GAMES & PLAY IN CHINESE & SINOPHONE CULTURES

EDITED BY *Li Guo, Douglas Eyman, and Hongmei Sun*

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Timeline of Dynasties

Xia (unconfirmed)	ca. 2100–1600 BCE
Shang	ca. 1600–ca. 1050 BCE
Zhou	ca. 1046–256 BCE
Western Zhou	ca. 1046–771 BCE
Eastern Zhou	ca. 771–256 BCE
Spring and Autumn Period	770–ca. 475 BCE
Warring States Period	ca. 475–221 BCE
Qin	221–206 BCE
Han	206 BCE–220 CE
Six Dynasties	220–589 CE
Three Kingdoms	220–265 CE
Jin	265–420 CE
Northern and Southern	386–589 CE
Sui	581–618 CE
Tang	618–906 CE
Five Dynasties	907–960 CE
Song	960–1279 CE
Northern Song	960–1127 CE
Southern Song	1127–1279 CE
Yuan	1279–1368 CE
Ming	1368–1644 CE
Qing	1644–1911 CE

Games and Play

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Sinophone Cultures

Introduction

Gameplay in Chinese and Sinophone Worlds

LI GUO, DOUGLAS EYMAN,
AND HONGMEI SUN

The field of game studies has recently begun to explore games as global and connected phenomena, but to date there has been little research specifically on games or gaming in China. This collection aims to fill that gap, offering chapters that cover a broad range of games and practices of play across social and historical contexts, examining historical and contemporary game forms and game cultures and the sociocultural contexts that influence the practices of play. The chapters demonstrate how games and play involve complex cultural connotations and practices and how they have shaped people's everyday life experiences in private and public spaces, physical sites, and virtual online environments. The methodological coverage connects game studies with archeological findings, fiction and narratology, vernacular culture and performance, social life, and leisure. These chapters provide reflections on historical through contemporary representations of gender, class, materiality, and imaginations of the nation. They also consider how digital games invite diverse cultural and geopolitical perspectives on identity and territory, regionalism and nationalism, aesthetic autonomy, and political censorship.

In current English-language scholarship there is no systematic study of game cultures in Chinese and Sinophone worlds. Although there are a significant number of works that focus on Japan and South Korea, to date, only two English-language monographs are specifically related to games and

play in China: Marc Moskowitz's *Go Nation: Chinese Masculinities and the Game of Weiqi in China* (2013) and Marcella Szablewicz's *Mapping Digital Game Culture in China* (2020). The journal *Games and Culture* published a special issue on "Games and Gaming in China" in 2016, focusing on the rise of the computer and video games industry. This is, however, a fast-growing field, and we expect additional key works will be published in the near future.

Bjarke Liboriussen and Paul Martin have argued for "regional game studies" as opposed to a fully global approach, in an effort to engage more research on games and gaming cultures "at a range of geocultural scales" that "identifies connections across and between these scales, [and] highlights and addresses unequal global power relations within gaming culture and within the academic study of games."[1] Much of the current work on gaming in China is distributed across volumes that focus on East Asia, including *Asian Games: The Art of the Contest*, *Mobile Gaming in Asia*, *Gaming Globally*, *Videogames in East Asia*, and *Gaming Cultures and Place in Asia-Pacific*.[2] Many of these collections focus on digital games; aside from *Asian Games* and *Go Nation*, very few works address analog games.[3] To situate games research in the rich history and culture of Chinese and Sinophone cultures, our volume explores Sinitic-language ludic cultures and communities in the early modern era and interaction between archaic and modern forms of gameplay. Taking a ludic perspective as a critical lens allows us to contest teleological modernist delineations of history, subjectivity, and empire. Examination of pre-1900 Sinitic-language ludic traditions provides insights into the complex process of sinicization of Western game players in Hong Kong, the role of game culture in early modern transnational commerce and cultural exchange, and the significant transformations of ludic communities in a polylingual modern environment. Studies on early modern ludic traditions articulate the inherent heterogeneity of Sinitic-language environments, which resist reductive assumptions of a homogeneous Han Chinese cultural subjectivity.[4]

The function of play, Johan Huizinga observes, could be considered in two aspects: play "as a contest *for* something or a representation *of* something. These two functions can unite in such a way that the game 'represents' a contest, or else becomes a contest for the best representation of something."[5] This implies that game entails a process of stepping out of the common reality and through action, achieving "actualization by

representation."[6] Ludic agents may play against linguistic, political, and sociocultural hegemonic structures from within these oppressive institutions. This volume takes a theoretical position that is autonomous, fluid in returning to locational cultures but also relational in encouraging errantry, reciprocity, and heterogeneity. Studies of games and play in Chinese and Sinophone cultures are particularly valuable because of their contribution to the creolization of ludic theories in a transtemporal, transnational context.[7] Through the principle of creolization, transnational game studies can compete against strictures of regional nationalism and cultural generalizations.

Contesting Game and Play

Methodologically, it is important to distinguish between *game* and *play*. In Western game studies, game entails play, but play can occur outside the scope of a game. Play is an *activity* required for the experience of a game, whereas a game is an *object* that at minimum requires procedures (rules) and materials that can be manipulated, whether those are words, sticks, balls, cards, game boards, or avatars residing in digital worlds. As anthropologist David Graeber argues, play can be improvisational, generating new rules and creating games, whereas a game is based on stabilized and highly visible rules, within which actions are well governed.[8] In *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga argues that play is both free (not a means to any other end) and meaningful. Play is separate from everyday experience and takes place in its own separate space, delineated by what he calls the "magic circle"—the creation of a space set apart from the rest of the world that exists only for the purpose of play and only as long as it is needed for that purpose.[9] Game designers see the magic circle as the context that provides the boundaries for a specific game, whereas game studies scholars debate whether the circle is created by the players or the designers, or simply demarcates the differences between a game and its surrounding context.[10] For our purposes, games are both bounded and purposeful, and, unlike play, games have rules. Play is separated from the real world. Both play and games are demarcated by boundaries that enforce this separation.[11] This volume explores how games that arise from various temporal and cultural contexts allow circulation of cultural practices to wider audiences.

In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga considers three Chinese terms for play, start-

ing with *wan*, "in which ideas of children's games predominate," but that semantically originates from "handling something with playful attention" or "to be lightly engrossed."[12] Huizinga notes that *wan* is not used for games of skill, contests, gambling, or theatrical performances, for which Chinese has to resort to other terms (such as *cheng* and *sai* for contests).[13] Today, the most common terms used for "play" in Chinese are *youxi* and *youwan*, with *youxi* covering a broader scope of the meaning of play.[14] Both compounds include the concept *you*, which is rooted in both Confucian and Taoist canonic texts and cultural traditions. The historical usage and modern development of the terms *you* and *youxi* expand Huizinga's discussion of *Homo ludens*. Understanding these terms is necessary to see the features of game culture in China as it relates to Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist traditions in Chinese culture. Although Western game studies scholars distinguish the concepts "game" and "play," in Chinese they are not differentiated, as *you* and *youxi* can refer to both.

The Confucian concept *you yu yi*, fundamental to discussions of aesthetic and educational traditions, is also productive in the search for philosophical roots of social features of games and play in China. Usually translated as "arts," *yi* includes a broad range of activities that require skill and knowhow, which can be pursued seriously or recreationally, including games. *You yu yi* involves games or play performed in a playful state of mind. As Confucius explains, he was skilled in *yi* because he was politically unsuccessful in his lifetime and invested his passion in play.[15] Play in Confucius's world is positioned as an alternative to political engagement. After Confucius, *you yu yi* became a lifestyle for generations of scholars who experienced frustration with their political ambitions, providing an avenue for the increased cultural importance of games.[16] For these literati, the link between play and life often manifested through writing as playful or recreational activity. Not only is writing-as-art, namely calligraphy, one of the *yi* that *you yu yi* refers to, but playful writing is also often an essential part of games played by educated men and women.

In the Taoist tradition, *you* is a central concept of *Zhuangzi* and arguably the core of Zhuangzi's answer to the question of how to live in the world. While the basic meaning of *you* refers to wandering, *you* is employed to describe *xiaoyao you*, the free and easy wandering of the enlightened individual. The notion of *you* also refers to a form of wandering of the heart and

mind, *you xin*: "through all of creation, enjoying its delights without ever becoming attached to any one part of it."[17] Zhuangzi turns to the analogy of craftsmen to describe this "wandering with freedom." One famous story he recounts is about a skillful butcher who has been using the same knife for nineteen years without sharpening it because "there are spaces between the joints" and thus there is always room for the blade to play about in.[18] The expression derived from this story, *you ren you yu*, is still commonly used today, meaning to play with a knife with ease. The cook explains that the key to his success lies in his care about the Way, which goes beyond skill (*ji*)—the skill in this case echoes the *yi* in the Confucian example.[19] This relationship between the Way and the skill in Zhuangzi does not conflict with Confucius. Zhuangzi's *you xin* can be understood as an elaboration on the freedom and ease of *you* represented in Confucius' *you yu yi*.[20]

The concept of gameplay has been richly articulated in Chinese religious traditions, as demonstrated by the expression *youxi* in Buddhist scripture. The Sanskrit text *Lalitavistara*, one of the most sacred texts in Mahāyāna Buddhism, has been translated into modern Chinese by Huang Baosheng as *Shentong youxi* (Divine gameplay). The title can mean either "extensive account of play" or "divine play," with *play* referring to the Buddha's playful actions to enlighten humans as well as to the plays staged by human beings in praise of Buddha's actions.[21] The phrases *shentong* and *youxi* frequently appear together in Buddhist sutras. One of the earlier Chinese translations, *Fangguang dazhuangyan jing—yiming shentong youxi*, translated by Divākara in 683 CE, includes the two phrases in the subtitle to make sure no ambivalence in the meaning is lost.[22] The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (Hua yan jing) lists ten types of gameplay practiced by boddhisattva in book 56, also rendered in Chinese as *youxi*.[23] Like its Confucian and Taoist counterparts, *youxi* here does not refer to any particular games nor games in general, but a playful manner in which boddhisattvas enlighten and save lives.[24] *You yu yi* and *you xin* represent a place and space where Confucius and Zhuangzi are in agreement, a common space of *you* where traditional scholars unsuccessful in their societal pursuit retreat to—a space of play enacted via games. This place is broader than the actions of play itself: thus, games become the vehicles for the playful attitude or the spirit of play. Corresponding with and complementing this playful attitude is the Buddhist idea of *shentong youxi*.

An Early History of Games in China

Archeological findings of toys for gameplay in China date to between six and seven thousand years ago. One of the earliest examples of children's toys is a set of three stone balls found in a four-year-old girl's tomb in the Xi'An Banpo Neolithic settlement. At another Neolithic Age site in Jingshan, Hubei, archaeologists discovered another toy, the *taoxiang qiu* (earthen sound ball), a hollow earthen ball containing stone pebbles or pellets that make sound when shaken.[25] Made for children's play, it could also be used as a simple musical instrument. These toys for gameplay display techniques in mold-making in the late second and early first millennium BCE. During the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BCE), Mo Zi was the alleged inventor of many toys, including a wooden bird that could fly in the air for three days. The master carpenter Lu Ban was the attributed inventor of the Lu Ban lock (Lu Ban *suo*), a toy made of six interlocking wooden sticks using traditional mortise and tenon techniques. During the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), the puzzle "nine linked-rings" (*jiu lianhuan*) was invented, an advanced game device that requires mathematical analysis to solve. The materiality of ludic practices—ranging from earth, stone, wood, to (later) jade and metal—demarcate the player's ludic experiences and signal the player's age, gender, class, personal taste, and background (from an ordinary household or an aristocratic family).

Among ancient games of contest, a popular one is six sticks (*liubo*), a two-person board game with each party holding six pieces, including a piece designated as a commander (*zhushuai*).[26] By casting dice on the board, the players make advances with their pieces; the player who takes the opponent's commanding stone wins the game. "Strategies of Qi" (Qi ce) in *Intrigues of the Warring States* (Zhanguo ce, third to first century BCE) records that in the Kingdom of Qi, in the affluent and prosperous Linzi, everyone took to the games of six sticks and kickball (*taju*).

Ludic activities during the Song and Yuan dynasties flourished thanks to the development of commerce and trade. Molded objects were in demand, particularly painted clay figurines and toys in the southern cities of Suzhou, Hangzhou, Yunzhou, and Zhenjiang.[27] A popular toy was the Moheluo doll, an infant-shaped figurine made of wax or mud. The name of the doll is allegedly a transliteration of the Sanskrit name Mahākāla, the Buddha's

son.[28] The popular genre of painting during the Song provided illustrations of children's toys.[29] The famous *Portrait of the Gift Peddler* (Huolang tu) by Li Song (1166–243) illustrated several dozen children's toys, many of which (kites, pellet drums, wind spinners) remain popular today. Further, there appeared diverse games emphasizing skill and competition. During the Song dynasty, a collection of ways of playing tangram puzzles, *Diagrams of Banquet Tables* (Yanji tu, 1194) was compiled by Huang Bosi (1179–118).[30] *A Game Manual for Shuanglu* (Pushuang) was compiled by Hong Zun (1120–174); *shuanglu* is a race game similar to European backgammon.[31] It "began in Western India and arrived in China during the Wei dynasty of the Cao family (220–65), and flourished during the Liang, Chen, Qi, Sui, and Tang dynasties."[32] The multiple variants of this game in China and Japan exemplify a case of ludic circulation in which gameplay was reinvented through cross-cultural exchanges.

Studies of ludic cultures necessitate a scholarly reflection on the researcher's own position in an ongoing process of remaking game history. Gina Bloom suggests that readers of ludic traditions are engaged in a "metagame" in that they enjoy a game-like process and are enabled to "recognize the ways their own historical moment, their own contexts for engagement with history, shape their understanding of the past."[33] A core concept in Bloom's study of staged games in early modern British theater is the notion of "enskillment," that is, the process in which participants in both games and theater have repeated exposure to routines and practices as games "showcase the degree to which embodied knowledge may be produced and communicated beneath the horizon of consciousness."[34] This notion of enskillment through the experience of gameplay is not exclusive to early modern Britain. An early example of gameplay as enskillment is the rustic game *jirang* (to strike the earth) during the reign of mythical Emperor Yao (2356–2255 BCE), which could be a practice for hunting.[35] The popular game pitch-pot (*touhu*), which involved shooting arrows into a pot, can be traced back to ancient shooting and hunting practice. The aforementioned Confucian concept of *you yu yi* entails a process through which disciples enhance cognitive skills and potencies through learning. According to *The Analects*, "The Master said, 'I set my heart on the Way, base myself on virtue, lean upon benevolence for support and take my recreation in the arts.'"[36] The path to moral self-fulfillment entails learning to enjoy artistic

endeavors. Moral consciousness and the spirit of art coexist as elemental parts of a fulfilling life.

Military practices and political actions may inspire the invention of games. Games arising from military drilling exercises include the ancient game of kickball (*cuju*) and "dragging the hook" (*qiangou*), an antecedent of tug-of-war. A recent example is Japanese Sugoroku games in the early twentieth century, the "imperial jingoism" that came to dominate the mass media during Japan's colonial era. Their visual culture suggests some ways in which "the process of mobilization left . . . an imprint" of empire on "the domestic landscape," primarily on the minds of children who learned to imagine themselves as military heroes, colonial elite, and the winners of the global race for empire.[37] The process of gameplay, by engaging the players in practices of enskillment, may facilitate the transmission of specific geopolitical imaginations.

Redefining Ethical Gameplay

A study of ludic cultures from the premodern to the contemporary invites recontextualization of game ethics through interdisciplinary examinations, including visual studies, narratology, gender, leisure, and everyday life. In the Chinese context, games with entertainment purposes were considered morally corruptive in pre-Qin periods. The philosopher Chunyu Kun (fourth century BCE) admonished King Wei of the Qi Kingdom (378–320 BCE) that excessive folk fascination with drinking and games like *touhu* and *liubo* could lead to the kingdom's collapse.[38] Several chapters in this volume study the art of *weiqi* and illustrate that the players' heightened awareness of the ethical stakes of the games endorses them as advanced players and makes gaming empowering. Game players' ethical deliberations on rules lead to creative endeavors to re-create the game without breaking the boundaries that condition the elasticity of game playing.

The growing influence of the Mystery School (*Xuanxue*) in the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties transformed the ludic cultures of the time in important ways. The Neo-Daoist philosophers Ruan Ji (210–63) and Ji Kang (223–62) advocated for "surpassing the doctrine of names and entrust their self-so [spontaneous nature]."[39] During this period, games with strong entertainment elements were popularized. *A New Account of*

the Tales of the World (Shishuo xinyu, fifth century) records a popular dice gambling game, *chupu*, favored by literati scholars of the Wei Jin period. According to "Rhapsody on Chupu" (Chupu fu) by Ma Rong (79–166), the game could have been invented by the Daoist philosopher Lao Zi for the people as entertainment so that they might not worry about the wars.[40] Stories about elite scholars Huan Wen (312–73), Wang Xianzhi (344–86), and Yuan Dan (fourth century) playing *chupu* show that a game player's skill could indicate his personal traits, character, or even political philosophy. In the Tang dynasty, the game evolved into a simpler dice game and gained popularity among common people. The game eventually raised moral questions and was outlawed in the Song dynasty because of the large number of people addicted to it.

The rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Yuan dynasties induced the return of Confucian discourses of gameplay. One example is the game of *chuiwan* (literally, "ball-hitting"), which is a golf-like game that could be traced to the Tang dynasty that enjoyed increasing popularity in the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties. The game was favored by emperors and court officials, as well as aristocratic men and women, though not popular among common civilians.[41] Resonating with the revival of Neo-Confucianism, the game rules of *chuiwan* emphasized "etiquette, courtesy, honesty, and wisdom."[42] Confucian game ethics emphasize the cultivation of one's own moral character rather than competition with others. Developed from a stick-and-ball game *bu da qiu* (literally, "step play ball"), *chuiwan* required players to play with their own ball, with the objective of hitting the ball into holes on the ground, which made the game more a competition with oneself.[43]

The banning of certain games during specific historical periods could reflect the evolving nature of discourses about ethical gameplay. During the Song and Yuan dynasties, moral discourses about games and gameplay were reinforced with state sanctions. An example is the banning of women's wrestling (*xiangpu*) games, in which female players bared their upper bodies. Women's wrestling was appreciated in the palace and practiced among commoners as a festival activity during the Song dynasty; however, Sima Guang (1019–1086) composed a memorial to the court strongly opposing the practice of women wrestling in public: "Making the scantily dressed women perform in front [of such an audience] is by no means of a way

of ratifying the rituals and rules and showing them to the country."[44] The memorial expresses moralistic concerns about female wrestling as a gendered spectacle and women's spectatorial pleasure in watching the gameplay.

Concerns about harnessing women's social presence and activities caused changes to the circumstances of gameplay. During the Song dynasty, swinging (*qiuqian*) was relocated to the backyard and became a "game in the inner chambers," corresponding to a constraint on women's social practices under the influence of Neo-Confucianism.[45] The debates about game ethics in a premodern context draw attention to the interaction and relocation of power between game objects, gameplayers, and spectator-participants of the game. Discourses about ethical gameplay are shaped by gender norms of the time. Leisurely, aesthetic, or sociable games induce queries about risks of dissolving morality, or contrarily, can be transformed to reinforce certain ethical norms, even at the cost of playability and entertainment.

Gender Performances and Ludic Heroines

The controversies related to women's wrestling in the Song dynasty illustrate how discourses of gender norms and roles could shape the subject's participation in gameplay and the social reception of game practices and performances. Marc Moskowitz's study of *weiqi* delineates how the game persists in a contemporary era, incorporating attributes of Confucian masculinity in its imageries, reflecting male familial identities, social bonds, and gendered discourses of virtue.[46] A similar male-coded game is elephant chess (*xiangqi*), which gained popularity during the Ming and Qing. Though similar to Western chess, Chinese chess is "based on military tactics, [and] for the reason that women are not supposed to go to war, there is no queen."[47] These ludic subjects are negotiated with social and moralistic norms of their times in gameplay practices. As this book presents, early modern women could be considered as ludic heroines who reconfigure game cultures through simulation, appropriation, and negotiation.

A historical review of game cultures in China indicates that female gameplayers invented and actively practiced games considered distinctively feminine, such as the aforementioned *qiqiao*, and also shared the space of gameplay with their male counterparts in a wide range of games that were not gender-confined, such as pitch-pot, hit ball, wrestling, kickball, card

games, and board games.[48] Women of the Tang dynasty enjoyed games including *maqiu* (polo), step play ball, boating, and tug-of-war. Governing-class women played the largely male-dominated game *weiqi*. *The History of the Southern Dynasties* relates that Lou Cheng, daughter of a professional *weiqi* player, disguised herself as a man and took to playing *weiqi* in public. Later she even took a relatively high-level local official's position.[49] This historical case, which Judith Zeitlin describes as "dislocation of gender," shows how playing *weiqi* allowed a woman to obtain a literatus's identity in social life.[50] Elite women of the Tang dynasty, from the favored consort of Emperor Xuanzong Yang Yuhuan to the wife of poet Du Fu, enjoyed *weiqi* as entertainment.

Such undertakings also persisted in the following centuries. A poem by Emperor Shenzong of the Song describes his hobby of watching his consorts and palace maids playing *weiqi*. Female *weiqi* players were not only gendered spectacles of male approval and connoisseurship; they also frequently played with men at *weiqi* games. Some women players gained eminence and even achieved the level of *guoshou* (literally, "national hand"). In the Southern Ming (1644–1662), two nationally acclaimed female *weiqi* players included *guoshou* Lady Guan and Zheng Hui. Elite women also composed prolific writings about games and gameplay. Late Ming authors Yao Shu and Gu Ruopu (1592–1681) composed *weiqi*-themed poems, integrating a gender-specific voice into poetic expressions.[51] Poet Li Qingzhao (1084–1155) favored a board game called *dama* (capture the horse), on which she produced a rhapsody, a "preface" to a preexisting handbook on the game, and thirteen short verses on game strategies and outcomes.[52] Literary texts about games and gaming subjects construct diverse forms of ludic subjectivity through illustrations of gendered codes of conduct and self-expressions, diverse modes of sexuality, and spectatorial exchanges. The ludic heroine in dynastic China is a subject-in-process at the margin of diverse social, cultural, and literary imaginaries and undergoes constant reconstruction and reinvention.

Youxi in and out of the Magic Circle: Connecting Games and Life

A central concept in game studies is the so-called magic circle, which separates games from everyday life and provides a boundary between the two.[53] Huizinga suggests that *all* play takes place within "a play-ground marked off beforehand," defining the magic circle as "a temporary world situated within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart."[54] Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman refine the definition as "the idea of a special place in time and space created by a game" that is entered voluntarily, set apart from ordinary life in locality and duration, and has a set of internal rules.[55] The idea of the magic circle has been criticized for drawing a strong boundary between games and real life: T. L. Taylor and Thomas Malaby question the degree to which a clear division between play and everyday life exists.[56] The Chinese terms of *you* and *youxi*, however, point to an ideal place where game and play are not separate from life: if the play world is separated from the more important things of life, or the Way, the boundary is forced and unwelcome and should be overcome. Tabloids in late Qing and Republic eras provide cases where playful activities serve as play or game with an important purpose. If we envision a special time/space for *youxi* in these cases, this magic circle provides camouflage for activities that can otherwise be problematic socially or politically.

Youxi bao (1897–1910), one of the earliest Chinese tabloids, established by Li Boyuan, takes as its mission a promotion of the *youxi* tradition via press media. Usually translated mistakenly as *Games Daily*, *Youxi bao* publishes articles that are unified by a playful style or attitude, including street news, political comments, witty short stories, poems and critiques, and other recreational genres.[57] Taking the pen name of Play Master (Youxi Zhuren), Li uses the attitude of *youxi* to draw readers and camouflage his political critiques. The paper, Li states, is named *Youxi* to "wake up the ignorant and cheer up the worried": the purpose of the paper is to entertain, to use satire and allegory as admonishment to the world, all in the name of *youxi*.[58] *Youxi bao* pioneered a fashion of *youxi* as recreational culture in modern Shanghai. The success of Li's model encouraged the appearance of many recreational newspapers and journals, including *Youxi zazhi* (The Pastime, 1913–15) and *Youxi shijie* (Recreation world, 1921–23). The inaugural issue of

Youxi zazhi provides a plausible argument about the importance of *youxi*: "an incomparable lifetime merit is but a deed of *youxi*; all nations arriving to pay tribute is but a field for *youxi*; claiming the power of overlord or king is also an act of *youxi*."[59] This discussion operates via a broad definition of *youxi*, which bears an unmistakable Confucian mark: following the lead of *Youxi bao*, the playful words in the journal are explicitly offered as political satires of that time.

The wish to utilize game/play to improve society is a common trait of the *youxi* journals. Both *Youxi zazhi* and *Youxi shijie* feature mostly literary works and playful essays. One genre that became popular via these journals is the "playful eight-legged essay," which many famous writers of the time, including Li Boyuan, contributed. These contributions comment on current affairs or cultural trends, imitating the style of eight-legged essays, a required form of writing for imperial examinations prior to 1905.[60] Originating from the fiercest contest in the Confucian scholar's life, the new eight-legged essay in its playful style became a game that spoofed the "game" of the examination itself, while providing an outlet for sharp satire.[61] This form of playful writing exemplifies the indivisible relationship between game/play and social reality in China. For the Confucian literati, skillfully crossing the border of the magic circle is an important means of protecting oppositional discourse by disguising it as a mere game—a strategy that has had mixed success in contemporary approaches to game design in China.[62] As Patricia Gouveia notes, "Play and games can serve as forms of social resistance and have a profound impact on the narrative construction of playful identities"—a thesis supported by the chapters on contemporary games in this volume.[63]

Games and Gaming as Digital Culture

In contemporary discourse, the term *youxi* has lost its nuanced historical forms and now almost exclusively refers to video games (as a shortened form of *dianzi youxi*). The history of video games in China follows a trajectory that is quite similar to that of video games in the United States, albeit starting about a decade later. As in the West, the first widely available games were arcade games, which became popular when introduced to China in the 1980s. As Lin Zhang notes in her history of video games in post-reform

China, "The number of game arcades surged in the fall of 1985, taking over parks, residential neighborhoods, shops, and theaters."[64] Consoles were introduced in the late 1980s, primarily imported from Japan; however, the imports were subject to high taxes imposed by the Chinese government, which resulted in a thriving trade in pirated hardware and games.[65] The first Chinese-produced console was introduced by Xiaobawang as both a gaming console and an educational technology, as it came with a keyboard and could run educational software.[66] By the end of 1993, over 60 percent of secondary-school students in Beijing owned a gaming console.[67] After 1995, the Chinese PC games industry grew rapidly, alongside the increase in home computer ownership in Chinese cities.[68] Object Software, the first Chinese business dedicated to game design, was launched the same year.[69]

Although online games, consoles, and PC games are all still popular in China, the extensive adoption of cell phones has led to a meteoric rise in the availability and popularity of mobile games. Over the past decade, Chinese companies have come to dominate the global mobile game market. Much of the scholarly consideration of mobile gaming in China focuses on psychological impacts of play (both positive and negative) or China's role in the mobile game market, which leaves a significant gap for game studies scholars to fill.[70]

The Chinese government since the mid-1980s has vacillated between condemning games as sources of antisocial behavior (Internet addiction) and championing games as vehicles for state values and ideologies.[71] As early as the introduction of arcade games, Chinese media argued that gaming "distracted from study, work, and healthy leisure. . . . Consequently, arcade games were labeled 'unproductive' leisure, and the arcade a potentially 'pathological' space to be regulated and policed."[72] Negative stereotypes of gamers and gaming continued throughout the development of PC, online, and mobile games, with serious concern about whether gaming (and Internet use in general) might be addictive. The government had been so concerned with the potential adverse effects of games (particularly on youth) that they instituted a series of laws limiting school-age children to a maximum of three hours of play per week, with no gaming allowed after 10 p.m. This concern has even led to the establishment of Internet addiction treatment centers, as documented by Yichen Rao's chapter in this volume.[73]

Much of the literature about gaming by Chinese scholars dismisses

games as "hedonic"—that is, designed purely for pleasure, and thus serving as a distraction from healthier endeavors or productive work that benefits society. The term *hedonic* frequently appears as a kind of standard adjective, without explication of why and in what context games should be designated as such. Keren He's chapter shows how some senior game players use games to resist the state's insistence on productivity and also as a eudaimonic activity: meaningful play as opposed to the purely pleasurable hedonic approach.

Paradoxically, the Chinese government has also championed gaming as a means of celebrating Chinese culture. In the mid-2000s, the rise of South Korea as a leader in the development of online games prompted a number of legislative and policy acts designating online gaming as a key industry for China's Internet economy.[74] Addressing the tension surrounding discourse around digital games, Cao Shule and He Wei analyzed every mention of games in the *People's Daily* newspaper from 1981 to 2017.[75] They identified six key themes and graphed the ebb and flow of each over time: games as an integral part of computer technology; games as an emerging cultural style or form of entertainment; games as toxic (particularly to youth); games as objects of regulation; games as key economic products; and games as officially recognized esports. As of 2017 at least, both games as "poison to youth" and as a positive new form of entertainment were again on the rise.

Ludic Ecologies: A Chapter Guide

This collection is organized chronologically, from prehistoric rock carvings to recently released mobile games. Chapters on "ludic circulations" explore board games in three historical and cultural contexts, focusing on the function of game boards, their ludic participants, and player-game relationships. Zach Berge-Becker recontextualizes the discourse of *weiqi* in Song-Yuan-Ming China (960–1644). By exploring the distinct cultures of gentlemen who enjoyed *weiqi* in their leisure hours and gentlemen who disdained it as a pernicious art, as well as occupational players and gamblers, Berge-Becker reveals how *weiqi* served as a game for those of high and low status to enjoy or dislike in their own ways. César Guarde-Paz examines newly discovered game board rock carvings in Hong Kong that are considered Neolithic symbolic representations. Guarde-Paz considers the

apotropaic and symbolic aspects of these games, exploring the games' ludic manifestations and their enhancement of transcultural communication. Rania Huntington examines scholar Yu Yue (1821–1907) and his invention of two board games. Huntington considers how Yu's game designs enrich the textures of allusions, create linked spaces in gameplay, and recreate microcosms on the boards.

Several chapters consider game participants as gendered ludic subjects and gameplay as a means of gendered appropriation and transgression. Patricia Sieber considers representations of female kickball players by three male *yuanqu* songwriters and examines how their songs about the game illustrate alternative models of femininity. Women players and their technical and aesthetic expertise in *sanqu* contribute to "the privileged currency of an alternative economy of play." Jie Guo draws from Roger Caillois's reflections on games and play to examine games in Ming-Qing erotica, in which the narratives induce transgressive pleasures through erotic scenarios and uphold or reinforce orthodox gender and sexuality norms by inflicting severe punishment on participants in erotic games. Li Guo's chapter examines courtesans' drinking games in *The Dream in the Green Bower* by Yu Da (?–1884), a captivating social tableau of game, leisure, and entertainment. If drinking games could enact ostensible egalitarianism, the courtesans who constructed gendered spaces of leisure also reconfigured such ludic spaces through creative gameplay.

Four chapters explore the role of players and their agency over the rules of the game. Jiayi Chen's chapter on gambling games and deception in Ming-Qing short stories demonstrates how diverse modes of narrative circumvention undermine the moral message against gambling that is claimed as the exigence for the tales. Hongmei Sun uses gameplay as a rhetorical method of literary analysis, focusing on the ways in which the narrative of *Journey to the West* can be seen as the account of a game whose players (from the Buddha to the Monkey King) constantly transgress the game's rules. Yichen Rao illustrates how young "game addicts" in a disciplinary treatment camp create their own games by incorporating characters, roles, and rules from institutional life into the game. Gamification for the players becomes a form of resistance, achieved by blurring the line between game and real life. Keren He shows that senior citizens' gaming modes and practices in Hong Kong and Taiwan challenge ageism and ableism in game culture.

Our final section consists of three chapters on contemporary digital games, each investigating the relationship between games and the political contexts in which they reside. Games and play "can have important consequences not only materially but also socially and culturally."[76] This tension is documented in Jiaqi Li's chapter on the popular mobile game *Honor of Kings*, in which the negotiation of the game's status as either socially beneficial or detrimental takes place between the game-design company and the state. Games can be vehicles for social critique because of game culture, as shown in chapters by Florian Schneider and Douglas Eyman. Schneider uses the mainland Chinese game *Chinese Parents* to explore content, interface, algorithmic interactions, digital politics of play, and the broader horizon of transnational digital networks. Eyman's chapter on *World of Warcraft* and *Genshin Impact* documents game culture as social critique and explores the results of state censorship on games designed in the West and imported to China. Providing a study on translation and appropriation of Chinese culture in video games, Eyman probes the rich interactions among policy, censorship, translation, and localization.

Notes

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3. One notable exception is Andrew Lo, "The Game of Leaves: An Inquiry into the Origin of Chinese Playing Cards," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 63, no. 3 (2000): 389–406.

4. See Stephen West, "Jurchen Elements in the Northern Drama *Hu-t'ou-p'ai*

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5. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), 23–24.

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8. David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2015).

9. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 10.

10. Jesper Juul, "The Magic Circle and the Puzzle Piece," in *Conference Proceedings of the Philosophy of Computer Games 2008*, ed. Stephan Günzel, Michael Liebe, and Dieter Mersch (Potsdam: Potsdam University Press, 2008), 561–67.

11. Jaako Stenros proposes three boundaries of play, including "the protective frame," "the social contract," and "the spatial or temporal cultural site." See Jaakko Stenros, "In Defense of a Magic Circle: The Social, Mental and Cultural Boundaries of Play," *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association* 1, no 2 (2014): 147–85.

12. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 32.

13. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 32.

14. Liu Mengfei, "Xunzhao youxi jingshen," in *Lixian: Kaishi youxi*, ed. Li Ting (Beijing: Dianzi Gongye Chubanshe, 2014), 74–93.

15. See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1 (London: Trübner, 1861), 82.

16. For *you yu yi* as a lifestyle for Confucian scholars, see Li Shenglong, "Kongzi *you yu yi* sixiang chanwei," *Hunan Normal University Journal of Social Science* 35, no. 4 (2006): 43–46.

17. Burton Watson, trans., *Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 6.

18. See Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 46–47, for a translation.

19. Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 46.

20. See Li Shenglong, "Sixiang chanwei"; Wu Dandan, "Kongzi *you yu yi* yu Zhuangzi *you xin* sixiang bianxi jiqi daoyi guanxi," *Guizhou Univerisity Academic Journal* no. 1 (2019): 66–73.

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23. Buddhabhadra, *Hua Yan Jing: Avatamsaka Sutra* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 56:14.

24. Liu Mengfei discusses *shentong youxi* after a survey of the idea of *youxi* in premodern China in "Xunzhao youxi jingshen."

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26. Tang Yu, "Fan er sheng: Hanhua Liubo tu de xingshi yu yihan," *Art Journal*, no. 5 (2019): 18–24.

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28. Meng Hanqing, "The Moheluo Doll," trans. Jonathan Chaves, in *The Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama*, ed. C. T. Hsia, Wai-yee Li, and George Kao (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 147–88.

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32. Hong Zun, *Pushuang*, "Preface," seq. 86.

33. Gina Bloom, *Gaming the Stage: Playable Media and the Rise of English Commercial Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 25.

34. Bloom, *Gaming the Stage*, 174.

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44. Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), "Lun Shangyuan ling furen xiangpu zhuang" 論上元令婦人相撲狀, in Sima Guang, *Sima Wenzheng gong chuanjia ji* 司馬文正公傳家集, ed. Chen Hongmou (Guilin: Guilin Chenshi Peiyuantang, 1741), *juan* 23, 4.

45. Li Ping, *Zhongguo chuantong youxi*, 195.

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53. See Stenros, "Magic Circle," for a review of the history and use of the term in game studies.

54. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 10.

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56. T. L. Taylor, *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Thomas Malaby, "Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games," *Games and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2007): 111.

57. Sunny Han Han's unpublished essay "Enlightenment Through Games" discusses Li Boyuan and *Youxi bao*'s contribution to the modern cultural market in China.

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66. Zhang, "Productive vs. Pathological," 2396; also see Anthony Fung and Sara Xueting Liao, "China," in *Videogames Around the World*, ed. Mark Wolf (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 119–36.

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68. Zhang, "Productive vs. Pathological," 2397.

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76. Malaby, "Beyond Play," 107.

1

Groups on the Grid

Weiqi Cultures in Song-Yuan-Ming China

ZACH BERGE-BECKER

Throughout imperial Chinese history, gentlemen (*shi*) saw in their *weiqi* boards a reflection of their own refinement. Like chess in the West, *weiqi* enjoyed an esteemed position among members of the cultured elite, who granted the game a lofty status by association with self-cultivation, cosmology, sagacity, and other gentlemanly ideals. Beginning in Tang (618–907), *weiqi* was grouped with painting, calligraphy, and the *qin* (zither) as a core set of sophisticated pastimes for sophisticated people.[1] It was a game to be played in secluded gardens and majestic pavilions, appreciated not only as a leisurely pastime but also as a sage art containing truths about morality, human affairs, and the workings of the cosmos.

This understanding of *weiqi* has endured for centuries and continues to play a foundational role in the collective imagination of modern scholars and players alike.[2] However, there is nothing inherently lofty or gentlemanly about two players taking turns placing their pieces (called stones or *zi*) on the intersecting points of a nineteen-by-nineteen grid, trying to capture and secure the most territory on the board. And the high-minded gentlemen who valued *weiqi* as a status symbol were not the only social group playing the game in middle-period China: their treatment of the game as a high art constituted only one aspect of a much broader world of *weiqi*. This chapter draws from Song (960–1279), Yuan (1271–1368), and Ming (1368–1644) dynasty sources to contextualize this gentlemanly *weiqi*

culture as just one of many within the broader world of *weiqi* in middle-period China, to demonstrate the problems inherent in continuing to privilege it as the de facto representative of an activity with many kinds of participants and modes of engagement, as well as to provide a more comprehensive picture of the world of *weiqi* in middle-period China.

Shade-Sitting (*Zuoyin*) and Hand-Chatting (*Shoutan*)

Wang Tingne (1573–1619) was a man of many identities. He was born to a wealthy merchant family, but instead of following in his family's footsteps he sought to enter officialdom. After failing to obtain a *jinshi* degree, he purchased a post as a lowly salt distribution commissioner and then resigned soon after; he continued to hold various county-level administrative positions, but focused most of his efforts on a new career as a publisher, running his own prolific publishing house. Wang sought not only to profit from his publications, but also to use them to present his public persona as a gentleman: in his ca. 1600 publication *A Mirror of People: A History* (Renjing yangqiu), a collection of anecdotes about exemplary and moral men, Wang included a section on his own parents' charitable acts, as well as his own biography. He had his illustrator, Wang Geng, provide images of Wang demonstrating filiality by serving medicine to his ailing father, and the whole Wang family giving generously to the poor.[3] In 1609 he published *Master Shade-Sitter's Weiqi Manual* (Zuoyin yipu), which provided him with another opportunity to present a gentlemanly public persona; as such, Wang's *weiqi* manual provides a concentrated dose of the values and symbols that constituted gentlemanly *weiqi* culture.[4]

Master Shade-Sitter (*Zuoyin xiansheng*), one of Wang's many sobriquets, was one of these symbols; its source is a fifth-century anecdote in which a gentleman and a monk refer to *weiqi* as "shade-sitting" and "hand-chatting."[5] These names for *weiqi* appear often in later literary collections, associating the game with elegance, leisure, reclusion, and tranquility. Wang could have crafted an original sobriquet demonstrating his fondness for *weiqi*, such as Fond-of-Black-and-White-Stones Layman or Master Nineteen-by-Nineteen-Grid (I make no claims to creativity); his selection of this well-known literary reference, however, not only declared his personal allegiance to gentlemanly values through *weiqi*, but

FIG. I.I.
Wang Geng's illustration, "Shade Sitting" from *Master Shade-Sitter's Weiqi Manual*. Courtesy of Guangxi Normal University Press.

also granted him credibility in the eyes of the clientele he hoped would purchase his manual.

Most of the volumes of Wang's manual are not extant, but among what remains is the original cover page, showcasing Wang's sobriquet in big, bold, red characters, and advertising in slightly smaller writing that the book contains poems and prose by famous gentlemen reproduced in their own calligraphic styles (several of these men were officials in Wang's own social network, who offered him prefaces and colophons for the *weiqi* manual). As he had done in *A Mirror of People*, Wang inserted his biographical information into his manual and had his illustrator Wang Geng compose another image of him, this time sitting in his garden (also named "Shade-Sitting"), playing *weiqi* with a Confucian while a Daoist and Buddhist watch.[6] These lofty men and the peculiar craggy rocks surrounding them symbolically present Wang's garden as a paradise for the gentlemanly sort.

No longer the scion of a merchant family or the Confucian son that he was in *A Mirror of People*, Wang has become Master Shade-Sitter: a sage, reclusive, well-connected gentleman and *weiqi* connoisseur extraordinaire. The promotion of himself and his manual continues in a short text preserved behind the cover page, reminding readers of several mythical *weiqi* origin stories, each linked to Daoist immortals or a mythical ruler, claiming

that *weiqi* is "the pleasurable Way of the immortals, and a tool for cultivating oneself. Its profound depths are not something that those of little skill or intelligence can pry into!"[7] The text criticizes recently published *weiqi* manuals for being jumbled and confusing and assures readers that *this* manual will not only help them achieve victory on the board but also master knowledge of an ideal activity for "whiling away one's leisure hours and stepping back from the turmoil of the world."[8]

Wang praises only one *weiqi* text besides his own: the *Thirteen-Chapter Classic of Weiqi* (Qijing shisan pian), which he says contains the utmost wondrousness of *weiqi*.[9] The *Thirteen-Chapter Classic*, written by Zhang Ni in Northern Song (960–1127), is a core text of gentlemanly *weiqi* culture and was reproduced in full in later *weiqi* manuals. Wang's praise of this text is strategic, as it signals to potential buyers that his manual belongs to its lineage and adheres to its ideals.

The *Thirteen-Chapter Classic* elevates the status of *weiqi* beyond that of a mere board game by linking it to classical cosmology. The three hundred and sixty stones represent the number of days in one year; the four corners of the board represent the four seasons; the stones are half black and half white, in accordance with *yin* and *yang*.[10] *Weiqi* was not merely the placement of stones on a grid; understanding the rules of the game did not mean that one truly understood *weiqi*. One needed to grasp the machinations of the universe, to perceive the workings of *yin* and *yang* or the ineffable "Way" (Dao), and mastery of the game was therefore reserved for gentlemen of particularly high refinement. Yu Ji's (1272–1348) preface to the manual *Mystery of Mysteries: The Classic of Weiqi* (Xuanxuan qijing) similarly describes *weiqi* as possessing the forms of Heaven and Earth, the principles of *yin* and *yang*, and the forces of nature.[11] And a preface in Wang's manual notes that the Way of *weiqi* lies in

> the machinations of the spirits and the movements of the heavens, congealing and dispersing like clouds, emerging and vanishing like dragons. A *weiqi* board may appear meagre, but in reality, it exceeds what the eyes and mind [can perceive]. This is not something commonly understood, grasped in one's hands and told to others.[12]

In addition to its abstract cosmological associations, gentlemen understood *weiqi* as a means of demonstrating good character. The *Thir-*

teen-Chapter Classic emphasizes that players must be calm and collected, in control of their feelings, and engaged in careful contemplation throughout the game. It warns that only inferior players resort to immoral strategies of trickery and deceit and reminds readers, "Don't speak [arrogantly] if you win; don't talk [resentfully] if you lose."[13] Wang's manual likewise expects players to "not be arrogant in victory, nor ashamed in defeat."[14] Deviation from such standards was recognized as the territory of lesser men; Ma Yu (1123–83) reflected poetically on his failure to adhere to such ideals, saying: "I boast of my good [*weiqi*] hand, greed arises in my heart-mind and goes unattended. Having made myself lowly, I advance towards danger!"[15] Liu Yin (d. 1167) jokingly said of himself, "I've never once done the affairs of a lesser man, but when playing *weiqi* I cannot but be a lesser man!"[16]

When understood and played properly, *weiqi* could function for the gentlemanly sort as an avenue of self-cultivation. A common origin story states that the mythical sage King Yao invented *weiqi* to educate his son and cultivate proper virtue.[17] In his preface to *Mystery of Mysteries,* Yan Tianzhang (ca. 1350) wrote:

> *Weiqi* is an art, and although it is called a lesser art, it is also where the utmost principle resides, and its daily use cannot be neglected. If you enjoy it day and night, in order to enlarge your aspiration toward rightness and principle, then in responding to affairs, you will have more than enough, without missing anything in your heart.[18]

The overwhelming majority of gentlemanly writings on *weiqi* look like this, focusing on conduct, cultivation, cosmology, or poetic and abstract depictions of the game; technical descriptions of gameplay or strategy are noticeably absent. Chapter 11 of the *Thirteen-Chapter Classic* contains a list of *weiqi* terminology, but even the treatise itself does not actually *use* that terminology throughout; in keeping with gentlemanly *weiqi* culture, it instead seeks to connect each chapter with quotations from the classical canon, repurposed as vague advice about how to play *weiqi* properly. This is not to suggest that gentlemen weren't interested in learning to play *weiqi* skillfully, but that demonstrating knowledge of advanced strategy or invoking technical terminology was clearly not valued in gentlemanly *weiqi* culture, which held greater esteem for more metaphorical invocations of the game. As Li Dongyang (1447–1516) once observed:

> Su Shi (1037–1101) was among the ancients who were not good at *weiqi*. He said: "Victory certainly brings joy, but one can also delight in defeat." From this we know that those who are not skilled at *weiqi* can still obtain great pleasure from it. People who attain this [understanding] can participate in conversations about *weiqi*. Those who are good at using metaphors to describe the world will certainly use *weiqi* [to do so]; rare will be the things that do not fit [when one] uses *weiqi* to observe the world.[19]

We may understand this gentlemanly *weiqi* culture as a *sticky culture*: "a body of understandings that glues participants to their community."[20] Sticky cultures stem from routine interactions and help to build a sense of affiliation and belonging to a social group with shared knowledge, a collective memory, and a commitment to certain ideals.[21] Community members do not need to adhere to the entire body of understandings available to them; however, as a man assiduously attempting to market his *weiqi* manual (and himself) to this gentlemanly community, Wang Tingne's manual provides a concentrated dose of many of the values and symbols constituting this culture. These include a shared understanding of the game as an ideal leisure pursuit, an art reflecting the cosmos, a tool of self-cultivation, and an avenue for demonstrating one's cultivated conduct to others; a shared awareness of how the game is played and the proper behavior expected of its lofty players; a shared knowledge of core texts like the *Thirteen-Chapter Classic*, and symbols and metaphors drawn primarily from the classical and literary canons.

Wang did not put a *weiqi* board on the cover of his manual; instead, he stamped his literary sobriquet in bold red characters. He told potential buyers that his manual contained calligraphy and poetry by famous men, but said nothing about the educational *weiqi* diagrams within. He did not try to convince customers that they were buying the manual of a master *weiqi* player but tried to assure them of his status as a proper gentleman by including prefaces with cosmological and metaphorical discussions of *weiqi* referencing the classical canon, an illustration of him playing *weiqi* with lofty men in an idyllic garden, and an advertisement reminding readers of *weiqi*'s illustrious origins, its usefulness for self-cultivation, and how wonderfully it serves to while away one's leisure hours.

Winning was a secondary value in this gentlemanly *weiqi* culture, but it was essential in the contemporaneous culture of occupational *weiqi* players.

Weiqi Artisans and *Weiqi* Attendants

At some point in the eleventh century, Liu Zhongfu stopped at an inn in Qiantang (modern-day Hangzhou). People asked the innkeeper about him, but the innkeeper could only reply: "[Liu] Zhongfu stays at the inn, leaves to roam around the marketplace, and returns each night, knocking on the door [of my inn]. I have never known what class of person he is."[22] One morning Liu put up a banner offering three hundred pieces of silver serving ware as a prize to anyone who could beat him at *weiqi*. Word spread, and local strongmen (*tuhao*) gathered *weiqi* players to see who would face off against Liu in front of a crowd; in the end, one was selected to play black while Liu played white. After one hundred stones were placed, Liu's opponent arrogantly boasted, "Now the positions on the board can already be judged. Black will certainly win!" But Liu replied, "Not yet."[23] And after about twenty more stones were placed on the board, Liu was victorious. The crowd sighed with admiration, and Liu addressed them as follows:

> I, Zhongfu, am a person from Jiangnan, who as a child was fond of this art [of *weiqi*] and immediately seemed to understand it. Through the praise of others, I was brought to attain [the status of] National Hand. In the following years, people have repeatedly urged me onward, wanting to recommend me for appointment as a Hanlin [Artisans Institute] Attendant [in the capital], but my heart desired to come to the great city of Qiantang [first], where lofty men and virtuous gentlemen are numerous, and which *weiqi* players call the "first hurdle." If I was fortunate enough to win [here], then I could advance [to the capital and the Hanlin Artisans Institute]. I have stopped here for ten days, and each day I have observed *weiqi* gatherings and renowned players taking on the game and have thoroughly observed their levels of skill. It was for this reason that I dared to put up the banner—it was not done out of arrogance.[24]

Liu then announced that if anyone in the audience could detect the one key move which allowed him to win, he would return home and never seek

renown through *weiqi* again. No one could figure it out, and when Liu pointed out a particular "move [that became] useful twenty moves later," the crowd was amazed, giving him gifts and treating him as an honored guest for his remaining time in Qiantang.

Liu was one of many men in Song-Yuan-Ming China who made a living by playing *weiqi*. Some traveled from place to place and performed their art for crowds; some opened *weiqi* shops where they played, taught, and sold games.[25] A select few were employed at the Hanlin Artisans Institute as *weiqi* attendants (*qi daizhao*), tasked with playing *weiqi* for audiences inside and outside the imperial court. Liu became one such attendant, and some of the games he played with National Hands at the capital were recorded as diagrams in the *Collection of Pure Happiness and Forgetting Worries* (Wangyou qingle ji).[26] Liu earned a livelihood not only through his position at court and from winning games but also by traveling to the homes of various noble families at the capital to teach *weiqi*; he also took a fellow occupational *weiqi* player named Hou Xiaogong as his disciple.[27]

An anecdote from the *Record of the Listener* (Yi jian zhi) emphasizes the importance of reputation for occupational players: it describes a young man from Caizhou of lowly social background who starts out as the best player in his village, then travels to Kaifeng and earns a reputation as a peerless player, and eventually ends up in Yan (the region of modern Beijing). At the time, a woman named Wayperson of Wondrous Contemplation (*Miaoguan daoren*) was a National Hand with her own *weiqi* shop in Yan, where she played with patrons and trained disciples. The young man visited her shop daily and pointed out mistakes in her gameplay; she did not want to see him again, but local aficionados wished to see a match between the two and offered a prize of 200,000 cash. She sent a messenger to the young man in advance; fearing that she would lose the match and suffer reputational damage, she offered to compensate him financially if he agreed to rig the game in her favor. The young man, however, refused her offer and won the games. Subsequently, the stakes were raised for an additional game: the young man wagered gold in exchange for her hand in marriage. He won the match, and the two were married.[28]

Prestige was a vital asset for these players: it drew patrons to their shops, increased the amount of prize money offered by audiences, connected masters with disciples, and led to employment at court as *weiqi* attendants for

a select few. This prestige was not earned through tasteful poetic references to the classics or cosmology; it was accrued through winning games, or at the very least, successfully demonstrating one's skill prior to losing. The same processes of reputation building continued into the Ming dynasty, as revealed in Wu Cheng'en's (1500–82) poem about the National Hand Bao Yizhong:

> Among those in the world who, at present, are praised for being good at *weiqi*,
> Bao [Yizhong] of Wenzhou occupies first place.
> Twenty-five years ago, I
> Already saw his incomparable wondrousness at the crisscrossed [*weiqi* board].
> At that time, as a youth, he travelled to Huai'an,
> He later left his footprints throughout Jiangnan.
> In rank he would not have yielded to Fan Yuanbo,[29]
> [So] he received reward and favor from Yang Sui'an.[30]
> Capable *weiqi* players came from all over to compete for cock of the walk,
> But at once, upon encountering [Bao], they were all in low spirits.
> Examination graduates and nobles [riding] decorated horses welcomed [him],
> The Hanlin Academicians inscribed poetry when visiting [him].[31]

The presence of renowned occupational *weiqi* players in major urban centers and in important *weiqi* manuals, paired with their undeniable skill at the game, had the potential to make them heroes for *weiqi* enthusiasts: people to discuss, appreciate, and even emulate, helping to constitute a sticky culture and bind a community together.[32] However, in extant texts, these players are not described as heroes to be emulated but as spectacle. Gentlemen did not write about adopting their play styles or about the influence their strategies might have on their own gameplay. They did not applaud these men as cultured or erudite nor write biographies about them. Bao Yizhong drew audiences of influential gentlemen, was praised by the renowned Wu Cheng'en, and even appeared in the poetry of Wang Tingne; however, he and his fellow occupational players were never a selling point for Wang's *weiqi* manual, nor were they ever a core component

of gentlemanly *weiqi* culture, which had only virtuous and high-minded gentlemen as its heroes.[33]

There were some instances of overlap between these cultures. In Ming, the National Hand Fan Hong grew up studying the classics and playing *weiqi* for fun, but later decided to abandon officialdom to become an occupational player.[34] In Song, the gentleman Zhu Buyi was skilled enough to challenge Liu Zhongfu in front of a crowd; Liu stopped a game partway through, apparently because the shame of losing would be harmful to his livelihood. Liu himself may be an example of overlap, as he had clearly received enough education to author his own short treatise entitled "Secrets of *Weiqi*" (*Qi jue*); however, his treatise contains no cosmological claims or poetic allusions and focuses instead on strategic elements such as the placement of stones and principles of attacking and defending.[35] Despite these instances of blurred boundaries, the two cultures of occupational *weiqi* players and gentlemanly players remained mostly separate.

An "Art of Opportunistic Trickery" and a "Wooden Wild Fox"

"[Confucius] said: 'People who spend the whole day eating, not applying their heart-mind to anything, are difficult! Are there not six sticks [*liubo*] and *weiqi* players? Doing that is still better than doing nothing!'"[36]

Any gentleman wishing to follow the wisdom of the classics while enjoying *weiqi* during leisure hours would have to come to terms with the fact that Confucius was not a fan of board games. Commentaries on the *Analects* (Lunyu) broadly agree that this is not an endorsement of *weiqi*; Zhang Shi (1133–180), for instance, writes that

> six sticks and *weiqi* are certainly not what is appropriate to do. However, is it not better to play those games and have one's heart-mind focused on them than to be scattered to who knows what extreme? The passage may be summed up by saying that not applying one's heart-mind and developing evil [ways] is to be feared. It is not to instruct people in six sticks and *weiqi*.[37]

Mencius went a step further, including *weiqi* among the five "unfilial things" (*buxiaozhe*) that cause people to neglect caring for their parents;

he also associated *weiqi* with focusing the heart-mind in a parable about two students of this "lesser art" (*xiaoshu*): the student able to focus on his *weiqi* lesson is considered superior to the student who is easily distracted by the thought of hunting.[38] However, Mencius clearly does not believe that *weiqi* is something that one should apply one's heart-mind to.

Gentlemanly *weiqi* culture did not encompass *all* gentlemen; though some saw *weiqi* as a sage art, others had nothing but disdain for it. Yu Ji's preface to *Mystery of Mysteries* notes that many people didn't believe that *weiqi* was invented by the ancient sage kings to educate their sons, as "the sages ought to teach their sons with the Way of humaneness, rightness, ritual, and wisdom; how could they have made a tool of crooked leisure—an art of opportunistic trickery (*bianzha zhi shu*)—which would increase their [sons'] stupidity?"[39] Yu argues against this position:

> Since the sages in antiquity created tools with the essentials in their spirit, there were no [tools] that were not beneficial when put into practice. Thus, Confucius [said that] playing *weiqi* is better than doing nothing, and Mencius [said that] *weiqi* is an art which you will not master unless you concentrate your mind with utmost resolve.[40]

Yu tactfully removed the word "lesser" (*xiao*) from the original Mencius line describing *weiqi* as a "lesser art" and made the sages appear fond of the game. His argument directly targets a separate gentlemanly culture that viewed *weiqi* as an art of vice, which expanded upon the classical canon's perspective on *weiqi*. In prior centuries, men like Wei Zhao (204–73) and Pi Rixiu (838–83) wrote influential essays espousing the harms *weiqi* caused its players, ranging from moral degradation to the loss of wealth through gambling.[41] These perspectives clearly persisted in Song, Yuan, and Ming. Zhu Yu (Northern Song), for example, referred to *weiqi* as a "wooden wild fox" (*mu yehu*), bewildering players into abandoning their responsibilities:[42]

> *Weiqi* [leads to] many abandoned tasks; regardless of [one's] noble or low [status], those who become obsessed with *weiqi* all lose their livelihoods. For this reason, people perceive the *weiqi* board as a 'wooden wild fox,' and say that it bewitches people like a fox.[43]

Exaggeration aside, men bewitched by the *weiqi* board did in fact lose wealth and status through excessive gambling. In Yuan, Wang Yi (1303–54)

issued a warning to farmers who might be enticed by gambling: "No one should 'learn' gambling; people who play six sticks and *weiqi* will certainly render their homes desolate and miserable."[44] In Ming, Yu Zijun (1429–88) wrote that low-status men in the capital city from "military craftsmen" (*junqiang*) and "prisoners" (*qiutu*) to "delinquent groups" (*san wu cheng qun*) were squandering their family's resources gambling on *weiqi* and other games, forcing some of them into destitution and banditry:

> The winners obtain [enough] wealth to do what they wish, and the losers [are left with] their hands up their sleeves and nothing to be done. Thus, they become severely cold and hungry, and develop a thieving heart [out of desperation]. There are often wanton robberies occurring in the capital city, so the prevention of [these] minor [gambling] offenses cannot be delayed.[45]

Yu's concerns about gambling as a path to financial and moral ruin were shared by others. In Ming, a magistrate in Hui'an was traumatized as a child when his father erroneously believed he was gambling on a *weiqi* game and beat him:

> When he was a child, [the magistrate] once played *weiqi* with someone; his late father spied on them and thought that they were gambling, [so he] beat [his son] twenty times. Now, in the middle of the night, [the magistrate] thinks of this and suddenly faints. Parents are always worrying that their kids are gambling; if they gamble then they will [become] impoverished, and then [become] thieves. [This leads to] lesser men violating the law, and noble men decreasing in rightness: there is nothing they won't do![46]

As a result of this traumatic experience, and his belief that *weiqi* could turn proper gentlemen into miscreants and "lesser men" (*xiao ren*) into thieves, the magistrate went so far as to "criminalize" (*zui*) *weiqi* and other forms of entertainment "even if people were not gambling [on them]."[47]

Gentlemen widely believed the pursuit of profit to be immoral and contrasted it with the noble pursuit of humaneness and rightness. Those who adhered to the gentlemanly sticky culture of *weiqi* and wished to bet on their games wagered poems, tea, ink sticks, and other small items of cultural significance that functioned primarily as tokens of friendship and remembrances of a shared moment of leisure and play.[48] Others were

willing to bet money as long as the stakes were low; Hong Mai (1123–1202) recorded the story of the Song gentleman Fan Duanzhi as a cautionary tale against being too fond of profits: each time he played *weiqi* against the concubines at his friend's house he wagered objects "not surpassing a few thousand coins in value" and always won, but when his friend offered him "three thousand strings of gold coins" if he could win the next match, he started overthinking his moves and lost. Hong wished for his readers to remember that "one cannot take excessive pleasure in wealth that is not one's lot. People who are fond of profits and forget rightness should reflect upon this."[49]

This was a lesson that women were expected to internalize as well. In the Ming novel *Plum in the Golden Vase* (Jin ping mei), Pan Jinlian bets one of her hairpins without incident, but when she later bets five mace of silver she is chastised and told to use her winnings to host a meal for the loser of the game.[50] By wagering small tokens of friendship or low monetary stakes, players differentiated themselves from the delinquents who gambled the entirety of their families' resources in the pursuit of wealth.

