Playing (with) the Trace: Localized Culture in *Phoenix Wright*

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Abstract

This article elaborates how residual traces of a video game's national and cultural origins – overlooked or ignored due to limited funding – can be an ethically responsible part of game localization when the goal of localization is not simply immersion, full adaptation and economics, but the generation of cultural interaction. This article proposes that the moments of incongruity, when a player (uncomfortably) encounters residual traces, are a positive aspect of cultural circulation in that they help players learn how to become hybrid citizens. Far from being failures of localization, as industry professionals contend, this article elaborates how these traces should be seen as successes of responsible localization practice.

Keywords: Localization, Translation, Bordering, Interface, Video Games, Japan

Résumé en français à la fin de l'article

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In the opening scene of *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney: Trials and Tribulations* (2007) (*Gyakuten Saiban 3* (2004, 2007)) the main character Phoenix Wright (Naruhodo Ryuichi in Japanese) is depicted wearing a white face mask (see image 1). While white face masks are a common sight in Japan where it is customary to wear one if you are sick, it might seem odd in the North American context where such masks are worn only by doctors performing surgery.

Figure 1: Phoenix Wright with white face mask

When asked by fans in a 2007 English-language interview, "What's up with the... face mask that Phoenix sports?" Phoenix Wright's producer, Matsukawa Minae responded:

> There's also a prosecutor with a mask – he's a very interesting character who likes to drink coffee in the courtroom. He'll go through cup after cup and they'll pile up, maybe ten or twenty cups in the course of a case. I think he's very interesting. The mask, he's hiding something from his past that comes to light during the course of the game – I think fans will really enjoy seeing why he's wearing a mask! (tiny dancer, 2007)

It is most interesting that Matsukawa misses the point of the question, and goes off on a tangent discussing a completely different character.[1] To the Japanese producer, the question could not be something as banal as why does Phoenix Wright wear a mask. He wears a mask because he is sick. To the Japanese producer it is obvious, but to the American fan asking the question it is not obvious. The mask is a culturally specific trace of Japan that has slipped through the cracks of localization practice.

According to most translators working within the game localization industry, culturally particular game elements that confuse the player are failures of translation. Thus, while the confusing cultural particularity of the face mask might have gone unnoticed by the game's Japanese producer, it was recognized by the localization team. The Japanese Naruhodo Ryuichi says nothing about the mask as it is an everyday item, but the American Phoenix Wright must explain that his doctor prescribed the mask so that he does not infect other people (see: Appendix 1). Hoping that the SARS outbreak several years prior to the release of this game would have made surgical masks a more common sight within North American, the localization team did its best to make the mask seem natural by adding an additional line of dialogue into the English version in order to explain the awkward visual (Hsu, 2013). However, the situation still caught in players' minds as a trace of Japan and resulted in the players questioning the producer.

Primarily, traces like the mask are understood as failures of translation. This negative view is supported by many game localization specialists (Judd, 2013; Smith, 2012) and idealized game localization practice, which argues in favor of the erasure of games' specific cultural contexts and iconography (Chandler & Deming, 2011; Esselink, 2000; Honeywood & Fung, 2012). To veteran Japanese to English game localizer Alexander O. Smith (2012), traces like the mask are failures of translation because they cause the player to experience what Smith calls iwakan [違和感 - sense of incongruity]. When the American player encounters such a

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1 As was helpfully pointed out to me by veteran game translator Brian Gray in conversation, it is possible that the question was translated incorrectly so that 'face mask' became kamen (仮面) instead of masuku (マスク), which might have confused Matsukawa. Kamen is the native Japanese word for mask; masuku, in contrast, is a foreign loanword within Japanese used for surgical masks like the one in the image. That Matsukawa states there is "also a prosecutor with a mask" indicates she was able to link the mask to Phoenix Wright, but found it implausible as the point of the question.

rupture she is robbed of an immersive experience and forced to think outside of the box provided to the original Japanese audience. Unlike Matsukawa and the average Japanese audience, the American fans had to ask what was up with the mask, indicating that they experienced an iwakan, a moment of incongruity.

In contrast, I argue that traces created through video game localization can be and should be seen as successes of localization. Approaching traces through the Derridian notions of writing under erasure (Derrida, 1976) and relevant translation (Derrida, 1979) allows me to argue that traces of Japan are a signifier of the border between locales and a residue of the border-work being done by localization practices to evacuate difference from the localized text. Iwakan – caused by experiencing a trace, or remainder, of the original Japanese cultural context – provoke the player into recognizing the original Japanese game within the localized version. Far from signifying failure, then, iwakan are what make the localization culturally relevant by educating the player.

One important thing games do is educate, and one of the ways players learn from games is through what James Paul Gee calls cultural models, which he defines as "images, story lines, principles, or metaphors that capture what a particular group finds 'normal' or 'typical' in regard to a given phenomenon" (Gee, 2007, p. 143). To Matsukawa the mask is a standard cultural model, and as such it is unremarkable and unremarked upon, even when it is subject to question. To the American audience, however, the mask is evidence of Gee's point that players learn about alternate cultural models through games. Upon witnessing the non-normative act of wearing a face mask American players demonstrate their interest in the game's distant origins by seeking out answers from somebody they thought might know (tiny dancer, 2007).

