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The Ghost of Orientalism

Case Study of Historical Representations, History Culture and Orientalism in the Video Game *Ghost of Tsushima*

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Abstract

This thesis explores how history is represented in the video game *Ghost of Tsushima* from 2020. The game is set on the island of Tsushima off the coast of Japan during the Mongol invasion of 1274. Players are placed into this world as the fictive samurai Jin Sakai, fighting to free the island from the Mongol yoke. At the same time the samurai is torn between following his family's code of honour or doing whatever necessary to succeed in his task of freeing the island. It is one of the most sold games for the game system Playstation 4 and has thus had a large reach. The game is of special interest as it is a Western produced product that treats a different culture's history, but also because it has been marketed successfully within that culture as well as that of the developers. My study uses theories of history culture, use of history, orientalism, self-orientalism, and game analysis in order to interpret the historical representations. The study also takes a specific look at what role the Japanese concept of *bushidō* takes in the representations within the game. The primary conclusions of this study is that there are three primary components that construct historical representations in a video game. These being a structural, an economical, and a cultural component. The first one is reliant on the video game medium, the second one on the commercial interests of the developers, and the third one on the history cultural context of the video game.

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1   Introduction

We will face death… and defend our home. Tradition… Courage… Honour… They are what make us. We are warriors of Tsushima. We are samurai!

These are the words of encouragement from Lord Shimura, *jitō*, lord paramount, of the island of Tsushima, before a battle facing the Mongol horde. Eighty Japanese samurai are to charge without fear of death against an army of thousands. Lord Shimura is one of the main characters of the video game *Ghost of Tsushima*, the object of study for this thesis. A keen interest in the cultural meetings between Japan and the West, as well as in video games, is what has led me to this study. In these interests I am, however, not alone. Following the impact of Japanese technological exports during the final decades of the twentieth century, the access to and success of Japanese popular culture and "soft power" has colored the past decades. The globalisation of Japanese popular culture has manifested itself both in the success of Japanese cultural products - films, anime, manga etc. - abroad, but also through an increased interest in Japanese history.[1] I have furthermore had thoughts of studying the usage of history (sv. *historiebruk*) and history culture (sv. *historiekultur*) for a long time and I have hereby found a way to combine it with my interest for East Asian history generally and Japanese history specifically. These two will be combined in the examination of the video game *Ghost of Tsushima* as a national and transnational cultural artefact. I acknowledge that their are other perspectives that would be applicable to this study but I have chosen to limit myself to the ones mentioned above and will discuss alternative ones at the end of the thesis.

1.1   Presentation of Sources

My object of study is the video game *Ghost of Tsushima*, which was released in 2020 by the American video game developer Sucker Punch Productions. It portrays the story of the fictive samurai noble Jin Sakai during the attempted Mongol invasion of Japan in 1274 set on the small island of Tsushima between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese main islands.[2] Instead of the invasion reaching mainland Japan as it did historically, this one samurai, Jin, fights the invading forces and prevents them from completely dominating Tsushima. All the characters and the story is fictive, but with clear parallels to historical persons, events and places. Jin has to use unorthodox methods, in contrast to his strict honour-bound upbringing,

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[1] Iwabuchi, Koichi. ""Soft" Nationalism And Narcissism: Japanese Popular Culture Goes Global". *Asian Studies Review*, vol 26, no. 4, 2002, pp. 447-469.

[2] See Appendix V for comparison of the game island and the real-world island.

in order to try to liberate the island from its occupiers. The game itself is of interest because it is a Western developer presenting a history of a foreign culture.It also treats Japanese history, which I find to be understudied. [3] The game has also become widely popular in both the West and in Japan, having sold 8 million copies as of January 2022.[4]

Video games are a peculiar media to study. One reason being that it is a multi-textual medium where narratives are produced on different levels both visually and auditorily. Another reason is the simple lack of previous research, and of authoritative and tried methods, since it is such a new field of study. Much like you need to watch movies in order to study them, is it necessary to play a game in order to study it, since that is how it was intended to be experienced. The game relies on an active consumer of the medium, not just a passive observer. Historian Adam Chapman writes the following in support of studying how history is conveyed in video games: "/…/ by playing a role in constructing our perceptions of the past, they are also part of forming our identities, our understandings of culture, society and even humanity."[5]

A video game, unlike a movie, does not have clear timestamps for how far you have come in the story etc.. Some games are more open in their approach to storytelling so you do not do everything in a specific order and some players take longer to complete sections than others. For this reason, I will be referencing specific missions, demarcated parts of the game, in order to show where in the game what I am talking about can be found. For example, "The Warrior's Code", *Jin's Journey – Act 1: Rescue Lord Shimura*" references the mission "The Warrior's Code" within *Jin's Journey*, a collection of missions, set during act 1 of the main overarching story. A complete list of all the game's missions and campaign can be found in Appendix I.

1.2   Purpose and Research Questions

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, I wish to study history culture and use of history in the context of Japanese history. I find that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of Japan in general and Japanese history in particular. Japanese cultural exports, and thus their own history culture, have been transferred to the West through the expanding interest of Japanese pop culture. Mainly in the form of manga, anime and video

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[3] The same has been argued by, for example, Ottosson, Ingemar & Ekholm, Thomas, *Japans historia* (Second Edition), Lund: Historiska Media 2018, p. 20.
[4] This figure makes it the 8th most sold game for the game system Playstation 4.
[5] Chapman, Adam, *Digital Games As History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Perspective*, UK: Routledge 2016, p. 12.

games. *Ghost of Tsushima*, as it is a game produced in the US, is an example of the West selling their own culture back to the Japanese. There is also a special relationship between Japanese and Western history culture, noticeable since even before the world wars, that I also wish to inquire into. By making this thesis, I hope to create interest in Japanese history as well as to show how preconceived notions of Japan and its history are produced and reproduced in the West.

The purpose of this study is to examine how history is presented in the video game *Ghost of Tsushima*, what history culture it reproduces. I wish to see if orientalist concepts can be found within the game and in that case how they function and may be used. Furthermore, I wish to discuss what role domestic Japanese concepts such as *bushidō* take within the game and what influence they have on Western notions of Japan. This will be done through the following research questions:

- How is Japanese history characterised in the video game *Ghost of Tsushima*?
  - How are characters and groups represented in the game?
  - What influence does conceptions of the samurai and *bushidō* hold in the representations in the game?
  - How are places and locations represented in the game?
- How has notions of orientalism affected the representations in *Ghost of Tsushima*?

1.3   Previous Research

The previous research for this thesis can be separated into three distinct traditions. These being the study of video games, the study of Japanese historical representation, as well as the study and debate of Orientalism. The study of video games is quite a new field of study. Especially history's role within the wider field of game studies. A number of introductory volumes have been written on game studies, for example *Understanding Video Games* by Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith and Susana Pajares Tosca. Adam Chapman has made an effort of trying to place history into the wider field in his *Digital Games as History*, which is part of the series "Routledge Advances in Game Studies". History culture and use of history have a quite insignificant place within this new field. If at all it is just mentioned in passing.

The specific object of this study has been studied previously. In september of 2021, Jordan Michael Brown published his Master's Thesis called *Adaptation of Japanese Myth in*

Video Games: The Case of Ghost of Tsushima, in which he, as the title suggests, studied how Japanese myths have been adapted into video games by conducting a case study using the same material as I.[6] While Brown focuses on mythologisation in general, I will be focusing on the warrior specifically and how other historical warrior stereotypes are portrayed in the studied material, as well as orientalist and historical representations more generally. I will be taking some dispositional inspiration from Brown's thesis since he maps out a lot of the valuable background information for this sort of study. Among these things are the definition of a video game, its unique characteristics both as a medium of popular culture, but maybe more interestingly what one needs to keep in mind whilst analysing that kind of material. By this study, I hope to expand the understanding of the use of history, mythologisation and stereotypes of the Japanese past in *Ghost of Tsushima*.

My knowledge of *bushidō*, its history and development, comes from a few different works. Primarily, I will be using Oleg Benesch's 2014 work *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism and Bushidō in Modern Japan*.[7] It will be complemented by other works when necessary or fitting, for example *Japanese Culture. The Religious and Philosophical Foundations* by Roger J. Davies and *Japanese Culture* by Paul Varley.[8] For most of the historical context of the period in which the game is set I will be using *Japans historia* by Ingemar Ottosson and Thomas Ekholm. Most research on Japan in video games has been on games created in Japan. Rachael Hutchinson has for example covered this in *Japanese Culture Through Videogames*.[9]

Working with Western perspectives on Asian culture and history requires one to further consider the existence of Orientalism. There is a risk that stereotypical and mythologised views of a given culture influences even the writer that wishes to study it, something that I also have to be aware of myself. It is both something that I will be studying as well as something that I have to acknowledge as a risk in my own writing. The term was made highly relevant by Edward Said when he published his work with the same name in 1970. Said's original work dealt with stereotypical images of the Middle East.[10] The aforementioned Thomas Ekholm has however related Said to Japan in his thesis *Då har*

[6] Brown, Jordan Michael, *Adaptation of Japanese Myth in Video Games: The Case of Ghost of Tsushima*, Society and Culture Division, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, MS. Beppu: Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, 2021.

[7] Benesch, Oleg, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai. Nationalism, Internationalism and Bushidō in Modern Japan*, UK: Oxford University Press 2014.

[8] Davies, Roger J., *Japanese Culture. The Religious and Philosophical Foundations*, Vermont: Tuttle Publishing 2016, Varley, Paul, *Japanese Culture* (Fourth Edition), Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 2000.

[9] Hutchinson, Rachael, *Japanese Culture Through Videogames*, UK: Routledge 2019.

[10] Said, Edward W., *Orientalism*, US: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Japan upphört att vara Japan. Ekholm further discusses Japanese "self-orientalism", a concept that comes from the fact that the Japanese have made their voices heard in the West, contrasting it to what Said claimed about the people of the Middle East. This has been made through, for example, publications in English, something I will return to later in this thesis.[11]

There is a general consensus that the still influential book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by Ruth Benedict from 1946 is to be considered an example of Orientalism directed towards Japan. The book is the result of an anthropological project conducted during World War II, aiming to learn about Japan both as an enemy and for a possible coming occupation.[12] Due to the war, Benedict never visited Japan for her study, nor did she know Japanese. Despite critics calling it orientalist, its influence has continued to be large. Two anthropologists claimed in 1992 that it felt like they were still just writing footnotes to Benedict.[13] Worth mentioning is that Benedict's work has also garnered much interest within Japan, something that has been studied by John Lie in "Ruth Benedict's Legacy of Shame: Orientalism and Occidentalism in the Study of Japan".[14] This is part of the process of self-orientalism as mentioned by Ekholm. A sort of exoticism of their own history and culture. Koichi Iwabuchi has written about this, for example in his article "Complicit Exoticism: Japan and its other".[15]

1.4   Analytical and Methodological Considerations

I will be basing my analysis on the English language version of the game. One reason for this is my own mentioned limited knowledge of Japanese, but also that it provides a stricter Western perspective. A third reason is that the English language version of the game is what most Western players would be met with, thus making it the most representative version. A limited set of ideas can be conveyed in a given language and thus everything is conveyed through an English-language cultural lense. I will be conducting my analysis at the crossroads between textual, narrative and visual analysis within the wider fields of historical studies and game studies.

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[11] Ekholm, Thomas, *Då har Japan upphört att vara Japan - Det japanska tehuset vid Etnografiska museet, samt bilden av chanoyu i Sverige och väst, 1878-1939*, Institutionen för språk och litteraturer, Göteborgs universitet, Diss., 2018, p. 6 ff.
[12] Benedict, Ruth, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946.
[13] Ryang, Sonia, "Chrysanthemum's Strange Life: Ruth Benedict in Postwar Japan", *Asian Anthropology*, 2002, 1:1: 87-116.
[14] Lie, John, "Ruth Benedict's Legacy of Shame: Orientalism and Occidentalism in the Study of Japan", i *Asian Journal of Social Science*, Volume 29: Issue 2, 2001.
[15] Iwabuchi, Koichi, "Complicit exoticism: Japan and its other", *Continuum*, Volume 8: Issue 2, 1994: 49-82.

Textual analysis is a common tool for the historian. Yet, textual analysis is not just one method, but multiple. For example, a large part of my analysis is going to be conversational analysis, where I interpret meaning from dialogue and other conversational forms. Due to the medium it is fitting to use narrative analysis as well, as the game is fundamentally a story that its creators wish to convey, and that itself is culturally situated.[16] The game visuals fill a similar role as imagery reflects the society in which it was produced and is intended to be consumed. It shows certain aspects of a given culture as that influences what is allowed to occupy the picture or screen.[17]

I will study how narratives and representations are constructed in this multi-textual medium. The different layers of text that will be analysed include, but are not limited to, spoken language, terminology, and symbols. Moreover, it will be about "reading" the medium as such, its possibilities, limitations, functions and purpose. This is part of what could be called "game literacy". The main objects of textual analysis will be dialogue and text present in other places such as place names, lore entries and mission descriptions.[18] Something to always have in mind is that my own background and values will affect the interpretations, this could for example include orientalist perceptions I am unaware of.

