

# From Farm to Game: Understanding Chinese Culture Through Video Games

**Xiaoyi (Lulu) Sun**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
8 Eglinton Ave E  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
Telephone 6476767079  
lulusun@unc.edu

## Keywords

Chineseness; Farming Simulation Games; Guófēng Yóuxì; Chinese Studies; Game Studies; Culture and History

## INTRODUCTION

The ancient Chinese proverb “Food is the God of the people” continues to hold profound significance in contemporary Chinese society, reflecting an enduring cultural ethos. In today's rapidly modernizing and urbanizing China, this adage gains new relevance as the government underscores the critical importance of ensuring basic necessities like food and clothing for its populace. Amidst these modern transformations, there has been a growing emergence of farming simulation games that creatively intertwine traditional agricultural practices with digital entertainment. These games not only offer leisure but also serve as a bridge connecting players to a bygone era of pastoral tranquility. One such notable example is the game “Taoyuan Shenchu Yourenjia” (“In the Deep of Peach Blossom Village”) which has garnered significant attention for its deep integration of Chinese traditional aesthetics and cultural motifs. This game, set in an idyllic, almost utopian version of rural China, has struck a chord with players, quickly becoming one of the most anticipated releases in its genre.

This paper embarks on a comprehensive analysis of the farming simulation genre, focusing on the case study of *Taoyuan* 桃源. It delves into various facets of the game, including its artistic design, narrative structure, gameplay mechanics, and the seamless incorporation of traditional Chinese cultural elements. The analysis extends beyond the technical aspects to examine the emotional resonance of the game, probing into how it elicits a sense of nostalgia, tranquility, and connection to cultural roots among players. Player feedback and interactions with the game are scrutinized to understand the broader impact of such simulations on contemporary gaming audiences.

By exploring *Taoyuan* in the context of the wider farming simulation genre, this paper posits that the game represents more than mere entertainment. It

Proceedings of CDiGRA 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.

functions as an emotional haven, a virtual sanctuary where players can momentarily detach themselves from the fast-paced, often overwhelming realities of modern life. The game invites players to immerse themselves in a digital rendition of the pastoral ideal, evoking an ambiance of peace and simplicity reminiscent of traditional agrarian life. This paper argues that such games are not only a testament to the evolving landscape of digital entertainment but also reflect deeper cultural and societal narratives, highlighting a collective longing for simplicity and a return to roots in the face of relentless modernization. Through *Taoyuan*, players find a digital retreat where they can engage with and celebrate the enduring values and aesthetics of traditional Chinese farming culture, thereby preserving and reinterpreting these cultural heritages for the digital age.

Full Article Available via: <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/farm-game-understanding-chinese-culture-through/docview/3056998378/se-2>

## BIO

Xiaoyi Sun, preferred name Lulu. She completed her undergraduate studies in East Asian Studies at the University of Toronto and earned an MA in Asian Studies from UNC-Chapel Hill. Her primary research focuses on how media technologies, particularly video games, reflect and reconstruct East Asian culture and history. In addition, she is interested in the 'fandom-ization' of game culture and the development of related industries such as e-sports, streaming, and game design. Social media is also one of her research interests.

## REFERENCE

*2022 Annual Report*. 2022. Mobvista.

Björk, Staffan, and Jussi Holopainen. 2006. "Games and Design Patterns." In *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, edited by Katie S. Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman, 410-37. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Bogost, Ian. 2015. *How to Talk about Videogames*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Bogost, Ian. 2007. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Bown, Alfie. 2018. *The PlayStation Dreamworld*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.

Caillois, Roger. 2006. "The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games." In *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, edited by Katie S. Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman, 122-55. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