Not just a matter of education, though, traces like the mask are a site where an anxiety of difference is contained and globalization is enacted. As argued by globalization scholars, global flow is not homogenization or cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991), nor is it the unfettered flow of money and information under neoliberalism (Ong, 2006). Rather, globalization is a nuanced, frictional (Tsing, 2005) process that takes place at particular disjunctive moments, sites or 'scapes (Appadurai, 1996) such as game localizers' daily

practices of translational border-work, and players' attempts to uncover the borders that are hidden through localization practice. Borders are the site of difference between distinct national locales; translation is the interface (Mandiberg, 2012) that negotiates difference across those borders by allowing certain cultural elements to cross and stopping others (Bermann & Wood, 2005); and playing traces transforms games into an inadvertent arena for "border pedagogy" (Giroux, 2005). It is particularly appropriate that the face mask, a device used to prevent physical contagion, is itself the trace that reveals the work of localizers as the industrial site trying to prevent cultural contagion by erasing traces of Japan. Not only is it impossible for localizers to fully prevent cultural contagion by erasing the border, but it is traces like the mask that lead *Phoenix Wright* fans to approach Japan and enable a form of cross-cultural hybridity (Consalvo, 2006; García Canclini, 2005).

This article proceeds with an introduction of the game *Phoenix Wright*, focusing on the complex processes through which the Japanese *Gyakuten Saiban* was localized into *Phoenix Wright* in the United States. Second, the article engages with the specific practices and limitations circumscribing game localization in general, and the localization of *Gyakuten Saiban* into *Phoenix Wright* in particular in order to show that the key to game localization is preventing traces of the foreign from being visible for domestic users. Despite the goal of erasing traces and preventing iwakan, or moments of incongruity, this article then shows that economic and practical reality necessitate the inclusion of traces and iwakan within most, if not all, localized games. Finally, in order to make sense of the traces that necessarily exist in localized games, this article proposes a Derridian conceptualization of the trace in order to reconsider iwakan as an element of relevant (Derrida, 1979), or ethically appropriate translation (Nornes, 2007; Venuti, 1998). All gamers play traces, but this article suggests that we (gamers, translators, and academics alike) follow Derrida's lead and play with those traces in order to understand how game localization practice manages the construction and negotiation of cultural and national differences as they are experienced within all games, Japanese, North American, European or otherwise.

Playing (with) traces enables both an engagement with/incorporation of cultural difference and an alternate form of mobility. This sort of active playing with borders is particularly important within the early 21st century where neoliberal assumptions of the free flow of

information, people and culture is opposed by reality where less privileged information, people and culture suffer restrictions on mobility (Govil, 2007; Nevins, 2002; Ong, 2006). Thus, like previous studies of television and cinema (Cronin, 2003; Moran, 1998; Moran, 2009; Nornes, 2007), one implication of this argument is that studying game localization practice can lead to a better understanding of globalization and media flow between nations and cultures. A second implication – particularly relevant to game localization specialists – is that the idealized International Game Developer Association (IGDA) 'best practices' (Honeywood & Fung, 2012) are not necessarily 'best' for all locales and all times, which is an important industrial argument in that is shows there are as many different best practices as there are video game industries (Zackariasson & Wilson, 2012).

I make this argument through a mixed-method combination of ethnography, interviews and close-textual analysis. Extended ethnographic fieldwork within the Netherlands, Japan and the United States over a three year period between 2011 and 2013 led to personal interviews with *Phoenix Wright*'s former translator, present translator, and Capcom's former head of localization about general localization processes and their work on specific titles including, but not limited to, *Phoenix Wright* (Hsu, 2013; Judd, 2013; Smith, 2012). The interviews I personally conducted are supplemented by secondary scholarly (Jayemanne, 2009) and popular (Riley, 2006; Sheffield, 2007; tiny dancer, 2007) interviews conducted with members of the *Phoenix Wright* production team. Finally, directing my interviews and supporting my analysis is my own perspective as a player of both *Gyakuten Saiban: Yomigaeru Gyakuten* (in Japanese) and *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* (in English).[2]

Particulars of *Gyakuten Saiban* (*Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*)

Originally created for the Gameboy Advance, *Gyakuten Saiban*, which means, roughly, *Reversal Trial*, was released in Japan in 2001. Classified on the box as a Courtroom Battle (

法廷バトル - houtei batoru), the game stars Naruhodo Ryuichi (Phoenix Wright in English),

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2 While research was conducted using personal recorded playthroughs of *Gyakuten Saiban: Yomigaeru Gyakuten* and *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* on the Nintendo DS, some images were captured using the iOS version, *Ace Attorney: Phoenix Wright Trilogy HD*. This was done for image quality.

a rookie defense attorney tasked in each episode with defending somebody charged with murder. As Naruhodo, the player begins each episode believing that there is a set up of some sort, but unable to prove it. In order to find the truth of the case and defend Naruhodo's client, the player must collect and use evidence in the right way during conversations outside and inside of the courtroom. The game progresses through 'presenting' individual pieces of evidence to witnesses and other non-player characters at the right time and place in order to make the conversation proceed along a new path. Outside of the courtroom this happens by simply showing the proper item to the proper character; inside of the courtroom this happens through objecting to something a witness says, and then presenting a piece of evidence that proves the witness has created a contradiction in their witness statement. By repeatedly pointing out contradictions Naruhodo eventually arrives at the truth and proves his client is innocent of the murder. Reminiscent of a graphic adventure game, *Gyakuten Saiban* is driven by writer Takumi Shu's over-the-top, amusing characters and tightly written dialogue.

