A Chinese Gaming Cultural Revolution: Contemporary Gaming Cultures and the Communist State

Panel Overview

Recently named "the game industry capital of the world" (GMA 2021), China is now the largest market for video games, with mobile games and esports accounting for most of its revenue. Recently, Chinese game companies, secure in their success at home, have started to expand to international markets, and generated 15.45 billion US dollars in 2020 in non-Chinese marketplaces. For example, *Genshin Impact* (2020) enjoyed tremendous commercial success in international markets as a PC and console game. Yet this game points to the growing affect that the Chinese gaming industry will likely have. King (2021) notes that many developers are worried that game designers and developers will need to self-censor to gain access to Chinese markets. And this worry is not without foundation: *Genshin Impact* censors live players from phrases around Chinese politics (Walker 2020). No surprise for those studying Chinese game cultures—national policy and media industries are intimately linked as the Chinese government closely monitors for media effects—the theory that media compel people to think and do things (Sherry 2009). This panel, then, will consider the intersection of game studies within both popular culture and state-imposed cultural policies. It grapples with new gaming laws passed, regulation (both formal and informal), and what types of cultural "Chinese-ness" express themselves in games. It is important to understand this because Chinese is a giant market, yes, but also Chinese games and game cultural practices intersect in global markets in a constant dialectic of media and play.

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The Impact of Juvenile Video Gaming Restrictions

Speaker 1

The National Press and Publication Administration of the People's Republic of China recently released several rules to regulate video game companies and platforms on providing services for juveniles. Such regulations are not new: In 2007, the "Online Game Anti-Addiction System" was

implemented, restricting minors to have 3 hours or less gameplay per day (Zhan and Chan 2012). This restriction was tightened recently, setting the permitted hours to only 8 pm-9 pm on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Instead of punishing the individual minor players, the law concentrates on limiting the game companies and platforms in providing services to young people (Xiao 2021). After Chinese regulators called in Tencent, NetEase, and others for an interview regarding the new restrictions, Tencent shares closed down 8.48% in Hong Kong, while NetEase fell 11% (Kharpal 2021). These regulations do not have isolated effects. Indeed, it is no surprise that the gaming regulations coincided with banning for-profit after-school tutoring, indicating that these regulations are part of a larger state-sponsored plan for education. Further, these regulations intersect with recent erosions to privacy: The national ID verification system has been implemented for online games in accordance with national regulations on anti-addiction policies of online games. In other words, use AI-administered surveillance in the home hopes to control gaming time on PC devices. These new regulations are not the moral panics of North America (violence, sexism, addiction); rather, in a Chinese context, they are part of a larger state strategy of population education and control.

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The Importation of Murder Mystery Games in China – Game Localization and Creativity

Speaker 2

The importation of western games and gaming culture have influenced China, while localization and creativity of its derivative games form a unique new trend. Murder mystery games, also known as "script killing", is an ideal object for studying the adaptation of the games across cultures. Digitally, players tend to use mobile applications to hold murder mystery games virtually, and structured gameplay rules are set within the application and modified as needed by writers. In-person murder mystery games create a new market for renting and hosting the game, and under this circumstance, a combination of escape room and live-action murder mystery game is born. Recently, Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism issued the "Regulations of

Shanghai Municipality on the Filing Management of the Content of Escape Room and Script Killing (Draft for comments)", which states that the plots should exclude any information that endangers national unity and national security (Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism, 2021), suggesting the media and authorities have been highly critical of the industry—a bottom-up game industry that developed outside of regular regulation. In this presentation, speaker 2 considers what is distinctly "Chinese" in these game (Liu, 2014), looking specifically at in-game environments, external environments, and users in determining localization (Zhou & Kolko, 2005). While Chinese authors create more domestic stories, they also create new themes, gameplay, market, and regulations. Domestically, themes take the advantage of cultural background and Chinese history (Pai, 2021). Yet even here, government policy needs to be taken into consideration.

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Arena of Valor (Wang Zhe Rong Yao): Policy as Design, and the Connected Cultures of Play
Speaker 3

Speaker 3 uses Arena of Valor, a popular mobile game in China, to highlight the tensions between government policy, cultural expression, and social interactions among players. Starting with an analysis on the popularity, culture background, and social interaction of the game, this presentation will focus strongly on China's game policies. The policy for sensitive contents against games in China is well known and has been applied to games since the game industry arose, whereas violence, sextual content, drugs, and contents that defame China or Chinese government are rigorously banned (Chew 2015, Shao et al 2016). What has emerged in

development companies is a special position--a person or a whole department--that works to go around the policy trying to enable the game to publish. In many circumstances, policy teams influence the design from the beginning. What emerges as a result of these policy (in addition to influences from external nations) is a cartoonish style to avoid "violence," leaving companies to only worry about design involving sexual content and rules for underage players. In addition, Arena of Valor mobilizes social connections, which play a huge role in propagating the game and is linked to social status on social media like WeChat and Weibo, showing show the player's profiles like ranking in games (Tong and Hui 2021). This case study, while grounded in a single game, looks to the cultural narrative and cultural practices of players, developers, policy makers, and emergent policy experts in the development and propagation of a popular title.

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