, it was possible to verify that the images presented there were, in most cases, not up to date, or did

not match the what could be seen in-game and in the splash art. Therefore, to ensure which information was correct, it was possible to either try accessing a VPN and connecting to China and then logging onto the Chinese server or find someone living in China that could verify the information. The latter was extremely useful, as a Chinese friend living in China was able to obtain the data needed.

3.3 Organizing the Data

The data obtained throughout the search was organized by categories, in line with the literature review on culture-specific items. First, I decided which categories I would use to classify the data and then created separate files for each category. This helped me to easily access information. Overall, organizing the data by files was a practical and efficient approach for my research project.

When organizing the data into categories, first I divided the files into 8 categories: video games banned in China, blood, nudity, gambling, symbology, smoking, alcohol, and successful adaptations because these were the most notorious cases where differences could be found. However, after analyzing the data, I quickly realized that I either had too much data for some topics or too little for some other topics. This led me to rethink my initial categorization and adjust it. I merged categories and created new ones to represent the data I was able to collect. This allowed me to have a balanced distribution of information across the different categories. For example, as I was not able to find a lot of examples regarding smoking in video games, I ended up putting it together with alcohol. Additionally, this ensured that I did not miss any relevant information in the specific video games that I used. In the end, I was able to navigate through my files and retrieve the necessary information for each section of my work.

The final categories were: Video games banned in China; blood, nudity, and gambling; symbology; smoking and alcohol; historical inaccuracy; and finally, successful adaptations. I joined nudity and gambling, and smoking and alcohol. I decided to do this because, considering the video games I wanted to analyze, there was not enough data available for a single category.

Finally, I realized that I needed to create a separate category for successful adaptations. This was important because I found that some video games were able to successfully

transition their video games differently instead of just altering certain aspects of the game to cater to the Chinese audience, but instead almost created a new one. By having a separate category for successful adaptations, I was able to analyze what made these adaptations successful and how they differed from those that, even though they also worked and were accepted in China, did not receive any special praise for users.

Overall, rethinking and adjusting my initial categorization was a crucial step in ensuring the success of my thesis. It allowed me to have a more comprehensive and organized approach to analyzing the data, which ultimately led to more meaningful conclusions. By taking the time to carefully consider and refine my categories, I was able to identify patterns and trends that might have been overlooked otherwise. This process highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability in research, as well as the need to continually reevaluate and refine our methods to ensure the most accurate and insightful results.

The process of considering and refining categories is an essential part of any research project. By taking the time to carefully analyze and categorize data, we can identify patterns and trends that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. This not only helps us to better understand our research topic, but it also allows us to draw more accurate conclusions and make more informed decisions.

However, it is important to remember that research is not a static process - it requires flexibility and adaptability. As we continue to gather data and analyze our findings, we must be willing to reevaluate our methods and refine our categories as needed. This ensures that we are always working with the most up-to-date information and producing the most insightful results possible. Ultimately, the ability to be flexible and adaptable is what sets successful researchers apart from those who struggle to make meaningful contributions in their field.

CHAPTER IV – RESEARCH FINDINGS

4 Video Games in China

Considering what has been previously discussed throughout the thesis, if companies want to be able to introduce their video games in the Chinese market, it could be better to adapt their games accordingly, changing certain aspects and sometimes making the characters of the game look entirely different. These changes include using specific Chinese characters and symbols and developing storylines that resonate with Chinese culture and customs to make the game more appealing and exciting for the Chinese audience.

Additionally, for the game to be well-received by the Chinese market, companies must take into consideration that the regulations of the Chinese government regarding restrictions are stricter compared to other countries. Therefore, the company must abide by those regulations to introduce its video game in the Chinese market.

Throughout this chapter, I will discuss some of the games banned in China because they did not adjust or could not prevent certain things from happening. I will also discuss some changes companies have made to adapt their game to the Chinese market, why, and how they happened.

4.1 Video Games Banned in China

Given how difficult it is to enter the Chinese market, it is unsurprising that some games were banned because they either refused to adapt to the regulations or contained sensitive content.

- **Animal Crossing**

For example, in the Japanese Nintendo's video game *Animal Crossing*, you can create a digital avatar that appears on a small, ostensibly uninhabited island with a pack of raccoons. The objective is to settle on the island by taking its natural resources and tricking people into exchanging products through the raccoons' economy. Even though the game had not been officially approved for sale in China, players could still buy it through importers and by changing their console's region setting (Gilbert, 2020).



Figure 3- Animal Crossing

retrieved from: <https://www.businessinsider.com/animal-crossing-new-horizons-nintendo-switch-banned-in-china-protests-2020-4>

However, this all changed in 2020 when some players, using their creativity, created what can be seen in the picture above, using in-game content to voice their discontent towards government policies regarding the Hong Kong riot situation (Gilbert, 2020). This caused an uproar among Chinese authorities, and eventually, the game was completely banned in China. This ban can be understood if we look at what was previously said by the MOC regarding game content that is forbidden, the MOC tells us that forbidden content includes "those endangering the unification, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State" (Zhang, 2012, p. 344). So, in such a delicate situation and with no action from Nintendo, the government acted and banned the game for good.