Despite spawning two sequels in Japan (2002 and 2004), and despite Ben Judd's internal encouragement of Capcom to localize the original Gameboy Advance title (Judd, 2013), *Gyakuten Saiban* was not localized until the Japanese game was re-released on the Nintendo DS in 2005. The re-released game, *Gyakuten Saiban: Yomigaeru Gyakuten* (逆転裁判：蘇る逆転 - *Reversal Trial: Revived Reversal*) utilized the DS's dual screen and touch screen functionality, and it featured an additional 5th episode. More important for the present discussion, however, is that the re-release's producer, Matsukawa Minae, was able to convince Capcom's decision makers to localize the title. *Gyakuten Saiban* was localized into English as *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, and the English translation was used to pivot the game into French, Italian, German and Spanish.

While the practices involved in localizing the title were complicated due to the large number of people involved[3], Ben Judd explained the core process of how linguistic elements like names and accents were changed as follows:

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3 The team responsible for localizing *Phoenix Wright* is quite large and distributed across both Capcom and Bowne Global Solutions. At Capcom are Matsukawa Minae (producer), Takumi Shu (original writer and director), Ben Judd (head of localization), Brandon Gay (internal editor), and Funakoshi Kaori (internal project manager). At Bowne Global Solutions are

Alex[ander O.] Smith [the translator] would come up with a list of names, and then as a second pass we [the internal localization team] would say oh, like it, like it, oh, that's not going to work, a bit too much, and get through one more filter. And then send it over to R&D, and a lot of the times they would come back and say this, this, and this. And then we would have to sit down and talk. (Judd, 2013)

Each name, and even many accents, went through the extended process of being changed by the translator, then approved by the localization team, the producer, the original writer, and even members of the development team. This extensive processes helped work out the best possible choice that could satisfy good English reception as well as fidelity to the original. For example, the main character, Naruhodo Ryuichi had approximately 20 translated permutations that eventually settled to be Phoenix Wright (Smith, 2012).[4]

Beyond changing the linguistic text, game localization experts are able to alter graphics. With *Phoenix Wright* a similar interaction occurred between numerous people spanning from Capcom's development team to the external translation agency. According to Judd:

Everyone [at Bowne Global and in Capcom's internal localization team] had played the original game and made suggestions like 'hey, this needs to be changed,' and 'this looks a little bit weird'… And then [the producer] went over to the [development] team and talked about what graphically could be changed. For every change it's going to cost a certain amount of money. And then [the producer] came back with a list. (Judd, 2013)

J. Patrick Riley, Yuuko Muto, Yuli Kim, Steve Anderson (external editor), Alexander O. Smith (translator of episode 1-4) and Philip Soldini (translator of episode 5). While this list is already large, it does not include the artists and programmers required to implement changes.

4 Naruhodo Ryuichi is difficult to translate due to his last name. Because 'naruhodo' means, roughly, 'of course,' there are numerous jokes involving his name throughout the game. Translating the name to Wright enables similar name-based jokes like that play with right/Wright. For a longer discussion of how translated names are determined, see: Janet Hsu's blog post "Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney - Dual Destinies Localization: TRIVIA TIME!" at http://www.capcom-unity.com/zeroobjections/blog/2013/10/02/phoenix-wright-ace-attorney---dual-destinies-localization-trivia-time.

While the team began with a larger list of ideal changes, cost restrictions meant the team changed only what was deemed both necessary and within budget. Thus, the diegetic live-action tokusatsu (special effects heavy) samurai show's splash screen title changed from 大江戸戦士トノサマン (Oedo Senshi Tonosaman - Edo Fighter Lord-man) to Steel Samurai (see images 2a and 2b), but the tokusatsu samurai show itself was not changed despite the story's relocation from Japan (where such shows are popular) to Los Angeles (where they are not made). Changing the splash screen was within budget, but changing the entire scenario – rewriting, redrawing, and reprogramming – would have been too costly.

| Figure 2a: Oedo Senshi Tonosaman | Figure 2b: Steel Samurai |

While Matsukawa was successful in getting the approval and funding to localize the DS re-release into English, French, Italian, German and Spanish, it was with significant limitations. Despite the elaborate interactions and impressive effort made to best localize the title into English, it is important to understand that *Phoenix Wright* was not expected to sell well in the North American market, so the localization team was not given enough funding to change everything. Limited funding resulted in many unchanged graphical elements that read as Japanese (see: Appendix 2). These unchanged graphics include, but are not limited to, the tokusatsu drama (Image 2a and 2b), a character who sells typical Japanese bento (boxed lunches) while wearing a hat decorated with onigiri (rice balls) (Image 3), a guard in who wears an armband (typical of authority figures in Japan) emblazoned with kanji (Chinese characters) (Image 4), a character wearing a magatama (a traditional Japanese bead or jewel)

(Image 5), and a small room with tatami (woven straw matting), a kotatsu (floor table with attached heater), and senbei (rice crackers wrapped with seaweed) on a plate (Image 6). In addition, narrative and ludic elements went completely unchanged due to lack of economic support: for instance altering the legal system, which is vaguely similar to Japanese law, but holds no similarity to American law, would have necessitated completely rewriting the story and core mechanics, a process that was far above the economic support granted *Phoenix Wright*'s localization team.

