



## Gaming in the Chinese Context

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Even though online games and esports have become a booming business in China over the past 20 years, the Chinese academic discourse in this area is relatively sparse, with limited research on Chinese games and gamers (Chew, 2016). This lack of research has sometimes resulted in stereotypes of Chinese games and gamers. Gold farmers (Liboriussen, 2016) and game addicts (Golub & Lingley, 2008; Bax, 2016), for example, often stand in for Chinese gamers at large. Some English media has gone so far as to assert that China has 100 million brain damaged gamers (Bischoff, 2014). Even though digital games are a relatively new phenomenon, proper understanding of this phenomenon has important social, historical and cultural implications. For example, game culture is one of the ways through which “othering” occurs, as has been discussed by Hanna Wirman (2016) in her analysis of “sinological-orientalism” in the western construction of Chinese game culture and business and by Constance Steinkuehler (2006) in her discussion of “virtual racism” against Chinese players in *Lineage II*.

Esports plays an important part in the Chinese gaming landscape, with the Chinese esports market the second biggest in the world, but this is not the sole reason we focus on the Chinese context. Rather, we are concerned with avoiding an essentialist understanding of games through a universal standard or value, preferring to attend properly to local contexts in tension with the social, political and cultural forces in which games and gamers are embedded. Instead of understanding or imagining Chinese games and gamers merely in terms of commercial or marketing language, we hope this panel could offer DiGRA attendees an opportunity to take a closer look at how games are played and how policies are enacted in the Chinese context.

## **(1) Gaming on campus (Paul Martin)**

Over the last 10 years esports has become a central aspect of internet and gaming culture in China, with the Chinese state actively supporting the development of the industry (Lu, 2016). At the same time, the state has expressed concerns over the role of computer gaming in the lives of young people, where games have been seen as detrimental to young people’s educational development, corrupting of their morals, and a potential site of political unrest (Bax, 2014; Golub and Lingley, 2008, Szablewicz, 2010).

The contradictory nature of this discourse is apparent in the context of collegiate esports, where universities that may be tempted to support the development of this extremely popular form of extra-curricular activity are sometimes wary of a potential backlash from the state or from parents if they are seen to be promoting a pastime that is still sometimes referred to as “electronic heroin”.

This presentation reports on an ongoing research project mapping out the various meanings and values ascribed to esports as its legitimacy as a college sport is debated by students, faculty, management, game developers, league operators, and political actors. The project looks at both resistance to the establishment and development of esports as an extra-curricular activity at Chinese universities and the strategies that advocates of esports employ to establish esports as a legitimate extra-curricular activity.

## **(2) Seeing Like a Male: The Male Avatars of Female Gamers and their Gender Performativity in MMORG (Yijin He)**

Online games as an open space provide gamers with wide possibilities for performing their gender identities. Gamers could customize their game avatars freely and extend or reconstruct their gender identities in the game. Based on interview and participant observation, this study looks at female gamers and their male avatars in Jianxia Qingyuan Online, a Chinese martial arts game by analyzing their experiences and significances of gender performativity. The openness of online game can be regarded as a liquid space with rich creative resources for female gamers to construct their own identities. However, as suggested by Brookey and Kristopher (2009), a free and open perspective on online space would risk neglecting the existence and reproduction of political and social matrix of gender and sexuality online. The gender performativity is conditioned as gendered social norms still play an important role in the game space which entangled with virtuality and reality.

## **(3) Social Interactions within Game: A Case Study of King Glory (Feng Tian)**

Based on the case of King Glory (Wangzhe Rongyao), this study mainly has three aspects of research: (1) How the game encourages social interaction. Including the establishment of a game group or a squad, the function of searching game players and connecting the players in the game; (2) How the connection between games and instant messaging software plays a critical role to increase players' loyalty. Mutual transformation of online relationship and offline relationships, different game groups in instant messaging software and the role of these game groups. (3) How social networks which exist outside the game support players engagement. Finally, through three aspects analysis above, it also discusses the possibility of deep integration between game and social interaction in China.

## **(4) The Change of Cultural Elements in Chinese Game Design in the Recent Twenty Years (Li Ruofan)**

This research looks at the change of cultural elements in the history of Chinese game design. In the recent twenty years, the change has undergone a considerable shift from merely imitating foreign games to a combination between local and global cultures by Chinese game developers. The transition of Chinese game culture was associated with the recognition of the importance of culture creativity. In the Chinese context, more young developers are participating in the game design by combining the game with traditional cultures.