- **Battlefield 4**

Another game that was forbidden was *Battlefield 4*, the first-person shooter, which is a type of game that usually displays the main character's arms at the bottom of the screen, holding the equipped weapon. Using the game controller, the player is supposed to move his avatar forward, backward, sideways, and in other ways, as needed to go through the game.

The problem with *Battlefield* is that they released a new storyline called "China Rising" in 2013. As the name suggests, it involves China; in this case, the story happens in mainland China, and it starts with the Chinese military leader trying to overthrow the current government with the support of Russia. Due to this, in the video game, a war between China and USA began, portraying China as the bad guys.

Similar situations used to happen in the past, but instead of China, Russia used to be the one portrayed as villain against USA, not only in video games but in movies and the entertainment industry overall (Tassi, 2013).

After being called a threat to national security and a form of cultural invasion, it was not surprising that the game was banned by the authorities, as it displayed a view of the country that was not pleasing to the MOC (Ravi, 2013).

- **Devotion**

This video game from 2019 is a first-person horror game set in the 1980s in Taiwan. The problem with the game is that it offered "easter eggs", which are secret messages or jokes that only some players paying close attention can find in a video game (Allen, 2019). Although "easter eggs" themselves are not a problem in China, this one, in particular, was not well received.



Figure 4 - When players interact with the poster (L), the poster (R) appears - with the words "Winnie the Pooh" and "Xi Jinping"

Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-47361172>

In the image above, the words "Xi Jinping" and "Winnie the Pooh" are written in an ancient style of writing. Even though this seems a harmless thing to do, writing Winnie the Pooh and Xi Jinping together, this situation led to a lot of problems for the company. Winnie the Pooh is usually seen as nothing more than a cute bear that loves honey. However, in China, Winnie the Pooh has become a humorous way for people all over China to mock the president, Xi Jinping, as many compare Winnie the Pooh to the Chinese president. Although this was seen as funny to some people and could be a positive way to portray the Chinese president, the joke was not seen as funny by the government, so, the Chinese government viewed this comparison as "a serious effort to undermine the dignity of the presidential office and Xi himself" (Haas, 2018), thus banning the character.

With that said, it is now possible to understand the problem with the video game *Devotion*, is that it was mocking the president as many people did online, ultimately resulting in a ban.

Red Candle Games, the company that created the video game, issued an apology stating that the poster made it into the game by accident and refunded offended users. However, harm was done, and both the company's name and video game itself were completely deleted from Chinese mainstream websites such as Weibo (similar to Twitter) (Allen, 2019).

4.2 Examples of Video Games Adaptation

Because of the uniqueness of the Chinese market and the need for businesses to adapt to capitalize on the large number of players in China, game companies typically release different versions of the game in the Chinese market. These versions are often slightly different from the game's original version to cater to Chinese players, who may have different gaming preferences and needs than players in other countries. Game companies also pay special attention to Chinese culture when developing games for the Chinese market. They incorporate Chinese characters and references into the game's content to make it more relatable and familiar to Chinese players.

It is crucial for companies attempting to make inroads into the Chinese market, as the Chinese people are very proud of their culture and appreciate it when foreign companies

respect it, but that is not all. Companies should also consider some specific things when adapting their game to the Chinese market to avoid having their game banned or rejected.

Therefore, some companies adapted as a way to not get their game banned, as previously mentioned, the dissertation is divided in categories, these categories will be discussed below, giving an in-depth view of the changes made and how they affected and changed the video games.

4.2.1 Blood

Currently, we have one mechanism for displaying different content in different countries. Specifically, we can check whether the game is being run in China, by looking for a specific file in the LoL install (a .dll file that is used by our publisher in China). If that .dll exists, then we swap out specific particle FX for other versions. This allows bloody things like Vladimir's trollpool to look red in most of the world, and black in China. We don't have similar marker files in other countries, so we can't use this technique anywhere else in the world. (Clark, 2017, para. 5)

The quote above is from 2017 when the Engineering Manager of Riot Games, an American company, the owner of League of Legends, Bill Clark, explained to the community how the process of displaying different content to different countries worked. In the case of China, the client would detect if a player was in China or outside, allowing certain content to appear differently depending on the location of a particular player.

Regarding video games containing blood, in the last few years, we started seeing an adaptation where instead of depicting blood as realistically as possible, the creators opted for more stylistic solutions, such as changing the color of the blood to a non-realistic hue. The first example of this happens in the MOBA video game, *LoL*⁸.

⁸ League of Legends is one of the world's most popular video games, developed by Riot Games. It features a team-based competitive game mode based on strategy and outplaying opponents. Retrieved from: https://nfhs.org/media/1020428/what-is-league-of-legends_.pdf



Figure 5- Vladimir Western and Chinese Version

Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48-JxJ0Bvr0>

As we can see from Figure 5, the game's character, Vladimir, is completely red in the Western version. Yet, in the Chinese version, the blood part turned purple. This character is a vampire. Vampires are generally associated with blood. Thus, it would be natural for both versions to use red.