Thus, there were gentlemen and women who did not object so strongly to gambling; there were also occupational *weiqi* players like the young man from Caizhou who placed wagers on their own games. However, neither the gentlemanly sort nor occupational *weiqi* players were the primary constituents of the low-status sticky culture of *weiqi* gambling, whose core participants are described as pathological gamblers placing profits above prestige or reputation, and even sometimes above acting with humaneness and rightness. These gamblers came from a variety of social backgrounds; once ensnared by the wooden wild fox, they shared a desire for enough "wealth to do what they wished" and risked their livelihoods, their families' resources, and their reputations in pursuit of this goal.

Endgame

The time has come to succumb to temptation and follow in the footsteps of middle-period gentlemen by invoking *weiqi* metaphorically. On the *weiqi* board, single stones have little relevance to the game until they are connected directly or peripherally to a group; the strength of that group can only be considered relative to the other groups of stones on the board. Some

stones may prove to be in pivotal locations due to either luck or skill, and the roles they play may change as the game progresses. As the board reaches the midgame stage (*zhong pan*), most stones become connected to clearly established groups, but the boundaries of these groups remain porous and contentious. At this stage, the groups of stones on the grid-lined board become a convenient metaphor for the world of *weiqi* in Song-Yuan-Ming China and the various cultures and participants constituting that world.

Activities known as high arts in middle-period China are often assumed to remain in the hegemonic hands of gentlemen, who had the power to define good taste and impose their values on the rest of society. It is undeniable that they were expert discourse producers, and many values contained in the discourse of gentlemanly *weiqi* culture persist to this day. Many contemporary scholars and players alike regularly invoke this gentlemanly *weiqi* discourse in their own descriptions of the game, discussing its close connection to cosmology, tracing its history through classic texts, and even using abstract metaphors to praise *weiqi* as a high art.[51] *Weiqi* is still commonly associated with self-cultivation, the sage King Yao, and the art of war; some members of modern *weiqi* communities still refer to the game as "hand-chatting."[52] The discourse of gentlemanly *weiqi* culture remains a useful glue for sticky cultures, giving *weiqi* high status as a noble pursuit and therefore a noble object of study.

However, this gentlemanly *weiqi* discourse represents only one subset of a much broader and richer world of *weiqi* in middle-period China. Its symbols, values, ideals, and understandings differ significantly from those shared by occupational *weiqi* players seeking prestige through winning games, "delinquents" and low-status sorts who pursued profit by gambling on *weiqi*, and the communities of gentlemen who rejected *weiqi* as a dangerous distraction from important matters (as opposed to an important matter in itself). The continuing dominance of gentlemanly *weiqi* discourse masks this rich variety of cultures and communities, occupied by participants of high and low status alike, and their distinct modes of engagement with the game. It privileges words over actions, pushing scholarly attention toward the study of *weiqi* metaphors and poetic ideals, while the strategies and techniques in extant *weiqi* diagrams remain understudied. As a result, it can cause us to forget that the core component of the world of *weiqi*,

shared by all its cultures and constituents, was not a discourse but the game itself: its rules, its objectives, and its basic material requirements. All kinds of people enjoyed (or disliked) it in distinct and creative ways, adhering to their own sticky cultures.

The gentlemen who claimed *weiqi* as a high art and who saw their *weiqi* boards as mirrors of their own morality were not a homogenous class of cultural hegemons: they were only one of the groups on the grid.

Notes

1. Zu-Yan Chen, "The Art of Black and White: Wei-ch'i in Chinese Poetry," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 4 (1997): 644.

2. For a good introduction to *weiqi* built on this foundation, see He Yunpo, *Weiqi yu Zhongguo wenhua* (Beijing: Ren Min Chubanshe, 2001).

3. Li-Chiang Lin, "Wang Tingne Unveiled Through the Study of the Late Ming Woodblock-Printed Book 'Renjing Yangqiu,'" *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 95/96 (2008–9): 291, 302–3.

4. A small number of extant Song-Yuan-Ming sources reveal that women were also participants in this male-dominated gentlemanly *weiqi* culture; see the introduction of this book, as well as Andrew Lo and Wang Tzi-Cheng, "Spider Threads Roaming the Empyrean: The Game of *Weiqi*," in *Asian Games: The Art of Contest*, ed. Colin MacKenzie and Irving Finkel (New York: Asia Society, 2004), 196–97; Chen, "Black and White," 644; Huang Jun, *Yiren zhuan* (Changsha: Yuelu Shushe, 1985).

5. Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu* (Sibu congkan jingming yuan shi jia qu tangben), 21.163. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

6. Wang Tingne, *Zuoyin yipu* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2001), 58.

7. Wang, *Zuoyin yipu*.

8. Wang, *Zuoyin yipu*.

9. Wang, *Zuoyin yipu*.

10. Yan Defu and Yan Tianzhang, *Xuanxuan qijing* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenhua Chubanshe, 1996), 5.

11. Yan Defu and Yan Tianzhang, *Xuanxuan qijing*, trans. Chen Xianhui (Taibei: Shijie Wenwu Chubanshe, 2002), 10.

12. Wang, *Zuoyin yipu*, 31.

13. Yan and Yan, *Xuanxuan qijing* (1996), 11, 15.

14. Wang, *Zuoyin yipu*, 4.

15. *Quan Jin Yuan ci*, ed. Tang Guizhang (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979), 287.

16. Zhang Duanyi, *Gui'er ji* (Qing wenyuan ge siku quanshu ben), 2.20. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

17. Marc Moskowitz, *Go Nation: Chinese Masculinities and the Game of Weiqi in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 34; Lo and Wang, "Spider Threads," 187.

18. Yan and Yan, *Xuanxuan qijing* (1996), 4.

19. Li Dongyang, *Huailu tang ji* (Qing wenyuan ge siku quanshu ben), 36.330. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

20. Gary Alan Fine, *Players and Pawns: How Chess Builds Community and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 103.

21. Fine, *Players and Pawns*, 103.

22. He Wei, *Chunzhu jiwen* (Ming jin dai mishu ben), 2.12. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

23. He, *Chunzhu jiwen*, 2.13.

24. He, *Chunzhu jiwen*, 2.13.

25. Lu Xiangshan (1139–93) once visited a shop run by a *weiqi* artisan (*qi gong*) who challenged Lu to a game. Lu bought a *weiqi* board drawn on a scroll, took it home to examine, and after realizing it was similar in nature to astrological diagrams, returned to the shop to defeat the *weiqi* artisan twice in a row. See Luo Dajing, *Helin yulu* (Ming keben), 1.5. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

26. Li Yimin, *Wangyou qingle ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982), 13a–22b.

27. Chen Yuan, *Mo tang ji* (Sibu congkan san bian jing song chaoben), 19.162. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

28. Hong Mai, *Yi jian zhi* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006), vol. 4, 1728–29.

29. Yuanbo is the courtesy name (*zi*) of Fan Hong, a renowned Ming dynasty *weiqi* player.

30. Sui'an is the sobriquet of Yang Yiqing (1454–1530), a high-ranking official.

31. Wu Cheng'en, *Wu Cheng'en shiwen ji qian jiao* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1991), 33.

32. Fine, *Players and Pawns*, 107.

33. Pan Mengbu, "Mingdai yongjia qipai shulüe," *Zhejiang gongmao zhiye jishu xueyuan xuebao* 12, no. 1 (2012): 86.

34. See Huang, *Yiren zhuan*, 140–41.

35. Yan and Yan, *Xuanxuan qijing* (1996), 32.

36. *Lunyu* (Sibu congkan jing riben zhengping ben) (Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.), *juan* 9.45 (17.22). *Liubo* is another premodern Chinese board game, with sticks thrown like dice to determine movement on the board.

37. *Lunyu ji shuo*, compiled by Cai Jie (Qing wenyuan ge siku quanshu ben) (Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.), 9.121.

38. *Mengzi* (Sibu congkan jing song dazi ben) Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0., *juan* 8.69 (4B.30); *juan* 11.91–92 (6A.9).

39. Yan and Yan, *Xuanxuan qijing* (2002), 10.

40. Yan and Yan, *Xuanxuan qijing* (2002), 11–12.

41. Paolo Zanon, "The Opposition of the Literati to the Game of Weiqi in Ancient China," *Asian and African Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 70–79.

42. For a Ming example, see Lang Ying, *Qixiu leigao* (Ming keben), 35.274. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

43. Zhu Yu, *Pingzhou ketan* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985), 28.

44. Wang claims that he knows farmers find prose difficult and is therefore limiting himself to simple four-character phrases that will be easy for them to understand. Wang Yi, *Mune zhai wenji* (Qing Qianlong ershiba nian keben), 1.11. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

45. *Ming chen jingji lu*, compiled by Huang Xun (Qing wenyuan ge siku quanshu ben), 40.764. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

46. Ye Chenji, *Shidong ji* (Qing wenyuan ge siku quan shu bu pei qingwen jin ge siku quan shu ben), 7.102. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

47. Ye Chenji, *Shidong ji*, 7.102.

48. For examples, see Cai Zhongmin, *Weiqi wenhua shici xuan* (Chengdu: Shurong Qiyi Chubanshe, 1989), 89, 139–40, 155, 166–67. As seen in Lo and Wang, "Spider Threads," 197.

49. Hong, *Yi jian zhi*, 3:1387–88.

50. *Jin ping mei* (Ming chongzhen keben), 11.76, 23.171. Airusheng Gujiku Database, V. 7.0.

51. Most scholarship continues to treat *weiqi* in premodern China predominantly or exclusively as a high art of the cultured elite; for some examples see the works cited in this chapter.

52. Moskowitz, *Go Nation*, 37.

2

Newly Discovered Game Board Rock Carvings in Hong Kong

Apotropaic Symbolism or Ludic Culture?

CÉSAR GUARDE-PAZ

Games in general, and board games in particular, have been an essential element of cultures in the East and West, ancient and modern, not only functioning as a major source of entertainment, but also embodying a social and religious significance that extends far beyond the boundaries of ludic spaces. Chess was once a metaphor for world order, and *liubo* boards have been associated with auspiciousness, divination, and ritualized descriptions of the cosmos.[1]

The presence of game boards carved on stone in the natural landscape, excised from their accustomed and more conventional space indoors, is a well-studied phenomenon within the Western regions of the Roman Empire and its sphere of influence. By comparison, in East Asia, game boards—more specifically, the subcategory of alquerque-like boards—have been overlooked. For instance, isolated carved boards resembling the strategy games nine and twelve men's morris (in which players must align three pieces to remove an opponent's piece) discovered in northern and western China have been received with lukewarm interest and researchers are prone to regarding them as contemporary creations.[2] Hong Kong and Macao

constitute notable exceptions, both in terms of the number of these game boards and the amount of research they have generated.[3]

Mostly distributed across isolated regions within Hong Kong, the so-called game board rock carvings (*qipan shike*) comprise eight groups of geometric patterns, appearing in pairs and resembling the strategy game twelve men's morris. Initially, the discovery in 1962 of the first game boards led some archaeologists to place them in the wider context of other, more complex prehistoric carvings in the territory, thus considering them to be Neolithic or Iron Age symbolic representations with unknown religious meanings. For instance, William Meacham has suggested that they should be dated to 300–100 BCE or even 500 BCE.[4] On the other hand, these newly discovered rock carvings attracted the speculative attention of journalists, whose reports drew specialists into debates over the authorship and age of the carvings. Countering Meacham's claims, some journalists stated that the boards were in fact carved by recent hikers, and noted they were like those still used by local people in parks. The latter, however, are in fact *weiqi* boards different from the ones discussed by journalists. The unseriousness with which ludic activities and manifestations have been treated led the media to consider these game boards historically inconsequential and most likely modern; relevant authorities have done little to preserve or study them.[5]

Such dismissive treatments notwithstanding, this article holds that the Hong Kong game boards can help us unveil forgotten "transitory moments," as noted by Kopp, "in which the real world and the otherworldly situation meet . . . having an active part in the shaping and performing of society."[6] This chapter introduces preliminary results from newly unearthed and formerly overlooked rock carvings with geometric patterns in the shape of game boards in Hong Kong. I start with a brief archaeological description and situate them temporally and spatially in order to understand their place within local communities. Next, I draw parallels with similar examples of rock art across the globe, focusing on possible social functions and the ways in which visual rhetoric connects to other key aspects of the cultural landscape. I argue that these game boards are ludic manifestations that local communities adapted from European games that, through commerce and intercultural exchange, spread across the regions of Macao and Hong Kong between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

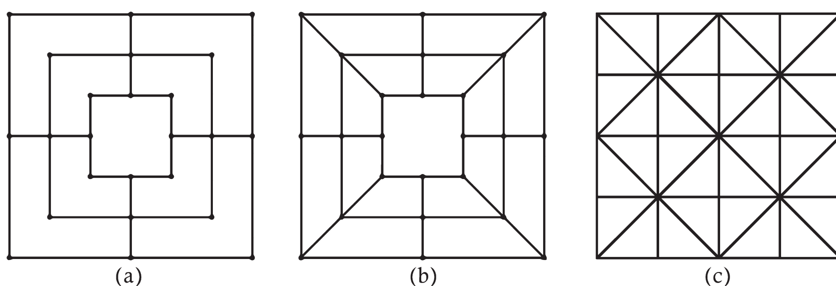

FIG. 2.1. Types of alquerque: (a) nine men's morris; (b) twelve men's morris; (c) alquerque of twelve.

Nine and Twelve Men's Morris Alquerques

Both nine and twelve men's morris are types of a strategy game played on a board on which three concentric squares intersected by two perpendicular lines from the sides have been drawn. (In the twelve men's morris variation two diagonal lines from the corners are added to the board). Usually these lines do not converge at the central point. Each player has twelve game pieces that can be placed in any of the twenty-four intersections created in the board. The objective is to align three pieces vertically or horizontally in order to remove one of the opponent's pieces. Once all pieces are on the board, players can move them to adjacent positions to form new groups of three until the adversary is left with no moves. Nine and twelve men's morris are played in the same way, since the additional lines do not change the number of intersections, but mobility across the board is increased in the twelve men's variation of the game.[7] Another variation, the alquerque of twelve, follows the same rules with a less sophisticated composition (figure 2.1).

The use of these boards seems to have been restricted to areas influenced first by the Roman Empire and later by European trade, including and as far as colonial examples in Peruvian temples in South America.[8] In Europe, where we find the highest concentration of carved boards, they usually appear in religious buildings; outdoors near military outposts, where soldiers carved them to entertain themselves while keeping watch; or along the coastline, where merchants waited for their ships to sail off.[9]

Questions of Temporality and Spatiality

According to their distribution, Hong Kong's game boards can be classified in two major groups. The first includes a twelve men's morris in Nei Lak Shan, Lantau Island, discovered in 1994, since lost; a three-in-a-row and an alquerque of twelve board in Upper Shek Pik; a twelve men's morris in Shui Hau, discovered in 1986, since lost; and a twelve men's morris in Tung Chung.[10]

Whereas the Shek Pik carvings include two different game boards, the remaining examples are all twelve men's morris and were believed to be composed of only one board. This was proven wrong when I visited the site of the Tung Chung carving in 2018. A second board, highly eroded, is next to the first, visible only in dim light.

A second group of carved boards is located in the eastern region of the New Territories, between villages on both sides of the Pat Sin Leng mountain range: a twelve men's morris with a three-in-a-row board in Ting Kok; a pair of twelve men's morris near the abandoned village of Tsat Muk Kiu, discovered by the author in 2017; and a twelve men's morris in Luk Keng, discovered in 2000, since lost.[11]

All these game boards are similar in size (18 × 18 cm to 25 × 25 cm) and morphology (except for Shek Pik, all present at least one twelve men's morris), and all the surviving examples appear in pairs. Among them, only the carvings in Shek Pik, Tung Chung, and Ting Kok were registered in archaeological publications.

Finally, an isolated—and probably moved from its original location—example of a twelve men's morris game board was found by the author in 2018 at Wing Lung Wai, a village in the Yuen Long district. This board is carved into the surface of a rock brick of 52 × 26 cm used for construction abandoned near the entrance of the village. Despite its assumed modernity, it should be noted that the village was founded during the Kangxi reign (1661–1722) and some of its buildings date to the seventeenth century.[12]

Early statements from villagers in Ting Kok and Shui Hau supported a recent creation date for these carvings, but in later interviews residents were unable even to recall their existence.[13] Conversely, villagers in Hoi Ha still remember the location of a Chinese *weiqi* board rock carving, even though they haven't seen it for decades. Therefore, while we should not summarily

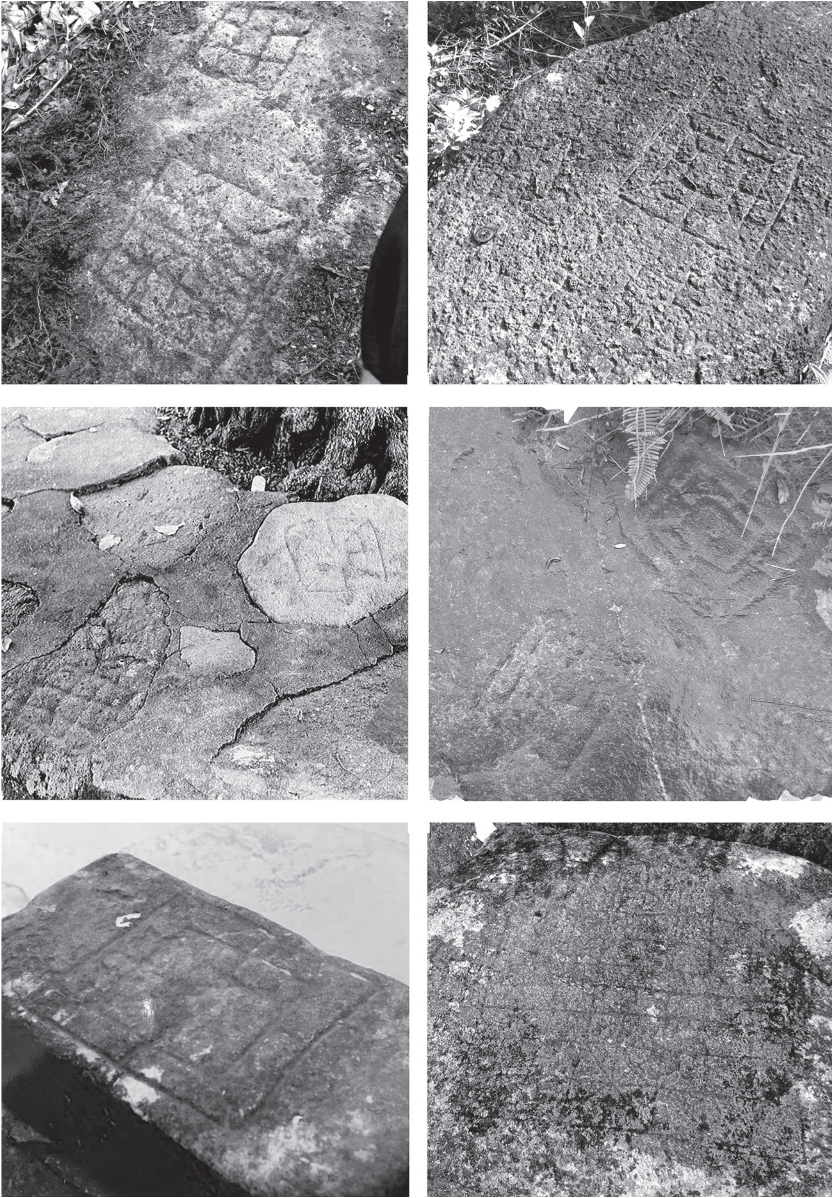

FIG. 2.2. Game board rock carvings in Hong Kong. From left to right, top to bottom: (1) Upper Shek Pik, (2) Tung Chung, (3) Ting Kok, (4) Wang Shan Keuk, (5) Yuen Long, (6) Hoi Ha *weiqi* board. Photographs by author.

dismiss these accounts, they should be weighed against empirical data and within the wider context of the sociological phenomenon of game and observations derived from comparative history.

The recent discovery of the new game boards in Tung Chung and Tsat Muk Kiu and the recovery of early reports unknown to the archaeological community provide us with two new pieces of topographical information: First, carvings do not appear randomly distributed, but exist along two different groups of ancient tracks that connected villages and facilitated trade across the regions of Lantau and the New Territories.[14] Although the age of these tracks is unknown and some of the existing routes could be traced back to the Song and Ming dynasties, they may have been rebuilt after the Great Clearance (Qian Jie Ling) order was lifted in 1669, when hundreds of Hakka families returned to the land they had abandoned and reestablished the northern villages along these tracks.[15] There has been no specific research into the nature of these tracks, but aerial photographs of Hong Kong as recent as 1924 show that these locations were thriving with activity and connected through tracks built along small streams.[16]

Second, carvings are concentrated in two areas with identical toponyms. The village of Luk Keng lies at the foot of his homonymous mountain, at the opposite site of Nam Chung village, whose location was also known as Shui Hau in the past.[17] The fishing village of Shui Hau in Lantau Island is also situated at the foot of a small hill called Luk Keng Mountain.[18] The resemblance in nomenclature between these two regions, strengthened by the parallel names of Tung Chung and Nam Chung (Eastern Stream and Southern Stream, respectively), could be the result of population mobility in early times after the Great Clearance, a phenomenon of toponymical migration for which similar examples exist in Hong Kong.[19]

This correspondence between trade routes and identical toponyms seems to indicate that these boards date from the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. Indeed, aside from a game board found in Mycenae (Greece), all known examples of carved alquerque-like boards are either Roman or Christian, thus making it very unlikely that the these boards had appeared in Hong Kong and Macao in the Iron Age and reemerged later in the Roman world.[20] Moreover, the typology of these boards is consistent with their European counterparts: they appear in pairs, of which one is always

a twelve men's morris—except for the Upper Shek Pik boards—and the other is a three-in-a-row board, an alquerque of twelve, or a twelve men's morris.[21] Similar combinations are common in Western Europe, and we find identical arrangements in the Cathedral of Ourense (Spain) and Santa Caterina's Church (Canosa di Puglia, Italy), among many other examples.[22] The question of provenance and who created these carvings remains, therefore, since as Meacham has pointed out, it is unlikely that they would be "the only known example of Ch'ing dynasty abstract rock art by Chinese villagers."[23]

Leisure amidst Commerce and Confraternity

Two more pieces of independent evidence appear to support the possibility that the fountainhead of these carved game boards streams from seventeenth- or eighteenth-century contacts with Western players or gamblers who, in all likelihood, spread them through trade and movement of individuals to Macao and Hong Kong, where they became localized as a common practice among village tradesmen and tradeswomen (in the latter, given the lack of these artifacts outside the southeastern coast of Macao). First, archaeological evidence from the excavated sites at Coloane (Macao), where we find a number of these game boards, reveals the presence of more complicated carvings, identified with two masted European trading ships, as well as two unidentified Western coins.[24] These vessels resemble autochthonous representations of boats in eighteenth-century maps of Hong Kong and Macao, with all their different constituent parts depicted in great detail.[25]

The existence of boats carved next to nine or twelve men's morris boards has been documented extensively across Europe, from the Canary Islands to Northern Italy, where they appear combined with Christian symbolism and inscription in Latin alphabet, and it is widely agreed that these are seventeenth- and eighteenth-century representations engraved by sailors and merchants stationed in the area.[26] Everything seems to indicate that the Macao and Hong Kong game boards exist within the same cultural and social context of sea trade and intercultural relations, a fact reinforced by the discovery of two European coins during the excavations, now in the Museum of Taipa and Coloane History. Thanks to high-resolution imagery

provided by the museum, I have been able to identify one of these coins as a Dutch half stuiver from Surabaya, dated 1826 or 1836, which suggests that the carved ships and game boards may be of this period.

A second, less conclusive piece of evidence comes from the local name attributed to some of these game boards in Hong Kong: *zau kekkat*.[27] It seems to be a variation of other southern Chinese game board names such as *zou cheng*, *zou tongqian*, *zou hu*, or *zou niujiaosai*, all of which include *zou* (walk) as their initial syllable.[28] The word *kekkat* is a strange combination of an infrequent character—*kek* (bend in a river)—and an interjection of regret, and may be a transcription of a foreign word. *Kekkat* sounds close enough to the Western name of the nine and twelve men's morris board, "alquerque," from Arabic *quirkat*, which is still preserved in Portuguese.[29] Although the possibility is certainly remote, local tradesmen or tradeswomen may have incorporated the pronunciation heard from Portuguese merchants playing the game while they were stationed in Macao.

Ludic Culture as Social Lubricant and Social Adhesive

In the light of the above evidence, and given the coincidence in typology and their grouping into identical combinations of three-in-a-row board, alquerque of twelve, and twelve men's morris, as well as their association with sites in Macao connected with trade and Western contacts, it seems feasible to conclude that these game boards were, both in their conceptualization and conveyance, of premodern European origin, probably created during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rather than autochthonous images evolved independently and spontaneously. The borrowing, adoption, and use of complex strategy games by agricultural societies and communities with simpler ways of life is neither an oddity nor a product of relatively modern contacts, since "geographic distribution of games points to a history of trade and migration."[30] Similar cases of transmission and expansion of games, carved or drawn in sand, are well attested across areas of European and Ottoman influence, both through trade and colonialism, and particular cases have been studied, for instance, in the African communities of the Comoros Islands.[31]

Despite the apparent fact that games seem rather unproductive, not only

do they change the players inwardly, as is the case with cognitive games, but they dramatically alter the very physical constitution of the shared space, both redefining and circumscribing the actual environment where games take place. This is particularly true for game boards carved in the open, where the otherwise natural space has been transformed into a small recreation ground of social significance for the community or individuals therein. An interesting example of how game redefined the landscape can be seen at Jebel Jassassiyeh, a small limestone hill on the Qatari littoral, where the recurrent carving of boat imagery and board games resulted in the establishment of a gathering place for pearl merchants and financiers who watched for incoming cargos and engaged in trade and banking activities from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.[32] The parallels to the coast of Macao are certainly intriguing.

A modern example of how the urban landscape can be and has been transformed in Hong Kong itself through the creation of ludic spaces can be seen in the well-known Community Centre Rest Garden in Yau Ma Tei, situated right in front of the touristic Tin Hau temple. This square was formerly a bustling market, but it developed gradually into a place frequented by prostitutes, drug dealers, art traffickers, fortunetellers, wandering singers, and other members of the traditional Chinese "underground," and became known as a "poor man's nightclub" (*pingmin yezonghui*) by the locals.[33] When the new square was refurbished in 1970, underground activities moved to the surrounding areas, and the square itself has since been transformed into an area for social gathering and everyday gaming. Numerous modern Chinese *weiqi* boards scattered along the garden have served to reinforce community ties and modify the way people understand and engage with the urban landscape, functioning as a sort of social adhesive that strengthens connections between social agents who otherwise would remain strangers.

Nevertheless, there is more to play than its immediate physical manifestation and the changes it brings to the landscape and society. It is well established that culture, as a set of common rules, is an "act" played following the imprint of nature on our own consciousness, suggesting an interdependent connection and functional relationship between being (*Sein*, in German, as a philosophical concept) and playing.[34] It is in this "acting," in the sense of both "action" and "masquerade," that social life becomes

possible, for culture presumes the compulsory acceptance of and respect for a common set of rules through which a civilization expresses its interpretation of the world, as it is imbued and enhanced with the supra-biological forms acquired by experience and play.[35] This is concomitant to the idea that the natural conditions of the real world disappear when faced with the artificial creation of egalitarianism that lies beneath the very idea of game, where everybody is supposed to start from the same initial conditions.[36]

These games have then a transformative impact not only on the natural landscape but also on the social environment and interactions between communities and cultures. They become particularly important when they are shaped within an intercultural context, as with the game boards carved in Macao and, we presume, also in Hong Kong. Since the act of playing requires a performance in which both participants are equally constrained by the same rules, games evolve from representations of the self and the other to spaces of uniformity and mutual agreement that unite them under a shared collection of values that hammers away the rigid boundaries of inherited cultural differences.[37] At a time when cultural and scientific contacts between divergent cultures were still of a limited nature and often led to disturbances in the belief systems of both worlds, games provided for the creation of meta-realities or, as Huizinga calls them, a "Paralleluniversum" that, however concocted, draw players together into an inclusive subculture.[38] This process of socialization and cultural understanding is characterized by immediateness, resulting in a special case of social communication between agents of different cultures (and communities) sharing the same space.

Games certainly changed and evolved between cultures over time, but they also, however temporarily, united and consolidated intercultural bonds. Games function as "social lubricants," as their liminal nature—their disregard for socially constructed boundaries—facilitates interaction across cultural landscapes both before and after the game starts.[39] Sinicization of twelve men's morris game boards may have been a process not very different from the Hellenization and Romanization experienced in Egypt after the conquest of Alexander or during Roman rule. Although we do not understand the rules behind these carved game boards, it is possible to infer that they may have been played like their Western counterparts, as is the case with other South American and African imported games

mentioned above, for which we have more detailed documentation and surviving practices.

Although these reflections about intercultural shared spaces hold particularly true for Macao, where rock carvings are coastal and include representations of ships, there is no evidence that this was also the case for Hong Kong. Given the extreme locations where these carved game boards have appeared—in most cases far from the sea but near land routes—it seems more likely that they were transmitted to Hong Kong by an indigenous population that adapted them to their own ludic spaces between trade routes. An exception to this may be found in the rock carvings in Tung Chung, which are located on the top of a small hill called Yuen Shek Dung, 70 meters above sea level, outside of the track crossing the mountain and overlooking the nearby Tung Chung Bay. This spot provides a complete view of incoming ships and may have served a military purpose in the past. Interestingly, a gravestone located 210 meters from the rock carving, as well as the nearby Tung Chung Battery built in 1817 to protect the bay from pirates, may indicate the presence of an old cottage or minor settlement on the hill.[40] The presence of two identical boards in the same rock suggests, as with the Qatari rock carving mentioned above, "pairs of lookout men, whiling the time away," and not merely isolated bystanders.[41]

We have seen how the remaining seven groups of game boards in Hong Kong can be related with reasonable certainty to two seventeenth-century trade routes extending across Lantau Island and the northern New Territories, and we have sufficient evidence to support the claim that at least one of these routes was used daily and intensively by men and women engaging in trading activities from Ting Kok to Luk Keng. According to local reports, women from Ting Kok and other villages nearby would walk the Pat Sin Leng mountain range twice a day to cut straw and collect wood for the fireplace, and tradeswomen from Tsat Muk Kiu would get to the market in Sha Tau Kok, across the bay from Luk Keng, to sell their wood in exchange for other goods.[42] Setting aside the obviously transformative process by which what was originally a men's game could have become a women's occupation, which surely demands further research and more specific approaches to be taken in the future, there is a significant impact on the landscape in terms of both its environmental and social conditions. Undoubtedly, there are multiple spots, paths, and trading routes to be

walked by and rested on, but establishing a recurrent point for entertainment or leisure, gathering or relaxation through socializing activities such as playing board games consolidated these routes as static ludic spaces, otherwise mutable and uncertain.

These boards were carved into the naked landscape with such diligence and perfection, for the obvious purpose of lasting for a long period of time, that we cannot but conclude that they were the instruments of a recurrent activity—a perhaps gratifying respite from day-to-day burdens. Game works as a diversion—something that diverts us from the repetitive roughness of our daily lives, a sort of interlude or *adagio* in the otherwise hasty *allegro* movement of human existence. As Huizinga points out, game also becomes a repetitive necessity itself "both for the individual . . . and for society by reason of the meaning it contains."[43] The Dutch historian calls this tension between the relaxation of diversion and the monotony of repetitiveness "abreaction," a technical term for cathartic experiences borrowed from late nineteenth-century psychoanalysis denoting "an outlet for harmful impulses, as the necessary restorer of energy by one-sided activity."[44] The constant, almost spiritless to and fro through the inhospitable mountain ranges of Hong Kong, backs fully loaded with trading goods, surely accounts for such psychological excess. It is not hard to visualize tradesmen and tradeswomen recurrently engraving these game boards in specific places in order to rest and relax, socialize and exchange stories, before continuing with their daily jobs.

Conclusion

Although several questions must be resolved by future studies, the glimpses presented herein allow us to classify the game board rock carvings of Hong Kong within a context of international commerce and intercultural exchanges that spread across the area during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, adapting these ludic manifestations to the new settled communities and shaping, however temporarily and briefly, these societies. The foregoing analysis of carved game boards, in Hong Kong and elsewhere, is perhaps best understood against the background of the former criticism and subsequent neglect that these ludic manifestations experienced both in academic and journalistic debates. Because these games were not only

defined by social practices and cultural exchanges—thus becoming witnesses to forgotten stories—but also emerged as definers of those shared spaces and daily activities, the significance of these findings goes beyond the popularly defined boundaries of game as a frolicsome practice of little relevance to the serious scholar.

The game boards once carved and played across the mountainous trade routes in Hong Kong reflect two important spheres of influence, transforming the natural or urban space through the conscious and constant repetition of ludic behaviors associated with the locations where they have been engraved. On the one hand, they require players to be confronted with an identical set of rules that transcends their individual differences, cultural or otherwise, hammering away the boundaries of familiarity that separate communities and societies. In this respect, they catalyze inter- and trans-cultural relationships, functioning as social lubricant to enhance the communication process between those describing each other as outsiders to their respective inherited traditions. This was most likely the case throughout Macao, where they are clearly associated with trade, and whence they reached Hong Kong as well.

On the other hand, they also establish recurrent spaces of shared activity that strengthen intracultural bonds, resulting in deep transformations of landscape functionality, as was the case with Qatari merchants and bankers who gathered around the recurrently carved game boards in Jebel Jassassiyeh. As social adhesives they bind people together into temporal communities assembled around these newly created ludic manifestations, thus altering their natural surroundings, perpetuating common routes, and easing the long walks across villages with the prospect of a well-deserved recess from their daily burdens.

The study of these game boards, concentrated in a precise area of southern China, highlights the importance of commerce and trade and opens new windows into the quotidian life of hitherto forgotten communities. Their apparent triviality should not mislead us to the oversimplified conclusion that, just because they do not hold the same arcane meaning as their Neolithic counterparts, they lack ethnographic relevance to the study of games and society. It is in this intersection that leisure pursuits and international contacts find common ground, extending beyond the limitations and specificities of East and West, of men and women, and

creating a fictional yet necessary dimension where differences dissolve into a crucible of cultural and gender undifferentiation.

Notes

1. Vanina Kopp, "Aachen, Baghdad, Constantinople: The Intercultural Function of Play and Games in the Early Middle Ages," in *Il gioco nella società e nella cultura dell'alto medioevo*, vol. 1 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 2018), 72; Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979), 71–72, 84; Zhou Zheng. "'Guiju jing' yinggai cheng 'boju jing,'" *Kaogu* 12 (1987): 1117; Armin Selbitschka, "A Tricky Game: A Re-evaluation of Liubo Based on Archaeological and Textual Evidence," *Oriens Extremus* 55 (2016): 105–66.

2. Anthony Siu Kwok-kin, *Tan ben suo wei: Xianggang zaoqi lishi lunji* (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju, 2015), 208. Two boards had been discovered in Dali (Yunnan) and Kuqa (Xinjiang), as reported by Bernard Quinet in "Signes et symboles à travers les siècles," *Bulletin du GERSAR* 28 (1987): 25–26, and "Triples-Enceintes asiatiques," *Bulletin du GERSAR* 36 (1992): 48.

3. For the Macao rock carvings, today buried under the Golf and Country Club, see T. N. Chiu and William Meacham, "Rock Carvings in Macau," *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 11 (1984–85): 134–35; William Meacham, *Rock Carvings in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: William Meacham Publications, 2009), 75–81.

4. William Meacham, *The Archaeology of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 126–28.

5. For the polemic, see Meacham, *Rock Carvings*, 65, and the original publications in Lu Hao, "Dong Yong jihe tuxing shike shifou guji yin ren caiyi," *Dungfong Yatbou*, September 14, 1982, 14; San Rao, "Dayu Shan shike yinqi guangfan taolun," *Wen WeiPo*, September 16, 1982, 15; Lu Hao, "Dong Yong shike de zhenglun," *Wen WeiPo*, September 21, 198, 25; and Gan Heng, "Dong Yong shike xin 'faxian,'" *Wen WeiPo*, September 24, 1982, 4. The most virulent criticism came from Leung Hui-Wah (1937–2002), for instance, in Leung, "Dayu Shan Shui Kou [Shui Hau] bandao faxian guji?" *Wen WeiPo*, April 19, 1988, 17.

6. Kopp, "Aachen," 61.

7. Ralph Gasser, "Solving Nine Men's Morris," *Games of No Chance* 29 (1996): 102–3.

8. Friedrich Berger, "From Circle and Square to the Image of the World: A Possible Interpretation for Some Petroglyphs of Merels Boards," *Rock Art Research* 21, no. 1 (2004): 15; César del Solar Meza and Rainer Hostnig, "Litograbados

indígenas en la arquitectura colonial del Departamento del Cusco, Perú," *Actas del Primer Simposio Nacional de Arte Rupestre* 12 (2007), fig. 48.

9. José Manuel Hidalgo Cuñarro, "Los juegos de tablero medievales de la Catedral de Ourense," *Porta da aira* 12 (2008): 117–21; William Facey, "The Boat Carvings at Jabal al-Jussasiyah, Northeast Qatar," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 17 (1987): 205.

10. Leung Hui-Wah, "Ba Xian Ling [Pat Sin Leng] beipo faxian guji," *Wen-WeiPo*, February 25, 1997, B2; S. G. Davis, Shirlee Edelstein, and Madeleine H. Tang, "Rock Carvings in Hong Kong and the New Territories," *Asian Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (1974): 1; Leung, "Dayu Shan," 17; Lu Hao, "Dong Yong faxian gu shike," *WenWeiPo*, September 14, 1982, 5; Meacham, *Rock Carvings*, 65.

11. Solomon Bard, *In Search for the Past: A Guide to the Antiquities of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1988), 57, 60, plate 48; Leung Hui-Wah, "Quanshui gang shang xin faxian," *WenWeiPo*, May 16, 2000, C11. Although Hong Kong's archaeological community was unaware of the existence of the Tsat Muk Kiu rock carving, I came to learn that local media had also reported this and other findings, none of which seem to have reached academic circles. See Leung, "Ba Xian Ling."

12. Anthony Siu Kwok-kin, "Xinjie weicun dingwu," *WenWeiPo*, June 3, 1989, 33.

13. For these early statements see Bard, *In Search*, 57; Leung, "Ba Xian Ling." Personal interviews by Witney Cheung Kwan-wai and the author in Hoi Ha (January 1, 2018), Ting Kok (April 2, 2018), and Shui Hau (January 13, 2019) among ten elderly residents who claimed to have been living in those villages all their lives. Except for Hoi Ha villagers, none of them recognized the photographs of the rock carvings that were shown to them.

14. For these track ways, see Nigel Spry, "Trackways," *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 12 (1986): 169–72. Maps can be accessed at http://www.hkmaps.hk.

15. Pak-sheung Ng, "The Lords Zhou and Wang Memorial Study Hall: Local Cultural Traditions and Historic Preservation," in *Indigenous Culture, Education and Globalization: Critical Perspectives from Asia*, ed. Jun Xing and Pak-sheung Ng (New York: Springer, 2016), 102.

16. See photographs in the National Collection of Aerial Photography in Edinburgh, dated 1924, ref. no. PEGASUS/RN/H/0028, https://ncap.org.uk/.

17. For the New Territories' Shui Hau, see Sima Long, *Xinjie cangsang hua xiangqing* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1990), 142.

18. A survey of the eighteen volumes of the nineteenth-century *Guangdong tushuo* shows only three Luk Keng and six Tung Chung, but fifty-three Shui Hau, a name meaning a curved path around a *feng shui* wood. Richard Webb, "Earth God and Village Shrines in the New Territories of Hong Kong," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 34 (1994): 187.

19. A similar case is reported in Siu, *Tan ben*, 69.

20. A small piece of clay carved with a rude nine men's morris board from the Hellenistic Period (323–31 BCE) is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae, ref. no. 26, although it seems no studies on this piece have been conducted. A similar gameboard unearthed in Rhodes has been dated to the Ottoman occupation of the island in Konstantinos Saranditis, "Pílino epitrapézio paichnídi apó tin póli tis Ródou," in *Sofía Ádolos*, ed. Pavlos Triantafyllidis (Rhodes: Archaeological Institute of Aegean Studies, 2014), 359–67. All examples of pre-Roman alquerque-like carvings adduced as evidence for the antiquity of the Hong Kong game boards (Meacham, *Rock Carvings*, 65) can be dismissed. See Berger, "From Circle and Square," 15; Christian Wagneur, "Inventaire-La mystérieuse triple-enceinte," *GESAR* (1995), unpublished report, and for the references to Sri Lanka, see Robert Charles Bell, *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations* (New York: Dover, 1979), 84; Henry Parker, *Ancient Ceylon* (London: Luzac, 1909), 577; and James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: An Account of the Island*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, 1860), 606n4. The oldest example of a men's morris that can be dated with some accuracy is carved on a Roman tile found in Germany and produced between the years 193 and 407. See Norbert Hanel, "Sonderkeramik in der Militärziegelei? Zu einer Tabula Lusoria mit Mühlespiel und Legionsstempel," *Kölner Jahrbuch* 30 (1997): 319–20.

21. A possible Chinese game akin to twelve men's morris called *qiandao* or *weizhi* is described in a single Buddhist source: "two persons, face to face, each one with twelve pieces, three straight result in defeat, thus it's called seize the way (*qiandao*)," in the *Commentary on the Tiantai Bodhisattva Precepts* by Mingguang (d. 623), *Tiantai pusajie shu* 2, T.1812:40.595b5, my translation. The same game is mentioned without further particulars in several Buddhist texts from the Taishō Tripitaka and the Zokuzokyo (Xuzangjing), dated Sui to Ming (*Daban niepan jing shu* 14, T.1767:38.122c6; *Liangchu qingzhong yi* 1, T.1895:45.842c19; *Fanwang jing pusajie zhu* 3, X.691:38.582a10; *Zaijia lü yao guangji* 3, X.1123:60.524a15 and X.1123:60.524b1). There is no archaeological evidence or artwork depiction for this game board. It seems to me that this is merely a local variant of the well-known and totally different *liubo* game board, where "two persons, face to face, sit in front of the board; the board is divided into twelve paths, two ends, with a central area called water; twelve pieces are used, which according to tradition are six white and six black" (Zhang Zhan, *Liezi zhu*, 8.12a-b, *Qinding si ku quanshu* edition, my translation). Cf. the Western Han figurines playing *liubo* unearthed at Gansu's Mozuizi Tomb no. 48, in "Wuwei Mozuizi san zuo Hanmu fajue jianbao," *Wenwu* 12 (1972), fig. 5.

22. Cuñarro, "Juegos de tablero," 130–36; Govert Westerveld, *The History of Alquerque-12*, vol. 1 (Murcia: Blanca, 2013), 26; Werner Pichler, "Die

'Spiele-Darstellungen' unter den Felsbildern Fuerteventuras," *Almogaren* 27 (1996): 155–68; A. M. Cubbon, "Merels Boards," in *Excavations on St. Patrick's Isle, Peel, Isle of Man, 1982–88*, ed. David Freke and E. P. Allison (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 277; Marisa Uberti and Giulio Coluzzi, *I luoghi delle triplici cinte in Italia* (Aprilia: Eremon, 2008).

23. Meacham, *Rock carvings*, 80. There is, of course, the *weiqi* board at Hoi Ha village mentioned above, but experts agree that the site seems to be modern, and it is certainly isolated from the other game boards. The nearby coral lime kilns at Hoi Ha, built in the early twentieth century, may provide historical context for this carving.

24. Chiu and Meacham, "Rock Carvings in Macau," 34; William Meacham, "Hac Sa Wan, Macau, Phase III," *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 11 (1984–85): 99.

25. Guo Fei, *Yue daji*, ed. Huang Guosheng and Deng Guizhong (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 2014), *juan* 32, 29b–39a, and 35b for the map of Macao's Hac Sa Wan. The Hong Kong Maritime Museum holds both the Gentiloni Paintings and a number of enameled dishes featuring this type of ship.

26. Hans-Joachim Ulbrich, "Communicating with the Gods: Superstition on Fuerteventura and Lanzarote," *Expression* 10 (2015): 64; Pichler, "Spiele-Darstellungen," 165–67; Fabio Gaggia, Carlo Gavazzi, and Pierangelo Manuele, "Navi scolpite sulle Alpi. Le imbarcazioni nelle incisioni rupestri alpine," *Rivista Marittima* 11, supplement (2001): 13, 40, 43, and figures 45, 49, 57–58, 66, 76, 79–83a.

27. Leung, "Ba Xian Ling," B2.

28. Deng Qilong, *Kaifang de Lingnan wenhua* (Guangzhou: Jinan Daxue Chubanshe, 1998), 58.

29. Lídia Fernandes and Marcos Osório, "Tabuleiros de jogo e outras gravações no Castelo de Vilar Maior," *Sabucale* 5 (2013): 97.

30. Alex de Voogt, "Strategic Games in Society: The Geography of Adult Play," *International Journal of Play* 6, no. 3 (2017): 308; Philip Townshend, "Games of Strategy: A New Look at Correlates and Crosscultural Methods," in *Play and Culture: Proceedings of the Association for the Anthropological Study of Play*, ed. H. B. Schwartzman (New York: Leisure Press, 1978), 217–25.

31. Alex de Voogt, "The Comoros: A Confluence of Board Game Histories," *Board Game Studies Journal* 13 (2019): 1–13.

32. Facey, "Boat Carvings," 206–7.

33. Chen Canyun, *Yiguo xiangqing* (Shijiazhuang: Huashan Wenyi, 1982), 183; Chen Kelun, *Gang shi Gang qing* (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 1990), 169.

34. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Boston: Beacon, 1949), 15–16, following Leo Frobenius, *Kulturges-*

chichte Afrikas: Prolegomena zu einer historischen Gestaltlehre (Zurich: Phaidon-Verlag, 1933), 23.

35. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 46.

36. Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 60.

37. Game as a mirrored representation of selfhood and otherness was not uncommon in the wide range of Chinese conceptions of game board entertainment, specifically in the relationship between the *weiqi* player's response to the game's outcome and their personal temperament; see Berge-Becker, "Groups on the Grid," this volume.

38. As mentioned in Jörg Sonntag, "A Matter of Definition? Game, Play, and Ritual in Medieval Monasteries," in *Il gioco nella società e nella cultura dell'alto medioevo*, vol. 1 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 2018), 335, although I have been unable to trace the source.

39. Walter Crist, Anne-Elisabeth Dunn-Vaturi, and Alex de Voogt, *Ancient Egyptians at Play: Board Games Across Borders* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 168–69.

40. For the Tung Chung Battery, see Bard, *In Search*, 86–88. Apparently there were other coastal fortifications in the area.

41. Facey, "Boat Carvings," 206.

42. Yau Tong, *Xinjie fengwu yu minqing* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1992), 43–44; Patrick Hase, "Eastern Peace: Sha Tau Kok Market in 1925," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33 (1993): 201–2n74.

43. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 9.

44. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 2.

3

Splendid Journeys

The Board Games of a Late Qing Scholar

RANIA HUNTINGTON

Near the end of his voluminous collected works, the prominent late Qing scholar Yu Yue (1821–1907) includes his designs for two board games, A Map for Splendid Journeys (Sheng you tu) and A Map for Splendid Journeys on West Lake (Xihu sheng you tu). He owed his renown to his role as the leader of one of the most well-established Confucian academies and to his prolific publications. Although scholarship on the classics anchored his *Complete Works of the Hall Where Spring Remains* (Chunzaitang quanshu), his fame allowed him to publish many eclectic works as well. Placing his games last shows he deems them the most frivolous of the frivolous.

Yu Yue's games are a personal rendition of a flexible type with both Chinese and global antecedents and parallels: racing games in which players roll dice, move markers along a path, and experience consequences for landing on different squares, with the first player to reach the end winning.[1] His two games construct distinct thought experiments on the theme of journey: the first envisions six character types on a quest for advancement across an empire-wide landscape; the second depicts a circuit through a familiar regional tourist itinerary. Analysis and play of his games reveal his thoughtful interventions as a game designer. Rather than representing a departure from his philological scholarship, his games celebrate the same values: completeness, erudition, systematic arrangement of allusions from varied sources, and multiple paths to success.

Creation and Overview of the Games

In his preface, Yu places his games in the context of two dice games dating at least to the Tang: "grid for selection of talent" (*cai xuan ge*) and "diagrams for selection of immortals" (*xuan xian zhi tu*).[2] The paths of political advancement by means of the exam system and immortality attained through Daoist self-cultivation were often conceived as parallel. The game that directly inspired Yu incorporated aspects of both. He does not mention a less erudite tradition of dice games: an inward-turning spiral path of images, sometimes called "gourd games" (*hulu wen*) because of their shape. They could depict any recognizable, visually appealing series of figures: Daoist immortals, heroes of *The Water Margin*, calendrical animals, and so on. Playable by the illiterate and small children, they appeared among the popular printed ephemera of the Lunar New Year.[3]

Following his habitual approach to popular material, Yu Yue improved on an existing model. In the spring of 1891 he was lodging at the Transcendant's Abode at Mount Youtai (Youtai Xianguan), next to his wife's grave in the hills near West Lake in Hangzhou. His grandson-in-law visited and gave him a game, Seeing the Splendors (Lan sheng tu), attributed to Gao Zhao (early Qing).[4] Intrigued but dissatisfied, with free time on his hands in his rustic retreat, he made his own version. Thus Yu's game creation began in the familial context of a solicitous younger man trying to amuse his elder. Gao's game was attractive to Yu Yue as a variation on the more common game of "ascending to office" (*sheng guan tu*), similar to the earlier *cai xuan ge*, in which game spaces are marked with official ranks and the dice dictate promotion and demotion.[5] Unlike games focused exclusively on official careers, Gao's game contained diverse definitions of victory. Yu taught at a Confucian academy that prepared men for the examination, but his own career had been derailed. He passed at the highest level only to be dismissed from office in a scandal related to exam questions, making it understandable that he believed in more than one path to success.[6]

He created two games, one national in scope and more closely modeled on Gao's, and the other focused on Hangzhou. In 1892 they were published alongside rules for a card game and a domino game, then all four games were included in the 1899 edition of his complete works. He provided complete rules and incomplete game boards, with only some squares marked,

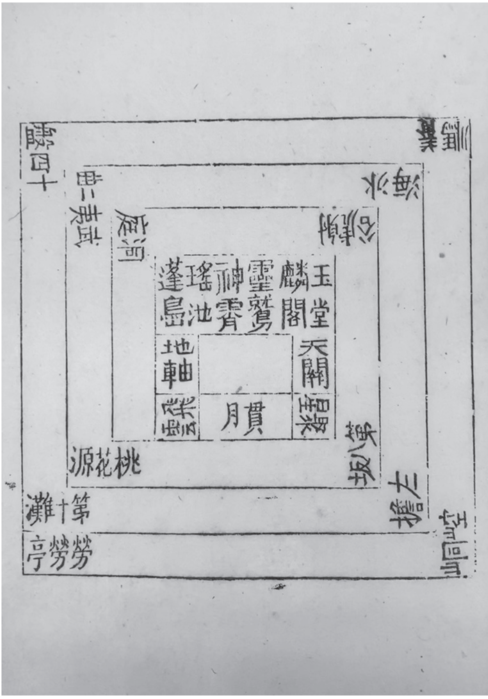

FIG. 3.1. Splendid Journeys game board design. Courtesy of Suzhou Library.

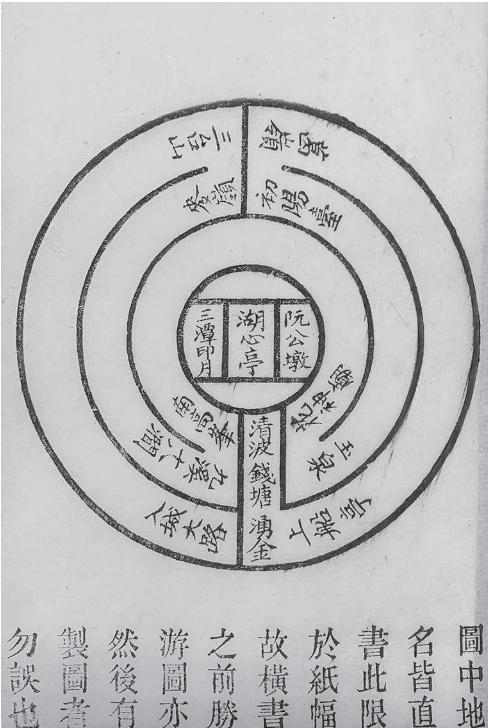

FIG. 3.2. West Lake Splendid Journeys game board design. Courtesy of Suzhou Library.

presuming players would use his instructions to create their own boards (see figures 3.1 and 3.2). Yu closed his preface with the hope that the game might be transmitted alongside a Tang antecedent, rather than statements about play.[7] He viewed his games as textual creations, not new traditions of practice.

In both games each player places some money in their personal stock and another portion in the collective pool. Then they roll dice (one in the first game, two in the second) to move along a path of named spaces that carry consequences: money is gained or lost, or forward motion is accelerated or limited. In the first game the path spirals inward, a structure shared by both its Chinese antecedents and international parallels.[8] Game space is conceived as a route to traverse rather than a battlefield to control, as in *weiqi*. Adding an element of gambling, the first person to reach the end gets half of the pot, the second player gets half of what remains, and the division continues until the last-place player gets nothing.[9] Yu's games bear the most resemblance to Goose, attested in Europe in the late sixteenth century, and Japanese *e-sugoroku* (pictorial double-six).[10] Despite a few limited elements of choice in the first game, they are games of chance rather than skill.

Compared to the gourd games or *e-sugoroku*, Yu's games are more verbal than visual. His players move through a landscape made of words. Nonetheless he does seem to care about the overall visual design of the game boards, which are more carefully drawn than Gao's. The similarity between the square and circular boards and his playful transformation of his pen name Quyuan (Bend Garden) into a set of calligraphic rebuses he created the year before suggests a meta-joke (figure 3.3).[11] In any case, he makes a deliberate contrast between the square and the round as ways of ordering space, suggesting different experiences as players either turn corners or follow a circle around the lake.