My analytical framework has three main components. The first being structure, focusing what the game medium allows for and limits in regards to historical representations. The second being culture, centering on how history cultural and orientalist notions influence the game's historical representations. The third and final being economic, discussing how economic and commercial interests affect historical representation. These are in no way to be understood as separate things, but rather as intrinsically connected aspects of the final game.

For what I call the structural component, I will take inspiration from Adam Chapman. According to Chapman there are two forms of narratives in historical video games, *framing narrative* and *ludonarrative*. Both are present to different degrees in different games. The first type are "discrete *narrative fragments* not changeable by gameplay", whilst the second is "the narrative that emerges through a player's play".[19] Chapman develops this notion by adding *framing narrative fragments* that make up the framing narrative. These narrative fragments are further described as "discrete, directing, self-contained and often contextually

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[16] Berglund, Louise & Ney, Agneta, *Historikerns hantverk. Om historieskrivning, teori och metod*, Lund: Studentlitteratur 2015, p. 159-161.
[17] Berglund & Ney 2015, p. 138 ff..
[18] The game has a pause menu where much of the mentioned non-dialogue text in the game can be accessed.
[19] Chapman, Adam, 2016, p. 119.

non-specific, pre-scripted, fully formed sections of narrative that emplot and structure the events of the game's narrative".[20] This is what is primarily used for my analysis.

Chapman goes on to claim that, whether aware of it or not, all players of a historical game produce a narrative based on the ludonarrative. The components to this process are what Chapman calls *lexia* and *framing controls*, that is to say the elements that can be used to construct the narrative and the framework for how these can be combined or not. These then produce the ludonarrative through player agency. Lexia should, according to Chapman, be understood as "the most basic *narratively charged units* that players can combine with other lexia". Chapman compares it to an actor's use of props, gestures or line, whilst the narrative fragment would be the events of the script that subject the actor to different situations. The amount of lexia in modern games are innumerous and can consist of "ludic representations of agents, objects, social structures, architecture, processes, actions and concepts". Ludonarratives take on different levels of meaning depending on game context. For example would a weapon lexia be relevant to a study of representations of military history.[21] The framing controls exist to make the gameplay satisfying and coherent for the player when he or she is interacting with the lexia. Even though it is primarily a gameplay structure, it also controls the narrative that the player can take part in. It influences player agency in certain directions.[22]

Chapman proposes three distinct categories of *story structure* that can in general terms be applied to different games. These are *deterministic*, *open*, and *open-ontological*. They are conditioned by the degree to which the player's agency influences the narrative of the game. These categorisations are by nature very generalised and Chapman acknowledges that some more unusual games will fall between categories. The *deterministic* is one where basically all of the game is presented to the player orderly, the narrative is rigid and little to no agency is given to the player. The open is more lenient to the player and allows for some agency. The player can in the case of open story structures influence the game character's conduct to some degree and how the narrative develops. The open-ontological is the category that maximises player agency. Most of the narrative is controlled by the player, the player can pick what lexia to take part of to a very large degree and is free in the construction of the narrative.[23]

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[20] Chapman 2016, p. 121.
[21] Chapman 2016, p. 123 f.
[22] Chapman 2016, p. 125 f.
[23] Chapman 2016, p. 127-131

For the cultural component, I will focus on Western history culture and what its relation is to the history of Japan as such, but also Japanese history culture. How, then, should we understand history culture? According to history professor Klas-Göran Karlsson, history culture is the arena in which a society communicates history as well as values which history is worth communicating in different societal contexts: in education, research, celebrations etc.. Included in this is also what history is neglected by a society. It poses questions about who has the power over which historical knowledge is produced as well as how and why it is reproduced and consumed societally.[24] History culture coalesces history consciousness (sv. *historiemedvetande*) and use of history. History consciousness constitutes, as the name suggests, our consciousness of history, not solely on an individual level but on a communal, societal level. Karlsson writes that history consciousness is difficult to study as such and must instead be studied through its different manifestations within the history cultural arena.[25]

Karlsson also describes different uses of history, where the one most relevant to this study is the commercial use of history (sv. *kommersiellt historiebruk*). This is what primarily represents the economical component in my analysis. Commercial use of history is about the intention to market "historically oriented products".[26] What history is marketable is thus conditioned by the history culture in which it is being marketed. Ulf Zander writes that both academic and non-academic history, despite their obvious differences, have in common that they are cultural products of their time. Everything from political to cultural to economic circumstances of the context where a given history is produced influences the end-product.[27]

Where there is use of history there is also non-use of history (sv. *icke-bruk av historia*). History is not used randomly, but rather within specific contexts for specific purposes. At times and for different reasons, parts of the past are left out of the public narrative.[28] It is primarily relevant in relation to an ideological use of history (sv. *ideologiskt historiebruk*), but I still find it meaningful to mention for this study as well. Some history is not marketable, and why is it not? It might be because it does not meet people's expectations of what history should be or because it is controversial for other reasons.

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[24] Karlsson, Klas-Göran, "Historia, historiedidaktik och historiekultur – teori och perspektiv", i Karlsson, Klas-Göran & Zander (red.), Ulf, *Historien är närvarande. Historiedidaktik som teori och tillämpning*, Lund: Studentlitteratur 2014, p. 65 f.
[25] Karlsson 2014, p. 57 f.
[26] Karlsson 2014, p 78.
[27] Zander, Ulf, "Historiekulturella manifestationer – historia i ord, bilder och musik", i Karlsson, Klas-Göran & Zander (red.), Ulf, *Historien är närvarande. Historiedidaktik som teori och tillämpning*, Lund: Studentlitteratur 2014, p. 106.
[28] Karlsson 2014, p. 75.

2   Historical Background

2.1   Historical Context

Ghost of Tsushima is set during the Mongol invasion of Japan in the year 1274. The Mongols had conquered much of North-East Asia and now had their eyes set on the island country of Japan. Kubilai Khan sent multiple messages addressed to the "King of Japan", the shogun, something that itself insulted the Japanese. After having received no answer the Mongols decided to invade. The Mongols would use a fleet of Korean warships constructed for the purpose of invading the island country. A large portion of the invading forces would also be Korean and Chinese, rather than Mongolian. Around 8000 Korean troops are for example suggested to have been used. The islands of Tsushima and Iki, located in between the East Asian mainland and the southernmost of the Japanese main islands, *Kyūshū*, would fall quickly.[29]

The troops would then land on *Kyūshū* where they would battle the shogunal troops.Japanese troops were used to fight individually whilst the Mongols fought in groups. The apparent superiority of the Mongol tactics would not help them in the long run as they as a rule returned to their ships every night. This was a mistake as a typhoon blew them away one night. This became the end of the first invasion. The second invasion would come after the Mongols had subjugated the Southern Song in China. 1281 would the second, even larger, invasion come. The Japanese were more prepared this time and had adapted to the Mongol war tactics with fortification and more coordinated fighting. A second typhoon would in the end blow away the second invasion as well. The Japanese elite still felt threatened by Khubilai's promises to return and were mobilised and on alert until his death in 1294. The invasions would have far-reaching consequences for Japanese society.[30]

This was during what is known as the Kamakura period (1185-1333) in Japanese history. The name of the period signifies the residence of the shogun, a sort of military dictator, and his bakufu, shogunal government. The shogun was of the samurai class. The current shogunal family specifically belonged to the Minamoto family. The real power in Japan though lay with the *shikken*, regent, of the shogun, a position that was dominated by the Hōjō clan. The country was nominally an empire with an emperor, although he only held religious and ceremonial power. The shogun was on paper appointed by the emperor but it was de facto an inherited title. This confusing state of affairs was a result of many years of

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[29] Sansom, George, *A History of Japan to 1334*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1958 p. 440-444.
[30] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, p. 78-80.

accumulation of power by the warrior class that reached its zenith with the Genpei war (1180-1185) in which two clans, Minamoto and Taira, clashed over influence and the Minamoto clan came out on top.[31] Much of the administration around the country was handled by *jitō*, but they were first and foremost the people responsible for the tax collection. The *jitō*'s income came primarily from land that was worked by the region's peasants. There was often friction between the *jitō* and his subjects as they were required to help work the *jitō*'s land.[32]

2.2   The Historical Warriors of Japan

The samurai and their ways take centre stage in *Ghost of Tsushima*. They are a very romanticised group in Japanese history, both domestically and, subsequently, abroad. I find that reading old legends creates a kind of uncertainty about what is true and what is not, since much of the content seems to correlate with what becomes espoused by later *bushidō* ideologs. This is of course par for the course since that is the point of an invented tradition. It must at least have a venere of historicity in order to appear authentic to any potential consumer of the tradition in question. Pre-modern Japanese warrior legends as well as Tokugawa period (1603-1868) romanticisation holds much inspiration for the ideology being developed in the 19th century.[33]

Historian Karl Friday describes the samurai as effectively starting as hired swords, mercenaries, under employment of provincial elites and, to a lesser decree, lower court nobility in the 700s. It was a new system of private armies that replaced a sort of conscription that had existed previously. This culture of using private military force would be co-opted by the government by formalising the private warrior positions within the military, legitimising the use of privately acquired martial skills.[34] Provincial elites, in an effort to secure their position in the competition for wealth, increasingly started to surround themselves with "warriors of ability" as well as increase their own abilities.[35] As the Heian period (794-1185) progressed, ever more power was moved to warrior-aristocrat families, from where the samurai would be recruited. Even though honing combat skills was encouraged in this class, most would not be full time soldiers until the 15th century and the beginning of the *Sengoku jidai* (eng. Age of Warring States). Rather, most of them were a sort of civil servants, one

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[31] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, p. 58-68.
[32] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, p. 65.
[33] Benesch 2014, p. 15-22.
[34] Friday, Karl, *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan*, UK: Routledge 2004, p. 6.
[35] Friday, Karl 2004, p. 8.

high such position being *jitō*. They would take a similar societal position with the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate and its long period of relative peace.[36]

The West have few warrior heroines that can be referenced, or that at least are popularly known. It is quite different in Japan and Asia at large. There are quite a few female warriors in Japanese history who are also reproduced in popular discourse. One well-known example is Tomoe Gozen. In the legendary story *Heike Monogatari* (eng. "The Tale of the Heike") is written that Tomoe Gozen was the first captain to her lord, "especially beautiful", "a remarkably strong archer", and "as a swordswoman she was a warrior worth a thousand".[37]

The Japanese Buddhist monks have also taken a prevalent role in Japanese martial history as warriors in their own right. An Edo period myth relates that warrior monks wielded *naginatas*, a spear of sorts. In reality they generally used the same equipment other warriors of the time did.[38] One famous example of a warrior monk who lived during the Kamakura period was Benkei who was supposedly the only loyal retainer and friend to the legendary samurai Minamoto Yoshitsune.[39]

Finally, I would like to mention a common literary trick in Japanese history to describe what is called *nanori*, or presentations, in which a warrior in a tale explains who he and his kin are, either before or during a battle. This is not thought to be something that actually took place but more a way of presenting the participants in a given battle without taking a pause in the story. It should be seen as a later construction similar to formalities among knights in Western Europe.[40]

2.3   Japanese History in Western History Culture

One of the central objectives of this thesis is to study Western perceptions of Japanese history, hence a brief discussion on how the relationship between the two have developed over the past century is warranted. I took to using the Google Ngram viewer in order to get an idea of how large the interest was for different phenomena relating to Japan within the English speaking world.[41] One comparison I did was on how interest in Japanese history compares to interest in Chinese history.[42] In such a comparison, it is suggested that China and

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[36] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, p. 56-57, 100, 133.
[37] McCullough, Helen Craig, *The Tale of the Heike*, California: Stanford University Press 1988, p. 291.
[38] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, p. 57.
[39] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, p 60.
[40] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, p 68 f.
[41] Google Ngram Viewer searches its corpus of English publications from 1500 to 2019 for occurrence of a given word or phrase. It also exists for a few other languages and special subjects.
[42] See Appendix III for Google Ngram Viewer Graph.

its history traditionally garners more interest than Japan and its history. Intriguingly it can be seen that the interest for different Japan-related things have trended in the West in different periods, likely related to things such as the publication of important books, like Benedict's in 1946, the World Wars, economic booms, popular cultural trends etc.