## **(5) The Development of the Youth's Community Culture of Online Games (Wenjun Gao)**

The current research explored the development of the youth's online-game community culture in the motivational framework. For the youth, playing online-games is more than just an entertainment; it is also a way to develop their own culture and identity. We proposed a motivational framework to understand how the online-game community culture can meet the youth's need-fulfilling goals, by specifying the basic needs of the youth and the mechanism of how playing online games can satisfy these needs.

## **(6) Collective Memory of Arcade Gaming in Hong Kong (Hanna Wirman)**

In 2002, there were more than 400 game arcades (or 'game centers') in Hong Kong. By 2018,

the number has dropped to less than two hundred. In their place, esports training centers and arenas are attracting both government and private investment. The nearly 50-years long history of local arcade gaming (Ng 2015), meanwhile, is changing as centers are primarily populated by older adults instead of youngsters. To document this changing landscape of semi-public play, this presentation draws on open interviews conducted in Hong Kong between 2017 and 2019. The interviews help to establish the local ‘collective memory’ (Halbwachs 1992) of arcade play, spaces and players. The presentation explores what kind of a cultural gamer identity the collective memory contributes towards and what are the meanings associated with game arcades in Hong Kong. Comparisons to cases outside of Hong Kong, such as Japan (Ashcraft and Snow 2008), will be made.

## **LIST OF CONFIRMED PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR EXPERTISE**

### **Moderator:**

**Di Zhu:** sociology of consumption, youth culture, and the internet and society

### **Speakers:**

**Feng Tian:** youth culture, esports, the internet and society and internet policy

**Paul Martin:** textual analysis, expression in games, the phenomenology of digital game play, Chinese gaming.

**Li Ruofan:** game design, creative culture, Chinese game history

**Yijin He:** gender, esports and comparative studies of game policy

**Wenjun Gao:** social mentality, social consensus, cultural psychology and the Internet mentality

**Hanna Wirman:** fandom, co-creativity, gender, esports, Mahjong, China

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## **BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPANTS**

**Feng Tian**, Professor and Deputy Director of the Youth Research Department of the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His research focuses on youth culture, esports, the internet and society and internet policy. He leads a number of projects on youth and online behavior, including short video, livestreaming, esports and child protection, with cooperation with the government, enterprises and NGOs. He published books of 'Social Life within HERE: How SNS Empowers Different Generations in China' (2018), 'Social Mentality and Internet Life of Aging Population' (2019), 'Livestreaming: New Landscape of Participatory Culture and Experience Economy' (2019).

**Paul Martin**, Assistant Professor in Digital Media and Communications at University of Nottingham Ningbo China. Dr Martin was a founding member of Chinese DiGRA and currently serves as its president. His work in the area of game studies focuses on textual analysis, expression in games, and the phenomenology of digital game play. His current research is in digital game form and meaning, games studies as a field, and esports in China.

**Yijin He**, Lecturer of sociology at the Beijing University of Technology. He was a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences since 2013 shortly after being awarded his PhD from the University of Surrey. His research interests concern issues of social theory and online youth culture. His current research centers on gender, esports and comparative studies of game policy. He is coauthor of 'Social Life within HERE: How SNS Empowers Different Generations in China' (2018).

**Di Zhu**, Associate Professor of the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. She is also the Secretary General of the Research Committee of Sociology of Consumption of the Chinese Sociological Association. Her research interests include: sociology of consumption, youth culture, and the internet and society. She published books of 'Taste and Material Aspiration: Consumption Patterns of Contemporary Middle Class' (2013) and 'Social Life within HERE: How SNS Empowers Different Generations in China' (2018).

**Wenjun Gao**, Assistant Professor of the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Research Fellow of Social Psychology Lab of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Her research interests include: social mentality, social consensus, cultural psychology and the Internet mentality. She published books of ‘Social Mentality and Internet Life of Aging Population’ (2019) and ‘Livestreaming: New Landscape of Participatory Culture and Experience Economy’ (2019).

**Li Ruofan**, Director, Department of Interactive entertainment creativity, Tencent. As a game developer, Li’s research area includes game history in China, creative cultures in game design and representations of traditional cultures in games.

**Hanna Wirman**, Assistant Professor at the School of Design of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Her research focuses on marginal game audiences, gender and on players’ participation in game creation before and after release. Her game designs range from design for children with special needs to games for orangutans. Her current research is in Chinese gaming, Mahjong, as well as all-female eSports and game arcades in Hong Kong. Hanna served as the first President of Chinese DiGRA and currently as the Vice President of DiGRA.