However, this is not the only case and is not exclusive to *LoL*.



Figure 6 - CS:GO Western and Chinese Version

Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-pao7uFXaU&t=12s>

Figure 6 is from *CS:GO*, which belongs to Valve, also an American company. In this game, bomb defusal is the main game mode for both the casual and competitive queues. A group of terrorists must take the device and place it at one of two bomb sites during each round. The counterterrorism team's job is to prevent them from planting the bomb or defuse it after it has been planted. The terrorists win the round if the explosive detonates or if they eliminate every Counter Terrorist. The CTs will succeed if they eliminate every terrorist either before or after the bomb is planted. Even if there are still active terrorists, a CT can

disarm the explosives. The CTs win a round if the bomb is not planted and both sides have active players at the end of the round.

As we can see from Figure 6, in *CS:GO*, the Chinese version of the game, which is exclusively sold on the Steam platform, differs from the Western one. In the Western version, when you get shot or die, the color of the blood is naturally red. However, in the Chinese version of the game, all blood is black.

Although these two cases mentioned previously are more obvious and, in a way, they are also more graphic, the same cannot be said about Figure 7.



Figure 7 - Clash of Clans Chinese and Western Version

Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwSZguOOSVk>

Figure 7 is from the online multiplayer strategy game *Clash of Clans*, owned by the Finnish company Supercell, is a mobile game in which each player is a village chief. The image refers to a spell where in the Western version, the icon of the spell is red, which in this case, can easily be connected to blood. Meanwhile, the Chinese version turned green, giving it a completely different feeling. However, one of the most controversial games was *PUBG*. In this Battle Royale, players fought against each other, shooting and killing. Needless to say, a lot of red blood was involved. So, the video game company came up with a solution.

The blood that came out of the characters turned green. However, due to the changes added in 2018, video games could no longer show any kind of blood, green included. This led to Chinese people complaining and joking online, some saying that "From now on Chinese people no longer have crude oil blood or green blood. Chinese people have no blood." (Chiu, 2019, para. 13). While others sarcastically asked if "is human blood not either green or black?" (Chiu, 2019, para. 13), this clearly shows some discontent on the part of the players.

In Chinese culture, red is regarded as an auspicious color. The fire element, which stands for life, vitality, and light, is related to the color red. Red is associated with happiness, success, and good fortune since it is favorably perceived. The color's significance has not altered much over time, but special occasions like weddings and festivals are when it is most frequently seen. In fact, red is the color of choice for Chinese wedding clothes (Vip Kid, 2019).



Figure 8 - PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds Chinese Version

Retrieved from: <https://www.scmp.com/abacus/culture/article/3029301/china-doesnt-want-dead-bodies-or-green-blood-games>

Perhaps in a way, the MOC did not want people to associate red with violent games. Thus, they decided that the appearance of red blood in video games should fall onto the following prohibited content: "Those inciting pornography, gambling, violence or instigating a crime" (Zhang, 2012, p. 344), and therefore banning blood from games.

4.2.2 Nudity and Gambling

When it comes to content that can be seen as more sensitive sexually, there are also clear examples of this in the video game *LoL*.

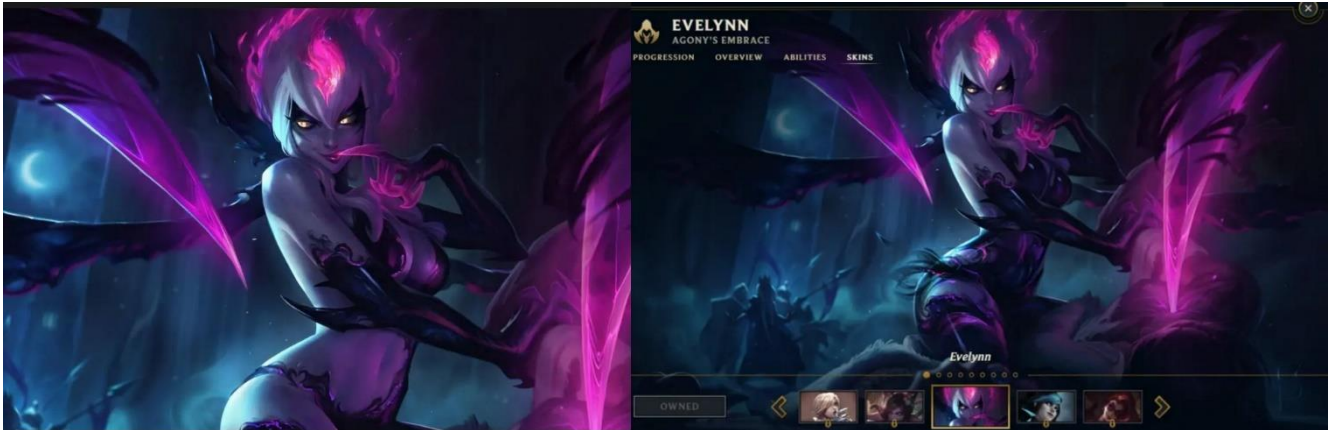


Figure 9 - Evelynn Western and Chinese

Version Retrieved from: Game Client

As we can see in Figure 9, the character Evelynn in the Western version of the game shows fewer clothes compared to the Chinese version where the character got her belly covered. Overall, more clothes were added to try and make her less sexualized.