The notion of *bushidō,* a supposed warrior code of the samurai and sometimes used as general Japanese cultural ethics, was introduced to a Western audience through Nitobe Inazō's book *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* from 1899. It became widely read and cited in the West and continues to influence modern perceptions of Japan.[43] The historian Oleg Benesch writes that the perspective on *bushidō* as a historical anachronism has had quite little impact on both popular and academic discourse. Benesch claims that many scholarly works still reproduce the notion that it is a traditional Japanese ethic. This is something that Benesch attributes to the fact that when *bushidō* had a popular resurgence in the 1980s, scholars were hesitant to address a "passing phenomenon with little or no historical basis".[44] In addition, the 1980s resurgence has been difficult to study the past decades due to scholars having lived through this period. The lack of actual critical studies of the pre-war discourse of *bushidō* has made its origin difficult to pin down.

The new *bushidō* was not unlike the one promoted by Inazō Nitobe around the turn of the century. He was personally revived as an icon in the post-war Japanese society, even being printed on the 5000-yen note in 1984. In this process of renewing and returning to *bushidō* it once again became a mark of uniqueness for the Japanese. They were both different from the West and different from their fellow East Asians.[45]

The return of a Inazō-esk perspective would not only affect Japan. Ruth Benedict directly references Inazō multiple times throughout her work, *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. The aforementioned work is probably one of the most influential works of non-fiction when it comes to the formation of post-war American, and broadly Western, views of Japan and the Japanese. As previously mentioned, Benedict did conduct her anthropological study of Japan without ever actually visiting Japan nor speaking Japanese, instead she conducted her study by interviewing Japanese-Americans and Japanese prisoners of war as well as reading English language documents and watching Japanese movies.[46] Benedict summarised her view of the Japanese in the following way:

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Benesch 2014, p. 4-5.
[45] Benesch 2014, p. 228 ff.
[46] Lie 2001, p. 251.

Both the sword and the chrysanthemum are a part of the picture. The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways. They are terribly concerned about what other people will think of their behavior, and they are also overcome by guilt when other people know nothing of their misstep. Their soldiers are disciplined to the hilt but are also insubordinate.[47]

John Lie writes that Benedict makes the case that the Japanese fundamentally order their world around a pre-modern "aristocratic", "class", "caste" and "feudal" hierarchy, passed down until modern times. Benedict also asserts that the Japanese live in a culture of shame rather than a culture of guilt, the latter rather representing American culture. The difference being that shame comes from your surroundings and guilt comes from within. Public esteem and *honour* is therefore the highest virtue in Japan.[48] Essentially the Japanese lack an internal consciousness, unlike Westerners. This is something that Benedict attributes to the fact that the Christian tradition includes the threat of hell and that the Japanese Shintobuddhist tradition does not. Interestingly, traditional Japanese faith does actually have a hell that Benedict seems to have been unaware of. In his examination on why Benedict's work became big in Japan, Lie writes that limitations in social scientific tools for studying non-American societies were so poor that it was easy for multiple societies, post-war Germany and Japan being two, to simply take on the approach of radically differentiating themselves from the Western historical pattern.[49] This is part of what in the case of Japan can be aptly named "self-orientalism".

In his article, Koichi Iwabuchi writes that in the process of creating a unified nation the Japanese tried to construct a certain "Japaneseness", something that effectively was a "samuraisation" of their culture and their past. Iwabuchi writes: "The confucian values of the *samurai* [warrior] class which comprised only six per cent of the population were massively disseminated through education and the workplace". Iwabuchi even cites Roy Andrew Miller in saying that the Japanese were determined to "orientalise" themselves before anyone else could do it for them.[50] Benesch also touches on how *bushidō* was used in post-war Japan, in a similar fashion, for self-orientalism.[51] Thomas Ekholm has studied the *chanyu*, the Japanese

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[47] Benedict 1946, p. 2 f.
[48] Lie, John 2001, p. 252.
[49] Lie 2001, p. 256 f.
[50] Iwabuchi 1994, 8/2: 49-82.
[51] Benesch 2014.

tea ceremony, and its relationship to the West generally and Sweden specifically around the turn of the 20th century. Ekholm exemplifies through Kumpei Matsumoto, an author who employed a self-orientalist perspective as he presented the Japanese tea ceremony in articles directed to a Western audience. It was described, Ekholm maintains, as both something common and a ritual filled with luxury to parallel the tea culture of, for example, Britain. This would partly suggest that casual tea drinking was something widespread and common in Japan, something that it was not in the same way as in the West.[52]

Imperial *bushidō*, prevalent during World War II, lost influence in Japan after the end of the Second World War (see section 2.4). Yet, *bushidō* as an idea was still something that people wanted to hold on to. It had been quite well-established over the past half a century. The idea of the samurai was apparently disconnected from the imperial *bushidō* of the early Shōwa since *kabuki* theatre adaptations and later theatrical adaptations of the *Akō vendetta* became quite popular.[53] The American perception of Japan and its history is also influenced by these *chanbara eiga*. Foreign critics soon started calling these depictions of historical periods "samurai movies". In Japan they are called *chanbara eiga* (eng. "sword fighting films"). They are largely seen as having been a way of avoiding confronting Japan's recent history by escaping to a bygone age of samurai, but at the same time they did constitute a reaction to imperial era *bushidō* by rejecting it, the famous Akira Kurosawa being one such film director. Therefore, the early post-war Japanese films were devoid of explicit references to *bushidō*.[54]

Benesch writes about how early post-war Japanese cinema, with Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954) as a prime example, tried to make samurai an "acceptable subject of entertainment". This required separating them from *imperial bushidō* by separating them from *bushidō* altogether. Thus, Kurosawa's samurai attempts at more realistic depictions of the historical warrior. They were depicted as "ruffians and criminals with questionable motivations". Referencing Yamamoto Mitsuhiro, Benesch writes that searching for "samurai values", aka. *bushidō*, in Kurosawa films because of an orientalist "tradition of samurai discourse" in the Western interactions with Japan in a process of "colonial domestication".[55]

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[52] Ekholm 2018, p. 73-76.
[53] The *Akō vendetta* was when 47 *rōnin*, masterless samurai, revenged their murdered lord in 1702 by killing his murderer in order to uphold their honour. They were all later ordered to commit suicide.
[54] Benesch 2014, p. 217 f.
[55] Benesch 2014, p. 218-219.

2.4   The Historical, Mythical and Modern Bushidō

Today, the historical concept of *bushidō* is considered to be primarily a construction of the Japanese Meiji period (1868-1912). The modern process of mythologisation of the samurai began when there were no longer any samurai around, as their status had been abolished in 1876. This merged with an earlier process of discovering what the samurai were or were supposed to be during the Tokugawa period when the samurai went from being a professional warrior noble class to primarily function as an administrative elite.[56] Benesch describes *bushidō* as both an invented tradition as well as an ideology.[57] With this in consideration I take the position that *bushidō* should be studied as such, an invented tradition and an ideology that is continuously reproduced with a set of goals that are not always clear. The term *bushidō* itself was constructed to match this new ideology-tradition and was well established by the 1890s.[58]

Historian Oleg Benesch writes that people like Nitobe Inazō were inspired by the idea of European mediaeval chivalry, and the contemporary discourse of "English gentlemen" stemming from this tradition, the idea of *bushidō* was developed in order to match the ideals of the Europeans. Nitobe wrote the book *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* was first published in English, not Japanese, in 1899 for a Western audience of intellectuals to say "we are just like you". Not publishing the work in Japanese until later is believed to have been due to it having been, at the time, controversial at home as people had different opinions on what *bushidō* was.[59] The work as well as *bushidō* itself was praised internationally, for example in *The Times*.[60] The modern view of *bushidō* and the historical samurai did not take solid form with Nitobe's publication but was, and is, under constant change.

According to Benesch, historians have not been able to find evidence for a widely accepted ethical system that can be considered a forerunner to the *bushidō* that was introduced in the 1800s. At the same time there is no evidence for a lack of such an ethical system, thus could one not rule out the possibility that the required evidence could be found in the future.[61] Like with the idea of chivalry in western Europe is the idea of hegemonically dominant, allencompasing ethical and moral values among Japanese warriors to be disregarded or viewed with much scepticism. In the Kamakura period, the samurai were

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[56] Benesch 2014, p. 15 f, .
[57] Benesch 2014, p. 6-9.
[58] Benesch 2014, p. 73 f.
[59] Benesch 2014, p. 1, 91 ff.
[60] Benesch 2014, p. 148.
[61] Benesch 2014, p. 5.

expected to show bravery in battle and loyalty towards their masters, the word samurai comes from *saburau* (eng. to serve). There was a supposed risk to losing prestige from, for example, fleeing instead of dying in battle. The reality of this is of course much less romantic and it was not necessarily ruinous to your reputation to have fled a losing battle.[62]

Something that would influence the later concept of *bushidō* was Zen Buddhism that spread among the warrior class during the Kamakura period. It focused on concentration and meditation, was very practical and not dogmatic. In time it would be very associated with martial practice.[63] Roger J. Davies writes that Zen focuses on direct experience of the world, that both stillness and daily work should be appreciated. Something that if anything has had a large influence on Japanese aesthetic life. Davies describes *bushidō* as "a combination of Zen practice and Cofucian loyalty".[64] Confucianism on the other hand being a originally Chinese school of thought that, in its later forms, emphasises in particular "loyalty to the ruler, filial piety to one's father, and strict observance of proper social ritual and etiquette".[65]

During the first half of Shōwa period (1926-1989) up until the end of World War Two *imperial bushidō* was the dominant *bushidō* iteration as it was sanctioned and propagated by the state. It appropriated much of the early *bushidō* in regards to loyalty and order, but applied it to the state and the emperor, although he was hidden away in his palace until the end of the war. It is for this state ideology that Japanese soldiers committed suicidal charges towards the enemy and crash airplanes into American ships of war.[66]

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[62] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, p. 56-57.
[63] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, p. 74.
[64] Davies 2016, p. 92 ff.
[65] Davies 2016, p. 101.
[66] Benesch 2014, p. 181 f, 207 ff.

3 Analysis

3.1 How Video Game Mechanics Represent History

There are many ways in which the game creates the historical Kamakura period setting. It involves both the aesthetics of the game as well as in what it allows and encourages the player to do. For this I have taken the system of analysis from Chapman, whereby measuring player agency in interacting with the historical recreation is used to interpret what narratives it constructs and reinforces. Chapman puts much focus on experience when he describes what playing a game is like: how one experiences a certain historically charged setting or situation.[67] The game allows for the player to traverse the island relatively freely with some limitations. It would, from Chapman's definition, roughly go under the definition of an open story structure, as the player can choose in what order certain things are done within the game, can influence dialogue, roam relatively freely and change aesthetics.[68]

Most importantly this makes it possible for the player to influence how history is consumed and therefore what narratives the player interprets. A concrete example of the interaction between lexia and framing control in the context of *Ghost of Tsushima* would be the following: the bow and arrows are lexia, the framing control is the requirement to have picked up arrows in order to shoot arrows with your bow. This creates the ludonarrative of being a samurai archer. It might seem instinctively true that one needs to have arrows in order to fire them, but a game might as well let you fire arrows without a rule governing the relation between picking up arrows and firing them. Through analysing these interactions of lexia and framing controls I am able to deduce historical narratives being represented and reproduced in the game.

One of the most general ways in which the game represents history is in combat. Early on, the player is armed with a katana and a bow, the two signature weapons of Kamakura period samurai. They are both aesthetically customizable lexia and the primary tools by which the historical samurai is reconstructed through gameplay.[69] The player is able to switch between different "combat stance" lexia, the framing controls only allowing one at a time. These are effective against different enemies and have different animations.[70] The different weapons are unlocked as the player progresses. With practice, the player may learn to seamlessly switch between different stances during combat, giving the player the feeling of

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[67] Chapman 2016.
[68] Chapman 2016, 129-132, 140 f.
[69] See Appendix IV for visual representation.
[70] Ex. one stance is effective against enemies with shields and another one against enemies with spears.

being a skilled samurai warrior, a Kurosawa protagonist that can take down multiple enemies with ease.[71] The aesthetic lexia are generally a prominent way in which player agency can influence the narrative of the game since the player can change dress and weapons that are either acquired by completing different objectives like missions in *Jin's Journey*, tales, or legends. In some cases, the player can literally dress the legends of others by wearing armours connected to a fictional legend of Tsushima. Hence, even though the game might not state it outright, it does help the player construct and experience the narrative of being that legend or someone related to it.

