

1. Chosen Topic and Personal Engagement

When I started playing roleplaying games (RPGs) as an undergraduate in San Antonio, the game I started on was the Legend of the Five Rings (L5R) RPG. I've continued playing that game in its several editions in the years since then, with games both in-person and online, and I've been fortunate enough to take part in formal, official events hosted by the owners of the RPG intellectual property. I've returned to the game to carry out my academic work at several points during my career, as well, addressing a little-studied game within an already-understudied field. Being able to do so once again, to develop a bit better an understanding of that game and to add that understanding to the greater sum of human knowledge, suggests itself as a worthwhile endeavor and a continuation of what has been a sustaining engagement.

2. Issues Surrounding the Topic

Matthes, E.H. (2016). Cultural appropriation without cultural essentialism? *Social Theory & Practice* 42(2), 343-366. doi: 10.5840/soctheorpract201642219

The article argues that philosophers' tools of thought can be readily applied to scholars' and artists' conversations regarding what cultural appropriation is and the ways in which it works moral and ethical harm. A rough definition opens the piece, followed by an essay map. Harms wrought by appropriation are detailed, and tensions between those inside and outside cultures are examined as the issue of cultural essentialism—distilling a rich and complex culture down to one or two “vital” features—is treated. How to avoid the problems of the latter receives attention as the piece ends. In all the article is a useful survey of cultural appropriation, one likely to inform my own discussion in the project as it moves forward.

Von Bergen, C.W., Von Bergen, B.A., Stubblefield, C., & Bandow, D. (2012). Authentic tolerance: Between forbearance and acceptance. *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 19(4), 111-117.

The article argues in favor of a position respecting persons rather than the validity of their beliefs. A history of tolerance, broadly conceived, leads into changing definitions of the term, thence into the issue of intolerance and its uses. A brief explication of what the authors term “authentic tolerance” follows, including looking at cross-cultural perspectives on the matter and establishing key points of practice. Conclusions regarding how to implement the authors' authentic tolerance end the piece, bringing it to what seems now a dated understanding of tolerance and acceptance, albeit one that seems to still have some social cachet and can therefore be applied as contextual materials in the project as it moves forward.

3. Specific Issue and Angle

Because L5R, originally an American product, works in an amalgamation of feudal Japanese and not-necessarily-contemporary-to-it East Asian cultures, there are concerns of whether the game is culturally appreciative or culturally appropriative. My inclination is to believe it is the former, although some aspects of the latter are unfortunately present. How much they are, and whether they outweigh the appreciation in the aggregate, will be the issue I hope at least to begin to address in the commentary essay to come.

4. Audience

My expected primary audience is still a “local” group united more by shared interest than geography, that group of people who play RPGs and their proximal, overlapping communities of tabletop gamers and science-fiction and fantasy fans. They remain the “nerdy” groups in middle socioeconomic strata, marked by the enthusiasm for material, attention to detail, and legacy of abuse concomitant with that label. Age ranges are still upper teens through, generously, mid-30s, those groups most likely to have a confluence of free time, availability of funds needed to facilitate play, and desire to play as recreation.

My expected secondary audiences are my students, whom I hope will take my efforts as an example to follow in their own work, as well as others who will teach the kind of courses that assign exercises such as this one, whom I hope will also benefit from having examples ready to hand. I would also anticipate that others running casual internet searches for information about RPGs will find their way to this example, although I rather expect that they would do so as tertiary audiences; nonetheless, I hope that they will find useful what I would make available to them.

I can expect that my audiences will be largely familiar with RPGs as concepts and, perhaps, in practice. I would not anticipate having to offer more than cursory definitions of commonplace gaming terms, although game-specific ones might need a bit more attention. I would also expect that they would be relatively adept readers, given the text-heavy nature of tabletop RPGs such as L5R—but I would not expect them to be literary scholars. Consequently, while I need not “dumb down” my prose, I should avoid the more intensive literary criticism to which I am trained and toward which I sometimes veer at odd moments as a result of that training.