The same happened to the French owned FPS game *Rainbow Six Siege* (Figure 10) by Ubisoft company, when in 2018, the picture on the left, which can be seen as more graphic, was changed for the picture on the right, where we can only see a hand.



Figure 10 - Rainbow Six Siege

Retrieved from: <https://www.pcgamesn.com/rainbow-six-siege/fan-outrage-over-aesthetic-changes-censorship>

This happened because the video game company wanted to enter the Chinese market. In this case, the video game did not simply have a Chinese and a Western version, the video game tried to be aesthetically globally accepted as a single version. The decision made many players threaten to quit playing if the changes went forward because they did not feel they should comply with other countries' laws (Boudreau, 2018).

When it comes to gambling, there is also an example that happened in the video game *Rainbow Six Siege* (Figure 11). In this case, the video game completely deleted the gambling machines, leaving nothing but a wooden table and three bottles of beer or soda.



Figure 11 - *Rainbow Six Siege* and Gambling

Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwSZguOOSVk>

Regarding Nudity and the topic of what can be considered sexual behavior in China, "In Chinese culture, elements derived from the teachings of Confucius have been previously cited as the distal historical basis of sexual conservatism" (Lijun, 2022, p. 84). Contrary to Western norms, Chinese people tend to be more sexually conservative or restricting, notwithstanding recent waves of the sexual revolution in China.

When it comes to gambling, Chinese people are well-recognized worldwide for their intense passion for gambling, and a brief glance at Chinese history reveals that gambling has existed for a very long time. Over 4,000 years ago, during the Xie and Shang dynasties, the first gaming records were found (Han, 2011).

Despite this long history, public commercial gambling has occasionally been outlawed by authorities who understood the harm pathological gambling might do to society.

Nevertheless, this was quickly reversed because of the financial contribution gambling makes to the economy. Nowadays, some critics also claim that gambling is harmful to individuals and society and that "Problems with gambling can lead to bankruptcy, crime, domestic abuse, and even suicide." (Baird et al., 2011, para. 8).

Since 1949, gambling has been deemed illegal in China (Guzman, 2022), except for welfare lottery and sports lottery, meaning that since gambling has been banned in real life it is not surprising that gambling is not very well accepted in video games either.

And since these are the rules for gambling in China, it is not surprising that the rising loot box system is much more restricted in China since they are seen as gambling. Unlike in global markets, loot boxes content cannot be purchased using real or virtual currency, so any content in the loot boxes must be acquirable using other ways (App In China, 2020).

In addition, among the content forbidden in video games by the MOC, we have "Those inciting pornography, gambling, violence or instigating a crime" (Zhang, 2012, p. 344). Even though the content previously shown cannot be considered pornography, this, plus the fact that Chinese society is more sexually conservative, makes the decision a natural thing for game companies to do to avoid any problems in the market.

4.2.3 Symbology

Another thing that we can observe in video games is that sometimes they contain certain aspects that can lead to misinterpretation or association with something wrong about a particular country or religion. Although this situation could not be found in *LoL*, in *CS:GO*, we can see three different situations where existing associations with countries or political parties were changed.



Figure 12 - CS:GO Communist Symbol

Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-pao7uFXaU&t=14s>

As we can see in Figure 12, the Western version has a communist symbol in-game. The problem with this situation is that it is one of the places where Terrorists can come out from, so people playing the game can associate the symbol with them. That goes against the intention of the Chinese MOC, especially if we take into consideration that this is also the symbol of the Chinese Communist Party, which is the ruling party in China.



Figure 13 - CS:GO Letter Change

Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-pao7uFXaU&t=14s>

Another example of this happens in another map of the video game. This location is where the Terrorists side starts the game. As we can see, the Western version shows us a wall written in the Arabic Alphabet. Meanwhile, the Chinese version simply shows an image completely different from the Western version (Figure 13).

If we look at the content forbidden by the Chinese MOC, we can see: "Those inciting the enmity, discrimination of nationalities, jeopardizing the unity among the various ethnic groups, or violating the customs and habits of minority nationalities" (Zhang, 2012, p. 344). In this case, having the Arabic Alphabet can easily be seen as inciting the enmity or discrimination of nationalities, as nowadays it is very common to have terrorism associated with Arabic-speaking nations. Therefore, the decision by the MOC has the intention to fight against certain stereotypes.

4.2.4 Smoking and Alcohol

When it comes to alcohol and smoking, we can also find examples of differences in *LoL*, and the example was also very controversial at the time.



