

# The Genesis of Wuxia Gaming: Adaptation, Nationalism, Rebellion, and the Emergence of Early Gaming Communities in the Sinosphere

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Wuxia games, adaptation games, early gaming community.

## INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the nascent period of martial arts-Wuxia video games during the late 1980s and 1990s within the Sinosphere, encompassing mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Originating in Taiwan in 1986, Wuxia games were profoundly inspired by Wuxia literature and martial arts cinema from Hong Kong, exerting a significant and enduring influence on the gaming culture of the Sinosphere.

Historically marginalized as a niche and often overlooked due to bias, research on Sinosphere gaming has predominantly focused on commercial (MacInnes & Hu 2007; Kshetri 2009) or political control (Cao & Downing 2008; Tai 2010) aspects, particularly in the internet era of gaming. Yet, the Sinosphere's gaming history predates the online gaming phenomenon. The pioneering developers, investment by gaming companies, and the art of storytelling have been instrumental in shaping the gaming landscape but have received scant academic attention. This research endeavors to bridge this gap, providing foundational insights into the genesis of Wuxia gaming genre.

Song (1999) interprets Wuxia novels as utopian constructs of the authors' imaginations. Jenkins (2006) and Ito (2009) propose that contemporary storytelling is transmedia, with narratives crafted across various media platforms and heavily influenced by active fan participation. This study examines case studies of game adaptations such as *Xuan-Yuan Sword* (DOMO group 1990) and *The Highest Rank of Martial Art: Wong Fei-Hung* (Soft-World 1993), which were inspired by popular Hong Kong films (*A Chinese Ghost Story*, 1987; *Once Upon a Time in China* 1991) themselves adaptations of Wuxia novels or traditional Chinese tales. By comparing video games with their source materials, this research aims to discern the distinctive elements that defined Wuxia games in their formative years, explore how utopian imaginings interplay with narrative in Wuxia game adaptations, and examine their impact on the early gaming community.

The findings reveal that, although online gaming was stigmatized as "electronic drugs" and faced stringent control post-2000s, the early gaming community could be

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considered an elite, geek-centric society. Significantly, the choice of Wuxia as a genre was not arbitrary but was ideally suited for further development within the Sinosphere. The nascent game industry in Chinese-speaking regions, emerging later than its global counterparts and facing stiff competition, adopted localization and nationalism as strategies to differentiate and engage players. The widespread popularity of Hong Kong Wuxia novels and their cinematic adaptations made Wuxia-themed games a culturally resonant choice. Moreover, the themes of heroic ascension (as martial arts masters) and scholarly ideals in martial arts narratives resonated with the values of the early gaming community, allowing the utopian visions of Wuxia to transition from novels and films to interactive gaming experiences.

In contrast to the ludological innovations that marked the early global gaming industry, exemplified by titles such as *Pac-Man* (Iwatani 1980) and *Tetris* (Pajitnov 1985), the nascent gaming scene within the Sinosphere was predominantly narrative-driven, deeply entrenched in the traditions of Wuxia literature and film. This study suggests that early Wuxia games capitalized on the established popularity of their literary and cinematic predecessors, streamlining their production cycles by faithfully adhering to the source narratives in many aspects of gameplay. However, with limited governmental oversight, these games often displayed a rebellious spirit by casting government officials as antagonists, a stark contrast to their filmic counterparts. While the gaming community expanded through the sharing of strategies, player participation at this stage was largely limited to consuming the narratives crafted by game adaptations, with interactive engagement yet to reach its full potential.

## ENDNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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