Sense of Belonging: The Ideology of Chinese Educational Games

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Keywords

Educational Game; China; Government Ideology; Sense of Belonging

INTRODUCTION

With the development of video games, online gaming has emerged as a media form suitable for expressing political ideologies. However, given China's background, diversity in the content of games is to some extent constrained. In particular, this is not a medium through which Chinese citizens are free to express what Bogost (2007, pp. 96-97) refers to as 'videogame billboard', instead, the central government has taken control of online gaming as a medium for disseminating its own political ideology (Zhou, 2013, p. 52). Officially sanctioned games encourage Chinese nationals to become more patriotic and sensitive to national ideology. Players no longer exist in a purely virtual sense, but are also expected to transport the values embraced in the game world into the material world. Online games encourage patriotism and a sense of belonging, which can defined as accepting the organization, regulations, polices, educations, and protections from the nation, and their identities and faces in the Chinese society (Bray, 2005, p.5), through structured play, characters emerge victorious upon defeating foreign forces and resisting immoral temptations, this is a loyalty equated not only with nationality (e.g. Thompson, 2001), but is also associated with the pride of being Chinese and building a commitment to protect China's image (Mathews, Ma, & Lui, 2008, p. 7).

Undoubtedly, when compared to traditional text-based and audiovisual media, online games are distinctive in terms of their multiple paths to "winning" or accomplishing various tasks. In practice, it is difficult if not impossible for governmental edicts to force players to choose specific, ideal paths; instead, the preferred strategy is to subtly prompt players towards feeling patriotic, proud of their homeland, and experiencing a stronger sense of belonging, in order to resist the "invasion" of liberal political values (Zeng, 2016). However, a number of questions remain, including how the theme of belonging is embedded within the texts of online games; what role a sense of belonging plays in online games; how these games promote the player's senses of belonging; what implied responsibilities Chinese nationals bring to the game experience; and what are the differences between Chinese sense of belonging and American one in *America's Army* (United States Army, 2002). Examples of this sense of belonging will be drawn here from the game version of *Learning from Lei Feng* (学雷锋, Shanda, 2012), through the Chairman Mao's reception, and the quotations from Chairman Mao, and depictions of the recapture of China's "breakaway territories" of the Diaoyu Islands and Taiwan upon the surrender of the enemies in *Glorious Mission* (光荣使命, Giant Interactive Group, 2011).

Therefore, in this speech, my intention is to propose that this sense of belonging is the most important factor when it comes to designing government sanctioned games. I will discuss this premise in three parts. First, I will note the forms of belonging expressed and defined in online games whose production involves the government. Second, I will discuss the rhetorical strategies through which the government attempts to inspire players to practice this sense of belonging in other spheres of their daily lives, as well as the distinctions between online games and traditional counterparts. Finally, I will explore how this sense of belonging, as a rhetoric, can be realized and how it may influence education in the future, especially the design of online games relating to political education.

OPTIONAL BIO

Chen Yingrong is a PHD candidate with particular interests in game studies, cultural studies and legal studies. Prior to studying in Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University, she worked in both Department of Cultural & Religious Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong, and School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong, as a research assistant. She holds a master's degree from City University of Hong Kong and a bachelor's degree in law from Tianjin Normal University. She presented papers at conferences including Clash of Realities and Chinese DiGRA.

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