Capcom did not expect *Phoenix Wright* to sell well. In numerous interviews producer Matsukawa reiterates her surprise that the title sold well in the English market (Riley, 2006; Sheffield, 2007; tiny dancer, 2007). Smith elaborates on just how little Capcom expected the title to sell by saying, "they didn't think it was going to sell at all. And how many copies did they make of the first one? It was like 2000 or something? They made like nothing and it sold out instantly and then they had to do a big reprint" (Smith, 2012). Most interesting, however, is Ben Judd's reaction:

> We nailed it, and it was good. And unfortunately, it was good enough that it sold well, so when [Gyakuten Saiban 2] came out [on the DS]… we had about 60% [time and money] to do the second one. And the second one is like 1.3 times as big a game as the first. So then there were mistakes, which is a shame. (Judd, 2013)

While Judd primarily means grammatical and consistency mistakes that increased due to the rush the team had when localizing *Gyakuten Saiban 2* and *Gyakuten Saiban 3* into English, also included are what this essay is calling traces. Minor textual, audio, graphical or even ludic 'mistakes,' like the existence of the room with tatami, a kotatsu and senbei, the guard with kanji on his armband, the magatama, the various bento, and of course the white, surgical face mask, which slip through the cracks of localization practice and reveal *Phoenix Wright*'s Japanese origins to the North American audience.

Localization and Iwakan

Idealized and actual practices of localization are quite divergent. Localization is defined by the Localization Industry Standards Association as "taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country, region and language) where it will be used and sold" (quoted in Esselink, 2000, p. 3). What this means ideally is that in addition to translating the written text within games, which includes names and dialogue, modern video game localizations translate and re-dub voices, modify background noise, soundtracks and graphics to 'local tastes,' recreate paratextual elements like manuals and websites, make larger gameplay changes like changing the speed and difficulty or deleting mini-games, and even sometimes rebrand the game in a marketing campaign aimed at the target locale (Chandler & Deming, 2011; Honeywood & Fung, 2012; O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013). Game localization can make all of these changes. For instance, the localization of *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan* (2005) into *Elite Beat Agents* (2006) manipulated every semiotic register so that a rhythm game with Japanese songs about a Japanese ouendan (cheer squad) could be transformed into a rhythm game with US top 40 hits about a secret agent group. While ideally localized games like *Elite Beat Agents* exist, such examples are rare. Much more common are localizations that do not fully manipulate the game.

In a close reading of *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, Mia Consalvo ruminates on how certain Japanese elements, which could be seen as inappropriate within a strict definition of idealized localization, remain within the localized game. She writes:

> the game does keep many fictitious Japanese references, possibly because it would have been extremely difficult to expunge all evidence of 'foreign' content... Yet perhaps references to Japanese media and popular foods need no longer be erased, or even heavily modified. Recent interest in Japanese pop culture, such as manga, anime, and of course videogames, has been well documented. Furthermore, while most Japanese companies attempt through localization to erase the 'cultural odor' of their products, more recent hardcore fans seem intent on preserving as much of the local Japanese 'flavor' as possible. Thus leaving some of the 'Japanese-ness' in the game might be as much of a draw as the game's skillful use of language. (Consalvo, 2009, p. 160)

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Consalvo brings up a crucial point in that there is conflict as to what is 'good' or 'optimal' localization practice. As Consalvo indicates, foreign fragrances (Iwabuchi, 2002) are often desired. Through translation theory we may extend this claim to say that such odor is even appropriate given certain socio-political situations (Venuti, 1998). However, despite the theoretical relevance and hopeful nature of Consalvo's point, it is important to understand that the practices and explanations of game localization specialists contradict her reading and belief that a Japanese fragrance is allowed to remain as a draw for the audience. To the industries responsible for localizing games, localization practice is about making a game culturally appropriate with the emphasis in practice being that replacing foreign with local is the appropriate process in terms of money and immersion. This conservative belief is elaborated in Anne Allison's (2006) interviews with marketing experts tasked with localizing Japanese cultural products into the United States, it is supported by the IGDA best practices (Honeywood & Fung, 2012), and finally it is visible in the attempts of *Phoenix Wright*'s localization team to make the localized text seem natural (Hsu, 2013; Judd, 2013; Smith, 2012).

For the localization of *Gyakuten Saiban* into *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* names, accents, speech patterns, jokes, sounds, and graphics are changed. Even the general setting moves from an unnamed place in Japan to Los Angeles. All of these alterations are important for the game industry for two related reasons: markets and money. A localization enables the sale of a game within a new market, or locale, and this in turn allows an increased return on investment. As a business, video games are meant to make money, and as a particular service meant to expand the reach of a game, the sole reason to localize a game is to increase the return on investment for the parties involved. After a large sigh, Judd responded to a question about how he toed the line between his own interests in Japan and the industry's bottom line mentality noting quite explicitly that:

It's a business. If it doesn't sell, it's done. So, that being said, I put myself in the shoes of the end user. The person who is buying the game. What do they want? Giving them a taste of Japanese, of

that culture, is it going to make them enjoy it more? Most of the time the answer is no… I'm not trying to change peoples' view on life, to try and culturalize them. (Judd, 2013)[5]

It is important to remember that the budget for localizing *Gyakuten Saiban* was limited, and as Judd said, it was even more limited for the sequels. Unlike idealized localization, key to most game localization is staying safely within the restrictive forces of taste and budget: for *Phoenix Wright* that meant on the one hand that the belief that keeping Japanese elements of the game within the game did not satisfy consumer desires, and on the other hand was the restrictive budget that prevented overly extensive changes.