Game One: Role-Playing

I will discuss Yu's first and more inventive board game in detail, exploring his conception of roleplay, game space, monetary stakes, and stages of play, with a briefer discussion of his second game for comparison. The race is complicated in Splendid Journeys, as in his source, by player roles being

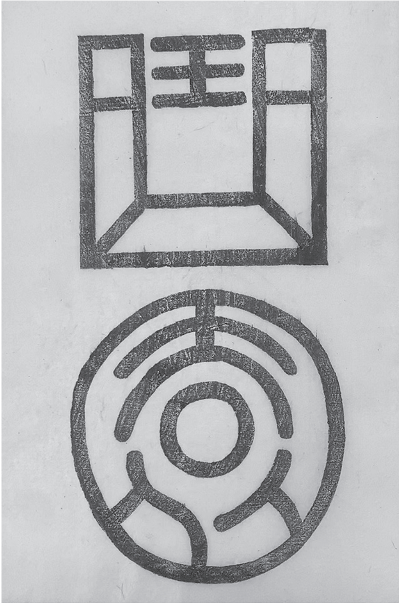

FIG. 3.3. Name of the Quyuan from *Quyuan moxi*. Courtesy of Suzhou Library.

assigned by a throw of the die. Gao's roles, a set of stock figures from Chinese popular culture, are poet (*cike*), Daoist (*yushi*), swordsman (*jianxia*), beauty (*meiren*), fisherman (*yufu*), and Buddhist monk (*ziyi*). Yu keeps the Buddhist and Daoist, slightly renames the fisherman (*yuweng*) and knight errant (*xiake*), and replaces the poet with the Confucian scholar (*rushi*) and the beauty with the woodcutter (*qiaofu*).[12] He does not say what should be used as game markers. The eighteenth-century novel *Lamp at the Crossroads* (Qilu deng) depicts a similar game with role-specific figurines made of luxurious materials—bronze, ivory, crystal, or jade—extravagance that could be fictional embellishment.[13] A later game instructs players to write each role's name on a piece of paper.[14]

Yu's change of the poet to the Confucian scholar reveals favor for his own vocation. His addition of the woodcutter shows his preference for parallel roles: the scholar and the knight errant represent engagement in the world through learning or justified violence, the Buddhist and Daoist represent departing from the world for a religious vocation, and the fisherman and woodcutter represent rustic reclusion. The latter were long-standing elite ideals of retreat into nature rather than an attempt to imagine the actual

lives of working men. His most drastic change, removing the only female character, the beauty, seems motivated by discomfort with the erotic plots her presence on the journey implies. In Gao's game there are rewards if she and the poet land on the same spaces, suggesting a budding romance.[15] At this point in Yu Yue's life, he would have been most likely to play games in a familial circle dominated by his daughters-in-law, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters.[16] Should removing the beauty prevent improper jokes in these mixed-gender and intergenerational groups? Yet the alternative is everyone taking male roles, cross-dressing on the gameboard. Perhaps he was unable to conceive of female routes of advancement and travel that could be depicted in the game.

Although the roles are mostly parallel in terms of advantages and obstacles, the Confucian and the knight errant seem the most distinct and the Confucian the most privileged (see below). The knight errant has additional challenges and opportunities for reward. Since one opportunity involves saving extra dots for future use, he has more freedom of choice than other players.[17] Yu Yue's editing of the martial arts novel *Three Knights and Five Gallants* (Sanxia wuyi), another example of his revision of popular entertainment media, reveals his interest in this figure.[18]

For the man making the game and many of his potential players, the Confucian is the only role that is not a fantasy. Though Buddhist monks, Daoist priests, woodcutters, and fisherman existed, it was unlikely that an upper-class man would choose any of those paths. In contemporary gaming terms, this resembles a hybrid of Life and a Dungeons and Dragons–style role-playing game.[19] Unlike conventional promotion games on which Yu was trying to improve, even the Confucian scholar's advancement is not presented in terms of examinations and political appointments.

One rule of Goose and the gourd games lacking in both Yu's and Gao's games is that if a player lands on a space already occupied by another player, they switch places, with the first player going back to the space from which the second had started their turn. But in these games, other than in a few specialized parts of the board discussed below, the players do not displace each other. As the different roles experience the landscape, they do not occupy it to the exclusion of others. There is never a direct contest of ability between them: the Confucian and the knight errant never test whether the pen is mightier than the sword; the Buddhist and the Daoist never vie to

see whose faith is more efficacious. Direct interaction between the players is instead enacted through the medium of money.

Game One: Map and Money

Each role has his own track to success, but it is still a race. Even recluses and men of faith are racing. Despite setbacks, players tend to progress forward; shortcuts are also limited. If one is forced to move backward, it is only to the start of the present challenge or the present turn, not to an earlier stage of the game. Some situations are set up to create bonds among players, but the heart of the game remains individual luck and advancement, conceived of in terms of movement on the board and money in the hand.

There are no merchants among the roles, but even the most unworldly kinds of success are defined in monetary terms. The link of game progress to monetary stakes was present in Song dynasty versions of bureaucratic advancement games.[20] Yu Yue does not state the amount of money needed at the start of the game or what to do if someone runs out.[21] This suggests actual currency, rather than the self-contained economy of Monopoly. Those who exhausted their reserves would find more cash or supply an IOU. In his domino game in the previous chapter of *Quyuan's Three Games*, he calls for low stakes, the cost of snacks or fruit, since this was a game to be played in the family with women and children. He deplores those who wager great fortunes on similar games.[22] An 1878 collection of drinking games included a game like Gao's that used swigs of alcohol as rewards and forfeits; evidently Yu considered low-stakes gambling more appropriate than drinking for family entertainment.[23] In play-testing the amount spent proved higher than initial estimates, and more than one player had to replenish their savings to continue playing.[24]

Yu Yue creates a longer path and more elaborate rules. Unlike Chutes and Ladders or Goose, in which most of the path consists of blank spaces, he follows Gao's game by naming and giving instructions, enforcing consequences for at least one of the player roles on every space on the board. This shifts emphasis from forward motion to the individual characteristics of the spaces. Yu's board creates a pathway of both earthly and fantastic places: the Three Gorges, the Five Sacred Peaks, Lake Dongting, and the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers appear along with the Kingdom of Rakshasas

(Buddhist demons) and a Wild Fox Peak.[25] He makes it clear that the board is arranged as conceptual rather than geographical space. For example, the Five Sacred Peaks linked to each of the cardinal directions are on five consecutive squares.[26] "Although the names of the mountains and waters have no order, they do have some significance."[27] Players enjoy a progression of accomplishment and marvel rather than physical distance as they circle toward the center of the board.

As the allusions are of mixed dates, the historical setting of the journey is unclear. This differs from some of the promotion games that meticulously recorded the rank systems of past dynasties.[28] In some spaces it is suggested that the players might interact with figures from the past, as when ancient masters transmit knowledge appropriate to each role. In others one should honor the past as past: landing on the space marked for the Miluo river requires a price of one coin to mourn Qu Yuan.[29] When crossing the ocean, certain rolls allow players to get a steam paddlewheel boat, rather than a sailboat, and move farther, suggesting the game is set in Yu's own nineteenth-century world.

Yu Yue's sense of geography and time is illuminated by comparison with another adaptation of Gao's game, fourteen years later. A Map for Global Travels (Huanqiu lansheng tu), printed in the periodical *Xiaoshuo lin* (Forest of fiction) in 1908, has its players assume modern roles: student (*xuesheng*), adventurer (*tanxian*), engineer (*gongshi*), merchant (*shangren*, missionary (*jiaoshi*), and ambassador (*gongshi*). The path starts in Shanghai, goes to Japan, then circumnavigates the globe from east to west, with Beijing as the finish line.[30] Although the game mechanics are the same as in Gao's or Yu's game, it models a different fantasy, in which Chinese players take on modern vocations, tour all the great sights of the world for the sake of knowledge and wonder, and finally win power and status in the capital.[31] In contrast, Yu is not trying to remake the received game board with new content, but to deepen and balance the fabric of allusions and to differentiate the stages of play.

Game One: Stages of Play

The game has deliberately designed stages: the first thirty spaces, covering two of the outer sides of the board, each offer loss or reward for one

character. On the first six spaces, players pay one coin as a fee to receive some privilege, such as the transmission of knowledge. On the next six spaces, each role has to pay a penalty for landing somewhere inauspicious for their vocation. For example, at the Stream of Bandits, the knight errant pays a fine of one coin.[32] There is a gap between game mechanics and game narrative: although two different verbs are used for payment, one more negative than the other, the monetary loss is the same. Six more spaces offer an opportunity to be rewarded from the shared pot for landing on places that signal accomplishment. Another set of spaces of success causes a player to be congratulated and paid one coin each by all the other players. This fivefold greater profit than that gained so far brings the characters into relation with one another. Again, there is a disjunction between the narrative level of the game and the transaction, for the festive "congratulations" is compelled. The next six spaces cause players to lose a turn. These pauses are framed in positive terms: the Confucian scholar lingers at the Mountain of Dreaming of the Brush, where the poet Jiang Yan had dreamed of being granted the colored brush signifying great talent by the earlier poet Guo Pu.[33] This initial game stage alternates two possibilities for loss with two possibilities for gain, followed by a potential pause before entering the next stage of play.

After the single squares of differentiated experience, Yu creates series of linked spaces. The next stage of game play, moving across the top of the board, down the left side, and starting into the next concentric circle, is marked by hazards of the terrain, restricting forward motion as the players become obstacles for one another. Modeled on a less complex precedent in Gao's game, most of this section is taken up by two stretches of eighteen spaces: a treacherous, winding mountain trail named for a place on Mount Tai in Shandong, and a narrow path through shoals of water named for a place in Liaoning. At the Narrow Road of Eighteen Bends players must stop on the first space and save any extra of their die roll to add one to each roll if they wish while crossing the Bends. Here the path is narrow, so players cannot land on the same space or pass one another; if they do, they must pay a fine and go back where their turn started. Only the woodcutter, skilled at climbing mountains, does not have these limits. If the knight errant does not reach this area first, he must roll the die to compete with the player who did, and only if he wins can he go forward; otherwise he

pays a fine of two coins and goes back.[34] On the Eighteen Shoals, the fisherman is the only one free of restrictions, and the knight errant must again contend with the others.[35] Yu conceives the knight errant as compelled to strive to be first even though he has no advantage in crossing rough terrain; winning or losing this contest has no effect on the other player involved.

Having players stop on the first space of these two hazards clusters them together, thus increasing the chances they will block one another's progress. Allowing the saving and use of the extra dots somewhat mitigates the challenge of getting through. Between the Narrow Road of Eighteen Bends and the Narrow Shoals is a space intended to strengthen connections between players just as they have been getting in each other's way. At the Hill of Meeting all players must stop and give any remaining dots on their die throw to the players ahead of and behind them (if it is an odd number, more goes to the one behind), and are rewarded with one coin from the recipients for doing so.[36] Giving more dots to the one behind is a limited attempt to equalize the players' positions.

The game's third stage (the latter half of the second spiral and almost all of the third) combines the features of the previous two sections—spaces for individual or shared benefit or cost and shared challenges—with obstacles that demand other roles throw the die on behalf of the players that land there. This binds players in another kind of transaction. For example, at the Perilous Ford all other players must ask the fisherman to roll for them. If he rolls a three, it is a boat, so they can move, paying him a reward of one coin. If after three turns they don't get a boat, they get to move and the fisherman pays a fine of three.[37] At the Kingdom of Rakshasas, others must enlist the Buddhist to role a four on their behalf to exorcise the demons; if he succeeds, he receives a reward and they move. Similarly, if he fails after three tries, he pays a fine.[38] There are similar spaces where each character takes a turn aiding the others: the knight errant slays tigers, the woodcutter carries others in a sedan chair, the Daoist exorcises fox demons. Protection is made parallel to transportation. Anticipating contemporary cooperative games, the characters are placed in relations of mutual dependence on those with different strengths.

Here Yu Yue's favoritism for the Confucian is revealed in two ways: at the space where the Confucian throws the die for others, Shengxian Qiao (the Bridge of Ascent to Immortality), where Sima Xiangru inscribed a

bridge and won the recognition of Han Wudi, he is not obligated to produce a particular result, and receives a reward regardless. His rolling for others is not given a narrative explanation like getting a boat or subduing demons, and thus he is not clearly depicted as serving his fellow players.[39] At the same time, the Confucian does not require the exorcist services of the Buddhist or Daoist to deal with rakshasas or foxes, though he still needs the knight errant to slay tigers.

In this section the terrain becomes the destination of pilgrimage as well as offering new varieties of obstacles. Players receive increasing congratulations from others according to how many of the Five Sacred Peaks they visit, and Yu has arranged the board so that the odds of landing on at least one are high. This penultimate section also contains spaces of historical commemoration. Other spaces demand certain numbers on die rolls to cross bodies of water. There is a series of spaces where one can move only slowly (by rolling one, two, or three), and another where can move only quickly (rolling four, five, or six).[40] For the first time there is also a space, the Pass of the Tumbling Horse (Daoma guan), also in Gao's game, that not only sends players back to where the present turn began, but demands rolling a second time and going backward.[41]

In the final stage of the game, the innermost part of the spiral, each player is on his own path to success, not blocking the others. Here Yu Yue also inscribes his own personal geography, making West Lake the beginning of the path to victory. Yu arranges the board so that each player must land on at least one of the Mountain of Nobility, the Waters of Fortune, or the Peak of Joy. While the value of congratulatory gifts increases, the endgame has the slowest progress. Giving the game a cyclical structure, Yu imitates his model by demanding that each player roll the number that assigned roles at the beginning (one for the Confucian, two for the knight errant, etc.) to reach his unique victory square. Although players cannot be pushed back to an earlier stage of play, they can go around the inner circle several times. To demand an exact roll to reach the finish seems common in racing games. It keeps the world of the game board self-contained, and slowing the attainment of victory allows other players to catch up, increasing competition and suspense.

Overall, the game is an optimistic vision of the journey. Loss is not the devastation of removing armies from the board or the destitution of

losing all one's resources. Halving the pot means that the group should keep playing until not only second place is decided but fifth and sixth. Although in monetary terms there is a loser, there is implicit assurance that each role can find his own way to success. None of the setbacks on the path are imagined as major moral failures, as corruption would be in games of official careers, or sins in Buddhist games. Yu rejects the model of the promotion games: success, even for the Confucian scholar, is not tied to rank or power. Compared to Gao's game that ends in Chang'an and the 1908 version that concludes in Beijing, his squares of victory celebrate accomplishment, renown, and transcendence on a celestial or otherworldly level.[42] Yu's game ends as a verbal elaboration of the spiral of auspicious images shared at Lunar New Year.

Game Two: West Lake Journey

Yu's West Lake game deploys different understandings of role, space, and journey, showing that he is thinking through the possibilities of the board game as form. He introduces it simply: "In the past I had the Map for Splendid Journeys, which has already been printed in the *Three Games*. Now I also have this map, so I appended and printed it here." Its rules are simpler. West Lake Journey dispenses with distinct roles, and thus there is no set limit to the number of players. It lacks the limited elements of choice of Splendid Journeys and involves less interaction between players. There is one stretch where players cannot overtake one another, and they frequently congratulate one another, but they never roll for one another or give each other dots. Players throw a pair of dice rather than one, making for a swifter journey around the shorter path of ninety-one spaces.

Although the mechanics are simpler, the path is more complex. Yu has expanded a single space named West Lake in the previous game to fill the entire board. Unlike the steady inward spiral representing progress and cultivation, this journey moves in to the shores of the lake and then out again, back to the city. Depending on the first roll, there are three different starting points from three different city gates of Hangzhou. The Pavilion at the Heart of the Lake at the center of the board is not the ultimate goal of play, but a place some players will visit by chance, representing either a shortcut or a delay. Yu is not the first to envision a spiral gameboard path

representing West Lake; the game played in *Qilu deng* has Gao's six roles moving along this track.[43]

All players are male literati tourists experiencing the landscape in the same way. Unlike in Splendid Journeys, the board is a stylized version of a representational map and a recognizable itinerary. Although the path doesn't match the physical West Lake perfectly, it follows a geographic progression, beginning on the north shore of the lake, moving west, exploring the hills west of the lake, then returning along the southern shore to the eastern side of the lake.[44] Anyone who lands on one of the ten celebrated West Lake scenes is rewarded with three coins by all other players.[45] Both of Yu's game boards satisfy Francesca Bray's definition of *tu* as "forms of symbolic mediation whose formal patternings of space created understanding or generated action by guiding the viewer through a strictly ordered trajectory," but the nature of the space represented differs: it is conceptual space for Splendid Journeys and a blend of physical and conceptual space for West Lake.[46]

On the level of narrative, transportation and weather create obstacles; on the level of game mechanics, specific numbers are frequently required to leave a square. Unlike in the other game, Yu decides certain meanings for numbers that recur throughout the game: three and six can be either a small boat or a large boat allowing forward progress, or the wind and rain that prevent leaving a particular spot. There is no consistent lucky or unlucky number, as each roll's meaning is determined by the environment of the space where a player stands. When first leaving the city for West Lake on the three opening spaces, each turn on which a player doesn't get a boat results in increasingly high costs for tea, then wine, then food.[47] Spending money is consistently envisioned in terms of tourist consumption, as compared to its varied meanings in the previous game.

Additional dice rolls simulate literati activities: taking exams, composing poetry, buying sutras, and picking tea. These endeavors are not directly competitive: one player picking tea does not affect how much remains for others, and there is no limit to how many players can be rewarded for seeing the Spring Dawn at Sudi. For examinations there are two tests: if one player reaches the space on which the exam is held with a low roll, he is not a real graduate and must pay a fine of five and go back to the previous space. But once qualified to land on the examination space, everyone passes;

the only question is how high the pass. Rolling four or above on both dice is a high pass, rewarded by the other players with five; rolling below four on both is a low pass, rewarded by the other plays with one; a mixed result is a middle pass, rewarded by the others with three.[48] Thus a middle pass is identical in value to landing on one of the ten famous scenes. In Yu's previous game the examination system was elided altogether, while here the central enterprise of literati men's lives is rendered monetarily equivalent to tourist amusement. Unlike in real life, players do not compete with one another to pass, and there is no quota. Placing the exams at the Confucian academies by the lake rather than in examination cells in the city is also a fantasy, as the most they could offer in real life was practice exams.

Splendid Journeys evokes a fantastic range of experiences for players, but this game recreates plausible outings, summoning memories of actual journeys.[49] Although in his first game Yu Yue gives West Lake a privileged position as the entry point to the stage of victory, in his second he is sitting within the landscape on the gameboard as he creates the game, inscribing the scenes of his personal history there. Beginning in 1868, Yu split his time between teaching on the shores of West Lake and spending time at his family residence in Suzhou. He makes his own Confucian academy, the Study for Explicating the Classics (Gujing jingshe), a game board space interchangeable with other places where exams are held. Landing on Three Platform Mountain (Santai shan), the location of the retreat where he writes the game, earns the same congratulations from other players as anywhere on the list of ten West Lake scenes, even though it was less renowned. Li'an Temple, where he wished to journey with his wife but never did, and the Cold Stream Pavilion (Lengquan ting), which they memorably did visit, are on the path.[50] A favorite destination, the Nine Springs and Eighteen Waterfalls (Jiu xi shiba jian), resembles the narrow paths in his previous game, but the rules declare outright that it is the most splendid place in West Lake.[51]

The ending of the game is not transcendence but returning to the city. Although one must stop at the final space and roll either a two or a four to enter the city triumphantly in a sedan chair, it is considerably less complex than the "winner's circle" in the previous game. Some of that circling complexity is instead given to the Pavilion at the Heart of the Lake at the middle of the board. Although the conceptual stakes of the game are lower

than in the first game, the financial stakes appear the same, leading again to a contradiction between the narrative level and mechanical level of the game.

Eubanks writes of *sugoroku* racing games in Meiji Japan that "the point of the game is more oriented toward indulging in a group fantasy, using the board game to support imagination," but that fantasy also teaches the geography of imperial conquest.[52] Some creators of official promotion games stressed their value for teaching history and bureaucratic structure.[53] What didactic agenda did Yu's games contain? Splendid Journeys taught a set of stock roles and associated allusions, as well as shared aspirations of travel and pilgrimage. West Lake modeled a tourist itinerary that gave equal attention to the hills and the lake, containing sacred sites and literary pursuits in the same repertoire of pleasure.

Stephen Roddy describes Yu's defense of the much-criticized examination essay form in terms of playing a game by the rules. He argues that Yu Yue views playful essays as a productive means of learning to use this essential tool of moral and intellectual cultivation.[54] A properly constructed game could teach players that a scholar must sometimes depend on a fisherman though he would never trade places with him, that exams were only a few spaces along the path and not the whole path, and that one should celebrate other people's fortunate encounters with gorgeous scenery or sacred mountains as much as one's own. He does not ask whether in practice this narrative of interdependence and shared pleasure could override the selfish thrills of rolling the right number and having money in the hand.

In his board games Yu Yue manipulates the elements of language, numbers, sequence, spatial organization, and probability. He thinks through an impressive range of the numerical possibilities offered by a single die or a pair of dice, then assigns them in-game cultural significance. Among all his adaptations his games have the most kinship with his divination systems, using probability to navigate the tension between randomness and meaningful patterns.[55] The link of game with augury was both common in the culture and of particular interest to him: he entitles one of his early works on the *Yi jing* "Playing with the Changes" (Wan yi pian), his revised systems for different forms of divination *Record of Playful Arts* (You yi lu).[56] His card game is based on the eight trigrams (*bagua*). Elsewhere he improves a system for divination with dominoes by adding a suitable Tang poetic

couplet to each result.[57] Although games and divination systems differ in the relationship between in-system patterns and the outside world, Yu Yue had confidence that erudition, logic, and exhaustiveness could only improve imperfect modes of practice.

It is unclear whether Yu Yue or anyone else ever played his games. As he doesn't provide a full game board, they would be playable only after someone made their own. Hand-drawn games of the gourd type exist, so players doing this is not implausible. Although Yu claims the size of the page prevented him from supplying a complete board, textually dense game boards were printed during this period, so it would have been feasible for him if it was a priority.[58] Instead, he decided to fit his games among his other works, suggesting that he may have intended these game rules as texts for reading. They may have been armchair travel in an extended sense, imagining simulating travel with a game. His works on divination, for which he never includes examples of their application, also suggest he took great pleasure in completing and transmitting a system, even if it were never put into practice.

Conclusion

A decade later, in 1901, Yu Yue reports in a self-mocking poem that someone printed a thousand copies of his board games to earn money for charity in Shanghai.[59] He is amused, and coyly proud, that his earlier diversion can fetch a price. The combination of his famous name and an ephemeral entertainment product had a potential market beyond his complete works. Since I have not discovered a surviving example of this edition, I don't know whether the unknown entrepreneur reprinted the text and illustrations that appear in Yu's complete works or made a complete game board.[60]

At the end of his life, he regrets his game designs, saying they encourage gambling, which could be very destructive for young people.[61] The combination of money and chance was potentially too volatile for his narrative design to contain. In the novel *Qi lu deng* the beguiling game with six characters traveling around West Lake represents an early stage of the young protagonist's moral decline, one of the amusements of the first night he got outrageously drunk in questionable company.[62] Like the defenders of *weiqi* as gentlemanly self-cultivation, Yu Yue was aware that he potentially

shared this form of game with gamblers, drinkers, and flirtatious players, yet he never bids the games be removed from his complete works.

Placing Yu Yue's board games among his other works of adaptation, the domino and card games, the poetic lines linked to divination by dominoes, the divination and calendrical systems, and the sequence of rankings of flowers, we see that he is committed to creating internally consistent systems by arranging erudite cultural references in received frameworks.[63] His omnivorous reading and prolific publishing gave him the confidence to believe he could improve on many parts of the textual tradition, from the serious to the playful.

The English version of Snakes and Ladders was published in the same year as Yu Yue's games.[64] The late nineteenth-century world was fascinated with journeys of chance, progress, and tourism, as commercial printing created a proliferation of miniature worlds for players to traverse. Staking his own place among these shared cultural flows, Yu represents self-cultivation of fantastic figures and genteel wandering in a well-known landscape as complementary trajectories.

Notes

1. See H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Board Games Other than Chess* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1952), chapter 6, "Race-Games." For a collection of map-themed games, see Ernst Strouhal, *Die Welt im Spiel: Atlas der speilbaren Landkarten* (Vienna: Brandstätter, 2015).

2. Yu Yue, *Quyuan sanshua*, in *Chunzai tang quanshu* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 7:3.1a. For an overview of promotion games, see Andrew Lo, "Official Aspirations: Chinese Promotion Games" in *Asian Games: The Art of the Contest,* ed. Colin Mackenzie and Irving Finkel (New York: Asia Society, 2004), 64–75. On a Ming Buddhist version, see May-Ying Mary Ngai, "From Entertainment to Enlightenment: A Study on a Cross-Cultural Religious Board Game with Emphasis on the Table of Buddha Selection Designed by Ouyi Zhixu of the Late Ming Dynasty" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2010).

3. See illustrations in Lo, "Official Aspirations," 70–71, and discussion in Sung Ping-jen, "Sheng guan tu youxi yange kao," *Taiwan shida lishi xuebao* 33 (2005): 60–61.

4. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 3.1a. *Lan sheng tu* is preserved in one of the latest installments of the compendium *Zhaodai congshu* (Collectanea of a Glorious Age), printed by Shen Maode. Gao Zhao, *Lan sheng tu pu,* in *Zhaodai congshu bieji* (Shi-

kai tang, 1833), *juan* 36. On *Zhaodai congshu* see Suyoung Son, *Writing for Print: Publishing and the Making of Textual Authority in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), particularly 108n65. The game Yu saw was a more recent reprint from Changshu. For changes Yu Yue made to his source, I use the 1833 edition of Gao's game, since I have not seen the later publication. I could be giving him credit for others' innovations.

5. For an introduction see Carole Morgan, "The Chinese Game of *Shengguan tu*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 3 (2004): 517–32; for an in-depth study see Sung, "Shengguan tu."

6. Yu describes his dismissal as "because of others' words." Yu Yue, *Quyuan zishu shi*, in *Chunzaitang quanshu,* 7:1.11b. Xie Chaofan, *Youxin yu chengyi*: *wan Qing wenhua shiyu xia de Yu Yue ji qi wenxue zhushu* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2009), 5; Rania Huntington, *Ink and Tears: Memory, Mourning, and Writing in the Yu Family* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 217n33; Stephen Roddy, "Heroes Play by the Rules: Yu Yue's Pedagogy for the Eight-Legged Essay," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 7, no. 2 (2020): 238.

7. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.1a.

8. See Lo, "Official Aspirations," 66.

9. Parlett notes this variant of Goose. David Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 96.

10. On Goose and its derivatives, see Parlett, *Board Games*, 95–101; Adrien Seville, *The Cultural Legacy of the Game of the Goose* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2019). On *e-sugoroku,* see Faith Katherine Kreskey, "Leaping Monsters and Realms of Play: Game Play Mechanics in Old Monster Yarn Sugoroku" (master's thesis, University of Oregon, 2012).

11. Yu, *Quyuan moxi,* in *Chunzaitang quanshu* 7:1.19a.

12. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.1b.

13. Li Lüyuan, *Qi lu deng* (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Chubanshe, 1980), 1:17.175–77.

14. Shuangjianshi zhuren, *Huanqiu lansheng tu, Xiaoshuo lin* 9 (1908): 2.

15. This happens both on and off the board in the game played in *Qi lu deng,* in which the hero in the role of the scholar drinks with a courtesan in the role of the beauty. Li, *Qi lu deng,* 1:17.176–77.

16. On Yu Yue's female-centered family life in his widowerhood, see Huntington, *Ink and Tears*, 32, 61.

17. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.3b.

18. Xie, *Youxin yu chengyi,* 253–65. Roddy, "Heroes," 252–53.

19. See Strouhal on games of "the journey through life." *Die Welt im Spiel*, 53–63.

20. Lo, "Official Aspirations," 66.

21. A later similar game says each player should have one hundred copper cash. Shuangjianshi zhuren, *Huanqiu lansheng tu,* 3.

22. Yu, *Quyuan shanshua,* 7:2.3a–3b.

23. Cited in Ma Guojun and Ma Shuyun, *Zhongguo chuantong youxi daquan* (Beijing: Nongcun Duwu Chubanshe, 1990), 238–42. The game depicted in *Qilu deng* demands role-appropriate performances in addition to drinking: telling jokes, singing a song, or saying the name of Amida Buddha. Li, *Qi lu deng,* 1:17.175–77.

24. Thanks to Aaron Balivet, Alicia Foley, Wenting Ji, Josiah Stork, Luwei Wang, Christine Welch, Juliana Bergman, Declan Halloran, Freya Rosen, Sophia Pringle, Yuan Shi, Luke Williams, and Jie Zhang for play-testing. Complete translations of game rules are available upon request.

25. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.3b–4b.

26. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.3b.

27. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.1b.

28. Sung, "Sheng guan tu," 47.

29. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.4b.

30. Shuangjianshi zhuren, *Huanqiu lansheng tu*.

31. See Yan Jianfu, *Wanqing xiaoshuo de xin gainian ditu* (Beijing: Beijing Lianhe Chubanshe, 2019), 25. Like Yu's game but unlike the 1833 printing of Gao's, each role has its own finishing square.

32. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.2b.

33. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.3a.

34. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3a.

35. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3b.

36. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.3a.

37. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.3b.

38. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.4b.

39. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.3b.

40. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.4a–4b.

41. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.4a.

42. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua*, 7:3.5a. Jin describes a version of Gao's game with distinct victory squares, but I have not seen it. See Jin Xueshi, *Muzhu xianhua*, in *Zhaodao congshu bie, juan* 43, 1.8a.

43. Li, *Qi lu deng,* 1:17.175–77. They appear to move only inward, not returning to the city, and to finish in four or five turns, suggesting a shorter path.

44. For a similar, undated game featuring Yangzhou, see Wang Zhenzhong, "Youyi zhong de Shengqing chengshi fengqing: guji shanben *Yangzhou huafang jiyou tu* yanjiu," *Anhui daxue xuebao* 2013.1:89–95.

45. On the development of West Lake as tourist destination, including many of the activities depicted in Yu's game, see Xiaolin Duan, *The Rise of West Lake: A Cultural Landmark in the Song Dynasty* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), especially 156–81 on the 10 Scenes (Views).

46. Francesca Bray, "Introduction: the Powers of *Tu*," in *Graphics and Text in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China*, ed. Francesca Bray, Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, and Georges Métailié (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 4.

47. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.7a.

48. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.7a.

49. On 1869 journeys to Li'an Temple and the Three Pools Impressed by the Moon, see Yu Yue, *Chunzaitang shibian*, in *Chunzaitang quanshu* 5:4.7a–7b. On an 1873 journey to the Nine Springs and Eighteen Waterfalls, see *Chunzaitang suibi*, in *Chunzaitang quanshu* 5:6.1a–2a.

50. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.7b. For Hangzhou journeys with his wife, see Huntington, *Ink and Tears*, 17, 26.

51. Yu, *Quyuan sanshua,* 7:3.8a–8b. See also Yu, *Chunzaitang suibi*, 5:6.1a–2a.

52. Charlotte Eubanks, "Playing at Empire: the Ludic Fantasy of *Sugoroku* in Early Twentieth-Century Japan," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 2, no. 2 (2016): 39.

53. Sung, "Sheng guan tu," 47.

54. Roddy, "Heroes," 252.

55. Roger Caillois discusses the link between games of chance and fortune telling, considering the latter a corruption of the former. Roger Gaillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1961), 47–48. On the link between games and divination in early China, see Mark Edward Lewis, "Dicing and Divination in Early China," *Sino-platonic Papers* 121 (July 2002): 1–23.

56. Volume 2 of *Di yi lou congshu*, *Chunzaitang quanshu.*

57. *Xin ding yapai shu, Chunzaitang quanshu*, vol. 7. Other works on divination include *Wuxing zhan* in *Quyuan zazuan*, *Chuanzaitang quanshu*, vol. 3; *You yi lu Chunzaitang quanshu*, vol. 7.

58. See Yeh on a *Hong lou meng* game, or Wang on a Yangzhou game. Catherine Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850–1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 165, 167; Wang, "Youyi zhong," 91.

59. Yu, *Chunzaitang shibian*:18.4b.

60. The Yangzhou game discussed by Wang provides a good example of single sheet ephemera. Wang, "Youyi zhong."

61. Yu, *Quyuan yishi yiyan.*

62. Li, *Qi lu deng,* 1:17.175–77; Lucie Borotová, *A Confucian Story of the Prodigal Son: Li Lüyuan's Novel "Lantern at the Crossroads"* (Bochum: Brockmyer, 1991), 30.

63. *Shi'er huashen yi* in *Quyuan zazuan*, *Chunzaitang quanshu*, vol. 3.

64. Irving Finkel, "The Ups and Downs of Life: The Indian Games of Snakes and Ladders," in *Asian Games: The Art of the Contest,* ed. Colin Mackenzie and Irving Finkel (New York: Asia Society, 2004), 204.

4

Exclusive Pleasures on the Cheap

Yuan Dynasty *Sanqu* Songs on Courtesan Kickball

PATRICIA SIEBER

In Chinese poetic culture, *sanqu* songs represented a new frontier when they came to the fore in the Yuan dynasty (1234–1368). *Sanqu* encompassed the topics addressed by earlier poetic forms—the rigors of official life in the case of *shi* poetry, the sentimental realm of the courtesan quarters in the case of *ci* song lyrics. At the same time, such songs also embraced the realm of leisure, including sports, games, and all manner of performance, with a distinctive vigor and verve. In contrast to an aesthetic of elegant refinement so prominently articulated in the critical corpus dedicated to *shi* poetry, *sanqu* songs often displayed their authors' pursuit of virtuosity and showmanship in a manner that could be appreciated by literary cognoscenti and popular audiences alike. Given that *sanqu* was a musical genre whose melodies were known and transmitted at court and among literati and the populace alike, such experiments could be embodied at multiple levels: literary phrasing, colloquial flair, prosodic cleverness, innovative narratorial perspective, thematic twists, and melodic emphasis to name the most obvious. Importantly, such ingenuity was not decried as superficial posturing, as had been the case for earlier poetic forms. Instead, Yuan sources approvingly note the popular renown that some of these literary feats generated for their authors.[1]

So prominent was this preoccupation with "instant hits" that we might speak of an "aesthetic of play" where authors voluntarily entered into the

"game of songwriting," a literary playground governed by certain rules and conventions.[2] However, such literary play did not take place within a "magic circle" divorced from everyday life; given the broad currency of literary skills in social contexts (noted in the introduction to this volume), such literary gamesmanship could have real-world effects, as this discussion of songs about kickball (*cuju*), one of the most popular sporting games of the Yuan period, will show. Such songs offered a platform for a pleasure-centered ethics of play while experimenting with voice, point of view, and language register. Meanwhile, such songs also reappraised relationships between courtesans and literati, a development that scholars have pointed to in other contexts. Songs about kickball thus constituted a dual playground of urban sophistication (*fengliu*). Details about the sport itself are relevant here: kickball's complicated techniques combined with the novel phenomenon of courtesan kickball teams during the Yuan period offered room for literary experimentation while also allowing for exploration of gender dynamics. The songs thus illuminate the gendered functions of play discussed here and elsewhere in the volume.

Among the six extant *sanqu* song suites about kickball, the two authored by Guan Hanqing (ca. 1220–after 1279) are attested in Yuan-era sources, while the other four, by Sadula (1300–48?), Deng Yubin (fl. 1294–97), Zhang Kejiu (ca. 1270–ca. 1350), and Tang Shi (fl. 1360) respectively, appear in Ming dynasty anthologies. The songs all rely on a shared knowledge of the technical vocabulary associated with kickball; at the same time, the songs embed the ball game in different gendered sociabilities and poetic mythologies. If some songs foreground an eroticized display of the female body in motion, in others, the representation of technically accomplished play as a discursive space gains ground. Hence, these *sanqu* songs are located at the convergence of form and content organized around the Yuan-dynasty elevation of "skilled play." They form part of a broader social valorization of games of all kinds, while also offering imaginative remediations of elite pursuits.

Sanqu Songs, an Aesthetics of Play, and Kickball Culture

In light of the new prominence and social approbation of literary playfulness, it is perhaps not so surprising that playful forms proliferated in

the *sanqu* corpus.[3] In the ready accessibility of its playful features, such an aesthetic differed in spirit from the often visually or allusively oriented literary games that had long been part of literati culture. If such literary games were designed to demarcate an in-group of literary cognoscenti, *sanqu* songs structured their play so that it took a certain skill to write such songs, but a formal education in the classical Chinese canon and poetic corpus was not required to appreciate the results. In other words, the threshold for enjoyment of the aesthetic features of *sanqu* was typically much lower than for other forms of poetry.

Several factors contributed to such accessibility. *Sanqu* drew on a lore of urban knowledge shared across different social strata and genders. However, rather than writing *about* such urban practices in the sentimental or historiographic manner of other lyrical genres, *sanqu* songs often gave such cultural activities a new twist. Specifically, Yuan songs and plays evince a new subject position, that of the spectator, who is capable of simultaneously embracing two points of view: that of himself as an observer and that of different protagonists within the narration.[4] Such a bifurcation of perspective stood in marked contrast to allegorical or identificatory readings and opened new forms of literary play. One way in which such a duality might manifest is through the ability to concurrently appreciate an urban pastime and enjoy its playful reenvisioning in song. *Sanqu* typically involved some form of remediation—that is, the implicit mimicry (immediacy) or overt and self-conscious recreation (hypermediacy) of other literary genres within the bounds of an emergent medium.[5] *Sanqu* songs made use of a range of other texts drawn from different genres, but rather than simply treating such borrowings as an allusion or as an intertext, such recontextualization frequently also invoked the textual and extratextual practices associated with such source materials. At the same time, *sanqu* songs were not uniform in their approach to how such remediation functioned. In some cases, the willful juxtaposition of multiple texts created a form of hypermediacy, but in many others, the desired effect of such an invocation of source materials was the creation of an enhanced experience of immediacy for audiences and readers.[6]

Extant *sanqu* song suites on the popular game of kickball (*cuju*) are no exception. In a triangulation between prior textual genres, the actual game of kickball, and subject positions within the songs, they seek to provide an

immersive experience for their audiences. However, the precise cultural trope and spectatorial configuration on which such a song-based description of the game was staged varied from song to song. In all instances, the songs must be understood against the backdrop of the newly prominent pleasures of urban life in the Yuan metropolises of Dadu (the newly founded Yuan capital, modern Beijing) and Hangzhou (the former capital of the Southern Song). We should not leap to the conclusion that such urban pastimes were simply a diversion for displaced literati. Instead, the policies of the Mongol rulers in many cases amplified cultural trends incubated in earlier periods, and many of these leisure activities found favor among people belonging to a wide range of social strata, ethnicities, and genders.

What I translate here as "kickball" has a long history documented in Chinese textual and visual sources. A recent spate of scholarship in Chinese has examined the history of the game partly with a view toward claiming that the earliest form of soccer originated in China.[7] However, as a broad array of sources ranging from the Warring States period to the Qing period shows, kickball was not a monolithic, unchanging game.[8] Rather, it encompassed different sportive practices, the most influential of which, apart from the fact they involved kicking a ball with different body parts, shared little with the agonistic, goal-centered structure of modern soccer. By the Yuan period, the game began to generate its own documentation in encyclopedias and specialized manuals dedicated to the game.[9] In one of the many continuities of urban life between the Southern Song period and the Yuan dynasty, kickball not only continued to be played among diverse segments of the populace, but also found favor among new groups of practitioners. For one, as depicted in figure 4.1 from a popular illustrated encyclopedia, *Collection from the Expansive Forest of Things Worth Knowing* (*Shilin guangji* [1328–1332]), the game appeared to have found new adherents among Mongol officers even as they continued to practice their own steppe-based pastimes (falconry, archery, and more).[10] Insofar as three people are involved with the ball, this illustration is likely a snapshot of the "three-player kickball" (*sanren changhu*) format in contrast to "solo player kickball" (*yiren changhu*), "two player kickball" (*er'ren chang hu*) or "team kickball" (*yuanshe*). Not all forms of the game involved a competition between teams. Instead, the objective of this type of "plain kicking" (*baida*) was the consummate execution of certain movements by a small

FIG. 4.1. Mongol officers playing kickball to the accompaniment of music (Shilin guangji 事林廣記, 1328–32). Source: Shane McCausland, *The Mongol Century: Visual Cultures of Yuan China, 1271–1368* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 77. Image file courtesy of Reaktion Books.

group of players. The quality of their moves was adjudicated by a judge (*jiaozheng*). Moreover, as the illustration makes clear, the game was often accompanied by music, suggesting that this style of kickball blurred the boundaries between "sport" and "dance."

For another, in the Yuan dynasty, in addition to seasonal kickball playing among respectable women, public women active in the entertainment quarters began to get involved with kickball culture. In figure 4.1, the presence of female musicians (playing clappers and drum) on the left points to one role that courtesans-cum-musicians assumed in the culture of the game.[11] Most distinctively, courtesans began to train on all-female teams (*shinü yuanshe*) to compete in public matches. We can infer that female

kickball performers participated in three different kinds of formats: the "official field" (*guan chang*), "the pole net field" (*ganwang chang*), and the "field site" (*changhu*). The second of these featured a single goal (*qiumen*) (see figure 4.2), while the other two did not involve a goal at all. In all cases, the skill with which specific movements were executed determined victory or loss.[12] Thus, in the course of a game, the different parts of the female body, including the courtesans' bound feet (*jinlian*), were subject to intense scrutiny, adding to the erotic allure of the game.

From the extant corpus of *sanqu* songs, we can infer that the matches of all-female kickball teams were attended by the scions of well-heeled families—examination candidates, leisured dandies, and songwriters, among others.[13] The dual social identity of players and audience as participants in the game on the one hand and as courtesans or patrons on the other—what have been called epitheatrical bonds in another context of patrons and skilled players—loomed over *sanqu* representations of the game's signif-

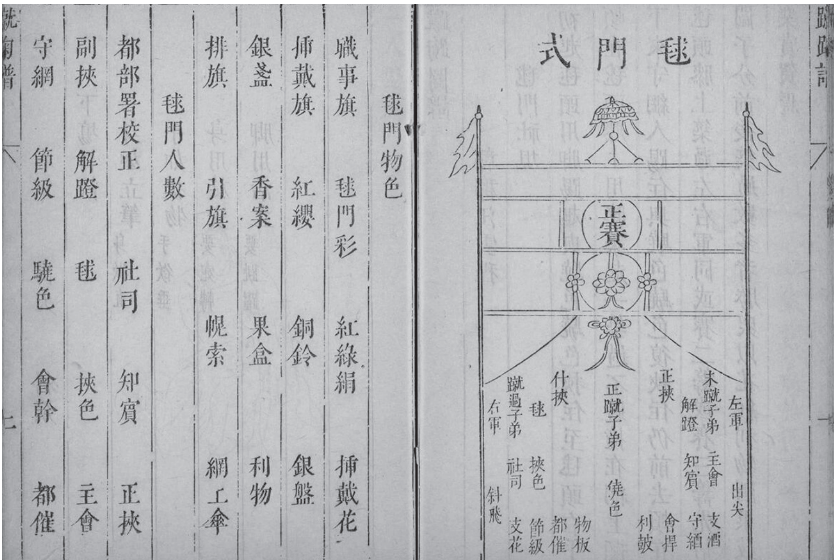

FIG. 4.2. Illustration of the "pole net" style of kickball in the earliest extant kickball manual. Shuofu 說郛. n.p: 1646. v. 103, seq. 59. Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library.

icance.[14] As a leisure activity, such kickball games could aspire to being utopian spaces devoid of normative economic pursuits, entrenched social hierarchies, and asymmetrical power relations.[15] As the introduction to this volume notes, games were coded as masculine or feminine, but the extent of talent, skill, and accomplishments involved might conform to or challenge gender norms. In the Yuan dynasty, a game with highly skilled male and female practitioners—like kickball—held out the promise of a more egalitarian relationship between courtesans and their male patrons; however, to the extent that courtesans could not transcend sexual objectification, such a game, like the sex games discussed in chapter 5, nevertheless took place in the shadow of gender asymmetries. Meanwhile, in contrast to the sentimentality found in patron-courtesan relations explored in chapter six, these songs are devoid of any hint of emotional attachment. *Sanqu* songs about kickball position the game as a realm of leisure where specialized knowledge of the game might allow for new forms of gendered representation (women) and gendered self-representation (men).

The best known evidence for self-styled mastery of nontraditional, entertainment-related savoir faire derives from a song suite about Guan Hanqing entitled "On Not Submitting to Old Age" (Bu fu lao). This song likely spoofed the common trope of quitting the entertainment quarters for good and was mapped onto the dynasty's most accomplished playwright.[16] In the manner of other pseudo-biographies about playwrights in *sanqu* form, the song spliced different elements of urban pursuits into a fictional biography that highlighted the subject's sexual prowess; capacity for liquor; familiarity with music, acting, and comedy; and importantly, for our purposes here, the ability to play assorted games.[17] In one of the stanzas of this song suite, Guan Hanqing is said to have mastered the following urban pastimes:

I have mastered the games of chess (*weiqi*) and kickball (*cuju*).
I have mastered playing dominoes (*dawei*).
I have mastered comic routines (*chake*),
Singing and dancing,
Playing wind and string instruments.
I have mastered vocal performance,
Poetic recitation and playing the "Double-Six" game (*shuanglu*).[18]

Even if the song is a hyperbolic and fictitious biography, it nevertheless captures one of the main threads of Yuan-dynasty urban entertainment culture, that is, the alternative gendering of male pursuits.

Specifically, all three of the songwriters examined in this essay—Guan Hanqing, Sadula, and Deng Yubin—tapped into a rhetoric of a differently conceived model of masculinity. Instead of hewing to the traditional persona of a homosocially oriented scholar-official devoted to the study of the classics in the service of the common good and patrilineal mobility, these urban denizens made no secret of flaunting their embrace of sensory pleasures. However, rather than denigrating Confucian learning per se, this construction of masculinity was underwritten by an expansive understanding of talent. In their own view, it was the elaboration of talent—be it in the realms of writing, acting, musical performance, or assorted games—that distinguished them from the prurient commoners or the abusive lechers of the privileged classes excoriated in plays and *biji* memoirs alike. As the song about Guan Hanqing cited above put it, such urbanites were said to be "quick and clever (*linglong*), sophisticated and sharp (*titou*)."[19] At the same time, in marked contrast to the scholar-official elite who traditionally had kept public women at arms' length, these men publicly reveled in the companionship of courtesans as sensuous beauties, intimate companions, and fellow talents.[20] In the words of the song about Guan Hanqing, these types of men "place first in the arena of entertainment (*paichang*) and of romance (*fengyue*)."[21] As we shall see, how exactly the presence of courtesans manifested in songs written about and by these urban sophisticates varied, but publicly visible contact with women was clearly a sine qua non for this type of masculine persona.

In what follows, we will examine three songs in detail. It will be apparent that all three songs strive to make the description of the game of kickball an opportunity to show off the writing skills of the composer, while also displaying the writers' familiarity with the cultural lore of urban sophistication. Thus, all three songs deploy some amount of technical knowledge about kickball, and they all resort to deliberate mixing of polite and informal registers. However, beyond the overlap in phrasing to characterize the game, the songs tell us less about the game itself than about the kind of experiences that these descriptions of kickball sought to provide for their listeners and readers. In that regard the songs differ in at least three

aspects: first, in the texts they seek to remediate within the protean form of *sanqu* song; second, the degree to which they eroticize the courtesan players, and third, the type of sociability their understanding of the game seeks to purvey. Moreover, the songs also adopt different literary techniques to recreate the game in the frame of the songs. One stays within bounds of omniscient narration, while the other two play with the possibilities of the bifurcated perspective of "a game within a song."[22] The first song to be discussed belongs to the oldest extant *sanqu* songs on the topic of female kickball players.

Guan Hanqing: Game as Pleasurable Examination

Guan Hanqing's song suite "Female Kickball Players" (Nü xiaowei) is, as modern scholars have noted, by far the most technically oriented of the three songs under consideration.[23] In fact, the song suite would not be intelligible without reference to the specialized manuals on kickball published in the late Yuan and early Ming period. Thus we can view Guan's song as an attempt to remediate a genre of technical writing within the form of *sanqu* through adding three dimensions—time, materiality, and social space—all replete with evaluative overtones. In drawing heavily on the catalog of specialized movements listed in the manuals, the song revels in players' technical expertise. At the same time, the song improves on such manuals insofar as it combines the various technical moves into a time sequence. Accordingly, instead of offering a dry list of terms in the manner of a manual or a static image found in an encyclopedia, the song presents the various technical moves kinetically. Moreover, it maps such movements onto dynamic, kinesthetically animated, and starkly material bodies. As these bodies traverse the terrain of the play space, they admix the earthiness of sweat and dirt with sublime beauty. In contrast to the manuals' exclusive focus on the mechanics of the game, the *sanqu* song invites readers to watch the players and imagine themselves as an implied audience as the song toggles back and forth between action and reaction. In the following translation, quotation marks indicate technical kickball terms.

[*To the tune of* "Dou anchun"]
Amidst the kickball fields,
In the alleys that resound with the clanging of jade accessories
 [on horses and people]—
Their renown travels north and south
In the entire world they are admired.
In the intricacies of the game, they excel.
The sound of the ball being tossed—it makes everyone cheer.
Those calls are lively.
[Everything] is just about perfect!
Leisurely and sideways—their golden lotuses.
Delicate and relaxed—their jade bodies.
Their skirts sway lightly.
Their embroidered belts float sideways.
Their dancing sleeves drop down.

[*To the tune of* "Zihua'er"]
They kick a "bucket handle kick" particularly hard.
The "folding fan kick" is extra swift.
They have a thousand ways to dribble.
Up and down—expansive and even—
Talking of technique—it is so spot on
that "shoulder kicks" come into play.
"Maneuvers of twists and turns" are varied.
The "hidden feet kicks" are nimble.

[*To the tune of* "Xiao taohong"]
For "fake outs," they diligently apply their ingenuity.
They do not fall short of their much-lauded ability.
Amidst the throngs of women [players], they are the most esteemed.
They are incredibly experienced!
When their bodies touch, they do not come into contact with the ground.
Once they have pursued a hundred kicks,
everything is happily wrapped up.

[*To the tune of* "Diaoxiao ling"]
As they flare their nostrils
A different fragrance is blown out.
Their silken socks are sticky with colored mud.
The many skills of their natural artistic talents!
Even if you are matched in "arranged groups of three" or "orchestrated pairs of two,"
The "mandarin duck hook" is like a painting.
Unexpectedly, we have been fooled into thinking that the team members are hesitating and holding back.

[*To the tune of* "Tusi'er"]
The powdery sweat—pearls drop in profusion.
The bejeweled hairdos are lopsided; their hair—the color of raven-black jade—is piled up akilter.
The "fake kick" and the "true kick" have been pulled off.
Leaning sideways, their bodies move,
their willowy waists lithe—
A bundle of appreciation!

[*To the tune of* "Shengyao wang"]
How neat!
Such technique is rarely seen.
The "left basin" and the "right break" are practiced through and through.
Perfect indeed!
With a minimum of energy,
Parallel to each other, their feet advance one by one.
As they come and go, they flutter about like butterflies.

[Coda]
Without having left the leisured grounds amidst the flowers and the willows [i.e., professional entertainment quarters],
No matter whether it is the small kicks of the plain style on the field
Or a team match under the kickball goal, the women have no peers anywhere.
In all competitions, they take first place.[24]

In terms of poetic subgenre, Guan Hanqing's song about female kickball players takes the form of a praise song or a kind of ode (*yong*).[25] Whereas other "humble subjects" had already been addressed in ode-like poetry prior to the Yuan dynasty, odes to a game and its female practitioners were rare.[26] Moreover, what is singled out for praise is not the beauty, sexual savvy, or moral fortitude of the players, but rather their technical prowess and dedication to the mastery of the game.[27] While the song is not indifferent to the female body as an object of eroticized beauty, that language is quite attenuated. In fact, one might argue that the first stanza's mentions of "golden lotuses" and "jade bodies" sets up certain expectations only to frustrate them. If such phrasing goads the reader into wondering about the sexual availability of the female players, subsequent stanzas redirect the reader's attention to the women's technical expertise instead.

In Guan's song suite, the stanzas move from the actual game to a range of appreciative language about the women's technical perfection. The appreciation is cast in a very informal register—"They are incredibly experienced!" "Spot on!" "How neat!" "Perfect indeed!" Thus, irrespective of whether these are actual spoken phrases derived from Yuan-dynasty proto-Mandarin, the language register suggests that these lines at least resemble what an audience member might exclaim when watching a kickball game. In doing so, Guan Hanqing's song suite presents an omniscient narrator in the position of a fan—someone who is not only cognizant of the rules, the special terms, and the reputations of the players, but cognitively engaged in the observance of the game with a community of other fans ("it makes everyone cheer"). In this animated embodiment of the players' movements and the appreciative viewer's response, Guan's song makes potentially complicated content more accessible and also creates the illusion of experiential immediacy.

Interestingly, the song purveys at least two different kinds of experiences. On the one hand, the implied reader is someone who can appreciate physical activity apart from the manual labor of agriculture, the skilled labor of handicraft, or the sexual labor of romance. For such a reader, the body is aestheticized in a realm of leisure governed by intense training and kinetic perfection. On the other hand, as the first and last stanza make explicit, the competitive game of kickball also alludes to the civil-service examination system. In the first stanza, the clanging of "precious jade" points to the fact

that the well-heeled elite attended such kickball matches, an observation also borne out by the descriptive details found in other *sanqu* songs about kickball.[28] In the final stanza—the equivalent of a climactic punch line in single-stanza songs (*xiaoling*)—the reader's expectations are confounded. The song takes up the idea of a competitive arena (*chang*) to compare the entertainment quarters and the implied world of officialdom. Contrary to what we might expect from normative masculinity, it is the realm of leisure that wins the day, culminating in the claim that the perfection of this form of female competition is without peer.

Importantly, in this climactic part of the song, the language of immediacy is made most explicit: through metaphoric overlay, two experiences are simultaneously made available "without leaving the leisured grounds of the entertainment quarters." By inhabiting the perspective of the narrator, the reader is invited to imagine an actual kickball game. At the same time, insofar as this subject position mimics that of a judge, such a vantage point affords the male reader an opportunity to adjudicate what constitutes perfection. Thus, the song not only delivers an animated rendition of the game itself, but stages it in the guise of an experience that would likely not be available in real life—the coveted role of an authoritative examiner in a dynasty that held examinations very infrequently. Rather than feeling relegated to the sidelines of normative life scripts, readers could attain satisfaction in the realm of games that might surpass that of the competitive realm of officialdom.

In this and in other songs by Guan Hanqing, a culture of highly formalized play allows for a shared form of expertise that is not predicated on the systematic exclusion of female attainment that is characteristic of the civil-service examinations. In Guan Hanqing's telling, kickball and its representation in the playful genre of *sanqu* potentially opened up a literary space where men and women could not only embody the alternative gender norms of urban sophistication (*fengliu*), but also project new kinds of sociabilities—a space where shared technical expertise is idealistically portrayed as a new currency of interaction in mixed-gender urban communities. To be sure, Guan's understanding was only one attempt to mobilize kickball as an imaginative shortcut to reimagine particular elite experiences. The kickball song suites attributed to the diasporic poet, songwriter, and official Sadula and official and Daoist devotee Deng Yubin, respectively,

show experimentation with narrative structures and offer another vision of what the game could mean for male-female sociabilities.

Sadula and Deng Yubin: Game as Everyday Myth

In the wake of the publication of the first *sanqu* anthology, *Sunny Springs, Brilliant Snow* (*Yangchun baixue*, 1324), other writers picked up motifs found in that seminal collection. Among them ranked Sadula, a 1327 metropolitan graduate (*jinshi*) and a member of one of the dynasty's prestigious cultural academies.[29] Primarily known as a *shi* poet, Sadula has only a single extant song suite, entitled "Courtesan Kickball" (Jinü cuju), to his name. After a distinguished official career, he retired to Hangzhou, the epicenter of entertainment and song culture in the latter half of the Yuan dynasty. In contrast to Guan Hanqing's song suite, Sadula's appeared in the mid-fifteenth-century collection of song and plays *Songs of Harmonious Resplendence* (*Yongxi yuefu*, 1566), a collection strongly associated with the Ming court. Given the Ming court's documented involvement with the revision of the Yuan song and drama corpus, we must be more cautious in reading Sadula's song suite as a commentary on urban Yuan culture.[30] However, in terms of language, form, and tune sequence, Sadula's song suite hews closely to Yuan models. Hence, editorial caveats notwithstanding, Sadula's description opens up a new perspective on how the portrayal of kickball could remediate another rarefied experience—that of the visit of a female deity or immortal.

In Chinese poetic culture, the trope of female immortals initiating mortal men into the erotic arts emerged with the rhapsody in the third century bce. Typically, in such a rhapsody, a goddess descends from on high and shares her knowledge with a mortal man in a beautiful natural setting. The most famous examples include the mythical encounter between the Goddess of Mt. Wu and King Xiang of Chu (Gaotang fu) and that of the Goddess of the Luo River and Cao Zhi (Luo shen fu). Echoing a shamanistic tradition, such encounters seemed reserved for male members of the imperial elite.[31] Moreover, these early accounts invariably end on a sad note, since the union between goddess and mortal proves to be short-lived. In Sadula's song, however, the exclusive experiences of kingly figures are mapped onto the spectators of a kickball game in the heart of a city:

[*To the tune of* "Liangzhou"]
The plain silk shirts hang around and
The multicolored silk sleeves envelop the jade sprouts [e.g., fingers].
The brocaded stockings pad and the black shoes surround the kicking golden lotuses [i.e., the feet].
Below the bleachers of officialdom, people all jostle in admiration.
[The players] resemble the Fair Maiden Sunü having been blown here from the Palace on the Moon.
Truly, they are like transcendents that have been blown down [to earth] by a Heavenly wind . . .[32]

After continuing the description of the game with technical moves similar to the ones found in Guan Hanqing's song suite, Sadula's song ends on the following stanza with a tongue-in-cheek twist on the usual unhappy ending:

[Coda]
If one were to say that you have attained the wish of cherishing jade and cherishing fragrance [sexual intimacy] in a bedchamber;
If one were to say that you have been matched at a banquet suffused in a fresh breeze and a bright moon inside a kingfisher-decorated hall:
Then it would be [none other than] the six-sided ball made of fragrant leather that made the match.
Yet next to the trellis overgrown with vines,
In front of the moss-covered cave,[33]
It turns out that you have not stepped away a single step from the gathering [on the field].[34]

In this song, in contrast to Guan Hanqing's third-person description, the last stanza clearly invokes a second-person interlocutor. Like Guan's final stanza, Sadula's song also introduces a comparison. However, the analogy here is not between officialdom and the culture of games, but between sexual encounters that could range from the myths of poetry to the real-life patronage of courtesan players. So what is promised to this "you" of the final line? On the one hand, it would appear that encounters with immortal women would be out of reach for most men, either because they were not

of distinguished enough standing (the culture of rhapsody) or because of the rarity of such accidental encounters (Daoist legends). On the other hand, patronage of real courtesans might not be readily available, either. For one, an ordinary viewer might not have the financial wherewithal to support a courtesan, let alone bring her into his household. For another, even men of considerable standing might not find favor with the women they wanted to patronize. An anecdote from *The Record of the Green Bowers* (Qinglou ji, 1364) about a *zaju* actress with the stage name Shunshi xiu (fl. 1321–27), who had a lifelong intimate relationship with songwriter and scholar-official Wang Yuanding (fl. early fourteenth century), attests to the possibility that a public woman might scorn even the most well-placed of suitors. According to this account,

> when Aluwen (fl. 1314–1336), the [prominent Mongol] official [and occasional songwriter], who served in the Secretariat [one of the most powerful agencies at the Yuan court], wanted to take up intimate relations with Shunshi xiu, he asked her one day in jest: "How do I compare with Wang Yuanding [from the Western Regions]?" She said: "You, my Sir, are an official. Yuanding is a literatus. In matters of state and the common good, Yuanding cannot rival you, Sir. However, when it comes to matters of romantic poetry and love, you, Sir, do not dare to look upon Yuanding." Aluwen smiled and desisted.[35]

By contrast, the game of kickball allows for the viewer to indulge in the fantasy of such a scenario without being at the mercy of one's own status, lack of cultural attainment, wealth, luck, or someone else's favor. In Sadula's description, at the end of the match an assembly of female immortals "wipe off the sweat with silken handkerchiefs and pick up hair ornaments that had fallen down [in the course of the game]."[36] In other words, in this poetic rendition, the game remediates otherwise exclusive forms of sexual intimacy as a form of erotically charged sportsmanship. In its casual invocation of the rhapsodic tradition, the song popularizes a potentially exclusive pleasure in dual form. First, the reader of such a song might not have to attend a game in order to imagine themselves as a potential companion of kickball-playing immortals. Second, if readers had the opportunity to attend such a match, their experience of the game itself might be altered in line with Sadula's vision. In other words, it is not just a matter of *sanqu*

remediating the roles of an ancient poetic form in contemporary literary guise, but the game itself and the social encounters it might facilitate in turn may become an occasion to fancy oneself a "king of yore" favored by an "ancient goddess." Thus, in contrast to Guan Hanqing's song, Sadula's song suite more explicitly veers in the direction of a dual take on the game of kickball as a skilled sport and an erotic fantasy. If this kind of deliberate ambiguity is only implicit in Sadula's song, the *sanqu* song by Deng Yubin makes such a double entendre explicit.