Figure 14 - Graves Western and Chinese version

Retrieved from: Riot Client

In 2014, a character in the video game *LoL* saw his cigar disappear, his cigar (Figure 14, on the left) was seen as his trademark. Although the character saw his cigar return in 2017, this change was short-lived, as in 2020, his cigar disappeared once again, and this time for good. This decision is not that surprising, as games that include drugs, alcohol, and tobacco could potentially be marketed to a higher age group and would need to have a higher age rating⁹. Removing it allows the game to reach younger players.

The same happens with the following character from the Chinese owned mobile game by Moonton Games, *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* (Figure 15).

⁹ The official rules for the age rating system itself were never made clear, however, the system is expected to be closer to the one used in Europe and The United States. However, in China, a 16+ game cannot have anything that a game in Europe and The United States 18+ game would have. Retrieved from: <https://www.protocol.com/china/china-game-rating>



Figure 15 - Mobile Legends: Bang Bang

Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a790_ePDelg

As we can see in Figure 15, the alcohol mug on the left from the Western version completely disappeared in the Chinese version.

Both smoking and drinking are not uncommon in China, on the contrary. Chinese people consider it customary to offer cigarettes to strangers they are conversing with. It serves as a conversation starter for new acquaintances. Lighting up without offering others a cigarette when you are hanging out with friends is rude. It is all about proper smoking behavior (China Daily, 2014).

The cigarette brand could also symbolize social standing in various parts of China. It is like "You are what you smoke" with cigarettes. There are numerous cigarette varieties in China, and a significant price difference between cigarette brands. While the cost of cigarettes varies per country, some are even the same. For example, people carrying the Chunghwa cigarette brand in China are often regarded as wealthy. In short, the cigarette brand says a lot about which place in society one has (China Daily, 2014).

Tobacco advertising and promotion in China have been banned from movies, radio, television, and newspapers ever since 1994 (Tobacco Control Laws, 2022). Although no law forbids video games from having tobacco in their video games, the fight against tobacco is becoming worldwide. Adding to this, in 2020, China had a rate of 25.6% of adult smokers (Zhang, 2022), which accounted for over 300 million people. So, it is no surprise that Xi Jinping announced the country's ambition to decrease the smoking rate to 20% by 2030

(Goodchild and Zheng, 2018). Therefore, it is not surprising that companies adopt the no tobacco solution in their video games. As China is trying to reduce its consumption, it is wiser to follow the current trend to allow a smoother process when publishing games in the country.

When it comes to alcohol, alcohol has been part of Chinese culture for up to 9000 years (That's Mandarin, 2022), and alcohol is very common during family celebrations and ceremonies and to honor ancestors and gods. There is also a famous Chinese proverb, "酒逢知己千杯少" (Jiǔ féng zhījǐ qiān bēi shǎo), which means "with a close friend, a thousand cups of wine are far too little" (Daxue Consulting, 2022), this shows how common it is to drink alcohol in China. Alcohol is also used to form and maintain social and professional relationships, so drinking during business activities is not uncommon.

As we have just seen, drinking alcohol is something very common in China, so having alcohol in a game should be no problem, and there is also no cultural or law problem with this. But, according to some recent news, the Chinese government may be considering imposing some restrictions related to the consumption of alcohol for government officials and the Chinese Communist Party workers, with these restrictions also applying beyond their working hours (Singh, 2022).

So, there seems to be no direct laws prohibiting the depiction of alcohol in video games. However, because the government appears to be attempting to reduce alcohol consumption, at least in certain fields of work, companies choosing to remove alcohol from their games is still their choice. They could be doing this in reaction to the Chinese attempt to reduce alcohol consumption and to make the process easier and have their game approved faster.

4.2.5 Historical Inaccuracy

King of Glory is one of China's biggest mobile games, and it was designed by Tencent. It was launched in 2015, and in 2016 the total revenue of the game had already reached 6.8 billion Renminbi, which accounted for 17.7 percent of revenue for mobile games in China (Jie, 2017).

If we deliberately narrate history in a playful or mocking manner, it is equal to “abandoning historical cultural tradition, a cutting off the bloodline of our national culture”, which will result in the loss of our cultural direction and goal (人民日报 光明日报, 2017, para. 11).

Due to the game's rise, it is no surprise that government authorities and its people started paying attention to the game. In 2017 the People's Daily, the newspaper representing the government, issued a series of news articles questioning the game's historical accuracy.

Another state media outlet, Guangming Daily, argued that in the video game, characters present "take on historical figures' names with no connection at all to their experiences in history" (Jie, 2017).



Figure 16 - A comparison between poet Li Bai in game(left) and on textbook(right)

Retrieved from: <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/0401/c90000-9198166.html>

Figure 16 depicts Li Bai. On the left, we have the in-game character; on the right, we have an accurate portrait of the poet in Chinese history. In the video game, the famous poet Li Bai from the Tang Dynasty suddenly turned into an assassin, with his looks completely changed. This is just one of the cases in which Bian Que, from the Spring and Autumn period, suddenly turned into an expert on poison (Jie, 2017). The inaccuracy of the game did not suit well, mainly because it can be seen as "endangering social moralities or fine national cultural traditions" (Zhang, 2012, p. 344). The newspaper also argued that 54 percent of the players are aged between 11 and 20, making this a problem.