Carmen Mangiron and Minako O'Hagan (2006) note that one way to look at video game localization is as translation with particular restrictions. These restrictions can be structural (the way that localization companies are organized separately from development teams and publishing companies; the way that money is a limiting factor in what localization can and cannot do), and they can be formal (the way that character limitations must be worked around when translating kanji compounds to much longer English or German words; matching translations to character lip movements). According to Mangiron and O'Hagan, what is unique about game localization as a form of translation, is that game translators work within these restrictions using what the authors call "transcreation," a form of quasi absolute freedom to change certain semiotic elements in order to create a "similar experience" for players in the target locale. Thus, the formal and structural restrictions necessitate greater freedom to alter the games, which would not be given to translators of other media.

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5 As Jennifer Prough (2011) shows in her discussion of manga production and affective labor in Japan, when readers of shojo manga become editors they must negotiate their own pleasure and the bottom line. Similarly, while localization specialists like Judd are professionals doing their job and minding the bottom line, they must also negotiate personal gaming preferences, and the personal belief that they are performing an ambassadorial role for Japan. One anonymous translator noted the importance of contextually understanding certain Japanese concepts like ninja and yokai, but then separated his own authorial work where he paid extreme note of such details and his professional translation work where he acquiesced to the company's desires, because "it's a business." Thus, while there are possibilities of actively negotiating personal preferences, money and industry discipline seem to push translators into toeing the line. Also see: O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013), who further discuss this liminality in terms a patron/translator power relationship that dictates game localization practice.

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In facing the economic restrictions inherent to localizing *Gyakuten Saiban* into *Phoenix Wright*, Smith used this quasi absolute freedom to completely rewrite elements of the game. Smith explained, "when there were things that couldn't be translated well I would ignore them and write something else that fit with the characters in the situation" (Smith, 2012). Specifically discussing why he changed one character's love of miso ramen (in *Gyakuten Saiban*) into a love of hamburgers (in *Phoenix Wright*), Smith elaborated:

> At the time I didn't feel it [ramen] was that insinuated into the fourteen year old crowd, that they would know it immediately... One of the rules I go by… is that if a translation is creating an iwakan that doesn't exist in the original, [if] there's a disjoint, if it's breaking immersion, if it's creating confusion that the original doesn't create with its original audience then you are doing a disservice to the goal of the scene or the line. So if I say, oh, it's my bento, and somebody has to say "what's a bento... I guess it must be this lunch thing and I see it and they're eating it," that's a whole thought process that didn't exist at all for the original player. (Smith, 2012)

Thus, Smith translates the experience, or overall feeling of the scene, and creatively alters Japanese elements that do not fit within an American mentality. A character's love of ramen became a love of hamburger; bento were called lunch boxes; a character's traditional medium garb became weird hippy clothing; and the wiretapped Hantou Hotel became the Gatewater to allude to the Watergate scandal. If, as O'Hagan and Mangiron argue, the goal of game localization is to create a similar experience for the target player in the target locale, then Smith demonstrates that the key to creating a similar experience is preventing iwakan.

To many within the video game localization industry, the key element of translating games is preventing iwakan, the incongruous feelings and moments that occur when encountering traces of cultural difference like Phoenix Wright's mask. While a lack of money often gets in the way, most telling is that when suitably funded, localization does in fact attempt to completely prevent iwakan by changing everything, as with Blizzard Entertainment's 'carte blanche' localization strategy. Similar to the previously mentioned transformation of *Osu! Tatakae! Oendan* into *Elite Beat Agents*, *StarCraft II*'s localization teams were given the budget and freedom to change anything and everything related to audio and graphics in addition to text localization (Barnes, 2012). In addition to using tools like FaceFX to

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facilitate lip-synching during the dialogue — allowing translators to worry about what is being said, not matching up dialogue to character lip flaps — localization teams were given 'carte blanche' clearance to change pretty much any and every graphical or textual asset within the game, even labels on beer bottles that existed within the game's bar scene, but were never visible to the player during normal play (Barnes, 2012). A particularly interesting example is how the game's cinematics were altered. During one of the game's numerous cut-scenes the player sees a computer screen quickly display information about a prisoner being scheduled for release; while changing this text was not originally intended, first one locale and then all for the rest changed the language displayed on the computer to their own. A second changed scene is when one character throws a grenade down a hallway toward a group of approaching soldiers. When the grenade stops rolling at the end of hallway the player sees that attached to the grenade is a small note that says 'Have a Nice Day' with a little heart symbol. Like with the computer display, each locale decided to change this hand-drawn element to a note in its own language, and the Russian even changed the heart symbol to a little yellow smiley face. For Blizzard's well-funded localization, traces of any sort, even little hearts, are prevented to make sure that the player never encounters an iwakan.

In contrast to Consalvo's hopeful pondering, leaving some of the original locale's culture in the localized version is rarely the goal of localizers, except when forced due to monetary lack. While localization specialists I have interviewed note that certain niche products leave a whiff of cultural odor (Iwabuchi, 2002) within localized products, preserving cultural odor is not the case with most mainstream console video games translated from Japanese to English, and it was not the case with *Phoenix Wright* according to both the head of localization and the translator.[6] Because of the increasing cost of producing video games, and the corresponding increase in cost to localize games (more text, audio and graphics with current generation games), most console games that are localized are aimed to hit as large of an

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6 Specifically, one translator noted that when translating manga, a much more niche medium aimed at reaching hundreds to thousands of people and not video games targeting millions of people, he would maintain the Japanese flavor because most players of that niche medium specifically want to experience Japan. Regarding games, Judd mentioned that were he localizing a product directly into French he would try to leave anime elements within the localized version due to anime's stronger, more mainstream popularity in France. However, it must be understood that game localization typically manipulates Japanese to English, and then uses the English to version to pivot into French, Italian, German and Spanish. Thus, English localizers act as gatekeepers (Lewin, 1947) of cultural flow to Europe as well as to North America.

