"We were the porters of overseas media." -- An investigation into the gaming information media under the influence of the state

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Video game history, Gaming culture, Video game magazines, Console games, Local production practice

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Online and mobile gaming have become a primary form of digital entertainment in China and are an integral part of everyday life (Jiang & Fung, 2017, p. 2). Its popularity was partly benefited by local authorities and their policies for the development of local industry, as they apply neo-techno-nationalism (Yamada, 2000) as an ideology and strategy to protect and cultivate local companies in developing online games and even to propel cultural exports into global markets (Jiang & Fung, 2017, p. 18).

However, victims can also be identified when the state implements policies based on this ideology to prioritize the development of the Chinese online gaming industry. In China, the development of gaming consoles and single-player games, which are primarily developed and imported from foreign markets, has been subject to a certain degree of influence from local authorities since 2000. From the No.44 notice (State Council, 2000), which was announced in 2000 for banning the circulation of foreign-made gaming consoles in the Chinese market (Liboriussen et al., 2016), the shortage on approval of license to these foreign-imported games in the Chinese market (Jiang & Fung, 2017, p. 10), the recent freeze of approval to new license of these games (Ye, 2022), the unsuccessful attempts of foreign-made consoles to entry the Chinese market around the 2000s (Lai, 2013), to the negative discourse of local news media toward these alien games (Zhang, 2013), all these, which could be considered as a part of techno-nationalist strategies, as they constantly limit the import and development of these products in the Chinese market for cleaning the path of local industry to develop their own, eventually contribute to the fall of the market size of these foreign products in China.

In this situation, where foreign-imported products could face a serious shortage and limitation in the Chinese market at the official level, a question arises: Will the production and promotion practices of local workers, who focus on console and single-player games developed overseas, also be affected?

When the official existence of these products in China is affected by local authorities, their official shortage and unlicensed condition in China could further affect the

ecosystem of the Chinese video game industry, market, and community, as foreign-imported products might need to depend on alternative methods to survive and exist in this country in this situation, which may be different in other markets, and eventually, unable to grow like those develop by Chinese developers. To unveil this and prove its existence, one method is to examine related businesses and determine if any influence of the official shortage of these products in China can be observed in the way they generate content for promoting these games and consoles. Ultimately, it could underline the influence of local authorities on the development of the local gaming ecosystem.

To address this, this research will focus on editors of gaming information media in China, a representative group in indicating the influence within the Chinese ecosystem, who specialize in creating content about foreign-developed products, and investigate their experiences in producing localized practices for these products. As a group of individuals focused on promoting foreign-developed games and gaming consoles to Chinese gamers, they are direct witnesses to the development of these products in China. The ban and shortage of these products in China, as obstacles, could create difficulties for them at the official level in fulfilling their jobs compared to their counterparts from overseas. Eventually, they were forced to improvise to continue producing content for local gamers and maintain the popularity of these products among Chinese gamers. In this case, understanding how they fulfill their roles will not only provide people with a better insight into the ecosystem of the Chinese video game industry and its related workers but will also further demonstrate the existing influence of local authorities on these foreign-developed products and the related ecosystem.

This research will rely on various methods, including in-depth interviews, ethnographic research, and reviews and analyses of archival documents. Based on preliminary interviews with related workers, observations, and participations, this research has uncovered certain earlier findings that could indicate the effects on the local practices of this group of people in the absence of foreign-made products in the Chinese market.

First, it is similar to the tendency of imitation in the development of gaming consoles and games in China, as specific local practices initially began by imitating foreign-made consoles and hacking titles introduced from overseas markets (Liao, 2015). These workers imitated their overseas counterparts, such as *Famitsu* from Japan and *Game Station* and *Game Weekly* from Hong Kong, and produced their own content for the local market. For instance, *Ultra Console Game* (UCG), one of China's bestselling video game magazines, has many similarities to *Famitsu*. From scoring systems to video games to the messages left by editors in every episode, many of these elements can also be identified in UCG. The former vice editor-in-chief of this magazine admits that they learned from these magazines at the beginning and claims that their magazines have performed better than the originals in some aspects after just two years of learning from them.

Besides, due to foreign companies' unsuccessful attempts to enter the Chinese market with their products in the 2000s and the ban on these foreign products, magazines that focused on their products were unable to secure news resources about them, including games, directly from these companies, as there was no Chinese market to them due to limitations. In this case, interviewees indicated they were forced to identify another reliable source to cover information about these

products for the local market. For instance, they must purchase overseas gaming magazines worldwide to secure reliable sources and translate content for their readers. Under such circumstances, it is unsurprising that some interviewees joke that they "were the porters of overseas media."

Foreign companies' unsuccessful attempts and the ban not only affect their ability to cover news for local gamers but also have a financial impact on them. When these companies were excluded from the Chinese market, it was nearly impossible for these media outlets to receive financial support and cooperation from them, such as advertising to promote their products in China. Such a difficulty even makes it a dream for some interviewees to cooperate with them. A former editor-in-chief of a gaming information website expressed a desire for financial cooperation with them during an interview and indicated that "it was a dream of him to make an advertisement for PlayStation."

Upon reviewing these findings, it appears that the policies and discourse issued and produced by local authorities have had an impact on the local gaming ecosystem. The absence of these foreign companies and their products in China made it difficult for local workers to develop indigenous practices, and this also had a financial impact on them. In this case, it seems that imitation and reproduction of information from overseas media outfits, as a kind of improvisation, play important roles in shaping local practices of making gaming magazines, making some workers who participated in this industry in its early stage (around 2000s) believe that they were simply porters of their overseas counterparts. Nevertheless, these findings may only partially explain the circumstances of these workers and their production. As this research progresses, new findings may bring us closer to understanding the authentic situation of these workers and their dedication to foreign-made games and gaming consoles in China.

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