Even though the newspaper argued making these points, some people still argued that video games are supposed to be creative, and that *King of Glory* is not set in any specific

historical period (Jie, 2017). One player also argued that many young players could use the game to do more research about historical facts themselves if they are interested (Jie, 2017).

Although this situation happened in 2017, in 2018, China's State Administration of Press and Publication (SAPP) announced some more changes to the regulation process for games to be published as one of the requirements to "Promote games with traditional culture + historical accuracy" (Niko, 2019). So, the situation with *King of Glory* does not sit well with the regulation committee.

4.2.6 Skeletons

Regarding Skeletons being shown in video games, we also have examples in *LoL*.

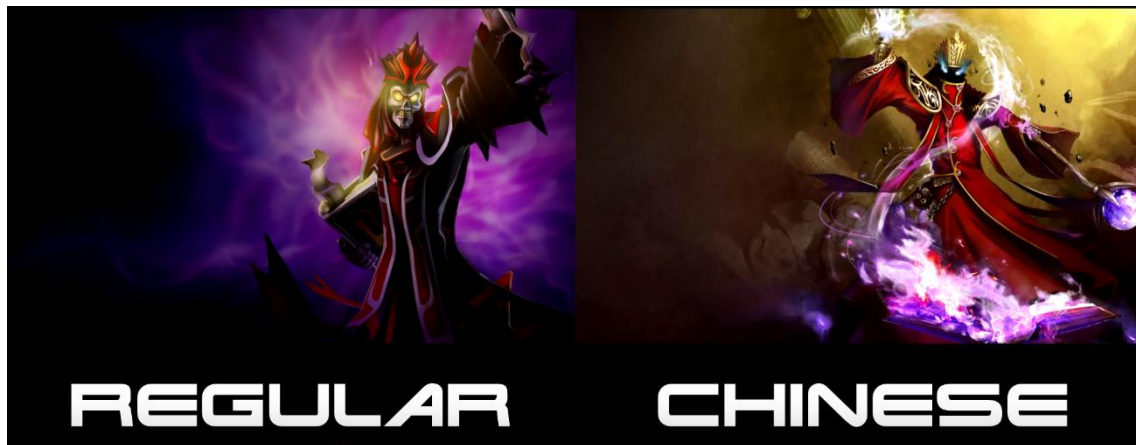


Figure 17 - Karthus

Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXh-vLff9TA>

As we can see in Figure 17, the Western version of the character has a face where bones are still clearly visible. Meanwhile, the Chinese version shows no bones and almost seems cartoonish.



Figure 18 - CS:GO Weapon

Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gzYdaY4AtY&t=180s>

The same situation can be observed in the video game *CS:GO* (Figure 18). As we can see, the picture on the left representing the Western version of the game clearly has a skull. Meanwhile, the Chinese version suffered almost a complete makeover and gave a completely different look to the gun. The skull is no longer there and has been replaced with a mask.



Figure 19 - World of Warcraft Character

Retrieved from: <https://www.icy-veins.com/forums/topic/56203-the-chinese-version-of-maldraxxus-is-a-little-weird/>

Another example of this can be seen in *WoW*, the now American owned by Microsoft video game (Reichert, 2023). *WoW* is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) created by Blizzard Entertainment. It allows players to create their own characters, embark on quests, interact with other players, and engage in battles within the game's virtual world. *WoW* has a rich and immersive storyline featuring various races,

classes, and professions for players to choose from. The game also includes player-vs-player combat, dungeons and raids, and a player-driven economy. *WoW* has a vast and dedicated community of players and is considered one of the most successful MMORPGs of all time.

Once again, it seems that skeletons are always turned into flesh-looking characters no matter what game it is. In this case, the green-looking skeleton (Figure 19) from the Western version saw its skeleton disappear and simply turn into a completely green character.

When it comes to the reasoning for this happening, if we first look at the forbidden content, nowhere can we see any rule stating that skeletons are forbidden. In fact, Chinese literature contains many supernatural stories, from ghost stories from the Qing period to skeleton spirits in the Ming dynasty (Custer, 2014).

If we look at some Chinese video games, we can see the presence of skeletons throughout the game.



Figure 20 - Age of Wushu

Retrieved from: <https://www.techinasia.com/china-doesnt-censor-skeletons-the-truth-about-game-censorship-in-the-middle-kingdom>

Figure 20 is from the video game *Age of Wushu*, developed by a Chinese company. In this image, we can see the presence of skeletons. The skeletons have been part of Chinese literature. As we have just seen, they are also present in Chinese video games, so it is a possibility that foreign companies are simply trying to avoid facing delays in releasing their games to the Chinese market by voluntarily removing certain content.