Jin will more and more follow what I will call the "Way of the Ghost", in contrast to the "Way of the Warrior". This is shown in the game by certain lexia in the form of being able to adapt "ghost techniques" such as using throwing daggers, *kunai*, and smoke bombs. You, as the player, are limited in how many such techniques that you can adapt and it stands in contrast to using the lexia of "skill points" that you acquire as you progress. The framing controls limits how many skills you require by demanding a number of skill point lexia in order to acquire certain "ghost techniques" or "samurai techniques".[72] These skill points are acquired in the game by increasing Jin's *legend* through for example completing missions. When the player does this, the player will be presented with different titles like "The Unyielding Wind" and "The Phantom Samurai", the final one achievable being "The Ghost of Tsushima". These are reminiscent of some historical samurai who were given nicknames for their warrior prowess like the Sengoku period rivals Uesugi Kenshin (1530-1578) and Takeda Shingen (1521-1573) who were known as "The Dragon of Echigo" and "The Tiger of Kai" respectively. Similar narrative fragments like the titles can be found in other areas of the game. The "Tales of Tsushima" of the game that act like side missions within *Ghost of Tsushima* would, for example, seem to be a reference to naming conventions for Japanese stories and legends. One example would be the previously referenced *Tale of the Heike*.

These are part of not just constructing the specific narrative of the player being the Ghost or being a samurai, but more broadly of being part of the mythological structure of the historical Japanese warriors. There are a number of other actions that the player can take in order to strengthen the feeling of being a samurai. Some are trivial and some are key gameplay features. An action of more trivial character is cutting bamboo with your katana. By timing button presses you can slice multiple bamboo sticks in reverence to samurai depictions. The player may single-handedly take down whole camps of Mongol troops by

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[71] See Appendix II for visualisation of the different stances and how they are selected.
[72] See Appendix II for a list and illustration of the game's skill system.

challenging the whole camp at the front gate to a stand off. Having the right game skills unlocked and a feeling for timing the player may even kill multiple enemies within a couple of seconds, truly living contemporary samurai legends. The ghost techniques are part of conveying an experience more akin to that of a ninja, another sterotypisised figure in Japanese history. This might be due to the close relationship between ninjas and samurai in popular consciousness.[73] Using a smoke bomb to hide or throwing *kunai* from a rooftop position does not really convey the Kurosawa samurai feeling. The player is in large free to choose what sort of techniques is used and thus also what ludonarrative is built, that of a samurai or that of a more ninja-esk character. Some specific missions limit the player to using ghost techniques by for example not allowing the player to be seen as that would restart the mission.

Poetry has played a prevalent role within East Asian elite tradition and is accessible to players of *Ghost of Tsushima*. We shall see later that it also plays a pronounced role in the history cultural position of the samurai and the Japanese. Haikus can be constructed by the player by interacting with certain areas in the game, the most common being shrines. The requirement to find shrine-lexia is the first framing control for haiku making. Once the player has found a shrine, the player will be presented with a number of lexia to "inspire" the haiku. There are many contemporary legends and stories that include poetry, I will once more point to the previously mentioned *Tale of the Heike*.[74] The most famous Japanese poetry form, haiku, was not present in the Kamkura period of the studied material. *Tanka* (eng. short poem) was the most popular poetic form during that period and consists of five lines 5-7-5-7-7 syllables, whilst *haiku* that was introduced in the 17th century is just three lines of 5-7-5 syllables.[75] Generally there are three lexia to draw inspiration from, everything from treetops to pouring rivers, for each of the three lines in the poem. When the player chooses a possible lexia, Jin will tell a corresponding haiku line, a narrative fragment. The second framing control becomes the limitation in which lexia can be used as inspiration for the 5-7-5 syllable poem. The resulting ludonarrative is that the player has taken on the role of someone who can write poetry, a cultured high-born.

The haiku is specifically interesting as it is the most famous Japanese poetry form and part of the Western perception of Japan, just like the samurai. The fact that samurai did historically write poetry is not irrelevant, but not what is most important. Commercial use of

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[73] The historical "ninjas" ergo assassins and spies were generally also of the samurai class.
[74] Sato, Hiroki, *Legends of the Samurai*, N.Y.: Overlook Press 2012, p. xxvi f.
[75] Varley 2000, p. 43.

history requires the developer to adapt these petitesses as well, and most people are not familiar with the *tanka* that would be what Kamakura period samurai would be familiar with. In the Japanese localisation of the game, the narrative fragment produced actually results in a contemporary *tanka*, something I assume is a result of the larger cultural knowledge of its existence within Japan.

3.2   Representations of the Samurai, the Japanese and the Mongols

The characters of the game are reflections of different interests and cultural understandings that the producer is either aware or unaware of. Some characters are more developed and are therefore more interesting to analyse. The protagonist Jin Sakai is an example of a character with a lot of depth due to his importance to the overall story. We can see his personality, inner demons, what drives him, what is important to him etc.. Other characters fill less expanded roles in the game universe and are thus of less interest. In the beginning of the game Jin relies wholly on his uncle, Lord Shimura, his only family after his father was murdered. Jin was effectively raised by his uncle. He has been taught discipline, to master his emotions and to live honourably, all by his uncle. Shimura is the only Japanese character in the game without a personal name, which would signify his high status. Nobody else has the rank to be addressed by only their clan name.

Much of the historical setting of the game is directly and indirectly presented through character dialogue. Some aspects seem to have no need for explanation though. The idea of the historical samurai, as it exists in the Western history consciousness, does not need to be explained as such. The mere word samurai belongs as much to Western as to Japanese history culture and could itself conjure up the required understanding of the setting. "Samurai" is presented in the game as a ubiquitous term for the warriors of 13th century Japan. The samurai are warriors, they have samurai horses and they have samurai armour. Worth noting though is that the term "samurai" is not present in contemporary sources before the Muromachi period (1336-1573), which makes it an anachronism for the represented period. This might be due to the familiarity of the term to a Western audience. The Japanese localisation of the game for instance has a more varied, and "historically accurate" terminology.[76] Since the game is primarily an instance of commercial usage of history can one expect the developers to adapt the setting to the target audience. The same can be said for

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[76] An example would be using the term *mononofu*, a contemporary term for warriors, rather than the anachronistic "samurai".

games in general, as it can for many other media such as films and literature to different degrees.

When Benedict introduces the Japanese, she does so with previously mentioned dichotomies. The most prevalent one being the "cult of aestheticism" and "cult of sword", the chrysanthemum and the sword.[77] This itself is reflective of early *bushidō* thought as the samurai is supposed to master *bun* and *bu*, letterdness and martiality.[78] This is something I can only assume reached Benedict through for example Nitobe or some other English-language Japanese literature. It is also represented through the combat and the poetry in *Ghost of Tsushima*. The player is allowed to see Jin reflect on his life and write poetry about his environment. Zen meditation would be the most obvious inspiration for this as stated previously. The haiku produced featured in the game that was mentioned under section 3.1 would be one of the clearest examples of Benedict's "chrysanthemum". Crossing the bridge between aestheticism and martial prowess is that Jin is able to read some Chinese due to having had to read Sun Tzu, referencing his work"The Art of War", an old Chinese strategy book of world fame.[79]

The Japanese samurai ist not the only group spotlighted in the game. A second one would be the invading Mongols. Most people are, to some degree, familiar with the Mongols and Genghis Khan. The historical Mongols were an ethnic group native to the territories of today's Mongolia, China and Russia, and the influence and might of the Mongol Empire reached, during the 13th and 14th centuries, from Japan in the east to Palestine and the European continent in the West. During this time, Mongols became rulers of, for example, both Persia and China. When the empire crumbled, many Mongol settlements across Eurasia assimilated with the local populations and customs. It was, in other words, an ethnic group with significant influence and impact on both Western and Eastern history and societies.

The game, however, never explains why the Mongols are invading. It is rather something - a characteristic - that comes from them being *the Mongols*. In this way, the Mongols are subjected to one type of orientalist stereotype. They are viewed solely as a collective, and we grasp few of their motivations and motives other than expansion and destruction. This view of the Mongols would, again, adhere to both Western and Japanese history culture. The game reveals that the Mongols as a group are led by "Khotun Khan", a fictional cousin of Khubilai Khan and grandson of Genghis Khan, and the game's primary

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[77] Benedict 1946, p. 2.
[78] Benesch 2014, p. 31-33
[79] "The Tale of Ryuzo", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 1: Rescue Lord Shimura*.

antagonist. Khotun's existence is plausible due to Genghis' prolificacy in life and Khotun makes a fitting main villain for the setting. Through his visuals being reminiscent of the real-world rulers of the Mongol Empire and the direct references to Genghis and Kubilai the player's historical consciousness is activated. Even though Khotun is none of these real-life people he does fulfil the requirements as a stand-in. He is *basically like* Kubilai and Genghis.[80]

On the first page of this thesis, I write the following quote by Shimura: "We will face death… and defend our home. Tradition… Courage… Honour… They are what make us. We are warriors of Tsushima. We are samurai!", which is taken from the opening battle of the game. It is declared when they are about to face an overwhelming enemy. In the same scene, it is established that they are but "eighty samurai against an army" and Jin comments that there must be thousands in the enemy army.[81] Despite the overwhelming advantage in numbers and equipment, as the enemy is shown to have siege equipment, it is the samurai spirit which helps the defenders prevail. This is quite reminiscent of how Benedict describes how the Japanese acted during the Pacific War. Benedict writes how the military equipment of the Japanese military was just the "outwards show of the underlying military equipment" and draws a parallel between this and the sword of the samurai as it "had been the symbol of his virtue".[82]

This notion that Benedict invokes, that the Japanese believe that the spiritual can overcome the material, returns in *Ghost of Tsushima* when they storm against the Mongols. "It was a pitting of our faith in things against their faith in spirit", Benedict writes about the Pacific War.[83] The way in which samurai are expected to fight reminds more than anything of *imperial bushidō* of the 20th century, that which demanded soldiers to charge the enemy head on, never surrender and give their lives in battle. *Bushidō* as a cult of death has traces to the mid Tokugawa period as well. Especially relevant is the *Hagakure* by samurai and Zen Buddhist priest Yamamoto Tsunetomo. It is a collection of practical and spiritual advice that was directed towards members of the samurai class. It largely equated the way of the samurai with finding an honourable death.[84] Yamamoto had personal reasons for writing these things down, but his writings were ripped out of their context when applied to imperial *bushidō*. These notions and the experiences of the Pacific War is also what influenced Benedict in her

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[80] See Appendix IV for visual comparisons.
[81] *Prologue* – Jin's Journey.
[82] Benedict 1946, p. 23.
[83] Benedict 1946, p. 22.
[84] Benesch 2014, p. 19 f.

writings. Fighting this way proves ineffective against the hordes of enemies and Jin will take another path to gain victory, something that is essential to the central conflict of the game.

In the opening battle of the game, Shimura sends one of his fiercest warriors to fight the Mongol leader in single combat. The warrior presents himself and his lineage, a typical *nanori*. The expected duel is rejected by Khotun who does not answer the *nanori*. Khotun instead empties his glass of alcoholic beverage on the samurai warrior and lobs a torch onto him, setting him ablaze. Soon after, the actual battle commences.[85] Shimura expects, as does the other samurai, that the Mongols should meet his fighter in honour. This is fundamental to the *samurai code* (read *bushidō*) that plays a large role in the game's story: fighting with honour. This scene brings to mind the first few lines of Benedict's work: "The Japanese were the most alien enemy the United States had ever fought in an all-out struggle. In no other war with a major foe had it been necessary to take into account such exceedingly different habits of acting and thinking."[86]

If I were to change "the Japanese" for "the Mongols" and "the United States" for "the Japanese", then this quote might as well have described the in-game Japanese encounter with the Mongol hordes. The Mongols were after all historically used to a different mode of combat regarding both scale and methodology. The hordes from Mongolia share this curiously similar position in the history culture of both the Far East and the West: a complete *other*.[87] They cannot be understood and they are here to destroy. The original statement of the quote still holds true as well as the player, likely a Westerner, would probably see Shimura's view of fighting honourably til death as something quite alien today as well. All the Japanese characters in the game switch between speaking Japanese and English depending on which version of the game you play. That is for the player to understand what the characters are saying, it is understood that they are "in reality" speaking Japanese no matter the version. This need for the player to understand the characters does not extend to most Mongols. Khotun makes a point of having learned the language of the Japanese, which is why he speaks English or Japanese in the game depending on the version. But the run of the mill Mongol soldier only speaks Mongolian and even the game's subtitles will be in Mongolian, unlike all the Japanese characters.

From a gameplay perspective, this adds to the player's immersion and makes sense within the universe of the game. The player's character, Jin, would not understand the

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[85] *Prologue* – Jin's Journey.
[86] Benedict 1946, p. 1.
[87] Steppe people are similarly portrayed in the games *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* and *Crusader Kings 3*.

Mongols. The fact remains though, that the Mongols become just a faceless horde without any depth. We are not meant to understand them. It is worth pointing out once more that in reality the forces of the Mongols would in large part have been composed of Chinese and Korean soldiers, unlike the ethnically pure Mongol forces of the game. Interestingly, this has sparked controversy in China.[88] The only in-game trace of this is the previously mentioned Korean ships off the island's coast. The Japanese warriors are thus represented as being of a more honourable kind than their Mongol counterparts. As we shall see, the honour of the samurai is a recurring theme within the game. Since Jin still has the "samurai mindset" early on in the story, he tries to rescue Shimura all by himself, something considered a suicide mission, but that he gladly attempts for his code and honour. It is further reminiscent of the *Hagakure*.