audience as possible. Such was the case with *Phoenix Wright*'s localization according to Capcom's head of localization who stated the importance of making money on the title (Judd, 2013), and the game's lead translator, who stated his goal was to avoid perturbing the target 14 year old crowd that would not know particular Japanese elements (Smith, 2012). However, despite the stated goal of aiming *Phoenix Wright* at a mainstream American audience that, according to Judd, does not want a Japanese odor within their entertainment, there were still textual and graphical traces within the localized version that cause iwakan for American players and in so doing reveal *Phoenix Wright*'s origins within Japan.

There are two ways of thinking about this issue of iwakan within *Phoenix Wright*. Following from Ben Judd's comment that "it's a shame" his team did not get more time and money, one line of thinking is that a more complete localization that completely prevents iwakan is a better localization. This line of thinking leads directly to the current IGDA 'best practices' and Blizzard's carte blanche localization of *Starcraft II* where much more money was expended in order further the goal that the game "feel like it was designed for any player that sits down in front of it, regardless of their locale" (Monehaim quoted in Barnes, 2012). With this line of thinking the lack of full economic funding caused player confusion in the form of a white surgical mask.

The other line of thinking, which this article is putting forward, is that iwakan can be good. Far from signifying failure, iwakan are helpful because they reveal to the player a trace of the game's cultural origin. Players experienced iwakan when they saw *Phoenix Wright* in a strange face mask, and the feeling of incongruity led them to ask about the mask. Traces of cultural difference are successful elements of ethical translation precisely because they encourage players to try to understand the construction of borders and difference.

From Iwakan to Trace

While the localization of Gyakuten Saiban into *Phoenix Wright* altered many cultural elements including turning ramen into hamburgers, an Osaka accent into a Southern accent, and Japan into Los Angeles, Smith notes that his alterations are dependent upon the general cultural awareness of those very elements. "Not to compare either my work or this game to

Dante, but it's an example of a translation for every time. There's been like 40 different translations in English [of *Dante's Inferno*] and all of them... are valid in their own way, and valid for their own time" (Smith, 2012). Thus, if Smith were to translate *Gyakuten Saiban* again now, he might not change ramen to hamburgers, as ramen has become relatively popular within the United States with restaurants popping up along the east and west coasts in a similar way that sushi spread to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s (Bestor, 2001; Corson, 2008; Issenberg, 2007; Solt, 2009).

While there might be a translation that is better for every time and place, and Smith's argument leaves room for 'better' to be a fluid concept, 'better' for the game industry (as a business) is tied to perceptions of current taste cultures and what marketing experts claim will sell. The problem with such an economically-based justification is that it holds translation/localization to be a completely 'reactive' practice: the industry believes it simply makes money based on audience preferences, but little thought is given to how video games are a cultural vehicle (Chen, 2013) where particular game localization practices lead to long term alterations of taste preferences. In comparing the import/localization practices involved with *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* (超力戦隊オーレンジャー - *Chouriki Sentai Ourenjaa*) and *Pokémon* (ポケットモンスター - *Poketto Monsutaa*), Allison (2006) indicates a similar lack of consideration by marketing experts of how taste changes over time and through consumption practices. While the *Power Rangers* television series was rejected by American producers for eight years because it seemed too different from American tastes, and was only localized once all traces of Japan could be removed, *Pokémon* was popular in part because of the Japanese traces. It was the unintentional remainder of these traces that then produces what Allison concludes is "a global imagination no longer dominated... by the United States" (Allison, 2006, p. 279). It is, of course, this changing realm of taste that Consalvo references when she indicates that "perhaps references to Japanese media and popular foods [in *Phoenix Wright*] need no longer be erased, or even heavily modified" (Consalvo, 2009, p. 160).

Naoki Sakai's (1997) theory that translation is a "subjective technology" that constitutes bodies and cultures is helpful for understanding the contradiction between marketing

strategies on one hand and both Allison's production of a global imagination and Consalvo's hopeful pondering on the other hand. Following Sakai, we must see industry practices of localization as 'productive': localizations do not merely capitalize off of current tastes, but they determine and reinforce cultural tastes and borders. In a later essay theorizing translation through language counting and differentiation, Sakai argues that translation is a type of bordering:

> translation pertains to two dimensions of difference that must not be confused: radical difference of discontinuity that does not render itself to spatialized representation, and measured difference in continuity that is imagined in terms of a border, gap or crevice between two spatially enclosed territories or entities, figuratively projected as a distance between two figures accompanying one another. And the transition from the first to the second we often call 'translation.' (Sakai, 2009, p. 86)

For Sakai, translation is an act that produces language (and cultural) borders by re-presenting difference as a measured, bridgeable gap. Thus, whenever translation is exclaimed to be impossible, and whenever a producer argues some element must be altered as it is 'too Japanese' to be understood by a North American audience, there is a marking of both incommensurable and commensurable difference, as well as the creation and cementation of a border. What this means, and how Sakai concludes his essay, is that translation is political: it is "an act performed at the locale of social transformation where new power relations are produced" (Sakai, 2009, p. 87). Far from being merely reactive, game localization as a practice produces the very cultural tastes, relations and communities it claims to merely satisfy (Carlson & Corliss, 2011).