4.3 Auto Regulations

Just as has been discussed, in the case of skeletons, there is no direct law that prevents them from having skeletons in video games. However, the rules can have a broad and open interpretation, leading video game companies to be extra careful when they want their video game approved in China.

Because these games have previously been published abroad, Chinese publishers that wish to operate them are under extra pressure to get approval quickly. More Chinese players will find their way into foreign servers for every day the game remains unavailable in China, depriving the Chinese publisher of their cut of the earnings. To avoid rejection and the consequent delays caused by having to alter the game and reapply, it would not be surprising if game creators excessively censored their games before submitting them to the MOC.

If we take the example of *WoW*, the company The9, a video game operator in China, was responsible for publishing *WoW* in China. As we have seen before, *WoW* saw its skeletons removed from the game. At the time, players and news articles made by the media jumped and blamed the MOC for this decision. Still, later, in an interview, The9's public relations director, Zhao Yurun, said that removing skeletons from the game, making it flesh-looking characters, was a voluntary decision before even submitting the game to the MOC for review (Custer, 2014). Also, try to make the game approved as fast and smoothly as possible.

So, although there is no doubt that in some cases, video game content has to be changed due to the policies of the MOC or some cultural aspects. There also seem to exist cases when video game companies made changes to have their game published in China faster.

4.4 Successful Adaptations

As we have seen before, in most cases, video games made changes simply because they were forced to, or they used it to publish their game fast. However, there are also some cases where games completely adapted and integrated Chinese Culture deeply. Such as the example of the Video game, *Don't starve* (Figure 21), developed by a Canadian company.

The objective of this video game is to find enough to eat while working to build a base camp and also fighting to survive against monsters (Burford, 2022).

What is interesting to notice about this game is how the food present in the video game was adapted, having the food dishes completely change names.

Original version	Chinese version	Description
Meatball	<i>Hongsao shizitou</i> (红烧狮子头) Literal translation: lion's head	<i>Hongsao shizitou</i> is a famous Huaiyang dish consisting of a large meatball cooked in vegetable broth.
Turkey Dinner	<i>Baiqieji</i> (白切鸡) Literal translation: white sliced chicken	Turkey is a typical meal in Canada while <i>baiqieji</i> is a typical dish of chicken of the Guangdong province in China.
Pierogi	<i>Dongbei shuijiao</i> (东北水饺) Literal translation: Northeast dumpling	<i>Pierogi</i> is a popular dumpling in Eastern Europe, while the dumpling most famous in China is the Northeast dumpling.
Meaty Stew	<i>Fotiaoqiang</i> (佛跳墙) Literal translation: Buddha jumps over the wall	<i>Fotiaoqiang</i> is a typical recipe of the Fujian province that includes many ingredients such as qinseng, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, etc.
Honey Nuggets	<i>Gongbaojiding</i> (宫保鸡丁) Known as <i>Kung Pao Chicken</i>	<i>Kung Pao Chicken</i> is a classic dish of the Sichuan province in China including chicken and chili.
Kabobs	<i>Gurouxianqian</i> (骨肉相连) Literal translation: Meat attached to the bone	Although kabobs refers to meat on a skewer, <i>gurouxianqian</i> is generally used to describe a very close relationship, like the relationship between bone and meat. Currently, it is a product of Kentucky Fried Chicken in China, the main ingredients of which are chicken breast and chicken cartilage.

Table 1- Don't Starve Retrieved from: https://www.jostrans.org/issue29/art_dong.pdf

As we can see, when adapting this game to the Chinese market, the company considered that most of the dishes in the original version were not that common or were completely unknown by the Chinese players. So, with this, the food content all turned into Chinese dishes, which gives a local feeling to the game, mainly since the game revolves around food, which is an essential thing to do. So, for example, Honey Nuggets turned into *Gongbaojiding* (宫保鸡丁), which is a very famous and typical dish in China that originates

from Sichuan province and includes chicken and chili. In some cases, we can see some creative adaptations. There is a dish called Wet Goop in the original edition. It is a virtual food that does not exist in the actual world, and it refers to any poorly cooked food that has no healing properties and is only appropriate for pigs to eat. It was translated into Chinese as *aide weidao* (爱的味道; English: taste of love), with a playful nod to the intended audience (Dong and Mangiron, 2018).

This adaptation made *Don't Starve* a massive hit in China, with China having 1430 servers where the players can connect to play. Meanwhile, the country in the second position, Australia, has only 335 servers for players to join (Resamvi, 2022). Obviously, for a game to succeed, it needs to be suitable by itself, but there is no doubt that a good adaptation can take it to another level.

4.5 The Impact of China

As we have seen previously, *LoL* had different splash art for different characters of the game in China and globally. However, recently, things are changing. Some years ago, Karthus showed bones in the Western version. Meanwhile, the Chinese version did not.



Figure 21 - Karthus recent version

Retrieved from: <https://leagueoflegends.fandom.com/wiki/Karthus>

We are starting to see a standardization of splash arts in *LoL*.