Lord Shimura, who is presented as both a brave samurai warrior and *jitō* of Tsushima, is idealised by Jin, both for his martial prowess as well as his benevolent rule. The primary role of the *jitō* historically was, as previously mentioned, to handle tax collection for the shogunal government. Shimura on the other hand seems to follow some ruler ideal that is much more modern and Western. In the game they describe him as being a father to his people, a description that has been quite common in Western historiography. In the United States they often speak of their *Founding fathers*, and especially of George Washington as being *the Father of the Nation*. In Sweden, relevant examples would be someone like Gustav Vasa or Per Albin Hansson, both of which have been given the equivalent epithet *landsfader* (eng. "father of the country"). In the first part of the game, which revolves around Jin's attempt to free Shimura from Mongol captivity, Jin continuously speaks about how freeing Shimura will lead to Tsushimas salvation, he for example says that he will "take a deep breath" when Shimura is free as it will mean hope for the the island.[89]

There is a very collectivist ethos being espoused in the game, for example in regards to portraying Shimura as a father to a people that he loves, goes both ways as the common man seems to be very supportive of their samurai leadership. Donations are being collected within temples to support the resistance against the Mongols. There is a mutual respect between the ruling and the ruled, something that on one hand falls in line with democratic ideals, but also with the Japanese collectivism suggested by Benedict. The game's way of

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[88] Chiu, Karen, "Ghost of Tsushima's Mongol invaders spark nationalist debate over PlayStation 4 game in China", *South China Morning Post*, 2020-07-21, https://www.scmp.com/abacus/games/article/3093956/ghost-tsushimas-mongol-invaders-spark-nationalist-debate-over (hämtad 2022-05-22).
[89] "The Warrior's Code", *Act 1: Rescue Lord Shimura* – "Jin's Journey".

depicting the struggle between Jin's desire to follow the *bushidō* of his family upbringing and his desire to free Tsushima could be interpreted as a fight between pragmatism and idealism. This would be a very real concern when compared to what the historical sources tell us about the ideal of the samurai and their reality. I would say that it also stands to reason that it becomes a reflection of American individualism. Something that Jin could be considered to represent as the game progresses.

After Shimura has been freed from capture the player will start doing missions with him and have more dialogue involving him. Before he learns that Jin is the rumoured "Ghost" he will praise Jin for remembering all that he taught him and that he is honoured to fight beside him.[90] Shimura is clearly sceptical of all alternative non-samurai ways of war as he even calls a hwacha a "weapon of the enemy, not the samurai".[91] During a later mission Shimura stands in shock of Jin as he sees that Jin used poison darts against the enemy and attacked them from behind.[92] Shimura condemns it as terror and not a tool the samurai should use as they are supposed to be a paragons to the people. This behaviour, he says, goes against the code he raised Jin to follow.[93]

The character that most strongly encourages Jin to be pragmatic is the thief Yuna. Jin has many interactions with Yuna, especially during the part of the story where the goal is to save her younger brother, Taka. The first such mission, fittingly called "The Warrior's Code", has Jin stab a Mongol guard in the back as Jin and Yuna are trying to break into a camp.[94] He is then confronted by a flashback to one of the childhood lessons by Shimura, in which he is told that, contrary to barbarians, a true warrior should look his opponent in the eyes as he kills him. The context is a revenge execution for the attempted murder of Shimura by an assassin of a rebellious clan. This goes hand in hand with Inazō's writings about revenge that are reproduced by Benedict. The Japanese require revenge, it is presented as an almost primal *need*.[95] In the same way, Jin's instantaneous reaction to the assassin is that he must pay for his crime with his life, something Shimura does not question, but rather encourages: "Look him in the eye. And teach him that samurai never act out of anger or fear. And take his life. With

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[90] "A Reckoning in Blood", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura.*
[91] The hwacha was a Korean siege weapon that was not developed before the 14th and 15th centuries but is still present within the game.
[92] Worth noting is that this was in a cutscene, so the player had no choice in using these techniques unlike most of the game.
[93] "The Fate of Tsushima", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura.*
[94] "The Warrior's Code", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 1: Rescue Lord Shimura.*
[95] Benedict 1946, p. 161.

honour". When Jin later goes against these words, he is breaking the above mentioned notion of the spirit overcoming material supremacy.

Such flashbacks are the setting for all conversations between Jin and Shimura between Shimura's capture and his later rescue. In an earlier flashback the *Sakai family code* is reiterated by Jin on Shimura's request. This code to Jin effectively acts as his family's interpretation of *bushidō*. The loyalty to family and lord was espoused by another Tokugawa period thinker, the military strategist Yamago Sokō. He was of the opinion that letteredness needs to be combined with the warrior role, the *bu* and *bun* mentioned previously. Letteredness mostly meant being aware of and following Confucian ideals of loyalty to family and lord. It also included aesthetic skills though.[96] I see this as something that Benedict picked up by proxy when she discusses "taking one's proper station" as well as the supposed debt Japanese people have to each other.[97]

As the game progresses and Jin takes on more and more of the Ghost's characteristics he actually becomes more and more similar to the common image of the ninja, both in actions and appearance. As stated in section 3.1 will the player start having access to poison, smoke bombs and is given a dress-up reminiscent of ninja-centric video games.[98] The dress-up is given to him when Jin decides to go against his uncle Shimura and sneak in to the Mongols and poison them in their final holdout during the siege of Castle Shimura.[99] In the end this leads to Jin's imprisonment when he refuses to distance himself from the Ghost. Shimura asks that Jin blame Yuna for this behaviour as someone must answer for these tactics to the shogun.

Benedict writes about how the Japanese value the concept of "taking one's proper station". Meaning that you are in the correct place in a hierarchy and act accordingly. Jin is supposed to follow his uncle's wishes, because he is above him in the hierarchy, his way is the right way. "The claims of the family come before the claims of the individual".[100] It is in his rejection of this that Jin, and thus the player, take on an individualism that narratively seems to be the right choice for the character in this context. You have the people with you, you have made progress, what has Shimura been able to achieve through his code? The triumph of individualism and freedom would from Benedict's perspective be natural as society advances and Jin and Yuna both represent a younger generation than Shimura.[101]

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[96] Benesch 2014, p. 20 f.
[97] Benedict 1946, p. 43 f, 98 f.
[98] See Appendix IV for visual comparison.
[99] "From the Darkness", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura*.
[100] Benedict 1946, p. 55.
[101] Benedict 1946, p. 46.

A stark contrast to the honour of the samurai are the *rōnin*, masterless warriors. They are warriors of equal skill but do not pay homage to any clan nor do they follow *bushidō*. This is something that is continuously brought up in the game. The *rōnin* are overall shrouded in mystery. At one point Jin tells a woman that "*rōnin* are dangerous, unpredictable."[102] It should be noted that *rōnin* were historically viewed with scepticism by Japanese governments.[103] Even as Jin goes further from the path he was set upon by his uncle he still continues to value warrior ethics and being honourable as he contrasts himself to the *rōnin* through statements such as "you are no warrior, just a murdering dog" to one *rōnin* and "I hope you find honour in your next life" to another.[104] The character Ryuzo is the leader of a group of *rōnin* called the "Straw hats", a group Jin initially tried to recruit for the liberation of Tsushima as Ryuzo also happens to be his oldest friend. Ryuzo held a grudge against Jin for a duel in a tournament that Ryuzo had lost to Jin, he had seen it as his one chance to prove himself and maybe be taken into the samurai class.[105] The Straw hats betray Jin and join the Mongols because the group is starving. In the end Ryuzo is killed by Jin in a duel in castle Shimura. This is after having begged Jin to tell everyone that he was Jin's spy. Jin could not forgive his friend's treachery.[106] Despite having gone against his family's code, Jin was still a patriot. Something an American audience would likely value more than any code of honour handed down from above.

Shimura at one point makes a big deal of recognising Jin, his nephew, as his son by adoption and formally requests this of the shogun in a request for assistance, both of which are accepted. In what Benedict calls the Japanese notion of "taking one's proper station" it would make sense that this is a big deal since it formally orders Jin into Shimura's family as his heir. Since it is acknowledged by the shogun it does make Jin responsible for Shimura's honour.[107] Lord Oga of the shogunal reinforcements even remark on Shimura's failure, in particular in controlling Jin and that the Oga clan might have to take command if Shimura does not get the situation under control.[108] It further suggests how the hierarchy is supposed to uphold societal cohesion and order.

Khotun Khan remarks that the samurai's code makes them predictable. In that regard Jin, the Ghost, separates himself from the samurai. Something that makes Jin dangerous

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[102] "The Black Wolf", 3rd tale in *Yuna Tales* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura.*
[103] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, p. 135.
[104] "The Six Blades of Kojiro", *Mythic Tales* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura.*
[105] "Tale of Ryuzo", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 1: Rescue Lord Shimura.*
[106] "From the Darkness", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura.*
[107] Benedict 1946, p. 54 f.
[108] "Honor and Ash", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 3: Kill the Khan*.

according to the Khan.[109] This interestingly parallels how the historical samurai had to adapt their tactics and strategies of war from the first Mongol invasion to the second. Jin would thus be more "realistic" in a sense. The ideals of the samurai clash with reality. As stated previously, a samurai could likely escape from a battle without losing face because the Japanese were not any less pragmatic than any other humans in the world. It is relevant once more to point at the European idea of chivalry as a good comparison since *bushidō* has been partially constructed in relation to it.

After the final battle at port Izumi Jin receives a message from Shimura who wishes to meet. This is the final mission of *Jin's Journey*. They walk together, reaching a cave where it is revealed that Shimura has been ordered by the shogun to execute Jin for his actions during the Mongol invasion.[110] A fight ensues where Jin, the player, eventually comes out on top. Here, the player is given the choice of fulfilling Shimura's final request of an honourable death, or to stick with his new pragmatic style and just leave, becoming the Ghost permanently. Benedict speaks of *giri* as being the highest form of debt in Japanese society. This is a debt that one for example has to their family.[111] Jin has a debt to Shimura for having raised him and Shimura sees it as his right to have an honourable death, something that Jin should grant him. In the end, both decisions seem to me to come from valuing his family as Jin, when the player picks to spare Shimura, says that he has no honour but he does not kill family.

The specific connection to family within the game is itself of interest. As mentioned previously *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* presents the Japanese as collectivists in contrast to individualist Americans. Jin's ethic and morale does not come from within as Ruth Benedict describes the American ethic and morale. Instead it is something that is handed down from his family. Jin's internal conflict then instead becomes a conflict of freeing himself from his family and finding his own way, his own right and wrong. This becomes especially clear towards the climax of the game's story when he openly goes against his uncle. Even when Jin changes, even when he becomes this more pragmatic person "without honour", it is not something he has got to himself. It is by the thief Yuna and others encouragement, the *needs* of reality that has forced him to abandon his previously so important ideals. But it is in the end, when the player can finally choose to completely abandon the code by not finishing Shimura off that Jin has become someone who does not

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[109] "The Fate of Tsushima", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura*.
[110] "The Tale of Lord Shimura", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 3: Kill the Khan*.
[111] Benedict 1946, p. 145 f,

care what his peers think of his actions. He has finally become American, as Benedict imagines Americaness, someone with an individual moral sprung from within, a free person. Brown parallels Jin, and the player's, new freedom with how one is free to roam Tsushima after the story has ended to complete whatever is left in terms of side missions etc..[112]

3.3 Representations of other characters

In the previous section, I discussed major groups like the Mongols and the samurai and related them to a few specific characters that are important representatives of this group. In this section I will focus on specific characters that I find to be of interest as representatives of different phenomena. I will start by looking more at Yuna that was mentioned in the previous section. Curiously, Taka, brother of the thief Yuna, is not treated with the respect that is stereotypical of filial relations in Japan. Benedict writes that it is a rigid structure of the older brother commanding respect of the younger and has a significant influence on the younger's life.[113] Being a female would subordinate you further except in the case of a mother child relationship.[114] In the case of Taka and Yuna it is clearly remarked that Yuna is the one who takes care of Taka and often tries to direct him toward what she thinks is best for him as well as being overall protective. This could be seen as a case of an ideal that only the elite has the luxury of following. As Yuna and Taka, with them both being orphaned former slaves and Yuna being a thief, do not have the material capacity to "care" about these structures. On the other hand, it would be attractive in a Western context to try to appeal to young modern, and progressive, demographics by showing a brother being taken care of by his sister, rather than the more conventional vice versa.

