



日本製のテレビゲーム [Japanese video games]

Many of the foreign students who come every year to Japan felt interested in Japanese culture for the first time thanks to manga and anime. Manga works continue an old tradition of storytelling by drawings and, no matter how outlandish a story they might be telling, they are permeated with Japanese culture and customs. The same could be said of Japanese video games: it is through them that some start to learn something about Japan, even when they are too young to notice it, just to later develop a deeper interest in the people and the culture from which those games come.

Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto [みやもと しげる 宮本 茂], one of the most important game designers ever, has explained that his inspiration in creating games so amusing and so full of adventure such as the *Super Mario* and *The Legend of Zelda* series were his own childhood experiences and games, his exploring fields, woods and caves outside Kyoto when he was a little boy. That is why one sometimes gets the feeling that the forests in *Zelda*, while riddled with fantastic creatures, have still some indefinable Japanese quality about them, and the roads and bridges in *Mario Kart*'s exuberant circuits have still something in them that could only come from Japanese roads and bridges.



There is one game which was specifically designed to let the player experience in some way life in Japan in the 1980s: a game called Shenmue, created in 1999 by Sega's Yu Suzuki [すずき ゆう 鈴木 裕]. Taking the role of a young Japanese man, the player had to solve a mystery, to live an adventure starting in a small village in Japan and moving gradually to bigger and busier environments, including a reproduction of Dobuita street and the seaport in Yokosuka city (Kanagawa prefecture), all places full of people going around in their everyday lives. I remember a detail which caught my attention when I first played that game: on the streets, there were plenty of vending machines which you could use to buy drinks, and whenever you did so, the main character invariably drank the contents of the can right next to the vending machine and threw the empty can away in the waste bin adjacent to it. Of course, one can understand the reason behind that peculiar behaviour after coming to Japan: waste bins can frequently be found next to vending machines, and only next to them, so it is a better idea to finish the drink and take advantage of the bin by the machine than to carry the can with you. You never know how long it will be before you find a suitable bin again!



Kochi's environments are especially full of wondrous forests, rivers and caves; it is truly a place to live *Mario* and *Zelda*-like adventures. So, it is not difficult to imagine Kochi-born musician Nobuo Uematsu うえまつ のぶお [植松 伸夫] being inspired by his childhood memories in this environment when composing wonderful soundtracks for games such as the celebrated *Final Fantasy* series. If you look at it this way, I am sure you will agree it is no wonder that some of the best games have been, and still are, made in Japan.