Like Sadula's song suite, Deng Yubin's *sanqu* song first appeared in the mid-Ming *Yongxi yuefu* collection. Like Sadula, Deng Yubin had served as an official, albeit in a minor capacity, before retiring to devote himself to Daoist activity. In addition to a number of explicitly Daoist songs, he composed "The Double Entendres Surrounding a Female Kickball Team" ("Shinü yuanshe qiqiu shuangguan") in ten stanzas.[37] The title already signals that the song suite should be read at two levels—of the game and of the erotic fantasy embedded in it. To make the conceit more effective, Deng's song suite reconceives of the game as a match between male and female teams. Deng's most striking innovation may well be the way the song suite focalizes the description of the game itself. In many ways, Deng's song suite describes the same technical maneuvers featured in Guan Hanqing's and Sadula's songs. However, in contrast to the use of second-person address in the punch line of Sadula's song, Deng Yubin's suite consistently interweaves second-person perspective with the description of the match. Throughout the song, the second person alternates between a purely spectatorial position invoked in the informal phrase "you see" (*nikan*) and an immersive assumption of the perspective of the male players in the guise of "you" (*ni*). Here is how such a metatheatrical oscillation structures the opening stanza of the song with all the "you" phrases in italics and all the technical phrases in quotation marks:

Enveloping a ball full of harmonious air
Once it's kicked off, a hundred subtleties arise.
[In a game] together with the scions of the entertainment quarters (*zidi*),
    a light bump of the loins, a smarting touch of the knees
In a moment, they hold up the ball with their chests.[38]
You see those "evasive loins,"

"A fake kick," a "true dribble,"
The thigh sharp as a blade.
As she moves, *you* acknowledge that her tack is for real.
As she advances, *you* recognize her as the big gun.
The set-up is tight.
The scion yells—now *you* know how much her kick would hurt *you*![39]

In the concluding line of the stanza, the boundaries between the male players on the field and the spectator are clearly delineated, but in highlighting access to physical pain, here a bifurcated perspective converges on the notion of vicarious experience. Thus, in contrast to Guan's song of seamless immersion, Deng Yubin's insists on the visibility of the remediation. The explicitly sexualized nature of the song becomes apparent in its use of mythology to describe the players. Not only are there "lonely male phoenixes who have descended from the nine empyrean heavens to seek out female phoenixes," but the female players are compared to "female immortals who have crossed the bridge in great number."[40] While the song suite overall is not as tightly written as either Guan Hanqing's or Sadula's, it most clearly dramatizes the game of kickball as a "divine pleasure" on the cheap.

Conclusion

By the standards of classical poetry, *sanqu* may come off as "shallow genre," but on closer inspection it reveals itself as a form governed by an aesthetic of play. It may be tempting to think that only anonymous *sanqu* songs revel in this aesthetic, but as the range of songwriters who wrote on the game of kickball demonstrates, men from the highest official echelons (Sadula), the middling ranks (Deng Yubin), and noncredentialed literati circles (Guan Hanqing) all experimented with such an aesthetic. Their songs infused playfulness not only into how they described the world, but also into what they chose to write about. As is typical for *sanqu*, the final lines of the three songs offer surprising punch lines that seek to playfully thwart the time-honored expectations of potential listeners and readers alike. In Guan's case, that twist takes the form of an inversion of the hierarchies of officialdom and the games of the pleasure quarters; in the case of Sadula and Deng, the songs transpose the tropes of the visitation

of female deities and immortals onto the realm of games. In all cases, the songs foreground immersive immediacy and imaginative access to what were otherwise exclusive or even nonexistent prerogatives such as regular civil-service examinations or unpredictable divine visits. In doing so, these songs experiment with new narrative perspectives, ranging from expert fan to cognitively engaged spectator.

At first glance, a game like kickball may seem a harmless if frivolous pastime. But after Zhu Yuanzhang (r. 1368–98), the founding emperor of the Ming, assumed power, he issued various edicts to rein in the culture of play, particularly among his military troops. One edict noted that among the troops stationed in capital, those who engaged in learning how to sing would have their tongues cut off and those who played kickball would have their feet cut off.[41] From this vantage point, a culture of play is not a peripheral phenomenon but can be seen as a countercultural sphere conceived in contradistinction to conventional domestic and public pursuits by men and women alike. In the full-fledged articulation of an urban space of games and performance, Yuan *sanqu* deploy the technical and aesthetic expertise embodied in female kickball players not as a metonym for the neglected scholar-official, but as the privileged currency of an alternative economy of play.

Notes

1. Patricia Sieber, "Nobody's Genre, Everybody's Song: *Sanqu* Songs and the Expansion of the Literary Sphere in Yuan China," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 29–64.

2. For the self-conscious navigation between different genres as practiced by the best documented *sanqu* songwriter, Zhang Kejiu (ca. 1270–ca. 1350), see Jae-hyuk Lee, "A Dialectic between Genres and Extension of Poetic Function: Zhang Kejiu's 'Regulated Songs,'" *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2021): 89–112.

3. Elleanor H. Crown, "*Jeux d'Esprit* in Yüan Dynasty Verse," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 2, no. 2 (1980): 192.

4. Casey Schoenberger, "Storytellers, Sermons, Sales Pitches, and Other Deceptive Features of City Life: A Cognitive Approach to Point of View in Chinese Plays," *CHINOPERL* 38, no. 2 (2019): 129–64; Karin Myhre, "Performing the

Emperor: Sui Jingchen's 'Han Gaozu Returns to His Home Village,'" *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2021): 31–58.

5. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

6. Patricia Sieber, "A Flavor All Its Own: Some Theoretical Considerations of *Sanqu* Songs as Mixed-Register Literature." *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2021): 203–35.

7. This summary is primarily drawn from Wang Yan, Sun Fei, and Dong Jie, "Lun Zhongguo gudai nüzi cuju de fazhan yu yanbian," *Shandong tiyu xueyuan xuebao* 36, no. 3 (2020): 68–74.

8. Textual sources include entries in dynastic histories, poems, poetic rhapsodies, court lyrics, and manuals on how to play the game; visual sources include stone reliefs, paintings, bronze mirrors, tomb figurines, clay pillows, woodblock illustrations, and porcelain. For a brief survey of the visual materials, see Li Yaqun, Ma Guoqing, and Zhu Shuju, "Cong Linzi cuqiu bowuguan cang cuju wenwu qian xi cuju yundong de fazhan yanbian," *Wenwu tiandi* (2010): 92–6.

9. The earliest manual is entitled *Illustrated Manual of Kickball* (Cuju tupu). It was included in Tao Zongyi's (1329–1410) compendium *Shuofu*.

10. For an alternate interpretation see Shawn McCausland, *The Mongol Century*: *Visual Cultures of Yuan China, 1271–1368* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 76.

11. On the difficulties of adequate terminology for professional women entertainers, see Beverly Bossler, "Vocabularies of Pleasure: Categorizing Female Entertainers in the Late Tang Dynasty," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 72, no. 1 (2012): 71–99.

12. See Wang, Sun, and Dong, "Lun Zhongguo gudai nüzi cuju," 70–71.

13. I have not found evidence on what qualified people to become part of the audience (e.g., paid admission) or whether popular audiences would also have been among the viewers. For another public ball game known as *chuiwan* that was documented with a manual in the Yuan dynasty, see Gui Yan, Zhang Tianju, and Han Liebao, "The Study of *Chui Wan*, a Golf-Like Game in the Song, Yuan, Ming Dynasties of Ancient China," *Journal of Sport History* 39, no. 2 (2012): 283–97.

14. Mark Stevenson, "One as Form and Shadow: Theater as a Space of Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century Beijing," *Frontiers of History in China* 9, no. 2 (2014): 225–46.

15. Rudolf Wagner and Catherine Yeh, "Frames of Leisure: Theoretical Essay," in *Testing the Margins of Leisure: Case Studies on China, Japan, and Indonesia*, ed. Rudolf Wagner, Catherine Yeh, Eugenio Menegon, and Robert Weller (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2020), 296.

16. Patricia Sieber, *Theaters of Desire: Authors, Readers, and the Reproduction of Early Chinese Song-Drama, 1300–2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 61–69.

17. Wenbo Chang, "Performing the Role of the Playwright: Jia Zhongmin's *Sanqu* Songs in the Supplement to *The Register of Ghosts*," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2021): 59–88.

18. Attributed to Guan Hanqing, "Bu fu lao," in Sui Shusen, comp., *Quan Yuan sanqu* (*QYSQ*), rev. ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1989), 1:173.

19. Guan, "Bu fu lao."

20. For the shift in appreciation of courtesans in the Yuan dynasty, see Beverly Bossler, *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity: Gender and Social Change in China, 1000–1400* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 295–97.

21. Bossler, *Courtesans*, 295–97.

22. I modify here the trope of a play within a play to recognize the fact that "spectatorship" could bridge different forms of cultural display, not just plays as text and plays as performance.

23. See Wang Xueqi, ed., *Guan Hanqing quanji jiaozhu* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1988), 790–99. Deriving from an ancient military officer title, usually rendered "colonel," *xiaowei* functioned both as a general term for players as well as a more specialized designation in certain kickball formats.

24. Guan, "Nü xiaowei," in Sui, comp., *QYSQ*, 1:177–80.

25. On "praise song/odes" as one of the legacy genres contributing to the rise of *sanqu* songs, see Idema, "The Ultimate *Sanqu* Song: Yao Shouzhong's 'The Complaint of the Ox' and Its Place in Tanaka Kenji's Scholarship on *Sanqu*," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2021): 17–18.

26. For a brief discussion of a Tang-dynasty rhapsody on the kickball playing of palace women, see Wang, Sun, and Dong, "Lun Zhongguo gudai nüzi cuju," 69.

27. For a similar emphasis on the technical side at the expense of eroticization, see Guan Hanqing's song-suite on the leading actress of the day. Guan, "Zeng Zhulian xiu," in Sui, comp., *QYSQ*, 1:170–71.

28. Tang, "Cuju," in Sui, comp., *QYSQ*, 2:1606.

29. McCausland, *Mongol Century*, 147–50.

30. See Tian Yuan Tan, "In Praise of This Harmonious and Prosperous Empire: *Sanqu*, Ming Anthologies, and the Imperial Court," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2021): 142–49.

31. David Hawkes, "The Quest of the Goddess," *Asia Major* 13, no. 1–2 (1967): 71–94.

32. Sadula, "Jinü cuju," in Sui, comp., *QYSQ*, 1:700.

33. The previous two lines are tentative translations.

34. Sadula, "Jinü cuju," 700.

35. Xia Tingzhi, *Qinglou ji jianzhu*, ed. Sun Chongtao and Xu Hongtu (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1990), 102.

36. Sadula, "Jinü cuju," 700.

37. Deng, "Shinü yuanshe qiqiu shuangguan," in Sui, comp., *QYSQ*, 1:306–8.

38. This line is a tentative translation.

39. Deng, "Shinü yuanshe qiqiu shuangguan," 306–7.

40. Deng, "Shinü yuanshe qiqiu shuangguan," 307.

41. Wang, Sun, and Dong, "Lun Zhongguo gudai nüzi cuju."

5

Games in Late Ming and Early Qing Erotic Literature

JIE GUO

Late Ming and early Qing sources frequently depict games—such as card games, drinking games, verbal games, (cross-gender) roleplay games, and so on—played in erotic encounters, often for the purpose of engineering seductions or enhancing sexual pleasure. Examples from a variety of erotic novels and tales from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries show how games were used as a literary convention in erotica.

Existing scholarship has paid abundant attention to the social, legal, economic, cultural, and political factors that led to the intense interest in sensual subject matters and the explosion of erotica, in both visual and verbal forms, in the late Ming and early Qing period.[1] In comparison, characteristics of erotica as a genre and its commonly used techniques and conventions remain understudied.[2] Although these aspects do receive occasional attention, they tend to be mentioned only in passing.[3] The only scholarship specifically on features, motifs, and techniques of Ming-Qing erotica has been art historical.[4]

Games, both sexual and nonsexual, are commonly found in erotic novels and stories. In erotic narratives, games not only serve as quotidian details that facilitate the contexts in which sexual encounters take place, but are also often directly involved in these encounters, serving as crucial pleasure-generating devices or facilitators of erotic subplots and vignettes.

Roger Caillois's discussion of characteristics of play in his classic *Man, Play, and Games* lists six features: free, separate, uncertain, unproductive,

governed by rules, and make-believe.[5] He pays particular attention to the latter two, which he thinks "may be related" but are at the same time mutually exclusive: "Games are not ruled and make-believe. Rather, they are ruled *or* make-believe."[6] In other words, unlike the other four, which may coexist with other features in the same game, the last two qualities in his list are incompatible. On the other hand, both features create unreality.[7] Games that rely on make-believe "presuppose free improvisation . . . the chief attraction of which lies in the pleasure of playing a role, of acting *as if* one were someone or something else."[8] Such an operation of "as if" leads to "pretend," to fiction. Remarkably, "rules themselves [also] create fiction," which, like make-believe, temporarily shrouds players in unreality.[9]

If the qualities "governed by rules" and "make-believe" are incompatible within the same game, we can distinguish between games that depend on one or the other.[10] Drawing on Caillois's discussion of these two distinct yet related game features, in this chapter I group games commonly found in late Ming and early Qing erotic literature into two types: those with rules and those centering around role-play, which primarily relies on make-believe. Drawing distinctions between games, however, is not my purpose here. After all, no scheme of categorization can capture all types of games and play.[11] My objective is to illustrate what I see as the most important functions of games in Ming-Qing erotic literature: to generate sex content and enrich the overall variety of sexual acts and themes for the pleasure of the reader. This dichotomous categorization captures important formal features of these games and demonstrates the primary functions of games in erotica. Despite their differences, both types of games are closely linked in their shared function of generating unreality (to borrow Caillois's concept). This shared capacity to create moments of fiction makes games, regardless of type, a useful device for putting on view dynamic and even wildly nonnormative sexual acts and relations that often face moral policing, either within the fictional world or from the author. Play and playfulness prove to be useful tools in providing the aegis under which transgressive encounters and acts may be put on view and enjoyed by the reader. At the same time, the reader may also take pleasure in the interplay between moments of unreality generated through games and the plots and subplots of the larger narrative as a work of fiction.

Games with Rules

A wide variety of games with rules can be found in late imperial Chinese erotic works, for instance, drinking games (*jiuling*), card games (*paixi*), riddles (*caimi*), the game of "beat the drum, pass the flower" (*jigu chuanhua*), and pitch-pot games (*touhu*), which involves throwing arrows into a pot.[12] The late Ming author Lü Tiancheng's (1580–1618) *Xiuta yeshi* (Unofficial History of the Embroidered Couch) features an episode in which the protagonist, a scholar named Dongmen, plays a drinking game with his wife, Jinshi, and mistress, Mashi.[13] Although the ostensible purpose of the game is to have fun among themselves, in actuality Dongmen is trying to get the two women drunk so that he can seduce Mashi's maid, Xiaojiao. He proposes a competition of speaking tongue twisters (*jikouling*), with the rule that whoever makes more mistakes should be punished with drinking.[14] As the women are not good at tongue twisters, Dongmen easily gets them drunk—a difficult deed under rules of social decorum but realizable within the game's unreality—and then is able to carry out his scheme of forcing himself on Xiaojiao, who cannot resist him without the protection of her mistress.

In the late Ming anonymous novel *Langshi* (History of a Libertine), the protagonist Langzi (literally, "libertine") is invited by his lover Suqiu to play a drinking game.[15] Again, the purpose of the game is not so much to have fun as to trick other game players—in this case, Langzi. In an earlier encounter, Langzi turned out to be no match for the sexually sophisticated and insatiable Suqiu. Determined to win the upper hand this time, he takes an aphrodisiac before their rendezvous. However, foreseeing Langzi's plan, the shrewd Suqiu engages Langzi in a game of riddles, having made him agree that if he loses, he would drink a big cup of cold wine. The clueless Langzi soon is defeated by Suqiu in the game and has to drink what turns out to be cold water, which is said to be an antidote to the aphrodisiac he took. Without the power of the drug, Langzi again loses to Suqiu in the "battle of sex."[16]

Drinking games involving tongue twisters and riddles are not necessarily erotic; indeed, they can be played on any social occasion. However, in these two cases, they are used to help create moments of unreality necessary for the realization of sex schemes; in this way they contribute to enriching the

variety of sexual scenarios in the narratives. In the case of *Xiuta yeshi*, the drinking game is deployed to create a violent "master-maid encounter"—a rape scene. In the case of *Langshi*, the drinking game helps move forward the subplot of sexual competition between two experienced lovers. It is worth noting that both games have a competitive component, which is key to their real function: schemers use games to get other people drunk so that they can carry out their secret plans. It is important that these games—tongue twisters in *Xiuta yeshi* and riddles in *Langshi*—not be games of chance, for the success of the schemes depends on their executioners' ability to take control. Given the critical role of these games in engineering sex schemes as part of the plot, the kind of pleasure the reader derives from reading about them does not depend on whether they are erotic games. Rather, they serve as a kind of foreplay, which to the reader is enticing not because they directly involve sex but because they titillate and arouse, foretelling that the climax—both sexual and narrative—that the reader is after is in sight.[17]

Explicitly erotic games are still of concern to the present study, though. Li Yu's (1610?–1680) *Rou putuan* (Carnal prayer mat) features a lengthy, elaborate description of a game involving a unique set of erotic playing cards, each of which has a picture that depicts a sexual position. In chapter 17, the novel's protagonist, Vesperus (Weiyangsheng), plays a card game with four women, all of whom are his lovers: Cloud (Xiangyun), Cloud's cousins Lucky Pearl (Ruizhu) and Lucky Jade (Ruiyu), and the three young women's aunt Flora (Huacheng), a knowledgeable but arrogant sex guru who owns a set of "spring-feeling drinking cards" (*chunyi jiupai*).[18] According to Flora, these cards are "for looking at while drinking or having sex (*jiu se*)."[19] However, for Vesperus, between drinking (*jiu*) and sex (*se*), the latter is more important. As he points out, the right way to use the cards is for him to have sex with the women by imitating the positions printed on the cards after drinking: "Normally these things are just for amusement, . . . but we do have a use for them in our contest today. Let's not look at them now, but wait until the wine takes effect. Then each of you must pick a card and act out with me whatever it shows."[20] By throwing dice, the women soon work out an order in which they take turns having sex with Vesperus by imitating the position on the card they each draw.

As an expert, Flora assumes the role of game master (*lingguan*). None-

theless, irritated by the arrogant air she puts on, her nieces contrive to teach her a lesson. After they have had sex with Vesperus by imitating the positions shown on the cards they each drew, the three younger women trick Flora into drawing a card that shows a man and a woman having anal sex (*Longyang de taoshu*).[21] As Flora has never had anal sex before, she is reluctant. Citing the "rules" of the game and at the same time emphasizing her role as game master, who supposedly should set the model for strictly abiding by rules, her nieces refuse to allow her to switch cards. Flora must obey and is said to have suffered greatly.

In contrast to the two drinking games mentioned earlier, this card game has sex-related rules. Strictly enforced, these rules directly give rise to a suspension of reality, which allows for the presentation of sexual violence and punishment (of an older, more authoritative woman, at the hands of three younger, less powerful women, for the pleasure of the male protagonist and, arguably, the male author and male reader), a scenario that would not make sense without the unreality created through the game rules.[22] Moreover, with its strictly enforced rules, this game creates an opportunity for the narrative to include jealousy, female competition, rivalry, intrigue, and revenge in its offer of sex themes and vignettes.[23]

Importantly, this game of "spring-feeling cards" should be seen as a variation of the "erotica-in-erotica" convention frequently featured in late imperial erotic works, which often feature scenes in which sexual partners use erotica—literary works or pictures—together for sexual stimulation and pleasure. In such scenes, the couple often imitates the sexual positions in the verbal or visual erotica they look at together. The ubiquity of this convention mirrors the influence of sex manuals, which often catalogue a variety of sexual positions.[24] As James Cahill aptly notes, "Erotic fiction up to late Ming has the same quasi-taxonomic character: they did it *this* way, and then *that* way, and then *this* way."[25]

In the erotic card-game episode in *Rou putuan*, the focus of the narrative is not so much the game itself as how each of the four women has sex with Vesperus by mimicking the lovemaking position shown on each card. This is not the only scene in the novel where Vesperus and his partners imitate different positions in erotic pictures. Chapter 3, for instance, features Vesperus using erotic pictures to enlighten his sexually frigid bride to the joy of sex. That imitation episode, however, emphasizes seduction, which

is itself an important motif in Ming-Qing erotica. The card game here, with its emphatically enforced rules, is geared to put on view for the reader more intercourse positions, including anal sex between a man and a woman.

In contrast to the two above-mentioned drinking games, this "card game" is explicitly erotic: the sexual function of Flora's playing cards is self-evident. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, rather than being a conventional game, this card game should be seen as illustrating Li Yu's inventiveness.[26] In other words, unlike the drinking games, which are not different from real-life games, the erotic card game should be seen as a context-specific invention the author devises for the scene and for the larger purpose of creating another sex scenario. This has two implications. First, despite its status as an idiosyncratic invention, its soundness as a playable game with rules in the context of the novel points to Li Yu's ingenious appropriation of both regular card games involving dice-throwing and the erotica-in-erotica convention. Second, despite its soundness as a game of rules, this card game is still categorically different from *real* games—those that exist in reality—in the sense that it is, after all, an invention.

Inventiveness is key to our understanding of erotic games in Ming-Qing representations. Compared with other conventions in late imperial erotica such as voyeurism, eavesdropping, and erotica-in-erotica, games put to erotic uses are often marked by idiosyncrasy and inventiveness. Take, for instance, chapter 27 of the sixteenth-century novel *Jin Ping Mei*. Titled "Li Ping'er Communicates a Secret in the Kingfisher Pavilion; Pan Jinlian Engages in a Drunken Orgy under the Grape Arbor," this chapter features Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian reinventing the pitch-pot game *touhu* into a sex game as part of their garden orgy.[27] *Touhu* normally involves players competing with one another by throwing arrows into a pot from an agreed-upon distance. In this episode, Ximen turns it into what he calls *rouhu* (fleshy pot).[28] Under the grape arbor in the family garden, Ximen ties Jinlian's feet to the trellis to suspend her legs in the air. Claiming to the maid Chunmei that he is going to "play a game of 'pitching into the fleshly pot,'" he then uses plums as he would arrows in the pitch-pot game, striking Jinlian's genitalia three times.[29] For each successful shot, he drinks wine. As a typical example of characters using games for sexual enjoyment and amusement, this *touhu* scene points to the playfulness that is often an important aspect of pleasure, both for the characters and for the reader.

(It is also worth noting that the wordplay between *touhu* and *rouhu*, for instance, is meant to amuse not only the characters but also the reader.)[30] Moreover, although *Jin Ping Mei* by no means resembles a sex manual, it nonetheless also exhibits the tendency, which is seen in late imperial erotica in general, to catalog an assortment of sex scenes, methods, and acts. The inventiveness of Ximen and Jinlian no doubt contributes to enriching the variety of lovemaking for the enjoyment of the reader.

All four games examined above are governed by rules. They may be divided into two distinct subcategories: "regular," nonsexual games drawn directly from life and those that are drawn from reality but through reinvention have turned into explicitly erotic games. Despite their difference, both kinds are meant to facilitate the production of sexual content.

Erotic Roleplay

Some games or play rely on make-believe, on "becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving."[31] In such instances, the pleasure the player derives is that "of playing a role, of acting *as if* one were someone or something else."[32]

In Ming-Qing erotica, cross-gender role-playing is often used as a plot device in staging seduction scenes. In *Langshi*, it is through role-playing that the maid Hongye manages to help the page boy Lushu seduce Langzi's innocent young cousin Junqin. Initially, Hongye uses erotic pictures to awaken "spring feelings" (*chunqing*, meaning "desire") in the young woman. As anticipated by the shrewd maid, Junqin is instantly enthralled and even proposes that Hongye play the role of a man so that the two of them can try out what is depicted in the pictures.[33] Hongye obeys by undressing herself and then making love to her mistress "as if [she] were a man" (*ru nanzi yiban*).[34] She then describes to Junqing her encounters with Lushu in graphic detail. The young woman is said to become so aroused that she soon starts an affair with the page boy.[35] Here, it is the seeming playfulness of the mock sex "game," which in this particular case involves both cross-gender and cross-class transgression, that emboldens the shy mistress to explore sex and its pleasure.

The late Ming author Feng Menglong's (1574–1646) "Jiang Xingge chonghui zhenzhushan" (Jiang Xingge's Reunion with His Pearl Shirt; hereafter

"Jiang Xingge") has a similar episode, in which a man replaces one of the two female players in a mock sex game comparable to the one in *Langshi*. In this story, a young wife named Sanqiao'er stays home alone when her husband, Jiang Xingge, embarks on a long business trip. Attracted by her beauty, Chen Dalang, a merchant sojourning in town, schemes to seduce her by enlisting the help of a Granny Xue (Xue *po*), who, as a hawker, has easy access to the inner chambers of the households in town. After winning Sanqiao'er's trust, Granny Xue begins to titillate the young woman—as well as the reader—with graphic stories.[36] Eventually, she tricks Sanqiao'er into sharing a bed with her so that she can teach Sanqiao'er "a way of having fun by oneself to meet one's urgent needs" (*ziququile jiuji de fa'er*).[37] In the darkness, however, the granny switches with Chen, who has been hiding in the room. Initially mistaking Chen for Granny Xue, Sanqiao'er ends up being sexually taken advantage of (*ren ta qingbo*) and it is only after they are finished that Sanqiao'er asks about his identity.[38]

Is this play or rape? The wording of the text here, *ren ta qingbo*, suggests both are possible. As the verb *ren* can mean "to permit, let, allow" or "to concede," *ren ta qingbo* can be translated as "[Sanqiao'er] let him [i.e., Chen] take advantage of [her]" or as "[Sanqiao'er] yielded to his hanky panky." While the first translation implies willingness on the part of Sanqiao'er, the second puts the emphasis on her lack of volition. In Caillois's definition, "play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement"; that is to say, it should be free.[39] In the role-playing game in *Langzi*, Junqing and Hongye both participate in the make-believe game knowingly and willingly. In contrast, Sanqiao'er only signs up for the game with Granny Xue and is kept in the dark about the third player, Chen. In this sense, she has no choice but to yield to Chen's hanky panky (*ren ta qingbo*). On the other hand, that Sanqiao'er quickly acquiesces to Chen's replacement of Granny Xue and takes pleasure in having sex with him also means that she (eventually) chooses to allow Chen to take advantage of her (*ren ta qingbo*)—chooses to stay in the play, in the make-believe, in the unreality that, paradoxically, allows her to *realize* her desire for sex. For the player Chen, who is in the know the entire time, the unreality of the proposed play that he secretly joins is necessary for realizing his sexual pursuit. In both cases, the boundary between unreality and reality collapses.

In this story, the safe, albeit temporary and fragile, unreality established

by mimicry provides the perfect remedy for the "urgent need" of a lonely, desirous young woman. It is this willingness to improvise in the "game"—to allow "latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative"—that eventually turns unreality into reality and the woman into an adulteress.[40] Ultimately, as the story develops, it is her choice to remain a player in the game, which eventually becomes reality, that provides the moral ground for her husband's decision to divorce her. At the same time, the fact that the game is initially imposed on her without her knowledge or prior consent still makes her a victim of Chen and Granny Xue's conspiracy. It is this status as victim that morally justifies her final happy reunion with Jiang Xingge. Sanqiao'er is still punished, however, for it is as concubine instead of as wife that she reunites with her beloved husband. The author punishes Chen by making him die from fear and a sense of guilt after he learns of the exposure of the affair. In the moral world Feng Menglong presents, both Sanqiao'er and Chen have to pay for the pleasure they take in the game as players, a role they both assume willingly in the end. We may see such an ending as a warning to readers who enjoy the graphic parts of the story. On the other hand, it is unlikely in reality for such a warning to deter anyone from seeking pleasure in the sex scenes.

Both role-playing games involve the participation of sexually inexperienced players. In these texts, role-play functions to bring into the narrative vignettes of defloration (in the case of Junqing) and seduction (in both stories). In contrast, in the novel *Chundeng nao* (Festive spring lanterns), we see a different kind of cross-gender role-play, in which participants are highly experienced in sexual matters.[41] The novel centers on the handsome scholar Zhen Shuangnan, who indulges in relations with both men and women before he gives up secular life to devote himself to Daoism in pursuit of immortality. The first chapters of the novel depict the triangular relationship between Zhen and the couple Yao Zi'ang and Yao's concubine Huiniang. Although Yao is a married man, he prefers men to women and is infatuated with Zhen's beauty. Attracted by Huiniang, Zhen manages to establish a stable relationship with her after gaining Yao's consent by sleeping with him.

In chapter 3, following Yao's playful suggestion, Huiniang transforms Zhen into a woman using her own clothing, jewelry, and makeup. All three

are pleasantly surprised by how beautiful Zhen turns out to be. Zhen thus jokingly asks Huiniang:

> Since your husband loves me, do you take me to be your sister or your fellow concubine? Yet, since you and I have shared the same pillow and quilt, I am also your husband. Now what do you suggest? Do you want me to be your sister, fellow concubine, or husband?[42]

When he hears this, Yao teasingly suggests that he would take Zhen as his wife and Zhen could take Huiniang as his wife. Laughing, Zhen agrees. The three then hold two mock wedding ceremonies, first for Yao and the masquerading Zhen, and then, after Zhen changes into his own clothes, for Zhen and Huiniang. They even ask a maid to pretend to be the wedding attendant (*binxiang*) and sing a wedding song.[43] Everyone laughs so hard they cannot finish the ceremony for Zhen and Huiniang.[44] "From then on," reveals the narrator, "Zhen constantly switched between male and female roles. The three of them teased and flirted with each other, keeping themselves greatly entertained (*yu*)."[45] The playfulness of these role-playing games is unmistakable. In fact, the character *yu* (entertain, amuse) points to enjoyment and pleasure, and we may say that these role-playing games are enjoyable not only to the characters themselves but also to the reader.

However, the playfulness is not unconditional. Even though erotica as a genre has the capacity to place under its aegis a wide range of deviant practices, desires, and relations, in the patriarchal, polygynous context of late imperial Chinese society, a harmonious triangular relationship between a woman and two men is still quite unusual for the genre. It is the playfulness of the game that all three characters participate in that grants legibility to an otherwise inconceivable relationship. In this relationship, Zhen's female impersonation is crucial. Playful as it appears, his assumption of the female role in effect transforms the pseudo-polyandrous relationship into a polygynous one, the only intelligible form of polygamy in the Ming-Qing context.[46] Moreover, it is worth noting that Yao, the other man in the triangle, never takes up female impersonation, nor does Huiniang take up male impersonation. Throughout the game, the one-man-two-women structure is carefully and firmly maintained. The wedding ceremony between Zhen as husband and Huiniang as wife is never finished, as it is conveniently

interrupted by laughter. This means that, in their game, only Yao's status as husband is *performatively* confirmed—in front of an audience consisting of not only the players themselves but also the servants. On the other hand, despite palpable efforts to contain transgressive energies within the unreality created through play, this complex relationship nonetheless gains a firm position in the novel, which, as a product of the larger late imperial erotic tradition, still seeks to negotiate taboos and offer as wide a variety of scenarios, motifs, desires, and relations as possible to meet the trained taste of the readership. This approach is reminiscent of the one in Feng Menglong's "Jiang Xingge," which on the one hand upholds gender and sexual norms by severely punishing participants in erotic games, while on the other still manages to offer the reader enticing scenarios and themes (e.g., adultery).[47]

Conclusion: Games and Ming-Qing Erotica

These examples of late Ming and early Qing literary visualizations of erotic games illustrate how these functions are shaped by the generic requirements of erotica on the one hand and the social norms of Ming-Qing society on the other. Based on my reading, I draw a number of preliminary conclusions.

First, games are commonly found in erotic novels and stories, as in other types of Ming-Qing fiction. Along with other quotidian details, games constitute part of the realism that serves as the backdrop for sexual relations and escapades, which do not take place in an asocial vacuum but are constantly policed by social norms. At the same time, the unrealities arising from games and play provide venues for exploring and displaying sexual acts, desires, relations, experiments, and imaginations.

Second, despite the ubiquity of games in Ming-Qing erotic fiction, games by themselves are not necessarily the focus of the narrative, nor are they necessarily explicitly sexual. Rather, their function is often auxiliary: they can be used to push forward sexual subplots or bring in themes of rivalry, seduction, adultery, defloration, or rape. This is particularly the case with nonsexual games drawn from the repertoire of real games (e.g., the drinking games in *Xiuta yeshi* and *Langshi*), which often serve to generate sex scenes and may be manipulated by seducers. Game scholars such as

Roger Caillois and Greg Costikyan take uncertainty to be an essential aspect of game. In *Uncertainty in Games*, for instance, Costikyan argues that uncertainty "is a primary characteristic of all sorts of games" and that "games require uncertainty to hold our interest, and that the struggle to master uncertainty is central to the appeal of games."[48] However, in instances where games are manipulated, uncertainty is weakened, if not done away with altogether, at least on the part of the scheming player, whose job it is to produce for the narrative desired game outcomes that lead to sex scenes. This does not mean that these games are no longer games. Nonetheless, it does shed light on the main function of these not-explicitly-sexual games in erotica: they are means to produce erotic content. On the other hand, even though these games may not be explicitly erotic, when used as a sort of foreplay for the sex acts they lead to, they can be tinged with sexual energies that may appeal to the reader. Moreover, even if these games remain totally unsexual, as devices deployed to push forward plots and create fiction, they may still appeal to the reader, who may take pleasure not only in erotic games but also in (fiction) reading itself.

In contrast with games with rules, the role-playing games examined above are marked by greater uncertainty, which indeed is a crucial part of these games' appeal, to both the players and the reader. While nonsexual games with rules often function to lead to "real" sex scenes, "make-believe" games—sexual games with rules, too, for that matter—are erotically appealing in themselves. In all the cases examined above—a shrewd maid's role-play as a man in an "educational" game with her innocent mistress (*Langshi*), a "pretend" game a lonely newlywed "signs up" for with an older woman, who is secretly replaced by a new player ("Jiang Xingge"), and a triangular relationship in which one of the players constantly switches between male and female roles (*Chundeng nao*), role-playing constitutes the sex content these narratives present to the reader. These role-playing games all bear the characteristics of uncertainty Caillois describes: "the course . . . cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative."[49] Even for schemers, such as Chen in "Jiang Xingge," the situation is uncertain. As there are no manipulatable rules, there seems to be greater uncertainty than in games governed by rules, as how the play will go depends on how the victims will react and if or how these victims will turn themselves into

players. (This points back to the discussion of Sanqiao'er's ambiguous status as victim and adulteress.) One could argue that such uncertainty spices up the narrative and even titillates the reader.

Even though improvised games such as the "spring feeling" card game in *Rou putuan* are derived from nonsexual games with rules, in terms of appeal, they share more affinity with role-playing games, as they are also sexually appealing in themselves. They do not have to lead to sex scenes in order to function; they constitute sex scenes themselves. Ultimately, despite differences in the concrete ways in which all these kinds of games contribute to the narrative, boundaries between them will collapse if we recognize that they share the same main function: with the unrealities they generate, they facilitate the narrative's overall supply of erotic titillation and enhance the variety of sexual vignettes, motifs, and themes.

Notes

1. In scholarship on the obsession with sensual subject matters in the late imperial China, historians and literature scholars approach the phenomenon from various angles. Focusing on intertwined discourses of *qing* (desire or passion) and *zhen* (authenticity), some treat the explosion of Ming-Qing literary depictions of desire and love as a reaction to the repressive tenets of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. See, for example, Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 117–26. Some situate the period's fascination with desire, passion, and sexuality in the context of literati culture and social networking. See Giovanni Vitiello, *The Libertine's Friend: Homosexuality and Masculinity in Late Imperial China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and Volpp, *Worldly Stage*, particularly the chapter "The Literary Consumptions of Actors in Seventeenth-Century China." As youthful female sexuality is highly visible in Ming-Qing fiction, some scholars pay particular attention to women's culture. See, for example, Ellen Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy and the Place of the Woman Writer in Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China* 13, no. 1 (1992), 111–55, which studies Feng Xiaoqing, a late Ming woman known for her literary talent, unfortunate life, and obsession with Tang Xianzu's (1550–1616) *Mudan ting* (Peony Pavilion). Some scholars examine Ming-Qing sexual arrangements by examining the institution of marriage, with focus on polygamy and polygyny (see Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and*

Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995], while others turn to late imperial juridical system and actual legal cases (see Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000], and Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005]. A recent study of late Ming flourishing of pornographic works emphasizes the close ties between "pornographic expression" and "urban commoners and their habits of literary consumption." See Wu Cuncun, "Pornographic Modes of Expression and Nascent Chinese Modernity in Late Imperial China," *Modernism/Modernity Print Plus* 1, no. 3 (2016).

2. Richard Wang's *Ming Erotic Novellas: Genre, Consumption, and Religiosity in Cultural Practice* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011) includes a chapter (chapter 1, "The Ming Novella as a New Genre") on characteristics of the Ming novella, even though these characteristics—direct speech, for instance—are not specific to erotic novellas.

3. Some of the most helpful remarks on characteristics of the Ming-Qing erotic appear in Patrick Hanan's short introduction to his English translation of *Rou putuan*. See Patrick Hanan, trans., *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1988), v–xiv.

4. James Cahill's online manuscript *Chinese Erotic Painting* includes a chapter entitled "Three Recurring Themes in the Part-Erotic Albums," which studies the recurring themes of "voyeurism," "deceiving the wife," and "love in the garden." See https://jamescahill.info.

5. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1961), 9–10.

6. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 8–9.

7. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 8–9.

8. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 8.

9. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 8.

10. Caillois classifies games into four main categories: *agôn*, which relies on competition; *alea*, which relies on chance or destiny; *mimicry*, which relies on "make-believe," and, finally, *ilinx*, which relies on shock. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 14–26.

11. Caillois, 12–13, offers the same warning.

12. Here I examine drinking games as only one type of games with rules commonly featured in late imperial erotica. For a fuller discussion of late imperial representation of drinking games and their role in gendered and sexually charged spaces, see Li Guo's chapter on the Qing author Yu Da's *The Dream in the Green Bower* in this volume.

13. For a useful discussion of the author Lü Tiancheng and the elite cultural environment in which Lü wrote the novel, see Wilt Idema, "'Blasé Literati': Lü T'ien-ch'eng and the Lifestyle of the Chiang-nan Elite in the Final Decades of the Wan-Li Period," in *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period: With an Essay on Chinese Sex Life from the Han to the Ch'ing Dynasty, B.C. 206–A.D. 1644*, ed. Robert Hans van Gulik (Leiden: Brill, 2004), xxxi–lix.

14. Lü Tiancheng, *Xiuta yeshi*, vol. 2 of *Siwuxie huibao*, edited by Chen Qinghao and Wang Qiugui (Taipei: Taiwan Daying Baike, 1995), 296. Although *jikouling* is not an explicitly erotic game, the strong physical orality it involves points to a subtle link between the verbal and the sexual. I thank the anonymous reader of this essay for suggesting this interesting point.

15. This novel is attributed to a Fengyuexuan Youxuanzi.

16. Late Ming and early Qing erotica often describes sex in military or competitive terms. Examples can be found in works such as Wuzhe Daoren, *Hailing yishi*, vol. 1 of *Siwuxie huibao*, ed. Chen Qinghao and Wang Qiugui (Taipei: Taiwan Daying Baike, 1995), and *Jin Ping Mei*.

17. I am indebted to the anonymous reader for the idea of games as "foreplay" in erotic fiction.

18. I use Patrick Hanan's English translations of the characters' names. Quotations are also from Hanan's translation.

19. Li Yu, *Rou putuan*, vol. 15 of Siwuxie huibao, ed. Chen Qinghao and Wang Qiugui (Taipei: Taiwan Daying Baike, 1995), 441; Patrick Hanan, trans., *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, 264.

20. Li Yu, *Rou putuan*, 441.

21. Li Yu, *Rou putuan*, 450.

22. I thank the anonymous reader for the point on the role of the male protagonist, the male author, and the male reader.

23. All these are commonly found themes in Ming-Qing erotic fiction, particularly in full-length works, for instance, the late Ming novel *Jin Ping Mei*.

24. Examples of the erotica-in-erotica convention can be found in numerous late imperial works, including *Rouputuan*, *Hailing yishi*, *Langshi*, and *Xiuta yeshi*, to name just a few. For a detailed discussion of the convention, see Jie Guo, "Erotica in Erotica: Adaptation and Somatic Translation in Late Imperial Chinese Erotic Culture," in *Erotic Literature in Translation and Adaptation*, ed. Johannes Kaminski (Cambridge: Legenda, 2018), 110–124.

25. James Cahill, "Introduction," in Robert Hans van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period: With an Essay on Chinese Sex Life from the Han to the Ch'ing Dynasty, B.C. 206–A.D. 1644* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), xxiii.

26. To my knowledge, this is the only mention of such erotic playing cards in

Ming-Qing literature. For Li Yu's inventiveness in literary creation as well as his "self-invention," see Patrick Hanan, *Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

27. For all quotations from the novel, I use David Roy's translation. In his translation, Roy adopts the Wade-Giles romanization system. To avoid confusion, I convert all names using the pinyin system.

28. David Roy, trans. *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei*, vol. 1–5 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993–2013), 145; Mei Jie, ed., *Jin Ping Mei cihua* (Taipei: Liren Shuju, 2007), 392.

29. Mei, *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, 392.

30. I thank my anonymous reader for pointing out the relevance of wordplay to the idea of playfulness.

31. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 19.

32. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 8.

33. Fengyue xuan youxuanzi, *Langshi*, in vol. 4 of *Siwuxie huibao*, edited by Chen Qinghao and Wang Qiugui (Taipei: Taiwan Daying Baike, 1995), 97.

34. Fengyue xuan youxuanzi, *Langshi,* 98.

35. See Fengyue xuan youxuanzi, *Langshi*, chapter 15.

36. It is interesting to note that Granny Xue's storytelling is nested within the narrator's; this "nested structure" echoes the convention of "erotica in erotica," which is commonly found in Ming-Qing erotic fiction. I thank the anonymous reader for calling my attention to the doubling of storytelling here.

37. Feng Menglong, "Jiang Xingge chonghui zhenzhushan," in *Yushi mingyan* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1995), 22.

38. Feng, "Jiang Xingge," 23.

39. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 6, 9.

40. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 6, 9.

41. This novel is attributed to a Zuili yanshui sanren, who, according to Chen Qinghao and Wang Qiugui, lived in the late Ming and early Qing period—see "Publications Notes" in Zuili yanshui sanren, *Chundeng nao*, in vol. 18 of Siwuxie huibao, edited by Chen Qinghao and Wang Qiugui (Taipei: Taiwan Daying Baike, 1995), 229.

42. Zuili yanshui sanren, *Chundeng nao*, 274–75.

43. Zuili yanshui sanren, *Chundeng nao*, 275.

44. Zuili yanshui sanren, *Chundeng nao*, 276.

45. Zuili yanshui sanren, *Chundeng nao*, 277.

46. See Keith McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010).

47. The other two chapters in this section of the volume, by Patricia Sieber and

Li Guo respectively, also explore gendered representations of games in imperial China. Their discussion resonates with the idea that games are never played or represented in ideological, discursive, or cultural vacuum.

48. Greg Costikyan, *Uncertainty in Games* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 9, 2.

49. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 9.

6

The Courtesans' Drinking Games in The Dream in the Green Bower

LI GUO

Women's experiments with drinking games (*jiuling*) and portrayals of courtesans as ludic heroines are themes in *The Dream in the Green Bower* (Qinglou meng; preface 1878), a novel by Yu Da (?–1884). The prevalence of drinking games in late Qing fiction reflects the literati's pursuit of pleasure ranging from private or familial undertakings among the privileged class to broad engagement of the reading public of the time.[1] Catering to this growing "community of fun," novelists Li Boyuan (1867–1906) and Sun Yusheng (1864–1940) designed literary drinking games to facilitate merry-making at parties, to which many devoted readers made contributions.[2] This "new culture of fun" is represented in the activities of courtesans in *Green Bower*. Their reinvention of drinking games reflects literati-influenced urban leisure aesthetics, including women fashioned as "more attuned to the conditions for pleasurable leisure," for that "leisure time/space has a closer affinity to women."[3] In this ludic culture, courtesans engaged with literary drinking games amid interlocking aspects of social circumstances, individual autonomy, and shared sentiments. Whereas the seminal novel *Flowers in the Mirror* (Jinghua yuan, 1828) emphasizes the talented heroines' practice in drawing from classical texts and distinguishing moral boundaries in game play, in Yu's text, the drinking games highlight the courtesans' sensual poems and their creative combinations of classic texts with popular verbal elements. The courtesans' reinvented drinking games

introduce readers to a mesmerizing social tableau of game, leisure, and entertainment.

The ludic self, as this volume's introduction observes, is "a *subject-in-process* at the margin of diverse social, cultural, and literary imaginaries and is under constant reconstruction and reinvention." In the domain of play, Roger Caillois identifies four types of games: *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*. *Agôn* refers to a group of games that are competitive, in which game players participate in the game given equal chances. The winner excels because of "a single quality (speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity, etc.), exercised, within defined limits and without outside assistance."[4] In contrast to *agôn*, *alea* refers to games that are dependent on chance and fortune, with destiny as "the sole artisan of victory."[5] *Agôn* prioritizes skill, work, and professionalization. *Alea* negates such qualities, as well as individual free will, and instead highlights "a surrender to destiny."[6] Whether in the context of *agôn* (roughly equivalent to games of skill) or *alea* (games of chance), players are bound to follow a set of arbitrary rules that force them to refine their skills, ethics, and fortitude.

The novel *Qinglou meng* permits the hero and his cultured heroines varied forms of ludic participation, from formulaic drinking games to elaborate narrative game play, while delineating the inescapable restraints on their actions in the game world. The story recounts the scholar Jin Yixiang's broad socialization with thirty-six courtesans, his social ascent through success in the civil exam, and his final reunion with the courtesans in the immortal realm. Initially, Yixiang and leading heroine Niu Aiqing are reincarnations of the Golden Child (Jintong) and Jade Fairy (Yunü) under the governance of the Divinity of Dispersed Flowers (Sanhua Yuanzhu); both are punished by having to descend to earth to eliminate their *qing* (emotions). The thirty-six courtesans are reincarnated fairies who are born to cast the spell of temptations on Yixiang and to demonstrate for him the impermanence of secular love. The novel illustrates the ludic world of the courtesans, which embraces literacy and artistry, and provides emotional sustenance to the literatus. Drinking games between Yixiang and the courtesans occur in more than two-thirds of the sixty-four chapters. The cultured courtesans are often rule makers in the game play and actively engage in negotiations with diverse tastes, class backgrounds, and moral aesthetics of femininity, and contribute to shared pleasures of reading as

playing. If fiction writing itself is equated with a narrative game, the closure of the novel in the Buddhist state of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) in *Qinglou meng* highlights the idle aspect of game play. When narrative transactions are completed and characters' destined voyages have come to an end, readers are reduced to a narrative situation akin to the beginning of the story or game, with no new meanings inscribed.

Game of Talent, Game of Skill

The close associations of drinking games with literary creations are richly reflected in the genre of *quzi ci* (lyrics composed to a tune with a fixed tune title) of the Sui Tang and Five Dynasties periods (581–960 CE), the subgenre of *xiaoling* (short *ci* poem) in the *ci* poetry of the Song dynasty, and *sanqu* (song poems) of the Yuan dynasty.[7] The seminal *Honglou meng* provides rich examples of women and men playing drinking games using diverse wine-drinking rules. Classic works inspired numerous inventions of drinking games. The collection *Xixiang jiuling* (*Romance of the Western Chamber Drinking Games,* preface dated 1816) anthologizes three hundred tallies on drinking-game chips, drawing from the lines in the play *Xixiang ji*. In the late Qing collection *Honglou ren jing* (*Mirrors of the Persons in Dreams of the Red Chamber*), every stick has inscriptions of a character's name from Cao Xueqin's novel, lines from the lyrics in *Xixiang ji*, and directions for drinking. Building on the intertextually and intermediary incorporations of operatic expressions in *Honglou meng*, the collection further devises games that channel late imperial readers' creative engagement with classic texts.

Celebratory scenes of drinking games recall Bakhtin's notion of the carnival mode in folk culture since they allow characters' dialogues to "rise above the plot" in a relatively detached linguistic and aesthetic sphere. For Bakhtin, carnival laughter is "a profoundly universal laughter, a laughter that contains a whole outlook on the world."[8] In *Jinghua yuan*, the chapters illustrating learned women's drinking games depict how their ludic endeavors enrich the narrative tableau through polyphonic interventions and laughter. In the ludic world, literary drinking games open spaces of gaiety and play. Much of the joy of the heroines' game play comes from displaying their knowledge of fundamental texts, their aptitude for poetry, and their skill in commanding vernacular narratives. A prominent scene

is in chapter 82. The characters draw out one of a hundred wooden sticks from a barrel, each inscribed with a specific wine-game command. The first player gives a command based on the popular *shuangsheng* (twin sounds, or alliterations) and *dieyun* (rhyming compounds) games, as follows:

> All we need are about forty to fifty wooden sticks, each inscribed with phrases about cosmology, geography, birds and animals, insects and fish, fruits and trees, flowers, and plants. Next to the inscribed phrase, two characters should be added, either "twin sounds" or "rhyming compounds." If one picks a stick on "cosmology rhyming compounds," she shall find a cosmological phrase that carries rhyming compounds. Afterwards, the player should cite a line from classics, histories, philosophers, and collections. Then the player chooses a main word in the cited line to command another to take a drink, either using the beginning character or the ending character. At the end of the line, the next player should take a drink and continue the game.[9]

The actual play of this game, however, involves even more elaborations to help the participants consume more wine. A maiden proposes to heighten the game's difficulty. She requires that the hundred players link their lines by connecting with the previous player's line through twin sounds or rhyming compounds, as if all the lines are continuously composed. Below are some of the first examples from the players of this complicated game:

1. 花卉雙聲: 長春《列子》荊之南有冥靈者，以五百歲為春。‘冥靈’疊韻，敬瑞春姐姐一杯.[10]
   Flower names twin sounds:
   Eternal Spring flower; *The Book of Liezi*; South of Jing there is the *mingling* tree, it regards five hundred years as spring. *Mingling* rhyming compounds. A toast to Sister Ruichun.

2. 古人名疊韻: 王祥《張河間集》備致嘉祥。‘備致’疊韻，敬祥蓂姐姐一杯。[11]
   Ancient people's names rhyming compounds:
   Wang Xiang; *Collection of Zhang Hejian*; preparing to welcome an auspicious sign. "Beizhi" (preparing to welcome) rhyming compounds. A toast to Sister Xiangming.

3. 古人名疊韻: 張良屈原《九歌》吉日兮良辰。‘吉日’疊韻，敬良箴姐姐一杯。[12]

Ancient people's names rhyming compounds:

Zhang Liang; Qu Yuan *Nine Songs*; on this auspicious day, this best of times. "Jiri" (auspicious day) rhyming compounds. A toast to Sister Liang Zhen.

4. 列女名雙聲：姬姜《鮑參軍集》東都妙姬，南國麗人.‘東都’雙聲，敬麗輝姐姐一杯。[13]

Names in *Exemplary Women* twin sounds:

Ji Jiang; *Collected Works of Bao the Adjutant;* lovely consorts from the eastern capital, beauties from the southern states. "Dongdu" (Eastern Capital) twin sounds. A toast to Sister Lihui.

TABLE 6.1. A literary drinking game based on the popular *shuangsheng* (twin sounds, or alliterations) and *dieyun* (rhyming compound) games.

Line	*Twin sounds*	*Rhyming compounds*	*Twin sound or rhyme taken from the previous line*	*Name of the next game player, which contains a character in the first part of the same line*
1.	長春	冥靈	___.	瑞春, containing 春, resonating with 长春
2.		王祥 備致	[ang] in 長 in the first line, used in 王祥 in the second line	祥蓂, containing 祥, resonating with 王祥
3.		張良 吉日	[ang] in 王祥 in the second line, used in 張良 in the third line; [i] as in 備致 in the second line, used in 吉日 in the third line.	良箴, containing 良, resonating with 張良
4.	姬姜 東都		[ji] in吉日 in the third line, used in 姬姜 in the fourth line	麗輝, containing 麗, resonating with 麗人

As table 6.1 shows, following the flower's name Changchun (Eternal Spring), the next two players who pick ancient people's names with rhyming compounds choose Wang Xiang and Zhang Liang. Wang Xiang carries rhyming compounds with Chang Chun in the previous line, and Zhang Liang shares rhyming compounds with Wang Xiang. In the fourth example, following the instruction on the stick, the name Ji Jiang contains an alliteration, and it shares rhyming compounds with the previous name, Zhang Liang. Also, a player chooses a character in the quoted classic text that is in the name of one of the attendants, thus selecting the next player. "Chun" 春 in line one appears in the name of Ruichun 瑞春, who is designated as the second player. Ruichun chooses the character Xiang 祥, which is in the name of a girl called Xiangming 祥蓂, making her the third player. The third player, Liangzhen 良箴, and the fourth player, Lihui 麗輝, are chosen in a similar manner.

As part of the game rules, books cited by previous players should not be alluded to again. Considering that not all classic texts contain many twin sounds or rhyming compounds, repetitive allusions to the same text are allowed with a cost (of wine-drinking). Specific rules prevent players from copying others' ideas. Those who expose their ideas to others are punished by being required to take ten giant ewers of wine. When a player fails to create a correct line, a challenge may lead to a dramatic presentation of the player's knowledge beyond the designations of female talent and allow her to make amendments and to continue the game at a more difficult level. As Stephen Roddy argues, the heroines in *Jinghua yuan* incorporate "scholarship within a framework of games."[14] Just as playing with sound permits the heroines to recognize literati traditions, drinking games allow the heroines to participate in role-play, guess riddles, emulate classical texts, and even foretell the destinies of other players. The heroines' drinking games illustrate women's self-empowerment through language and expand understandings of the learned women beyond established discursive descriptions.

Envisioning the Ludic Heroine

Yu Da's novel *Qinglou meng* constructs an idealized perception of another group of ludic heroines, that is, the urban courtesans, who are epitomized by literacy, aesthetic tastes, and artfulness in eliciting pleasure. Resonating

with Bakhtin's polyphonic novel, Yu's work presents drinking games that grant the characters the "equality of utterance," allowing them to distance themselves from their social circumstances and to participate in the egalitarian process of game-playing. Contradicting voices enhance the pleasure among the players; witty or teasing explications yield amusement among the players and their diegetic audiences. The abundant variety of the courtesans' games can be related to the late imperial trend of training maids in art and entertainment. Chloë Starr observes that the drinking game episodes in late Qing novel *Huayue hen* (Traces of flowers and the moon, preface 1858) are "clustered" with a regular periodicity to illustrate an idyllic vision of the courtesan's emotional world. *Qinglou meng* likewise arranges drinking games in the narrative to mimic the rituals of life for the scholars and the courtesans. Drinking games create an imaginary spatiotemporal site where the players are distanced from their social circumstances and re-envision their own worth and mutual relations in the ludic world.

