Haunted In Translation:

Exploring the Cultural Translation of Japanese Horror Games in an English-speaking YouTube Community

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploratory, qualitative analysis of the participants in English-language YouTube audiovisual content featuring reactive playthroughs of Japanese horror video games. The aim is to understand the identity, motivations and lived experience of these participants to understand how they culturally translate Japanese horror. The research draws on data collected from one semi-structured in-depth interview and seven in-depth, open-ended questionnaires conducted remotely. This research uses the analytical framework of cultural convergence as defined by Henry Jenkins (2006) to understand how the participants' engagement in community affects the knowledge production about Japanese culture gained from Japanese horror video games. Despite the participants' demographics aligning with YouTube's overall demographics, the participants had various levels of familiarity and interest in Japanese culture, language and folklore; further, many recounted issues with understanding horror outside of their cultural experience. Ultimately, they utilize the reciprocal nature of their shared-interest community to achieve cultural translation of Japanese horror. By focusing on this heretofore unexplored online space at the intersection of New Media studies and cultural studies, this research contributes to the broader discourse in Asian Studies surrounding the transcultural effects of globalization by offering a nuanced, human-centered perspective on the cultural translation of horror.

Keywords

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1. Introduction & Background

The digital landscape has become a thriving space for content creation, with YouTube emerging as a prominent platform for diverse content genres. Among these, Japanese horror content stands out: a niche wherein content featuring Japanese horror video games, mythology and folklore has led to a community that demonstrates aspects of cultural convergence- specifically one where participants collectively produce, engage with, consume and react to the content[1]. The intersection of cultural folklore, online content creation and community building provides a unique lens through which to explore the multifaceted world of Japanese horror and its intersection with the English-speaking online space.

There exists much research into the topic of Japanese video games as transcultural products, products that help us gain a glimpse into Japanese culture- at least, a representation of it. Online communities have also received attention as well, as a form of social interaction and knowledge production as yet unseen before the democratic, decentralizing effect of both the Internet and globalism on culture. Horror, too, as either a genre, a feeling, or a literary device, has been the subject of much academic contemplation. To my knowledge, no previous research has sought to explore the intersection of these three topics - Japanese video games, horror, and the participatory nature of online communities with knowledge production. The dearth of information becomes even more stark when one searches for research that focuses not on just the concepts at play, but on the human aspect of it. Who are these participants? How did they come to participate? Why do they continue to do so? And how does all of this relate to their knowledge or interest in Japanese culture? Broadly, I focused on the trans-cultural translation of horror from the research participants' perspective. When I refer to the "cultural translation of horror", I refer to the subjective nuances of how we, as humans, perceive certain situations or concepts as frightening or profane; when taking into account cultural and linguistic barriers, the message intended by the story's creator might be misinterpreted or completely missed. How do these English-speakers interpret and relate to the Japanese cultural conceptions of what is horrific? My research asked participants if they encountered issues with understanding what is being presented

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[1] Content, in this context, refers to the product of the process of content creation. Content creation, as defined by the Pew Research Center "includes creating a Web site, posting material to another Web site for work, family or another organization, posting materials to a personal or another person's Weblog or online diary. It also includes posting photos, artwork, writing, or audio and video files to the World Wide Web, to a chat room or discussion or newsgroup or to a central server for sharing with others". (Lenhart & al. 2004, p. 4)

and if so, in what ways they as a community parse the cultural meaning of Japanese horror video games. I aim to contribute to the body of knowledge by qualitatively exploring these questions by asking some of these participants themselves, in order to illuminate what has been, up until now, a relatively uncharted area of Japanese studies. I seek to hear and read, in their own words, their experiences and motivations.

1.1 Horror, Video Games & Japan

As a person who has always had an interest in both horror and video games, I've been fascinated with exploring the ways in which both interests can shed light on the nuances and intricacies of a person's understanding of themself and the world around them. The topic for my research requires quite a bit of context in order for the reader to be able to localize themself within this niche intersection between Japanese horror games and English speaking communities based around the content of English-speaking YouTubers. Horror, both as a term and a media genre, tends to elude concrete, objective definition as both its creators and consumers express vastly differing ideas of what it entails. For some, horror is as simple as what they personally find frightening or uncomfortable, thus leading them to label media that fails to scare them as not horror (Tucker 2011). For example if one finds the concept of vampires to be trite, old-fashioned or simply not scary, one might label a vampire movie - no matter how dark or light the tone - as not horror. For others, horror is a broad, nebulous term that encompasses anything that causes a sense of unease - a sense of mental or emotional dislocation that titillates even as it makes reference to that which we (either as individuals or as a society) find to abhorrent or profane (Landais 2016). For this second group, horror can be as varied as the human experience and encompass various forms: supernatural, mythological, psychological, existential, physical, religious or societal. This list is by no means exhaustive, but serves to give an idea of the breadth of the various subgenres within horror itself.

Video games are created by developers, and developers themselves include a wide diversity of creators. A developer can be a company, whether large or small, or a developer can be a single person or group of people who create a game as a personal project or hobby separate from their main form of employment. Professional developers can be either medium or large publishers that produce games that are classified as "AAA", or independent "indie" publishers

who lack the access to the financial and technical resources of larger publishers but have more freedom to take experimental and innovative risks with gameplay, story and distribution (Forbes.com 2008). Due to the widespread access afforded by the digital age, in 2024, developers from all over the world can create and distribute games to geographically and culturally distant potential players (Kunzelman 2020). Horror games have proven to be a popular genre in video games, with games from far-flung places gaining viral popularity and recognition far from their cultural origin. *DreadOut*, a 2014 Indonesian survival horror game and *Devotion*, a 2019 Taiwanese psychological horror game are examples of Asian horror games that gained widespread recognition in the horror gaming community. In my own experience as a person with interest in horror games, both of these games were set in the modern day of their respective countries and were steeped in the culture, language, history and folklore of their creators. *DreadOut* is set in a modern-day Indonesian high school where the students are haunted by creatures from Indonesian folklore, and *Devotion* depicts a 1980s Taiwainese family struggling with its downfall through the perspective of Taiwainese folk religion.

When it comes to Japanese horror games, the Japanese video game industry has a long history of separately developing both video games aimed at the domestic Japanese market and games that are aimed at a more "Western", international market (Ramírez-Moreno 2019, pp. 52-55). According to Ramírez-Moreno, some Japanese horror games are categorized as distinctly "Japanese" by their creators, such as the *Fatal Frame* (Japanese title: *Zero*, European title: *Project Zero*) series. These often take place in Japan, with Japanese characters and cultural references. Meanwhile, other horror video games by Japanese creators take place in the West, with non- Japanese characters and cultural references to that location (for example, Silent Hill, Resident Evil). Despite this, games such as Silent Hill can be considered to be of a Japanese style due to their tendency to focus on challenging the player to puzzle out what their next task is to progress rather than action-based challenges (Ramírez-Moreno 2019, pp. 52- 55). While Japanese game developers also produced horror games set in Japan with greater emphasis on Japanese culture, history and folklore, these games rarely received international release, or achieved international release much later (Ramírez-Moreno 2019, p 55). For example, despite the *Fatal Frame* series being one of Japan's best known Japanese-style horror games, the 2008 fourth series entry *Fatal Frame: Mask of the Lunar Eclipse* was only released internationally in 2023. Oftentimes, "Japanese-style" games were not released due to concerns that an international

audience would not be interested in games that were so steeped in a "foreign" cultural flavor (Ramírez-Moreno 2019, pp. 54-55, 60).

Based on Ramírez-Moreno's research, for Japanese companies funding the release and distribution of video games internationally prior to the 2010s, a game failing to sell well represented a significant financial risk; thus, games that these companies viewed as safer bets - i.e., using an American location or lacking distinctly Japanese cultural aspects - were more likely to receive an international release. Rendell also confirms this state of affairs, which led dedicated fans of the unreleased games to distribute unofficial fan translations so that the games could be played before official international release (Rendell 2023, p. 158). Some fans played the games as best they could in the original Japanese, using their own knowledge of the language as evidenced by YouTuber Gab Smolders (Myerscough 2017). With the rising ease of online game distribution in the 2010s, Japanese indie developers have also gained an audience worldwide, releasing experimental and innovative horror games without a high barrier of entry or high financial risk in the event the game fails to sell. For these reasons, it was interesting to see which Japanese horror game the participants listed as their favorite and which they chose as the most accurately depicting Japanese culture. The participants' level of familiarity with Japanese culture is something I also consider in my research, as this will directly affect their perception of the accuracy of these games' depiction of Japanese culture.

1.2 Online Platforms & Community

I decided to select YouTube as the platform where I would seek a community to research due to its long history as the home of video content creators who share their recording of their game playthroughs and the ease of finding and contacting English-speaking YouTubers who provide horror game content. YouTube is an American website for sharing videos that was founded in 2005 and was bought by Google in 2006. Not only is YouTube accessible worldwide, it holds the honor of being the second most visited website on the entire internet with 2.5 billion monthly visitors watching over 1 billion hours of uploaded content daily (Semrush 2024). Anyone with a YouTube account can upload, view and comment on YouTube videos. For those who choose to upload content, viewers can "subscribe" to the content creator's YouTube channel in order to easily find that creator and receive notifications when the creator uploads a new

video. YouTube uses advertisements to generate revenue for itself as well as to compensate content creators who bring viewers to the site. A viewer can also choose to "join" a YouTube channel and pay a monthly subscription fee to help support the content creator; this subscription provides the viewer with a variety of benefits such as advertisement-free viewing or access to the content creator's community in order to interact with other fans or viewers with similar interests. Content viewers can engage with both the content and the content creator through either "liking" or "disliking" a video or commenting via text on a video.

In this research, I focus primarily on the genre of YouTube videos categorized as "Let's Play". Let's Play are visual media such as screenshots or video that take the viewer through a video game playthrough, usually with entertaining commentary throughout (baldurk, 2010). For example, the player may have a camera recording their face while playing the game so that the viewers can see their reactions to the content, and the commentary may focus on humorous occurrences during the playthrough. While Let's Plays originally involved screenshots when presented on online gaming forums in the 1990s and early 2000s, the advent of fast internet and the boom of video sharing sites such as YouTube launched a massively popular category of videos that followed this format (baldurk 2010). Some of YouTube's most well-known content creators started out in the early years of the 2010s uploading Let's Plays of games (Wadeson 2013): PewDiePie (111 million subscribers, 30 billion views, channel founded 2010)[2], Markiplier (36 million subscribers, 21 billion views, channel founded 2012)[3] and Jacksepticeye[4] (30 million subscribers, 16 billion views, channel founded 2012).

While YouTube does allow for some engagement of a channel's viewers and the content, that engagement is limited to comments and the liking and disliking. Real-time chatting is available on livestreams, but there is no way to create a persistent community space for viewers to interact with each other and the content. Of the YouTubers who have a community based around their content, Discord is often the platform of choice to build a persistent community due to its ease of use and various ways to interact (Sundaravelu 2022). Discord is a free social communication platform founded in 2016 that allows users to interact via either text, video, or voice. Users can interact either privately, through direct messaging, or in a "server", which is a persistent, virtual community that users can access through an invite link. Similar to YouTube,

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[2] (*PewDiePie*, 2010)
[3] (*Markiplier*, 2012)
[4] (*jacksepticeye*, 2007)

any Discord user can create a Discord server for their personal use, for the use of their friends or a public community. Servers usually contain both text and voice channels. The text channels allow for chatting in the form of instant messaging and the posting of pictures, videos, gifs, sounds. The voice channels allow for users to initiate or join a voice call, a video call, or share their computer screens with other users in the video channel. Server administrators can control, through server settings, who can access a server and what permissions the server users have using "roles". Thus, a content creator or community built around an interest can easily create and moderate a space where community members can chat, interact and share media through text, voice and video. The primary user demographic of Discord is people who are interested in games, and as of March 2024, Discord is the 30th most visited website in the world (Semrush 2024).

Thus, while my focus is on the communities of English-speaking YouTubers who play Japanese horror games, the communities themselves are often located on Discord or another platform that allows for a persistent community space for community members to interact with each other and the content. While other platforms for video Let's Plays such as the livestreaming website Twitch.tv and Facebook Gaming on the Facebook social media website exist, I chose to limit my research to just one video-sharing platform in order to work within the scope of the requirements of this thesis. YouTube is both the original and longest-running video platform for English horror game content, and thus has the most established community of English-speaking viewers of its content. Further, expanding my research to include other platforms such as Twitch.tv and Facebook Gaming would necessitate the inclusion of a different primary video content format: live streaming. In my experience, live streaming entails a different form of community due to its synchronous nature and fundamentally changes the interactive paradigm between the content creator and the audience. While the live streaming of Japanese horror game content also piques my interest, properly analyzing a community that centers around live streamed content would require much more detailed and comprehensive research than could reasonably fit within this thesis' scope. Furthermore, while the community that I research in this thesis was located on and contacted through the Discord platform, I also asked participants about other platforms and spaces where they either engaged in community or were aware of community taking place regarding the Japanese horror game content. This was done to avoid framing Discord as the only location for relevant communities, and the description of Discord

above is intended to give the reader basic understanding of where I, as the researcher, contacted a relevant community for my research. When relevant, other platforms are mentioned by research participants as locations where community activities or engagement takes place - similar to the framework in which Discord is mentioned here.

1.3 Research Problem & Aim

Who are these participants in this online content niche, and how did they find their way there? Most importantly, how do they, as a community, use this Japanese horror game content as a way to understand and engage with Japanese culture?

This thesis seeks to explore and understand the motivations, experiences, and cultural translation of both the producers and consumers of Japanese horror games on YouTube. I wish to explore the process of knowledge production of the content, and delve into how the participants' involvement relates to their interpretation of the Japanese horror narratives presented in the content. The thesis explores how participants began their journey into this niche, the nuances of their engagement with Japanese horror content, the reactions and comments of participants, and how they position themselves in relation to the content. By delving into these aspects, the aim is to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the ways in which English speaking communities understand and relate to Japanese culture through Japanese horror games in the modern digital landscape. This research builds upon broader discussions about online subcultures, cultural translations of horror, and the transmission of cultural narratives in the digital age as experienced by the participants in the transcultural exchange.

As my research focuses on the subjective experience of the participants, I will be focusing on one content creator and their community, due to the limited scope I am able to address in this thesis. However, my questions to the participants will not ask them to limit their responses to the one content creator's output, but will seek to understand their experience in the larger niche as well.

