

# Good Gamer, Good Citizen: Representing Video Games in Chinese Television

**E. Charlotte Stevens**

Birmingham City University

5 Cardigan Street

Birmingham, B4 7BD UK

[charlotte.stevens@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:charlotte.stevens@bcu.ac.uk)

## Keywords

Video games, Chinese games, Chinese television, representation, esports, adaptation

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This presentation discusses a developing project that looks at remediation of video games in Chinese television dramas, and will be of interest to Game Studies scholars interested in the social and cultural place of games and gaming, in China and more generally. This work uses textual analysis to explore how gaming is represented across a sample of these dramas, looking at how they construct discourses about games and being a player in a Chinese cultural context. For example, these dramas will feature PC gaming or are based on PC games, which is likely an artefact of the historical console ban and stronger presence of internet gaming cafes (Cao and Downing 2008). Others, such as *You Are My Glory* (Tencent 2021), which functions as extended product placement for Tencent's own *Honor of Kings* (2015), is a romance based on mutual proficiency in mobile gaming. These television dramas are interesting paratexts that drive interest towards games (Jiang et al. 2022), but more, they offer a view of how games and practice are framed in a mainstream media form.

This work draws on a corpus of almost 50 television dramas produced in China since 2005 which are adaptations of games and that adapt novels about players as part of the 'adaptation fever' (Inwood, 2017) that has seen many so-called 'IP dramas' (Wang and Yang 2020) produced after the rise of domestic streaming services (Wang and Lobato 2019) or are original stories about players and their gaming experience. These cross a range of genres, including fantasy drama adaptations of role-playing games and multiplayer online games, e.g. *Chinese Paladin* (CCTV 2005), *Xuan-Yuan Sword* (Hunan TV 2012), and *The Player* (Mango TV/Tencent Video 2021); dramas in which players transmigrate into games to navigate a world they understand is governed by game rules and limitations, e.g. *Your Highness* (Sohu TV 2017), *Unique Lady* (iQIYI 2019), *Go and Domain Your Game* (Tencent Video 2023), and contemporary workplace dramas which present success in MMOs as a proxy for success as a citizen and as a romantic partner, e.g. *Love O2O* (Dragon TV/JSTV/Youku 2016), *Gank Your Heart* (Mango TV 2019), *King's Avatar* (Tencent Video 2019), and *You Are My Glory*.

Rather than being a study of factual documentaries, this project approaches gaming dramas as texts that speak to the place of games in contemporary Chinese culture and society.

Dramas such as *You Are My Glory* model a positive place for games and gaming in contemporary China, where success as a player correlates to being a great (heterosexual) romantic partner, and where individual effort is in the service of team success. Further, where *Honor of Kings* and its player base negotiate Chinese history and heritage (Liboriussen and Martin 2020), *You Are My Glory's* female lead is Uyghur actress Dilraba Dilmurat whose star persona as a cosmopolitan ethnic minority (Zhao 2022)

Proceedings of DiGRA 2024

© 2024 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

is leveraged in a broader argument about nation, identity, and cultural belonging all filtered through proficiency in *Honor of Kings*.

Out of this broad corpus, to date I have identified 25 Chinese television dramas specifically about esports or online gaming produced since 2016. These dramas produce and reproduce discourses around games and gaming in a Chinese cultural policy context that constructs online gaming as an adult activity, with children's access limited to a few hours per week. They also frame group play (professional esports teams, amateur MMO play) as desirable peer/collective activity in a social context where few people have siblings or cousins due to the historical one-child policy, and a place where young people can connect with each other and shape identities that are beyond the control of their parents or the state (Fung 2015; Yue and Li 2021). Further, for dramas about esports teams, we see a modelling of community (living and working together) which run counter to Western media stereotypes of a someone playing alone in their basement; however, they also counter a domestic Chinese narrative of games as 'electronic opium' (Tai and Lu 2021, 206; see also Golub and Lingley 2008). Indeed, Tencent's dual status as game developer and television producer is compelling because these dramas demonstrate MMOs as an acceptable hobby because this genre of programming models typically Asian values of collectivity and harmony also found in East Asian games (Yoon and Cheon 2014).

In summary, Chinese contemporary television dramas about games and players are of interest to Games Studies because they are variously adaptations of games, sites for negotiating discourses about games, transmedia extensions of specific properties, and a general appeal about the social benefit of spending time playing with your friends.

## REFERENCES

- Cao, Y. and Downing, J.D.H. 2008. "The Realities of Virtual Play: Video Games and Their Industry in China." *Media, Culture & Society* 30 (4): 515–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443708091180>.
- Fung, A.Y.H. 2015. "Gamers, State and Online Games." In *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Media*, edited by G.D. Rawnsley and M.T. Rawnsley, 330–40. Routledge Handbooks. London; New York: Routledge.
- Golub, A. and Lingley, K. (2008). "'Just like the qing empire': Internet addiction, MMOGs, and moral crisis in contemporary China." *Games and Culture*. 3 (1), 59–75.
- Inwood, H. 2017. "Screening the In-between: Intermediality and Digital Dystopianism in Contemporary Chinese Film and Fiction." *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*. 43 (2): 193–219. <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.39825>.
- Jiang, H., Liu, Q. and Wang, Y. 2022. "Analysis of Tencent's IP Convergence Development Strategy:" In *Proceedings of the 2022 8th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2022)*. Chongqing, China. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220504.524>.
- Liboriussen, B. and Martin, P. 2020. "*Honour of Kings* as Chinese Popular Heritage: Contesting Authorized History in a Mobile Game." *China Information*. 34 (3): 319–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X20908120>.
- Tai, Z. and Lu, J. 2021. "Playing with Chinese Characteristics: The Landscape of Video Games in China." In *The Routledge Handbook of Digital Media and Globalization*, edited by D. Y. Jin, 206–14. Routledge Handbooks. New York; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Wang, L. and Yang, S. 2020. "Analysis on the Dissemination of Internet Novel IP (Intelligent Property) Dramas in the New Media Era." In *Advances in Social Science, Education, and Humanities Research*. Vol. 507. Moscow, Russia: Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201215.335>.

- Wang, W.Y. and Lobato, R. 2019. "Chinese Video Streaming Services in the Context of Global Platform Studies." *Chinese Journal of Communication*. 12 (3): 356–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2019.1584119>.
- Yoon, T-J. and Cheon, H. 2014. "Game Playing as Transnational Cultural Practice: A Case Study of Chinese Gamers and Korean MMORPGs." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 17 (5): 469–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877913505172>.
- Yue, A.X.P. and Li, E.P.H. 2021. "Reconstruction of Gender and Youth Identities: A Study of Online Gaming Communities in Shanghai." In *The Routledge Handbook of Chinese Studies*, edited by C. Shei and W. Wei, 447–61. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge. DOI: [10.4324/9780429059704-31](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429059704-31).
- Zhao, J.J. 2022. "Performing 'Realness' in a Transnational Ethnic Imaginary: Starring Dilraba on Post-2010 Chinese TV." *Communication, Culture and Critique*. 15 (3): 336–54. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcac017>.