Reminiscent of Jia Baoyu's residence Yihong yuan (literally, "Pleasing Red House") in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Yu Da's Plucking Green Garden is an imagined space of leisure for the girls, as "green" connects directly to the Green Bower. Yixiang, described as "a gentleman with *qing*," socializes with the courtesans and insists that among the singsong girls "there are many with true affections."[15] The courtesans express their emotive competence through poetic exchanges with scholars in "fragrant and bedazzling poems" (*xiangyan shi*), which, unlike the barren and bland words of scholars, "are as lofty as bright snows in the early spring."[16] Often such ornate poems are embedded in drinking games, which engage courtesans and literati as equals during the temporal and spatial setting of the game. A game demands participants acquiesce to its rules and inhabit a ludic environment of simulated fairness, despite the game players' real social identities. In the ludic world a player's intellect receives applause and endorsement, but "humiliations are also immediate and public."[17] The courtesans' drinking games create spaces of leisure, whereas the participants' playfulness constantly reconfigures these spaces.

As Rudolf Wagner and Catherine Yeh argue, "leisure is a gendered time/space," and "in time/spaces with joint activities, the egalitarian utopia of leisure gives women more prominence in determining content than in other decision-making fields."[18] In Yu's novel the exchanges between Yixiang

and the courtesans operate with the premise of *qing*, or mutual affection. However, aside from the few Yixiang marries, his connections with most heroines are temporary social relations of leisure. Their mutual emotional commitment does not carry restrictions; a courtesan may choose to marry a patron if the patron can buy her freedom. The courtesans' less attached economic bonds with the patron permit the girls autonomy and self-rule. Whereas the courtesans take advantage of the games to display their skill, poetic sensibility, and taste, the scholar Yixiang often resorts to the spirit of *alea* to seek intimacy from his genteel rivals. In chapter 15, Yixiang and a friend of his dress up as beggars to meet the courtesans and borrow travel money from them in order to test the heroines' character.[19] This game of *alea* succeeds in helping Yixiang win the hearts of two courtesans. However, the game of *alea* may also work against the hero. Once, having lost many times in the drinking games and taken wine excessively, the tipsy Yixiang attempts to summon a spirit of a peony flower, who, attracted by his talent, meets him in a dream. The following night, the peony spirit visits again, only to inform Yixiang that she has been punished by the Flower Goddess for seducing the patron and is banished from the garden.[20] The episode ends with the fairy vanishing as a wind in a thunderstorm and Yixiang awakening in shock. This example is a combined situation of *alea-ilinx*, or *chance-vertigo*, illustrated by the enchanted Yixiang and his failure to obtain the flower spirit.

Throughout *Qinglou meng*, the drinking games' allusions to characters in *Honglou meng* feature mimicry by "playing the linked verse game facing the snow" (*duixue lianju*), forming the plum-themed poetry club, or composing poems that compare the courtesans to Cao Xueqin's famous heroines.[21] Whereas Yixiang good-humoredly compares himself to the amorous Baoyu, the drinking games ironically foreshadow Yixiang's fleeting relationships with the courtesans. Yixiang's recurrent anguish comes from his incapacity to accept such uncertainties in his fluid entanglements with the courtesans. The protagonist is by no means "a good player" who faces unfortunate outcomes with objectivity and detachment.[22] His frequent entrancement by wine and beauty introduces a corruption of *ilinx* and nullifies the willpower of *agôn*. Unlike Yixiang, the sophisticated courtesans are aware of the capriciousness of their bonds with patrons and of patrons' lack of emotional consistency as part of the game's rules. A

heroine, Aiqing, even emerges as the winner in a game of chance by first pretending to decline Yixiang's marriage proposal but later accepting it with the assistance of an intermediary.

Because of this predestined bond with Yixiang, Aiqing's triumph in marriage is a situation of *alea* (chance). In contrast with Aiqing, the thirty-six beauties are largely introduced in the spirit of *ludus* to highlight the scholar's life of idleness and insouciance. The sense of leisure, even ennui, in Yixiang and the courtesans' frequent banquets and elaborate game playing invites a reconsideration of the concept of *ludus*, that is, "the primitive desire to find diversion and amusement in arbitrary, perpetually recurrent obstacles."[23] Unlike *agôn,* which entails tense competition with a rival, *ludus* often engages game play as a device to dispel boredom.[24] The dreamlike world of leisure, as illustrated in *Qinglou meng*, creates an elusive and self-contained space where characters' destinations depend on a variety of attributes, whether skill or chance, romance or wealth. Games, whether the drinking games in the text or the novel itself as a prototypical game, depend on absolute and arbitrary rules; only by accepting these rules can the players find meaning in game play. In *Qinglou meng*, the game-like rapport between courtesans and literati is often lost when the affectionate Yixiang fails to realize the unreality of the romance. The heroines represent the freedom in play. They play only when they wish to and enjoy the autonomy to leave the game as they wish.

Like the drinking game, the literatus' bond with the reincarnated fairies is no less than a game that "consists of the need to find or continue at once a response *which is free within the limits set by the rules*."[25] Complying with the rules of the games means accepting the arbitrary, oppressive aspects of rules in the game's illusive world. Although game play configurations can be similar to reality, "the respective activities that they subsume are not reducible to each other in time or place."[26] A qualified player can identify the distance between make-believe and reality, between life and play. The ending of the narrative intersects with the closure of Yu's narrative game when the Moon Immortal bestows each of the returned spirits of the thirty-six beauties, as well as Yixiang and Aiqing, with a magic pellet to eliminate their *qing*. When Yixiang takes the pellet, "Aiqing appears to him just as a stranger and could not evoke any of his feelings."[27] The elimination of the characters' *qing* breaks the spell of their games of romance, allowing

the protagonists and readers to perceive that love and emotions are but illusions, while dictating the closure of the narrative.

As Jie Guo observes in her chapter on games in Ming-Qing erotica, games allow readers to intermix the unreality of the game world with the complex plots of the narrative artifice. In a final episode, *Qinglou meng* encapsulates its own narrative game in a Buddhist elucidation. "The book takes the word *qing* (feelings, emotions) as a wedge to lift up the plot, deploys *kong* (emptiness) to evoke the theme of *se* (form) in *qing*, and ultimately applies *se* to resolve the innate emptiness of *qing*."[28] If the novel is a ludic pastime, the dialectics between *qing* and *se* here is playfully spatialized through the idea of *kong* (emptiness). When read in the milieu of game studies, "emptiness" is none other than a kernel of play, which Caillois argues is "unproductive."[29] Play (be it the novel as a game of narrativization or Yixiang's game of romance) does not generate new values. Instead, it mostly exchanges belongings between players and often ends in a situation similar to the beginning of the game.

Regulating *Qing* in Game Play

Drinking games play an important role in facilitating the exchange of *qing* between the scholars, who are on the path to officialdom, and the learned courtesans, who are often themselves competent poets. Yixiang's socializing with the courtesans is modeled after the Twelve Golden Hairpins in *Honglou meng*, with Yixiang playing the role of Jia Baoyu. In a trend of reinventing *Honglou meng* in late Qing novels, the hero fashions himself as an admirer of Baoyu and the compassionate patron of courtesans.[30] The mutual affection of literati and courtesans could be identified in the Qing literati's trope of articulating the decline in their power and glory through nostalgic remembrance of late Ming courtesans. In *Qinglou meng*, narrative sympathy channeled through game play is based on the characters' shared emotional experiences. Sympathy encompasses emotive, bodily, and mythical transmission of feelings and facilitates characters' self-image and identification with others.[31] Through shifting speakers and registers, literary drinking games facilitate exchanges of moral sentiments and sympathetic understanding.

As an expanded narrative game, the novel depends on *qing* to precipitate

or delay the reincarnated characters' journeys toward moral redemption and their return to immortality. When Yixiang witnesses the deaths and departures of most singsong girls and becomes averse to *qing*, a Daoist priest demonstrates for him fake and real *qing*. According to the priest, there are six kinds of *qing*, including *chiqing* (keenness), *zhenqing* (sincere feelings), *huanqing* (joviality in gathering), *liqing* (longings upon separation), *chouqing* (helpless sorrow), and *beiqing* (agonizing memories).[32] As "a most affectionate person," Yixiang's journey in the realm of *qing* surrenders to fate—a game of *alea*. Yet, as the priest explains, keenness (*chiqing*) gives birth to sincerity (*zhenqing*); sincerity accounts for the trueness of jovial love (*huanqing*). Joviality foreshadows the griefs of departures (*liqing*) and helpless sorrow (*chouqing*). Together they culminate in agonizing recollections (*chouqing*).[33] *Qing*, rather than being a device of fortune or a stake in romance, is implicit in the rules of the game; it governs the process of game play, testing characters' prudence and tenacity, imposing uncertainties, forcing the amorous to succumb to worldly vicissitudes.

Rules and conventions in drinking games contribute to emotive exchanges between the players, establishing a sympathetic equilibrium between them. The poems the courtesans compose are described as ornate and luxuriant in style, excelling in the genre of *xiangyan* (fragrant and bedazzling), displaying a delicate balance between *qing* (love and affections) and *se* (desire), deploying a broad variety of rhyming patterns. The term *xianglian ti* can be traced to Han Wo's (844–923) *Collection of the Scented Dress-Case* (Xianglian ji). Li Xiaorong observes that the "scented dress-case style" refers to "poetry devoted to the aesthetic and erotic appreciation of woman's image and the boudoir scene."[34] In Yu Da's text, scented dress-case poems display the heroines' moderation between emotive self-expression and ritual decorum. The games using scented dress-case poems allow characters of both genders to express emotional longing. In a drinking game with Yixiang about poetry composition, Aiqing composes the following lines:

> Seated in the red chamber and not yet married,
> she is like a beautiful jade hidden in a case, pure and flawless.
> Her sister-in-law is elder and must be more knowledgeable,
> the abashed girl wears a magnolia flower in her cloud-like hair.[35]

Applauding Aiqing's poem for "seizing the girl's fragrance and vibrancy, making the beauty alluring," the mischievous Yixiang inquires why the beauty is "abashed," and then realizes that the magnolia flower, or *yehe hua*, is a pun on "a nocturnal union" between the lovers, indicating sexual intimacy. As the game goes on, the enamored Yixiang becomes more eager, his poems more erotic. The poised Aiqing teases him with the following poem:

New poems fill up my Xue Tao papers,
Radiant are the flowers, full is the moon.
Do not spare this fine moment,
My lord, do not slumber away this evening.[36]

The transformation of drinking games in *xianglian* poetry exchanges demonstrates the characters' negotiations of emotion and decorum, affection and desire, and indicates the courtesans' connoisseurship of a broad array of poetic rhymes and creative development of feminine writings. The drinking games permit Aiqing to deploy her learning and dexterity to enhance entertainment, display her aptitude, and maintain a spiritual bond with Yixiang. This example illustrates Aiqing's competency in a game of *agôn*. When poetry writing becomes a game of skill, it allows Aiqing to regulate her companion and his longings.

The courtesans' drinking games permit them a means of reconfiguring the legacy of women's poetry. The same chapter illustrates Yixiang and the beauties socializing in the grand Plucking Green Garden. After playing a finger-guessing game with all attending the gathering, Yixiang, seeing that there are seven people at the table, proposes a poetry drinking game of *meiren qiyong* (seven odes to the beauty). The evaluation of these poems follows the *xianglian* genre. As Yixiang puts it, "Only when a poem fits both emotions and reason, could it be considered as a *xianglian* poem."[37] He applauds various aspects of the courtesans' poems, such as "subtle application of allusions, achieving a natural and expedient style," or "producing a savoring poetic taste and breaking a new path." The following poem by Aiqing is praised for being "refined and appropriate, fragrant in style and deeply moving."[38]

Bright moonlight, paper gauze, plum flower shadows,
On the pillow, an aromatic soul charms the butterflies.

Even the parrot is like thee, languishing.
Wary not to stir the lady, he rests still and silent.

As this example displays, drinking games via the mode of *xianglian* allow the courtesans to make feminine physicality, sensuality, and psychological activity the subject of playful writing.[39] Han Wo's description of urban women in his *xianglian* poems allows women to speak via men, and the *xianglian* mode in the courtesans' games builds on this tradition by enabling the heroines to rewrite an urban femininity and inscribe their longings and aesthetic sensitivities. As a playful mode of writing, *xianglian* poetry has been denounced as a wasteful digression, which, like other ludic literatures, is adopted by "government courtesans" (*guanji*) to deplete a scholar's talent and prevent him from criticizing military and state affairs, politics, and society in his writings.[40] As a form of game play, *xianglian* poetry inscribes the central role of courtesans as ludic participants and highlights gendered performance as an integral element of gaming aptitude. To write in the mode of *xianglian* may be to engage in a combined game of *agôn-mimicry* (or competition-simulation). In a poetry competition, the adjudication of a good *xianglian* poem, as Aiqing presents, depends on the conditions of *agôn* (efficacious skills, erudition, reason, obedience to conventions), but also involves mimicry (simulated roles, spectatorship, carnival, or mirth).

Drinking games in the text are initially games of skill designed to test the game players' learning, ingenuity, and ability to identify or draw from classical poetry, music, or riddles. However, poetic lines created from the games may frequently "bleed across the boundaries of that magic circle to reference the actual person playing, their real circumstances."[41] For example, chapter 5 depicts three scholars gathering with twelve beauties at a banquet and exploring an "elaborate drinking game" (*qiaoling*), with the twelve heroines emulating the Twelve Golden Hairpins in *Honglou meng*. The rules of the game are as follows:

> This drinking game requires three proverbs. The first cites from *The Book of Songs*, the second line is the name of a *qupai* melody, the last one concludes with a line of an ancient poem which shall contain the character "flower." The play counts the head of everyone at the table, starting from the first character of the poem. The one who is counted when the character "flower" is uttered will take over the game, have a drink, and replay the game.[42]

The lines created to answer the game's rules create a situation of narrative mise en abyme by allowing the characters to generate puns and create teasing humor. A girl, Yuesu, when answering the command, says, "Is it tonight or which night? Three scholars, in one day shall see all the flowers of Chang An" (今夕何夕，三學士，一日看遍長安花).[43] Alluding to Meng Jiao (751–814), who composed this poem after his success in the civil exam, Yuesu creates a pleasing epiphany that addresses the scholars' connoisseurship of feminine beauty and foreshadows their felicitous pursuit of officialdom. The jovial audiences at the banquet occasionally also add playful interpretations to insinuate eroticism. When Huiqiong takes her turn to drink, she dedicates a line to the previous player, Yuesu: "And how gaily I laughed and talked, ascending the stairs. Tipsy, I pluck a flower branch and take it as a wine straw" (載笑載言，上小樓，醉折花枝當酒籌).[44] Mocking Yuesu for "being beside herself" with smiles and words because of wine, the naughty Huiqiong implies Yuesu's desire for intimacy, eliciting laughter from all at the banquet. In game play, laughter signals what Caillois calls *paidia*, "a primary power of improvisation and joy," a "spontaneous manifestation of the play instinct."[45] *Paidia* is allied with *ludus*, another component of play. Whereas *paidia* represents uncontrolled fantasy or laughter, *ludus* disciplines *paidia* and emphasizes effort, skill, and training in play.[46] *Paidia* and *ludus* are two parameters underlying the rubrics of play. Huiqiong's poem makes Yuesu an embodiment of *paidia*, with a power of merry diversion.

The text also offers many examples of games of chance, particularly games that are combined with gambling and allow playful diversion. In one Yixiang plays a variation of an old dice game with the girls. The dice in the basin (covered by a cup) are laid out in advance in a certain format. A line of an ancient poem is used to make the player guess the layout of the dice.[47] When Yuesu gives the line "when the blossoming apricots of ten *li* come to his view" (一色杏花紅十里), Yixiang makes the right guess that the dice pattern is "five dice showing number two, and the last one showing number four" (二五子四點).[48] The following line, "The First Scholar urges his charger to bear him with speed" (狀元歸去馬上飛), carries an auspicious indication about the hero's success in the civil exam.[49] Yixiang, having deciphered the dice pattern and Yuesu's wishes, suggests naming the game *tongxin ling* (same-heart drinking game) to indicate his appreciation of Yuesu's understanding. The imperative of *qing* is reinforced through the

ludic conventions and establishes an emotional equilibrium between the courtesan and the scholar. In exchange for Yuesu's sympathy for Yixiang's situations in the game and in the quest for fame and fortune, she earns a pledge of love from him.

Whereas *qing* governs the characters' emotional exchanges in the ludic sphere, riddles and proverbs are often used to create mirthful, lighthearted, and playable games, denoting the power of *paidia*. In chapter 45, Yixiang and twelve beauties are at a banquet on a boat and play a popular game to add entertainment to wine drinking. The game is as follows: "The player first gives a lantern riddle, the answer of which is a line from the *Four Books*, and concludes with two proverbs. All three parts need to be consistent in subject."[50] This blended game allows the heroines to match classical texts with vernacular expressions of resonant circumstances, creating a hybrid textuality that bespeaks the heroines' novelty and humor. What follows are a few intriguing lines created by the courtesans.[51]

> 上不在上，下不在下，左不在左，右不在右—不偏之謂中。諺語云：四面勿著實，記記打來鼓當中.
>
> Up not above, down not below, left not on the left, right not on the right. —Not to be inclined to one side is called hitting the center. The proverb goes: do not put weight on the four sides, make every strike at the center of the drum.[52]

> 楊君脬大無醫治，宰去嘐嘐始獲安—殺雞。諺語麼，只管羊卵子，不管羊性命。
>
> A man with the surname Yang had an oversized bladder and could not find a cure. Only after he had it removed could he regain comfort and ease. —Killing the Fowl. The proverb goes, "A greedy and cruel person only cares to take the sheep's testes, even at the risk of killing the sheep."[53]

> 拜倒妝臺聽訓責—是焉得為大丈夫乎。諺語云：「怕老婆，跪踏板。」
>
> Kneeling before the dressing table to receive her chiding—"How can such men be great men?" The proverb goes, "Fearing the wife, he kneels on a step board."[54]

Eliciting instant understanding from the audience and inducing amusement, these witty lines created through the games exemplify "moments of lyric poetic performance" characterized by a multimodal, hybrid textuality.

The courtesans' extension of literary games to popular forms such as riddles and proverbs produces lines that are discordantly relational and expresses a vernacular aesthetics created through the culture of drinking games. *Qinglou meng* demonstrates the heroines' openness in reinventing drinking games beyond classical texts, from poems of sensuality and eroticism to riddles, proverbs, dice games, and jokes. The novel's depictions of courtesans playing drinking games invite a consideration of the economies of leisure when endorsement or punishment is carried out through wine drinking.

The characters' performative use of humor in drinking games also induces *paidia*, that is, clamorous, boisterous laughter. At one point when Yixiang and the thirty-six courtesans meet and dine, Yixiang recounts an old joke told by a friend about the legendary eight immortals.[55] When three of the eight immortals dine together, they play a game using four sets of *diezi* (reduplicative characters). Each take a cup of wine after completing four lines using "huhu tutu" (puzzling puzzling), "qingqing chuchu" (clear clear), "rongrong yiyi" (easy easy), "fanfan nannan" (hard hard). Building on this game, Yixiang creates another set of four lines using the same reduplicative characters and encourages the girls to continue the joke sharing. Wanqing seizes the occasion to tease the hesitant Jiangxian:

笑話不說糊糊塗塗，An unsaid joke puzzling puzzling,

說了笑話清清楚楚。A joke told clear clear.

聽挹香說容容易易，For Yixiang to say it easy easy,

要絳妹講煩煩難難。For Sister Jiang to play hard hard.[56]

Two other girls take turns, one telling a story using a pun, another using a self-mocking trope. The mischievous Yuesu now joins and contributes a couplet:

歪嘴丫頭歪嘴歪嘴歪嘴,
A maid with a twitched mouth her mouth twitched twitched twitched,

搭腳娘姨搭腳搭腳搭腳。
A concubine with unbound feet her feet unbound unbound unbound.[57]

This playful couplet with cleverly matched patterns illustrates the animated actions of maids and concubines at the courtesans' houses. Engaging framed

narratives at multiple levels, this game is a fictional element in an embedded joke in a reported conversation between Yixiang and a male friend. As Yixiang tells the story, he simulates the scene of conversation, in which he jokingly creates four lines using the reduplicative characters to mock his friend, taking the joke/game from the story of the immortals to the second level of narrative—the conversation with his old friend. The shared joke mobilizes the audience (the courtesans) to emulate the formulaic pattern and make up new jokes about the original joke teller or an intimidated player, or to make fun of their own situation to induce mirth, or to create a joke with innovative patterns of reduplicative characters. The embedded drinking game serves as an apparatus for storytelling and may seem to allow the courtesans to insert their own circumstances at the banquet into the lines. However, both the hero and the singsong girls are aware of the game as a secondary reality, which, generated through mimicry, cannot replace the real world in which they live.

Epilogue

Literary drinking games are built on a combination of various game rubrics. Implementation of awards and punishments follows stringent rules, emphasizing skill, forbearance, and tenacious commitment to extended game play, which are crucial to *agôn*. The combination of dice games and gambling with linked verse games, however, adds the element of *alea*, creating uncertainties in the game's outcome even for the most efficacious and sophisticated players. Ludic enactments following eminent characters create situations of narrative mise en abyme and ludic mimicry, which obfuscate the secondary reality of the game world and heighten the irreducible difference between the jovial dreamworld and the characters' impermanent lives. The penalty of wine drinking for those who transgress against the rules or fail to meet the challenges of the games causes intoxication, leading to the corruption of *ilinx* (failure to control *vertigo*) and resulting in the less competent players' loss of ability to play.

Granted that the novel is a narrative game, the plot amplifies the imperative of *qing* through wide-ranging formulations such as *chiqing* (keenness), *zhenqing* (sincere feelings), *huanqing* (joviality in gathering), *liqing* (longings upon separation), *chouqing* (helpless sorrow), and *beiqing* (agonizing

memories). These formulations of *qing* structure the novel's subplots and function as drivers of an arduous game that tests the hero's moral and emotional aptitude (i.e., *zhongqing*, concentrated feelings) through his encounters with the courtesans. The narrative game of the novel resolves the imperatives of *qing* and demonstrates the characters' transformations from *zhongqing* to *kong* (emptiness in state of mind), signaling the idle nature of their ludic participation. Yet cultured courtesans who compete in drinking games and engage in combat for their personal destinies are not mere game devices. Instead, they exercise a ludic agency by demonstrating talent in gendered modes of expressions, outwitting their patrons in game play skills or even remonstrating the patron's behavior through linked verses. If the novel is a dreamworld of ludic diversions, it is the courtesans who conceive the conditions of play, determine their own actions in gambling with fate, and often set the mechanism of the game, be it the game of life or a pastime.

Notes

1. Juan Wang, *Merry Laughter and Angry Curses: The Shanghai Tabloid Press, 1897–1911* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012), 51.

2. Juan Wang, *Merry Laughter*, 40.

3. Rudolf Wagner and Catherine Yeh, "Frames of Leisure: Theoretical Essay," in *Testing the Margins of Leisure: Case Studies on China, Japan, and Indonesia*, ed. Rudolf Wagner, Catherine Yeh, Eugenio Menegon, and Robert Weller (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2020), 306.

4. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1961), 14.

5. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 17.

6. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 18.

7. See Kang Baocheng, "Drinker's Wager Game and the Dissemination of the Yuan Musical Plays," *Literature and Art Studies*, no. 8 (2005): 62–73.

8. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Carnival and the Carnivalesque," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 254.

9. Li Ruzhen 李汝珍, *Jinghua yuan* 鏡花緣 (Shanghai: Shanghai yadong tushuguan, National Digital Library of China, 1923), 82:3.

10. Li Ruzhen, *Jinghua yuan*, 82:5. Changchun (eternal spring) refers to *Catharanthus roseus*. "South of Jing there is the *mingling* tree, it regards five hundred

years as spring" is from "Tangwen" (The Question of Tang). Lie Zi 列子, *Liezi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Yenching Institute at Harvard University, 1961), 5:3.

11. Li Ruzhen, *Jinghua yuan*, 82:6. Wang Xiang, a nobleman of Jin dynasty, is one of the twenty-four paragons of filial piety. See Guo Jujing 郭居敬 (Yuan dynasty), *Quanxiang ershi si xiao shixuan* 全相二十四孝詩選 (woodblock printing, Ming dynasty, National Library of China), 4. The cited line is from *Dongjing fu* 東京賦 (Eastern Metropolis Rhapsody) by Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139), trans. David Knechtges, *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 1: *Rhapsodies on Metropolises and Capitals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 243–309.

12. Li Ruzhen, *Jinghua yuan*, 82:6. Also see Qu Yuan (339–278 BCE), *Jiuge* 九歌, *The Songs of Chu: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poetry by Qu Yuan and Others*, ed. and trans. Gopal Sukhu (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 6.

13. Li Ruzhen, *Jinghua yuan*, 82:8. Ji Jiang refers to noble ladies from aristocrat families. Ji 姬 was the Zhou royal surname; Jiang 姜 was the family name of the Qi kingdom. See David Knechtges, "Ruin and Remembrance in Classical Chinese Literature: The 'Fu on the Ruined City' by Bao Zhao," in *Reading Medieval Chinese Poetry: Text, Context, and Culture*, ed. Paul Kroll (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 85; Bao Zhao 鮑照 (405–66), "Wucheng fu" 蕪城賦, *Bao Mingyuan ji* 鮑明遠集, ed. Ge Yinliang 葛寅亮 (Ming dynasty), *juan* 1, 3–4.

14. Stephen Roddy, *Literati Identity and Its Fictional Representations in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 203.

15. Yu Da 俞達, *Qinglou meng* 青樓夢 (1878) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1994), 1:3.

16. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 1:3.

17. Chloë F. Starr, *Red-Light Novels of the Late Qing* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 220.

18. Wagner and Yeh, "Frames of Leisure," 305.

19. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 15:67–70.

20. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 11:47–48.

21. See Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 7:25–27; 17:76–79; 18:84.

22. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 49.

23. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 31.

24. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 31.

25. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 8.

26. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 64.

27. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 64:277.

28. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 64:277–78.

29. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 10.

30. Catherine Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850–1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 162.

31. See Jeanne Britton, *Vicarious Narratives: A Literary History of Sympathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2.

32. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 58:255.

33. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 58:255.

34. Xiaorong Li, *The Poetics and Politics of Sensuality in China: The "Fragrant and Bedazzling" Movement (1600–1930)* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2019), 49.

35. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 14:63.

36. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 14:63.

37. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 14:93.

38. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 14:65–66.

39. *Xianglian* has been translated as "Fragrance Vanity" (Upton), "Fragrant Toilette" (Ko), "Scented Dress-Case" (Xiaorong Li), and "Fragrant Dressing-Case" (Nanxiu Qian). See Beth Upton, *The Poems of Han Wo* (PhD. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1980); Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Nanxiu Qian, *Politics, Poetics, and Gender in Late Qing China: Xue Shaohui and the Era of Reform* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015); Robert Tuck, *Idly Scribbling Rhymers: Poetry, Print, and Community in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 21.

40. Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792–1841), "Jingshi yueji shuo" 京師樂籍說, in *Gong Zizhen xuanji* 龔自珍選集, ed. Sun Qinshan (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2020), 293.

41. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer of this chapter for this insight.

42. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 5:18.

43. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 5:18. "Is it tonight or which night" is from *Book of Songs*, poem 118, "Choumou" (Fast bundled). See Arthur Waley, trans., *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 93. "In one day shall see all the flowers and beauties of Chang An," see Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751–814), "Dengke hou" 登科後 (After Passing the Examination), in *Meng Jiao Jia Dao shixuan* 孟郊賈島詩選 (Selected poems of Meng Jiao and Jia Dao), ed. Lu Yisheng (Hong Kong: Sanlian Shudian, 1986), 62.

44. "And how gaily I laughed and talked" is from *Book of Songs*, poem 58, "Mang" (A simple peasant), Waley, 50. "Tipsy, I pluck a flower branch and takes it as a wine straw) is from Bai Juyi, "Tong Li Shiyi zui yi Yuanjiu," in *Quantang shi*全唐詩 (Complete Tang Poems), vol. 3 (Wuhan: Hubei Renmin Chubanshe, 2001), 1435.

45. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 13.

46. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 27.

47. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 9:40.

48. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 9:40. See Yang, *Qingyun ji*, 2:1.

49. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 9:40.

50. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 45:201.

51. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 45:201–2.

52. "Not to be inclined to one side is called hitting the center" is cited from Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–200), "Zhongyong zhangju" 中庸章句, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集註 (National Digital Library of China).

53. *Shaji* (killing the fowl), see Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. James Legge (Auckland: Floating Press, 2010), 165.

54. "How can such men be great men?," see "Teng Wengong xia," in Mengzi and Yan Xinglin, *Mengzi* (Taipei: Bulage Wenchuang, 2019), 97.

55. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 29:128.

56. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 29:129.

57. Yu Da, *Qinglou meng*, 29:129.

7

Ghostly Dicing

Gambling Games and Deception in Ming-Qing Short Stories

JIAYI CHEN

Dice games have long been a popular form of gambling in China and beyond.[1] Gamblers toss one or more dice in each wager, aiming at a particular numerical sum or combination. Each throw leads unpredictably to good or bad fortune, which in turn triggers new rounds, one after another. Too ordinary to be noticed, yet too powerful to be neglected, these tiny cubes embody multiple dialectical significances of predestination and human agency, chance and control, and even life and death.[2]

While dice gambling is universal, its discourses are historically and culturally specific. In early modern China, the seventeenth-century novelist and playwright Li Yu (1611–80) described dice as innocent objects, transformed into devils (*yaonie*) in the hand of an addicted gambler:

> Dice are innocent. Why should they be accused of wrongdoing? It is unknown why, despite their innocence, dice are viewed as evildoers. If you do not disturb them, they are merely some dry bones with thirty-six possibilities of pip combinations.[3] Once they entangle you, these dry bones will become some wronged ghosts, their six faces becoming six iron chains, and the thirty-six combinations becoming thirty-six Celestial Rectifiers.[4] They will tie you up, killing you or saving you as they wish.

Once animated, it is the ghostlike dice that entangle gamblers. The essence of dice lies in their malevolent effects on gamblers who initially disturb them and are now entirely passive to their impact.

Through personifying dice, Li Yu intends to warn his readers against the harm of gambling addiction. Indeed, according to his contemporary You Tong (1618–1704), gambling wastes people's time, exhausts their minds, and depletes their property. Finishing his essay after the fall of the Ming dynasty, You Tong even ascribed the political turmoil to gambling and advised the Qing emperor to suppress it.[5] Still, people in the late Ming and early Qing were fond of gambling—a fast, if high-risk, way to accumulate money.[6]

That said, Li Yu's remark is not simply a moral admonition. It serves as a prologue to a longer story. In the form of the narrator directly addressing the audience with the pronoun "you," Li Yu's statement gradually guides the reader into a fictional realm where gambling occurs hand in hand with deception. In this chapter, I examine this story by Li Yu in tandem with two other stories by Ling Mengchu (1580–1644) and Pu Songling (1640–1715). All three are short stories that explore the intertwinement of dice gambling with assorted deceptions. They share a similar narrative structure, with the main story inserted between a prologue and a concluding remark.[7]

Specifically, I probe into how the moral messages about gambling are communicated to the reader through these narratives. Historically, readerly agency grew during Li Yu's time. Readers were encouraged to engage more actively with the text—a phenomenon largely relevant to the development of commentaries and annotations (*pingdian*) and the prosperous print market.[8] Within this context, some commentators offered "methods of reading" (*dufa*) before their annotated drama or fiction proper. For instance, Zhang Zhupo (1670–98), critic of the *Plum in the Golden Vase* (Jin ping mei), informed his readers of the potential danger of being deceived by the text. A solution is to read it as though it were a literary work of the reader's rather than an invention of the author. Zhang writes:

> Though you should certainly read it as if it were a work of your own, it is even better to read it as a work that is still in its early planning stages. Only when I start to work out every detail for myself in order to avoid being deceived will I avoid being deceived.[9]

For Zhang, the reading process is less passive reception than participatory recreation of the author's words. Reading becomes a way to claim ownership over a literary work; by taking control of it, the reader grasps and possesses the truth.

From a perspective of gaming, to echo Hongmei Sun's chapter on the novel *Journey to the West* (Xiyou ji), if the narrative is comparable to a game of reading, with the reader as the player, Zhang Zhupo's emphasis on readerly agency suggests that the reader should think like a game designer (namely, the author). Reading is like "a contest between reader/player and author/game designer" in which the former puzzles over the truth of the text manipulated by the latter through various narrative devices.[10] In the gambling stories discussed in this chapter, the authors invite the reader to seek moral truth by inventing supernatural characters, employing multiple points of views, and interconnecting narrative registers. The reader does not join in a gambling game with the fictional characters. Rather, undermining a direct admonition against gambling, these stories become a playground in which they—an onlooker of all the happenings yet a "player" of the narrative—try to master the author's message while avoiding his deceit. The allure of reading the stories is like playing a metagame of gambling: uncertainty about a precise message entices the reader to continue flipping pages, hoping at some moment to discover the truth left by the author.

Inventing a Ghost Gambler

Li Yu's story is titled "A Living Person Pays the Gambling Debt for a Ghost" (Gui shuqian huoren huan duzhai). It was first published in his short story collection *Silent Operas* (Wusheng xi).[11] In this story, Li Yu broaches a consequence of gambling: winning is losing.[12] Though paradoxical, this claim implies a condemnation of gambling, as it suggests that regardless of the outcome, there are no true winners. However, as the entire story unfolds layer by layer, it is the invention of a ghost gambler that both reifies and undermines this statement, adding complexity to its validity.

The first half of the story concentrates on Wang Zhusheng, who loses in a gambling game hosted by Wang Xiaoshan. Since Zhusheng starts the game without anything to stake, he has to borrow money from Xiaoshan, eventually repaying these debts with the property rights of his father,

Wang Jixuan. The tragic ending of the first half is understandable: both of Zhusheng's parents die from regret because of their tremendous economic losses, and Zhusheng is forced to marry into his wife's family. Xiaoshan's profit from this gambling game is reversed in the second half of the story, where another game takes place between him and Wang Jixuan's ghost. Losing in a similar manner to his son, the ghost gives Xiaoshan all his silver, which then transforms into the worthless paper money that Zhusheng burnt for his father. Indeed, for Xiaoshan, winning becomes losing.

In this story, not only do dice metaphorically become ghostly beings that haunt gamblers, but a real ghost plays an essential role in overturning Wang Xiaoshan's good fortune. Like a man with no traces, the strange visitor (the ghost of Wang Jixuan) is never recorded in Xiaoshan's "leather account book," which lists the wealthy people in and out of Suzhou. The visitor, disguising himself as an experienced gambler, introduces himself to Xiaoshan with much ambiguity: "My surname is Tian, but I have never had a first name. Although I am now living in Fengdu County of Chongqing Prefecture, Sichuan Province, my ancestral home is Suzhou."[13] He is somebody with his family name, while he is nobody (or rather everybody) without a first name.[14] He is living somewhere with a precise location, but he is from nowhere to be found in the human world.[15] Wang Jixuan's ghost is one of the rare supernatural characters in Li Yu's works. Preferring the ordinary to the extraordinary, Li Yu opines that the best material is from life as witnessed and experienced by people. He derides writing about ghosts as a technique of unskillful writers to hide their clumsiness.[16] Given such rejection, why did he still choose to depict a ghost?

Wang Jixuan's ghost acts on money, the gleam of which overshadows the mysterious identity of the strange visitor. Its allure encourages Xiaoshan to resume hosting a gambling game, and its metamorphosis eventually exhausts all his property. Li Yu gives a remarkably detailed depiction of the silver brought by the ghost at the expense of suspending the narrative:

> Their silver gleam flickered with jewel-like colors, varied and numerous. The ingots were as large as boats drifting across, with no passenger at the ferry landing. They were as curved as a crescent moon, whose light overflows onto the water reflecting the sky. On their faces, there was no vein that did not reach the end, as delicate as a spider's web. On their heels,

> there were holes connecting the belly, as dense as a beehive. If someone used them to cover the land of the Jetavana Temple, [the person] would successfully purchase this auspicious place. If they were piled up, they would be sufficient to block passers-by.[17]

The silver is rendered from color and shape to texture and quantity, then transforms into different concrete things: a boat, a crescent moon, and a human being with a face, heel, and belly. Ambiguity arises from this montage-like set of images, casting doubt on what the silver's true form is until another lyric pauses the narrative again:

> A layer of cardboard serves as the bone, covered with tinfoil to imitate silver. The veinlike texture on the surface is the marks of stiff paper.
>
> They appear to weigh five *liang* but are actually less than three *fen*. When [people] burn them in the stove to test their authenticity, they transform into butterflies, fly away, and disappear.[18]

In the end, the silver that used to be everything turns out to be nothing, echoing the identity of the ghost visitor, a somebody who is actually nobody.

Through the supernatural, Li Yu explores the dialectic between concreteness and nothingness, or more precisely, the illusory nature of wealth obtained through gambling. Indeed, gamblers can start a game with nothing in hand (as in the case of Wang Zhusheng) and win real property, but they may also lose everything they possess. So may the host of the game, who seems to take more control over the players but can still suffer the loss of property. As in the case of Wang Xiaoshan, winning against a ghost in a gambling game becomes futile.

Additionally, the ghost may represent karmic force. Ming-Qing short story authors often structure stories in symmetrical halves, with the second half designed to resolve the problems of the first and bring the narrative to closure.[19] If familiar with the symmetrical narrative structure, the reader of this story may be able to anticipate a reversal after Wang Zhusheng's tremendous loss in the first half. But they will still be surprised that it is a supernatural being—a figure of "absurdity" (*huangtang*) for Li Yu—who fulfills this role. One explanation is that Xiaoshan's loss turns out to be his retribution (*baoying*) "based on a law of heavenly justice."[20] The ghost

of Wang Jixuan, in other words, becomes the visible manifestation of the invisible force that human beings can never manipulate, like the ghostly dice, forcing people into passivity.

Winning in gambling is an illusion, and the literary representation of the gambling games, too, is illusory. Taking advantage of the supernatural, Li Yu underscores the fictionality of the entire story. "Such fiction should be sold like an immortal's prescription," he advocates in the concluding remark.[21] Instead of commenting on the narrative itself, he self-consciously urges more people to buy and read the story. Comparing the story to "an immortal's prescription," he provides a particular method of reading. The reader is encouraged to follow the moral message underneath the narrative, regardless of its absurdity.[22] This reading method derives from the prologue. The "immortal's prescription" echoes the story in the prologue following Li Yu's account of the ghostly dice. In that story, a gambler buys an immortal's prescription from a Daoist priest that promises no loss in gambling. Following the prescriptive words, he endures his addiction to gambling and becomes the host of gambling games. Consequently, he wins back the money that he loses. The prologue story further alludes to a Song dynasty anecdote in Su Shi's (1037–1101) *Forest of Anecdotes of Dongpo* (Dongpo zhilin) about a Daoist priest selling "prohibited prescriptions" at the Xiangguo Temple. A young gambler spends one thousand *jin* on a "prescription of no loss in gambling," but on opening it, discovers that the prescription works only "when one becomes a host of gambling games."[23] The anecdotal account calls attention to different textual layers of a prescription through the act of "opening": one must uncover the playful, amusing words and find the hidden serious message. For Li Yu, reading the story is not dissimilar to opening such a prescription. In fact, serving as an "anticipatory comment," his prologue has already made this method evident.[24] He concludes the prologue story by saying, "We realized that it was not the immortal's prescription but the principles that the Daoist priest sold. Even though everyone knows these principles, nobody practices them."[25]

Yet the search for the principles of the main story is not easy, because Li Yu does not fashion the narrator in an omniscient position. From the opening remark on the ghostly dice to the prologue story and then to the main story, the narrator is unable to effectively advocate against the evils of gambling but continuously seeks suitable accounts to substantiate his

changing claims. While the prologue claims that the host of gambling games can benefit, he then demonstrates in the main story that even the host does not always win: the revenge of Wang Jixuan's ghost results in Wang Xiaoshan's loss. The narrator's viewpoint is traversable. Right before the prologue story, someone points out, "Storyteller, you are wrong."[26] Without a clear addresser, this comment can be interpreted as being made by the implied audience or the narrator himself. In either case, the narrator continues to explore, layer by layer, how to present a persuasive argument about winning money in gambling. Then, to what extent can the reader be persuaded by the narrator that winning is losing? It is up to the reader to gamble on whether the narrator is trustworthy as they are enticed into the narrative until they finish reading.

Gambling as Deception

The unanswered question of Li Yu's story is how Xiaoshan could constantly win in all the gambling games. This is because Xiaoshan colludes with other local gentry members and tricks the gamblers.[27] The trickery is concealed until the second half of the story, as the first half concentrates the reader's attention on Zhusheng's experience. Notably, when reprinted in Li Yu's second short story collection, *Priceless Jade* (Liancheng bi), the story's original title was revised to "Innocently Tricked into the Trap; Accountably Losing All Fortune by the Ghost's Deception" (Shourenqi wuxin luoju, lianguipian yougu qinjia). Echoing the symmetrical narrative structure, this new title elucidates the deceptions embedded in the story: Xiaoshan's trickery and Jixuan's revenge.

Human and ghost swindlers are common characters in late Ming and early Qing short stories on gambling, including the two written by Ling Mengchu and Pu Songling, which I turn to now. The stories each have well-designed swindles at the center. Framing the deceptions with varied narrative devices, the authors invite the reader to inquire into the causality of the protagonists' encounters, especially whether a premeditated deception diminishes the aspect of chance in gambling.

In late Ming and early Qing discourses on gambling, chance—normally manifested as the unpredictability of each wager's outcome—has a paradoxical relationship to fate (*ming*). On the one hand, chance and fate are

perceived as the two sides of a coin. Winning or losing money, in Ling Mengchu's exposition, for instance, is merely "brought about by fate."[28] Another intriguing example is the literary trope of using dice to connote one's destiny. The late Ming scholar-official Wang Shizhen (1526–90) recorded an ode on die composed by a courtesan. The poem, literally describing a die's material, appearance, and exploitation, reads: "The stretch of humble bones are turned into [something] with dots on all sides. Since it was tarnished, it has been tossed till present days."[29] As each line contains a pun simultaneously referring to a die and to the courtesan herself, the quatrain can be further read as a rendering of her humble family backgrounds, sophisticated social skills with her clients, and her wandering, degrading living conditions. Like a die, she can be easily played with out of her clients' desire and her uncontrollable destiny.[30]

On the other hand, the unpredictability intrinsic to gambling was thought to challenge the nature of fate that was predetermined by invisible heavenly forces. Like divination, gambling could reflect people's desire to master and even overpower these forces. This becomes the central theme of the prologue in Ling Mengchu's "Court Gentleman Shen Buys a Laugh for Three Thousand Taels; Lord Wang Lays a One-Night Trap" (Shen jiangshi sanqian mai xiaoqian, Wang chaoyi yiye mihunzhen), which exemplifies the complex interplay between gambling, divination, and fate. Based on an account in Hong Mai's (1123–1202) *Record of the Listener* (Yijian zhi), the story centers on a Northern Song gambling addict, the scholar Ding Shi. A physiognomist foretells that Ding will achieve the top honor in the civil service examination only to claim the impossibility of his success when Ding revisits him two days later. According to the physiognomist, this is a heavenly punishment, because Ding has won six million *qian* through gambling; only by returning the ill-gotten gains and quitting gambling can he win the sixth place in the examination. Despite depicting a failure in triumphing over heavenly forces, this story is more than a warning against the immorality of profiting via gambling. The irony lies in the fact that even predestination is modifiable and thus unreliable, as Ding's predetermined fate changes based on his behavior.

A detail is worth our attention: the physiognomist writes down that "the top honors of the civil service examination this year goes to Ding Shi" after the first divination but tears the paper up during Ding's second

visit. It highlights the paradox of writing as an authoritative yet unstable medium for conveying divinatory messages. The warning that immoral gains will negatively affect one's fate is never explicitly written. In other words, owing to the limitations of the divinatory message, even though Ding's fate has been foretold, it remains uncertain and subject to change once Ding violates the hidden rules.

Again, like Li Yu's opening remark on the ghostly dice, this prologue story, along with two mini-essays on gambling, cannot be well interpreted when detached from their original literary context. Functioning as prefatory materials to the main story, they can be compared to a written divinatory message, anticipating the fate of the protagonist, Court Gentleman Shen. As the reader would know from the start, Shen, a playboy who "squanders money like dust," will lose all his property in a gambling game with a group of rascals. These prefatory materials lack absolute authority, much like the written words of the physiognomist, as they merely reflect the perspective of the narrator. Nonetheless, it is the perspective of the narrator that largely determines the ways one can read the main story. It creates uncertainty for the reader to determine whether Shen's loss is a result of the rascals' swindle.

The main story is also developed from a *Yijian zhi* anecdote about Shen falling into a deceptive trap. Ling Mengchu retains Hong Mai's original narrative structure and preserves the revelation of the deception until the end. An experienced reader, however, may yet realize the illusory nature of the narrative. Its structure largely echoes that of the "strange encounter" stories, which have a relatively fixed formula composed of "encounter, interaction, parting, and revelation."[31] Shen is invited by strangers to a luxurious house at night, where they have a banquet. When dawn comes, the strangers, who are actually swindlers, disappear, and the house turns out to be a deserted residence.

A closer look at the narrative showcases how Ling, through deliberately inserting the narrator's point of view, elaborates on the original *Yijian zhi* version to spotlight this illusory quality.[32] In the story, Shen is attracted by the sound of dice being tossed. Peeping from behind the screen, he sees a group of beauties gambling. This is an important moment that sets the stage for the subsequent gambling game involving Shen, his two "friends," and those beauties. The original account is neutral and concise: "Suddenly,

Shen heard the sound of someone laughing and tossing the dice in the hall. Hiding from behind the screen and peeping through its crevice, [he observed that] inside, candles were brightly lit, and there was a large table at the center, around which seven or eight beauties were gambling."[33] Ling Mengchu, however, suspends the narrative by describing the scene through the narrator's point of view.

> [Audience,] What do you think is going on inside? Look: there are candles lit up brightly, and there is a large table positioned at the center. The slender jade-like hands toss the dice; the little rouge lips call out the number. Golden hairpins and jade bracelets all become stakes for a single throw; romantic battles and flesh formation are all on display. If this is not the Moon Palace, how could it possess such immortal atmosphere? If this is not the Golden Valley Garden, where else could these beauties come from? While the foolish should remain silent, how come the prodigal son wouldn't expose his innermost thoughts?[34]

Sexually arousing and sensually seductive, this gambling scene is too vivid to be true. The narrator directs the reader's perspective through two parallel rhetorical questions by comparing the gambling site to the Moon Palace and the Golden Valley Garden. As neither of these places existed during Ling's time, he reminds his readers that the scene is nothing more than an inaccessible hallucination.

The narrator then shifts back to Shen's perspective by repeating the same scene through his eyes: "As he peeps under the light, truly [the beauties] are like Chang'e who transcends this world. Their pretty looks and demeanors are seldom witnessed in his eyes."[35] What appears to be a shared view between the narrator and Shen eventually reveals itself as an ironic disparity. While Shen metaphorically applies the figure of Chang'e to describe the beauties he gazes at, the narrator's portrayal utilizes the Moon Palace, where Chang'e is said to reside, for its literal meaning: a nonexistent fairyland.

This discrepancy shines a spotlight on Shen's initiative. In comparison to Hong Mai's account, which leaves Shen's agency ambiguous, Ling's elaboration makes it evident that Shen actively immerses himself in this illusory realm and participates in the game. Dice are animated again, but in this story, instead of haunting people like a ghost, they "go with people's feeling and desire":

> Although the dice have no consciousness, they are incredibly efficacious and go with people's feeling and desire. At first, Court Gentleman Shen is in luck, and the "win" wager follows him. Therefore, every time he tosses the dice, he wins. After he rests for a while, an omen of failure is coming. As Shen somehow feels sorry and willingly chooses to lose [to the beauties], his own spirit is significantly deflated. He feels it charming that the mistress appears angry while invigorated, which further captivates him. Distracted by these thoughts, he is completely defeated in the [final] throw.[36]

The plot is interrupted again by the narrator's comment on tossing dice. Yet the reader who has flipped through the prefatory materials would be told more than once that dice never follow one's sensibilities. Gamblers unconsciously lose money when "the losing dice displace the winning dice" or a special "medicine die" (*yaotou*) filled with lead is tailored to cause gamblers to lose.[37] But here, the narrator takes a self-contradictory stand by suggesting that even unconscious dice can empathize with gamblers' feelings. Rather than ascribing results only to fate or chance, Ling provides the alternative interpretation that in a gambling game, fortune becomes intertwined with the gambler's emotions.

More complicated than the original version, "Shen pinched [the dice], tossed them, and lost," the representation in Ling's story displaces deception as the real impetus of the game.[38] In this illusory realm constructed by the swindlers, that the outcome depends on the gambler's fortune is never denied but rather highlighted. It is Shen who perpetuates the ceaseless tossing of the dice. The swindlers, in a subsidiary position, play the simple role of deciding when to terminate the game through their trickery. Upon revisiting the prefatory materials of different genres, the reader will notice multiple anticipatory explanations for Shen's fate. The first mini-essay focuses on the emotions and avarice of gamblers, the prologue story discusses predestined heavenly order, and the second essay considers cheating. As the narrative unfolds in this manner, the reason for Shen's loss in the final toss is presented to the reader as a multiple-choice question, involving factors such as Shen's emotions, his destiny, and the swindlers' manipulation.

In Pu Songling's "The Confidence Men" (Nianyang), gambling is merely one of many kinds of deception. While Ling portrays a real gambling game

that dominates the deception, Pu turns deception into a game metaphorically, the failure of which keeps triggering new rounds until the swindlers' final success. Pu employs a similar narrative structure by situating the story proper between his introductory and concluding remarks. Yet in contrast to the story of Shen, there is neither a gambling addict nor a detailed moral teaching. Instead, Pu's story centers on how a group of swindlers defraud Wang Zixun of his money, while Wu Anren, with the assistance of a fox spirit, wins the money back from the same group. In the introductory account, Pu provides a general exposition about *nianyang*, preparing the reader with a proper perspective to approach his account:

> The Historian of the Strange (Yishi shi) says: Even though [the confidence men] randomly meet [you], their words are as sugary as the sweet wine. Their approach is gradual, but the draw of their deception is profound. . . . They set traps whenever opportunity arises, and as a result the setting and form of deception can vary. It is often said that these people would infiltrate, using pleasing words to gain your trust. They are called *nianyang*.[39]

What is worth attention is the word "gradual" (*jian*; meanwhile, *jinrun*, meaning "to infiltrate," also connotes "gradualness") in this opening, suggesting the multiple steps, slow progression, and indirectness of the swindle. These characteristics are elucidated in Pu Songling's rendering of the gambling episode in which Wang Zixun is involved.

Pu Songling achieves an illusory effect comparable to Ling's by emphasizing the performative aspect of the swindle. Everything is artificial in the swindlers' performance, and dice also become props. The swindler Xu, who is seemingly unable to understand the swindler Jin's southern dialect for the word *touzi*, does not take out the little cube until Jin mimes its shape. This single episode also attracted the attention of Qing dynasty commentators. Feng Zhenluan (1760–1830), for instance, regarded it as a typical moment reflecting how swindlers approach a victim gradually.[40]

Wang, however, declines the swindlers' invitation to gamble, claiming that he does not know how to play the game. The swindlers do not give up. Similar to actual gamblers, they enact another round of deception, aiming to entice Wang into joining their game. Wang decides to remain as

a spectator, observing their gambling activities and harboring doubts about its authenticity. In contrast to Shen, who cannot help but enter the illusion, Wang is able to distance himself from the swindlers' performance. Failing again, the swindlers persist in their pursuit of new rounds. By changing their strategy, they force Wang to "join" the game: Xu acts on Wang's behalf and tells him the game's outcomes. Unable to withdraw, Wang is forced to lose to a bandit named Tong, another swindler; ultimately, they succeed in obtaining Wang's property through this multistep deception.

Pu Songling never details the process of gambling itself. The game is not real for a single moment; rather, it is the deception that is transformed into a figurative game. The swindlers act as gamblers of their deception, initiating new rounds of trickery aiming for a final win. As individual episodes in the narrative, all these rounds point to the final success of the swindlers winning the money. This very nature of the swindle is revealed through Wang Zixun's personal view after he realizes that he was deceived by *nianyang*: "When one round fails, [they] would enact a new round to make sure that he can be trapped."[41] After the final round, Feng Zhenluan remarks, "It is as if [they] have constructed a ghost's cave, where miraculous transformations have reached their zenith."[42] According to Feng, this illusionistic world belongs to the "ghost," an allegory of these swindlers. The gambling game, as part of the deception, possesses a ghostly quality. Instead of inviting active participation, it haunts the victim, on and on.

Like Li Yu, Pu Songling uses a symmetrical structure and brings supernatural power into the second half of the narrative. An omnipotent fox helps Wu Anren to defeat the swindlers in each round of their deception and win the money back. Allan Barr showcases the similarity between "The Confidence Men" and the vernacular stories in terms of their symmetry and neatness.[43] Nevertheless, Pu's story distinguishes itself from Li Yu's through a distinct narrative technique that derives from historical biographies. As Wai-yee Li points out, the story proper of "The Confidence Men" is modeled on some accounts in Sima Qian's (145–86? BCE) *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shiji).[44] Within the latter's narrative framework, two or more historical incidents involving the same figures are connected in a chronological sequence by transitional sentences such as "several years later there took place so-and-so's incidents." By adapting this structure, Pu parallels

the fox story with Wang Zixun's, thus equalizing the two halves.[45] Adding the second half in this manner leaves the reader uncertain as to whether the fox is as authentic as a historical figure or the swindlers are as illusory as supernatural beings. Indeed, the "Historian of the Strange," in his unusual anticipatory comment, states, "The human realm is comparable to that of ghosts and demons."[46] This calls the reader's attention to the parallelism between the swindlers and ghosts. Yet again, like a divinatory message, the information revealed in this anticipatory comment is incomplete without any mention of the swindlers' ultimate failure. Even this authorial remark becomes unstable, susceptible to being overturned once the reader takes the second half of the story seriously.

Coda: Ghostly Dicing

About one century after Pu Songling completed *Liaozhai's Records of the Strange* (Liaozhai zhiyi), Yuan Mei (1716–97) finished his story collection *What the Master Would Not Discuss* (Zibuyu). The collection is full of accounts concerning supernatural beings and strange happenings. In this collection, there is a gambling story that addresses Li Yu's doubt about whether ghosts gamble in the netherworld.[47] Yuan Mei's answer was yes. In this story, "The Gambling God Called Mi Long" (Duqianshen hao Milong), a lifelong gambler surnamed Li does not stop gambling even on his deathbed. Soon dead, he returns to life only to ask his wife to burn some paper money for him so that he can repay his gambling debt in the netherworld.[48] To make his wife believe in him, Li then tells her about the game in the ghostly realm.

> The Gambling God in the netherworld was said to be Mi Long [Delusion Dragon]. He has several thousand disciples, and all driven by him. . . . The way ghosts gamble in the netherworld is not like gambling in the living world. In the netherworld, a few dozen ghosts gather round to gamble with thirteen dice. Every time the dice are thrown into the gambling pan, and the winner is the ghost who gets the five-colored die with the golden side. The ghosts will gamble with all the money they have accumulated. . . . When the ghosts incur losses and become destitute, they come to the living world to spread plagues and cheat people out of food and wine.[49]

Yuan Mei's story provides a counterpart to the three stories discussed in this chapter. In his preface, Yuan regards himself as merely a recorder of the stories "that delight the heart and astonish the ears."[50] That Yuan largely masks his role as an author and discourages any careful interpretation of his accounts contrasts with the attitudes of Ling Mengchu, Li Yu, and Pu Songling toward their stories.

In the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, gambling was so prevalent among various social echelons that even state laws could not prohibit it. In this context, the three authors chose to use stories to form an interactive relationship with the reader, inviting them to join a metagame of reading and to carefully decipher the embedded moral messages. They connect gambling with deception in different ways, exploring the relationships between predestination and unpredictability, truth and illusion, strangeness and ordinariness, and ultimately, between themselves and the reader. In Li Yu's story, the ghost character is a manifestation of heavenly forces that control the game's outcome, yet the absurdity of the narrative diminishes the persuasiveness of the narrator's warning against gambling. In the illusory realm where Ling's game is staged, deception is intertwined with the gambler's emotions and fortune. By introducing multiple points of view, the narrator deliberately leaves open the question of which factor serves as the driving force behind gambling losses. Pu transforms the entire deception into a gambling game, while the introduction of a fox character in the story's second half raises doubts about the authenticity of the entire account of these swindlers.

The narrative complexity of these stories motivates the reader to keep seeking the author's true message about gambling. Interestingly, exploring the interplay between gambling and deception is not confined to early modern Chinese short stories. Eighteenth-century British novelists also utilized the trope of deception to explore the dialectics between chance and control and the episodic nature of gambling. As the literary historian Jessica Richard points out:

> The romance of gambling is in the episode, as the gambler seeks this particular moment again and again and resists combining episodes into a longer narrative, a narrative that would perforce suggest walking away from the tables. . . . Cheating reinforces the episodic quality of gambling,

> undermining the effectiveness of any attempts to combine discrete gambling episodes into aggregate long averages.[51]

In the three stories I discuss, cheating becomes an integral part of the narrative. Diverging from the literary imaginings of gambling in the British novels, it is rather the narrative, filled with uncertainty and skillfully crafted by the author, that captivates the reader and keeps them engaged until they uncover the embedded moral principles.

Yuan Mei's story deprives a gambling story of its complexity. Whether it be Yuan's authorly manipulation or his recording from other sources, he does not care if the reader perceives it as history or literature. At least in the story, the family members of the gambler Li believe his words about gambling in the netherworld and burn paper money for him so that he can go on to gamble. Within Yuan's literary world, ghostly dicing takes on its literal meaning, referring neither to an illusion of victory nor to a haunted deception. Gambling is simply rendered as an addiction that is incessant even in the netherworld. Ghosts dice like human beings, winning or losing by chance. As long as the ghosts have sufficient stakes, the dice they toss can keep rolling, again and again, one round after another.