Sadonobu Ishikawa is a master of archery who once rejected training Jin. He is sought out for support in freeing Shimura from captivity. Sensei Ishikawa's skills themselves are legendary.[115] One peasant asks Jin if it is true that Ishikawa "sank a pirate ship with a single arrow". The truth being that he routed a pirate fleet by killing a captain on a ship from land.[116] It is quite typical to portray old masters, especially Japanese, or broadly East Asian, in this way: a master of incredible skill or holder of esoteric knowledge.[117] He is thus a mythologised figure and a stereotypical portrayal that would be recognisable to both target audiences. Jin

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[112] Brown 2021, p. 57.
[113] Benedict 1946, p. 53 f.
[114] Benedict 1946, p. 48 f.
[115] He is called "Sensei Ishikawa" in the English version of the game, the correct transliteration of the name and title from Japanese though would be *Ishikawa-sensei.*
[116] "The Tale of Sensei Ishikawa", *Jin's Journey* & 1st tale in *Ishikawa tales* during *Act 1: Rescue Lord Shimura.*
[117] Famous examples would be Master Yoda from *Star Wars* and Master Oogway from *Kung Fu Panda.*

finds Ishikawa in his home, one he notes is a "humble home for a samurai". This goes hand-in-hand with the concept of the great master, as it also happens to be located on a remote, hard to reach, mountain. He agrees to help Jin once he has found his missing student.

Ishikawa's apprentice is called Tomoe, an archery prodigy of humble origin. The character of Tomoe is to a Western audience quite an obscure reference. She is an iteration of the historical female samurai Tomoe Gozen. References to historical figures in this sense is something that is quite common within Japanese popular culture, but would be scarcely understood in the West.[118] This sort of obscure reference is common and perceived as less obscure in Japanese video games. I would guess that this is a result of taking inspiration from Japanese video games in order to pander to the Japanese audience. The historical Tomoe Gozen was, just like her game counterpart, specifically known for her skills with the bow. She is supposed to have lived during the Kamakura period, according to the *Tale of the Heike*. Curiously, Tomoe is presented differently in *Ghost of Tsushima* from how incarnations of Tomoe Gozen are usually presented in Japanese popular media. Although Tomoe's skills in the game are reflecting her historical counterpart's, she does play quite a different role in the story. Instead of a captain of troops she is a lost apprentice. She has joined the Mongols after Ishikawa betrayed her and is only redeemed by the end where she sails away from Tsushima for her own adventure.

As has been suggested by Chapman, the historical elements are subordinate to other gameplay decisions.[119] I would like to suggest that Tomoe's role in the game is such an example as well, but for somewhat different reasons. Whilst incarnations of Tomoe Gozen in Japanese popular media are more often portrayed "accurately", Tomoe in *Ghost of Tsushima* seems to rather fill the role of the strong female character, popular in the West. Most Westerners playing the game would have no idea about who Tomoe Gozen is, and thus the reference would be rendered meaningless if implemented a priori in the development. Recognisable concepts in the West, maybe especially in regards to East Asian depictions, is a master, a *sensei*, a role filled by Ishikawa, and an apprentice, a role filled by Tomoe. Nothing in that requires her to be female, nor a commoner, nor a reference to Tomoe Gozen. Both meritocracy and strong female characters would be attractive to a Western audience. I would make the guess that they did not first and foremost come up with the idea of referencing Tomoe Gozen, but rather the structure previously suggested, and then found that they could

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[118] Examples of representations of Tomoe in Japanese-produced games would be *Persona 4* and *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*.
[119] Chapman 2016, p. 20.

make that reference. Tomoe Gozen was thus appropriated to fit a Western audience rather than how she is normally displayed. Just peeking at the reception of the game, multiple articles have been written about making a spin-off game about Tomoe suggests that it worked.[120]

Lady Masako Adachi is another interesting character who helps Jin. She is the last remaining member of her clan, as the rest were slaughtered. Masako's tales revolves around avenging her clan's murderers, something that she has become obsessed with. How Masako takes revenge over everything else is something that would be quite familiar in the West both as a universal reaction to being wronged, but also something that is specifically related to the Japanese. It is again relevant to bring up *giri*. Revenge could be a way to satisfy *giri* and should in this context be seen as the only way from Benedict's perspective.[121] The storyline would make sense as a motive both from a Western perspective, an Orientalist perspective and a self-Orientalist perspective. We understand revenge, we see the Japanese as people valuing honour and the Japanese see themselves in this way as well. The *Masako tales* are therefore quite well fit into the crossing of the relevant history cultures.

In the end of the storyline it is discovered that it was in fact Masako's own sister that led the conspiracy to slaughter the Adachi clan. It led Masako to make a choice between the honourable in avenging her family and killing her last living family member. In the end she decides to end her sister's life, thus choosing what is honourable. Something that interestingly parallels the decision Jin later has to make about his uncle. The end to this side-story thus prepares the player to make a similar choice as Masako did.[122]

On a slightly different note, it is worth pointing out that one of the conspirators was in fact Masako's earlier lover, Mai, who was banished from the Adachi clan estate a few years back.[123] This suggests that Masako was attracted to the same sex, if not both sexes. This was actually something not necessarily uncommon in contemporary Japan, at least among men. It is not apparent from the sources how the situation was for homosexual woman at the time but it is probable that it was at the very least tolerated.[124] That being said, like other things this is not to be seen as something that was included because of its historicity, but rather something

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[120] Tassi, Paul, "'Ghost Of Tsushima 2' Has A Clear Hero In Waiting, A Legendary Woman Samurai", *Forbes*, 2020-07-28, https://www.forbes.com/sites/paultassi/2020/07/28/ghost-of-tsushima-2-has-a-clear-hero-in-waiting-a-legendary -woman-samurai/?sh=2ddaa9eef3e6 (hämtad 2022-05-22).
[121] Benedict 1946, p. 163 f.
[122] "The Sister Betrayed", *Masako Tales* during *Act 3: Kill the Khan*.
[123] "The Thief", 7th tale in *Masako Tales* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura*.
[124] Dynes, Wayne R. & Stephen Donaldson (ed.), *Asian homosexuality*, USA: Garland Publishing 1992.

that was included in order to accommodate a modern Western audience. That it could be historically accurate is secondary to the commercial interest.

I have previously mentioned that not all characters from the large gallery of the game will be part of this analysis. I mentioned Jin as one that obviously takes up much space in the analysis, as he is the protagonist of the game. The sake salesman Kenji plays a very limited role in the story and is therefore an example of a less interesting character even though he has a decent number of lines as he is not as developed as other characters, nor does he seem very representative for what I am analysing. The warrior monk Norio on the other hand is an example of a very expanded character and thus one with enough depth to spend time on in the analysis. He is interesting because he is, at least to me, one of the most obscure characters in relation to Western history culture. Both his character, the topics he speaks of and the references he makes are not things that I think most Westerners would recognize. In one scene he speaks of praying for the divine wind (*kamikaze*) to sweep away the invaders and save Japan. This is something that the monks were asked to do during the historical Mongol invasions as well.[125] It might be a case of exoticism, presenting something foreign as interesting and intriguing.

Moreover, Norio is a standard representation of the Japanese warrior monk, like for example Benkei from *Tale of the Heike*, both are even shown wielding *naginata*, despite katanas being more common among warrior monks historically.[126] Norio also proceeds to take on a similar role to Benkei in the story. Benkei was the ally and close friend of Minamoto Yoshitsune, who rebelled against his brother, Minamoto Yoritomo, after the Genpei and in the end only had Benkei at his side.[127] Norio becomes one of Jin's close followers and helps him in finally freeing Tsushima from the last of the Mongols.[128] It is therefore worth considering that it might not be a complete coincidence that Benkei and Norio both supported a sort of rebel, Yoshitsune against his brother and Jin against his uncle. Norio would, to me, seem more like a character that in a stricter sense fits into the Japanese history culture, and would therefore be a bit more directed towards the Japanese audience. I have mentioned previously that I have played the English language version of the game and the only other version is a Japanese language localisation. This is understandable given the game's setting, but it would also explain why the game's representations mixes quite freely references attractive to a Western audience with the ones more directed to a Japanese one.

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[125] Sansom, George 1958 p. 445.
[126] See Appendix IV for a visual comparison.
[127] Ottosson & Ekholm 2018, 60 f.
[128] "Eternal Blue Sky", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 3: Kill the Khan*.

One aspect of Norio that would resonate with a Western audience is the conflict of whether a monk should also be a warrior. This is for example reflected in conversations between Norio and the pacifistic monk Hochi, where the latter condemns armed resistance. Hochi has also worked as a healer for the Mongols, saying that it matters little to him if someone in need is Mongol or Japanese. Also something strongly reflecting a quite modern view of medicine and nursing.[129]

Quite late in the story, it is revealed that Yuna and her brother Taka were formally slaves, in fact the only ones who managed to escape the slavers' farmstead. Jin is tasked by Yuna to avenge everyone that has suffered under the slavers she and her brother suffered under. Jin no longer seems to have any qualms about acting dishonourably. "I will kill them in their sleep", he suggests to Yuna.[130] Worth noting is that the slavers are originally to be punished by Jin for working with the Mongols, not the slavery itself. The slavers are to be seen as fifth columnists for cooperating with Mongols. Japanese people overall are rarely enemies, if so, they are mostly specific characters that are working with the Mongols, like Tomoe, Ryuzo or the slavers. Enemy Japanese more generally would in that case be henchmen of slavers or *rōnin*. Any part of the population that are cooperating with the Mongols are generally seen with disdain but in the end they often have reasons for helping the Mongols that would at the very least be empathetic to the player.

I would generally not say that the characters are exceptionally stereotyped in ways that for example is common in Japanese fighting games. Rachael Hutchingson writes that stereotypes in general are "practical, logistical and financial reasons" for adapting characters in that game for that genre. The story is given in small portions in minutes-long battles and short cutscenes.[131] *Ghost of Tsushima* in comparison needs more complex characters because of its large story-focus, something that results in characters that feel real, but not necessarily representative for any historical reality.

Interestingly, when it comes to all the characters with their own tales in the game become Jin's allies specifically and not of the army or Shimura. When Jin is imprisoned by Shimura they all stand beside Jin and meet up with him afterwards. They also support his decision to sneak in and poison the Mongols.[132] They, just like Jin, either abandon their previous principles with the challenges that face them. So in some regards the case could be

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[129] "Three Actions, Three Illusions", 2nd tale in *Norio Tales* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura*.
[130] "Silent Death", 2nd tale in *Yuna Tales* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura*.
[131] Hutchinson 2019, p. 72.
[132] "From the Darkness", *Jin's Journey* during *Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura*.

made that these characters represent the reality of dire historical situations. The ideals of Lord Shimura are only really applicable within a stable society and not in a situation of crisis.

3.4   Representations of locations and the historical space

The historical setting is presented to the player in a myriad of different ways. One of particular interest is the landscape where the game takes place. It is fundamental to the context in which the game takes place and continuously influences the player's interpretation of the game universe. The island of Tsushima has been recreated with a Kamakura period look featuring castles, villages and more. They all constitute lexia that the player can interact with, to different degrees, depending on the framing control, something I discussed more in-depth under section 3.1. The player has the ability to take part in samurai legends that have been constructed specifically for the game, but with inspiration from older, historical legends. The player takes part in the legends as Jin does by hearing rumours or listening to them around a campfire. The game rewards the player for following up on myths and rumours with gaining boons, like armours and weapons of legendary reputation as well as being able to master super-natural skills. These myths are similar to myths that have passed down through Japanese history and to a degree what contemporary samurai of the Kamakura period would have heard of, *Tale of Heike* being one such example.

The island of Tsushima itself plays a large role for the historical setting. A location of particular interest is castle Kaneda, which is located in the centre of the island, splitting it in two. The historical Kaneda castle has been reconstructed in order to fill the role of the Mongol leader's first headquarter. All these landscape lexia's historical significance is of course subordinate to their gameplay function. For instance an important game enemy, a *game boss*, is often situated in castles.[133] The Kaneda castle aesthetic must primarily fill this role of *game boss castle*. Freedoms are thus taken in the recreation of the castle, as well as other landscape lexia, to make them gameplay friendly. A prominent example is a cliffside pathway into the castle that can only be reached at a certain point in the game. It is also interesting to note that the in-game castle has been moved from its historical location to better block the land bridge to the other half of the island where the rest of the game is set.

Continuing with the subordination of the historical setting to the necessities of the game, there is a second castle in the game, castle Shimura. Not too surprisingly, this is the castle of the Shimura clan. This castle, unlike Kaneda castle, has no real-life equivalent.

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[133] One of the most famous examples being Bowser in the game series Super Mario who is located in a castle.

Rather it fills the role of a *second boss castle* as Khotun moves there after Kaneda has fallen to the protagonist.[134] The player is also reminded of the Mongol occupation of the island as Korean ships can be seen around the island from vantage points. Mongol camps and patrols are also regularly encountered around the island. This is part of the historical setting that is only conveyed through environmental lexia. The Koreans and Chinese are as previously discussed not really mentioned in the game, except when Jin remarks that he knows Chinese.