1.4 Research Questions

Thus, the overarching question that I seek to explore is: Who are the participants in the niche community of Japanese horror content on YouTube, and in what ways do they engage in the cultural translation of horror?

To answer this, I've broken down the larger question into sub-questions:

1. Who are the producers, consumers and community members engaging in the Japanese horror content on Youtube? How did they come to engage in this content, and why do they choose to do so?

2. How do the participants define the genre of "horror"?

3. How do they position themselves in relation to the content - community member, expert, or as a person with interest in the topic? How involved in the communities are they, and in what ways?

4. How are Japanese horror stories and media culturally translated and interpreted by the participants? What cultural meaning do they derive from this content - i.,e. do they view it as distinctly Japanese, as another example of horror?

5. What level of familiarity do the participants view themselves as having with Japanese culture or Japanese horror? How do the participants view the authenticity of the Japanese horror narratives in the content?

2. Literature Review

In order to answer these questions, I will need to make use of a combination of cultural studies, digital humanities and new media studies as a theoretical framework to understand this unique intersection of transcultural understanding through visual media on a globalized platform. This presents some challenges: while online communities, Japanese horror video games, and cultural translation and hybridity have been the focus of research in these fields, there is a dearth of research on this particular intersection of these topics. As described below, the most similar existing research has addressed either similar participatory communities on YouTube, convergent horror cultures located in digital spaces, or the representation of Japanese culture in the globalized, transcultural context of Japan's production of horror video games.

2.2 Horror & Online Communities

In his 2017 dissertation *Digital Dissonance: Horror Cultures in the Age of Convergent Technologies*, author Daniel Powell spends time defining horror and its purpose as a genre - whether to disgust, to horrify, or to caution and warn (pp. 14-18). Powell uses references from both psychology and literature to point out how horror, as a descendant of the folktale, acts as a form of mediation, a way for humankind to speculate and address the unknown, the uncanny and the anxiety-inducing (Powell 2017, p. 14). Linking this to the modern digital age, Powell addresses the effect of the internet on the knowledge production, expertise, and authority within which definitions of horror and folklore are created (pp. 85-90). Specifically, the modern digital age has led to a disruption of the traditional form of knowledge production which involved an authority disseminating expertise on a topic to the learners. Now, instead of a vertical flow of knowledge and expertise from a singular authority, the authority is spread horizontally amongst members of the community, who collaborate to pool their knowledge and various expertise to produce knowledge - a concept called "collective intelligence" (Powell 2017, 85-86). A key factor of these communities is that they are dynamic - members of the community may come and go, and have varying levels of familiarity or expertise with the topic of interest that brings them together. When assessing horror video game communities, Powell defines them as "interactive, collaborative, generative, synchronous, visual, audio" (p. 90).

I find Powell's definition of horror to be helpful for this thesis, especially in conjunction with Ramírez-Moreno's view of video games as cultural artifacts: Japanese horror games as cultural representations of what causes fright in Japanese culture - the cultural anxieties, the Other, what is considered to be unknown or horrifying(Powell, 2017, pp. 3–5, 9). However, much of his work focused on defining and discussing technohorror specifically- a subgenre of horror that involves technology, post and transhumanism, and machines. Further, his categorization of horror video games as "synchronous" (Powell 2017, p. 90) would not apply to YouTube, where the interaction between the participants of content creator and audience is asynchronous. Despite these key differences, I find Powell's assessment of the effect of the digital space on knowledge production to be relevant to the community aspect of my research, especially in relation to the analytical framework that I will explain in the next section.

Transmedia Terrors in Post-TV Horror: Digital Distribution, Abject Spectrums and Participatory Culture by James Rendell, 2023, also offered discussion around horror video games and communities. Aptly noting that many participants were interested in horror games but found it too terrifying or stressful to play the games themselves, in the chapter "Streaming Screaming: Post-Television Horror Texts and Platforms", Rendell delves into the role the content creator playing the game for the audience through their reactions - or lack thereof (Rendell 2023, 134). A content creator screaming, being startled, or non-verbally reacting to something frightening can be both an indicator of how to interpret what the viewer is seeing (scary, horrifying, humorous) as well as a comforting presence, similar to watching a scary movie with a friend. This, along with the content creator usually talking aloud while playing in order to figure out puzzles or determine what to do next, can give the viewer the illusion that they are playing the game themselves (Rendell 2023, pp. 133-145). In the chapter "Digital Crypt Keepers: Informal Digital Dissemination and Consumption of Post-TV Horror", Rendell addresses participatory culture by discussing how transcultural fans assist with the dissemination of the horror content, but only in informal ways such as piracy that illegally circumvent the intellectual property claims of the original creators of the horror content. Further, the author only mentions the transcultural context of fans disseminating horror shows and movies, specifically in countries where the property has not been licensed yet, increasing local demand (Rendell 2023, p. 158).

Rendell's analysis of horror video games in that context spoke to primarily horror video games that were played, and reacted to, live on streaming platforms such as Twitch.tv (Rendell

2023, p. 109). While live streaming is indeed an important aspect of participatory culture, I was surprised to see that other forms of participatory culture with horror games - such a pre-recorded videos uploaded to YouTube - were markedly absent from that chapter, despite his reference to informal uploading of pre-recorded horror movies and shows later. Despite the fact that the pre-recorded videos are not live, they can be commented on and reacted to on both the YouTube video page itself as well as in the content creator's community pages on Discord and other platforms where the content creator can react or respond to the feedback. This changes the nature of the participation, as pre-recorded content can be watched as the viewer's schedule and time zone allow, rather than being limited to the streamer's schedule, and is worth looking into. The chapter on informal digital dissemination (Rendell 2023, p. 157) also could have benefited from an assessment on how the transcultural horror content that is translated and subtitled affects the cultural understanding of the horror in much the same way that a streaming content creator's audio and visual cues inform how the viewer interprets what is happening. In this thesis, I seek to analyze how these transcultural communities engage in knowledge production of the horror content and the culture from which it originated in order to address this gap.

2.1 Horror, Video Games & Transcultural Comprehension

In "The Folk Horror "Feeling": Monstrous Modalities and the Critical Occult", the closing chapter of *Monstrous Beings and Media Cultures* (2023), authors Balanzategui and Craven discuss how the transmission of traditional folklore to online spaces and communities has led to a participatory intersection between the producers and consumers of such content. This applies particularly in the modern age, where digital platforms allow folklore and cultural narratives to be projected far from their cultural origin. To define "folk horror", they posit that the producers and audiences of the content engage in a reciprocal discussion - a discussion whose form is defined by the platform on which it takes place. For my research, that reciprocal conversation would be in the form of the content that the producer chooses to make, those who choose to watch such content, and the comments and interactions they leave behind on both YouTube and in the community's Discord server. While Balanzategui and Craven focus specifically on folk horror, their discussion is relevant to the Japanese horror games that are the focus of my research as well. Horror, as a genre, often relies on folk horror, urban legends and

other such tales of things (or concepts!) that keep us awake at night to titillate and intrigue. Their view on the reciprocal nature of how a content creator and audience defines horror is insightful. However, Balanzategui and Craven focus the chapter on discussing the definition of "folk horror" and reject the categorization of "folk horror" as a subgenre of horror, but rather as an "aesthetic mode" (Balanzategui & Craven 2023, p. 241). While my research does involve "folk" participation, my ultimate aim is to focus on the participants themselves and their lived experiences by centering their responses as the basis for my analysis rather than focusing on the abstract concept of folk horror.

In "Cultural Transduction and Intertextuality in Video Games: An Analysis of Three International Case Studies" (2016), Uribe-Jongbloed, Espinosa-Medina and Biddle discuss the concept of "cultural lacunae" - mismatches between the cultural assumptions, associations and baggage of both the content producers and the content consumers. In my research, the line between content producers and consumers is blurred as I consider both to be participants. Despite this overlap in the participants' roles, the idea of cultural lacunae is highly pertinent when considering interpretations of one culture's media and folklore by another - in this case, interpretations of the Japanese cultural concept of horror by an international, English-speaking audience online. Gaps may exist between how the participants of the content interpret the cultural touchpoints of Japanese horror games and how the game developers intended the horror to be interpreted. The authors further present the concept of "cultural transduction": "...cultural transduction refers to the conscious process of transforming audiovisual content to suit the interests of a given cultural market" (Uribe-Jongbloed, Espinosa-Medina & Biddle 2016,143-146). The concept of cultural transduction is especially relevant for this research, as the ways in which the games have been translated and presented may affect the ideas of Japanese culture that the participants in this community perceive. While the concepts presented by the authors are applicable in my research, I hope to apply these concepts anthropologically - by focusing on how the human participants experience these concepts, while also focusing on Japanese horror games instead of the American, Mexican and Uruguayan examples used in the article.

Ramírez-Moreno's 2019 article "Hyperculturality, Globalization and Cultural Representation in Japanese Survival Horror" expands on the idea of cultural transduction with a direct reference to Japanese horror games. In his article discussing the ways in which Japanese

survival games represent a form of cultural representation, Ramírez-Moreno delves into the key differences between American and Japanese horror video games, how these differences arose historically, and what these differences mean for the state of Japanese horror games as cultural artifacts in a world facing unprecedented cultural globalism. Ramírez-Moreno discusses the idea of hyperculturation - culture taken from its origin and disseminated in the global digital space, resulting in a globalized online culture from both everywhere and nowhere (Ramírez-Moreno 2019, p. 52). As a result, Japanese horror games have led to the "construction of a cultural identity through video game audiovisual signifiers (Ramírez-Moreno 2019, p. 52) " for the purpose of global consumption. Ramírez-Moreno deftly takes the reader through the differences in both the form and goal in Japanese games for either a Japanese or Western market, and how these are a result of Japan's reconstruction of its identity both domestically and internationally post-World War II.

While Ramírez-Moreno makes the case for video games as a cultural artifact from which one can distill cultural representations (Ramírez-Moreno 2019, p. 61) - an idea that forms the basis for my choice of this topic- I would like to add to this research by exploring how one part of the audience, the international English speaking part, view and interpret the representation of Japanese culture from these games. The author directly relates the cultural representation in Japanese horror games to Japan's post-war zeitgeist, but that does not fully explain the current popularity of these games to a modern-day international audience. A modern-day, international audience does not share that particular post-war zeitgeist due to not being Japanese, and yet, there are those who enjoy games that traditionally would be labeled as for the Japanese market. While Ramírez-Moreno's article lays a good historical foundation for understanding the nuances of what differentiates Japanese survival horror games from other types of horror games, it does not answer what attracts those who consume content related to Japanese horror games in an international setting- the topic I'm seeking to explore.

3. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework that I use in order to fill the gaps in the body of knowledge shown above is divided into two overarching themes:

- *Cultural translation of horror and transcultural hybridity:* I seek to gain insight into how the research participants viewed and effected cultural translation of Japanese horror.
- *Knowledge production in online communities:* I aim to gain insight into whether the communities the research participants engage in contribute to their familiarity with Japanese culture and Japanese horror.

3.1 Cultural Translation of Horror

In order to achieve an in-depth examination and comprehensive analysis of the participants' views of Japanese cultural horror and their own transcultural hybridity, I will incorporate the perspectives of both Clotilde Landais in her 2016 article "Challenges and Strategies for Analysing the Translation of Fear in Horror Fiction" and Peter Geschiere and Birgit Meyer in the introductory chapter "Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure" in their 1998 book *Development and Change.* In her article, Landais asks "How do we define horror? But also, how is it translated?". She defines horror as fiction that embodies the narrative mechanics of suspension of disbelief, and suspense itself, in order to evoke a feeling of disgust, fear or revulsion in the reader's mind (Landais 2016, p. 242). In order to evoke these feelings, the reader or viewer must understand what is occurring - either through words or by contextual implication (Landais 2016, pp. 243-244).

As such, translations of horror can, and do, significantly impact the reception of the horror of work of fiction. If the reader or viewer can not understand what is said, they may become confused or lost in terms of the storyline. If the horrific aspect relies on contextual implication, the audience may entirely miss what the work's creator intended to be frightening. For example, in some cultures, meeting a young child walking alone at night would be unusual due to cultural expectations that night time is dangerous and therefore that children should be accompanied by an adult. In this instance, a lone child would be an indicator that something is amiss; a story might use that sense of "wrongness" to build a feeling of creepiness or tension. However, if the audience came from a culture where children walking alone at night time is not

considered to be a cause for concern, the scene would fail to evoke the intended sense of wrongness or creepiness in the audience. For much of the Japanese horror content on YouTube, translation (and to some extent, localization) is a necessary aspect. This is because the content's language was originally Japanese or was created with the assumption that the audience is Japanese and thus familiar with Japanese cultural context. Thus, in analyzing the research participants' responses, it will be necessary to question how do the participants define horror and consider the forms of translation of the material from which the content is sourced.

Geschiere and Meyer challenge the anthropological idea that globalization will necessarily lead to homogeneity in ideas, experiences and cultures; rather, they posit that the flow of ideas also can lead to a reaction of closure - the affirmation of cultural differences and boundaries as citizens seek a fixed reference point for identity (Geschiere & Meyer 1998, p 605). Further, they question the traditional definitions of anthropological definitions of the "local" in general - the tribe, the nation, what defines a group of people for the purposes of research - and how these definitions have led to discussions of a "loss of authenticity" in the face of global cultural flows. Authenticity, as a concept, comes into question as a potentially artificial way to gate-keep or set boundaries on what is, or is not, a defining feature of a culture (Geschiere & Meyer 1998, p. 602 - 606). Awareness of these concepts of defining authenticity across transcultural lines will inform my analysis as I seek to understand where the participants place themselves culturally and how it affects their sense of hybridity.

In order to incorporate these analytical perspectives involving the translation of horror and cultural authenticity and identity in a globalized world, I ensured that the questions posed to research participants were composed with the aim of not only seeking an answer to the research questions, but also to draw out their views on the questions in an open-ended way in order to have enough information to have a viable analysis. I will analyze the participant responses to determine how their views on horror and the cultural content of video games inform their idea of what makes a culturally accurate Japanese game. I will also analyze the research participants' idea of what makes a Japanese horror game culturally accurate in the context of their own descriptions of their familiarity with Japanese culture.