Notes

1. All the short stories discussed in this chapter refer to dice as *touzi*, a term that came into being in the Tang dynasty. Before then, dice were called *qiongce* or *qiong*. This terminological change was largely in alignment with the modification of the shape and material of dice in the Tang dynasty: from oblong to cubic and from jade and stone to bone and ivory. The attention to bone as the raw material is reflected by an alternative name for dice, *xuege* (drilled ["holed"] bone). For an overview of dice in game cultures in Asia, see Colin Mac MacKenzie and Irving Finkel, eds., *Asian Games: The Art of Contest* (New York: Asia Society, 2004), 39–44.

2. Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 2–3.

3. If Li Yu was referring to the six-sided dice (twenty-one pips in total), the number thirty-six probably indicates the possibilities of pip combinations with two dice, that is, a result of six times six.

4. The "Thirty-Six Celestial Rectifiers" refers to a group of perilous cosmic

powers. See Mark Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare: Daoism, Territorial Networks, and the History of a Ming Novel* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 69–70.

5. You Tong 尤侗, *Jiedu wen* 戒賭文, in *Zhaodai congshu bieji* 昭代叢書別集, Shikai Tang 1833, *juan* 10, 1:a–3:b.

6. For the Ming and Qing codes on gambling, see Guo Shuanglin and Xiao Meihua, *Zhongguo dubo shi* (Taipei: Wenjin Chubanshe, 1996).

7. The two vernacular stories by Ling Mengchu and Li Yu have more complex prologues. Meanwhile, in Pu Songling's story, the account of "the Historian of the Strange," which normally appears at a story's end, is, unusually, positioned at the very beginning.

8. For a comprehensive study of the fictional *pingdian* traditions in early modern China, see David Rolston, *Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary: Reading and Writing between the Lines* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997). For scholarship on print culture in early modern China, especially how it invites an active reading experience, see, for example, Wei Shang, "'Jin Ping Mei' and Late Ming Print Culture," in *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan*, ed. Judith Zeitlin and Lydia Liu (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 187–238; Yuming He, *Home and the World: Editing the "Glorious Ming" in Woodblock-Printed Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013).

9. English translation modified from David T. Roy, trans., "How to Read the *Chin P'ing Mei*," in *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, ed. David L. Rolston (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 224. The subject "I" (*wo*) in the second half of this entry is translated into "you" by David Roy, probably for consistency with the first half, which is without a subject. For the Chinese text, see Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡, *Gaohe tang piping Mingdai diyi qishu: Jin ping mei* 皋鶴堂批評明代第一奇書：金瓶梅 (Taipei: Guangwen Shuju, 1981).

10. According to Murray, there are two important structures shared by games and stories. The first is a contest between protagonist and antagonist and the second is the puzzle, "which can also be seen as a contest between the reader/player and the author/game-designer." See Janet Murray, "From Game-Story to Cyberdrama," in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 2.

11. This story's title is paired with that of the previous story in the collection, "An Impoverished Ghost Appealed to the Injustice of Prostitution for a Living Brothel Client" (Ren suji qionggui su piaoyuan). The two stories could be read in tandem; they warn against the harms of prostitution and gambling, respectively.

12. Li Yu 李漁, *Wusheng xi*, in *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Guji Chubanshe, 1990), 8:148–49.

13. Li Yu, *Wusheng xi,* 166.

14. The surname Tian 田 is part of the character *gui* 鬼 (ghost).

15. Fengdu is another name for the netherworld.

16. "Jie huangtang," in Li Yu, *Xianqing ouji* 閒情偶寄 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2000), 29.

17. Li Yu, *Wusheng xi*, 167.

18. Li Yu, *Wusheng xi,* 169.

19. Allan Barr, "*Liaozhai zhiyi* and Chinese Vernacular," in *Reading China: Fiction, History and the Dynamics of Discourse. Essays in Honour of Professor Glen Dudbridge*, ed. Daria Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 17.

20. According to Kao, the idea of *bao* (requital) functions as the central ideological value determining the narrative structure of Ming-Qing short stories, and *baoying* helps to "make sense of the irrational or the non-rational, sometimes absurd, occurrences by giving them an interpretation according to a higher law of causality." See Karl Kao, "*Bao* and *Baoying*: Narrative Causality and External Motivations in Chinese Fiction," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (*CLEAR*) 11 (1989), 135.

21. Li Yu, *Wusheng xi*, 171.

22. Li Yu expresses his own anxiety about whether readers will grasp the moral message underlying his story by comparing his relationship with the readers to his relationships with friends. For Li, only students definitely listen to their teachers' words; friends might not do so. See Li Yu, *Wusheng xi*, 150.

23. Su Shi 蘇軾, "Ji daoren xiyu," in *Dongpo Zhilin* 東坡志林, in *Congshu Jicheng Chubian* 叢書集成初編 (Changsha: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1939), *juan* 2, 27.

24. Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 20.

25. Li Yu, *Wusheng xi*, 150.

26. Li Yu, *Wusheng xi*, 149.

27. Li Yu, *Wusheng xi*, 168.

28. Ling Mengchu 凌濛初, *Erke pai'an jingqi* 二刻拍案驚奇 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 2017), 94.

29. Wang Shizhen 王世貞, *Yiyuan zhiyan* 藝苑卮言, Ming Wulin qiaoyun shushe keben 明武林樵雲書舍刻本 (1589), in *Xuxiu Siku Quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1695, *juan* 8, 533.

30. It can also be that the clients' desire was driven by the courtesan, just as the gamblers were always attracted by the die.

31. Sarah Allen, *Shifting Stories: History, Gossip, and Lore in Narratives from Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014),165.

32. For a discussion about point of view in Chinese fiction critics, see David

Rolston, "'Point of View' in the Writings of Traditional Chinese Fiction Critics," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 15 (1993), 113–42.

33. Tan Zhengbi, ed., *Sanyan liangpai ziliao* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1980), 789.

34. Ling Mengchu, *Erke pai'an jingqi*, 99–100.

35. Ling Mengchu, *Erke pai'an jingqi*, 100.

36. Ling Mengchu, *Erke pai'an jingqi*, 102.

37. Ling Mengchu, *Erke pai'an jingqi*, 94, 96.

38. Tan, *Sanyan*, 789.

39. Pu Songling 蒲松齡, *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben* 聊齋誌異會校會註會評本 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2011), 564.

40. Feng comments, "It seems that [the swindlers] approach him gradually." See Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, 567.

41. Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, 569.

42. Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, 568.

43. Barr, "*Liaozhai zhiyi*," 17.

44. Wai-yee Li, "Rhetoric of Fantasy and Rhetoric of Irony: Studies in 'Liao-chai chih-I' and 'Hung-lou meng'" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1988), 31.

45. The first half of the story may have been based on Wang's actual experience. See Barr, "*Liaozhai zhiyi*," 17.

46. Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, 564.

47. Li Yu, *Wusheng xi*, 171.

48. Thanks to Ariel Fox for pointing me to this story.

49. Paolo Santagelo, trans., *Zibuyu, "What the Master Would Not Discuss"* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 280–81.

50. Santagelo, *Zibuyu*, 161–62.

51. Jessica Richard, *The Romance of Gambling in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 45–46.

8

Playing Journey to the West

HONGMEI SUN

As an important text for Chinese literature and culture, *Journey to the West* (Xiyou ji) has attracted inexhaustible critical attention, but few have engaged with the narrative structure or stories contained in the structure as games. One interpretive tradition takes the book as a work of fun, a product of intentionally playful writing, rather than a work with religious, philosophical, or political meaning.[1] These criticisms emphasize the author's playful intentions over the stronger tradition of reading the book as a series of allegories and see the book as the outcome of a writing game, *youxi*, played by literati in China, which is briefly discussed in the introduction to this volume. But actual games played by characters are also worthy of attention, as is the journey articulated as the narrative of a game.

I examine a common feature of the way players play and argue that the typical games and play in the *Journey to the West* narrative demonstrate a distinctively transgressive nature, which manifests also in contemporary adaptations. It has been acknowledged that games and play are potentially transgressive—a particularly interesting phenomenon for videogames.[2] I contend that players in *Journey to the West* are transgressive in a specific manner: cheating—the violation or manipulation of rules of games—is not only commonly employed by players, but even encouraged by the narrative.[3] I also propose to view the journey (*you*) itself as a game (*you*) designed by the Buddha and Bodhisattva Guanyin, who form the pilgrimage team of Tripitaka and his disciples, including Sun Wukong (the Monkey King, or Monkey), Zhu Bajie (Pigsy, or Pig), and Sha Wujing (Friar Sand, or Sandy), as the main players, and set goals for them: to travel to the Western

Heaven to retrieve Buddhist scriptures. Along the journey, the pilgrims encounter enemies and friends, some of which are intentionally positioned by the Buddha and Bodhisattvas as designated stops in the game, where the players engage in contests, wagers, and other playful activities, albeit ones with serious consequences.

Journey to the West is a cumulative text, written by generations of authors on the basis of previous works, with Wu Cheng'en (ca. 1500–ca. 1582) generally accepted as the author of the 1592 version that is widely considered canonical.[4] The multiple narrative threads, including (1) the Monkey King creating a turmoil in Celestial Palace, (2) the Tang Emperor's lawsuit with the Dragon King in the netherworld, (3) Buddha and Guanyin's arrangement of the pilgrims' journey for the sutras (including Tripitaka's birth story), and (4) the journey itself, are all part of the larger game of the journey. Each narrative also contains short episodes of games within it. Read through the lens of gameplay, many seemingly arbitrary constraints placed on the narrative make sense. For instance, the troubling inconvenience of the journey that all pilgrims must endure—the entire team following the speed of Tripitaka, a slow traveler and easy target for demons along the way, despite the superb supernatural abilities of all other members—has a sound reason: games require rules that "prohibit more efficient in favor of less efficient means."[5] Players of a game "engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome."[6] The narrative of *Journey to the West* explains that many of the demons that the pilgrims have to defeat are arranged by Buddha and Guanyin (thus "artificial") so that the pilgrims can arrive at the destination after experiencing the required eighty-one sufferings (thus "inefficient"). The game reading of the *Journey to the West* narrative does not negate previous readings of the journey's various allegorical meanings, but it opens the interpretation of the journey to an additional possibility. The game setup also conforms to the idea of "divine gameplay" (*shentong youxi*) as discussed in the introduction to this volume, albeit in this case in a fictional form.

The analysis in this chapter focuses on three sets of games to demonstrate the transgressive features of gameplay in *Journey to the West*. Part 1 compares three wagers (selected from threads 1, 2, and 4), involving the Buddha, the Dragon King, and Monkey, who all breach the border between the game and the non-game. Part 2 examines shape-shifting, a trick practiced by many

characters, to showcase how border crossing in the gameplay of *Journey to the West* encroaches on the boundary between the original and the copy. Part 3 examines how the continuous rewritings and adaptations of *Journey to the West*, including an increasing number of film adaptions in recent years, have transformed the narrative into a network of metagames that discusses how to restart and replay the game repeatedly through the various playthroughs, generating endless possibilities for new rounds of play.

Video games based on *Journey to the West*, despite their close kinship to the narrative, are not addressed here, due to the limitations of scope and length. There is a deliberate indifference to the distinction between games and play in this chapter, owing to the lack of differentiation of these concepts in Chinese, the varied definitions that both receive in the field of game studies and their inseparable relationship, and the transgressive nature of gameplay in *Journey to the West*.[7]

A Map Is Not the Territory?

Many scholars accept that there might exist an earlier urtext that Wu Cheng'en revised or edited into the 1592 edition of *Journey to the West*.[8] Fragments of such an urtext, *Journey to the West as Storytelling* (Xiyou ji pinghua; hereafter, *Storytelling*), survive and are recorded in other texts, including the story that introduces the Tripitaka thread of stories into the *Journey to the West* narrative (narrative thread 3), namely the wager between the Dragon King of the Jing River and fortune teller Yuan Shoucheng regarding weather forecasting.[9] Another fragment is an account of the contest between the pilgrims and three Taoist demons along the journey in Cart Slow Kingdom.[10] The fact that the only two stories surviving from *Storytelling* are records of competitive games speaks to the importance of games for *Journey to the West*; each example represents one type of game commonly played in *Journey to the West* by humans, demons, or immortal characters.[11]

Although the hundred-chapter *Journey to the West* is far more extensive than the *Storytelling* fragments, the wager between the Dragon King and Yuan Shoucheng remains unchanged: After hearing a report about a fortune teller named Yuan who can accurately predict the best location and time for fishing, the Dragon King transforms into a scholar to meet

Yuan, with the intention of stopping him from causing the demise of sea creatures. When the conversation begins, Yuan answers Dragon's weather inquiry with a forecast of the following day's rain. The Dragon King, a god in charge of local rain, responds self-assuredly with a wager that Yuan's forecast will be inaccurate. However, on returning to his residence, he receives an edict from Jade Emperor about the next day's rain, precisely as Yuan had predicted. Driven to win the wager, the Dragon King resorts to transgression: he changes the quantity and time of the rain for the following day, and subsequently shows up at Yuan's place to claim his winnings.

But Dragon needs only a composed reminder from Yuan before his pride turns into panic: he has committed a capital crime by defying the Jade Emperor's order. From this point on, Dragon's goal shifts from winning the game to saving his own life. Following Yuan's direction, the Dragon King shows himself in a dream of the Tang emperor and begs for help, addressing the human emperor as the "true dragon" while referring to himself the "faux dragon."[12] This flattering contrast between true and false succeeds in winning him the help of the emperor, who tries to save the Dragon King's life but eventually fails: though he could stop Wei Zheng, the designated executioner of the Dragon King, from killing the dragon in life, he cannot stop Wei from doing it in a dream. Dragon is beheaded while Wei Zheng takes a nap.

The Dragon King's infamous failure constitutes a warning for the many game players later in the book: games in this world have serious consequences. Games are always shown as an inseparable part of the world, and to win the game it is important to cross the line between the game and non-game part of life in a productive way. Playing a game is never just about focusing on the game itself. A discussion of the relationship between game and life is more productive when illustrated by Buddha's wager with Sun Wukong, detailed below. Buddha's victory indicates that the way to win is to blur the line between the game and the world, or the line between the map and the territory. Dragon fails due to his inability to manipulate the line. Monkey also fails but learns to become a better player later, applying the lesson to other games in which he participates.

In characterizing play, anthropologist Gregory Bateson uses map-territory relations allegorically, noting that the relationship of language and what it denotes resembles that of a map and the territory it charts—the

map is not the territory, just like the word "cat" cannot scratch us.[13] According to Bateson, the ability to play means the ability to communicate and understand map-territory relations. He postulates that play implies a combination of primary and secondary (unconscious and conscious) processes. "Play marks a step forward in the evolution of communication—the crucial step in the discovery of map-territory relations. In primary process, map and territory are equated; in secondary process, they can be discriminated. In play, they are both equated and discriminated."[14] A cat's playful nip is a bite and not a bite at the same time. Actions of "play" are thus paradoxically related to other actions of "not play." In *Journey to the West*, the secret of winning lies not only in understanding the map-territory relations, but in a supremacy in playing with the line between map and territory, play and not-play, the unreality in the game and the reality behind the game.

It is via the wager with Buddha that Sun Wukong, having defeated everyone in Heaven and challenged the Jade Emperor's authority, is eventually subjugated. As a solution to the conflict between Heaven and Monkey, Buddha proposes to Monkey: "If you have the ability to somersault clear of this right palm of mine, I shall consider you the winner. . . . If you cannot somersault out of my hand, you can go back to the Region Below and be a monster."[15] Monkey believes he can easily win, as a single somersault can carry him 108,000 miles away, while Buddha's hand is "not even one foot across." This thought is confirmed after he sees Buddha stretch out his right hand, which is "about the size of a lotus leaf."[16] He does not know that what he sees is the map and not the territory; he does not know the unreality of what appears to be real. When he jumps away from Buddha's palm and somersaults to what he believes to be the edge of Heaven, marked by five pillars, he even writes a few words on the pillar and leaves his monkey pee there to prove that he has made it off the Buddha's hand. Only after he returns is he told that he has never left the palm, with the words he has written on Buddha's finger, accompanied with the smell of pee, as evidence. Discovering the discrepancy between perception and reality, the disbelieving monkey tries to somersault to the place with pillars again, but Buddha's five fingers transform into the Five Phases Mountain and imprison Monkey underneath.[17] Buddha has confused Monkey by making the line between the game and non-game permeable. While showing Monkey a palm "the size of a lotus leaf," when Monkey begins to

somersault Buddha changes the size of his palm to as far as Monkey can fly—or that is one way to see it. Monkey's experience of having left the palm does not count, because the signs left on the fingers indicate that the two different realms are one and the same. Buddha has set a very perceivable realm for the game—what appears for Monkey's eyes as his palm—but once Monkey hops off his palm he replaces the realm of the palm with a realm bigger than Monkey's somersault distance, so the non-game realm is being enclosed within the game. Although strictly speaking Buddha has cheated, he can prove he has not, since for someone who can move the boundary, the map *is* the territory: play is not-play; game is reality. His last action to end the wager—transforming his fingers into mountains to keep Monkey within—indicates that he has violated the rules again (abrogating the promise that he will let Monkey go if he fails to jump free from the palm), but it also proves the danger of a permeated line between realms: his hand, which should be the frame and setting of the wager, transforms into Five Phases Mountain, an element of external reality, reaching both spatially and temporally beyond the game. Everything is within Buddha's palm, but he can also make his palm not his palm. With the ability to erase the border of un/reality, Buddha wins with ease.

Unlike Buddha's manipulations, the Dragon King's cheating move in his wager fails to observe the boundary between play and not-play. Instead of maneuvering, nudging, or corrupting the line, his gameplay simply ignores it. After he wins the game by violating the rules, the real-world consequences catch up with him. Even his alleviating moves after realizing his mistake continue the error: to change the fate of being beheaded in his reality, he begs the emperor of the human world, who in turn also fails to understand the importance of the line between the two worlds: one where he resides and another he can access only via dreams. Both Dragon and the emperor would like to affect the game by blurring the line between the map and the territory, but unfortunately neither has the ability to do so.

For Monkey, after learning the distinction between map and territory, the journey provides abundant opportunities for practice. A wager that he proposes to two minor demons at Level-Top Mountain to win their magic gourd and jade jar illustrates his improved skills in manipulating the line.[18] Learning of the magic gourd and jade jar's capacity to engulf a thousand people, Monkey produces a fake magic gourd which, according to him, can

hold the heavens inside, and procures an agreement with the demons that once he shows them how the gourd engulfs the heavens, they will trade. His task is to convince the demons that the unreality of holding the heavens is a true act. What the demons see is that Monkey throws the gourd in the air with an incantation, and subsequently it becomes pure dark, and they lose sight of everything—the heavens is held inside the gourd. What they do not see, proceedings outside of the game proper, is that Monkey sends a threat/request to Heaven: "I therefore beseech His Majesty with due reverence to let old Monkey borrow Heaven to be stored up for half an hour so that I may accomplish my task. If he but utters half a 'no,' I shall ascend to the Divine Mists Hall and start a war!"[19] The discussion in the Divine Mists Hall upon hearing this demand reveals the amusing truth. Quite annoyed at the Monkey's nuisance, Jade Emperor exclaims, "This impudent ape! . . . How could Heaven be stored up?" Third Prince Nata responds that Heaven, in principle, cannot be stored up, but the deities could create an illusion to help Monkey by unfurling Lord Zhenwu's banner of black feathers across the South Heaven Gate, and by so doing "the sun, the moon, and the stars will be covered, and it will be so dark on earth that people cannot see each other even if they are standing face to face. The fiends will be deceived into thinking that Heaven has been stored up."[20] Jade Emperor consents to this, and as a result, Monkey wins the wager.

Note that all the deities in Heaven are willing to collaborate with the Monkey King over a trivial wager so that he can win the magic gourd even though he could instead simply steal it from the minor demons. Surely Monkey has deliberated over this latter option but decided against it because his reputation would be ruined by committing robbery in broad daylight. Cheating in a game is more acceptable, apparently, and a regime from above is created to help Monkey win via cheating. The humorous tone of the book and Monkey's playful character notwithstanding, this incident indicates a game culture in the context of *Journey to the West* that encourages skillful transgression, especially if the line between the game and life is crossed artistically. Monkey's performance of containing Heaven in a gourd muddles the line between game and non-game successfully by having the support of everyone in the Celestial Palace, who also prove to be experts in presenting the unreal as real, while in the other example Dragon loses his wager due to the lack of a capable supporting network. The only

defect in Monkey's game is that the reader can clearly see how he has cheated, while in Buddha's case no one fathoms how he accomplished the move. But in both cases, the reason that the player's trick works is in the inequality of perception: in the former case, Buddha knows that his palm is and is not the palm, but Monkey does not; in the latter, Monkey knows that his gourd can and cannot contain Heaven, but the demons do not.

This Map Is the Territory

Despite the close association between game and non-game life, it is important to maintain the distinction to survive the game, as indicated by the Dragon King's example. Meanwhile, *Journey to the West* shows a clear preference for the characters' abilities to traverse the line without losing the awareness of it, as indicated in the wager between Buddha and Monkey. In games involving shape-shifting, a trick that Bodhisattvas and demons enjoy alike, playfulness around the border between game and life—to a point that is close to the erasure of it—is even more crucial. As discussed by Roger Caillois, a quality of "make-believe: accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life," is one of the six core characteristics of play.[21] While games always engage a "make-believe" element, when the players create a kind of imagined reality, set against "real life," in the fantasized world of *Journey to the West*, the boundary between the real and the unreal is crossed or temporarily erased by shape-shifting. Instead of relying on players' consent and imagination to create the "special awareness of a secondary reality," shape-shifting presents a false reality and tricks participants into accepting it as real. This kind of coerced rather than voluntary "make-believe" is transgressive, as it violates the most basic rule of play: that play is free.[22] Interestingly, such shape-shifting-enabled crossover of the border between play and not-play in *Journey to the West* is mostly temporary, as if to maintain that although transitory transgressive mimicry is allowed, permanent distortion is unacceptable; the relation between the copy and the original shall not be reversed.

Regarding the relationship of the copy and the original, of the sign and the real, sociologist Jean Baudrillard warns of the disappearance of the distinction between map and territory altogether, or the establishment of a flipped relationship between them, using Borges's allegorical tale about

the map so detailed that it exactly covers the territory: with the decline of the empire, the map becomes a simulacrum, the double without origin. In the age of simulation, "the territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory . . . it is the map that engenders the territory."[23] Many examples of gameplay in *Journey to the West* feature the endangered origin-copy difference or temporarily inverted map-territory relationship—in other words, a type of transgressive gameplay or simulation exemplified by the Cart Slow Kingdom episode.

The description of the competitions between Buddhists and Taoists at Cart Slow Kingdom in *Journey to the West* is much more elaborate than in the earlier *Storytelling* version. Beside maintaining the contests between the pilgrim monks and the three Taoist demons with Monkey's victory in the end, the later version also has additional scenarios before and through the contests, which not only serve to showcase Sun Wukong's skillful art of crossing the lines, but also involve another fundamental skill: simulation. Before meeting the three Taoists, Sun Wukong saved five hundred enslaved Buddhist monks by giving each of them a piece of his hair, which, when invoked, can create an image of Monkey looking so real and formidable that "not even a thousand cavalry would dare charge near him."[24] This hair magic replaces the need for the real Monkey, who is free to continue his journey and to compete with the Taoists.

Another scenario added prior to the contests is the confrontation in the Abbey of the Three Pure Ones between Monkey, Pigsy, and Sandy (Buddhist monks) and the three demons (Taoists). Sneaking into the abbey to enjoy the offerings from the Taoists to the Three Pure Ones, the Buddhist disciples of Tripitaka change into the statues of the three Taoist lords so that they can sit there eating leisurely. To make their role-play more convincing, Monkey even has Pigsy move the real Taoist statues into the outhouse. With the absence of the real statues, the monks become the statues, which were put there to enjoy offerings on behalf of the real (absent) lords to begin with: the Buddhist monks are a simulation of the simulation. Discovering that the offerings are consumed, the Taoists take the pilgrim-transformed statues as the lords in person and perform a ritual and request holy water from them. Finding out that their mimicry of the map is so successful that they must act as the territory, the Buddhists produce some urine and pass it to the Taoists as holy water.

The deeply humiliated Taoists then create a series of challenges to retaliate, all intended to have the Buddhists killed. The first is in response to a drought in the kingdom: a rainmaking competition, which the monks must win in order not to be killed. The Taoists, however, are strong opponents who have brought rain to the kingdom for years in the past. As in the words of the group of rainmaking celestials who have arrived to help make the rain, "the proper magic of the Five Thunder exercised by the Taoist was not faked."[25] Monkey, therefore, must interfere with the real rainmaking ceremony using his fake version. The trick that enables him to cheat without being caught is, again, the reproduction of his own image using his hair. With the spurious Monkey staying with Tripitaka to observe the rainmaking ceremony on the ground, the true body of Sun Wukong rises to midair to improvise his own rain ceremony: he bullies the rain gods into responding to his signals instead of the Taoists', thus hijacking the Five Thunder proper magic. When it is Tripitaka's turn to lead the rain ceremony, Monkey, in the air, signals the rainmakers to produce rain at his command, while the spurious Monkey remains on earth ensuring people believe that he has been playing honestly throughout the contest. In the following steps of the contest, Monkey continues to use the make-believe monkey to set himself free to cross the lines of unreality and life and to create more confusion between the real and the fake to win the game.

Monkey's duplication magic brings freedom, but also indicates a danger. What if the reproduction threatens to replace the original? It was already demonstrated that Monkey can use a replacement head just as well when his original head has been cut off.[26] Since the copy head can replace and become the original—Monkey is still considered Monkey afterward—is it possible that in some situations the map can insist that the territory is not the territory, but the map is? When the line between map and territory becomes sufficiently ambiguous, such a situation is bound to occur, as in the widely popular and frequently retold episode of the six-eared macaque, when Sun Wukong meets his worst enemy, a monkey that looks and acts like him with a goal to replace him as the pilgrim on the westward journey.[27] The six-eared macaque transforms into Monkey and plays the role so well that no one can tell the real from the fake until they arrive in front of Buddha. The point of the macaque's mimicry is not to role-play Monkey in his absence, but to act as Monkey in the real Monkey's presence so that

the real is turned into the fake. Such reversion of the map-territory relation can only be imagined as a disastrous disorder, as indicated by the titular couplet of chapter 58: "Two-Minds cause disorder in the great cosmos; It's hard for one body to realize true nirvana."[28] The macaque is conquered the moment Buddha announces his real identity—an announcement of his failure to become the simulacrum of Sun Wukong. Monkey then takes an insubordinate action: instructed by Buddha not to move, he kills the macaque with his rod in front of dozens of his superiors. Although Monkey defends himself with the excuse of the macaque's guilt of assault and robbery, this action is likely caused by fear—an uncontrollable urge to wipe out Monkey's biggest threat, this map that is seeking to take over the territory.

This episode raises questions about the border between the original and the copy: What is the difference between the Monkey King and the six-eared macaque? How do we decide which one is the true pilgrim? If the macaque has become a perfect copy of Monkey, the distinction between them appears to be arbitrary and liable to break down. If Buddha had made a mistake, if one dares to think it possible, then it could have been the six-eared macaque who accompanied Tripitaka to fetch the scriptures later in the story; the map proceeds to be the territory. The narrative of *Journey to the West* does not tolerate long-term transgression of the map-territory order, as it does not allow permanent shape-shifting, although it does entertain and even encourage shape-shifting as short-term transgressive mimicry. However, such attitudes toward the relationship of the origin and the copy are changing in contemporary adaptations of *Journey to the West*.

The Map Needs to Be Redrawn!

The two sets of examples above illustrate the flexible map-territory relations in the gameplay of *Journey to the West*. With gods as game designers who try to hold absolute control, and players such as the six-eared macaque trying to subvert the game, the game continues as most characters learn to play somewhere in-between. The map-territory relation is constantly being tested; even gods are willing to be flexible, improvising to fix problems in the game. For instance, at the end of the journey, when the pilgrims have left with the scriptures, Boddhisattva Guanyin finds out that the count of ordeals that Tripitaka has undergone is only eighty, one short of the sacred

number eighty-one. An additional ordeal is hence created to complete the number on their way back.[29] The finishing line of the game is drawn and then moved, and what seems to be outside of the game soon turns out to be within. The fact that there is no map, nor any clear guidance for the pilgrims, seems to also point out a core lesson of the game: it is about looking for the rules instead of being taught the rules; it is about testing out the boundaries, or figuring out the slippery boundary between the map and the territory.

The transgressive gameplay connects the fictional stories and the life of readers, with the blurred line of game and non-game, original and simulacrum (and, by extension, avatar and gameplayer) emphasized. Perhaps in these games lies part of the secret of why *Journey to the West* has remained attractive to generations of readers. Many adaptations in recent years use the Monkey image for self-representation, as Monkey's struggles exemplify the pains and joys of today's readers.[30] There is a theme that many new adaptations share: gods as game designers reset the game repeatedly in each adaptation, so that the game players play the game in desirable ways. The players, on the other hand, particularly Wukong, demonstrate more and more clearly their unwillingness to participate in this coercive game. Such new adaptations can be viewed as new playthroughs of the original tale (or game), in which the pilgrims have increasing degrees of free will and gods find it harder to get the game back on the right track. Two such cases illustrate the transgressive gameplay designed by the gods and the varied forms of resistance employed by the players.

The 1995 Hong Kong film *A Chinese Odyssey* (Dahua xiyou), a two-part comedy, created a tragic Monkey who stays true to his heart but eventually has to succumb to his fate.[31] The game designers, in this case Guanyin and Jade Emperor, loathing the poor performance of Sun Wukong, who rebels against the role given him, reset the game to have him reincarnated as Joker, who nevertheless resists the fate of becoming Monkey despite being reminded of it repeatedly throughout his life. At his death he succumbs to Guanyin's master plan and adopts the role of Sun Wukong.[32] The imposed role-play of Monkey, a clear source of tragic sentiment in the film, is arguably what makes this work deeply appreciated by the generations of audiences who take Joker as a stand-in for themselves. Facing the transgressive game forced on him, Joker's choice is to follow his love

and use his lifetime to reject compulsory make-believe and refuse to play the game. Inspired by *A Chinese Odyssey*, Jin Hezai's internet novella *Story of Wukong* (Wukong zhuan) portrays another Sun Wukong who refuses to submit to the gods' game plan. In this version, none of the pilgrims are voluntary players. Wukong is reincarnated in his current life so that he can play the game as the gods' design without the memory of his past life, the life of a rebel, described as the six-eared macaque. According to that plan, Wukong playing the role of the pilgrim is to erase the existence of the macaque. However, with the help of all the other involuntary players of the pilgrimage game, memories of his past life return gradually and, in the end, when Wukong is coaxed into a battle with the rebellious six-eared macaque, he realizes that he is battling a copy of himself.[33]

These two adaptations both feature gods as controlling game designers who use revised editions and copies (Joker and the six-eared macaque) to guide Monkey along the proper route of the game, while the protagonists resist playing their designated roles to varied degrees. In *A Chinese Odyssey*, Joker chooses to run away from the game until the end of his life, at which point his spirit comes to realize he is the Monkey King, after all. Wukong in *Story of Wukong*, in contrast, chooses to end the game for both the other Monkey and himself. After killing the Monkey who is rebelling against Heaven, Wukong is announced as the six-eared macaque and summoned to succumb. The memory of himself being the same Monkey he just killed is restored and he jumps up once again against Buddha before his own disappearance: at that moment he is Wukong and the six-eared macaque simultaneously. He has eliminated the difference between the two monkeys, and thus also deletes himself. While the Wukong in the six-eared macaque episode in *Journey to the West*, as discussed earlier, kills the macaque (the copy) so he (the original) can stay in the game, Joker (the copy) in *A Chinese Odyssey* refuses to participate in the game despite Guanyin's urging. As for the *Story of Wukong*, while the gods become more aggressive in forcing the simulacrum to replace the original—so much so that the line is altogether blurred—Wukong also rejects the coercive gameplay more completely by deleting the simulacrum and the original at the same time: the only way to stay free, outside of the game.

The *you* 遊 (journey or game) to the west is characteristic of transgressive gameplay. From Buddha to Guanyin to Monkey, all players and game

designers are masters in manipulating boundaries, including the lines between game and non-game, the territory and the map, the copy and the original. Whether using shape-shifting or other magical tricks, transgressive gameplay in *Journey to the West* ensures victory by crossing boundaries temporarily without endangering such boundaries. The transgressive gameplay demonstrated by contemporary adaptations allow for a more prolonged blurring of the line between the simulacrum and the original.

Notes

1. There have been many commentaries on the book as a work of *youxi* starting in the Ming and Qing periods; this approach continued with Hu Shi and Lu Xun in the early twentieth century. Western interpretations focus more on religious and philosophical allegories. For a review of Chinese commentaries, see Zang Huiyuan, "*Xiyou ji* zhuti 'youxi shuo' fazhan jianlun," *Journal of Taiyuan University of Technology (Social Sciences)* 3 (2010): 3–7; for a review of Western criticism, see Vincent Yang, "A Masterpiece of Dissemblance: A New Perspective on 'Xiyou ji,'" *Monumenta Serica* 60 (2012): 151–94.

2. Kristine Jørgensen and Faltin Karlsen, eds., *Transgression in Games and Play* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

3. Jie Guo, Li Guo, and Jiayi Chen's chapters in this volume all engage with transgressive gameplay, albeit with their own focus.

4. Questions of authorship and provenance continue to be debated. For a summary of studies on the authorship, see Anthony Yu, introduction to *The Journey to the West*, by Wu Cheng'en, trans. Anthony Yu, 1–96 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). This chapter refers to the 1592 Shidetang edition as the original, with the understanding that the relationship between the Shidetang edition and two shorter versions from around the same time, *Tang Sanzang xiyou shi'e zhuan* (A chronicle of Tang Sanzang's journey to the west and deliverance from the ordeals) by Zhu Dingchen and *Xiyou ji zhuan* (Story of the journey to the west) by Yang Zhihe, remain debatable. For more about the accretive history of *Xiyou ji*, see Glen Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu chi: A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-Century Chinese Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Zheng Zhenduo, "*Xiyouji* de Yanhua," in *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu xinbian*, 263–99 (Taipei: Wenguang, 1973) and Yu, introduction. This chapter uses the *Xiyou ji* printed by Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe (1988) as the Chinese version and *The Journey to the West* translated by Anthony Yu as the English version unless otherwise specified.

5. Bernard Suits, *Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2005), 34.

6. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 80.

7. Bo Kampmann Walther reviews the efforts toward differentiating games and play by academics in "Playing and Gaming Reflections and Classifications," *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 3, no. 1 (2003), http://www.gamestudies.org/0301/walther/.

8. Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu chi*; Cai Tieying, *Xiyou ji ziliao huibian* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2010).

9. This episode is recorded in *Yongle dadian* v.13139; the expanded version constitutes chapter 9 and much of chapter 10 of *Xiyou ji*. See Cai, *Ziliao huibian*, 476–78.

10. This fragment is included in *Proverbs of Pak Tongshi* (Pak T'ongsa onhae), a Chinese language textbook printed in Korea in 1677. See Cai, *Ziliao huibian*, 478–84.

11. Other brief references of incidents in *Storytelling* do exist, but they are not fully detailed stories.

12. Both the *Yongle dadian* excerpt and chapter 9 of *Xiyou ji* differentiate the "true dragon" and "faux dragon," and in *Xiyou ji* the Tang emperor also speaks with his officials about the "dragon in the dream."

13. Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," in *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology,* ed. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, 314–28 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 317.

14. Bateson, "Theory of Play," 321.

15. Wu, *Journey*, 1:194.

16. Wu, *Journey*, 1:194.

17. Wu, *Journey*, 1:195.

18. Wu, *Journey*, 2:104–18.

19. Wu, *Journey*, 2:116.

20. Wu, *Journey*, 2:116.

21. Roger Caillois postulates six essential qualities for play: it is free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules, and make-believe. See Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1961).

22. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 6.

23. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

24. Wu, *Journey*, 2:277.

25. Wu, *Journey*, 2:293.

26. Wu, *Journey*, 2:307–8.

27. Wu, *Journey*, 3:104–17.

28. "Two-minds" here refers to the two monkeys, since Sun Wukong is repeatedly referred to as "mind monkey" in the book. See Yu, introduction, 63–76.

29. Wu, *Journey*, 4:361.

30. See Hongmei Sun, *Transforming Monkey: Adaptation and Representation of a Chinese Epic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), on adaptations in literature and cinema with Sun Wukong adopted as a stand-in for contemporary readers.

31. See Li Zeng, "Adaptation as an Open Process: Dahua Fandom and the Reception of *A Chinese Odyssey*," *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies* 6, no. 2 (2013): 187–201, for an account of the reception of *Dahua xiyou* in China. See Kun Qian, "Pandora's Box: Time-Image in *A Chinese Odyssey* and the Becoming of Chinese Cinema," *Asian Cinema* 1 (2011): 308–28, for an analysis of the time element in the becoming of Monkey's identity.

32. Jeffrey Lau, dir., *A Chinese Odyssey, Part One: Pandora's Box*, and *Part Two: Cinderella* (Hong Kong: Newport Entertainment, 1995).

33. Jin Hezai, *Wukong zhuan* (Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe, 2001).

9

How China's Young "Internet Addicts" Gamify the Disciplinary Treatment Camp

YICHEN RAO

The fever of online gaming arose because of the rapid development of the market economy and online technology in China in the past fifteen years. Seeing the game industry as a major source of economic benefit, the state faced a problem that accompanied this capitalist consumerism: young people's detachment from family, school, and workplace and retreat to the addictive game worlds that offer much more instant fun than reality.

Since 2006 there have been frequent news reports of parent-child conflicts, school refusal, crimes, and even patricides among adolescents who seem to be addicted to the Internet, especially to online games, which has caused moral panic in Chinese adult society. Parenting experts give lectures and publish advice books to guide middle-class parents to manage their children's gaming behavior. The state has also tried to govern youth gaming through industry regulation and legislation, which has resulted in a strengthening of state control over the Internet. The concept of Internet addiction (*wang yin*; hereafter, IA), a term coined by US psychologist Kimberly Young, was introduced to China and taken up by medical practitioners and educational experts, some of whom established treatment camps.[1] A nationwide survey in 2009 estimated there are 24 million youth in China with IA.[2]

Neither the American Psychological Association nor China's Ministry of Health has ever formally recognized IA as a medical category, but

treatment has been prevalent in China for the past fifteen years in the form of private or semiprivate treatment camps. Since the first of these institutions was founded in Beijing in 2005, the sector has been dogged by controversy: as early as 2006, reports that one camp was treating addiction with electroshock therapy provoked public outcry. Meanwhile, some camps continue to rely on disciplinary methods and residential therapies including military training and psychological counseling. Some treatment camps with licensed medical staff prescribed drugs for depression and anxiety, viewed as comorbidities of IA.[3] The demand for such services—and the harsh, often military-like discipline they promise to instill in wayward minors—remains sizeable, especially among middle-class parents desperate to turn their kids into good students.

Gaming disorder has now become a recognized illness category in the World Health Organization's ICD-11.[4] In countries with highly developed Internet connectivity, excessive online gaming is often an issue. But social reactions to it are somewhat different. In the United States, interventions for excessive Internet use are limited to counseling and self-help groups; private counseling or outpatient services are provided by individual counselors and psychiatrists.[5] A few inpatient rehabilitation programs geared specifically toward IA were recently founded in the United States, such as one in Utah offering overnight hospital stays, digital-detox retreats, wilderness therapy camps, talk therapy, and medication.[6] Although ambitious, none of these established an IA program with a focus on social control of adolescents, as was customary for drug abuse, nor did these programs frame excessive online gaming as a national public health issue with corresponding government interventions.

In China, IA discourse is mostly related to whom the "gaming disorder" label aims to cover: young people whose social functioning is affected after spending excessive hours playing online games. Yet the label "Internet addict" is more moral than medical, as it reflects the broader moral panic that views digital games as "electronic opium."[7] This panic expresses collective distress regarding the disruption of social control systems that emphasize family hierarchy and relational obedience and reveals anxieties about changing cultural practices impacting both family and consumer society.[8] Children are drawn to games not as escapes but as connections with an

alternative, competing reality that they feel more attached to, compared with highly pressured and alienating school competitions.[9]

In 2014 I conducted three months of immersive fieldwork in an IA treatment camp in Beijing, after which I stayed connected with some informants through social media. I conducted thirty-five interviews with young gamers outside the institution from 2015 to 2021 to understand the continuing development of the phenomena. The larger project aimed to understand the shifting patterns of social control and gaming cultures under China's rapid market reform, one-child policy, and digitalization. The ethnographic data on gaming and gamification collected in the treatment camp is used to reveal the broader context of power mechanisms of youth gaming and the meanings of play in contemporary China.

Disciplining Gamers: Anti-immersion Systems and Competitive Reality

The Chinese government responded to the moral panic over Internet addiction in several ways. In 2002 the government issued legislation forbidding Internet cafes from allowing entry to minors. In 2006 the Law on the Protection of Minors was revised to include new clauses requiring the state and the family to guide minors' online behavior. "Indulgence in the Internet" was for the first time placed on par with other misbehaviors defined as bad for the physical and mental health of minors, such as "smoking, excessive drinking, vagrancy, gambling, drug abuse, and prostitution."[10] All these attempts started as a response to the public outcry about parent-child conflicts over online gaming, but they ended up strengthening state control over the Internet industry.

The term "green online game" was invented by the government in 2008 to refer to "pure, healthy, and non-addictive" online games.[11] These games do not use sexually arousing pictures or violent activities to attract players but aim to promote moral standards for children. The state requires online games to set a limit on playing time for minors with an "anti-immersion system." It also tries to enhance parents' power through technology. In 2009 the Chinese government requested that software called "Green Dam Youth Escort" be preinstalled in personal computers sold in mainland China. This

software was said to help parents monitor what their children were doing on the Internet, keeping children away from obscene and dangerous content with a filtering system. But it was criticized by the public as a violation of information privacy and stopped running after several months.

The Ministry of Health organized a research group in 2009 to explore the medicalization of IA. In 2016 a lawmaking group formulated the Regulations on the Protection of Minors Relating to Online Behaviors and tried to incorporate IA into a legal framework. Both attempts failed because of strong social controversies around the reported violence and the use of electric shocks in the treatment camps. With continued implicit permission of the treatment camps and a general guideline of avoiding violent treatment, the state began another round of economic regulation with the Notice on the Prevention of Online Gaming Indulgence among Minors issued in October 2019 in answer to changing behaviors of youth online prompted by the popularization of mobile games. The regulation forbids online games, including mobile games, to allow minors to log in from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. and sets daily and monthly limits on in-game payments by minor users.

These regulations are only part of the social control project to funnel middle-class "game addicts" into a normative and competitive track. Many ethnographies present contemporary Chinese youth as impacted by heavy pressures, conflicts, competitions, and social differences under the rapid transformation of Chinese society marked by decollectivization, market reforms, and the one-child policy.[12] The pressure caused by severe competition is felt by youth from preschoolers to college graduates and their parents. On the other hand, the most popular games in China are based in an equally competitive, combat-oriented virtual world. Almost all "Internet addicts" in the treatment camp I researched were high-level players of a game called *League of Legends* (*LoL*).[13] Rather than saying that they were addicted to the Internet, it might be more accurate to describe them as living in a fantasy world. For some, *LoL* was the first and only game they played. Even when they were not playing, they were watching videos uploaded by global *LoL* players, surfing *LoL* forums on mobile phones, talking with their friends during and after class about the game experience, and thinking about *LoL* on their way home or to the Internet café.

League of Legends was launched in China in 2011 by Tencent. Developed

by Riot Games, a US company, the game is based on a multiplayer online battle arena where players select and control virtual "champions" to form leagues, destroy rivals' defense towers, and kill the champions of other leagues. The performance of each player is calculated, summarized, ranked, and recorded after each match, just as students are evaluated in Chinese schools. Every player knows his rank in every "season" and is awarded medals at different levels. Professional teams are also formed and subsidized by digital-equipment companies to battle other teams. When the competitive game world threatens to take too much time from adolescents' competitive school education, many troubled Chinese parents have searched for various ways to control their children's gaming behavior. The treatment camp is usually their last resort.

The Base

The institution where I conducted my fieldwork is referred to by all residents as "the base." Once attached to a hospital, the base became independent in both finances and administration in 2011. At the time of my fieldwork, a comprehensive therapy consisting of psychological counseling, education, military training, family participation (parent training and family therapy), and medicine was gradually being developed.

Though IA was a major reason why most young people were sent to the base, it is only one of the "adolescent problems" that the base aims to treat. These problems include not only medicalized disorders such as mood and conduct disorders but also issues not formally diagnosed, such as IA, truancy, and defiance of parents. In short, the trainees come from families in which parents do not know how to deal with their children's "abnormal" or defiant behaviors and cannot obtain useful support from doctors, counselors, or teachers. Most residents were between fourteen and nineteen years old. Some were over twenty. Many were students at various levels before they came to the base, but some were also young adults attending graduate school or working. Regardless of age, trainees are all referred to as "children" that need "psychological growth" by the governing adults. Some came voluntarily. Many more were brought by their parents through deception.

The average length of stay was six months. Parents, most of whose

backgrounds were at least middle-class, paid around ¥14000 (US$2000) every month. Parents were not merely consumers. They, too, were subjects to be reformed, and as such were required to abide by the base's rules. They were strongly advised to attend therapy and parental training throughout the six months, though they were free to come and go at any time. They were also able to cease treatment and take their children home by stopping payment at any time during the process.

Within the base, six units worked together to carry out the comprehensive therapy. The first and most important unit was the psychological group, consisting of nine psychological counselors from different schools and backgrounds. The second unit was the drillmaster team, consisting of around ten drillmasters (eight male and two female), whose role was to supervise trainees' everyday activities and lead their behavior training. The third was the clinical unit in charge of trainees' health and the prescription of drugs. The fourth was the nursing unit, taking care of trainees' hygiene and other living conditions. The fifth was the leisure activity group, responsible for all group activities outside of training and psychotherapy. The sixth unit was the parents' group, managing issues related to the parents. As parents were required to stay in the institution to grow together with their children and watch the whole treatment process, the staff needed to help arrange their accommodation.

Everyday Discipline and Resistance

Trainees were ranked as in military camps. There were squad leaders and platoon leaders. All trainees were grouped into squads of five to seven; five squads formed a platoon. The position of squad leader was taken in turns by squad members. For some trainees, it was a challenge to live an independent life away from parents for the first time. They had to learn how to wash their clothes, clean their beds, fold their quilts into perfect "military cubes" like tofu (which needs a lot of practice), and to sleep and get up at scheduled times. Trainees had to get up very early to do morning exercise—rain or shine, winter or summer. The sanitation in each squad room was checked by a nurse, a drillmaster, and squad leaders every morning. They collectively evaluated conditions with scores and ranks. The ranking of hygienic conditions determined how early the trainees in a squad could

get their food during mealtimes. For example, the trainees from the squad with the best hygiene would be the first in the queue to get food on their plates. This sequence mattered because though people started eating at different times, they were all required to finish eating at the same time in answer to the mustering whistle.

Time on the base was highly rationalized. One was expected to do what was scheduled and ordered at a certain time and in a certain place. Anything not on the schedule needed to be preapproved by governing adults (drillmasters, doctors, or counselors). To be excused from training, for example, a note from a doctor or counselor was required. Among these activities, military training was resisted the most, especially when the sun was hot during midsummer. Lectures were also resisted because they reminded the trainees of school lessons, which they found boring, repetitive, and sometimes difficult to understand. But they could not simply sleep with their heads on their desks or leave the room, as they did in school, because the drillmasters were always watching them. The favorite routine activity among many trainees was counseling, as it allowed for self-expression and did not require much physical labor.

Controlled pleasure and delayed gratification were used in training so that trainees would gradually get used to a life without instant rewards. It was everywhere in one's encounters with the institution beyond military training. For example, daily consumption was highly restricted, and certain objects were forbidden to trainees. Contraband included snacks, soft drinks, cigarettes, books unexamined by the counselors, digital devices such as phones and laptops, and other objects used for entertainment. Despite the strict controls, these things still entered and circulated in the base through various means. Sometimes trainees were allowed to have a short outside visit accompanied by their parents if the counselor thought it would be helpful for their therapy. When trainees came back, their belongings had to be checked by the nurse. If they brought in something forbidden, it would be confiscated except with counselors' special permission. For example, trainees were usually not allowed to bring books into the base. But textbooks, nonfiction books, or comic books that the counselors considered psychologically healthy and educational for that person might be allowed. Men's magazines, game magazines, fiction, manga, and publications with dubious content would never be approved. I never saw newspapers or news

magazines in the base. The purpose here might be not only control of pleasure but also the creation of a space for self-reflection without exposure to many external influences. I once helped Doctor Huang, the counselor I worked with, to decide whether sentimental pulp fiction could be permitted for a female trainee in treatment for self-harm and rebellious conduct. We decided to let her keep only one book at a time, a way to both control the pleasure and reduce the uncertain influence. Yet many forbidden books were still snuck onto the base. An informant told me that he succeeded in smuggling a men's magazine called *For Him* (Nanren Zhuang) into the base at the cost of some snacks that were confiscated during the check. He put the snacks in the outer package of the bag to capture the attention of the nurses in the hope that they would not pay additional attention to the inner package where he kept the magazine.

Defiance and transgression (overt resistance) were the most identifiable behaviors of resistance. Defiance could simply be foot-dragging when answering commands or a refusal to participate in training and therapy. "Toilet excuse" was frequently used to escape a boring lecture or avoid group therapy. Keeping silent was also a way to show defiance. Some trainees intentionally starved themselves by refusing to go to the dining hall. Transgressive behaviors included hiding and using contraband such as cigarettes or mobile phones and fighting with peers. Contraband use was punished heavily, although some hidden materials (such as mobile phones) were said to be in wide circulation. Brawling was common among both male and female trainees. It was often punished with *yueshu* (bodily restraints with ropes) or, in severe cases, punitive long-term isolation. It was uncommon for trainees to attack drillmasters. When it occurred, the drillmaster would not hit back. Their usual reaction was to push the person away and control them with the help of other drillmasters.

"Prison breaks" happened from time to time. Such escapes were intolerable system errors and a reason for absolute suppression and punishment. But for the trainees, the escape, or even the imagining, discussing, and planning of it, was meaningful resistance or part of the game. In their constructions, the escape became an exciting, romantic, and heroic endeavor. The success of the escape was narrated by the residents as the result of sophisticated calculation and bravery—an influence of the cultural constructions in TV dramas, movies, and video games.

Gamifying the Base

Trainees were allowed to play nondigital games, and they were encouraged to play certain types of games, such as sports on the training ground or in the gymnasium. In many ways, game playing alone cannot be interpreted as resistance because it was also a form of permitted pleasure. But sometimes, when I walked through the corridor, I found that these games could not merely be reduced to "legal pleasures" because trainees were not satisfied with playing the simple, traditional, and unchallenging card or chess games. They constantly sought a stronger sensual reward by adapting regular games using more complicated rules and inventing new games to make the combat more exciting and engaging.

With a fifty-two-card deck, players could set up various games with new rules. The most popular poker game in the base was a game called double-up (*shuang sheng*). One needed clear thinking, quick calculation, and good team consciousness to play the game well because the rules required one player to cooperate with another to fight against another team of two. Another popular game was the famous board game Three Kingdoms Kill (San guo sha). In the standard mode each player selects a historical character from the Three Kingdoms to play. Each character has certain skills and attributes derived from the stories in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Everyone is randomly assigned a role (monarch, minister, rebel, or traitor) to play. To win, players must follow the rules set up for each role. For example, the rebel wins by killing the monarch, and the minister wins by killing rebels and protecting the monarch. The game ends when the monarch is killed or all the rebels and traitors are killed. The game progresses as players take turns drawing cards. There are different types of cards, such as action cards (strike, dodge, heal), equipment cards, and scroll cards.

At one time drillmasters thought Three Kingdoms Kill was too addictive to be allowed because trainees responded to the muster whistle more slowly than usual when they were playing this game. So they confiscated the game and allowed trainees to play it only on weekends. In response to that, trainees created a new board game adapted from Three Kingdoms Kill and called it The Base Kill, in which all the characters, roles, and rules were drawn from the everyday institutional life of the trainees. The

characters in the game included almost all people in the base—trainees, drillmasters, counselors, and even the director! Real nicknames of people in the base were used on the character cards. For example, Doctor Wu, a very talkative counselor, appeared on a card as Auntie Wu. Xiaobao, the youngest trainee, appeared as the Invincible Primary School Student. Another character, called Four Million, referred to Jianlong, who was said to have made ¥400,000 by playing games and selling virtual products such as avatars and equipment before he came to the base. "Four Million" was the nickname people gave him as an exaggeration of his fantastic gaming business. As in Three Kingdoms Kill, every character had unique attributes and skills. For example, the Invincible Primary School Student had the skill of avoiding attacks by the character Yongtai because, in reality, Yongtai was very protective of Xiaobao and would never hurt him. This character also enjoyed the privilege of drawing an additional card in each turn because Xiaobao was the youngest (and smallest) trainee in the base.

The action cards and scroll cards were also adapted from daily activities in the base. For example, brawl replaced strike as the attack action, escape replaced the dodge action, bread (something also used as currency in the base) served as the healing action, restraint was a scroll that one could use to make a player unable to take action for a turn, note helped one ward off the unwanted effect of a scroll, and medical advice and brooms became equipment to defend and attack with. The fine details in the design of each rule and card vividly illustrate the creativity and reflectivity of the trainees as they gamified institutional reality.

Such details also reflected rich information of the community beyond the institution. For example, the cards of horses in Three Kingdoms Kill, which added or deducted distance from the others, were replaced by the cards of brand-name sneakers, such as Adidas and Nike. These were the most popular brands among residents in this institution and among middle-class teenagers in China, reflecting the class identity of Internet addicts and the social position of the institution. It is worth noticing that although trainees are required to change from their casual clothes into military uniforms when admitted, a process Goffman characterizes as a "leaving off" and a "taking on," they are allowed to keep their branded sneakers.[14]

FIG. 9.1. The character of Xiaobao (left) and the card of Nike (耐克) sneakers (right). Photography by author.

The Deep Play of The Base Kill

In the previous sections, the mechanism of the base was presented as something that negates, forbids, confines, and dominates. The rules are applied because the institution needs to reduce uncertainty and maintain stability. But rules, as Brian Massumi argues in his discussion of soccer, gradually become “an integral part of the play without ceasing to be a transcendental intervention.”[15] For example, the rules in soccer give rise to many of the tensions that excite players and attract audiences. A foul made by a player on team A results in a free kick by team B. Suddenly, the free kick dominates the rhythm of the game because it may change the match results even in the last few seconds. In this sense, the rule is no longer an inhibitor. It is something that makes the game more engaging and exciting.

This argument also applies to institutional encounters. Once the rules

were learned through repetition and internalized into the everyday life of the institution, they became metainformation that the trainees could identify, symbolize, and recreate. When the institutional rules were adapted into game rules through deep play, they were no longer something that confined individual mobility and controlled pleasure. They opened bodies to contingent events. Randomness and spontaneity are in play in both institutional encounters and card games.

While playing The Base Kill, the institutional rules, roles, and boundaries stopped being interventions in reward seeking and meaning making but became the catalyst for exciting engagement in a "play within a play." This excitement is heightened when playing a game character based on a familiar figure, or perhaps even based on the trainees themselves. By gamifying the base and transforming its roles, rules, and personal relationships into a creative virtual infrastructure, the trainees cease being either the passive sites on which an efficient power mechanism operates or simply rebels against the enforcers of the dominating control. They have developed a system of their own through spontaneous, experimental interactions with the institution. The players create an "unreal" institution without jumping out of their own institution and merge the metastatement of "this is play" with the metainformation about discipline and punishment.[16] Though they do not directly change the rules and regulations of the institution, they dissolve the behaviorist meanings assigned to the restrictions and punishments behind those rules, undermining the intended disciplinary effects. The cards of brawling and *yueshu*, for example, provide commentary on the institutional disciplines against disobedience and violence. Yet they also demonstrate the possibility of living with the institutional disciplines through neither direct defiance nor nonreflexive obedience. With The Base Kill, the young people show that they can create more complex forms of play: the brawling card does not stand for actual physical violence but does denote the idea that brawling can take its meaning beyond the disciplinary framework. It is a symbol of developed human dignity, reflexivity, and creativity that claims their "misbehaviors" are appropriate while creating meanings deeper than resistance.

What sets the cockfight apart from the ordinary course of life, lifts it from the realm of everyday practical affairs, and surrounds it with an aura of enlarged importance is not, as functionalist sociology would have

it, that it reinforces status discriminations (such reinforcement is hardly necessary in a society where every act proclaims them), but that it provides a metasocial commentary on the whole matter of sorting human beings into fixed hierarchical ranks and then organizing the major part of collective existence around that system. Its function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves.[17]

In Geertz's interpretation, the Balinese cockfight is deep not due to the money being gambled but what money causes to happen: "the migration of the Balinese status hierarchy into the body of the cockfight."[18] Though the enormous amount of money gambled makes the game deeper, it is not the core driver of the deepness at play. People gamble with a pursuit of "esteem, honor, dignity, respect," creating and discovering the individual and social temperament.[19] In The Base Kill, though there is no element of gambling and hardly any material gain, the play is still deep as it connotes a pursuit of the social status that the young gamers hope to interpret and reconstruct by themselves and beyond the label of "Internet addict." With an iterative process of designing while playing the institution-based game, they have adapted the institutional rules and redefined the broader social framework of winning and losing that produces this total institution. While the governing adults consider these games a nonutilitarian pastime distinct from utilitarian productive activities such as schoolwork, counseling, and training, the young people create and discover therapeutic meanings from them.