Not only specific landmarks and environments are used to shape the player's experience of a given location, but also positioning and cinematography. For example, the game makes use of imagery inspired by Japanese *chanbara eiga*, such as Kurosawa's works. The game even has a specific setting that lets the player turn on what is called *Kurosawa mode*, which gives the game a black and white look as well as stronger winds and amplified shadows, reminiscent of old Japanese movies. As stated by the game's directors, Jason Conell and Nate Fox, they drew inspiration from film, especially in how the one-on-one duels ought to feel with camera angles, moves etc.. Fox claimed that the well-known Kurosawa movie *Seven Samurai* (1954) "defines my concept of what a samurai is". Another inspiration is *Sanjuro* (1963), since it ends with a standoff between two samurai.[135] The references to the stand-off can be seen in how the game, through framing controls, limits the player's movement in specific situations as a single enemy approaches for combat. I would like to comment that the use of classical movies for inspiration is itself a sort of use of history due to the movies' age. When exploring the game world, the player will encounter static scenes, for example depictions of executions among the Mongols. One that is reminiscent of modern firing squads is people standing with their backs towards the executioners that fire a single arrow in their backs at point blank range. In other words this would be a form of execution that a modern American player would recognise. It also serves to reinforce the picture of the Mongols as merely brutal and savage murderers. Burned down villages, charred and impaled corpses may lay around as well.[136]

Western media has previously been criticised for their romantic depictions of the early Japanese warriors. The 2003 feature film *The Last Samurai* starring Tom Cruise is one such example. The movie was criticised for depicting samurai uncritically as honourable

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[134] This is again reminiscent of how the Super Mario game boss Bowser moves castle after losing.
[135] Romano, Nick, "How *Ghost of Tsushima* teamed with Akira Kurosawa's estate for new cinematic mode", *Entertainment Weekly*, 2020-07-08, https://ew.com/gaming/ghost-of-tsushima-akira-kurosawa-estate-cinematic-mode/ (hämtad 2022-05-22).
[136] See Appendix IV for example.

do-gooders, more fitting for a children's storybook.[137] This is an example of how different historical representations can clash, as described by Ulf Zander. It can and does create friction within the same history culture This sort of friction would reasonably be even bigger when there are interactions between different history cultures.[138] In the case of *Ghost of Tsushima*, this sort of criticism can be mediated to a degree by the previously mentioned localisation as well as the overlapping between the two history cultures.

I ask myself if there is any more critical discourse being reproduced or if the references to Kurosawa are only lip service to someone whose films the developers enjoy. It would also be wrong to separate any Kurosawa-esk imagery within the game from the history culture of the Western world. As stated previously, the author of *Bushidō : The Soul of Japan*, Nitobe Inazō influences readers in both post-war Japan as well as the Euro-American sphere. References to the works of Kurosawa do not undo possible Orientalist strands and depictions. This is due to the large amount of self-Orientalism that happens in Japan, as can be seen with the example of how Nitobe Inazo's work in new Japanese translation increased in sales within post-war Japan, interestingly especially by Diet members.[139]

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[137] Rich, Motoko, "*Land Of the Rising Cliché*", *The New York times*, 2004-01-04, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/04/movies/land-of-the-rising-cliche.html (hämtad 2022-05-22).
[138] Zander 2014, p. 102-104.
[139] Benesch 2014, p. 228 ff.

4   Summary, Conclusion and Discussion

This study has explored how history is expressed and represented in the video game *Ghost of Tsushima*, as well as what factors condition the representation of history. The basis for this has been the following research questions:

- How is Japanese history characterised in the video game *Ghost of Tsushima*?
    - How are characters and groups represented in the game?
    - What influence does conceptions of the samurai and *bushidō* hold in the representations in the game?
    - How are places and locations represented in the game?
- How has notions of orientalism affected the representations in *Ghost of Tsushima*?

I have studied how different game characters reflect history, both as groups and as individuals. For example, I have looked at both Mongols and Japanese people generally as well as looked at how specific characters like Jin, Shimura, Khotun Khan and Tomoe are represented in regards to stereotypes, established historical knowledge, Orientalist and self-Orientalist perspectives. *Bushidō* has been looked at specifically as a ductile notion that has had much influence on representation of the Japanese, their history and samurai specifically. Moreover, I have examined the locations and places of the game. I have also looked at how positioning is done with parallels to Kurosawa movies specifically as that has been an outspoken inspiration as well as something that has been relevant in wider *bushidō* discourse within Japan.

During my delving into the study of this video game I have found a recurring theme in my trail of thought to be recognisability. This is something that goes hand-in-hand with a commercial use of history, conditioned by the history culture context. There are two fundamental aspects of the game's setting that would be familiar to most Westerners to some degree: the Mongols and the samurai. The setting of defending an island against hordes of invaders is in itself maybe an interesting setting, the Kamakura period Japan is interesting in general, and so are the Mongols. But the choice of this period specifically and this setting is subordinate to the marketability of the end-product. This history is marketable because the historical consciousness of the consumer can be easily triggered by both Mongols and samurai. Authentic historicity is selective and only applied when it fits the commercial purposes. As we saw from the Google Ngram data, there is not really a huge interest in

Japanese history as such in comparison to, for example, Chinese history. Only specific aspects of East Asian history, more often than not seen through an Orientalist lens, can attract most Western consumers. The peculiar situation of Japanese and Western history culture overlapping has of course had some effect to the contrary though. I would say that my results coalesce with previous research in the subject as a whole, especially in regards to how orientalism directed towards Japan works within and without Japan and the US. I would also once more like to point out that I have been treading in somewhat uncharted territory with my subject, which leaves me with limited options for comparison when it comes to previous research. Chapman's way of game analysis has been useful though and I find that it is fitting for analysing history in video games.

Whilst playing the game *Ghost of Tsushima*, one will have certain experiences. These experiences are conditioned by what the developers want to show, what the player is culturally situated to see, as well as what actions have been available in the game. These things are not produced in a vacuum, but are rather influenced by more or less conscious commercial interests. *Ghost of Tsushima* is first and foremost a commercial product which makes the historical aspects of the game subordinate to the commercial interests. As a result, the game is specifically determined by a commercial usage of history. What is commercially viable depends on what the public is interested in consuming. The game company is selling an escapist experience with historical features. One of the selling points is that you can play the role of a samurai, perhaps a historically accurate one, but one that you would recognise. This is where the use of history is conditioned by the history culture which, as has been discussed, is of a special character due to Japan and the US special history cultural relationship.

It is interesting to consider this kind of game in relation to any other culture, the overlap of two history cultures within one media. Could for example a similar game be made about Chinese or Russian history seen through a Western lens and sell within both respective markets? It seems to be quite a unique example where the foreign and domestic observers view history in such a similar way. This has become the result of the previously mentioned self-orientalism of Japanese history culture. This is what I would consider the most interesting aspects to study in the history cultural relations between the West and Japan, and something I deem worthy of further investigation. I would rather say that it is part of a cultural dialogue between Japan and the West, primarily the US, where different more or less Orientalist concepts are produced and reproduced within and without Japan.

Given the aspects of traditional Orientalist stereotypes within *Ghost of Tsushima*, as they have been constructed and forwarded by Nitobe and later Benedict, I would argue that the developers of this title have brought Kurosawa's imagery together with a sort of Western *bushidō* discourse, a discourse paradoxically similar to the sort Kurosawa distanced himself from. It would thus not only be anachronistic to Kamakura period history, but also to Japanese movie history, *bushidō* discourse and its place in popular culture. This unique blend comes about from the special relation between Western and Japanese history culture.

This is not the first study to be done on *Ghost of Tsushima* and does not necessarily have to be the last. First and foremost I would like to say that I do not claim to have been able to study all characters equally and one could expand on what I have written within the boundaries of this thesis. It is quite a vast game that can be approached from many different perspectives. For instance, one could study some of the other game modes that stand on offer that have not been treated in this thesis, nor have I included the expanded story that takes Jin to the island of Iki. One could also wish to do a perspective on how gender is treated in the game or conduct a study of how the circulation of knowledge influences the game. When it comes to the study of use of history and history culture specifically one could study the game's reception as well as delve into the developer perspective, as multiple interviews have been made for related press and as there is some behind the scenes footage. It might also be interesting to make a comparative study with another similar, or dissimilar, product. I am myself interested in the coming movie based on *Ghost of Tsushima* and it might be a subject of future studies. The game aside, the general history cultural tendencies and Orientalism/self-Orientalism could be studied in another product as well.

What is maybe the most interesting aspect of this study is how the three factors of structure, culture and economy affect how history is reproduced in modern media. The video game medium has certain aspects that limits structurally what kind of history can be represented. The given history culture influences what history is included, what is "remembered" and what is "forgotten", as well as what is publicly acceptable representations of a historical setting. The third, an economic factor, is about how commercial interests play into the choices that developers make for their history cultural artefact. These three factors harmonise into an end-product that is, for example, a video game such as *Ghost of Tsushima*. It is in no way limited as an analytical framework for this game in particular, but rather I encourage future thesis writers to apply these perspectives in their analysis.

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Appendix

Appendix I – List of mission

Here is a complete list of missions in the game within the categories mentioned in the thesis. Some missions overlap categories and are thus mentioned multiple times.

Jin's Journey

<u>*Act 1: Rescue Lord Shimura*</u>

"The Warrior's Code"

"The Broken Blacksmith"

    "Blood on the Grass"

    "The Tale of Ryuzo"

    "The Tale of Sensei Ishikawa"

    "The Tale of Lady Masako"

"Hammer and Forge"

"The Iron Hook"

"Shadow of the Samurai"

"A New Horizon"

<u>*Act 2: Retake Castle Shimura*</u>

"A New Horizon"

    "A Message in Fire"

    "The Walls of Yarikawa"

    "The Coward of Yarikawa"

    "The Ghost of Yarikawa"

    "Ghosts from the Past"

"A Reckoning in Blood"

"The Fate of Tsushima"

"From the Darkness"

<u>*Act 3: Kill the Khan*</u>

"Honor and Ash"

"Wolves at the Gates"

"A Gathering Storm"

"Heart of the Jito"

"Eternal Blue Sky"

"The Tale of Lord Shimura"

Tales of Tsushima

<u>*Ishikawa Tales*</u>

1. "The Tale of Sensei Ishikawa"

2. "The Sensei and the Student"

3. "The Past Never Passes"

4. "The Way of the Bow"

5. "Dreams of Conquest"

<u>*Masako Tales*</u>

1. "The Tale of Lady Masako"

2. "The Headsman"

3. "The Husband"

4. "The Traitor"

5. "The Fool"

6. "The Ghost and the Demon Sensei"

7. "The Terror of Otsuna"

8. "Friends in Passing"

9. "Laid to Rest"

6. "The Family Man"

7. "The Thief"

8. "The Conspirator"

9. "The Sister Betrayed"

Norio Tales

1. "The Last Warrior Monk"

2. "Three Actions, Three Illusions"

3. "Ghosts in the Fog"

4. "The Birth of Suffering"

5. "The Blood Sutra"

6. "The Cause of Suffering"

7. "The End of Suffering"

8. "The Guardian of Tsushima"

9. "This Threefold World"

Yuna Tales

1. "The Tale of Yuna"

2. "Silent Death"

3. "The Black Wolf"

4. "Message in Blood"

Mythic Tales

"The Heavenly Strike"

"The Curse of Uchitsune"

"The Legend of Tadayori"

"The Unbreakable Gosaku"

"The Six Blades of Kojiro"

"The Spirit of Yarikawa's Vengeance"

"The Undying Flame"

