

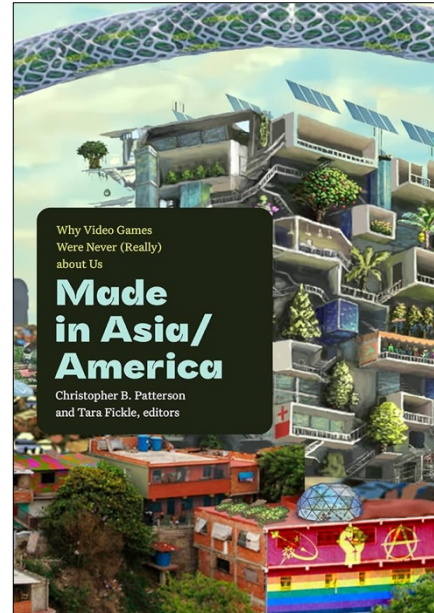
Christopher B. Patterson and Tara Fickle (Eds.), **Made in Asia/America: Why Video Games Were Never (Really) About Us**, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024, 364 pp., open access.¹

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Video games and the academic field of game studies have experienced significant growth in recent years. As new video games enter the market, scholars are increasingly engaging with these games to unpack their cultural and theoretical impact. Despite this ongoing expansion, a critical gap remains. Asian, Asian American, and Asian/American racializations in video games continue to be overlooked, both within the content of video games and in the scholarship surrounding them.

Christopher B. Patterson and Tara Fickle's edited volume, **Made in Asia/America: Why Video Games Were Never (Really) About Us**, curates 14 essays that explore video games through theoretical lenses such as colonialism, postcolonialism, and their interactions with Asian/American identity. Throughout the book, Patterson and Fickle use *Asia/America* to emphasize the intertwined histories and ongoing exchanges between Asia and the United States, moving beyond fixed national or ethnic categories. The book offers a refreshing shift from traditional approaches to game studies. It highlights the fact that while many video game players are Asian/American, they remain significantly underrepresented among game designers and developers. The editors also call on readers and scholars to reimagine the way games are interacted with and how games can reveal or better give us insight into how racial and geopolitical assumptions are present when we speak about Asia, America, and Asia/America.

The book serves as a strong entry point for readers, whether they are situated within game studies or entirely new to the field. It provides a clear historical overview while identifying key gaps and areas for future research. The curation of the book is both thoughtful and intentional. This sense of care is evident throughout the volume. It is clear that the project began long before its official publication, with early conversations, roundtables, and workshops, particularly through the Asian American Studies Conference, laying the groundwork. The editors are transparent about their recruitment process and intentional in inviting scholars with a range of identities and perspectives, ensuring a rich diversity of voices. This inclusive and community-rooted approach sets the book apart from many others in the field. The scholars in the book also approach game studies from a critical ethnic studies approach, which is quite scarce in the field of game studies.



¹ <https://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/3343/Made-in-Asia-AmericaWhy-Video-Games-Were-Never>

Throughout its chapters, the book introduces a range of concepts and theoretical frameworks from outside of game studies and thoughtfully integrates them into the field. In fact, it often uses video games as a platform to reflect on and interrogate broader definitions and meanings. For example, in chapter 2, "The Asiatic and the Anti-Asian Pandemic on *Paradise Killer*," Patterson examines the term "Asiatic" and its shifting meanings. Using *Paradise Killer* (p. 52) as a case study, he explores how the game allows players to exercise agency in determining what "truth" is, while also reimagining the meaning of the game's space and the term itself. The issue is not just the definition of "Asiatic" but the lack of recognition and reconciliation surrounding its use.

Another instance where conversations from outside game studies are brought into the fold is in "Designer Roundtable #2, Choose Your Mothership." The participants in this roundtable come from various industries beyond gaming. For example, Toby Đ reflects on their experience in the film industry, where they encountered barriers related to their Asian identity. Đ draws connections between these challenges and hiring practices in the gaming industry, noting that being Asian can feel like a double-edged sword. While the rarity of Asian representation might make one stand out, it can also lead to exclusion or tokenization. This tension between visibility and marginalization reflects a broader pattern of limited recognition and acceptance within the field, an issue that emerges across multiple conversations in the book.