The recent splash art of the character no longer displays any bones and is now shared among all regions (Figure 21). Although this is only one example, the same happened with every character, just like Graves losing his cigar in every region and Evelynn having more clothes, with the difference remaining in-game content related to showing blood.

Considering that the Chinese video gaming market is the biggest in the world (Buchholz, 2021), and the eSports market is also the one where more money is spent, it is not very surprising that companies take the Chinese market as their top priority.

In the specific case of *LoL*, it is also not surprising that the Chinese market is being taken into higher consideration, as China alone accounts for 75 million *LoL* players out of the total of 180 million in 2022 (Kamberovic, 2022).

Also, as mentioned earlier, the dominance of Chinese companies in the gaming sector, could be seen as a factor for these changes to happen as well. Since a lot of big games that were previously owned by European or American companies are now owned by Chinese companies, the way they develop their product and focus on the market, could have an impact due to different ownership.

Therefore, making China their top priority, and simply making Chinese versions of the certain games the default version outside of China as well. This means that instead of companies having their Western version and Chinese version separately and with clear differences, in some cases, such as the case of *LoL*, both Chinese and Western version are now becoming the same.

Having lived in China and played video games gave me a lot of first-hand experience for my dissertation. I played *LoL*, *Rainbow Six Siege*, and *CS:GO* in China, so I noticed the differences in blood, nudity, symbology, smoking, alcohol, and skeletons. My background in language and Chinese culture, along with my experience living in China and playing video games, helped me interpret the data and provide valuable insights for my dissertation.

I knew these things were different, but I did not always understand why.

To understand these differences, I searched for more information. I knew that China's high alcohol and smoking consumption was a cultural issue, and that the government was fighting it. Articles and news confirmed my suspicions that the government was trying to reduce consumption. Since most video games, especially the ones mentioned throughout the dissertation, are played by younger generations, removing these items made sense.

I was unaware that blood, nudity, and historical inaccuracy were controversial. I searched for evidence to prove this. Thus, I discovered that the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China had its own list of allowed and forbidden video game content. This data helped me understand why the Chinese and Western versions differ.

In some cases, Ministry regulation had an impact, but other cases seemed to have different motives. Since 2018, Chinese video games cannot show blood in any color. Despite government regulation prohibiting it. Red symbolizes happiness and luck in China, which may have influenced the government's decision.

Gambling and nudity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Chinese people have been sexually conservative since Confucius' time. Chinese gambling dates back over 4,000 years. Today, only welfare and sports lotteries are allowed because authorities view gambling as harmful to society (Guzman, 2022). Thus, video games cannot show such things.

Symbology seems to have no cultural impact and is simply a government law to avoid discrimination against certain countries or ethnicities.

Smoking and alcohol are also affected. Since 1994, China has banned tobacco advertising and promotion in certain spaces (Tobacco Control Laws, 2022), so video games not having them either can be seen as a natural thing.

Although I was unable to find any specific law that prohibited such things, China's high smoking rate and the president's recent goal of lowering it to 20% by 2030 can certainly

be seen as an "incentive" for gaming companies to avoid displaying tobacco (Goodchild and Zheng, 2018).

In China, alcohol is part of family celebrations and business. The government is also restricting alcohol consumption for government officials and Chinese Communist Party workers, even outside of work, in the same way it restricts tobacco. Thus, video game companies should avoid it (Singh, 2022).

When it comes to historical inaccuracy, *King of Glory*, a huge hit in China, inaccurately displayed historical Chinese characters, changing their past. Perhaps this is why the government mandated in 2018 that video games promote traditional culture and historical accuracy (Niko, 2019).

Skeletons seem to have disappeared from video games in China. However, found Chinese games with skeletons, after researching I also found no law against it (Custer, 2014). Chinese literature also features skeletons. Since government rules can be interpreted broadly, it could be the case that video game companies are extra cautious to get their games approved in China quickly.

While some companies adapted parts of their games to the Chinese market, others almost created new games, like *Don't Starve* (Burford, 2022). The high number of Chinese players intrigued me, so I investigated, and I discovered that they completely adapted the game to fit Chinese culture and connect with Chinese players by using Chinese food names, this turned this mostly unknown game in the west a huge hit in China.

There is no doubt that the Chinese market is a huge piece of the video games industry, so these adaptations are not only a due to cultural aspects, but could also be impacted by business factors, as everyone wants to get into the Chinese market and obtain profits from it, sometimes even going beyond what is culturally and forbidden by the government, to make their games available faster.

As companies may be changing their focus to cater Chinese gamers, I do believe that the number of research about China and video games adaptation to the Chinese market is still underdeveloped. Hopefully, this is something that will gain more popularity and generate more research study.

For my research, I focused on certain aspects in video games and focused on understanding the differences and why they happened. However, there are so many more

topics that could be researched, one of those being, if international video games based on mythology, had their Chinese version adapted to fit the Chinese culture, and instead of using foreign mythology, introduced Chinese mythology and the impact it had.

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