Appendix II – List and illustration of skills

Stances

From left to right: Stone Stance (against swords), Water Stance (against shields), Wind Stance (against spears), Moon Stance (against heavy opponents).
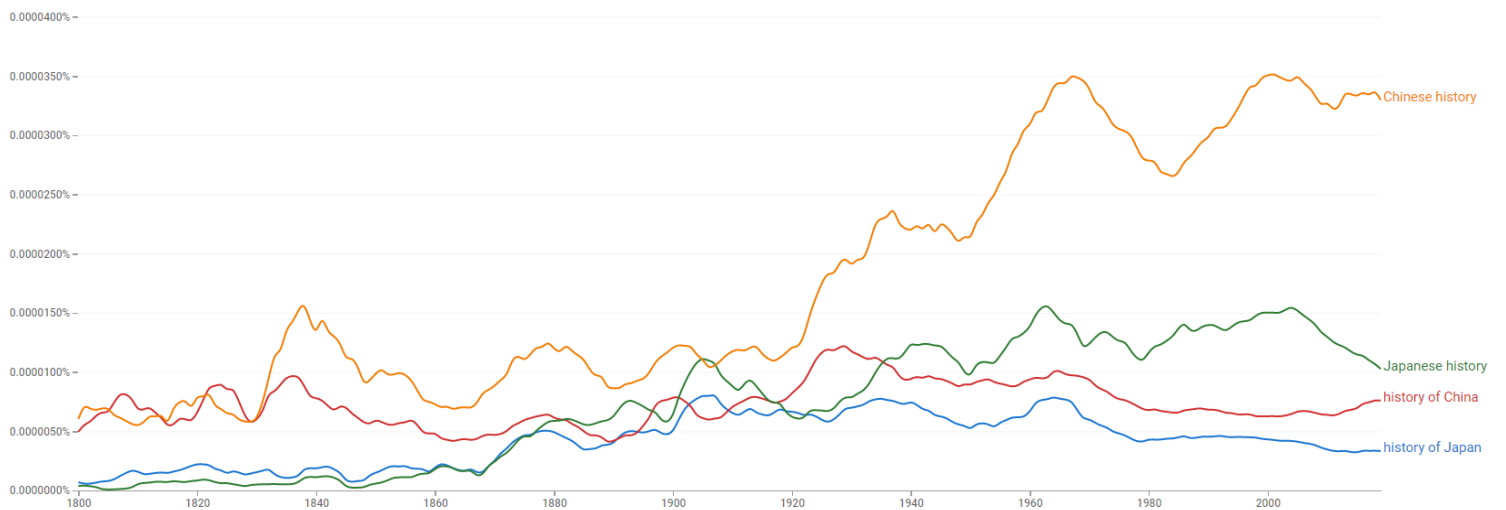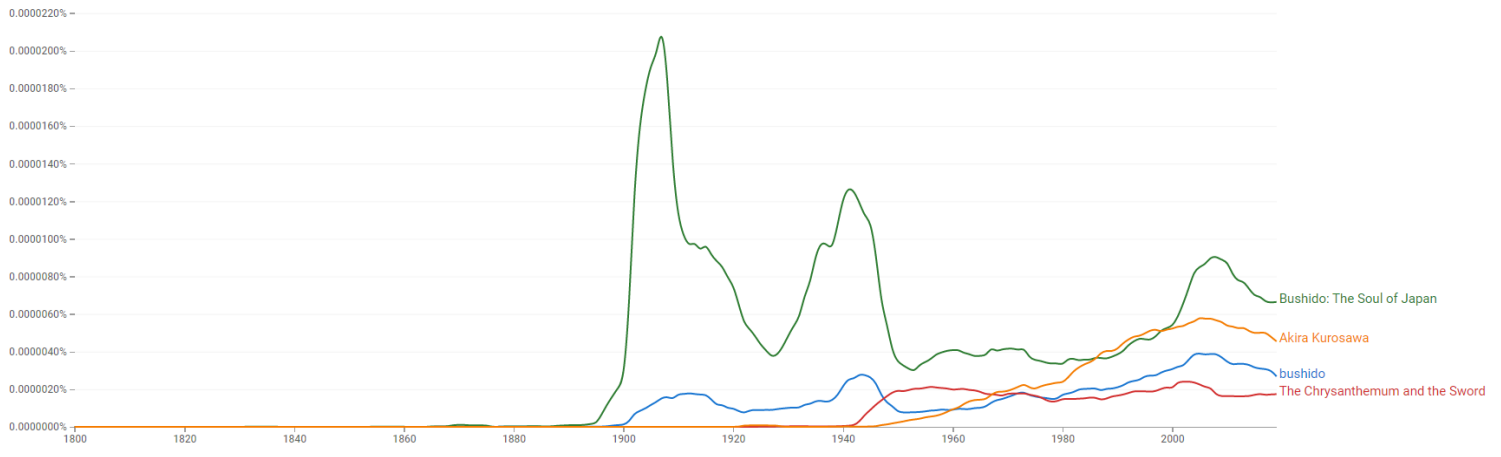
Samurai Techniques

Ghost Techniques

Appendix III – Google Ngram Viewer Graphs

Comparison of mentions of Chinese history, history of China, Japanese history and history of Japan: Google Ngram Viewer

Comparison of mentions of bushido, Bushido: The Soul of Japan, Akira Kurosawa and The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: [Google Ngram Viewer](#)
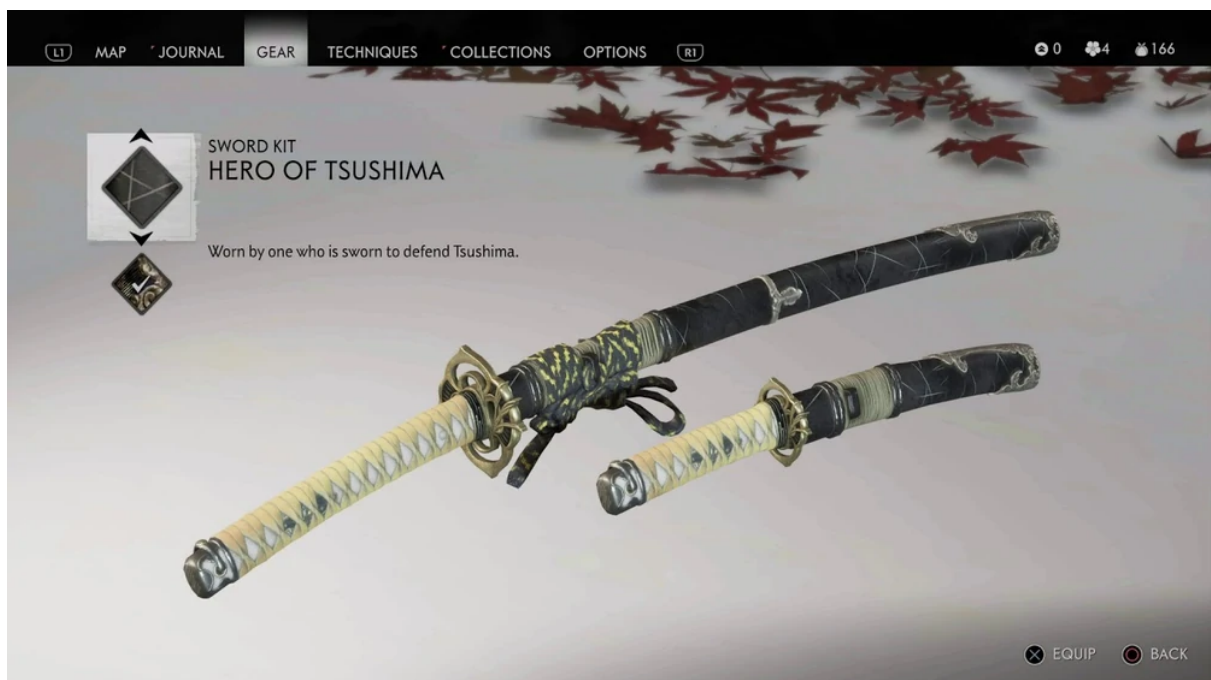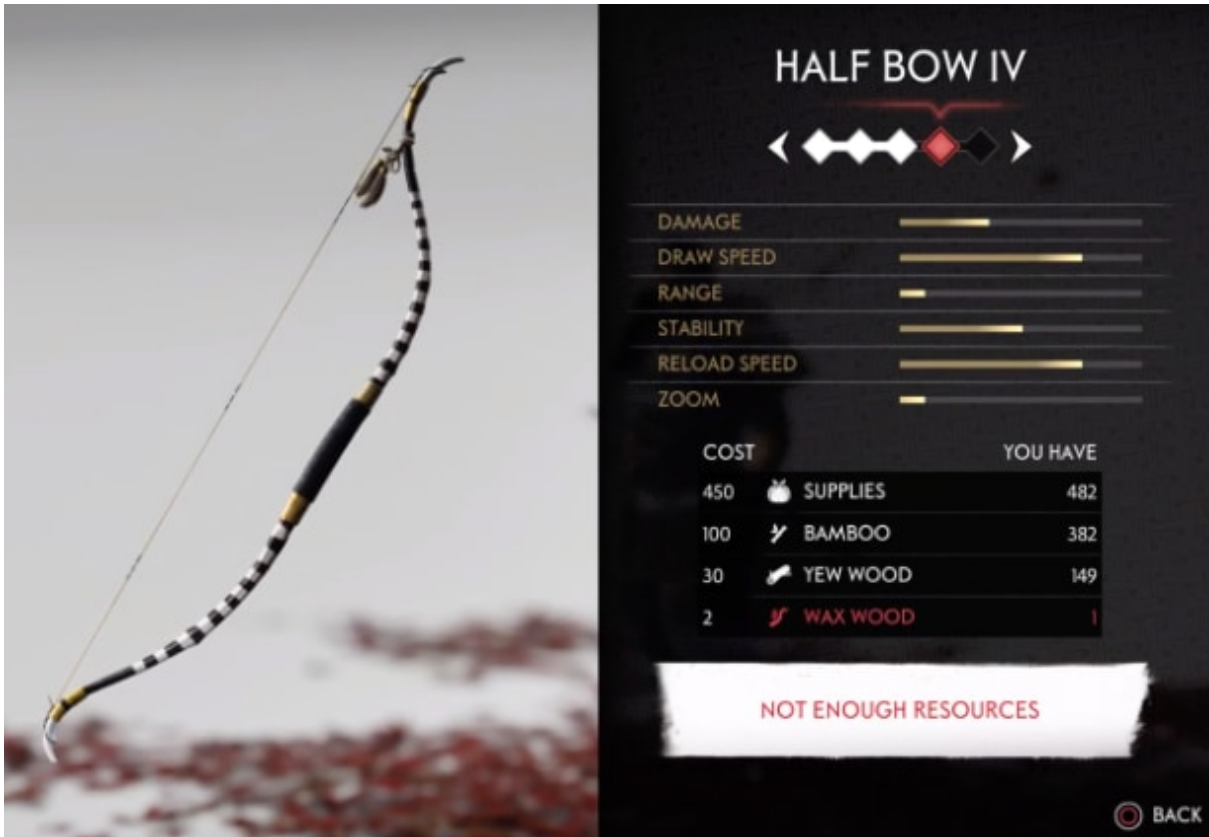
Appendix IV – Visuals

Top left: Khotun Khan in the game. Bottom left: Kubilai as depicted in the show Marco Polo. Right: Classical post-mortem portrait of Khubilai Khan.

To the left: Norio from the game. To the right: A classical portrait of Benkei.

The katana, the main weapon of the game with the "Hero of Tsushima"-customization.

The half bow of the game when the player is trying to upgrade it.

To the left: Jin wearing the "Ghost armor".
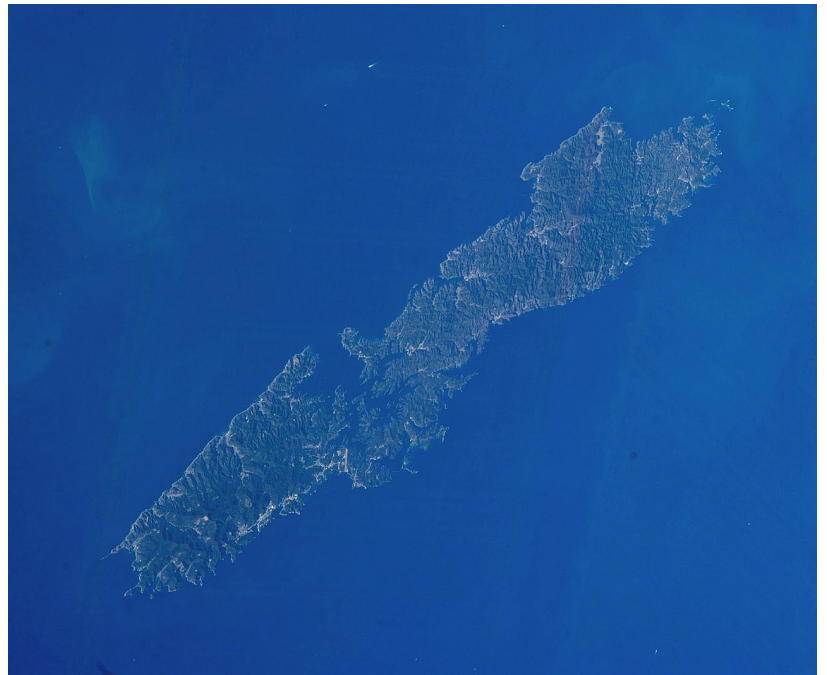
To the right: Jin wearing the "Sakai clan armor".

Top left: Jin in his "Ghost armor". Top right: Jin in his sakai samurai clan armor.

Bottom left: The ninja/shinobi "One-armed wolf" from the game Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice.

Bottom right: A typical portrait of a ninja from 1853.

Charred and impaled corpses outside of a Mongol camp.

Appendix V – Map

To the left: Map of the island of Tsushima as it is presented in the game.
To the right: Satellite picture of the real-world island.