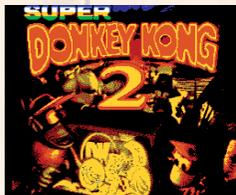


PIRATE PORTS

UNUSUAL CONVERSIONS TO THE NES

The latest and greatest consoles don't always make it to the developing world. In China, the gaming scene of the 1990s was dominated by the Famicom—or at least the Famiclone. Still, the country's booming magazine industry kept a stream of teasers flowing in from Japan that left gamers eager to play the latest and greatest. Enter the pirates.

The fabricators of unlicensed Famicom cartridges—usually IP pirates, but occasionally developers—came up with a slew of really creative ways to backport titles from fourth and fifth-generation systems to the “Red and White Machine.” —Derrick Sobodash



SUPER DONKEY KONG 2

CHINESE TITLE:

Chaoji Da Jingang

PUBLISHER: Ka Sheng

PRICE: Unknown

Rare took a big financial risk when it invested in SGI workstations to make DONKEY KONG COUNTRY: the Super Nintendo's (SNES) third bestselling game. DONKEY KONG brought cutting-edge 3D technology to a comparatively old system and paved the way for similar games like KILLER INSTINCT. Ka Sheng brings its sequel, DIDDY'S KONG QUEST, back to 8 bits.

THE GOOD: Ka Sheng's game plays as solid as the original, though with smaller sprites relative to the screen size.

THE BAD: The rich, CGI-rendered characters appear here in three colors. They still look good, but lose one of the series' key selling points. The enemies also respawn too soon, making backtracking dangerous.

THE UGLY: Only four stages? This engine is too good for such a short game.



FINAL FANTASY VII

CHINESE TITLE:

Zuizhong Huangxiang VII

PUBLISHER: ShenZhen

Nanjing Technology

PRICE: 35 yuan (\$5.12 USD)

Square brought in millions of converts to the RPG genre with FINAL FANTASY VII. This FINAL FANTASY installment was praised for its soundtrack, narrative and “beautiful cut-scenes.” But what happens when those scenes vanish? ShenZhen Nanjing answers that on its custom Famicom board.

THE GOOD: ShenZhen crushed 3 CD-ROMs into a 16-megabit cartridge. The story survived unscathed—if you can live without Yuffie and Vincent. The game even has a Materia system, and the death of Aeris!

THE BAD: Zero originality. The script was lifted from the Chinese translation of FINAL FANTASY VII. Sprites and backgrounds were pillaged from FINAL FANTASY III. Character portraits were pilfered from SUPER ROBOT WARS. Did ASCII make a *Final Fantasy Maker* 1990?

THE UGLY: The soundtrack is terrible 8-bar loops of early FINAL FANTASY music hacked to fit Nanjing's driver. Battles are unbearably slow and unbalanced, and surviving to the first item shop depends entirely on luck.



BIOHAZARD/ RESIDENT EVIL

CHINESE TITLE:

Sheng Hua Weiji

PUBLISHER: Waixing
Computer Science and
Technology

PRICE: 25 yuan (\$3.66 USD)

URL: www.waixing.com.cn

Waixing has a dirty name in the industry, but turned out a few gems in its early days. In this RESIDENT EVIL clone, the player guides Jill Valentine through a 2D mansion during the first T-Virus outbreak in Raccoon City. This Famicom remake comes out sufficiently scary.

THE GOOD: The zombies are fast enough to offset any loss in tension that came with the switch to an overhead view. Major gameplay elements like mixing items and hunting for ammo were preserved—for better or for worse.

THE BAD: While Waixing might have made the map sprites, it stole the zombies and battle system from RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN. That's not necessarily bad, but the first-person shooter style battle engine, based on a bouncing-line rhythm game, would be a lot cooler if it used the NES Zapper.

THE UGLY: Repetitive, rumbling music. Ambience is key to survival horror, and that's where Waixing loses out. For a Famicom game with suitably scary music check out Capcom's SWEET HOME.



CHRONO TRIGGER

CHINESE TITLE:

Chao Shikong Zhi Lun

PUBLISHER: ShenZhen

Nanjing Technology

PRICE: 35 yuan

URL: www.sznanjing.com

CHRONO TRIGGER pushed the limits of the Super Nintendo's base hardware with its rich visuals and moving music. But just as important to the experience was its story, something a Famicom clone cannot possibly get wrong. Right? The Black Wind howls for whoever dares to play this disaster.

THE GOOD: Nanjing tried to copy three of the game's songs, but the beautiful melodies of Yasunori Mitsuda end up an ear-shattering mess with scratchy drums.

THE BAD: Guardia 1000 A.D. has a suspicious number of PCs and Pokéballs. The game is clearly hacked over Nanjing's pirate POKÉMON—Chrono's first fight is against a pack of wild Rhyhorn. Every plot point is changed, and the game ends when you meet Magus.

THE UGLY: The active battle system, laggy scroll speed, and poor list organization combine in a fatal cocktail. Clearly no testing was done before this game shipped, since it is unbeatable without some impressive RAM hacking.



TOMB RAIDER

CHINESE TITLE:

Gumu Li Ying

PUBLISHER: ShenZhen

Nanjing Technology

PRICE: 15–30 yuan

URL: www.sznanjing.com

Eidos/Core Design came out of nowhere with TOMB RAIDER, one of the first fully 3D adventure games on the PlayStation (and Saturn) and a key seller in the systems' early libraries. Critics were as taken by the idea of an adventure game with a heroine as they were by her boxy curves. But all the mid-1990s girl power in the world can't make this 3D adventure work on Famicom.

THE GOOD: Nanjing wrote a new story. In this game, Lara has to locate a missing map whose finders have all died mysterious deaths. Is it a curse or something else?

THE BAD: Lara runs like she's weighted down by two really heavy objects: her guns. Movement slows to a crawl when the pistols come out, and those one-pixel bullets would be more at home on an Atari 2600.

THE UGLY: Hope you like the title screen music, because that is the entire soundtrack. Damage calculation is stupid: you have to bury six slugs in a spider before it dies. Once you realize bringing up the menu resets all enemy positions, you'll be abusing that glitch to avoid playing this game.