3.2 Knowledge Production in Online Communities

In "Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide", Jenkins defines culture convergence as a cultural shift that involves a new, participatory culture wherein the audience of content no longer simply passively consumes content but rather, actively participates in the production and dissemination of the content (Jenkins 2006, pp. 1–4). Originally, knowledge production was solely in the hands of the expert or a figure of authority who then transmitted that information to a passive audience. However, in today's digital world where participatory culture is the norm, knowledge production is often done horizontally amongst online community members using collective intelligence (Jenkins 2006, pp. 1–4, 50 - 55). The community Jenkins describes resembles Peter M. Haas' concept of epistemic community in political science, but with some key differences. Haas defines an epistemic community as " a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area" (Haas 1992, p. 3) However, framed within the context of New Media and cultural anthropology, communities displaying convergence as defined by Jenkins are intentional communities that center around a shared personal interest rather than a common field of scientific or policy-making expertise. In fact, the idea of "expertise" becomes difficult to define when working within a framework separate from political science and opens itself to more subjective definitions. I wish to explore the process of knowledge production in these communities to determine if it follows the traditional model of expert- to -audience, if it resembles cultural convergence, or something else entirely.

In order to incorporate this analytical perspective regarding online communities and knowledge production, I incorporated questions about the Japanese horror video game communities that the research participants engaged in. Additionally, I ask the participants if they consider themselves an expert on the topic of horror games in general or specifically Japanese horror games. I then analyze their responses using the perspective of cultural convergence in order to determine what, if any, level of knowledge production appears to be occurring due to their interaction in an online community centered around Japanese horror games. Further, I analyze the responses to glean to what extent the choice of content and knowledge production in the community is the result of content creator and community member interaction, resulting in a reciprocal "discussion" whereby each influences the other rather than following the traditional flow of information from expert to audience.

4. Methodological Approach

4.1 Research Design

Because my research is exploratory and focuses primarily on the experiences and motivations of members of a specific community, this research employs a qualitative approach. Qualitative research favors using text, video or audio as the basis for inductive analysis that allows the researcher to reason from the specific to the general (Bryman 2012, p. 368). In addition to being an appropriate choice for a topic that focuses on communities based in the digital space that interact primarily through video (the content creators) or text (all participants), a qualitative approach will allow the nuances of the participants' lived experiences to shine through. By using an inductive form of reasoning in my analysis, I hope to find overarching, general themes in the specific explorations of the participants' experiences that will allow me to better understand this content niche.

Thus, I employ an interpretivist epistemological approach that acknowledges the subjectivity inherent in the exploration of participants' experience with and understanding of Japanese horror games. Interpretivism recognizes that individuals construct their own meanings and interpretations, and in this study, it provides a lens through which to understand the nuanced, personal narratives of content creators (Clark et al., 2021) . Ontologically, a social constructivist approach will guide the exploration of the socially constructed nature of knowledge within the context of Japanese horror games communities. Communities exist within a web of social interactions, shaping and being shaped by their community and cultural influences. By embracing social constructivism, my research recognizes the collaborative construction of knowledge and the dynamic interplay between the various participants in the community. This approach aligns with my goal of probing the untested territory of my research topic and glimpse the interconnected social and cultural dimensions of Japanese horror game communities on YouTube.

Initially, I selected remote semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate method for my qualitative, exploratory research (Bryman 2012, p. 471). However, finding participants willing or able to set aside the time for a remotely conducted interview proved difficult due to the geographically disparate nature of the community. Thus, I opted to provide the rest of the participants with in-depth questionnaires that they could answer at their own pace, in their own

time zone. The semi-structured interview and in-depth questionnaire offer a platform for the participants to share their personal journeys, motivations, and experiences. The questions used in the interview and questionnaire were based on my research questions and informed by the gaps in the literature that I seek to address. The majority of the questions were open-ended, and respondents were encouraged to elaborate as much as desired when answering the questions. In total, there were 42 questions; however, some questions were conditional - based on if they responded yes or no to the preceding question. The interview guide and questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1 and 2, respectively.

4.2. Data Collection and Sampling

The data collection took place in February and March 2024 and was conducted remotely from Malmö, Sweden. Originally, I had intended to do a study of multiple communities; eventually, I decided to narrow my focus to one community in order to keep the scope of my research achievable. I reached out to several YouTubers that focused on horror video game playthroughs via their contact information provided on their YouTube channels, but this met with limited success. Of the seven YouTubers I reached out to via contact email, Discord, Instagram[5] or X[6], only 3 eventually replied, of which one declined to participate due to time constraints and one responded too late to be included. Once a content creator with a viable community agreed to be involved, I conducted a remote video interview using an interview guide (see Appendix 1). After this, I was able to make a post in his Discord server general chat seeking community members who would be willing to complete an in-depth questionnaire concerning Japanese horror games. Of the nine community members who responded with interest, seven completed their questionnaires.

I chose this method of finding appropriate participants due to the nature of the YouTuber's content: as this YouTuber primarily played horror games and often played Japanese horror games, the members of his community Discord server were those who watched horror content enough to pay a nominal amount of money for access to his Discord server - and thus demonstrated their interest in being part of a community centered around the playing and

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[5] Instagram is an image and video sharing social networking website and mobile application.
[6] X, formerly known as Twitter, is a text, image and video social networking website and mobile application.

watching of horror games. Thus, this purposive sampling (Clark et al., 2021) would ensure that I would be able to find English-speaking participants who fit the main criteria of my qualitative research: English-speaking viewers of Japanese horror content that are members of an online community based on an interest in such content. Of the eight total research participants, four were female and four were male. Two are Canadian, one is Australian, five are from the United States. One of the American participants currently lives in Scotland, having relocated several years ago. The participants ranged in age from 26 to 37 years of age, with five participants being in their 30s.

The video interview took place on Zoom[7], and was recorded with the express consent of the interviewee. That recording was then transcribed and analyzed according to my research questions. For the questionnaires, I created unique Google Docs[8] forms that had identical questions on them. Then, I shared a link with each participant that allowed them to access their unique instance of the questionnaire. This allowed their answers to be saved and easily exported for analysis using the same framework as the recording. Each participant was informed of the purpose of the research and the way that their responses would be used. Consent was sought and obtained, and I made myself available for any questions or concerns they may have and provided my contact information. No monetary or other form of compensation was offered to the participants in order to obtain their participation. The respondent profiles can be seen in Table 1.

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[7] Zoom is a videoconferencing and instant messaging software utilized for remote meetings.
[8] Google Docs is an online cloud-based word processor that allows sharing document access. In this case, it allowed me to share the questionnaire with the respondents through a dedicated link and automatically saved the questionnaire responses without the participants needing to own a paid word processor software.

Table 1: Respondent Profile

Participant:	Age	Gender	Location	Horror Interest (Years)	Response Format	Content Creator?
MrKravin	37	Male	Scotland	14	Video Interview	Yes (YouTube & Twitch)
A	36	Female	United States	7	Questionnaire	No
B	26	Female	United States	6	Questionnaire	Yes (Digital Artist)
C	27	Male	Canada	12	Questionnaire	No
D	30	Male	Canada	11	Questionnaire	No
E	32	Female	Canada	14	Questionnaire	Yes (Digital Artist)
F	Early 30s	Female	United States	10	Questionnaire	No
G	29	Male	Australia	12	Questionnaire	No

4.3. Ethical consideration and limitations

This study adheres to the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (CODEX, 2019). The participants were informed prior to interviewing or receiving the questionnaire that any information provided would be used solely for academic research purposes - specifically for this thesis conducted as a student of Lund University, Master's Program in Asian Studies. All participants gave their consent to being included in the research.

I have been interested in the topic of horror games since 2011, and have watched various YouTubers playing these games - including MrKravin. After approximately 3 years of watching

horror video game Let's Plays on YouTube, I joined MrKravin's Discord community in 2016. As a member of the community that is being researched, I acknowledge the potential for personal bias on the topics of YouTubers, Let's Plays, horror video games, and Japanese horror video games to my past involvement in these communities. Although I have not been active in MrKravin's Discord community since 2020, I acknowledge that my position as an insider within the horror gaming content online community has likely impacted the participants' willingness to respond to my request to complete my research questionnaire. Further, this thesis reflects my position as an insider to the community studied. Being a member of the community opened doors for me as a researcher, but it is important for me to acknowledge that a different researcher may have obtained different results or access.

I have prioritized the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in my research, including choosing to summarize the participants' answers in order to redact personally identifying information that may have inadvertently been included. The participants are therefore described as Participant A, B, C and so on. The exception to this form of anonymizing is MrKravin, the horror gaming YouTuber who agreed to participate in this study and gave permission for me to post a request for research participants in his Discord community. As a content creator, MrKravin is a public figure and has given his express permission to use his online moniker to refer to him in this research. However, I elected to summarize his interview in order to ensure that any unrelated, personally identifying information was excised.

I acknowledge that while this study may elucidate the motivations of these eight participants in particular, this research represents only a small sampling of the millions of English-speakers interested in Japanese horror game content on YouTube. This research is limited in scope to a sampling of one community, and therefore my conclusions in this research in no way represent the perspective of every member of the overall community. Instead, I seek to build an exploratory narrative to better understand the nature of this niche digital space.

5. Findings and Analysis

In this section, I will detail and analyze my empirical findings from the interview and surveys that I conducted using the methodological approach mentioned in the previous section. My findings are presented using my research questions as a structural guide followed by analysis for each sub-section. The analysis is conducted using the qualitative analytical framework described previously. In doing so, we can derive understanding in our exploratory dive into the intersection of an English-speaking online community, Japanese horror games and transcultural hybridity through the words of the participants themselves.

5.1 Participant Identification

Who are the producers, consumers and community members engaging in the Japanese horror content on Youtube? How did they come to engage in this content, and why do they choose to do so? How do they define "horror"? What level of familiarity do the participants have with Japanese culture or Japanese horror games?

5.1.1 Empirical Data

In selecting the questions about the participant's identities, I chose to ask basic questions such as gender, age, origin and languages spoken. However, I let the participants choose whether or not to share other aspects of their identity that they saw as related to this topic by asking primarily open ended questions. The participants were native to a total of three countries (the United States, Canada and Australia), with one native of the United States currently residing in Scotland due to a move in the past few years. The gender distribution turned out to be a 50/50 mix of male and female, with an age range of 26 to 37 years of age. With the exception of Mr. Kravin (37 years old) and Participant B (26 years old, female), the male respondents tended younger at ages 27, 29 and 30 years old. The female respondents tended to be older, from 30, early 30s, and 36. All are native English speakers, with all respondents except Participant B either speaking or in the process of learning another language. Participant C, F and G are able to speak some Japanese, with Participant F able to speak, read and write Japanese with intermediate proficiency due to her previous university studies and Participant G able to speak at an intermediate level of proficiency.

The respondents had a variety of reasons for their interest in horror games, but there were some commonalities. MrKravin's interest began with the Resident Evil (Capcom, 1996) and Silent Hill (Konami, 1999) games, both developed for the Sony PlayStation gaming console by Japanese game developers. Sony is also a Japanese electronic company. From there, MrKravin sought out scarier and scarier games and would play them co-op (in co-operative mode) with friends on his couch. Around 2010, a friend mentioned that there were people who recorded their games and uploaded them to YouTube. MrKravin thought this sounded fun, and thus began his own hobby of uploading horror game playthroughs to YouTube with his commentary and reactions as he played. Similarly, Participant C began playing and watching horror games due to his general interest in horror, while Participant A watches others play because playing the horror games herself stresses her out too much. Participants B, E, F & G all had a fascination with either horror movies, scary books or folklore since they were children that led to their current interest in horror games. Participant B loves to watch horror games because they allow her to experience the horror she saw in movies without it being "real"; Participant E used her interest in the monsters she saw in her youth to design monsters for her digital art creation. Participant E, fascinated by folklore and terrified of zombies as a child, used horror games as a way to face his fears and now enjoys horror games for their entertainment. Participant D, in contrast, never had an interest in horror games until he first watched a YouTuber play one and found their reaction to be funny. Now, he still watches horror games in order to see what new methods game developers employ to scare their audience. Every participant began watching horror games on YouTube in the time period from 2010 to 2013, with the exception of Participant A, who began watching them in 2017.

The respondents demonstrated a range of interest and familiarity with Japanese culture, from the highly familiar to the uninterested. The majority of the participants expressed both an interest in and at least passing familiarity with Japanese culture, mythology, folklore and language. MrKravin and Participants A, B, C, E fall into this category. MrKravin's interest in Japanese folklore is expressed by a tattoo of an *oni*, a mythological Japanese *yokai* often translated to English as a demon, orc, ogre, or troll. Participant B described herself as having "looked into" traditional Japanese theater such as *noh* and *kabuki*, and often incorporates aspects from Japanese mythology in her digital art. Participant C watches Japanese lifestyle and travel log videos. Participant E attends anime conventions where she cosplays (dresses up as a

character from an anime, manga or video games) and sells her art that incorporates influences from Japanese folklore. All five of these respondents were familiar with Japanese entertainment media such as anime and manga, had not visited Japan but wanted to visit in the future, and could recognize some basic Japanese phrases or words through their exposure to Japanese media.

Three of the respondents (Participants F, G and D) identified as being at opposite extremes of the Japanese culture familiarity and interest spectrum. On the extremely interested and familiar end of the spectrum, Participant F completed a Bachelor's degree in Asian Language and Literature (Japanese track) and still keeps up on Japanese culture. Fascinated by Japanese mythology, folklore and urban legends, she follows SAYA IN UNDERWORLD, an English-language blog that posts weekly updates on the latest urban legends being discussed in Japanese-language online forums (Saya_In_Underworld 2024). She visited Tokyo, Japan in 2010, and due to her studies and visit, is very familiar with Japanese food, household etiquette, government structure and modern culture. Participant G occupies a place on the same end of the spectrum. Participant G "adores" Japanese mythology and folklore to the extent that he has an "almost categorical knowledge" of it. He is very familiar with its ancient and recent history, modern day culture in relation to work and social mores and has engaged with Japanese citizens in Australia. Similar to Participant F, he has visited Japan - taking a long tour from the Japanese south to the north - and intends to visit again.

Participant D's level of familiarity and interest in Japanese culture stood as a stark contrast to the other seven respondents. While Participant D is interested in learning about the folklore of various cultures (including Japan's), he stated that he is "not especially interested" in Japanese folklore in particular, nor is he very familiar with Japanese culture. He knows that Japan has Shinto and Buddhism as its main religions and "often [has] a poor work-life balance". He speaks no Japanese, but has encountered Japanese culture through media such as anime, movies, games and reality TV shows. He has not visited or lived in Japan, and expressed no interest in doing so.