Visible within this example of *Gyakuten Saiban* / *Phoenix Wright*, but at stake with all game localization, is the active production of politically significant cultural borders between people and places. If Sakai argues that translation is important as a labor practice that hides/reveals borders, then this article extends Sakai's claim to argue that iwakan are important because they reveal to players the political border-work being done by localization practice.

Iwakan are moments when the player senses or even sees that there is something below and before, in this there are helpful similarities with the Derridian ~~trace~~.[7] Just as the word written ~~sous ratture~~, or ~~under erasure~~, (Derrida, 1976, p. 62) haunts the reader despite its erasure, the localized element that has left a trace creates an iwakan for the player. It is in these moments of haunting[8], when the player feels an iwakan and recognizes there is something underneath the localization, that the game she plays is 'living-on' ('sur-vivre') its original language version (Derrida, 1979) through a 'relevant' ('relever' and 'relève') translation (Derrida, 2004). Through such a recognition of the trace the text is able to survive in a manner that is relevant to both the world and the player: in moments of iwakan, the player of *Phoenix Wright* sees below the otherwise clean surface of the localized game to the haunting traces of Japan, and it is these haunted traces that can reveal to the player what Sakai (2009) calls the production of power relations.

Abé Markus Nornes (2006) has similarly argued that ethical film translation now requires an 'abusive' turn where translation forces the viewer to actively engage with the film and its translation. Nornes argues that standardized, market driven subtitling and dubbing modes of translation are "corrupt" because they "[smooth] the rough edges of foreignness, [and convert] everything into easily consumable meaning" (Nornes, 2006, p. 185). In opposition to this "corrupt" translation practice that only "pretends to bring the audience to an experience of the foreign" (Nornes, 2006, p. 155), Nornes advocates for an abusive translation that is "ready and willing to experiment, to tamper with tradition, language, and expectations in order to inventively put spectators into contact with the foreign" (Nornes, 2006, p. 230). To Nornes, this type of abusive translation is important because it moves beyond the national chauvinistic view of "translation as global battleground, where border crossings involve altercation and contamination, prophylaxis and destruction" (Nornes, 2006, p. 233). Traces

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7 A traditional Derridian sense of the trace argues that writing '~~under erasure~~' emphasizes the *différance* within language. Just as there is a constant sliding of signfieds on signifiers as meaning changes and builds up, there is never simply the word, or the concept, but its embodied history that is necessarily both painful and traumatic. Finally, while this article has similarities to, and partially draws from, Lippit's (2005) use of Derrida to understand atomic traces as trauma within Japanese film, it is immediately indebted to Lewis (1985), Nornes (2007) and Roy (2010), who take Derridian theory and layering as both ethical starting point and method.

8 'Haunting' here is drawn from Derrida's Specters of Marx (1994). Hauntology, coming from its close sounding pronunciation in French to ontology, is a question of being. Whether one is, or one is haunted. As with 'living-on' and '~~traces~~,' haunting involves incorporation as a form of progress and process.

and iwakan within video games are a similar Derridian abuse in that they push players to actively engage with games not simply as entertainment, but as a part of global capitalism and cultural flow.

Playing (with) Traces

Traces, when the other is visible despite the best effort of game localizers, are inevitable with localized games due to a lack of time and money to completely rewrite the game from the ground up. In alignment with localization industry professionals, one can think about these traces as translational failures because they create an iwakan that can confuse the player. However, this article has argued that it is possible and helpful to think of these slippages as a trace of the game's culture of origin that, when played, force the player to acknowledge globalization's material stoppages and flows around the world, which Anna Tsing has called the "friction: the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (Tsing, 2005, p. 4). While many gamers may not wish their escapist play ruptured, games are always-already frictionally entangled with politics, economics, and entertainment (Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter, 2009; Huntemann & Payne, 2010), and the presence of an increasingly large number of independent, serious, news, art, and persuasive games (Bogost, 2007; Frasca, 2007) points to the futility of wishing for something as impossible as frictionless entertainment.

Despite a niche American fan base that might push for the maintenance of a Japanese odor within localized games (Iwabuchi, 2002), the localization industry generally assumes that North American players cannot or do not wish to deal with Japan, cultural differences, or the frictional entanglements of politics, economics and culture at play within modern commodities (Allison, 2006; Judd, 2013; Tsing, 2005). As a result, localizers do their best to prevent iwakan, or traces of the Japanese origin, thereby re-inscribing a hard cultural border between Japan and North America. In delimiting the player experience localizers work to manage the translational interface (Mandiberg, 2012) that determines what type of border-work is being done within each game and between each locale. If the game localization industry's theoretical and idealized "full localization" (Chandler & Deming, 2012) is a hard border where nothing of the foreign seeps through to the target player in her locale, then this

essay is ultimately arguing two things: first, that porous translational borders are inevitable due to the limitations of localization in practice; second, that porous translation's visible and playable traces are a particularly playful approach to difference and global flow.

