"Well, That Was Fun, Who's for Chinese?": Blending in the Chineseness into China Related Video Games through Localized Translation

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Keywords
Translation; Localization; Chineseness

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Video games have become one of the activities that attract the most attention around the world. One of the most effective ways of localizing video games is through translation, which not only brings precise meanings to guide the players, but also creates cultural contexts that players from other countries feel more comfortable with. Hence, even though video games present their creators' culture, national identity and even cultural policy (Webber, 2018), these elements need to be adjusted to the target market so as to build a solid community for players. Reflecting on studies on video game translation, scholars (e.g.: Costales, 2012; Dietz, 2007; BernalMerino, 2007) have already provided translation strategies according to different genres and game assets, indicating that translators need to focus on "human agency" (Minako & Mangiron, 2013, p. 109) that were specific audience who brought different individual backgrounds to the game community. This requires translators to provide not only clear translation, but more importantly, ideological engagement.

Game localization and translation in China are different from in other languages. Since the copyright of video games is only being appreciated and fully protected in recent years, most of the hit games were not localized in China through the official approaches. Many of the games are pirates circulated by many self-organized translation groups. Most of the groups are freelance that are not 'officialised' and providing the translation of video games on their own. Through interviewing some of the game players, we found out that many of the players prefer the unofficial version

made by fan players for two reasons. First, they report that the unofficial version is provided by a group of people driven by the love of the game instead of money.

Second, they believe that those experienced fan groups are specialised in games, which could provide a more precise and game-experience related translation. From the interviews, we noticed that 'Chineseness' - the quality of being Chinese, of having and revealing Chinese characteristics- was not fully presented by official translation, which potentially led to game players' complaints.

Studies on such a topic have already been conducted in the context where big companies like Nintendo and Sony localized their products successfully in western countries. However, few scholars have situated their studies in China, investigating how video games from western countries have been successfully localized there. Furthermore, few studies have investigated the shift from western values and identities into Chineseness presented by the translators. This research will target at the games that have already employed the "Chinese elements" in the design. Therefore, we plan to conduct a critical discourse analysis on two video games that gained enormous popularity in China – *Civilization V* and *Assassin's Creed Chronical: China* – to present how Chineseness is presented through different translation strategies. This research will first examine and compare the translation from the studio designed the game and the fan-made one. Further, this research will investigate the paratext of the games on translation, for instance, the player's comments, forum posts and media articles, to build up the context and help to interpret the not only the translation choice and strategy but the Chineseness presented by the translation.

In *Civilization V*, compared with the unofficial one, the official translation is fixated on the literal meaning of the text. The most prominent example is the introduction of China, where the translation is word for word without considering the common Chinese expressions. However, Xuanyuan's translation employs the classical Chinese writing style with rhyme, the writing style is challenging for gamers. In such circumstance, the style is fully representing Chinese culture and identity that can be defined as Chineseness. Moreover, Xuanyuan's translation is more descriptive and subtle, which are the Chinese characteristics the Chinese people recognise. Similar examples can also be observed in *Assassin's Creed Chronical: China*. As a matter of fact, there are no errors or obstacles in understanding both games' official translation; however, they are criticized for "not actually speaking Chinese". To be fair, the expressions may be grammatically accurate, and some expressions may even be the actual slang, creating such familiarity, but those expressions are not appropriate given the game context. Those expressions are excluded by Chinese players and industry media as "not actually speaking Chinese".

This research attempts to decode how Chineseness is presented in a western video game, providing insightful reflection on how Chinese translators can improve in the future. Since this research is in the working process, more findings and discussions can be elaborated later on. But currently, we hope to apply this research idea to initially decipher how to blend in the Chineseness into China-related games through translation and deliver more insights about Chineseness.

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