For the most part, the participants described horror as a genre that seeks to evoke an emotional response from the consumer - specifically, the emotion of fear in some fashion. Words used to describe that emotion included nervousness, terror, anxiety, subtle unease, uncanny, dread, vulnerability. Participants A and E elaborated that these emotions were invoked through the use of tension, suspense and/or mystery in the story or setting. Participant A described horror

as something that causes one to question what is true and real while leading one to contemplate the unknown; Participant E described horror similarly defining horror as "a genre that blends the unknown, the thrill of fears and an otherworldly atmosphere." MrKravin's definition of horror sums up the various ways in which the other participants defined it:

> "...shining a light on part of life that people don't like to think about or discuss very often. And yeah, it usually does typically cover some pretty morbid or dark or sensitive topics. It's not always just jump scares and blah! stuff in your face. It can go into things like mental wellbeing, mental health, it can go into problems with the family, problems with society in general. It really can cover a bunch of different broad topics while also trying to actively scare you. And yeah, it's just, it's this all encompassing kind of darker flip side of reality.

While most of the participants were relatively broad in their description of horror by referring to the type of emotion that horror content evoked in its audience rather than the form the horror content took, Participant G specified that horror involved supernatural content in order to evoke these feelings.

5.1.2. Analysis

The participants, by and large, were primarily from North America - specifically, the United States and Canada - and ranged from 26 to 37 years of age, with most of the participants in their 30s, native English speakers, and an even split between male and female. This is in line with YouTube demographics for 2024, which show that 38.8% of YouTube viewers are in the 25 - 44 years range - more than 1 in 3 viewers, the United States has the second most YouTube users by country, and the overall gender distribution on YouTube is 43.2% female and 56.8% male (Kemp 2024). Most respondents had an interest in Japanese culture and language specifically, and all had an interest in folklore. Three participants were active content creators online with either making videos, art or cosplaying.

Interestingly, only Participant D did not engage in Japanese culture or media in other ways outside of watching Japanese horror games. Others either studied Japanese language and culture, had traveled to Japan or consumed and engaged in other forms of Japanese media such

as anime, manga or travel/lifestyle videos. The extent of the interest varied widely. Participant A's interest in Japanese folklore and culture stemmed from her self-described "language hobby", as she believed that a good way to learn about a culture is to learn their language. As a result, she had taken time to learn some Spanish, German and Norwegian. On the other hand, Participant F obtained a bachelor's degree in Asian Language and Literature, and Participant G had "categorical knowledge" of Japanese yokai and several weeks traveling all over Japan.

From this information, we can glean quite a few insights into who is engaging in the Japanese horror content niche on YouTube. The participants fall in line with YouTube demographics concerning age, location and gender. The majority was interested in horror or folklore from a young age, and the majority began engaging in Japanese horror game content on YouTube around 2011 during the boom in Let's Play content on YouTube. However, the participants differ widely not only in their level of familiarity *with,* but also their interest *in* Japanese culture. The difference between someone with zero interest in Japanese culture specifically (Participant D) and someone who committed to obtaining a degree focused on Japan (Participant F) is vast. Similarly, there existed significant variation within the subset of participants who expressed interest in Japanese culture specifically: some watched anime and travel videos, others created art or costumes and engaged in real world community events, and some focused on formal study of Japan.

From the information the respondents provided about themselves, we can conclude that the participants in this space are generally from countries with English as their primary spoken language; are in the YouTube age demographic that ranges from 25 - 44 years of age, and have a long history of interest in horror that goes back to at least 7 years with many expressing interest since childhood. All of the participants share an interest in the language, folklore or mythology of other cultures; every participant has spent time learning multiple languages, and most of them are currently attempting to learn a language or use their language skills. With the exception of Participant D, seven of the eight participants have an interest specifically in Japanese language, folklore and horror.

5.2 Digital Communities: Participant Positioning

How do they position themselves in relation to the content - as a community member, expert, or as a person with interest in the topic? How involved in the communities are they, and in what ways?

5.2.1 Empirical Data

Participants indicated that they follow and watch multiple YouTube content creators that play Japanese horror games. Three participants (MrKravin, Participants A and G) stated that they watch 4 YouTubers, two participants (Participants D and E) stating that they watch 5 YouTubers, and Participants B, C and F stating that they watch 7, 8 or 9 YouTubers respectively. While respondents shared other topics of interest on YouTube, the above numbers include only those that play Japanese horror games. Participants listed the following YouTubers as ones they watch: Table 2 contains those who were listed by multiple participants, while the list afterwards are YouTubers who were listed once. The YouTubers are listed in descending order of most times listed by participants.

Table 2: YouTubers Who Play Japanese Horrors

(as listed by research respondents)

YouTuber	Times Listed by Participants
MrKravin	7
Gab Smolders	5
CJUGames	4
John Wolfe	4
ManlyBadassHero	3
KatFTWynn	2

Youtubers listed once by respondents: Theo Williams; OhItsRobinM; Stella Abassi; Markiplier; Jacksepticeye; RDCWorldGaming; Berleezy; RatedPG (PhysicalGamerz); SinowBeats; ProZ; Mangaminx/TheRPGMinx; Supergreatfriend; Bobvids gaming; Alpha Beta Gamer; TiraLyra; VoidBurger Gaming; Insym.

The purpose of this listing is to demonstrate the wide variety in YouTube content creators that the participants listed as not only people they watch, but communities that they are familiar with and/or engage in. While some participants stated they did not actively engage or contribute to all of these communities, they were able to give their impressions of the level of community activity on the part of either the community members or the content creator around whose content the community centered. For example, they have seen the comments on their videos written by others, or seen the extent to which the content creator solicits game recommendations - even if they themselves may not comment or submit such recommendations.

MrKravin, the content creator whose community participated in this research, gave me insight into his own way of engaging with his community. He positions himself as an expert in horror game design - i.e., he is able to guess when a scare will happen, or where the story or gameplay will go - due to his long experience playing a wide variety of horror games for over 14 years. Due to this experience, he will comment both positively and negatively on the games he plays concerning their cultural accuracy, their handling of story and gameplay mechanics, and their references and influence by other horror games. In the past, MrKravin offered free translation editing assistance to amateur or indie game developers for whom English was not their first language; this was to help these developers prevent confusing or mistranslated text in their games. MrKravin mentioned that he initially began posting himself playing horror games on YouTube as a fun way to continue the sort of fun he had playing horror games co-op with his friends: casual, friendly, having fun while making jokes, commenting on and sharing reactions to what was happening in the game. MrKravin expressed he tries to embody that relaxed feeling in his content, and welcomes chatting and interacting with his viewers on YouTube, Discord, or when he streams on Twitch. He takes feedback on what games to play based on a combination of his own interests and the comments on his videos on YouTube and community comments in his Discord server. Participant A also mentioned that MrKravin accepts recommendations from his Patreon, YouTube and Twitch subscribers who support his content via monthly recurring contributions.

Every participant stated that the Youtubers they watch for horror game content took feedback from their communities in relation to their content. Participants A, E and F mentioned seeing the content creators post polls to their viewers about what to play. Participants A, B, D, E, F & G mentioned that content creators they watch take recommendations, either directly via submission form or subscriber pick, or through comments by viewers on their videos, social media posts, or live streams. Participant B shared that she sometimes sends game recommendations to two content creators they watch, saying that recommendations allow for the YouTubers to discover and play interesting horror games that are not widely known or popular. Participants D, F, and G, on the other hand, prefer to find YouTubers whose tastes in horror games match theirs and watch whatever content they provide, rather than making suggestions to a YouTuber if they prefer a different type or style of horror game content. Participant C stated that he often gets recommendations on what to play by watching what the YouTubers he watches play and getting an idea of the games. Participants C and E mentioned that they will occasionally comment on horror games YouTube videos to support the content creator and comment on the game. In contrast, Participant F, a self-described "lurker" (a person who watches content or is in a community but rarely, if ever, comments or interacts directly with other community members), rarely comments or submits suggestions.

Despite her status as a "lurker", Participant F said that she engages in MrKravin's Discord community - but nowhere else. Participant A responded that she does not engage in any communities: "I tend to stay away from active fandoms." Most of the participants stated that their primary form of community engagement was either on YouTube (comments), Twitch (live chat), or Discord (posts/chat/comments), with a few exceptions. Participant C also participates in the Reddit community r/horror, while Participants B and E listed a wider range of websites on which they participated in horror communities. Participant B engages in such communities on X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok in addition to YouTube; Participant E interacts with horror game communities on X, Tumblr, Instagram Twitch and Tiktok in addition to YouTube. In a notable contrast to Participant A, Participant E describes herself as "interacting heavily with fandom spaces".

In regards to the respondents positioning within the community - as either an expert, community member, or knowledgable about horror games (Japanese or not) - every single respondent described themselves as either very knowledgeable or a conditional expert - i.e., an

expert in a certain area, or specific aspect of horror games or Japanese horror games, specifically. MrKravin stated that while he does not have the expertise to create a video game himself, he knows what goes into making a horror game good when it comes to story quality and pacing, building tension, gameplay mechanics and creating immersion. Participant G also stated that while he believes that what makes a horror game "scary" is subjective, he knows what makes a horror game "bad" in terms of the story or game mechanics. Both respondents attributed this to thousands of hours of either playing or watching horror games.

5.2.2 Analysis

In their responses, the research participants demonstrated how interconnected and varied the communities are. No participant's list of YouTubers matched another's list, and the YouTubers used several different platforms to communicate with their community. Despite this, every single respondent described how they had witnessed horror game YouTube creators taking feedback and recommendations from their community in one form or another. Several mentioned content creators conducting polls on platforms such as Discord, X or Twitch.tv. Others mentioned that creators like MrKravin would offer patron or subscriber picks, or would have a form for submitting recommendations. Either way, all described that the YouTubers they watch take feedback from the community in terms of what type, length or style of horror game was played. From the YouTuber perspective, MrKravin stated that he noticed an uptick in interest whenever he posted a video featuring a Japanese horror game, especially one by the developer Chilla's Art. MrKravin clarified that the interest took the form of increased viewer watch time in addition to more views. He also noted that while he does often choose what he wants to play next, he indeed reads his YouTube video comments and pays attention to the reactions in his Discord server community. As a result, he takes notice when a game he's unfamiliar with is frequently requested by the community.

This indicates that the process of selecting which games are played is a reciprocal one. While some audience members may lurk or not provide active feedback, many choose to do so - as evidenced by the myriad of ways in which respondents mentioned they'd seen the content creators interact with their communities while providing ways for the community to influence what is played. Passive feedback is provided through video views and watch time - indicators of the level of interest in a particular video topic. At the same time, audience members themselves

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are introduced to horror games that they may not have heard of. Through this reciprocal exchange, the audience influences the YouTuber's content and the YouTuber introduces the audience to forms of horror in video games that they may not have encountered before.This exchange demonstrates the key impetus for convergence culture as defined by Jenkins (Jenkins 2006, pp. 1–4). Rather than the traditional one-way interaction media model where an active content creator influences their passively- consuming audience, the content creators and their audience are engaged in a mutual give-and-take wherein the audience directly influences the nature of produced content even as the content creator influences the audience via their content choices and reaction to said content. In my research's specific case, the Let's Play YouTubers who play horror games are influencing the audience by introducing them to these horror games and providing a community in which both discuss and find more of this type of games. The audience, through various forms of both active and passive engagement, influences the games the content creator chooses to play and react to. This makes sense in that the content creator's success depends on keeping their community watching their output. The linear interaction model of the past has been replaced by a circular model of mutual interaction and influence.

From the answers provided by the respondents, it is clear that the content creators and the communities work together to construct a base of knowledge about horror video games - how to achieve scares, what matters in making a horror game effective and what they, as a participant, find to be interesting. Due to the shared nature of the content - the YouTuber sharing their playthrough and reactions and the audience all watching the same video - both the YouTuber and the audience now have a shared knowledge foundation. As a community, they should be able to engage in in-depth, nuanced discussions about the content that might be hard to follow by those lacking context. The respondent's self-positioning concerning their level of expertise with horror games bears out this conclusion. As mentioned above, all of the participants described themselves as either knowledgable or an expert in aspects of horror video games. In the next section, we will determine whether this collective intelligence results in knowledge production beyond just horror games. More importantly, we will be able to see if the respondents utilize their community knowledge sharing in their determination of what makes a Japanese horror video game culturally accurate.

5.3. Cultural Translation of Horror

How are these Japanese horror stories and media interpreted by the participants? What cultural meaning do they derive from this content? How do the participants view the authenticity of the Japanese horror narratives in the games? Does their engagement in a community result in knowledge production concerning Japanese culture?

5.3.1 Empirical Data

Participants A, B, E, F, G believe that there exists a distinct cultural element to horror games, with Participant B expressing that cultural elements help her understand and relate to the protagonist. Similarly, MrKravin shared that the cultural elements help him put himself in the shoes of the characters and understand what they find to be horrifying. Participants C and D also believed that horror games have a distinct cultural element to them, but with an important caveat to their view. Participant C finds that horror is uniting in that it reflects "our shared humanity", regardless of the form horror takes. Participant D believes that horror uses culture as a storytelling tool, stating that "a monster is a monster regardless of what its cultural origins are".

The respondents were largely in agreement on the topic of translation style preferences and the effect incorrect translation can have on their immersion in a horror game experience. Participants A, C, D, E, F and G stated that bad translation affects their immersion in a horror game and can make a game impossible to understand or play. This affects their understanding of the horror being portrayed. Participant B, on the other hand, stated that bad translation does not affect their immersive experience. Participant B had no preference regarding either a literal or meaning- based translation style. Participants A and F expressed that their preference for translation style depended on the context, with some situations lending themselves more naturally to one translation style or another. Participants C, D, E, G fell clearly on the side of preferring translations that get the meaning and intent of what is said across instead of a literal translation. Participant F mentioned *Hollow Coon*, an adventure game by Japanese indie publisher Nayuta Studio, as the only game he believes found the perfect balance in translation where the intent of what was said is maintained with minimal meaning loss in translation.

Uniting these translation preferences was an ambivalence concerning localization. Translating focuses specifically on conveying what is being said in one language into another; localization, on the other hand, refers to the process of adapting media to the intended market by

adjusting or completely changing aspects of the media. This process is undertaken in order to make the product more relatable to the local market. For example, localization can include adapting a show to align with local cultural, social or religious norms, legal standards, naming conventions or even locally equivalent consumer products. Although localization was not a part of my initial questionnaire, nearly a third of the participants mentioned the difference between translation and localization, and I found it a worthwhile differentiation to include empirically. While Participants A, F and G all understood and appreciated the need for localization in order to help the intended audience relate to the content, all three expressed a strong dislike for localization that either completely changed the meaning of a scene or completely removed the original cultural aspects of the content. All three participants expressed the need for a nuanced and balanced approach to transcultural media localization - an approach that helped local audiences understand and relate to the content, but refrained from rendering the content culturally odorless.