Particularly important for players in certain socio-political locales, traces are a means of trespassing (Miyoshi, 2010) over otherwise impassable borders. Such trespassing is particularly important during the present moment where a fear of marked others leads to racialized surveillance, patrol checks, and militarized borders near certain marked borders but not other (Gates, 2011; Nevins, 2002). As an uncontrollable slippage, traces are a means of trampling national, cultural and disciplinary borders, but in a way that does not allow Western elite to simply go out and sample the other (hooks, 1992; Roy, 2010). Traces allow a type of uncontrollable trespassing: they allow gamers to cross borders, but not simply tour in a way that reinforces the here and there, the foreign and the local through a type of translational tourism that reinforces center/periphery power relations. Players cannot control iwakan; they simply feel it while playing, and in that instance both trespass there and are invaded here. When encountering traces like Phoenix Wright with his face mask, North American players approach the reality of borders and difference in a productive manner; playing traces reveals disallowed pathways over borders and between locales, but such play can also open up new pathways in the future just a previously unacceptable translations like ramen can become acceptable and understandable over time. It is through traces and iwakan that players learn alternate cultural models (Gee, 2007) and become hybrid global citizens by incorporating difference (Garcia Canclini, 2005). As such, traces must be understood not as a failure of translation, but as both inevitable element of game localization practice and as essential part of globalization.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Transcript of mask scene from *Gyakuten Saiban 3* (Japanese) on the left; author's direct translation in the middle; transcript of mask scene from *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney: Trials and Tribulations* (English) on the right. Added English line is highlighted.

	Japanese		Direct Translation		English Localization
ナルホド	う。お。おはよーございますセンセイッ！	Naruhodo	Uh. Oh. Goood morning, sir!	Phoenix	*cough* *sniffle* Good morning there everybody!
チヒロ	おはようございます。（とりあえずエガオよ、千尋）	Chihiro	Good morning. (In any case, smile, Chihiro)	Mia	Good morning… (Try to keep smiling, Mia!)
ナルホド	きょ、今日は。。。。ボク、がんばりますからッ！	Naruhodo	To, today... I'm really gonna try hard!	Phoenix	I, err, I just want to say… I'll give it all I've got!

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	Japanese		Direct Translation		English Localization
ナルホド	ええもお、やりますとも！げほ。げほげほ。	Naruhodo	Eh, well, I'm gonna try! Cough, coughcough.	Phoenix	Yup, it'll be fine! No prob! *cough* *achoo* *achoo*
チヒロ	あ、。。。そんあにリキまないで。ええと。。。なるほどさん！	Chihiro	Ah...please, not so strongly. Uh... Mr. Naruhodo!	Mia	Oh, what's wrong? Do you have a cold or something… Mr. Wry?
ナルホド	はは、はいッ！。。。あ。いえ、あの。	Naruhodo	Ye, yes!... Um, er, well...	Phoenix	Actually, it's Wright… Like the flying brothers… People screw it up all the time.
ナルホド	セイカクには”なるほどう”なんですけど。。。	Naruhodo	Actually, it's really Naruhodou, but...	Phoenix	And yes I have a cold. That's what this mask is for.
				Phoenix	My doc says this way, I won't give it to anyone else… Be kind to others, he says…

	Japanese		Direct Translation		English Localization
チヒロ	いいですか、なるほどさん！シンパイはいりません。	Chihiro	Okay, Mr. Naruhodo! There's no need to worry.	Mia	Right, Mr. Wright! You have nothing to fear in court today!
チヒロ	あなたが無実なら。。。かならず、助けてみせます！	Chihiro	If you're innocent... I will definitely save you!	Mia	If you are truly innocent… I promise I will save you!
ナルホド	うぐぐぐぐ。む、胸ぐらをつかまないでくださ い。。。げほ。	Naruhodo	Ugggghh, p, please don't grab my shirt... cough.	Phoenix	Nnnnggghh… P-Please l-let go of my shirt… *cough*

Appendix 2: Additional Traces
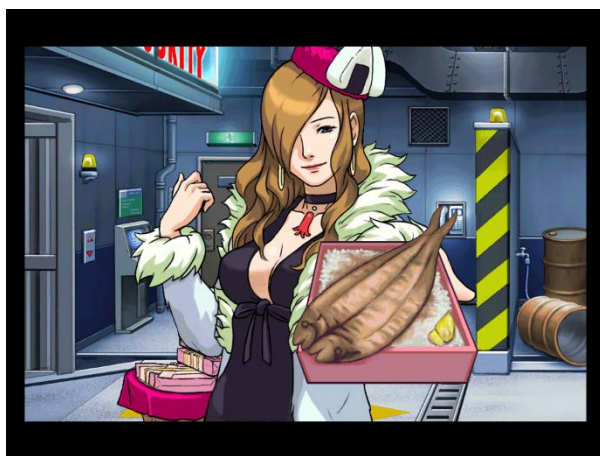

Figure 3: woman onigiri hat selling bento	Figure 4: guard's armband with kanji

| Figure 5: character with magatama | Figure 6: tatami, kotatsu, and senbei |

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Résumé

Cet article développe la manière dont les traces résiduelles de l'origine nationale d'un jeu vidéo, parfois négligées ou ignorées en raison de financement limité, peuvent être une partie éthiquement responsable de la localisation du jeu vidéo lorsque l'objectif d'une localisation n'est pas seulement l'immersion, une adaptation totale et des considérations financières, mais de la génération d'interactions culturelles. Cet article propose que les moments d'incongruité, lorsqu'un joueur rencontre (de façon inconfortable) des traces résiduelles, sont un aspect positif de la circulation culturelle par le fait qu'ils aident les joueurs à apprendre comment

devenir des citoyens hybrides. Loin d'être des défaillances de la localisation, comme le prétendent les professionnels de l'industrie, cet article précise comment ces traces devraient être vues comme des succès d'une pratique responsable de la localisation.

Mot-clés: Localisation, Traduction, Frontières, Interface, Jeux Vidéo, Japon