- Cole, Matthew, and Katie Steward. 2017. “‘A New Life in the Countryside Awaits’: Interactive Lessons in the Rural Utopia in ‘Farming’ Simulation Games.” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38, no. 3: 402-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2017.1306985>.
- Costikyan, Greg. 2006. “I Have No Words, and I Must Design.” In *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, edited by Katie S. Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman, 192-211. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Gee, James Paul. 2015. *Unified Discourse Analysis: Language, Reality, Virtual Worlds and Video Games*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Grossman, Paul, et al. 2004. “Mindfulness-based stress reduction and health benefits: A meta-analysis.” *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 57, no. 1: 35-43. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3999\(03\)00573-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3999(03)00573-7).
- Huizinga, Johan. 1950. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London: Roy Publishers.
- Hunicke, Robin, et al. 2004. “MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research.” *Challenges in Game AI: Proceedings of the AAAI Workshop on Challenges in Game AI* 4, no. 1.
- Ibendahl, Gregory. 2017. “The Use of a Farm Simulation Game to Enhance Student Learning.” *2017 Annual Meeting: Presentation at the Southern Agricultural Economics Association Annual Meeting*.
- Inwood, Heather. 2022. “Towards Sinophone Game Studies.” *British Journal of Chinese Studies* 12 no. 2: 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.51661/bjocs.v12i2.219>.
- Jagoda, Patrick. 2020. *Experimental Games: Critique, Play, and Design in the Age of Gamification*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2006. “Game Design as Narrative Architecture.” In *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, edited by Katie S. Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman, 670-89. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Jiang, Qiaolei, and Anthony Y. H. Fung. 2019. “Games with a Continuum: Globalization, Regionalization, and the Nation-State in the Development of China’s Online Game Industry.” *Games and Culture* 14, no. 7-8: 801-24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120177376>.
- Kovács, Tamás et al. 2017. “Development of Farm Simulation Application, an Example for Gamification in Higher Education.” *Journal of Agricultural Informatics* 8, no. 2: 12-21. <https://doi.org/10.17700/jai.2017.8.2.373>.
- Li, Chenxi. 2021. “From Involution to Education: A Glance to Chinese Young Generation.” *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research: Proceedings of the 2021 4th International Conference on Humanities*

*Education and Social Sciences (ICHESS 2021)*: 1884-87.

<https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211220.320>.

Pérez-Latorre, Óliver, et al. 2017. "Videogame Analysis: A Social Semiotic Approach." *Social Semiotics* 27, no. 5: 586-603.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2016.1191146>.

Rodríguez, Gerardo, and Lidia Miranda. 2022. "Body and Senses in the Production of Cultural Meaning: From Middle Ages to TV Series, Films and Video Games." *Digital Age in Semiotics & Communication* 5, no. 1: 126-57.

<https://doi.org/10.33919/dasc.22.5.7>.

Szablewicz, Marcella. 2020. *Mapping Digital Game Culture in China: From Internet Addicts to Esports Athletes*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Squire, Kurt. 2010. "From Information to Experience: Place-Based Augmented Reality Games as a Model for Learning in a Globally Networked Society." *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 10: 2565-2602.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811011201001>.

Squire, Kurt. 2021. *Making Games for Impact*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Stevenson, Harold W., and Akane Zusho. 2002. "Adolescence in China and Japan: Adapting to a Changing Environment." In *The World's Youth: Adolescence in Eight Regions of the Globe*, edited by B. Bradford Brown et al., 141-70. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Stockton, Sam. 2019. *Dating Ga(y)mes: Queer Performance in Farming Simulation Roleplay Games*. University of Calgary, BA Thesis.

Suits, Bernard. 2005. *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Ontario, CA: Broadview Press.

Sutherland, Lee-Ann. 2020. "The Desk-Chair Countryside: Affect, Authenticity and the Rural Idyll in a Farming Computer Game." *Journal of Rural Studies* 78, no. 1: 350–63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.05.002>.

Szilágyi, Róbert, et al. 2017. "Development of Farm Simulation Application, an Example for Gamification in Higher Education." *Journal of Agricultural Informatics* 8, no. 2. <https://doi.org/10.17700/jai.2017.8.2>.

Tencent. 2023. 桃源深处有人家. Mobile. Suzhou, Jiangsu, China: Tencent.

Treanor, Mike, et al. 2011. "Proceduralist Readings: How to Find Meaning in Games with Graphical Logics." *FDG '11: Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Foundations of Digital Games*.

Wu, Chi-Hua, et al. 2023. "Gamification of Culture: A Strategy for Cultural Preservation and Local Sustainable Development." *Sustainability* 15, no. 1: 650. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15010650>.

Xiong, Meifang. 2021. *Research on the Influence of Chinese Style Games on Users' Traditional Cultural Identity*. Jinan University, MA Thesis.

Ye, Tian. 2022. "Interview by the Kuaibao Editorial Office." *Baidu*, June 29. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1736949994326447978&wfr=spider&for=pc>.