MrKravin and Participant C found that Japanese horror games that take the familiar and twist it to be uncanny can fail to get the horror across, as he is not able to relate to the initial "familiar" situation. MrKravin gave the example of a common trope he has encountered in playing Japanese horror games: that of the grandparent or elderly family member living with the family. The elderly family member is often portrayed as the source of fear due to age-related health issues such as dementia; this causes unease and anxiety to the protagonist as they deal with their elderly relative acting in an uncanny fashion, such as wandering the halls at night or speaking in unintelligible and ominous ways. Initially, MrKravin wondered why so many of these Japanese horror games featured this trope. Eventually, MrKravin realized that this was due to multi-generational homes being traditionally more common in Japan, with families providing care to their elders in their own home rather than an external elderly care facility. Still, MrKravin expressed that the horror landed differently due to cultural differences in how mental and medical health is viewed.

> But there are times where I'm just - it doesn't quite make sense to me. When it comes to the older generation living with the current family, and they try to hide different medical issues in a lens of horror, like, dementia is brought up a lot. And so it'll be just a creepy

old lady. And sometimes it's kind of just like, "Hmm, they need medical help. They don't need me with a flashlight [shining] on them".

Similarly, Participant A shared a situation where missing context caused her to miss the implied horror of a movie scene. In a movie that focused on Aokigahara Forest (a Japanese forest known as location commonly chosen by members of Japanese society who wish to commit suicide), a security guard puts on a pair of headphones as night falls. Unaware of the cultural context of Aokigahara Forest, Participant A found this action confusing as she assumed a security guard would need to hear their environment in order to be effective. It was not later that she understood: local folklore claimed that the unhappy, deceased residents of Aokigahara Forest moan, wail and make strange, disconcerting noises at night. Participant D, on the other hand, stated that he had never encountered a situation where cultural difference affected his understanding of the horror being depicted in a horror video game.

Various reasons were given by Participants A, B, C, E, F and G for their interest in Japanese horror games specifically. Participant A loves learning about world folklore, cultures, and mythology. Participant B expressed that culturally familiar forms of horror have never scared her, but that she finds horror featuring mythology or cultures that are new to her intriguing. Participant C described Asian horror as aligning with what he finds scary. Participants E, F & G related their interest in Japanese horror games to their larger, more encompassing interest in Japanese folklore and mythology; their folklore interest originated from their in-depth interest in both modern and traditional Japanese culture.

The respondents had much to say when asked "Have you played any games that seemed very "Japanese" in its horror? How so?" Participant C gave a detailed response with a concrete example:

> I notice Japanese horror especially has a very large focus on wronged individuals coming back from the grave to exact revenge - especially wronged women. So any games I see or play that have a plot element of the wronged spirit of a woman coming after either her killer or anyone unfortunate enough to be in her way all have a Japanese influenced feel to me. A game like '*Infliction*[9]' comes to mind.

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[9] *Infliction* is a 2018 psychological horror game by Australian indie developer Caustic Reality.

Participant A described horror games where the horror is derived from Japanese mythology or folklore in the form of enemies, monsters or story obstacles while also mentioning a "certain bluntness" to Western horror. Participant B expanded Participant A's focus on Japanese mythology and folklore by citing games by indie developer Chilla's Art (especially *The Kidnap*), the *Fatal Frame* series,*World of Horror*, *Spirit Hunter Death Mark* and *Yomawari: Night Alone* as distinctly Japanese due to including religious practices, locations and aspects of daily life in Japan as well. Participant E mirrored Participants B's description. Participant F described Japanese horror as featuring "more creeping dread and suspense than body horror" compared to American-style horror, as did Participant G, describing games by Chilla's Art as a good example of Japanese horror due to their focus on "slow-burn suburban horror with a much more mild pacing and emphasis on situation, character and environment instead of the more common Western way of emphasis on feeling "wrong", showing monsters and gore for shock value". Participant D showed a strong contrast to all of these perspectives by stating that despite having watched "numerous" games based in Japan, he was "unable to think of tropes in Japanese horror that make it seem "Japanese"".

In the interest of prioritizing the words and perspective of the respondents, I have chosen to use Table 3 below to convey their selection of the most culturally accurate Japanese horror game(s) as well as their explanations for why.

Table 3: Japanese Horror Games that Culturally Accurate or Distinctly Japanese (as deemed by research respondents)

Participant	Game(s)	Explanation for Game(s) Chosen
MrKravin	*Fatal Frame* series, games by Chilla's Art.	"I think Chilla's Art does a perfect slice-of-life kind of horror game when it comes to Japanese culture. Just little things like working at a cafe shop but then being stalked, or working late night at a convenience store."

Participant	Game(s)	Explanation for Game(s) Chosen
Participant A	None.	"I've seen folks play so many Japanese horror games, and I can't remember the names of any of them." About Japanese horror games in general: "I feel like at the very least they're a solid representation of what a member of Japanese culture could do in extraordinary circumstances."
Participant B	*The Kidnap* by Chilla's Art.	"The game shows the life of a young child and how he is stalked and eventually kidnaped. Throughout the game you see that the child lives in a very "Japanese looking house". The player also sees how the child walks home either alone and sometimes with friends. He also goes to a store by himself. This may not seem important, but looking from an American point of view, something like this would appear to be potentially dangerous for a young child in the United States."
Participant C	*Okaeri* or *Stigmatized Property* by Chilla's Art.	"...both of those games have a subtle, uncomfortable slow-burn type horror that I've come to associate more with Japanese made horror.Where the threat isn't immediately apparent but from the start something feels deeply wrong about the situation. Both have a grounded feel about their horror as well, neither having a large, looming threat beyond comprehension but rather a sense that what's going on is something only just out of your understanding, it's a human horror but that humanity is no longer confined to the realm of the living."
Participant D	*Shenmue*	"...because [Shenmue]'s a bit more "realistic" in nature."
Participant E	*Higurashi*, *Fatal Frame* series,	While the last two are set outside of Japan, she feels that they still show their roots.

Participant	Game(s)	Explanation for Game(s) Chosen
	games by Chilla's Art, *Resident Evil* series and *Silent Hill* series.	
Participant F	*The Closing Shift, The Convenience Store* and *The Caregiver* by Chilla's Art	"I really do think that Chilla's Art nails it with a lot of their games, especially those that depict retail positions. I think my pick is The Closing Shift. So much of the game is just routine, and the idea of the necessity of work and pleasing your boss getting in the way of acknowledging the fact that something is, indeed, really wrong here, and that you should prioritize your safety. Stalking is also a huge fear in modern Japan, so to have the antagonist be a stalker who (for the most part) is just human, and thus so believable, makes this both a good plot and a scarier one for it because it is so plausible. I also appreciate Chilla's Art for more realistic depictions of apartment living; they're cramped but efficient."
Participant G	Unnamed Game	"I don't remember the name, unfortunately, and had to get a second-hand translation, but one that was basically one large metaphor for the powerlessness of a woman who ended up being abused to death by her husband in, if I recall, the early 1800's. It was based on a true story, and the fantastical horror elements were all just directly representative. It alluded to a reform, if I recall, around 1868? of some kind, which I can't remember the specific details of, but while it was obviously a very extreme example it did showcase the patriarchal societal structure of the time."

All eight of the respondents said that they see distinct cultural elements to video games and indicated that this was a large part of their interest in watching horror. In the responses, Participant D had no interest in Japanese culture or language specifically, and described his watching of Japanese horror games to be somewhat incidental to his interest in horror games and other cultures in general. Initially, Participant D's lack of interest may have seemed to place him as a sole outlier, but his reasoning for the lack of particular interest in Japanese culture or Japanese horror games is similar to Participant C's view on horror. Participant C viewed horror as a genre that "reflects our shared humanity" despite the form the horror takes, and Participant D shared a similar sentiment by stating that culture is a storytelling tool in horror, and that "a monster is a monster regardless of what its cultural origins are." Their responses indicate that while they acknowledge that while horror video games have a strong cultural aspect to them, the overall feelings and themes are universal - the fear of the unknown or uncanny is a shared bond for all humanity.

However, Participant B added a viewpoint that sets her apart. Participant B described the United States as having "no culture" and that horror that is culturally familiar to her has never scared her. The strong boundary drawn by Participant B between "familiar" horror and the assertion that she does not consider her own culture to be "culture" is reminiscent of Geschiere and Meyer's point about how increasing globalism may not necessarily lead to cultural homogeneity. While Participant C and D spoke to how horror is universal to humanity and unites us regardless of culture, Participant B demonstrates an affirmation of cultural boundaries regarding identity. While Participant B engages in transcultural hybridity through her art and interests, she delineates quite clearly between Japanese culture and her own (or lack thereof).

Participant C's description is reminiscent of the archetype in Japanese folklore of the *onryō*, a type or *yurei* (ghost) that is the angry, vengeful spirit of a person who was wronged while alive. The *onryō* is capable of harm on all scales - from harming those who led to the *onryou*'s wrongful death to causing natural disasters if the wrongs are not redressed (Yoo 2022). This trope has been present in Japanese folkloric belief since at least the Heian era (794 - 1185 C. E.) in *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari*, published before 1021 C.E.), a Japanese literature classic considered by many to be the first novel historically that is still extant. In *The Tale of Genji*, Lady Rokujō, a mistress of the titular Prince Genji, becomes so jealous that her spirit

results in the death of several of his other lovers (Malita & Kuchta 2015). This concept of the vengeful spirit has also been repeated in Japanese theater over the centuries (Yoo 2022) and can even be said to influence Japanese politics (Antoni 1998) and media depictions (Delost 2023) today. Although Participant C did not express a familiarity with Japanese culture on par with a few other participants (particularly Participants F and G), it is striking that he was able to succinctly describe a well-documented Japanese horror trope. This speaks to the respondent's ability to draw cultural inferences from the media he has engaged in, and leads us back to the question of cultural translation of horror.

The question of cultural translation of horror was answered by the respondents with layers of nuance and a number of statement qualifiers. Across the board, all of the respondents preferred translation styles that prioritized that intent and meaning behind what is being translated over a literal translation; of those who mentioned localization, all agreed that it was a necessary aspect of content provided in a different language. However, all also acknowledged that there may be times when a literal translation works best, or times when localization results in the erasure of cultural aspects of the content - an outcome that they deemed undesirable. Their similar experiences with mistranslations negatively impacting their immersion in a game is consistent with their responses, as is the fact that most of the respondents had experiences where the "horror" of a game landed differently - or not at all! - due to cultural differences. Despite these issues with culturally translating horror, the participants were able to figure out what had initially confused them: MrKravin grew to understand why the Japanese horror games often featured a frightening elderly family member, and Participant A learned more about Aokigahara Forest and the local folklore concerning what occurs there at night.

It is here that we begin to see how issues with the cultural translation of horror leads to knowledge production in the community. In his interview, MrKravin spoke to how he found it obvious when a game set in Japan was not created by a Japanese game developer:

> I can easily tell whenever it's a Western dev[eloper] trying to make a Japanese game, because they'll have American outlets…on the walls, or they'll have very specific American foodstuffs in their house. And they won't have even little things when it comes to the architecture… I've noticed that [Japanese homes] have in their entryway, a little

step where you take off your shoes and you step up into the house. [Western developers] won't have that. They'll just have a front door with shoes everywhere.

According to MrKravin, he comments on these indicators when he is making a video, saying things such as " This is a very Western bathroom, there's no soaking tub" or commenting on the fact that all of the products in the house have English-language labels. Interestingly, he also stated that he has seen YouTube comments from his community pointing out and discussing culturally inaccurate aspects of games set in Japan but not made by a Japanese developer. Six of the eight participants felt that it was clear when a game set in Japan was not made by a Japanese developer; they saw these games as showing a more stereotypical depiction of Japanese culture and society. As stated succinctly by Participant G, "A Western developer wants to use their idea in a Japanese backdrop where a Japanese developer will implement their idea over what to them is just their surroundings and life." Interestingly, Participant B was able to think of a Western-made game set in Japan that she believed to be accurate: *Ghost of Tsushima,* a 2020 adventure- action game set in 1274 A.D. by a U.S. based developer.

In previous sections, we saw that the participants demonstrated varying levels of familiarity and interest in Japanese culture and language. If we extrapolate that variation to the horror game community at large, we can see how some of the audience (and perhaps even the content creator themself!) are likely to be confused about aspects of Japanese culture depicted in games by Japanese developers. If interested enough, curious viewers may either research their questions themselves or, more likely, engage in the content creator's community in some form. They could post a video comment with their inquiry, read, read a more culturally experienced viewer's comment chain discussing the video's themes and cultural aspects, or they may seek out the community on another platform like Discord, Reddit, X, etc. if they are not already in it. Even if a viewer is not aware of the inaccuracy of a video game, the content creator may react to the inaccuracy and other viewers may comment on it with their knowledge as well, as mentioned by MrKravin.

The above process of knowledge production aligns with Powell's concept of collective intelligence. While no individual community member is an expert of Japanese culture or society and any given individual community member has blind spots regarding cultural (in)accuracies, by communally discussing these games' themes, storyline and gameplay the community is able

to synthesize knowledge about Japanese culture. While the level of cultural expertise reached can be debatable, the knowledge production achieved provides enough context for the participants of varying Japanese culture familiarity to confidently choose a game they perceive as culturally accurate. Furthermore, MrKravin's community demonstrates cultural convergence in how the reciprocal nature of the content creator - audience relationship is a factor for the Japanese horror games he plays as well. MrKravin mentioned that his videos featuring Japanese horror games always have a high level of interest from the viewers. He mentioned that games by Chilla's Art in particular are often requested by viewers.

Finally, we have the respondent's selection of what they deem to be the most culturally accurate Japanese game. I saved this part of the analysis for last for a reason; now, we have a sense of how the participants describe themselves, their definition of horror, their involvement in communities, their level of interest in Japanese culture and their idea of what makes a culturally accurate Japanese horror game. Basically, we now have the context within which to analyze these responses.