Adapting the institution into a game is itself a form of an experimental play within the institutional rules. And the finest details of the game design constitute another kind of creative play built on the globally reconfigured metalanguage of rules. It accords with Thomas Malaby's argument that games are always "the process of becoming" and filled with contingencies.[20] A developed game is ontologically closer to the institutions where rules are established not only to avoid uncertainties but also to create contingencies and meanings, while play is a creative action in-between the conscious and unconscious and thus can travel beyond existing rules and create new symbols. But only when the negating functions of the rules become strong will tensions emerge and turn contingencies into the potential for symbolic constructions against and interactions beyond material restrictions.

Before coming to the base, the trainees connected with the online game world as an alternative imaginary of competitions better than their school exams. The games they chose were usually highly combative, with fancy characters or settings and rich instant feedback on winning and losing. The games opened symbolic spaces for the players' identification with the heroes or champion avatars and for creative engagements of contingencies, producing metasocial commentaries on people's positions in the competitive reality. These young people's gaming behaviors at this stage can thus be counted as "deep play" in the Geertzian framework as their pursuits of recognition are embodied in virtual bodies and battlefields. But this metasocial commentary does not intend to create a different version of institutional reality based on a critical awareness of the current version. People reflect on their identities by mapping their pursuits onto the icons and symbols designed by the game companies.

However, when deprived of the freedom to play for longer hours under the anti-immersion systems and Green Dam, the play became deeper. The young players personified Green Dam into a cartoon character called Green Dam Girl, creating their own icons and symbols to play with. This character was dressed in green, wearing a river crab (*hexie*, 河蟹, a mockery of *hexie*, 和諧, China's "harmonizing" actions) hat, armed with a paintbrush to wipe out online filth, wearing an armband with the word "discipline" written on it. Later, the character was adapted into even more creative and sophisticated artworks such as cosplay, manga, and even computer games with "unhealthy" content. The play became deeper after the players were led to create a more implicit symbolic space based on strengthened consciousness and reflection on the existing power relationships and social rules. The institutional restrictions were turned into meaningful cultural contents. At the discursive level, like the game *Chinese Parents* discussed by Florian Schneider in this collection, the Green Dam artworks provide a politically meaningful social commentary on the ironic phenomenon.

The same process was observed in the base. In the beginning, only digital games were banned in the institution. People could play ready-made board games and sports. At this stage, the play was only deep in the Geertzian sense when some residents hoped to prove their institutional status by winning over others through certain strategies. After Three Kingdoms Kill was viewed as addictive, confiscated by the drillmasters, and allowed

only on weekends, the young people came up with The Base Kill. When their available symbolic spaces for entertainment and creativity became constrained, they were motivated to create new symbolic spaces independent from institutional permission, such as games that can be re-created by the players even if they are confiscated. They came to realize that they had not only the agency to win a game but also the creativity to construct an alternative version of the winning itself.

The Base Kill, with designs different from both competitive schoolwork and equally competitive combat-based online games, indicates an alternative way out for these young people. Both China's educational system and the most popular online game at the time—*League of Legends*—emphasized intense competition and social differences. The companies that cultivate professional *LoL* players where some of my informants worked require them to practice and compete from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily in a residential game house, embracing the very philosophy of striving in China's market temporality. The Base Kill, however, is not such a game. Though the game is also combative, it does not emphasize hierarchy and rankings. The charm of the play is beyond the reward of winning, killing, and leveling up.

The Base Kill includes these features:

1. Every character is designed to be different yet equal. There is an intentional balanced design of attributes and skills to enable sustainable deep play. For example, though the character of Xiaobao has only three "hearts" (which means that the "life" of the character is relatively weak), it has the privilege of keeping an additional card at every turn and can avoid attacks from one of the strongest characters, Yongtai. As mentioned above, this design exists because Xiaobao is the youngest trainee in the base and enjoys protection from the older trainees, especially Yongtai. This design shows that the residents have developed a sophisticated understanding of the community and respect individual differences, merits, and equality. The criteria of comparison are no longer based on a one-dimensional grading system determined by a centralized authority, as in China's public education system.

   Though trainees also created character cards of the governing adults, they did not make them negative even though they had terrible experiences with some of the authority figures. Though mockeries and stereo-

types exist in character designs, they are not directed only to the adult figures. The adaptations are based on people's shared impressions of the person without intentional offense. People also make fun of themselves while designing their character cards, which makes the game even more deep and fun. While they play, the trainees may choose to play the characters of governing adults if their designated skills or attributes are helpful for combat or alliance. In the design of the game, there is a mix of mutual mockery and appreciation. It is not a reflection of assigned social status or institutional hierarchy. Instead, it is a play of sincere, mutual appreciation as full individuals. Through the design of the character cards, the trainees show a holistic view of each individual and express their desire to be viewed similarly by the adults. In my interviews with them and through the counseling sessions I observed, the trainees clearly expressed their wish for adults to stop talking in the manner of authorities and commanders, such as *jiang dao li* (talk reasons) and *xia ming ling* (give commands). This design reflects an awakening of the individual psychological interiority among Chinese youth under the market reform and the one-child policy, which challenges the Confucianist patterns underlying China's family-based social control systems.

2. By turning themselves into characters and playing with their selves, trainees subconsciously assign therapeutic meanings to the text of the play. What matters in the play is using your own character not to defeat others, but to gain a better understanding of how to utilize the strength of the character and the rule of the game to achieve a collective win, sometimes through self-sacrifice. Unlike video games, which usually include game mechanics algorithmically constructed to propel gamers to make reductionist choices (see Schneider's chapter in this collection), board games are usually less constrained by the automating numbers that structure people's self-maximizing behaviors. The design plays down the individualistic, goal-oriented pursuit of self-achievement, as encouraged by society and reflected in Chinese middle-class anxiety. Instead, this game includes the pursuit of individual status and recognition without forsaking the pleasure of mutual connection among peers, the sense of belonging to a wider community, and the rich experiential contingencies that can make the less advantaged players feel the

winning potentials. It also resists the assigned social hierarchy and the narrow path of individualistic winning (as in school) by showing the alternative path by design. Though many of the game mechanisms were inherited from the well-designed Three Kingdoms Kill board game, including the collective tactics and contingencies, the reason for taking inspiration from Three Kingdoms Kill indicates certain unconscious collective pursuits.

The gamification of the total institution is a vivid case of "a metasocial commentary upon assigning human beings into fixed hierarchical ranks and then organizing the major part of collective existence around that assortment."[21] But this interpretive act is based not on the static cultural arrangement of a small-scale society but on the dynamic social fact of a large-scale, rapidly developing, modern society. The game as a virtual institution provides a metasocial commentary on the problematic relationships and power mechanisms between adults and youth caught in the "unfree" world structured with binding and escalating social competitions in contemporary China. These social competitions are bound up with political and cultural restrictions, educational and social rankings, and social and economic hierarchies generated through synergies of market forces, the state, and culturally inflected systems of social control. What young people unconsciously express through the deep play of The Base Kill is their hope of gaining the social power of play through a more equal system of competition that allows them to develop social bonds and respect each other as whole persons.

Interestingly, this gamification happened in an institution where middle-class youth are removed from the linear development of both the competitive educational system and the competitive gaming market. On the one hand, the play of The Base Kill happens as a therapeutic act outside the treatment plot of the institution. No one, including the director, anticipated this gamification. And few governing adults would appreciate or even understand it as a therapeutic act. On the other hand, there is a poem-like slogan that every trainee is required to shout out during military training, which corresponds with the trainees' unconscious pursuits. I found the following text on a piece of paper kept under the glass pane of a trainee's desk:

Every day is different, the fingerprint is different, we are mutually different;
Banana and apple, compare and compete, but harm themselves;
Come to the world, express yourself, different from others;
Courage and belief, create yourself, master the success;
Thank the world, happy and free, keep on exercising;
I love myself, accept myself, recognize myself.

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10

Gaming while Aging
The Ludification of Later Life in *Pokémon GO*

KEREN HE

For Carrie, a sixty-eight-year-old retiree living in the city of Hong Kong, video games have always brought trouble to her family life. When her son was in school, she constantly fought with him over his gaming addiction, only to later become a fan herself of *Heroes of the Storm*, a multiplayer online battle arena game. After receiving one month's training from the Senior Citizens' Home Safety Association, in 2018 she participated in an e-sports event sponsored by Acer, an electronics company based in Taiwan. Unlike other e-sports tournaments attended and cheered on by young teens and adults, here the contenders were all in their sixties, divided into four teams coached by younger gamers. After two preliminary competitions and one final game, Carrie won the championship together with sixty-three-year-old Barbara and sixty-eight-year-old Rosa. The three sexagenarians enthused in the post-match interview about the new skill they had mastered, together with the life prospects it promised. Carrie was finally able to reconcile with her now-adult son, realizing his dream of gaming together at home. But perhaps more interestingly and importantly, gaming had won Carrie over as an essential exercise for body-mind coordination. "I have always taken it as my mantra," said Carrie, "that video games will shield me from dementia."[1]

Carrie's experience is hardly an isolated case in the world of gaming. With the expansion of the video game market and the growing need for leisure activities during the prolonged years of retirement, a considerable

portion of the next generation of gamers will be older adults. In 2021, the Interactive Software Federation of Europe reported that about 35 percent of those between forty-five and sixty-four years old self-identified as gamers.[2] According to statistics from the Entertainment Software Association, male gamers above the age of sixty-five in the United States have been playing for about seventeen years; women in the same age group have been playing for twelve years.[3]

In response to the increasing visibility of older gamers, DreamHack, the most renowned e-sports tournament company, hosted the first senior World Cup for *Counter Strike* in June 2019. Each of the four teams from Sweden, Finland, Germany, and the United States boasted a combined age of over 350 and enjoyed a high profile as well as a loyal fan base in online communities. While adult gamers continue to play their favorite games into old age, the industry has also invested in marketing efforts to court silver-haired players who have never tried video games before. As early as 2005, Nintendo launched *Brain Age*, a puzzle game that targets older demographics with the proclaimed health benefits of retaining cognitive ability. The company's Wii console was also marketed to attract older players who wished to develop physical dexterity while facilitating cross-generational playing experiences. Along similar lines, numerous casual games on mobile devices such as *Lumosity* and *Cognifit* are designed to address age-related declines in cognitive function, targeting not only elders but also those who want to take precautionary measures against aging through play.

This rising domain of senior gaming has become an emerging field that regulates and defines later life in the contemporary PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, where the identities of elders have been shaped by their exclusion from the labor force, as enforced by statutory retirement ages and pensions. Although very little quantitative research is available regarding Chinese senior gameplay compared to the United States and Europe, the exponential growth of Internet data makes digital games a potentially important venue for Chinese retirees and their everyday lives. In addition to conventional leisure activities such as TV watching, pet keeping, and square dancing, gaming enables new affective and embodied experiences for elders, creating alternative spaces for them to explore their identities beyond family and local society. Despite such liberating potential, what disciplinary forces are at work in senior gaming that have shaped the stereotype and Chinese

elders' self-image? And in turn, what kind of senior gaming can diversify the normative modes of play, challenging the underlying logic responsible for ageist bias in both leisure and work? This chapter answers these questions by examining the emergence of an "aged mode of gaming" alongside the rise of mobile devices and a neoliberal work ethic in the contemporary Chinese-speaking world. Central to my discussion is a case study about the reception of the augmented reality (AR) game *Pokémon GO* in Taiwan, which offers a potential site of interrogating normative senior identity and its underlying logic of development.

Although the intersection between critical gerontology and game studies is still relatively uncharted territory, scholars have already begun to pay attention to marketing efforts that recruit older players as an untapped consumer source.[4] Critiques have been made about the industry's tendency to overemphasize the potential health benefits of senior gaming, which stereotypes older players as a homogenous group troubled by similar physical and mental issues. Furthermore, by touting video games as a useful tool for maintaining the functional citizenry, designers and developers have been criticized for focusing too much on the pragmatic dimensions of senior gaming instead of its hedonistic ones, making gaming experience a means to an end rather than pure entertainment on its own terms.[5] This chapter takes this critical stance as its departure point, illuminating how the emergent gaming culture for Chinese elders falls into the same pitfall of sacrificing entertainment for instrumental purposes. However, I argue that such an instrumental logic in senior gaming must also be contextualized within the cult of productivity and efficiency inherent in the neoliberal economic rationale prevailing in the contemporary Chinese-speaking world, which penetrates the domain of play as much as that of work. This logic is what underlies not only ageism but also the developmental thinking that reifies human life in terms of its marketability and exchange value. In this light, the search for an alternative mode of senior gaming can also enact an alternative ethic regarding work and play outside of the neoliberal order.

The Aged Mode of Gaming

Video games have long been considered an integral part of youth culture. They are played mostly by young people and reflect values associated with

youthfulness. Featuring genres such as the first-person shooter, racing, and real-time strategy, mainstream AAA games usually center on frame-perfect performance, which requires intense practice, emphasizes competitiveness, and flaunts virtuosity in live streaming. The PRC's gaming market has been irregular since 2000 largely due to state regulation of console games and the ensuing black market.[6] Yet the cult of ableism in game culture is still prevalent in dominant discourses about digital games. On the one hand, according to the official discourse that espouses e-sports as a marker of the PRC's soft power in digital technology, gaming is on a par with other competitive sports and deserves more professionalization. The General Administration of Sport considers it a healthy form of athleticism because it can engineer superior muscle-brain coordination.[7] On the other hand, while blaming video games for Internet addiction, negative social perceptions still implicitly acknowledge their effects in boosting young people's self-assertiveness, competition, and ambition. In this light, games are condemned mainly for wasting such capacities in venues outside of the players' careers.[8] Despite these disparate stances, both discourses recognize the active physical and mental input involved in gaming. Insofar as they facilitate the maximization of performance and efficiency, mainstream video games replicate the logic of the workforce that defines its membership in terms of economic productivity. Excluded from the workforce for their perceived lack of productive power, elders have remained external to the market of video games. If the field of play and leisure takes cues from what governs the field of work, as Patrick Jagoda argues in his observation of post-Fordist society, those who cannot work hard cannot play hard.[9]

With the growth of the game industry and aging gamers in the PRC, however, there has been an increasing awareness of an aged mode of gaming—a new gameplay mode that accommodates the physical conditions of older players, enabled by the rise of casual game genres in mobile devices, and more importantly, by the waning of the pursuit of high performance that has so far discriminated against elders in play as much as in work. On August 21, 2017, *VG Chatroom*, one of the most popular Chinese gaming podcasts, released a special episode, "Elders' Gaming Life." The three hosts discussed their older family members' gaming habits while ruminating over the latest trends in the industry, which set the tone for senior gaming

in the future. In contrast to the emphasis on body-mind coordination in younger players, they observed that more video games are now encouraging a diversified range of abilities such as patience and strategic thinking, which particularly suits the skillsets of older players. In the latest version of the classic first-person shooting game *Battlefield*, for example, older players who lose out on reaction speed have the option to revel in the slower-paced activity of teamwork. This downplaying of competition in game design corresponds to the gaming mode of older players, who sometimes gain satisfaction outside of scores and rankings. In playing the console game *Super Mario*, one host recalled an older family member rejoicing over figuring out a tactic all by himself after repeated failures, in contrast to younger players, who typically acquire tactics online beforehand to level up in the most efficient manner.[10]

In addition to alternative in-game achievements, the aged mode of gaming is also prominent in some emergent game genres that envision an alternative temporality outside of the frantic pursuit of productivity. *VG Chatroom* pays special attention to one such genre, the "walking simulator," an indie game category that features players' slow, open-ended promenade through an environment. As is suggested by its name, the "walking simulator" reduces in-game interaction to the most ordinary bodily movement, such as driving a truck (*Euro Truck Simulator II*), serving as a fire lookout in the forest (*Firewatch*), or exploring one's family house and history (*What Remains of Edith Finch*). But in contrast to the prevalent view that mocks the walking simulator for its lack of intense action or high-pressure environment, the podcast hosts acclaim the useless, aimless action of strolling in gameplay, embracing it as an aging state of mind that can resist the urge to gain calculable output from immediate action. Game scholars have argued that the walking simulator can promote a feminine mode of play that pits a more casual interactive mechanism against the dynamic, aggressive masculinity emblematic of mainstream game culture.[11] By labeling the walking simulator an aged mode of play, the podcast further illuminates the contemplative, self-sufficient dimension that brushes against not only hardcore masculinity, but also its underlying ageist emphasis on physical vitality and cognitive agility.

The aged mode of gaming observed by *VG Chatroom* is part of a larger trend in the rise of mobile gaming. As smartphones and tablets have be-

come increasingly integrated into everyday life, app-based digital games on mobile devices have facilitated casual gaming—they are engaged only sporadically as time-fillers, and do not require much concentration as an ambient mode of play.[12] It is still debatable whether mobile games all register the aforementioned "aged" features, as the processing power of recent generations of mobile devices allows for more complicated gaming apps. With the increasing ubiquity of mobile devices among older demographics, however, the aged mode of gaming has cultivated its own niche market. According to a survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Tencent, about 80 million Chinese over sixty years old reported using a smartphone in 2018. For 98.5 percent of these users, the online platform WeChat offers the single most important one-stop source for news sharing, social networking, shopping, and services, as well as games.[13] Compared to other mobile game platforms in the PRC, WeChat boasts an ecosystem of mini programs for games, rather than stand-alone apps, that particularly fits the needs of older players. These mini programs not only spare extra labor in downloading and profile setting, but also integrate the sharing feature of WeChat, which is essential to the online social lives of Chinese elders.[14]

With a low technological threshold and lack of high graphic processing, most of the WeChat mini programs represent the bona fide aged mode of gaming. As *VG Chatroom* observes, one of the most popular genres for Chinese older players are tile-matching games such as *Craz3 Match* (Tiantian ai xiaochu) on WeChat. They typically do not require hours of training in muscle coordination and reaction, but rely on players' intuitive habituation and instantaneous pleasure in lining up tiles of the same color. The other popular game genre on WeChat, Chinese poker (dou dizhu), also demonstrates a simple low-tech design. Having long ranked at the top of all mobile game titles across platforms, most of the poker mini programs do not come with any new features compared to their traditional physical form, other than an expanded circle of players and in-game purchases of accessories. The genre's indifference to innovation and updates is so obvious that one host of *VG chatroom* remarks that its only contribution is to forestall the cheating that could happen in real-life play.

Although the aged mode of gaming on WeChat opens a playful space for elders, it does not necessarily erase the cult of high performance, effi-

ciency, and productivity that runs deep in hardcore game culture. As Julian Kücklich points out in his observations of mobile games, although the casual, ambient mode of play does not require intensive investments of time, training, or money, it nonetheless monetizes even the smallest and most fragmentary moments of a player's attention, transforming it into another form of profitable labor under the guise of play—or "playbour"—as long as data is generated and collected from players.[15] This strategy of converting leisure and distraction to marketable value is also visible in some mobile games targeting older players, where their aged mode of performance is covertly channeled back to the labor market. The work ethic of productivity and efficiency that governs youth gaming culture has not dissolved. It now takes on a more hidden and pernicious form, sparing no "useless" moments of its older players.

A case in point for this hidden regimentation of senior gaming is *My Amazing Parents* (Lihaile bama), a mini program game on WeChat launched in 2018. Explicitly targeting older players, as evident in the title, this puzzle game randomly matches two rivals or organizes group competitions with a variety of multiple-choice questions. Unlike similar games on WeChat that target younger players with trivia from popular culture, the puzzles in *My Amazing Parents* are mostly based on knowledge about household management. Common questions range from tips about cooking, such as "What is the best way to clean greasy dishes?" to the basics of child education, such as "What is the best way for kids to stay safe during a stampede?" The undertones of such questions parallel recent changes in the role of Chinese elders, who have become caregivers of the household and de facto preschool teachers of grandchildren.[16] Recruiting grandparents as unpaid domestic laborers liberates parents from domestic chores, indirectly contributing to the productivity of the regular workforce. In a similar vein, games like *My Amazing Parents* also discipline elders to adapt to their retirement roles as domestic helpers, capitalizing on their free labor for the benefit of a work-based society.

The aged mode of gaming thus remains ambiguous in its construction of a new aging experience. On the one hand, by catering to the needs and abilities of older players, it facilitates social inclusion in gameplay, profoundly diversifying the gaming experience while breaking age stereotypes. On the other hand, such social inclusion also opens the door to economically

exploiting older players, who are expected to prove their usefulness, directly or indirectly converting it to market value. In this way, the incorporation of elders into gameplay, despite its ostensible anti-ageist prospects, still replicates an instrumental and developmental logic that paradoxically enacts ageism. Although elders are no longer considered too useless to play games, their playing is only validated through its usefulness. To locate an alternative aged mode of gaming that significantly deviates from the market mindset, it is not enough to examine innovative gameplay mechanics and media interfaces on the industrial level; one must also explore how such mechanics and interfaces can be phenomenologically appropriated.

The Pleasure of Waste

While "homegrown" mobile games are rapidly gaining traction in the PRC's market, the transnational hit *Pokémon GO* has also enjoyed wide popularity in Chinese-speaking regions. Although the game was banned in the PRC because of its reliance on Google Maps, it created an unprecedented craze in Taiwan after its release in the region on August 6, 2016. Debuted in 1996 on the Nintendo Game Boy, the Pokémon enterprises have grown into a global media franchise that includes video games across platforms, TV shows, films, manga, boardgames, and merchandise. As the consortium's first mobile game, *Pokémon GO* swept the world thanks to its AR function, created by Niantic. The game overlays a virtual world inhabited by pocket (poké) monsters (mon) onto the real world. With the GPS sensor on their smartphones, players can navigate their environment and catch as many as 797 species of Pokémon, or hatch them based on the distance covered in walking or driving.[17] By visiting physical landmarks in their regions, players can also obtain props from Pokéstops and further participate in two types of battles at "gyms": deploying their Pokémon to overturn a gym that belongs to a rival team, or cooperating with multiple players to capture a legendary Pokémon. Taiwan's high degree of urbanization has guaranteed full usage of these location-based features. Especially in the well-connected, walkable metropolitan areas of Taipei, Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung, it is not uncommon to witness spectacles of thousands of players stampeding after a rare Pokémon, with the "intensity one usually expects of marathons or attempts to escape alien invasions or terrorist attacks."[18]

Although *Pokémon GO* was well received among millennials in Taiwan, for whom the franchise is part of their childhood memory, curiously, older players constitute its most conspicuous fan base. Images of retirees strolling their neighborhood chasing monsters became a staple in news outlets, and young players' jokes about their parents' or grandparents' addiction frequently popped up in online forums. Admittedly, elders do not make up the largest player population in Taiwan. In 2017, only 7.1 percent of players are above the age of fifty-one. But among those who have achieved the highest levels in the game, 48.2 percent belong to this age group.[19] The data suggests that elders are the most patient and persistent players and have continued to level up even after the initial craze for the game cooled. The trend accords with a survey in Japan conducted from 2016 to 2017: While the game failed to retain younger players over time, its fan base of players over fifty spiked from 17 percent to 25 percent. Among "heavy players" who played the game on more than twenty-five days in a month, the percentage of players above fifty increased from 18 percent to 31 percent over a year, in comparison to the decrease of players under thirty.[20] In addition to their growing number and sustained devotion, Taiwanese older players are also keen on participating in team play, which makes them highly visible in public spaces. It is not uncommon for elders to form groups on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Line, combining Pokémon outings with other group activities such as hiking and tea drinking.

The rising cohort of older players inspired an array of media discourses that celebrated *Pokémon GO* as a channel for ameliorating adverse conditions of later life, both socially and physically. Among other things, the game claims to offer casual fitness in the outdoors and expansion of seniors' communities beyond their immediate families. An oft-quoted report is a Japanese study about how the game encourages elders to walk close to ten thousand steps per day.[21] News stories suggesting that *Pokémon GO* helped elders with terminal diseases also contributed to an instrumental understanding of the game. According to one such report, Cai Tianliang, a patient in his sixties who suffered from colon cancer, used to lock himself at home in distress, only to rekindle his hope for life after getting hooked on *Pokémon GO*. It was reported that walking around neighborhoods in Taipei temporarily inhibited the growth of his cancer cells, and he later became an active leader of a group with approximately a hundred *Pokémon*

GO players in the Banqiao district.[22] Such alleged benefits of the game in incentivizing physical fitness and social activities have already been debunked by scholars.[23] But the bigger problem of the media discourse lies in its entrenched tendency to value the game's usefulness over playfulness, which undercuts seniors' right to have fun just for the sake of it.

More significantly, underlying such an instrumental view of gaming is a deeper instrumental perception of elders. As expressed by the shorthand "Grey Tsunami" in demographic studies worldwide, the grey-haired population is often considered a barrier to economic development that will inevitably drain public coffers while being unable to add to them.[24] This "waste" narrative has often been internalized by elders themselves. According to a study conducted by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in Taiwan in 2015, about 40 percent of older interviewees perceived themselves as a "burden of family or society."[25] Within this discursive environment, the potential for *Pokémon GO* to improve physical and mental health also extended to relieving the financial burden of eldercare. During an interview on the TV show *Da-Win Dining*, a physician mentioned *Pokémon GO* as a potential substitute for pain treatment such as morphine and to brain stimulants such as dopamine, which can reduce symptoms of geriatric depression. Because of the game's contribution to shrinking the healthcare budget, she joked that older players should be awarded the title of "Envoy for the Ministry of Health and Welfare."[26] These perceptions about older players in Taiwan constitute another dimension of the instrumental logic in social development. While *My Amazing Parents* implicitly recruits elders into an alternative workforce, *Pokémon GO* is praised for protecting the regular workforce from wasting their tax contributions on unproductive members of society.

Being the "waste" outside of the regular workforce and an ever-expanding economy, however, can be a mode of subversive play. In introducing the notion of "nonproductive expenditure," Georges Bataille envisions certain types of unproductive activity, such as competitive games, extravagant consumption, and artistic creation, that "have no end beyond themselves."[27] There is often an excess in such unproductive activities that cannot be subordinated to the principle of utility—the potential "material or moral good" to be gained in return.[28] Rather, these activities are dominated by the principle of loss—the energy, money, and time invested are consid-

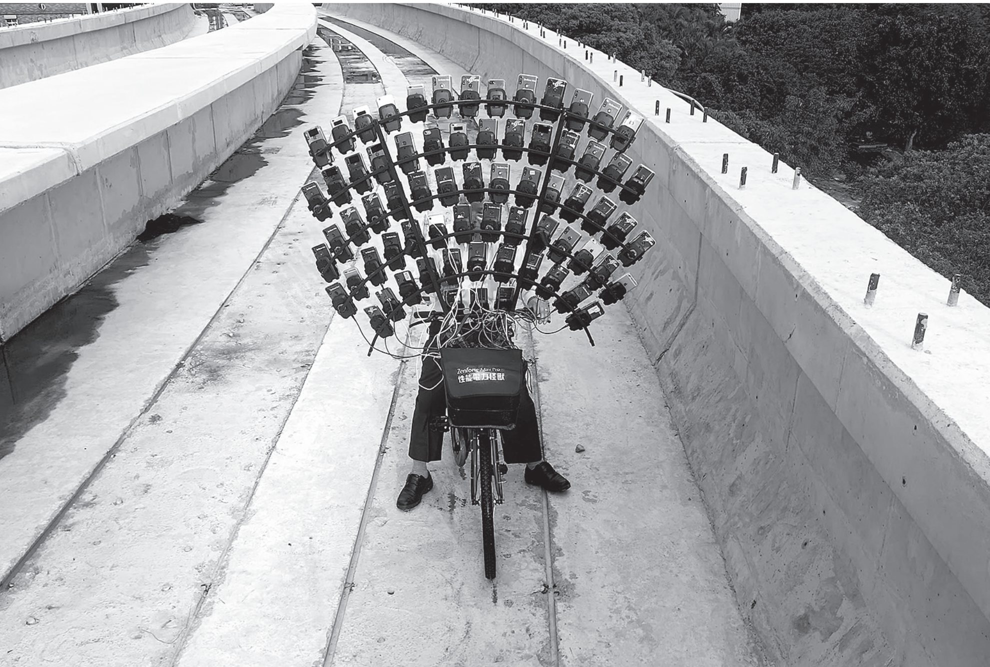
ered misspent or wasted, for they cannot be converted to anything with economic value other than pure pleasure. In the modern market economy, the work ethic of productivity and efficiency has led to what Bataille calls a “closed system” of exchange, in which no pleasure cannot be reinvested to more useful aims of stimulating economic growth. But the principle of loss has never ceased to disrupt domains such as children’s gameplay. On the one hand, childlike acts such as hoarding treasure defy the normative capitalist order of exchange by fixating on noncirculatable objects.[29] On the other hand, the pointless and sometimes destructive mode of play can discount calculation about investment return, thus resisting the logic of market rationality.[30]

Although the Bataillean mode of pleasure is most obvious in children’s play, senior play with games like *Pokémon GO* presents a much overlooked but poignant venue where older adults who are perceived as social “waste” pursue a “wasteful” activity. The case of Chen Ching-Po (b. 1949), a hardcore fan in Taiwan nicknamed “Uncle Pokémon,” best illustrates the gaming strategy unique to this demographic. A retired feng shui master who used to make a living by “catching ghosts,” Chen became obsessed with catching monsters when his grandson asked for rides to play *Pokémon GO* in the Greater Taipei metropolitan area. Unsatisfied with a single smartphone, over the years since the launch of the game, he has slowly expanded his equipment to seventy-two devices—more than twenty of which have independent game accounts—for an uninterrupted, simultaneous gaming experience. To carry these smartphones along with half a dozen industrial-grade chargers in the outdoors, he assembled a stacking system using a mop handle to lay out all the devices on top of his bicycle basket (figure 10.1). Pedestrians were often amazed at the spectacle, with all the smartphones sitting on his bicycle like a thousand-handed Bodhisattva, and fellow players all over the world were impressed by his virtuosity in simultaneously playing on ten devices, with each finger controlling one screen. In February 2019 the electronics company Asus invited Chen to be the envoy of their latest smartphone model, replacing the South Korean star Gong Yoo. Chen also stars in a short film, *ICING* (2021), which explores the technologization of everyday life in Taiwan (figure 10.2).

On the surface, the sensation Chen caused made him a potential figurehead for technological corporations’ sales campaigns. Within the ludic

FIG. 10.1. *left* Chen Ching-Po's array of devices on his bicycle. Courtesy of Lin Chia-Wen.

FIG. 10.2. *below* Chen Ching-Po's latest array with seventy-two devices. Screenshot from *ICING*. Courtesy of Chen Yen-Cheng.



world, however, his peculiar gaming mode nonetheless stands for everything in opposition to it. When Chen was close to reaching the highest level with his first game account, he decided it would be less fun to focus exclusively on accumulating the five million XP (experience points) needed in the final stage of leveling up. For the pure enjoyment of capturing monsters, he purchased a second smartphone to start the game all over again with a new account. With the passage of time, Chen eventually reached the highest level in many of his accounts. But his interest remains not in collecting Pokémon but in the process of catching them. He sometimes let go of a Pokémon after catching it while refusing to trade with other players. Only following the crowd in pursuit of a legendary Pokémon once, he remained uninterested in rare, highly sought-after species.[31] In contrast to younger players who take pride in their familiarity with the Pokémon world, a test held by EXP.GG, a gaming media platform, shows that Chen could remember only a limited number of Pokémon names.[32]

Chen's preoccupation with the kinesthetic pleasure at his fingertips is in direct contradiction to Niantic's design of in-game achievement, which encourages players to expand their Pokémon collection over time. And the logic of this in-game accumulation is fundamentally different from Chen's expenditure on devices in the extraludic world. While the latter amounts to one-time consumer behaviors, the former is part of the game mechanism that purposefully mimics the entire circle of economic activities in the real world. As Anne Allison observes in her critique of the franchise during its early stage of global expansion, Pokémon's playscape, from the very beginning, was essentially a template for millennial capitalism despite its nostalgia for a preindustrial world.[33] Through accumulation, exchange, and growth, the gaming process in *Pokémon GO* continues to mimic behaviors emblematic of the capitalist economy: After obtaining Pokémon as natural resources in their habitats, players are expected to not only evolve the species, increasing their numbers, but also to optimize their varieties for best battle results. With the introduction of the trading system in June 2018, swapping or transacting with real-world currency has become a common practice. This in-game economic incentive is directly supported by Niantic's marketing strategy of collection updates and controlled releases of the most popular species. Although Chen's obsession with the game would be welcomed by the company as a successful case of consumer retention,

his indifference to the developmental rationale significantly deviates from the company's cultivation of a *Homo economicus* identity.

Chen's deviation from the economic mindset of *Pokémon GO* is more apparent in his use of multiple devices and accounts. In the game's online community, multiaccounting is a controversial issue that borders on cheating, as it is against Niantic's Terms of Service.[34] Much of the critique against multiaccounters has revolved around the players' "incredibly selfish" or highly calculative mode of play.[35] Originating in the gym system of the game's older version, multiaccounting is aimed at maximizing currency gains. As defending the gym is the only way to obtain in-game coins, players would ideally keep their Pokémon for a specific time frame—but not much longer than required—to collect coins and make use of the Pokémon elsewhere. To optimize gym time, some players started to use alternative accounts in different teams to kick out their original Pokémon. Another highly controversial practice is to load all slots at one gym with Pokémon from the same team using different accounts, maximizing coin reward while paralyzing other players. But instead of taking advantage of multiaccounting, Chen refuses to battle at gyms at all, as it would, according to him, "harm the rapport with other players" in the community.[36] In other words, for Chen, the game's economic assumption that players compete with each other over the scarcity of resources does not hold. What he cares about most is not the accumulation of Pokémon, still less the in-game currency, but enjoyment. As he explained in one interview, the sole purpose of having multiple accounts, for him, was to be able to single-handedly fight a raid boss without having to wait for other players.[37]

Chan's gaming mode also fundamentally differs from cheating because of his unwillingness to use alternative accounts to build the primary account through trading. He showed no interest in evolving a single account as a trainer, which is the in-game identity cherished by younger players, premised on the most efficient and calculated regimentation of casual labor. In the game, any body movement that covers a certain geographical distance is transferable to the achievement of hatching eggs. Even the touch of a finger is an opportunity to bring in resources. In other words, no labor output is too superfluous or trivial to contribute to the growth of Pokémon capital. As one famous live streamer remarked, even a twenty-minute ride toward a gym should be respected as a serious investment.[38] For many

young players, a single identity is indispensable, as it is a proportionate materialization of their investment. The experience of Brandon Tan, a star player in Singapore, is a case in point. Although he occasionally plays with multiple accounts, Brandon is widely known for his primary account's record-breaking XP, which he claims has been hard-earned by playing full-time while traveling around the world.[39] The self-justification he had to marshal against doubts about cheating reflects the fan community's fixation on the trainer's labor value.

In comparison, Chen's gaming mode appears extravagantly wasteful, unable to be converted to any meaningful goals inherent in the game design following the Bataillean utility principle. Having no interest in expanding his collection, Chen remains indifferent to the game's developmental logic that mimics real-world economic behaviors. Refusing to validate a single trainer identity, he remains unswayed by the temptation to capitalize on his casual labor. More importantly, Chen's consumption of *Pokémon GO* is a literal waste of money in the Bataillean sense, as a large part of his consumption is stuck in a closed system that cannot be reinvested for economic growth in the "right" direction. In addition to spending around NT$200,000 on revamping his paraphernalia, including his bicycle, smartphones, and chargers, Chen indicated in an interview that he might spend an average of NT$20,000 per month on smartphone mobile plans.[40] He also pays for in-app purchases of coins and other props, which go directly to Niantic. But the bigger chunk of his expenditure simply falls out of the sustainable developmental mode that the company promotes, which subsumes fun and playfulness to "higher" goals of accumulation, expansion, or any extraludic progression in health and wealth. Much like Chen's seventy-two devices projecting sideways from his bicycle, his gaming strategy deviates from the value orientation of the game, which implicitly endorses the principle of utility.

Chen is not an isolated case among older players in Taiwan, but by and large represents the gaming strategy of his demographic. Unlike young live streamers who take pride in maxing out the potentials of a single account, the hardcore older players that draw media attention are all multi-accounters: Similar to Chen, in Hsinchu in northwestern Taiwan, an older player installed a device at the front of his motorcycle that allowed him to simultaneously play on three tablets and two smartphones.[41] In the Banqiao

district in New Taipei City, the late leader of the red team used to employ eight phones on which he played for up to eighty friends' accounts—both to help others and for his own pleasure.[42] Likewise, two older players with cancer, who became famous for their obsession with the game, regularly brought along two smartphones in their daily outings.[43] Multiaccounting and the simultaneous mode of play enable these elders to maximize the kinesthetic pleasure of finger gestures on touch screens, sometimes at the cost of optimizing in-game resources. While young players focus on the "Pokémon," older players are more preoccupied with "Go." Deviating from the goal of the game, retirees estrange themselves from the normative social expectation of reinvesting in personal and economic development, justifying their position of simply being "waste." As Chen and other elders' gaming mode gains more traction with the public, younger players have also started to follow suit. In one of the episodes of *I Like Esports* (Dianjing zanqilai) in 2020, a Taiwanese variety TV show, a young female professional joined Chen to showcase her skills using multiple devices and accounts.[44] Finding self-sufficient pleasure outside of the rules of the game is no longer exclusively associated with old age but rather with a chosen mode of play.

Conclusion

The emergence of senior gaming in the Chinese-speaking world is a double-edged sword in terms of age inclusion. It challenges the entrenched ageism and ableism in game culture, undercutting the neoliberal cult of performance and labor in work that has so far governed the domain of play. However, the new gaming mode is still subject to a more covert form of market logic that maximizes efficiency and utility. By touting gaming as an instrument for training elders in health maintenance and labor skills, this logic implicitly capitalizes on senior gameplay to economize the social welfare system for the benefit of a younger workforce. Against this overarching work ethic, deviations can still be located in individual gaming experiences and in technological innovations, as demonstrated by the case of *Pokémon GO*. In contrast to younger players, retiree fans of the game in Taiwan display a seemingly irrational, "wasteful" gaming mode that defies the game's design. In this light, to age against the grain is not only to age while gaming, but also to game in an aged way.

It would be a fantasy, admittedly, to overload the aged mode of gaming with the mission to resist the instrumentalizing logic of neoliberalism. Among other things, one can only reasonably anticipate the aged mode of gaming in *Pokémon GO* to be subject to change with the aging of its fan base, and it remains to be studied as to how elders' strategies of using multiple devices and accounts are adopted in other games with similar highly linear, goal-oriented designs. More importantly, as the chapters in this book demonstrate, game players' agency often remains ambivalent despite any disruptive potential. For example, the young addicts in the PRC's treatment camps were not intent on reinventing institutional reality through board games (chapter 9), and thought-provoking Chinese indie games on Steam still zigzag between reinforcing realities and simulating alternatives (chapter 11). By the same token, older Taiwanese players of *Pokémon GO* demonstrate only a partial deviation from the utility principle of the game, as registered in their multiaccounting tactics. For the concerns of this chapter, though, it is nonetheless fair to note that their weak agency—weak insofar as they can by no means resist the all-encompassing utility principle in the world of gaming—becomes exactly what validates play on its own terms. For it would only replicate the rationale of instrumentalism to deploy and value play for resistant agendas. Elders are not playing to be rebellious as much as they are not playing to be useful. And it is exactly in uselessness—for the purpose of both developmentalism *and* counter-politics—that the aged mode of gaming can find its shelter.

Or perhaps the aged mode of gaming is not as useless and singular as we assume. Its agency is becoming steadily more visible in the domain of eldercare. While AR games such as *Pokémon GO* continue to enjoy popularity among elders, virtual reality (VR) has also entered elders' lived experience, ready to revolutionize both gaming and aging. The recent popularity of all-in-one VR headsets such as HTC Vive and Oculus Quest has facilitated collaboration between tech industries and medical institutions, which employ VR as an integral part of eldercare in Western countries. On the one hand, virtual tourism and social network programs have shown potential in assisting elders to overcome their perceived isolation. Specifically, by presenting immersive experiences and stimulating interactions, these programs have started to be employed in rehabilitative treatments

of dementia.[45] On the other hand, VR simulations of senior perspectives is proving to be effective in preparing healthcare workers for their duties and, more importantly, enabling young people to sympathize with elders' day-to-day struggles.[46] Admittedly, the VR industry in Mainland China is still in its formative stage, focusing largely on the service of video streaming. However, VR games and their application scenarios are expected to multiply, especially after the Chinese government issued a five-year plan in 2022 aiming to better integrate VR into various industries, whose impact on senior well-being has yet to be seen. Fortunately for an aging Chinese society, gaming technology is chasing elders, not the other way around.

Notes

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10. VG Chatroom, "Elders' Gaming Life," *VGTime*, August 21, 2017, https://www.bilibili.com/video/av13636406/.

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12. See Christian Christensen and Patrick Prax, "Assemblage, Adaptation and Apps: Smartphones and Mobile Gaming," *Continuum* 26, no. 5 (2012): 731–39; Jesper Juul, *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

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11

The Video Game Chinese Parents *and Its Political Potentials*

FLORIAN SCHNEIDER

Little Stone is having a rough time. I made the Chinese preteen slave all day to satisfy the demands of his teachers and parents. His morning started with lessons in computer programming, then exercises in the arts, followed by math and science. He had hoped to kick back and watch his favorite TV dramas in the afternoon, but then I realized he was falling behind in his foreign language skills, so I made him skip leisure time and take more English lessons instead. Now it turns out it has all been a bit too much. Exhausted from all these activities, Little Stone is teetering at the brink of burnout. His cognitive capabilities are taking a hit—and this right before his report card is due. If his performance dips any lower, his parents will worry even more about his potential to enter a renowned university in a few years. And what will the neighbors say when they learn of his failures!

Little Stone's anxieties are my own anxieties: my task is to guide the little fellow through year after year of school stress and to help him balance the impossible demands that his parents, peers, instructors, and love interests all put on him as he grows up. That is the conceit of the Chinese-language video game *Chinese Parents*, which was released in 2018 for personal computers (PC) on the transnational gaming platform Steam. In *Chinese Parents*, players manage the daily life of a Chinese student from infancy to adulthood, with the goal of developing his or her academic skills for the university entrance exam, the dreaded *gaokao*. The game is awash with cultural tropes, and the designers inject no small amount of sarcasm,

creating a gaming experience that is equal parts resource management and social commentary. As such, the game is a digital reflection on contemporary Chinese issues, and it speaks to questions in both Chinese studies and game studies about the potential of digital media content to serve as a meaningful political intervention into contemporary Chinese society.

Politics in the People's Republic of China (PRC) today are strongly shaped by information and communication technologies, which have profoundly transformed life in China. Research into the political implications of these processes tends to explore what we might call "hard" political issues: the potential for digitally enabled collective action, authorities' ability to censor digital spheres and flood them with propaganda, or the way that online opinions shape policymaking—a topic I have also focused on in my own previous work.[1] And yet critics have rightfully pointed out that interactions in digital China are not primarily about such hard issues, at least not for the vast majority of Chinese digital-media users. Instead, much like in any other society, these interactions are about seemingly trivial matters, like sharing digital pictures of one's food or of cute pets on social media, connecting with friends and family in dedicated forums, consuming transnational mass culture, or playing games.[2] Digital China is full of playful activities, and if we are to understand what politics emerge out of Chinese digital networks, we would be well advised to take these seemingly "soft" issues seriously.

Video games, and the gaming cultures that surround them, are a particularly exciting place to explore how politics connect with everyday interactions in digital China.[3] China has a sizeable online gaming market.[4] Chinese enterprises develop games for the domestic market, often generating significant profits, whether in traditional PC or casual gaming markets.[5] This has in turn provided fertile ground for an active e-sports industry, which is the site of much debate about the nature of play in China.[6] The discourse on e-sports is also, more broadly, about the state of Chinese gaming and its potential to serve as a proxy for China's success in the world.[7] At the same time, Chinese gamers are part of transnational commercial networks that provide digital labor for online games, most famously in the much-stereotyped form of the "gold farmer," a player who resolves repetitive game elements for others in return for a fee.[8] In short, video games in China are sites of transnational engagement, political

imagination, and digital capitalist practices that bridge the divide between hard and soft politics.

A relatively new phenomenon, in this context, is the arrival of Chinese-designed independent ("indie") games on transnational gaming platforms such as Steam, the largest online gaming platform for PC and Mac. While the platform competes with other online retailers like Good Old Games (GOG), Epic Games Store, and developer-specific outlets like Electronic Arts' Origin distribution platform, none of these retailers feature the breadth of Steam's offerings or the depth of its Web 2.0 integration.[9] Steam has revolutionized the international PC gaming industry and catapulted it online, and its features range from comment sections and like buttons to community-building elements such as friend circles and live-streaming functionalities. It is in this context that Chinese game designers are now offering creative new games about local issues and experiences for transnational audiences, often opting for Steam-only releases over uploads to indie and casual gaming platforms like Kongregate or Itch.io. On Steam, these innovative designers engage potential players through early-access projects and online discussion, and much like the games themselves, these discussions are often decidedly self-aware about the sociocultural themes that the games cover.

Emancipation through Digital Play?

As a form of mass art, video games speak to many of the same debates as popular cultural products more generally, especially with regards to their potential political relevance. To what extent, for instance, do video games reinforce or challenge views of the world? Do they coopt players with their ideologies or do they challenge players to think critically about the worlds they are accessing within the game? Do they create fruitful analogies to everyday experiences? Do they simulate meaningful social and political processes? And by extension, do they make worthwhile philosophical arguments in their own right?

Scholarship on the political potential of video games generally focuses on one of two possible dimensions. When it comes to studies that explore the content and experiences that such games offer, researchers tend to emphasize either discourses, representations, and story ("narratology") or

the mechanics and affordances of the game medium ("ludology"). While some combine the two perspectives, it is important to acknowledge that each approach is ultimately informed by specific theoretical arguments, leading to often conflicting interpretations of what we might make of a specific game or the medium as a whole.[10]

Scholarship that focuses on digital content, specifically on the discourses that games generate, tends to be critical of representations that reflect, recreate, and potentially reinforce existing power relations in society. This kind of scholarship looks at the statements that games make about social actors and their places in the world, the racial and gendered stereotypes games utilize, and the social conventions that game narratives present as "normal" or "natural." This line of inquiry originates in cultural studies, critical discourse analysis, and the Frankfurt School's critical theory, and it relies heavily on literary and film theory, which it transfers to the medium of the video game to trace ideologies and the discursive mechanisms that lead to their normalization within specific game products. Scholarship of this type frequently treats video games much like any other kind of medium, proposing to "read" them as "text," even when discussing medium-specific mechanics.[11]

Another approach provides a somewhat different angle on the political relevance of video games by looking at the play experience, specifically at how the mechanical affordances of the computer (the controllers, interfaces, and algorithms) prompt reflection about the narrative content of games.[12] Conceptually, this approach shares much in common with the idea of games-as-ecologies that Douglas Eyman discusses in his contribution to this volume: the idea that games and their meanings unfold in the interactions between game mechanics and player decisions. In this view, narrative elements are not the most relevant aspect of interactive media, which reveal their politics by prompting users to reflect on their own involvement in creating the narrative through engagements with a machine and, by extension, to think about their role in algorithmically governed information societies. In his seminal game studies work, Alexander Galloway writes that "video games are games, yes, but more importantly they are software systems; this must always remain in the forefront of one's analysis."[13]

The experience of playing with an algorithm might then generate po-

litical meanings beyond, or even in contradiction to, the discourses and ideologies that games relay. David Murphy makes a similar point, arguing that the political potential of video games emerges from contradictions between representation and simulation, between narrative and gameplay; in this view, it is precisely the "ludonarrative dissonance" between these elements that creates productive tension during play.[14]

Chinese indie games are useful research subjects in this context. They are highly ideological, and they often make explicit statements about society. They also allow users to calibrate information environments, potentially offering the kind of experience Galloway, Murphy, and others see as politically most meaningful. We might expect to then find intriguing productive tensions and ludonarrative dissonances within such works. At the same time, the fact that the designers have opted to sell their video game products on an interactive, transnational gaming platform also means that we are able to see firsthand how players react to such games. What do the players themselves say? What elements of the games are meaningful to them? Do they notice the ideologies, or the algorithmic mechanisms, or both? Or maybe neither? As a case study, what tension does the game *Chinese Parents* create between discourses and mechanics? How do those relate to the experiences that players discuss on the gaming platform Steam?

The Discourses of Simulated Child-Rearing

In *Chinese Parents*, the designers infuse their interactive cultural product with numerous visual and linguistic statements that serve as commentary on contemporary Chinese society. The scope of these discourses is too rich to cover in full here, so I have singled out four themes that I believe are particularly relevant for discussions about the game's potential to communicate ideology, create player immersion, and prompt cognitive dissonance. Two of these themes invite interpretations that are critical of their subject matter: The first is the game's parenting discourse and in particular gendered assumptions about sons and daughters. The second is its portrayal of social pressures, which manifest in the game through certain achievements and concerns about "face" (*mianzi*) and money. The other two themes are more difficult to interpret as criticism and could be seen

to promote conservative attitudes. These are, first, the game's discourse on childhood, especially the game's nostalgia for adolescence, and second, the way the game portrays human development and skill.

Ostensibly, the game is first and foremost about parenting. The game is actually about much more than this, but the central narrative dynamic pushes parental discourse to the fore: the player makes choices about the child's activities, and as the consequences of those choices unfold, the mother and father interact with the kid through scripted textual dialogues. Through these dialogues, the game provides rich commentary on what Chinese parents might expect of their children and how their judgments reflect gendered biases. In *Chinese Parents*, players can choose to raise a boy or a girl. In terms of the gameplay, the choice has no immediate meaningful effect. The son and daughter are represented differently through the artwork, as are their rooms and other environments, but in terms of the cognitive abilities that the game asks players to maximize, or the options it offers for daily activities, the differences are either very minor (girls can attend ballet lessons) or nonexistent (boys and girls can likewise choose to play basketball, take science lessons, develop whichever cognitive or physical faculty they choose, and so on). Indeed, the game at times has parents, students, and teachers comment that life offers men and women equal opportunities (figure 11.1).

At the same time, however, the designers have injected discursive statements that suggest a different story. For example, if the player decides to send a girl to computer science classes, the father will act surprised and state that this is a "boy's subject" (figure 11.2). Later, as the girl grows up, her grandmother may make an appearance to share conservative ideas about how the main goal for girls should be to find a good husband and start a family. Judging by the symbolic and textual elements that frame such statements in the game, the creators signal that such gender interpretations are outmoded: reactionary statements are made to clash with the actual opportunities offered to the virtual children, and they serve to urge players to defy social conventions. The artwork also suggests that the children themselves are skeptical or even angsty about such parental (and grandparental) interventions: kids are frequently depicted lost in thought, daydreaming, and staring off into the distance. At the level of discourse,

FIG. 11.1. Dad's progressive views extend only so far. The father says, "How can a girl only study this; that's something for boys!" Screenshot by author.

the game presents a progressive view critical of contemporary Chinese society and many of its assumptions.

This is also true for the way that the game frames the social pressures that parents and children face in today's China. Two mini games serve as tongue-in-cheek criticisms of Chinese social dynamics: a frequent competition for "face" and a gift-giving simulation. The first prompts players to step into the shoes of the child's mother and compete with other mothers in a verbal game of bragging about their children while taking down the competition with snide remarks. The player and their computer opponent attempt to outdo each other in fake politeness and subtle insults until one emerges as the winner, which then leads to additional "face points." The second game asks players to take on the role of the child as they are offered one of the famous red envelopes that Chinese gift givers use to offer money to family, friends, and acquaintances on special occasions such as Chinese New Year. The player must repeatedly reject the gift, balancing the right degree of modest refusal with grudging deference to receive the gift. Reject too firmly, or accept too eagerly, and the gift giver will not hand over the envelope. There is much to unpack in both depictions, but the humorous simulations and the textual cues are so exaggerated and sardonic that they

again serve as discursive statements critical of Chinese social interactions, especially any superficial concerns with prestige and money.

It might then be fair to say that the game offers significant opportunities for progressive interpretations of contemporary China, but the game narrative is not quite that clear-cut. Especially when it comes to the game's portrayal of childhood, the discourse becomes somewhat skewed toward conservative themes. Take the portrayal of children and their environments. The visual artwork draws heavily from Japanese manga and animation formats that tell stories of bittersweet high school experiences. The backdrops are lovingly crafted to evoke the kind of school and university life that adult Chinese players would recognize from their own youth. These elements, combined with story components that deal with friendship and dating, suggest that the harsh competition for grades is tempered by a relatively sheltered upbringing. All of this oozes nostalgia and invites players to interpret the game's narrative with soft eyes, excusing the actions of parents, teachers, and other authority figures as loving interventions that are ultimately necessary in order to create the foundation for a memorable adolescence.

These nostalgia triggers combine with a reductionist vision of human capability that is meant to serve a specific understanding of success. Characters are portrayed as having a set of numerical faculties, such as those familiar from many RPGs and particular simulations like *The Sims*: cognition, emotional intelligence, creativity, physical fitness, and similar variables provide the core of the characters, and as such they need to be maximized on the road to success. The scores inform school assessments and ultimately define what universities the children can attend. If players wish to win the game, they need to buy into the premise that human faculties can and should be maximized in this way. This arguably serves as justification for a neoliberal understanding of social success.

Judging solely by the narratives and symbolic representations in *Chinese Parents*, the game ultimately offers both progressive and conservative statements; one could even argue that the satirical elements should not be understood as a form of critical appraisal but rather as a way of selling the game: edgy, self-aware cultural references sell. All in all, it is hard to establish conclusively what political interpretation the game encourages at this level of analysis, though the narrative ambiguities themselves are

already a progressive statement in their own right: forcing players to consolidate the conflicting statements pushes them to acknowledge that life is complicated, that there are no simple answers to social problems, and that growing up in contemporary China is ultimately messy. A look at the game mechanisms suggests a similar interpretation.

Game Mechanics and Their Disruptive Potentials

In terms of the story it tells, and the statements it makes, *Chinese Parents* is already an ambiguous cultural product, and this impression is only enhanced through its gameplay and design choices. The game combines a string of somewhat repetitive mini games with a barrage of Chinese memes that require a high level of contextual knowledge to appreciate. While mastering the mini games and deciphering the many cultural references can be entertaining, it also holds the potential for much frustration. At the same time, the game confronts players with loops of turn-based decisions and consequences that prompt continuous engagement with the game, both in individual playthroughs (raising a child) and across multiple games (raising generation after generation of offspring).

Some of the representational components of the game already discussed allude to game mechanics, especially where dynamic game elements contribute to the representation of human skills or to antagonistic interactions between player and nonplayer characters. One could even conclude that presenting skills and conflicts as dynamic variables is itself mostly a matter of representation. After all, the designers have decided to translate their specific idea of intelligence into something called "cognitive quality" that can take on a numerical value between one and several thousand points. However, it is important to recall Galloway's argument about games as systems: such dynamic game elements go beyond representation; they are matters of simulation.[15] In the case of the numerical values that stand in for certain skills, these values dynamically model human abilities, and they create an algorithmic reality with which players are forced to interact. If the players wish to see their characters succeed, they need to buy into the algorithmic premise, learn to understand its rationale, and take the appropriate actions through the game's interface to exploit this logic and maximize these values.

What kind of experiences do the game mechanics of *Chinese Parents* enable? Whatever one may think of the discourses that the game presents, a closer analysis of the mechanics shows that the game invites critical reflection on social processes, and that it does so by producing contradictions between the gameplay elements as well as between gameplay and narrative. Five examples illustrate this: the way the players are invited to identify with various characters in the game, the approach of using mini games to model complex real-world processes, the practice of prompting players to respond to in-game surveys about childhood experiences, the way the game forces players to balance trade-offs within the algorithmically managed resource system, and finally the effect of playing the game for several generations. Due to these elements, the players must continuously navigate complicated dissonances and disruptions, which in turn strengthen the impression that the social situations modeled in the game are complex, multifarious affairs that deserve critical reflection.

The first issue is a matter of identification. Whom exactly does the player play? Both the title and the early phases of the game suggest that the player is acting as a parent to a newborn, and as a review of player comments shows (see below), this is also how many players interpret their role. However, the game flips this identification by making players choose actions for the child that would not be under a parent's control—for instance commanding the toddler to roll over or start speaking words—and later choosing activities that are clearly not in the interests of the parents, like slacking off or dating. Indeed, the parents appear as pop-ups to admonish such choices, and one numerical value that players need to carefully monitor is the child's standing with the parents, which translates into perks if players manage to increase this value sufficiently. What is more, in some sequences the player must make choices from the perspective of the child, such as when assembling an essay for school, competing in talent shows, or complimenting a love interest.

Is the player then actually playing the child? This may seem like a plausible interpretation, but again the game stubbornly resists having its perspective narrowed: players skip back and forth between perspectives, for instance when they play the mother during face-saving contests, and they engage in mini games that ostensibly model neurological processes outside of anyone's control. This places players in an odd position, acting at times

as a manager, at other times as near-omnipotent god figure, then as a parent, and at yet other times as a child. This can be a vertiginous experience.

The mini games contribute to this sense of disruption through the ways they model social interactions. The short game through which players lay the foundations for the child's mental and physical faculties is heavily modeled on the aesthetics of mobile games like *Candy Crush* or *Bejeweled*. In contrast to such games, the child-development episodes rely less on spatial puzzling and more on resource management: on a partially obscured game board, players click on a limited selection of colored bubbles that increase certain faculties and provide perks, with each choice revealing other adjacent bubbles. However, each choice also costs the player energy, which is a scarce resource. It is a matter of both luck and of careful planning to get the most out of each round. This is a fairly simple set of mechanics that are meant to simulate extremely complex and meaningful processes in child development. Similarly, the mini game that models gift giving relies on an exceedingly simple mechanic: players have to click their mouse button repeatedly when the gift envelope enters a specific zone between giver and recipient, and the margin of error decreases at higher difficulty levels.

