

Critical Thinking of ‘Excessive Indulgence of Playing Saps Ambitions (*wan wu sang zhi*)’ : A Research on Urban Adolescents’ Consumption of Peripheral Products of Digital Games in Mainland China

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INTRODUCTION

The ancient proverb—‘Excessive indulgence of playing saps ambitions(*wan wu sang zhi*)’ is commonly used by Chinese parents to criticize their children who excessively focus on ‘non-academic’ hobbies rather than concern ‘serious’ attainments and achievements. Since the Millennium, the ‘only child’ of urban families in mainland China has been vested with diverse possibilities of consuming choices, benefiting by the enhancement of consuming capacity of Chinese families. Thus, the sub-group of the youth, who consumes digital-game peripheral products produced in varied media modalities, gradually formed. And the sub-group’s consumption is inevitably regarded as the practice of ‘*wan wu sang zhi*’ by their parents. With the theory about sociology of consumption and subculture, critically analysing the conception of ‘*wan wu sang zhi*’ is conducive to understanding the consumer roles played by these ‘only child’ in the culture industry of digital games, and to insighting the cultural conflicts hidden in the circumstances of domestic consumption, between two generations. To explore the multiple and complicated meanings of the digital-game peripherals consumption of these adolescents, 13 cases has been selected with the criteria of intensity sampling and narrative research serves as the main method of this study. Analysing the qualitative data from interviews of the ‘only children’ in the first-tier city, Guangzhou(in mainland China) is aimed at studying the only children’s experience of consuming digital-game peripheral products and observing their autonomy during the decision-making process in their domestic consumption. Based on this ongoing research, ‘*wan wu sang zhi*’ represents fourfold meanings:(1)Parents’

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educational expectation for their only children is unduly rooted in the social appeal of upward mobility, while such an educational-cultural appeal vies with adolescents' sub-cultural consumption for space and time in the only children's everyday life;(2)Parents' negative judgements on the consumption of digital-game derivate products derived from the generational cultural conflicts over consumption perspectives;(3)For lack of digital-game playing experience, parents of the only children barely comprehend the rich cultural meanings and social functions of digital games, and 'wan wu sang zhi' reflects the differentiated conceptions of 'game'/'play' between generations;(4)The consumption related to the mass culture had encountered the criticism of 'Moralism' in mainland China, and the moral critic discourse is borrowed by the parents to educate their child for values cultivation in the-only-child families. The young interviewees reveal that they commonly can perceive their parents' expectations and the young try their best to communicate with their parents around the topic of digital games and its new culture, which is usually a failed communication. In such a communication, these young interviewees hope not bring direct conflicts between themselves and the parents; and they prefer to establish stable social-supporting connections, with which learning a few circuitous resist strategies, and make effort to avoid being 'one of the real cases' as the proverb 'Excessive indulgence of playing saps ambitions' described. For these young people, their sustained consumption of the products means keeping a proper distance from the 'Growth Path' and educational space which are designed and constructed by their parents; they are unwilling to overload the external attainment expectations while they expect to seek and experience a kind of meaning about 'satisfaction in life'. According to the further analysis of these adolescents' individual consumption history of digital-game peripheral products, the intention of sub-cultural consumption has transformed from shaping a certain cultural identity to reconstructing and representing the 'self'. Furthermore, their consumption implies that this sub-group is intended to practice their agency in a different way from that of the traditional consumption, which is to distinct the self from the mainstream culture in the sense of the infinitesimal and to resist the cultural authority experimentally; the 'only children' attempt to endow their consumption practice of digital-game peripheral products with resistance, and create sub-cultural meanings through the consumption, answering against the patriarchal-symbolic order in a silent way.

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