Of the eight research respondents, five selected either a specific video game or pointed to every game produced by the developer Chilla's Art. Games by Chilla's Art were referenced continuously by respondents, even if they chose another game as the most culturally accurate (for example, Participant D mentioned Chilla's Art as a culturally accurate game developer in his questionnaire, although he later chose *Shenmue* as the most culturally accurate game). Looking into Chilla's Art, I found their Patreon page and their website; not much other verified information could be found about the developer. On their Patreon, they describe themselves as "We're just a couple of Japanese brothers making Japanese horror games. I'm often mistaken for a foreigner, but I'm actually a Japanese who grew up in America and lives in the countryside." (*Chilla's Art - About*, 2024). There is a list showing their 21 games thus far, with the oldest released in 2019 and the most recent game released on March 23, 2024 (*Games*, 2024). Other than a contact form, no other information is available about the prolific developer team. The games themselves are short - requiring 1 - 2 hours to complete -, in Japanese with English subtitling available and have a retro graphical style reminiscent of VHS tapes and the Sony Playstation 1 gaming console released in the mid- 1990s. The stories, as described by the participants, are very grounded: the stories told feature normal, everyday Japanese people going about their daily lives. The horror featured in these slice-of-life stories come from either realistic

or urban legend- style dangers. Examples include a young woman slowly being realized that she is being stalked as she works her nightly shift at a convenience store (*The Closing Shift | 閉店事件*)[10]; a student who returns home expecting to hear here mother's greeting of "Welcome home!", but encounters strange occurrences instead (*Okaeri | おかえり*)[11] ; a neglected elementary-school aged boy who is kidnapped (*The Kidnap | 誘拐事件*)[12].[13]

Of the myriad of options in the area of Japanese horror video games, the respondents pointed to the games made by a small, independent Japanese developer team of two brothers who locate their games in Japan in every possible way: geographically, culturally, linguistically and religiously. Before the age of the high-speed internet, it would have been prohibitively expensive for a team of two brothers to distribute their games across the world. Now, in 2024, we can see this developer share their idea of horror steeped in the culture they identity with an audience that clearly appreciates the glimpse into a more grounded, realistic portrayal of a Japanese person's day-to-day life - at least, before the horror begins.

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[10] (*[Chilla's Art] The Closing Shift | 閉店事件*, 2022)
[11] (*[Chilla's Art] Okaeri | おかえり*, 2019)
[12] (*[Chilla's Art] The Kidnap | 誘拐事件*, 2023)
[13] On the online storefronts where Chilla's Art games are available, the developer listed the game titles as shown - featuring both the English and Japanese names together.

6. Conclusion

In the end, what has this exploration of the heretofore largely unresearched niche revealed? My goal was to gain qualitative insight into who the participants in the niche of Japanese horror video game communities online are: their ideas and expertise about Japanese horror, Japanese culture and society, and how that interplays with the community in which they engage. Doing so required utilizing concepts from a cultural perspective of Asian Studies, a humanistic approach to Video Game Studies, research focusing on Horror fiction in modern, folkloric and digital forms, and audience theory from the explanatory framework of New Media studies.

With this goal in mind, I interviewed an English-speaking Let's Play YouTuber who focuses primarily on horror games and received responses to an in-depth questionnaire sent to seven volunteers from his community on Discord. From these respondents aged 26 - 37 located primarily in North America, we found that most were interested in Japanese horror games as well as Japanese language and culture. While their level of current and previous familiarity with Japanese culture varied, all were able to either point to games they believed to be culturally accurate or convey aspects of games that they found to be distinctly culturally Japanese. While some participants were more active in horror gaming communities than other respondents, all respondents detailed how the niche's content creators take feedback from their communities on what games to play. The reciprocal nature of the content creator and audience influencing each other through a mutual conversation of both active and passive interactions with recommendations, video comments, views and watch time demonstrates Jenkins' concept of cultural convergence emerging through the internet age's enabling of participatory culture in a way impossible previously.

The participants described both the struggles and successes involved in culturally translating horror. At times, mistranslations led to confusion or broke the immersion necessary for a video game to evoke the sense of fear or unease they found necessary for effective horror. While participants sought to relate to the characters in Japanese horror games, at times they failed to understand the horror due to unspoken societal assumptions and cultural differences without context. Ultimately, the participants demonstrated that they were able to find answers due to the collective intelligence of the community. Even though no one community member was an expert on the entirety of Japanese culture, they are able to pool their knowledge and discuss

the themes of Japanese horror games to gain an understanding. Most importantly, the participants overwhelmingly favored the work of a Japanese developer whose work is grounded in realistic, day- to - day depictions of the life of a Japanese person. The same held true when it came to the topic of translation and localization: the participants preferred translation styles that prioritized the intent of what was said and preferred light-handed localization that allowed the cultural aspects of a work to take precedence while providing context for the transcultural viewer. In essence, the participants favored *authenticity*; a concept addressed by Jenkins, Powell, Rendell when discussing cultural convergence and collective intelligence in the context of online communities; by Balanzategui & Craven, Uribe-Jongbloed, Espinosa-Medina & Biddle, Ramírez-Moreno and Landais in the context of transcultural media exchange of folklore and horror; by Geschiere & Meyer in the context of the global flow and closure of cultural identity. Ultimately, it became clear that what the participants sought and valued in their choices of culturally accurate Japanese horror games is authentic depictions of Japanese day-to-day life, Japanese cultural and personal anxieties, Japanese folklore and situations. It is clear that the participants valued authenticity due to their unanimously expressed interest in the folklore, language and lived experience of other cultures - as demonstrated by the myriad of ways in which they engaged in transcultural experiences: learning languages, watching videos, playing games, traveling internationally and pursuing informal and formal study of Japan.

While my research is from a small sample of the larger Japanese horror video game community, I was able to prioritize focusing on the lived experience of these eight community members. There is more work to be done in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the participants in this niche. A larger study that delves into not just one, but multiple communities would provide broader insight. A study of a larger community with millions of subscribers would provide a much larger sample size. Alternatively, while the live-streaming side of Let's Plays has been more extensively researched, it would add to the body of research if further study were conducted on the subtleties of the synchronous nature of Japanese horror video game Let's Play live-streaming.

Ultimately, the conclusion I took away from this explorative research is that while the cultural translation of fear is a daunting task, both the creators and consumers of Japanese horror video games have eagerly stepped up to the task. Utilizing their own interest in horror, Japanese culture, or both, they utilize the global access of the internet age and communities with shared

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interests to synthesize knowledge of Japan. Furthermore, I believe that we can inductively draw the conclusion that the reason these English-speaking participants engage in the niche of Japanese horror video game content on YouTube is because they, like many others, are interested in cultural experiences and understanding even when engaging in online communities centered around entertainment.

Appendix A

Interview & Questionnaire Guide

Questionnaire Guide

Hello, my name is Ashley and I'm working on my thesis for my Master's in Asian Studies at Lund University, Sweden. Thank you for volunteering to help with my research! Please answer these questions in as much detail as you like, and let me know if you have any questions.

- How do you like to be referred to online? (i.e., please give a moniker, nickname or a way you would like to be referred to in the thesis)
- Where are you from?
- Besides English, do you speak any other languages?
- How old are you?
- What is the best contact method to reach you in the event of follow up? Please provide an email address.
- Are you a content creator? Where do you share your content? (YouTube, Twitch, etc)
.
    - How long have you been creating content?
    - What language is your content in?
    - How would you describe the focus of your content?
    - What led to you being a YouTuber?
    - Do you watch other YouTubers who play Japanese horror games?
- Are you a viewer of horror games on Youtube?
    - How long have you been a viewer of horror games on YouTube?
    - What content creators do you watch play these games?
    - What languages do you watch content in?
    - How would you describe your YouTube topic interests?
- What does "horror" mean to you?
- What led to your interest in horror games?
- Do some horror games have a more distinct cultural element to them?
- What do you think about how horror translates across languages/culture?
- Have you ever felt that the translation of a game affected your understanding of it, as an English speaker? I.e., either mistranslated words, unclear meaning, or the use of words with a different implication.
- Have you encountered a situation where the feeling of "horror" landed differently due to a cultural difference?
- Have you played any games that seemed very "Japanese" in its horror? How so?
- Do you engage in any communities around Japanese horror game content? Where are these communities located? I.e. offline, Discord, Reddit, Tumblr, etc)

- How engaged with the content would you say the communities are? How do they engage(i.e. comments or posts on discord, reddit, youtube, memes, etc)
- How do you choose the horror games you watch?

- Do the content creators you watch take feedback from your community when deciding what to play?
    - If so, how does that affect the games that are chosen?
- How do you see the interaction between you and the content creator? (i.e., do you pass content/information to them, is is 2 way interactive, etc)
- How do you see your level of expertise in the topic of horror games?
- Do you have any interest in Japanese culture? (traditional, modern, folklore, etc)
- How familiar are you with Japanese culture?
- Have you ever lived in Japan or visited? When and where?
- Can you speak, read or listen to Japanese? What level of fluency would you say you are?
    - If yes, have you ever translated something from Japanese to another language? What issues did you come across when choosing how to translate?
- When it comes to translation, do you prefer direct, literal translations of Japanese or translations that may not be literal, but get across the "vibe" or sense of a phrase?
- What ways have you encountered Japanese culture? (anime, movies, games, travel, etc)
- Have you ever had an interest in Japanese mythology? (i.e., Kami, yokai, yurei, oni, Shinto)
- Do you have an interest in Japanese horror specifically?
- As an English speaker, what do you think about how accurate (or not!) the narratives in the japanese horror games are to Japanese culture?
- Do you see any differences between games made be Western developers that show Japanese culture versus games by Japanese developers?
- What do you consider to be the most culturally accurate Japanese horror game you've played or seen played, and why?

If there's anything else that you want to share related to these topics, please feel free to add it below. Thank you so much for helping with my research!

Interview Guide

Main research question: Who are the participants in this niche Japanese horror content on YouTube, and why do they do so? To answer this, I've broken down the larger question into sub-questions:

1. Who are the producers, consumers and community members engaging in the Japanese horror content on Youtube? How did they come to engage in this content, and why do they choose to do so?
    - How do you like to be referred to online?
    - Where are you from?
    - How old are you?
    - What is the best contact method to reach you in the event of follow up?
    - Are you a content creator? Where do you share your content? (YouTube, Twitch, etc)
    - How long have you been creating content?
    - What language is your content in? Do you speak any other languages?

- How would you describe the focus of your content?
- What led to you being a YouTuber?
- Do you watch other YouTubers who play Japanese horror games?

2. How do the participants define "horror"?
   - What does "horror" mean to you?
   - What led to your interest in horror games?

3. How are these Japanese horror stories and media interpreted by the participants? What cultural meaning do they derive from this content - i.,e. do they view it as distinctly Japanese, as another example of horror?
   - Do you see any differences in the horror games you play?
   - Do some games have a more cultural element to them?
   - What do you think about how horror translates across language/culture?
   - Have you ever felt that the translation of a game affected your understanding of it, as an English speaker?
   - Have you encountered a situation where the horror landed differently due to a cultural difference?
   - Have you played any games that seemed very "Japanese" in its horror? How so?

4. How do they position themselves in relation to the content - community member, expert, or as a person with interest in the topic?
   - Do you have a community for your content?
   - How engaged would you say your community is with your content? (i.e. comments or posts on discord, reddit, youtube)
   - How do you choose the games you play?
   - Do you take feedback from your community when deciding what to play?
     - How does that affect the games that are chosen?
   - How do you see the interaction between you and the audience? (i.e., do you pass content/information to them, is is 2 way interactive, etc)
   - Do you see yourself as an expert in the topic of horror games?

5. What level of familiarity do the participants have with Japanese culture or Japanese horror? How do the participants view the authenticity of the Japanese horror narratives in the content?
   - Do you have any interest in Japanese culture? (traditional or modern)
   - How familiar are you with Japanese culture?
   - What ways have you encountered Japanese culture? (anime, movies, games, etc)
   - Have you ever had an interest in Japanese mythology? (yokai, yurei, oni, shinto)
   - Do you have an interest in Japanese horror specifically?
   - As an English speaker, what do you think about how accurate (or not!) the narratives in the japanese horror games are to Japanese culture?

- What do you consider to be the most culturally accurate Japanese horror game you've played and why?

- Ask about community members who might be interested in doing an interview or filling out a survey, best way to find people

Appendix B

Semi-structured Interview Transcript

This interview transcript has been edited for brevity, clarity, and to remove any personally identifying information or unrelated information.

Researcher: Can you give me a bit of a background on who you are and what you do?

MrKravin: I've been making basically like horror gaming content on YouTube for the last 10 and a half years, which is now that I say that number out loud, it makes me like, whoa. It's a long time. Yeah, I have recently relocated to Scotland. And yeah, I play a lot of horror games and record a lot of videos on it.

Researcher: You live in Scotland now, but you are from the US, right?

MrKravin: Yes.

Researcher: Do you mind if I get an idea of how old you are?

MrKravin: I am 37 years old.

Researcher: Is English your native language?

MrKravin: Yes.

Researcher: Do you speak any other languages?

MrKravin: I speak a little bit of Spanish, but I haven't spoken it in many, many years. So like for all intents and purposes, it's just English these days.

Researcher: What got you into - and this is kind of a more open-ended question - what got and streaming this sort of content, specifically like horror games?

MrKravin: The first horror game that I really, really enjoyed was the first Resident Evil game and the first Silent Hill game. I really enjoyed those. And then after that, I really branched out and tried to just find even more scary and yeah, I would play them, like couch co-op with my friends. And as we were playing, talk about gaming in general. And then at the time, it was around 2010 to [20]11, somewhere around there, one of my buddies, he told me "You know, people actually record their games and post it on YouTube". And I was like, "Oh, that sounds like fun." So I started looking at that a little bit more and then just started doing it as a hobby. And now I guess so many years later, here we are.

Researcher: So you mentioned Resident Evil and Fatal Frame, which Resident Evil was by, I think Konami?

MrKravin: It's by Capcom.

Researcher: - I believe they're Japanese. So when you played the Fatal Frame game, was it already translated?

MrKravin: Yeah.

Researcher: Have you played any of the other ones since then?

MrKravin: Yeah, I played the first, I played one and two. I played one and two. I skipped number three on accident. And then there was one that came out on the Wii U called Blackwater or Maiden of the Blackwater or something like that. I forgot what the title was, but that one really got me back into the series.

Researcher: Seeing that's how you got into horror games, how often do you say you play Japanese horror games?

