

## On the publication of “Replaying Japan: Inaugural preparatory issue”

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It has been six years since the Ritsumeikan Center for Game Studies (RCGS) was established in 2011 as Japan's leading video game research institution affiliated with the university. This year also marks the fifth anniversary of the inauguration of Replaying Japan, an academic institute studying video games that began in 2012 through collaboration with the University of Alberta in Canada. Since then, we have come to know that there are a far greater number of video game researchers abroad, especially those foreign researchers who are interested in video games created with the involvement of Japanese producers, than we had initially expected when these academic institutes were founded.

The Japanese are a people who show an extremely high interest in playthings in video games and playthings more generally, but this interest was not reflected in universities even at the time when RCGS was started. It seems that the common belief that study and play are oppositional things was influential in limiting the academic interest in games. There was even a tendency that play and playthings were considered to be potential barriers to the acquisition of the advanced knowledge that a university education should offer.

Even in the United States, where the video game was invented after the Second World War, universities were not directly involved in its invention. Instead, the prototypes of today's video games were gradually developed by young Americans who pursued new business opportunities. In Japan, it was toy distributors that introduced those video games to the country. Furthermore, it was not universities that contributed to the development of videogames in the 1980's, but mainly enterprises offering play as business. Since the 1990s, numerous video games created by Japanese producers became popular, transcending cultural and language barriers to gain support from people all over the world, with the industry becoming a huge global business. This fact clearly suggests that video game playing has crucially become international in scope.

For this reason, video games have been developed mainly by companies that do not have much of a relationship with universities and have spread around the world introducing an interest in Japanese culture to many young video game players. In addition, an increasing number of researchers who conduct studies on video games are wondering whether video games might be more than simply playful in nature. These researchers have come to realize the value of gathering and organizing published video games as their study materials.

The development of video games became possible with the power of business. However, due to competition among companies and legal restrictions such as copyrights, it is difficult for companies to offer a place for a researcher to act as a video game player and conduct studies freely on the diversity of video games available on the market while exchanging ideas with others. Does this not clearly suggest the roles that only universities can play in making a substantial influence on the future development of video games? I think that one of these roles universities will be expected to play is to utilize their unique expertise in a wide range of fields to conduct further research into the uniquely international nature of videogames, a characteristic which has been brought to light through the activities of RCGS and Replaying Japan over the last six years.