The concepts brought from outside of game studies into the field are incredibly valuable. At the same time, it is clear that ideas within game studies can also extend beyond the discipline. For example, chapter 8, "The Video Game Version of the Indian Subcontinent" by Mukherjee, explores the gaming landscape and economic interests in India. It also delves into the term "Asia" as it is used in the industry, particularly in connection with the idea of "odorlessness." In some instances, both in video games and beyond, this notion of odorlessness refers to the removal of national or cultural "odors" to create something more palatable for a global audience. This strategy, while often subtle, reveals how cultural identity is erased or muted to appeal to broader, often Western, markets.

In the remainder of the book, several chapters offer compelling contributions by introducing frameworks that not only apply to game studies but also extend beyond it. One standout is chapter 9, "High-Tech Orientalism in Play: Performing South Koreanness in Esports" by Voorhees and Howard, which examines how the broader environments, such as fandoms, audiences, and external media, around games often fetishize anything associated with South Korean culture. The historical linkage between techno-orientalism and high-tech orientalism provides a powerful lens to understand how the West continues to fetishize "exoticness" through racialized narratives. While this chapter focuses on Asian and Asian American identity, the framework it introduces can easily be used to analyze other identities and across different media outside of game studies.

Another especially important chapter is chapter 14, "This Is What We Do" by Lee, which explores protest and activism within video games. Lee pushes back against the assumption that games are merely escapist, instead framing them as active spaces where political and social issues are engaged. The chapter also powerfully shows how in-game protest can reshape how characters and identities are perceived, for instance, how Mei from *Overwatch* (p. 296) can be reimagined as an antihero symbol, revealing deeper

issues of systemic racism within both game studies and the industry. In doing so, Lee's chapter reinforces how virtual actions often reflect and challenge real-world power structures.

This book offers an incredibly diverse and innovative approach to game studies, particularly in how it engages with race, specifically Asian-ness and American-ness in the space of video games. The scholars featured go far beyond surface-level analysis and guide readers through their thought processes in ways that feel grounded and intentional. One of the book's greatest strengths is this transparency. The introduction, in particular, is very effective. It not only summarizes the book but also sets expectations that go beyond a generic overview. It includes specific insights that help readers feel more invested in the journey and better understand the positionality behind the project.

Another strength of the book is how it connects different aspects of life, such as representation, geography, romance, performance, and protest, to real-world issues of race and Asian American identity. Even with this wide range of topics, the book stays cohesive and focused. This is something other edited volumes often struggle with when moving across various themes. What stands out is how the scholars break down disciplinary boundaries, showing how the frameworks used in the book are not only applicable within game studies but can also be applied more broadly across academic fields.

One unique feature of the book is the integration of both essays and roundtable discussions. This format allows readers to engage with the roundtable transcripts in a way that feels interesting, raw, and grounded in real conversations. These sections offer helpful context about the current state and environment of the field. However, while the roundtables added depth, they would have benefited from a clearer structure. Including opening and closing statements or brief summaries could have helped readers follow the dialogue more easily, especially with the number of participants and shifting voices. At times, the conversation became difficult to follow, and smoother transitions could have made those sections easier to digest and more impactful. One section readers may have hoped to see explored further was in Part 2: *Playable Bodies*, which does a great job of introducing representation and the concept of the body in game studies. However, this section and the book overall could have engaged more with how loot boxes and monetary spending relate to race and fetishization, which are themes mentioned elsewhere. Including a focused discussion on the economics of play, such as spending rates or how players might financially invest in exoticized or fetishized Asian characters, would have added an important layer of analysis. This perspective would be especially powerful when approached through a critical ethnic studies lens.

Overall, the book does a great job of tackling and filling the gap around Asian and Asian American racializations and their interactions within video games. Through its wide range of chapters and diverse group of authors, the book offers both current analysis and future-oriented frameworks that support ongoing conversations around representation. These discussions take place across multiple layers, including the content of games, player communities, and the often-overlooked roles of designers and developers. By drawing attention to who is represented and who is creating these games, the book challenges readers to think critically about race and power in the gaming world. It invites deeper theoretical engagement and expands the possibilities for what game studies can examine and achieve.