MrKravin: Pretty frequently. Like probably a few every month. Most of them are by either just a small team or just sometimes just a solo person. But usually around two or three a month probably.

Researcher: When you play them two or three a month, would you consider that to be a decent percentage of the horror games you play?

MrKravin: Unfortunately, it's a small part. It's a small percentage. I wish that I could find more. I would love to play even more because I think they're fascinating. They're just totally different than what Western studios and Western creators make right now.

Researcher: How so? In what aspects are they totally different, would you say?

MrKravin: So a lot of them deal a lot with just local folklore, like urban legends, and just kind of the intricacies of their own culture that is just so beyond and just so different from what I'm used to. So it's really intriguing to me.

Researcher: Do you find them scary in any sense?

MrKravin: We play this kind of game so often. So there's probably a bit of a tolerance. Yeah, you do build up a thick skin after a while of doing these. And like I can almost tell when a jump scare is about to happen. Yeah, for the most part, just because of how different they are than the games I typically play, they still do get me quite often.

Researcher: With the Japanese horror games, do you find that the cultural elements they include translate well in a horror sense?

MrKravin: Oh yeah. I'm trying to think of how to phrase it. Because it's something that I'm not familiar with, I can't add my own expectations to it. And so it just catches me off guard completely sometimes. And sometimes they often lean into the long black hair, kind of like *The Ring* kind of characters. But they also go in just these really wild directions that I've never seen in Western culture before. And then there's even like the way the buildings are laid out, like the level. They have their own style of architecture. They have their own intricacies with their own home life that I find really interesting. And so when you're exploring some of these buildings, you have to open up these different screen doors to go into a room. And there's always gonna be something waiting for you. It's really good. So with, I think with the intricacies of the families and the layouts and things like that, they get you because you're not familiar with them.

Researcher: Has there ever been a time where, at the time you didn't get why something was scary, or you didn't get the cultural nuance of something that was in the game, and then you later realized, "Oh, that was related to something with the culture or a specific urban legend - in terms of understanding the cultural context.

MrKravin: Yeah, so a lot of it is like the scary grandmother that lives with them. Why does everybody live with their grandparents? But then it makes sense when you think about that the older generation will live with their children whenever they're in their older years, rather than going to an old folks style home, you know? And so there's that aspect to it. There's also like the hardworking father kind of trope who works all the time. Never there. And so, I played a few games where the child is afraid of their father because they never get to see them. And they're always just so stressed and overworked. So there's that aspect to it. And the kind of overbearing mother kind of trope, just little things like that, that we don't really get that often in Western media or culture, but over there is just like a day-to-day thing for them.

Researcher: Do you watch any other YouTubers play horror games in general? Or Japanese horror ones?

MrKravin: I do and I don't. I try not to before I play a game. That way it's all fresh and I can give my authentic genuine reaction. But if a game has scared me really bad, then after I play it, I'll go and see other people's reactions. There's a YouTuber I like to watch. His name is CJU Games. He's really good. My friend KatFTWynn. She's great. She has a really good Fatal Frame series as well. She mostly streams.

Researcher: What does horror mean to you? A little bit of context on why I asked. Some people, they define horror as things that scare them in particular. Whereas some people have more of the concept of horror as dark storylines or things that would generally be considered morbid or macabre. So what does horror mean to you as a genre?

MrKravin: So I guess it would be kind of like shining a light on part of life that people don't like to think about or discuss very often. And yeah, it usually does typically cover some pretty morbid or dark or sensitive topics. It's not always just jump scares and blah! stuff in your face. It can go into things like mental wellbeing, mental health, it can go into problems with the family, problems with society in general. It really can cover a bunch of different broad topics while also trying to actively scare you. And yeah, it's just, it's this all encompassing kind of darker flip side of reality.

Researcher: Do you see any kind of differences in the horror games that you play? Specifically referring to cultural differences when it's from different countries, different cultures, et cetera. I've noticed in the past, there's been times where [you] play a game and maybe there's like a mistranslation. You used to offer, "Hey, if anyone needs help reviewing their translation before putting in the game, I'm available." You would offer to assist with that because sometimes it could change, the nature of the immersion or the meaning of what is happening, et cetera.

MrKravin: So a lot of times whenever a dev whose first language isn't English, they don't have the tools for getting a professional translator because that costs money. So they just use Google translate. And oftentimes that is just a literal translation of those words into English. And it necessarily doesn't fit the way we speak or we structure our sentences. And so sometimes the meaning can get completely lost. I've helped with a few different games with just kind of reworking sentences to nail down the meaning that they're trying to achieve. But I haven't done that in a while, actually. I need to start doing that again. That was a lot of fun. Just trying to get their point and their view across can sometimes be lost in translation and can be a little bit confusing at times when you're reading a sentence and it's like, "What do they mean specifically here? What is that? It kind of can also take you out of it as an English - only kind of person, whenever I read a sentence and it's almost like word spaghetti, it's just all kind of tossed together.

Researcher: It reminds me of that meme: "I understand what each of these individual words mean, but I don't know what they mean put together."

MrKravin: It becomes like a literal translation of what they said, so it can just become a kind of mishmash of words and meanings. So it's kind of either up to the player to figure out what they meant, or it's just gonna be completely just whoosh, no idea.

Researcher: So when it comes to these kinds of translations, based on what you just said, it seems like you perhaps prefer the style of translation where they try to get across the feeling or "the vibe" of what the person's trying to say as opposed to direct translations. Because generally in translations, there's two schools of thought. Some think you should literally translate what's being said, and some think [one] should try to get across "the feel" [of what's being conveyed].

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MrKravin: Yeah. I think that there's a little bit of nuance that gets lost whenever you do a literal translation, like "This word means this, this word means this", Because sometimes words can have a double entendre. Or you say one thing, but kind of are inferring to another one, but that can get completely just thrown out whenever you do a literal word for word translation. So sometimes you have to rework the sentence a little bit to bring back that meaning and that feeling.

Researcher: Right, because horror generally is trying to evoke a certain sense, either horror, terror, fear, different emotions. The feel of what's being said or translated is related to the fact that horror tends to try to evoke a feeling.

MrKravin: Yeah.So you can put me in a scary room, but it's only gonna really take me so far in terms of feeling something and caring about my character that I'm trying to embody. Cause if every other note that I read or every word, every sentence that's being spoken to me doesn't quite make sense or isn't getting across their point or the meaning, then I get a little taken out of it. And then that connection between me and the character is just kind of severed. Cause I'm more thinking about "What did they mean here? What did that sentence specifically mean?" There could be jump scares happening, and I'm still like, "That last note was confusing. That was weird."

Researcher: I remember times where the translation might be so scrambled, it would actually be humorous in English. And so it would actually kind of take you out of the horror cause you're laughing. As opposed to being scared.

Researcher: Have you ever encountered a situation where the horror landed a bit differently because it's not that familiar to you? I.e., I never had a scary grandmother, so for me personally, that might land differently or not at all. Have you ever encountered a situation like that with horror?

MrKravin: Yeah. I try to keep an open mind. I try to put myself in the character's shoes as we're playing, try to see it from their perspective of "Oh, I'm a child. These adults are acting a certain way that is unusual or unfamiliar." But there are times where I'm just like, it doesn't quite make sense to me. When it comes to the older generation living with the current family, and they try to hide different medical issues in a lens of horror, like dementia is brought up a lot. And so it'll be like just a creepy old lady. And sometimes it's kind of just like, "Hmm, they need medical help. They don't need me with a flashlight on them". But yeah, I try to stay grounded with the character and the setting.

Researcher: Do you have a community for your content?

MrKravin: Yes, I have a Discord server, which anybody that signs up for my Twitch or my Patreon or becomes a YouTube member can join. I have this just very small paywall to get in because people would just randomly join and be awful. So I figured at least $1, as a barrier to entry, keeps out a lot of the riff raff. Yeah, the trolls basically.

Researcher: How engaged would you say your community is with your content?

MrKravin: I would say very. People suggest games that I play. People respond very well to the stuff that I cover. They seem to appreciate the kind of genuine, laid back attitude that I try to have. Yeah, I would say they're pretty engaged.

Researcher: How much would you say that affects your choice of game to play when someone suggests one?

MrKravin: I typically have like my own list of stuff that I wanna cover, but if it's a title that I have never even heard of, then I'll definitely check it out, especially whenever it gets brought up numerous times.

Researcher: How do you see the kind of interaction between you and your community?

MrKravin: So I try to approach it as, again, just like a couch co-op, just we're hanging out, just checking out a game together. I'm not a celebrity, but some people approach it as like, "Don't talk to me, we're not here to be friends" kind of situation. And I don't like that. I definitely try to have open communication with everybody. I always listen to feedback from my community. I try to be open and talk to everybody and yeah, just keep it like a chill hangout.

Researcher: So you're not approaching it as you're an expert on horror games or anything, I would almost say you seem almost equal participants. Like you said, you don't try to put yourself as "I'm a video game expert" but equals in terms of expertise or interaction, or would you say that's not quite it?

MrKravin: I would say equals, but just from me doing it for so long now, I do think that I do have a little bit of expertise when it comes to horror game design. I can't make a game to save my life, but I've gotten really good at figuring out when a jump scare is probably going to happen, kind of figure out where the story is going or the gameplay direction that they're taking, just from doing it for years now. But I still try to approach it as just hanging out, checking a game out, seeing what it has to offer. And, just getting some good scares out of it.

Researcher: And do you have any familiarity or any interest in Japanese culture- whether traditional, modern, video games or tea ceremonies, etc?

MrKravin: Oh yeah. I would love to visit Japan sometime. So outside of Japanese horror, I read a lot of manga, watch a lot of anime. I love Japanese food.

Researcher: Have you ever had an interest in Japanese folklore mythology specifically? Yurei, Yokai, Oni, Shintoism, all those sort of cast of characters, Kitsune, et cetera.

MrKravin: So I actually have an Oni tattoo. Because I love the idea of, because even the way they depict these demons or entities is just totally different than what we do. And so I think it's really fascinating. I haven't experienced it, but like a Kabuki theater [where people change] masks around to show emotions and stuff like that, I think is really cool. And just the different folklore, I think is great because we have our own and then they have their own entirely different cast of ooky spooky ghouls that they bring out. And then also seeing how it influences manga and anime is really cool. The idea of these different deities and gods, giving different characters different kinds of powers, I think is really cool. I went to the British National History Museum and saw what they had on display for Japan, because I'm currently obsessed with Jujutsu Kaisen, so I saw these two deities, and it's basically personifications of some of the characters. It's like, "Oh, so this guy gets his power and it's based on him."

Researcher: As an English speaker, what do you think about the accuracy of the narratives in Japanese horror games? As in, do you feel they're accurate to Japanese culture or potentially like "That one dev's view", et cetera?

MrKravin: I can easily tell whenever it's a Western dev trying to make a Japanese game, because they'll have American outlets, outlet sockets on the walls, or they'll have very specific American foodstuffs in their house. And they won't have even little things when it comes to the architecture, they won't have. I've noticed that they have in their entryway, a little step where you take off your shoes and you step up into the house. They won't have that. They'll just have a front door with shoes everywhere. They wouldn't do that.

Researcher: And they wear their shoes throughout the house.

MrKravin: Yes, exactly. And that's a big no-no. Just little things like that. So I can tell whenever it's somebody trying to make a Japanese horror game, and they're not familiar with the actual culture itself. So that's why whenever I play an authentic Japanese horror game, I can get just so immersed in it and just so intrigued by just little things, like how the house is set up, what they have in it. Just different like day-to-day life items that they decorate their area with. It just, you know, it really comes off as if you're there.

Researcher: When you play, you said you notice when it's not made by Japanese devs based on these little indicators, the sockets or even the light switches are different. Do you point these out when you're like streaming or making a video or do you keep that to yourself?

MrKravin: I'll point it out. Be like, oh, that's weird. Everything they have is written in English. That's odd. Or just little things, like the step up into the house or even like the way the bathrooms are laid out sometimes. I'm like, this is a very Western bathroom. They don't have the soaking tub.

Researcher: Do you ever notice people in the community or your viewers pointing out or noticing that it's not by a Japanese dev or someone familiar with Japanese culture?

MrKravin: A few times, yeah. A few people said," I lived in Japan for a long time. They wouldn't be doing X, Y and Z. Instead it would be something totally different."

Researcher: How receptive would you say other viewers have been to that?

MrKravin: So far, very receptive. Cause it's never, I never try to be overly harsh or negative about it. Just general feedback. Like, eh, this isn't quite, this doesn't feel quite right, doesn't look quite right. And so people generally appreciate that instead of just bashing like, "Oh, this sucks. This is garbage."

Researcher: What would you say your favorite Japanese horror game is?

MrKravin: If it's just by the developers, I'd have to say probably Silent Hill. Cause I just have, I have a deep appreciation and love for them. The Resident Evil games are brilliant. Love them. In terms of like small creators, the Chillas Art series, they're incredible. Their way of depicting reality and what's happening is just always - I can never guess where things are going. And after so many years of movies and horror games, I'm excited when I don't know where things are going.

Researcher: What do you consider to be the most culturally accurate Japanese horror game that you've played and why?

MrKravin: It'd have to be the Fatal Frame series or the stuff by Chilla's Art. I think Chilla's Art does a perfect slice-of-life kind of horror game when it comes to Japanese culture. Just little things like working at a cafe shop but then being stalked, or working late night at a convenience store. In this latest one, it was basically this family being just torn apart or taken out one by one. I think they do a very good job of demonstrating Japanese culture.

Researcher: Is there anything that you would want to add or say about your experience playing Japanese horror games, doing content on them, having a community that- [Japanese horror games] may not be your specific focus, but [a community] that interacts with that kind of game.

MrKravin: Anytime I do a Japanese horror game, I notice that it really gets people's attention. The audience retention on the videos is much higher than some of the other videos I post. Some people are checking it out for longer and engaging with it more. Anytime that Chilla's Art posts a new game, people are in my comments being like "You gotta check it out, do it, do it!". And yeah, people are really excited for Silent Hill to come back. I'm a

little nervous about Silent Hill 2. The Bloober team has done some good work, but I don't think that they can handle or properly do the kind of, I don't know if they can cover topics of mental health or suicide or self harm in a way that isn't just over the top and like in your face with it. The reason why I like Silent Hill 2 so much is because all the monsters are manifestations of the main characters own guilt and trauma and dread. Whereas this, I think it's just gonna be him running around with a gun just blasting everything. I don't know if they're gonna quite get it. Yeah, I'm gonna go in with an open mind. So hopefully it won't be just him decapitating monsters with Hideo because he's not supposed to be this action hero, but then they released a combat trailer for the game. It shows the nurses jumping over stuff, action style.

Researcher: So they're going for more of a Resident Evil [style] almost.

MrKravin: I think so, yeah.

Researcher: You mentioned that Silent Hill is one amongst one of your favorite Japanese horror games. And that's interesting because even though it is by a Japanese dev, it's actually set in the US. And it's supposed to tell a more Western story. In that game, are there any aspects of it that you think might be more related to a Japanese cultural point of view in terms of like the characters, the story, how things are presented, anything like that? Or do you see any Japanese influences on it at all?

MrKravin: I can't even nail down, maybe some of the apartment layouts in Silent Hill 2 or I don't know. Like I think they did a really good job of trying to like localize it to the US and not just have it be just set in Japan, I guess.

Researcher: Why do you think that your videos with Japanese horror games tend to have a higher engagement or longer watch time, et cetera?

MrKravin: I think it's just because it's in a setting and a storytelling method that my audience just isn't quite used to or see all the time. And so it just captures them and intrigues them a little bit more than the average jump scare simulator that I play. And yeah, I think, I really think it has to do with just showing off their culture, their idea of like folklore monsters, their idea of how they handle mental health and things like that that really intrigue my audience.

Researcher: Which of the Japanese horror game have you seen has had the most interest from your audience?

MrKravin: It's gotta be the Chill Azart games. Anytime they put out a game, I'm getting multiple comments being like, "You have to play this new game, check it out, do it".

Researcher: And they're an indie dev, right?

MrKravin: Yeah. Just two people.

Researcher: Do you have anything else you want to add?

MrKravin: Rather than like a Silent Hill 2 remake, I wish we had gotten like a Parasite Eve remake. That's another Japanese horror game, came out on the PlayStation. I loved it.There's also a game called World of Horror, which is really good. It reminds me a lot of Junji Ito. Just really grotesque artwork, but it's an RPG. And you get status elements like maggots in your skin and stuff like that, it's really gross.

Researcher: So you say it's RPG, is it more like the RPG maker style, like 2D RPG, or is it three dimensional?

MrKravin: It's all in one, it's a flat screen. So it's kind of like an analog horror. It's like you're

just looking at a screen and clicking on stuff. Yeah, it has a lot of Japanese folklore in it. Just different monsters can appear in this little seaside town and just absolutely wreck you. It's really good.

Appendix C

Questionnaire Summaries

Participant A is a 36 year old woman from the United States. She speaks native English and some Spanish, German and Norwegian, although she watches content in only English. She has been watching horror game content on YouTube since 2017, and primarily watches GabSmolders, MrKravin and CJUGames for horror games.

She describes horror as a "Psychological or suspenseful tension, created with atmosphere/environment", and as a genre that causes one to question what is true, real and unknown. She loves ghost stories, but gets too stressed if she plays horror games herself. She loves learning about various cultures, folklore and mythology. She is a language hobbyist in order to learn more about cultures.

Bad translation affects her immersion in a game, and once or twice missing context meant she missed horrific implication: guard sitting in Aokigahara but wearing headphones so they couldn't hear the restless spirits, but didn't know why at the time.

Participant A says that Gab Smolders conducts polls on Twitch, and MrKravin takes suggestions on his Patreon, which brings their attention to horror games that aren't receiving a lot of mainstream attention. She states that she doesn't engage any communities: "I tend to stay away from active fandoms."

She has passing familiarity with Japanese culture and Japanese language. She believes the type of translation style depends on the context. She is familiar with Japanese entertainment media and has also looked into Noh and Kabuki. She watches the YouTube channels Sora the Troll and Let's Ask Shogo, which talk about traditional and modern Japanese culture. She prefers non-American horror, as American horror brings a "certain bluntness to the genre".

Participant B is a 26 year-old English speaking woman from the United States who has been creating digital art online since 2018. Japanese horror games are her favorite, and she watches the following YouTubers: MrKravin, JohnWolfe, ManlyBadAssHero, Theo Williams, OhItsRobinM, and Gab Smolders.

She defines horror as something that evokes emotion, specifically "nervousness, terror, anxiety". As a result, horror can be more than monsters and can be based on real life situations. She has always loved horror movies, and horror games allow her to experience a horror scenario without it being real. Poor translation does not affect her immersion, but cultural elements help her relate to the main character. Familiar horror has never scared her, but mythological horror or horror that is culturally new to her causes her unease. Horror games that she views as distinctly Japanese: games by indie developer ChillasArt (especially The Kidnap); Fatal Frame series; World of Horror; Spirit Hunter Death Mark; Yomawari: Night Alone. These have practices and folklore that she deems very Japanese in religious practices, culture and location.

She engages in communities related to Japanese horror game content on X, YouTube and Tiktok. There are two creators that she sometimes sends links to games if she thinks they will like them. She is not an expert at horror games or modern Japanese culture, but in both cases feels like she is pretty knowledgeable. She is very interested in both traditional and modern Japanese culture, and would like to learn the language and visit one day. She doesn't mind different translation styles, and she has mostly encountered Japanese culture through anime and

movies. She often incorporates elements of Japanese mythology in her digital art. She feels that Japanese horror stands out as unique because America has "no culture".

Participant C is a 27 year-old male from Canada who can understand French and some Italian and Japanese. He has been watching horror games on YouTube since 2012, and watches MrKravin, JohnWolfe, GabSmolders, CJUGames, StellaAbassi, Markiplier and Jacksepticeye.

He describes horror as not only something that scares you, but also something that causes subtle unease due to being uncanny or setting off your gut instinct to run. He finds that horror is uniting in that it reflects our shared humanity, rather than the differences in what form the horror takes. Asian horror aligns with what he finds to be scary.

He finds poor translation as immersion breaking, and prefers translations that get the meaning across even if not literal. He finds that games that take something familiar and twist it can land differently, as he won't be able to relate to the "familiar" situation. He finds that Japanese horror games have a focus on wronged individuals, especially women, coming back from the grave to seek revenge; thus, any games with that as a plot element feels "Japanese influenced" to him. The content creators he watches tend to follow their communities preference on horror games length and type (AAA or indie, etc). Besides commenting on their YouTube videos occasionally, he doesn't interact with the creators much, and watches them for recommendations on what to play himself. He participates in the community on r/horror.

He believes himself to be well-versed in what makes a horror game, and is interested in both Japanese culture and visiting Japan one day. He can recognize some Japanese phrases and can tell the difference between the Japanese syllabaries. He is familiar with Japanese entertainment media, travel vlogs and lifestyle videos. Most culturally accurate Japanese horror game: Okaeri or Stigmatized Property by Chilla's Art. "...both of those games have a subtle, uncomfortable slow-burn type horror that I've come to associate more with Japanese made horror. Where the threat isn't immediately apparent but from the start something feels deeply wrong about the situation. Both have a grounded feel about their horror as well, neither having a large, looming threat beyond comprehension but rather a sense that what's going on is something only just out of your understanding, it's a human horror but that humanity is no longer confined to the realm of the living."

Participant D is a 30 year-old male from Canada who is learning Oneida, an indigenous Iroquoian language. He has been a viewer of horror games since 2013 and watches MrKravin, Gab Smolders, RDCworld, berleezy and PhysicalGamerz. He defines horror as invoking "a sense of dread". He began watching horror game playthroughs to see the content creator's funny reactions; now he watches them to see what methods games use to scare the player.

He states that most horror games are set in either East Asia or America, but that some reference indigenous mythology or futuristic settings. He thinks that culture in horror is used as a storytelling tool, and that "a monster is a monster regardless of what its cultural origins are." He has not encountered a situation where the horror landed differently due to a cultural difference, and feels that mistranslation can break immersion. He can think of no tropes that make games such as those by Chillas Art "Japanese". He prefers translations to give a sense of the meaning instead of literal translations.

The only place he engages in communities around Japanese horror game content is YouTube: he leaves comments on YouTube videos and talks on Discord. He watches whatever the content creators upload, and that a couple of the content creators take input on what to play

next. He is not especially interested in Japanese culture more than any other culture, and is not very familiar with it. He has never been to Japan, and speaks no Japanese. He is familiar with Japanese entertainment media. He assumes that games made by a Japanese developer are culturally accurate, but has no way of knowing. Most culturally accurate Japanese game: Shenmue.

Participant E is a 32 year-old woman from Canada who can speak basic French and understand some Italian. She is an artist who creates comics and fanart that she shares on X, Tumblr, Instagram and TikTok since 2010. She previously did a brief stint streaming herself creating art on Twitch and YouTube. She began watching horror games on YouTube in 2010-2011, and currently watches Gab Smolders, SinowBeats, John Wolfe, MrKravin and ProZ; she previously watched Mangaminx, ManlyBadassHero and KatFTWynn. "Horror is a genre that blends the unknown, the thrill of fears[sic] and an otherworldly atmosphere." She became interested in horror through a childhood interest in monsters. She also draws monsters for her art.

She says that sometimes, things that are creepy in one culture can be more subtle or blatant to those from another culture; sometimes, aspects that are normal in the original culture can be seen as part of the horror in another culture. Mistranslation can make a story hard to follow, or translation/localization can result in the connotation being lost or meaning watered down - i.e., "ghost" instead of words that indicate more types (one that has never been human, or a vengeful spirit, etc). She states that in the Indonesian horror survival game DreadOut, some of the enemies were confusing and didn't act in a horror fashion as expected; the horror only made sense once one read the written notes explaining the context. She finds that for translation, especially dialogue, going by the intention matters: some things might sound polite in one language, even if intended as rude in another. However, she doesn't like it when the meaning is completely changed for localization.

She is engaged in fandom communities on Tumblr, Discord and Twitter, and finds that those communities are very engaged with the games' content. Some content creators she follows open polls on X or will take recommendations if you're subscribed to them. She also will comment on their videos and streams to guess the story or share thoughts. Very Japanese horror games: Higurashi, Fatal Frame, games by Chillas Art, Resident Evil and Silent Hill. While the last two are set outside of Japan, she feels that they still show their roots.

She is very interested in Japanese folklore and mythology, and sees herself as pretty familiar with Japanese culture through the anime conventions she attends and sells art at, as well as due to a brief attempt to learn Japanese. She has not lived in Japan and can recognize some phrases and words. She is familiar with Japanese entertainment media, fashion and snacks.

Participant F is an American woman in her early-30s who speaks Japanese with intermediate proficiency. She has been watching horror games on YouTube for about 10 years, and watches MrKravin, CJUGames, Supergreatfriend, Bobvids Gaming, John Wolfe, Alpha Beta Gamer, Gab Smolders, TiraLyra and VoidBurger Gaming. She describes horror as "a sense of unease and vulnerability, featuring tension, suspense, and usually mystery", and has loved horror since she was a child.

She believes that if the audience has enough context and background, most horror can translate across cultures well. She believes that due to many horror developers using text to carry the story, poor translation can kill the games. She herself has translated Japanese in a literature translation course; she says that Japanese is very contextual and indirect. For some situations,

such as directions, a direct translation is needed; for others, she will focus on the intention as many Japanese phrases and idioms don't lend themselves to direct translation. She differentiates between translation and localization. Localization makes the games more relatable, but it has an impact in that it changes or cuts the original meaning.

She engages in community only on MrKravin's Discord. She watches most of what the above mentioned creators post, as they align with her horror game tastes. Many of the creators are open to feedback, such as conducting polls, subscriber picks, or relying on video chat or comments. While she herself is a "lurker", most of the creators she follow engage with their community quite a bit. She sees herself as able to engage in both casual and in-depth discussion about horror games, but has less expertise on game developers.

Participant F has a Bachelor's degree in Asian Language and Literature (Japanese track), and keeps up with some aspects of the culture. She finds Japanese mythology, folklore and urban legends to be fascinating, and reads a blog called Saya in Underworld that posts about urban legends in Japanese online forums. She visited Tokyo-area Japan in 2010 and is familiar with the cuisine, household etiquette, government structure and modern culture.

She believes that every culture's media tends to gloss over, emphasize, or de-emphasize certain things - for example, Japanese horror movies will have an urban or well-off protagonist encountering horror in a ridiculously run-down village in shambles- similar to Western movies that have the horror located in rural mansions or areas far from modern civilization. Games like The Closing Shift, The Convenience Store and the Caregiver by Chilla's Art, however, locates the horror in realistic, relatable modern areas of modern Japan. She also appreciates horror media that references aspects of Japanese society such as a culture of overwork or social norms.

Most culturally accurate: games by Chilla's Art, specifically The Closing Shift. It is very grounded in the horror, the locations, the social norms.

Participant G is a 29 year-old male from Australia that is learning Japanese. He has been viewing horror games on YouTube for nearly 12 years, and mostly watches Manbadasshero and Insym. He mostly watches in English, but also rarely in Spanish, French, Malay, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc. He describes horror as "the content of the supernatural crafted to instill dread". He was fascinated with folklore as a child.

He believes that all horror games have a cultural element and hit harder for the culture it originated from due to superstition and what they were raised to believe. Japanese horror focuses on the psychological and tension building, whereas Western horror focuses on the physical and jumpscares. He has watched horror games where the translation was so bad, he had no idea what was going on in the game. He feels that a lot is lost even when translation is done correctly- keeping both the meaning and the intent. He prefers the intent behind something said rather than the literal meaning. Only one game has managed this balance - Hollow Coon by Nayuta Studio. He finds Vietnamese and Thai horror interesting, but not scary to him.

He engages in community by talking on Kravin's discord server. He finds a creator that he likes and then watches their japanese horror content- he doesn't choose himself. Insym (content creator) takes feedback based on community requests and has a submission form. Participant G has played and watched thousands of hours of horror games and has strong opinions concerning horror, but does not consider himself to be an expert on what is scary and good. However, he can list what makes horror bad.

He is very interested in Japanese culture. He has been to Japan on a long tour and intends to go again, adores Japanese mythology (of which he has almost categorical knowledge), is

familiar with Japanese history , entertainment and modern culture. He is able to speak intermediate Japanese. He prefers Japanese horror to Western horror by far. He finds Japanese horror games to be fairly accurate, especially in regards to social structures and real-life occurrences. He finds that Chilla's Art is the most accurate culturally, with both folklore and realistic horror in a psychological manner. slow - burn, character and environment.

Most culturally accurate Japanese game: unnamed game about domestic abuse and murder set in 1800s Japan which led to reform.

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