The reduction of real-world complexity through mechanisms prompts players to think about the technical aperture of the computer. Roth describes how this phenomenon in video games can be created consciously, as in early *Metal Gear Solid* games that require players to unplug controllers or restart the machine in order to solve in-game problems, or unintentionally, through technical problems like dipping frame rates or awkward key bindings. He writes that in such instances "the player is variously confronted with the performance of the computer and its ability to enact the unimagined, contributing to decisively alienating experiences."[16] This sense of alienation, arising from the interaction with an algorithm and its limitations, is also meaningful in the case of *Chinese Parents*, where having to smash the mouse button at precisely the right time to win can be supremely frustrating, can estrange players from the game narrative, and can push them out of the immersion that the game otherwise encourages through its cutesy artwork. In this fashion, *Chinese Parents* is never far away from reminding players that they are playing on a computer.

Another mechanic that contributes to this feeling is the survey element that the designers built into the game's narrative, which repeatedly breaks

the fourth wall. After each round of the talent-building mini game, players plan the child's day by selecting academic and leisure activities, then let the algorithm simulate the results of their choices. *Chinese Parents* then adds an element of randomness by injecting unexpected events into the daily routines, such as getting bullied, being singled out by a teacher, or being embarrassed by one's parents. The game asks the player whether they have experienced anything similar growing up, and once the player has responded to the query, the game displays the global distribution of answers from all players who have played the game.

To the player, this suggests that there are many people out there engaging in precisely the same game activities, and this in turn generates a sense of imagined communion with people the player does not know. The game mechanic creates the sort of "synchronous time" that Benedict Anderson wrote about when he described the ability of traditional mass media to inspire association with imagined communities such as nations.[17] In this case, the imagined community is gamers engaged in a Chinese parenting simulation. While such an experience might serve to increase immersion and invite identification with the game narratives by normalizing certain childhood experiences as commonly shared, the breaking of the fourth wall ultimately shatters any illusion about the players actually managing a child's life and instead invites them to reflect on their own position in this digitally connected community. The surveys provide intriguing moments for reflection, for instance by suggesting that a bullied player is not alone in their potentially traumatic personal experience.

One could argue that the survey elements are not actually game mechanics: players do not need to respond to survey questions; they can simply go on parenting without any negative consequences. The surveys themselves are what Galloway calls "nondiegetic" components, meaning they remain outside of the game's narrative.[18] This does not make them irrelevant, but it means that such elements interact differently with in-game representations than diegetic components do. While players can of course pause the game, enter the game menu, struggle with their input device, or (in this case) answer a survey, such actions are of a very different quality than operations that optimize the variables required to win the game.

What, then, do the game mechanics that directly govern play contribute to the discourses? Like any resource management game, *Chinese Parents*

requires players to look beyond the representations and understand the mathematical mechanics that inform the game's rationale. At the surface, the representations may seem blatantly neoliberal. They suggest over and over that personal dedication will directly maximize measurable skills that then assure success in the competitive marketplaces of education and work. However, peeling back the layers of representation to successfully play the game also means recognizing these neoliberal representations for the deceits they are. The game systems create challenges by confronting players with continuous streams of dilemmas. With a limited number of time slots per day, it is simply not possible to train a child to become, for example, both an athlete and a successful pianist. Add to this the requirements of staying mentally healthy and having a social life, and the pressures of the game quickly become overwhelming. In this sense, the game does not so much model parenting, or adolescence, but rather neoliberal informationalism. In an algorithmic world governed by measurable understandings of value, all achievements come at a steep opportunity cost. There is no pure sense of success.

While the game generates the potential for such realization during a single playthrough, it truly brings such meanings to the fore through its generational dynamics: once players have finished one game, they can continue by raising the offspring of the kid they just accompanied through the game. This next child will inherit some of their parent's abilities, but more importantly, players now enter the parenting cycle with additional experience. They can experiment with a different approach. Did the previous child spend too much time slacking off? The next generation can do better. Did the previous child train to become an artist? How about the next child maximizes physical skills to become a basketball star? While this freedom of choice is liberating, it also generates cycles of depressing repetition that, ultimately, still require players to maximize the same variables within the same dilemmas created by the same resource scarcities. The game cleverly turns repetitive gameplay into a meaningful (though arguably bleak) simulation not of parenting but of life in an information society. Whether in the game or outside of it, players are on a treadmill, and the game will not let them forget it. This is a powerful statement, particularly coming from a medium that is frequently maligned as a "waste of time" and an obstacle to social success. Chinese players are bound to remain especially aware of

this context, considering the prevalence of discourses in China that portray gaming as an "addiction" and players as "losers."[19]

Player Discourses: Making Sense of *Chinese Parents*

Chinese Parents can be said to contain contradictions on numerous levels, including within the narrative, within the gameplay, between narrative and gameplay, and even between players' experiences of playing the game and their experiences of living in an information society. But how do players react to these ambiguities? The Steam platform with its comment spaces promises to provide an answer. While I am not in a position in this chapter to quantitatively and systematically analyze all of the more than ten thousand comments about the game, I have examined the fifty comments that the platform itself identified as "most helpful" in the spring of 2019 based on user feedback. Subsequent research will need to explore how representative these initial impressions are, but several patterns emerge based on the most popular remarks about the game on Steam.

One observation is that numerous comments primarily discuss the game design or certain game elements, usually to suggest adjustments. Some players comment on how the game's numerical assessment method does not accurately model the real-world university entrance exam; others find fault with the way the game simulates dating. Yet others find the gameplay repetitive across playthroughs and would like the designers to resolve this problem by adding additional life paths (all translations are my own):

> When it comes to the game quality, aside from a sense of freshness at the start, the gameplay isn't very satisfying later on, and there's a lot of repetition. In the end I'd recommend adding outcomes where people do not get married or are gay.

While such comments do not tell us much about whether and how a game like *Chinese Parents* makes players engage with information society more broadly, they minimally suggest that players are comfortable stepping back and forth between their reflections of the game's representations, its mechanics, and its ability (or inability) to speak to wider social issues, such as

sexuality. A similar pattern is evident in player comments that discuss the game's representations more explicitly. In such contexts, players frequently see themselves as taking on the role of a parent, even though the game itself offers the various forms of identification discussed above. Apparently, the narrative setup invites players to see themselves as controlling a parent who is responsible for their child rather than as a child making certain choices under parental pressures. This leads to intriguing experiences for many players, along the lines described by this commentator:

> I didn't want to become the kind of father I despised as a kid, but in this game, when I became the father, every time I looked at those exam results, I had a terrible sense of anxiety; to increase my kids' scores, I wouldn't let them play or date but would only make them endlessly study, study, and study some more. I wanted my son to succeed, but in the end, he became an average worker. At that point I had a mental breakdown; I had become my own parents.

This comment already suggests that the player is using the game as an analogy for reflecting on their own social upbringing, and potentially also on the judgments that Chinese society makes about success and failure. Becoming an "average worker" is viewed unfavorably, and it here becomes the catalyst for a crisis in thinking. Other gamers likewise describe that the game left them "lost in thought" or "pondering deeply," and these reflections repeatedly lead to criticism of China's cutthroat obsession with material success.

> I originally wanted my young son to try out all sorts of careers, but in the end, I made each generation become the wealthiest.

> Even though each profession has its own delights, I ultimately still got hoodwinked by the money.

> When my kid grew up, I originally wanted to let things slide, but in my heart I still couldn't let it go, and during each playthrough I did my best to exploit my kid's full potential, making him attend the most classes and maximizing his scores.

> Even if the data turned out beautifully, is it really my kid who is happy, or is it me?

Aside from the reflection on monetary incentives, it is intriguing that the commentator here reflects on their ability to make a nondiegetic element like data turn out "beautifully," especially in contrast to the (implied) consequences on the child's happiness. Importantly, the player constructs their own narrative out of elements that are not, strictly speaking, part of the game itself. The game does not comment on whether the adult children are happy or not, only whether they are successful in their chosen career, and yet the player finds it worth discussing how the algorithmically programmed variables may clash with less tangible values such as quality of life.

Note also how the player comments on their experience across "each playthrough" and "each generation." This is a frequent point of departure for game comments. Players find their own reflections on society transformed through repeated play. As one player describes:

> When I was playing the game and I had completed the first generation, I suddenly woke up with a start to the realization that I had become a despicable parent. So during the second generation, I strictly followed my own educational principles, but then when I saw my extraordinarily gifted daughter left with no chance of entering a well-ranked high school, with no way to reverse that outcome, and she ended up having average scores in the university entrance exam, I had this deep feeling of guilt, like I had crushed a young sapling with my own hands.

In short, the conflict between algorithmic incentives and (repeated) playthroughs serves as a productive tension within which players make sense not just of the game but of themselves and the society in which they live.

Conclusion

What potential for social and political reflection might a game like *Chinese Parents* hold? This examination has involved a combination of auto-ethnographic work, design analysis, and discourse analysis, including both game contents and user commentaries on the gaming platform Steam. This approach is not without limitations: video games create very large imaginary spaces and exploring these spaces auto-ethnographically is bound to leave many potential ways of playing unexamined.[20] I have also only dipped into the rich player commentaries, and a next step will be to

conduct a more systematic, computer-assisted analysis of the more than ten thousand contributions to establish whether my initial impression of gamer interactions is indeed accurate. Another open question is whether players who comment actually reflect on the system of the university entrance exam or merely on the game; self-awareness may not be the main mode of play, even if it is signaled in the comments, and future qualitative research that observes and interviews players would shed light on the degree to which players translate their game experiences to criticism of the issues that the game models. Finally, it is worth asking how these observations about a Chinese game on the Steam platform compare to similar games on platforms that cater to indie and casual gaming audiences, for instance Kongregate and Itch.io.

Despite these limitations, it is clear the game *Chinese Parents* is politically meaningful. While scholars of video games have frequently been skeptical of in-game narratives and representations, mostly on the grounds that such components might communicate ideologies in service of the status quo, *Chinese Parents* is not so easily reduced to a dominant discourse. The designers have injected a strong sense of irony into the game's arguably stereotypical renditions of adolescence and parenting in China. Granted, the fact that a commercial game sells an ironic understanding of market capitalism to consumers for profit arguably says much about the limits of cultural industries to serve as vehicles for progressive change. Nevertheless, I would hesitate to dismiss the critical potential of such games. *Chinese Parents* generates emergent narratives that are full of contradictions and prompt players to reflect on the many seemingly absurd social tensions that define the experience of growing up in contemporary China. It is by no means clear that the game coopts players into a conservative worldview, despite its nostalgia-inducing artwork and the frequently reactionary attitudes of authority figures, or that it normalizes neoliberal assumptions about success. Instead, it provides enough communicative resources to invite critical engagement with precisely these attitudes.

While the narrative already provides players with plenty of triggers for critical reflection, the game mechanics create an experience that is truly ambiguous and characterized by frequent moments of estrangement from the game. If the narrative serves as a commentary on Chinese social processes, then the repetitive gameplay, reductionist mini games, and algorithmically

constructed dilemmas serve as a metacommentary. The message that these tensions send is that growing up in China today is an impossible task, shaped by neoliberal constraints that cannot be overcome, only "gamed," much like scholars in earlier periods "gamed" the imperial examination system that preceded today's dreaded *gaokao* (see the introduction to this volume). As the player comments suggest, such realizations leave many a gamer "deeply pondering."

Ultimately, the most powerful aspect of *Chinese Parents* is not related to its parental themes at all. It is instead its ability to algorithmically model and interactively implement the seemingly insurmountable contradictions between harsh social expectations and nonconformist attempts to achieve happiness in China. By putting players in the uncomfortable position of having to negotiate these contradictions, the game subtly milks an irony that is likely to be on Chinese players' minds: that playing a game is precisely the kind of nonconformist behavior that the game asks them to minimize if they wish to win the game. *Chinese Parents* is not solely, or even primarily, a child-rearing simulator. It is a tongue-in-cheek object lesson about the value of industriousness that can ironically only be learned by "wasting" time playing.

Notes

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12

The Public Gaming Discourse of Honor of Kings *in China*

JIAQI LI

The quality and creativity of mobile games have evolved tremendously since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Compared to the first generation of mobile games such as *Tetris* (1994) and *Snake* (1997), thousands of game apps now feature more vivid graphics, sounds, and social connections. More significantly, together with mobile devices, these game apps are making virtual experience a part of our daily lives. *Angry Birds*, *Fruit Ninja*, *Pokémon GO*, and other popular mobile games are certainly being installed or uninstalled on smart phones or tablets at this moment. The same touch-based interaction, however, is available on only a few newer laptop brands. Slicing virtual fruits with our nimble fingers is more addictive than with a clumsy mouse or keyboard. Wandering streets to catch a target Pokémon in augmented reality is an unprecedented adventure for all of us. Our new and pervasive gaming experiences are more tightly bound to our mobile devices.

With the rapid growth of global mobile industries, the development of mobile gaming in Asia has attracted researchers' attention. Publications have focused on "the politics of cute customization" in South Korea and Japan, specialties of Japanese and South Korean mobile gaming culture, and the influence of the smartphone on the "transformative mobile game culture" of South Korea.[1] Chinese gaming culture, however, has remained relatively unexplored. When it comes to the Chinese mobile game market, researchers have been primarily concerned about the socioeconomic effects

of game addiction and digital piracy.[2] Studies have also focused on the production model of mobile games in China, factors that influence user adoption of mobile games, and the impact of mobile games on Chinese "industrial structure and creativity."[3]

Little work has focused on public perceptions and uses of Chinese mobile gaming. Since China's sociopolitical situation is different from those of its maritime neighbors, how do Chinese talk about mobile gaming in everyday life? What is the mobile gaming discourse? Case studies on the consumer perspective have investigated Chinese mobile game genres and their impacts on local consumers' behaviors such as *WeMatch* and *Space Hunter*, the experiences of Chinese urban white-collar workers in the social games *Trading Friends* and *Parking War*, and the comparative experiences of adolescent gamers in South Korea and China.[4] Such research focuses on Chinese consumer behavior in the mobile game market, but does not address issues of Chinese public discourse to study perceptions of mobile gaming in daily life.

A useful lens for exploring changes in Chinese public gaming discourse is the 2017 nationwide debate about a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) mobile game, *Honor of Kings* (Wangzhe rongyao). *Honor of Kings* (*HoK*) was the most popular mobile game in China, with 53.8 million daily active users by the end of 2018.[5] The great popularity of *HoK* triggered severe public criticism that aimed to ban its sales on the domestic market. Both commentary on discussion boards and journalistic and government documents on the issue show that the survival of *HoK* in the Chinese market is dependent more on game modifications than the company's defense against domestic criticism.

The Popularity of *HoK*: Mobile E-sport, Social Function, and Localizing Role-Play

HoK is labeled with two contradictory terms in China, "national game" (*guomin youxi*) and "pesticide" (*nongyao*). The latter term is short for "pesticide of kings" or "pesticide of the dead" (*wangzhe nongyao*), a homophone of its official name, Wangzhe rongyao, which ironically indicates tremendous social turbulence caused by severe game addiction. By the end of May 2017, the number of monthly active users (MAU) of *HoK* was 163 million.[6] *HoK*

FIG. 12.1. Comparison of *HoK* (left) and *LoL* (right). Screenshots courtesy of Du Ruibin 杜瑞斌.

was reported to be the top iOS game in the world in the first half of 2017, earning US$150 million.[7]

HoK was first published in November 2015 by Tencent Holdings Limited. As one of the largest international companies in China, Tencent is known for its social media platforms, Tencent QQ and WeChat, as well as its platform for publishing or licensing Internet games. In 2008, Tencent became the sole agency for *League of Legends* (*LoL*), a global strategy video game, which was published by the US company Riot Games. After purchasing and hosting Riot Games in 2011, Tencent started to develop a mobile game based on *LoL*. *HoK* shares many similarities with *LoL*: both are role-playing MOBAs in which a player controls a single character on one of two teams to destroy the opposing team's structure. They provide players with six types of roles, including marksman, mage, assassin, tank, fighter, and supporter. The two games are similar in graphic design, notably the appearances of characters and battlefields (figure 12.1).

HoK has three distinctive features, however, that contribute to its unprecedented success in the Chinese market. First, *HoK* is defined as a mobile electronic sport (e-sport). Compared to a PC, a mobile device has a smaller screen, simpler operating system, and less digital storage. These

physical restrictions provide a gamer with limited space to conduct delicate performances in digital competitions. These disadvantages, however, were transformed by Tencent into advantages. A small device provides more flexibility for players to start a competition whenever and wherever they like. To ensure that players can start games at odd times without being interrupted, Tencent, by simplifying the gaming processes, reduced the competition period from hours to only fifteen minutes on average. Another significant improvement was the virtual keyboard designed for this mobile game. By touching a screen, competitors can control their roles more directly and quickly. The virtual-device-based operation provided gamers with more intimate interaction than one based on a physical device. Overall, the game became more accessible and attractive to diverse groups, although the complexity and options for competition were reduced. By the end of May 2017, there were over 200 million players, 54 percent of whom were female, reversing the male-dominated landscape of e-sports.[8]

Second, *HoK* broadens and deepens social engagement within Tencent's platform. Reportedly, by the end of the first half of 2017, the MAU number of Tencent QQ was about 700 million and WeChat over 900 million.[9] Only Tencent QQ or WeChat users can sign in to their accounts as a formal member of the gaming community. The access rule aims to lead users of multiple social media platforms onto its mobile gaming platform. Built on a social media network, *HoK* encourages users to invite their friends to join a competition for increasing connection and intimacy. Users, after logging in to the game, can view their friends' gaming data, such as rankings, historical records, and active status. The gaming data becomes part of their conversations. More importantly, the game competition enriches the social model as well. As a teamwork-based game, *HoK* requires team players to cooperate. For example, in the normal model of five-on-five competition, each teammate needs to choose a different role to compose a well-balanced team. Three players should defend their home constructions in three branches against the opposite team's attacks. Two other teammates have the duty of hunting to earn money for equipment or supporting their teammates if their territory is invaded. Teammates are allowed to text or talk with each other to design strategies. By engaging in in-game interaction, gamers have the opportunity to socialize with friends from Tencent QQ or WeChat.

The third feature is its localization design, which diversifies the mobile e-sport experience. The character designs are mainly based on Chinese history and mythology, which are well-known among Chinese players. When controlling a character on the battlefield, players can listen to short famous quotes from the character to experience its personality. For Lü Bu, the generous military general in the late Eastern Han dynasty, as an example, eight different quotes show his boldness, including "Kill the blocking god" (Shendang shashen) and "From this moment, the battlefield is dominated by me alone" (Congcike kaishi, zhanchang youwoyiren zhuzhai). Some characters' lines are taken or adapted from classical poems or popular movies. Players can purchase virtual skins to change the original costumes and soundtracks into more individualized versions as well. The great popularity of *HoK* stimulated various business opportunities for other industries, such as game data analysis, live webcasts, and more.[10] Meanwhile, *HoK* was triggering intense debates across the nation.

Debates on *HoK*: From Antihistory and E-opium to a New Digital Lifestyle

Despite its ongoing popularity, *HoK* suffered fierce criticism in 2017, aimed at its antihistorical design. In March, *Guangming Daily*, an official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for domestic intellectuals, criticized the mobile game for distorting Chinese history. The report argued that the game characters, inconsistent with the historical and mythological narrative, were keeping teenagers from forming an "authentic" historical view. For example, Jing Ke is a male assassin in history but is female in the game. The report emphasized that mobile games, as a branch of the culture industry, should take on educational responsibility instead of merely making profits.[11] *People's Daily*, the largest official newspaper of the CCP, reproduced news of the report in both its WeChat account and Sina microblog.[12]

The criticism also aroused opposite opinions, even within the national press. *China Daily*, owned by the publicity department of the CCP, mentioned that some Chinese ancient poems that appear in *HoK* had become popular.[13] An article from the *21st Century Business Reviewer* noted that Tencent rewrote traditional stories in a modern style, which would enrich national culture.[14]

The public reputation of *HoK* was hurt during these debates, though some supporters insisted that game industries should not be responsible for education.[15] Tencent took action to avoid further criticism: in April they added introductions to characters adapted from Chinese history and mythology.[16] For the purpose of showing the differences between fictional and historical narratives, *HoK* not only provided historical backgrounds for these characters, but also invented new stories to introduce their game roles. Tencent changed the name of the female assassin from Jing Ke to A Ke to make the character more fictional and independent as well.[17]

Tencent's game website also released a series of videos on how to learn Chinese history in an interesting way, thus branding *HoK* as an educational product. In its first video on Liu Bei, a king in the late Eastern Han dynasty, Tencent argued that the key to learning history is to understand historical figures instead of reciting facts. By explaining how its designers embodied the benevolence and justice of Liu Bei in *HoK*, Tencent reframed the antihistorical debates as educational value conflicts.[18] Moreover, based on its attractive soundtrack, Tencent continued to operate the poetry reading program and to produce its background music albums. Lu Han, a Chinese pop star, was invited as the brand ambassador to strengthen the trust between young players and the game brand.[19]

The next criticism of *HoK* was that it could become addictive for its teen players. *China Youth Daily,* run by the Communist Youth League of China, criticized *HoK* as "digital opium," citing several game-addiction cases.[20] The criticism of game addiction was later enlarged by two developments in the city of Hangzhou. Jiang Xiaoxiao, a middle-school teacher, published an article attributing students' distorted values to their use of mobile games and called for a ban on the games for the sake of teenagers' mental health.[21] Her article was quickly reproduced on the Internet. Next, a thirteen-year-old pupil jumped off a building because his father stopped him from playing *HoK*. As the pupil was being moved to the hospital, he woke up and begged to log in to the game one more time.[22] The *Qianjiang Evening News* proposed a ban on *HoK* after reporting on these two events.[23] Furthermore, by investigating several primary and junior schools in Shenzhen and interviewing Tencent company representatives, the *Southern Metropolis Daily*, the most influential newspaper in Southern China, exposed that *HoK* had not implemented the national anti-addiction

system that aimed to protect adolescents from online game addiction.[24] More media criticized the game's evil nature in late June, though several reports argued that it was unreasonable to simply ban the mobile game.[25]

Faced with this new wave of criticism, Tencent promised to upgrade its system and limit teenagers' gaming hours in the near future.[26] Hu Yong, a professor at Peking University and chairman of the China Information Economics Society, was invited by the company to defend the mobile game in a column at the same time.[27] However, before mounting the anti-addiction system, Tencent suffered the fiercest criticism to date from official media as *People's Daily Online* criticized *HoK* for causing serious addiction problems and called for a strengthening of the supervision of the company on July 3, 2017.[28] The next day, *People's Daily* published another article calling for supervision of online games.[29] This criticism was so serious that it directly caused the Tencent stock shares to plunge as much as 5 percent, losing over US$17 billion in a single day.[30]

Tencent's rebranding measures came in the following days. On July 3, Li Yu, the chief developer of *HoK*, published a letter of apology and an improvement plan.[31] Tencent implemented anti-addiction measures on the following day to limit teenagers' gaming time. Ironically, that same day, it was reported that some teenagers bypassed the restrictions through black market applications.[32] The ineffectiveness of the anti-addiction system drove the public to rethink the causes of game addiction. Both official and unofficial media outlets turned from attacking *HoK* to considering the larger problem of domestic game addiction, though some voices doubted Tencent's security system.[33] The responsibility for mobile addiction was shifted toward family, school education, or other factors. In its fourth article, *People's Daily* attributed game addiction to the dereliction of family duty instead of to the black market or the game industry.[34] This forgiveness from the official media also stimulated a quick increase in the value of Tencent stock.

This was not the end of the debate about *HoK*. If the mobile game is not a source of addiction, how do we reconsider the role of mobile gaming in daily life? Significantly, *People's Daily* argued that mobile games indicated the emergence of a new mobile life.[35] However, criticism of *HoK* kept growing in July. On July 7, Xinhua News Agency, an official agency of the Chinese government, advocated for sociopolitical powers to engage in

forming a healthy gaming lifestyle, and on July 11 emphasized that the game industry needs both governmental support and supervision.[36] It appeared that for the sake of its survival, *HoK* would be wise to invite sociopolitical powers to reshape its gaming experience.

For the official media, the problem of distorting history still existed, which would influence political support for globalizing the mobile game. On July 10, Xinhua criticized *HoK* for its representation of Chinese history, which could mislead both Chinese teenagers and foreign players.[37] Because of its antihistorical image, *HoK* had been considered an inferior cultural product by *Guangming Daily*, which argued that the Chinese game industry should focus on the "proper" narrative of Chinese culture.[38] This article was reproduced by the official website of the Ministry of Culture, which suggested the direction of national policy on the mobile game industry.

The gaming community showed little interest in Tencent's attention to poetry reading, background music albums, and history lessons, as those programs aimed to promote *HoK* as a creative product but did nothing to improve their gaming experiences. According to the number of visits to the official website of *HoK*, the history lesson series attracted the highest number of viewers among the three programs. While the video of Li Bai, a Tang dynasty literary genius, had 741,000 views by November 2017, the number was insignificant compared with the continually increasing number of users, which had reached 178 million by the end of September.[39] What has sustained and enlarged the popularity of *HoK* is not the company's development of these three programs or its defense against public criticism, but the game's modification, which successfully transformed sociopolitical resistance into cultural consumption.

Reimagining Pop Culture: Resistance or Consumption?

The global mobile game industry has been booming since 2014. The average popular period of the top twenty mobile games in 2015 in the American market was about fourteen months.[40] The three-year-long top status of *HoK* in China is thus an exception in the global game market. However, during the debates of 2017, *HoK* was labeled as antihistorical and addictive in China. What makes *HoK* acceptable as a new kind of digital lifestyle, therefore, has been its mobile game modification. Through ongoing mod-

ifications, Tencent has developed a new form of digital nationalism and creative imagination to satisfy both the Chinese official media and the gaming community.

Instead of following an "authentic" historical narrative, Tencent chose to embed the value of nationalism into the game. A series of characters named the Great Wall Team (*changcheng xiaodui*), later renamed the Great Wall Guardians (*changcheng shouweijun*), were published from early June to mid-September 2017. The team leader is Hua Mulan, the legendary female warrior in ancient Chinese literature. Other team members include Kai, the first original character, released in July; and Baili Shouyue, Baili Xuance, and Su Lie, all modeled on famous military generals in the Tang empire but not well-known in present-day China.[41] The four new characters were released one by one from July to September. The mission of the team is to protect their homeland from invasion by monsters. This fictional story rewrites China's history by emphasizing defensive justice in the virtual war narrative.[42] This national defense value is also highlighted in the gameplay itself. If there are more than two teammates from the Great Wall Guardians, they can enhance their abilities to fight on the battlefield. In addition, background orchestral music enriches the epic imagination aurally.[43] Tencent thus successfully recuperated its antihistorical image by producing a new form of digital nationalism.

Meanwhile, Tencent tried to improve the creative image of *HoK* to attract more players. Besides the cool-looking fiend prince, Kai, Tencent published its second original character on October 23, the cute pet Mengqi, to target young players and female players.[44] The continual emergence of new characters aimed to enhance the independent and creative features of the mobile game and diversify the gaming experience. Another breakthrough in Tencent's rebranding strategies was the invitation of pop singers to produce theme songs for its game characters. The first such pop song was produced for the 7th Lu Ban, a robotic character modeled on a historical Chinese carpenter and inventor of the same name. The theme song, "IQ 250" (Zhishang Erwuling), was composed by Hua Chengyu, an influential contemporary Chinese singer and songwriter. The title is a shortened form of one of the character's game lines: "Master Lu Ban, IQ 250; Worship, remember to worship" (*Luban dashi, zhishang erwuling; mobai, jidemobai*). Ironically, according to game data from June 2017, the clever 7th Lu Ban was

the worst fighter, with 6443 million deaths, 1731 million more deaths than the second-ranking character, Hou Yi, a Chinese legendary hero who shot down nine suns to solve a severe drought.[45] Although the large numbers of deaths make the 7th Lu Ban less attractive, Hua's lyrics reinterpret the terrible fighter as a cute maverick. His musical interpretation changed the cultural image of the 7th Lu Ban as well as the meaning of "IQ 250" into a more positive form.[46] This new interpretation encouraged competitors to explore and enjoy a more diverse virtual experience. The history-based world of *HoK* was expanded by publishing original characters and pop songs, and the game's new cultural image thus became more acceptable to Chinese media — at least, there had been no more serious collective criticism about its cultural representation.

The flexibility of the digital online program makes it available to respond to the domestic criticism as well as to global markets in a short period. Since late 2017, Tencent has published several foreign-language versions of *HoK* to target overseas players. Instead of adding foreign cultural elements to expand the existing virtual worldview like *World of Warcraft* (as Douglas Eyman demonstrates in this volume), Tencent rewrote the whole story and redesigned its virtual characters for non-Chinese players to become immersed in the game more quickly. In the English version of *HoK*, *Arena of Valor*, most Chinese characters are replaced by American and Japanese heroes, such as Batman, The Flash, and Jinnar, while Sun Wukong and a few other recognizable Chinese figures are visually redesigned for Western players.[47] By deconstructing Chinese nationalism and aesthetics, the mobile game opened new digital space for overseas players to craft their gaming experiences. Indeed, while *Arena of Valor* is designed and promoted by the Chinese Internet giant, it is becoming much harder to categorize *Arena of Valor* as Chinese pop culture. The flexibility of digital modification allows a local mobile game to de-emphasize its nationalism and culture in the overseas markets. By developing cooperation with different countries, a hosting company can redesign and popularize its products within corresponding contexts. Future investigation on the evolution of *HoK* toward global markets should not ignore the relationship between its digital modification and regional gaming discourses.

Conclusion

Due to Tencent's localization designs, *HoK* as a mobile e-sport is accessible to different age groups in China. The popularity of this mobile game among Chinese gamers, meanwhile, provoked nationwide criticism for its ahistorical depiction and the addiction risks it posed to minors. The game company transformed sociopolitical resistance into cultural consumption by developing a new kind of digital nationalism and creative imagination. The modification capacity of *HoK* deconstructs the value of the host country and invites overseas gamers to craft their own localized mobile experiences. The relationship between digital modification and gaming discourses should be considered a key factor in the localization and globalization of *HoK*.

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13

Translation and Chinese Culture in Video Games

DOUGLAS EYMAN

A primary early form of distribution of culture through gaming has been massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs). Because these games were fully global from the beginnings of the genre, they have a long history of experiencing the flows of language and culture that are brought into games by players, which in turn impacts the design of a game as it is updated and expanded. Games and gaming as rhetorical objects and practices both represent and influence local culture, and they often circulate in wider networks, both regional and global. Western companies face challenges as they export computer games to China, and this process provides avenues for Chinese culture to respond to and to some extent reshape the gaming experience, effectively reversing the exportation of cultural practices and initiating a bidirectional flow of language and culture. Much of the influence (in both directions) happens in the process of translation, but this must be understood not only as a linguistic process, but also as one that requires adjustments to cultural depictions (representations of fantasy character races, locations, and narratives), political positioning in the target market, visual design, and the interactive mechanics of the game itself.

Until recently, few games have been designed with a global player base in mind; rather, most have been developed locally and then translated to make them available outside of their original local contexts. Localization involves both linguistic translation and cultural adaptation, and because most multiplayer games now operate multinationally, a reciprocal effect

takes place as games are localized but also retain ecologies of the original game.[1] Translation studies scholars have traditionally made a distinction between foreignization and domestication, but that clear demarcation has been significantly blurred as a global community of game players has influenced our notions of the local.[2] In practice, translation of games is less unidirectional (translating from a source language into a target language) and more bidirectional as the process changes both the translated version and the original as design and linguistic effects are incorporated in successive iterations of the game.[3]

World of Warcraft (*WoW*) is a useful primary case for examining the interactions among policy, (self-)censorship, translation, and appropriation as it is a well-known MMORPG that was designed in the United States and made available to Chinese players and audiences. As a point of comparison, a newer game, *Genshin Impact*, clearly draws on the legacy of *WoW* but has enjoyed a much higher regard (from both Western and Chinese players) in terms of cultural representation. The multilayered translation approaches that allow these games to cross cultures include linguistic translation (text and speech), changes to visual design elements, and the adaptation or inclusion of cultural heritage representations.

Digital Games, Translation, and Circulation of Culture

The practice of translating video games and other media for new target audiences is usually described as "localization"—that is, the translation accommodates the game to the expectations and literacies of the target audience. Many of the challenges with video game translation occur because the original design process focuses on a single language and culture, so the act of translation becomes a post hoc process that doesn't always fit neatly into the game design specifications. More recent efforts at designing games for global audiences starting from the initiation of the design process engage in a process of "globalization" in order to minimize localization requirements; some translators of video games have argued for a mediated approach described as "glocalization"—a process that "integrates the notion of the universal and the local into a strategic production structure for goods that aspire to be globally appealing."[4] The Mists of Pandaria expansion for *World of Warcraft* is an example of designing for glocalization: its de-

velopment was not a localization of an existing game; it was intentionally designed from the outset to appeal to and ostensibly celebrate Chinese culture in the game franchise.

Researchers in translation studies recognize four primary methods for translating games: foreignization (keeping a "foreign taste" when translating a game), domestication (translating a game to suit the characteristics and cultural standards of the destination locale), no translation (leaving parts of the game in the source language), and transcreation (creating a new text in the target language).[5]

All of these methods are practices of rhetorical translation (considering audience, purpose, and context) as opposed to literal translation, which seeks a direct correspondence between linguistic phrases and context without regard to audience expectations. The mode of cultural and rhetoric translation employed by games such as *WoW* as they are designed for global audiences does not easily fit into the four primary methods outlined above.

Starting in the mid-1990s, the field of translation studies began to shift from a theory of translation as a process that attempts to match the meaning of the original text as closely as possible to one that takes into account the rhetorical context, an approach they designated "functionalism," which prioritizes the function a translation needs to serve for the target audience.[6] Videogame translators have embraced functionalism as an approach because the target audience is both reading the text and using it in pursuit of the larger activity of gameplay. Because games are explicitly interactive, unlike most textual production, the practices of design and translation must account for a multimodal experience. Translation needs to address not just linguistic elements, but also visual design and cultural expectations, particularly in the context of play. Games and other media have traditionally been designed in one location or culture then translated and adapted as they are made available in other locales, mediating the culture of the original production through that of the extended audiences. While issues of linguistic translation are the most obvious challenge, design and cultural expectation revisions contribute more directly to the glocalization process than they do in other media forms and genres. The following examples show how linguistic and design translation choices are often entangled with cultural literacies or expectations.

One of the best-known cases of poor linguistic translation in a video

game is that of *Zero Wing*, a Japanese game released by SEGA in the United States in 1991. The translation of the text in the game was grammatically incorrect to the point of being nonsensical—so much so that it later generated countless memes, starting with "All your base are belong to us" in 1999.[7] While the translations are grammatically challenged, it is possible that part of the problem is also a visual design issue, as the space provided on screen for the text may not have allowed enough room for more cogent translations. For instance, a competent translation of the original Japanese text that became "All your base are belong to us" can be rendered as "With the help of Federation government forces, [the enemy] has taken over all of your bases."[8] However, the main issue with the translation is more likely to be that the design team did not use a professional translator—game designer Tatsuya Uemura has noted that the translations were handled internally by a team member whose English was "really terrible."[9] *Zero Wing* is also of interest because Clyde Mandelin, who reverse-engineered the original game programming, later discovered that while the English-language version of the game had three different post-credit endings, the Japanese version had thirty-five, many of which referenced then-current Japanese popular culture in ways that would have been difficult to translate across cultures. As Mandelin explains:

> Many of the extra endings feature references to old comedy routines, music, anime, and more. A lot of this information isn't well-documented on Japanese sites, and it's even harder to find info on it in English. The age of the references suggests this text was written by someone who grew up in the 1960s or 1970s.[10]

The issue of design and linguistic translation interacting in ways that add constraints to the textual translation is one that occurs relatively frequently when games are designed solely in a monolingual context. The space on the screen allocated for text, whether dialogue, signage, captions, or narrative, is often set based on the original language. As translator Marianna Sacra explains, "I am [often] asked to not exceed the source language length by more than 10%. This leaves us poor German translators with having to find a good solution where sometimes there isn't really one—like abbreviating words to the extreme."[11]

There is also the case of interplay between visual translation issues and

changes made due to the cultural expectations of the target audience. When the Japanese game *Xenoblade Chronicles X* was localized for a North American audience, the option to change the bust size of the protagonist's avatar was removed, which many American fans who had been playing the Japanese version decried as censorship; some clothing options (such as bikinis) were also eliminated from the US version.[12]

The examples above demonstrate the challenges of translating videogames across languages and cultures, but most of the examples come from single-player games that don't provide opportunities for player interaction. What happens to the process of translation when the game in question is played by millions of players across the globe, as is the case with MMORPGs?

Researching Multiplayer Games

A common feature of MMORPGs is having very large game worlds where players interact with the game environment, the procedures (or rules) that provide the mechanisms and constraints of play, and other players. Most MMORPGs provide opportunities to play in an individualized mode (PvE, or player-versus-environment), a cooperative mode (usually through joining guilds or teams), or a competitive mode (PvP, or player-versus-player, which may be individual combat or team-based).

Game analysis can focus on game design, game experience, the economics of game production, or the impact of the game on other media and performances, among many other approaches. Games function as ecologies—they have designed environments and mechanics that players interact with while they participate in aesthetic and communicative experiences within the game.[13] Mechanics are "the underlying algorithms and procedures that determine how player actions are carried out in the game," strategies are "the tactics used by the player to respond to a specific task or encounter," and the interplay between mechanics (rules) and strategies (player decisions) reflects the ecological relationship between the environment and its effects on its inhabitants.[14] Because the interactions of mechanics, strategies, and environment are complex, players must develop expertise in order to succeed; they effectively must develop literacies specific to each game played, although these literacies build upon more generic or foundational game-playing literacies.

World of Warcraft is tailor-made for an analysis of cultural appropriation as an outcome of globalism. Players of the initial US release of the game in 2004 found themselves competing with Chinese players who were employed to generate in-game resources that could be sold on trading sites for real-world money. Blizzard, the company that produced *WoW*, initially sought to make it more difficult for Chinese players to participate. By contrast, in 2012, Blizzard released the Mists of Pandaria expansion, which drew heavily on Asian (primarily Chinese) imagery and folklore. Blizzard has also made visual design adjustments to the Chinese versions of the game, demonstrating a limited form of reciprocal design engagement, albeit one related to the potential for censorship by the Chinese government.

World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft, produced by Blizzard Entertainment, rapidly gained in popularity after its initial release in the United States in 2004. By 2006, *WoW* had over 6.5 million subscribers worldwide. Even prior to its Chinese release, it had 1.5 million subscribers in China by July 2005, increasing to an estimated 3 million in July 2006.[15] At the height of its popularity, *WoW* boasted 12 million players; more recent estimates place the number of players around 5 million.[16] In 2018, revenue generated just in the Asia Pacific region surpassed US$1 billion.[17] After the initial release of the game, Blizzard introduced a series of expansions that added new environments, new player classes and races, and new mechanics (sometimes making radical changes to mechanics to streamline and simplify elements of gameplay). The first expansion, Burning Crusade, was released in 2007; Mists of Pandaria, the fourth expansion, appeared in 2012. The ninth expansion, Dragonflight, was released in 2022.

Purchasing the game requires buying both the game software and a separate monthly or annual subscription that allows access to the multiplayer servers. In the initial Chinese releases, players could purchase hourly and daily tokens, which were typically used to play at Internet cafés. Players select a class (such as warrior, druid, or rogue) and a race to provide the basis for the characters they create. There are two main political factions in the game: Horde and Alliance. Certain races are aligned with one or the

other of these factions; the only exception is the race of humanoid pandas called Pandaren, introduced in the Mists of Pandaria expansion. Players tend to gravitate toward one faction, but since players can create multiple characters, many play in both factions. Gameplay includes completing quests assigned by in-game nonplayer characters, leveling skills and professions, and engaging in cooperative battles against challenging bosses and competitive battles against other players. Players can complete cooperative tasks by joining ad hoc groups or by joining a guild.

Because it is so well-known and continually expanding, many scholars have studied *World of Warcraft*. Early scholarship on *WoW* focused on collaboration among players, particularly in guilds, drawing attention from researchers in game studies, anthropology, psychology, and communication studies. As the game gained both visibility and a larger player base, researchers expanded the range of topics to include identity formation, communication practices, economics, design, and philosophy. Bonnie Nardi's *My Life as a Night Elf Priest* is perhaps the best-known ethnography of the game. Other key works that take *WoW* as an object of study include *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader*, edited by Hilde Corneliussen and Jill Walker Rettberg, and *World of Warcraft and Philosophy: Wrath of the Philosopher King*, by Luke Cuddy and John Nordlinger.

While *World of Warcraft* was not the first MMORPG to find success in China, *WoW*'s initial Chinese language release became immensely popular, partly because many Chinese gamers had already been playing on North American and European servers.[18] The popularity of the game is largely responsible for the development of an entire industry dedicated to transforming the acquisition of in-game virtual resources to real-world funds through a process known as real-money trading. Every few years, Blizzard entertainment also releases expansions for the game; some expansions have gone through several rounds of censorship by the Chinese government before being approved for release. Both the gaming-as-work and the issues around censorship play a major role in the ways that gamers interpret and interact with the game, leading to distinctly different experiences as the game design is mediated through the real-world cultures in which it is played.

WoW in China

In addition to its massive subscriber base, *WoW* also began to appear in distinctly Chinese contexts, from murals to web comics and beyond. In 2008, the world's first *World of Warcraft* themed restaurant opened in Beijing. "The front doors were painted to look like the Dark Portal. Inside, TVs displayed footage of the game, suits of armor stood eternal vigil over your appetizers, and the walls were covered with some impressive murals."[19] In China, 2011 saw the opening of World Joyland Play Valley, a full-scale amusement park inspired by *WoW*. While *WoW* in China was very well received, the influx of Chinese players on US servers that preceded its availability in China was accompanied by tensions between Western and Chinese players. The tensions played out most visibly in the controversies surrounding the practice of "gold farming."

GOLD FARMING

Even before *WoW* was officially released in China, a significant number of players from China joined the game. Because the game had no linguistic translation features for in-game chat, there was little communication between Chinese players and those from the United States and other English-speaking countries, which heightened the divide between players from different cultures. In addition to the language barrier, there was also a difference in play style, as a substantial number of Chinese players appeared to not be engaging with the game's narrative arcs or in its collaborative endeavors and instead were diligently collecting crafting materials and selling them for gold at the in-game auction houses. Western players described these activities as "gold farming" and argued that it disrupted the intended gaming experience for other players.[20]

Gold farming in *WoW* is an example of what economists have designated "real-money trading" or RMT.[21] While not specific to the genre, instances of RMT began to increase in the late 1990s.[22] They were facilitated by the success of the first major MMORPG, *Ultima Online*, which launched in 1997, and the widespread availability of a digital marketplace through the online auction platform eBay.[23] Current measures of RMT are difficult to find, as

most MMORPGs have designated the selling of virtual goods in real-world markets a form of cheating, but estimates from 2008 indicated that RMT accounted for a minimum of US$1 billion in transactions.[24]

In *WoW*, "gold farmer" became an epithet, as many players felt that paying actual money for in-game resources (or, in a variant of the practice, paying a third party to go through the process of leveling a character) constituted a form of cheating because it was not equally available to all players.

One of the effects of the growth of the gold farming industry was an influx of Chinese player-workers, whose presence sometimes unsettled the balance of the game mechanics, which were not designed to support this kind of activity. As other players became frustrated with the impact on their gameplay, they began to lash out against the Chinese farmers. Their responses exemplify "overt racist attitudes towards Chinese farmers" but "players who harbor negative feelings toward Chinese farmers do not believe that these feelings denote racial discrimination."[25] Media scholar Lisa Nakamura points out that although "players cannot see each other's bodies while playing, specific forms of game labor, such as gold farming and selling, as well as specific styles of play, have become racialized as Chinese, producing new forms of networked racism that are particularly easy for players to disavow."[26]

This anti-Chinese sentiment doesn't appear to have dampened enthusiasm for the game when it was released in China, and Chinese players still make up a significant portion of the total player population. In a way, the practice of gold farming represented an intrusion of Chinese entrepreneurial culture into a Western-designed context, surfacing the tensions that arise when game designers don't account for cross-cultural play and performance by the players (despite the clear indications from *Ultima Online* in 1997 and onward that MMORPGs tend to have global audiences from the moment of their release). If the gold farming era of *WoW* represents an influx into the Western versions of the game of cultural practices that were not accounted for in the game design and mechanics, the next chapter in *WoW*'s relationship with China represents a kind of inverse situation, where the Chinese government forced designers to accommodate Chinese cultural norms when releasing game expansions in China.[27]

The first *WoW* expansion, the Burning Crusade, was released in China in September 2007, about nine months after its release in the United States. The delays included the time needed for translation, but the game's visual design was also altered in accordance with guidelines from the Chinese Ministry of Culture. Major changes were made to appearance of the player race called the Forsaken (essentially animated skeletons), hiding exposed bones with flesh. Also, when a player died, they left behind a tombstone rather than a corpse. As Andrews notes:

> In the West, many assumed that Chinese culture has a taboo against skeletons or bones, but that is not the case as far as I can tell. Rather, it seems that the government agencies who police online games seek to tone down violence and death. Visible skeletons and player corpses are considered part of that undesirable content.[28]

The next major expansion, Wrath of the Lich King, was initially denied release by the Ministry of Culture, which required extensive visual design changes. These changes and concomitant government review cycles caused an eighteen-month delay.[29] Design changes included replacing undead creatures with living ones, removing images of skulls and skeletons, and changing the color of blood to green.[30]

In the cases of both expansions, the process of translation included design changes that were predicated not just on making the content accessible and understandable for users in a different language, but on issues of cultural appropriateness. The main narrative and underlying mechanics, however, were not changed, so the translation work was necessary only at the level of visual design. The next expansion, Cataclysm, followed the same design changes, and was thus approved relatively quickly. In a sense, Mists of Pandaria underwent a more significant shift in design from the outset, incorporating cultural references and actions for East Asian users not as a reaction to government mandate but as an integral element of the overall design of the entire expansion. Game journalists expected that this new expansion, featuring Chinese myths, visual design, and a new race of humanoid pandas, would be scrutinized by the Chinese government—but

Mists of Pandaria became the first expansion to get approval without delay, launching just a few days after the Western release.[31]

Mists of Pandaria

Previous expansions typically offered new locations for players to explore. The original release of the game featured an earth-like planet with two continents surrounded and separated by vast oceans; subsequent expansions added a sundered planet called Outland and the new continent Northrend and made massive changes to the original contents and new elemental realms. Mists of Pandaria (MoP) introduces the new continent of Pandaria as well as the Wandering Isle (which is atop the giant turtle Shen-zin Su). Expansions introduce—along with new locales and their associated lands, histories, folklore, dungeons, and activities—new species of creatures, new allies, and new enemies. In addition to the new Pandaren player race, the expansion adds, among others, the aquatic jinyu, the ape-like hozen, and the Sha, a physical manifestation of negative energy.[32]

Game studies scholar Kurt Squire has argued that digital games provide designed experiences "in which participants learn through a grammar of *doing* and *being*."[33] Recognizing the game world as a designed ecology that serves a specific purpose and that facilitates both doing and being for the game player highlights the importance of accounting for and evaluating the environment—not just player action and interaction—as a critical element of the game ecology.[34] Pandaria clearly borrows visual elements as well as narrative and mythological premises from Asian culture, primarily from Chinese culture. Reviewers generally praised the visuals, most noting the cultural references: "The east Asian designs are wonderfully vibrant and vivid," according to one.[35] Another wrote, "Drawing heavily on ancient Chinese culture and myth, the zones are filled with temples and lush countryside where dragons soar through the sky. Affable natives are happy to tell you stories about their past in exchange for a little help."[36] Religious studies scholar Robert Geraci argues that the "Chinese mythology underlying the 2012 Mists of Pandaria expansion is a reaction to the extraordinary popularity of *World of Warcraft* in China and a desire to ensure that even more players have a cultural stake in the game's mythos."[37] This approach is not just an appeal to the market, however, as it is through the mythical

narrative that player decisions are made and the narrative is thus intrinsic to the function of the game.[38]

Much was made of the choice to introduce anthropomorphic pandas as the new playable race. As reviewer Sophie Prell notes:

> The Pandaren have taken a lot of flak for looking like Kung Fu Panda rip-offs and, while you can defend their existence as a legitimate piece of lore that predates the Dreamworks films, it's clear that the race has undergone some changes since their introduction. . . . [Now] every Pandaren has a belly, and they remark constantly how they love to eat, very similar to Po from the Kung Fu Panda franchise.[39]

This change in appearance was the result of an intentional appeal to glocalization on the part of the game designers, highlighting an element of cultural translation that more specifically locates the basis of the design in China. As game designer Matthew McCurley points out, "The panda is inherently Chinese, but the samurai armor and styles" of the original sketches "had the trappings of Japanese culture." Eventually, the design shifted to "traditional black and white Chinese linen garb and conical straw hat" that would be more acceptable to a Chinese audience."[40]

In addition to the environment, which includes temples, villages, and landscapes evocative of Asian locations, the game also added literal farming as a game interaction and a new source of renewable in-game resources: the Chinese gold farmer had, in a sense, been replaced by the more traditional farmer in this expansion. The inclusion of farming as an activity can be linked to the success of games like *Farmville*, which debuted on Facebook in 2009, but it can also be read as an acknowledgment of the importance of farming in Chinese culture and economics.

Not all reviewers and players found the design choices effective, however. Reviewers like Sophie Prell at NBC News found the Pandaren too "cute" to be taken seriously; others, such as *The Red&Black*'s Tiffany Stevens, described the new design as "borderline racist."

> The Pandaren speak in near "Engrish," the dialogue is ripped straight from a midnight kung-fu film and some Pandaren have Fu Manchu mustaches. Five levels into play, I'm already encountering lazy yin-yang themes that draw heavily on spirit worship and ancestor references.[41]

Takeo Rivera saw the expansion as a continuation of the game's "preexisting tendency toward non-White dehumanization into the real of the Asiatic, producing essentialist cybertypes that are at once legible, inhabitable, and targetable," arguing that the expansion is situated in "both a system of racial legibility and a Euro-American colonial fantasy of Columbian discovery."[42]

While there has to date been no formal study of Chinese players' response to the aesthetics, mythos, and narratives of Mists of Pandaria, several offered their opinions on various gaming community discussion boards. As one anonymous gamer explains:

> I'm a Chinese player and I feel like pandaria captures the image that I think people looking from the outside into the culture would see. They use a lot of tropes like martial arts and Asian spirituality. I feel like it has a silly portrayal, especially when lorewalkers drop into a martial arts stance.[43]

Another Chinese player complained that "the translated names are just cheesy beyond belief, as Blizzard literally translated many words/names directly," a sentiment that was echoed by several of the Chinese players on the discussion board.[44] The question of names and naming in translation appears in several online community discussions. On the official Blizzard discussion forums, user Snow asks, "What will you name your Pandarens in MoP? Well I got the name Qilin for my pandaren shaman. . . . It's a mythological Chinese beast, so I'm quite happy with that name" (2012). User Wathley adds, "I have Mushi reserved. It's the English translation of the Chinese word for Priest" (2012). But a later discussion thread appears in 2013 called "Stop giving your Pandaren Japanese names," where user Ryena argues that "There is nothing Japanese about Pandaria, if anything it's Chinese" (2013). Tellingly, most of the discussion of character names on the official Blizzard discussion boards appears to be generated by Western players, rather than commentary by Chinese players.

Genshin Impact

If *World of Warcraft* represents a successful exportation from the United States to China, albeit not with such specific intention from the base game and initial expansions, Chinese companies are now beginning to export

Chinese-produced games to global audiences. Unlike *WoW*, however, many of the more recent offerings from China are designed with a global player base in mind from the initial point of development. At the time of this writing, one of the most popular Chinese-produced games is *Genshin Impact* (known as Yuanshen in China), released by the Shanghai-based game development company miHoyo in September 2020.

Genshin Impact is not quite an MMORPG, as it is primarily a single-player game, although it does feature a limited co-op mode for collaborative gaming and allows for multiplayer chat while playing. The game can be played on PC, console, and mobile platforms, which makes it one of the first open-world games to work seamlessly across nearly all devices. During beta testing, many Chinese players found the design and mechanics functioned too much like the immensely popular *Breath of the Wild* game.[45] But the game became very popular when it was first released, despite these initial critiques.[46] As can be seen in other chapters in this volume, many games take prior narratives as their starting point, including the widely known *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Journey to the West*; *Genshin Impact*'s reliance on a rather direct evocation of *Breath of the Wild* seems to me in line with this tradition. Moreover, the open-world maps, the quest mechanics, and even some of the narrative storylines also echo key procedures in *WoW*, so both games feature in the genealogy of *Genshin Impact* to some extent.

Players in *Genshin Impact* begin in the realm of Monstadt, one of three realms currently available. Monstadt, based on its architecture, cuisines, and names, would not be out of place in central Europe. The more developed realm, however, is Liyue, which is clearly and distinctly Chinese in character.

Perhaps as a result of the highly publicized challenges faced by *Honor of Kings*, the Chinese myths, legends, and designs in *Genshin Impact* are evocative of Chinese culture more generally, rather than based on existing history or literature; unlike the cases of *World of Warcraft* noted above and *Honor of Kings* (see Jiaqi Li's chapter in this volume), *Genshin Impact* had been subject to relatively little censorship from the Chinese government until early in 2022 (although certain words and phrases, such as "Hong Kong" and "Taiwan," are banned from use in the in-game chat function).[47] In early 2022, however, miHoyo released an update that provided new costumes for many of the playable characters—costumes that were far more

modest than the original designs. These new designs are optional for global players but mandatory for Chinese players; whether this was demanded by the Chinese government or was a preemptive attempt to avoid additional scrutiny by the game designers is unclear. In 2021, the Chinese government cautioned game design companies to avoid including "obscene and violent content and those breeding unhealthy tendencies, such as money-worship and effeminacy."[48] One journalist noted that the *Genshin Impact* character Venti, a principal male character in the game, was cited by a government auditor as an example of the effeminacy problem in the game industry.[49] The game has thus far survived despite these critiques and become very successful, bringing in US$2 billion in revenue in its first year.[50] Much of that success has been attributed to the visual design and use of Chinese cultural references.

The popularity of *Genshin Impact* has prompted the publication of several gaming and fan sites that provide tips on gameplay, but there are also many sites that focus on the meaning of the Chinese character and place names (including YouTube guides to pronunciation), as well as more general considerations of Chinese culture as represented in the game.[51]

Players' interest in the cultural aspects have led to many postings by fans on Reddit and other social media sites. For instance, several players noticed that a particular character's constellations (a series of additional attack moves or abilities, represented as a constellation of stars) had an unusual naming convention: most constellations feature two Chinese characters that are then translated into English as individual words or short two-word descriptions; however, the Chinese descriptions for Hu Tao (the manager of a funeral home in Liyue) were much longer (although the English versions were much shorter, so the difference is only in the original Chinese description). Players worked on their own translations and theorized that the original version is a poem that follows the pattern of a *yuefu* long-short verse based on the line length. The poem itself can be interpreted as a reference to the character's profession, and indeed Chinese poetry makes an appearance through the narratives of both characters and enemies throughout the game.[52]

Players have also paid close attention to the visual design of the game. One Chinese American player who provided a close reading of the design of two of the main playable characters noted that "because they are using

Chinese design elements that I am more familiar with" the architectural and visual design of the city of Liyue "feels more like home."[53] As noted above, visual design is as important to game translation and circulation as text, and players have noticed the ways in which the design in *Genshin Impact* evokes Chinese themes and motifs without relying on direct representation. Players have also specifically noticed the way the cuisines of each area are represented, and one fan of the game has made an extensive document comparing the in-game descriptions and visual designs of recipes to the actual Chinese dishes that inspired them.[54]

Because the game has only been out a little over one year as of this writing, academic research focusing on *Genshin Impact* has yet to be published, but I hope that the above descriptions will encourage scholars of game studies and Chinese culture to consider it a worthy object of study. Additionally, since the release of Mists of Pandaria, very little research has examined how different player communities experience the representation of Asian cultural heritage, a project which warrants more in-depth study to consider linguistic, design, and cultural references within a game as part of the investigative framework. The complex interplay of culture and language in the translation process, and the questions surrounding the fine line between homage and appropriation, will continue to be an issue as game design and development become increasingly globalized. Of note for future research is the rise of Chinese-designed games that are glocalized for Western audiences, such as *Genshin Impact*, and the bidirectional translation (and in some cases, transcreation) processes that support the global circulation of Chinese culture through games and gameplay.

Notes

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Glossary of Chinese Terms

A Ke 阿軻

bagua 八卦
Bai Juyi 白居易
"Baiju" 白駒
Baili Shouyue 百里守約
Baili Xuance 百里玄策
Banpo 半坡
bao, baoying 報，報應
Bao Canjun ji 鮑參軍集
Bao Zhao 鮑照
beiqing 悲情
bingtou hua 並頭花
binxiang 儐相
bu da qiu 步打球

cai xuan ge 采選格
caimi 猜謎
Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹
"Changdi" 常棣
Changchun 長春
Changshu 常熟
Chen Dalang 陳大郎
Chen Qinghao 陳慶浩
chiqing 癡情
chouqing 愁情
chuiwan 捶丸
Chundeng nao 春燈鬧
Chunmei 春梅
Chunmeng suoyan 春夢瑣言
chunqing 春情
chunyi jiupai 春意酒牌
Chunyu Kun 淳于髡
Chunzaitang quanshu 春在堂全書
chupu 樗蒲
Chupu fu 樗蒲賦
cike 詞客
cuju 蹴鞠

Daban niepan jing shu 大般涅槃經疏
dama 打馬
Daoma guan 倒馬關
dianzi youxi 電子遊戲
dieyun 疊韻
Dongjing fu 東京賦
Dongmen *sheng* 東門生
Dongpo zhilin 東坡志林
dufa 讀法
duixue lianju 對雪聯句
Dupian xinshu 杜騙新書

e-sugoroku 繪雙六

Fanwang jing pusajie zhu 梵網經菩薩戒注
Fangguang dazhuangyan jing—yiming shentong youxi 方廣大莊嚴經—一名神通遊戲

Feng Xiaoqing 馮小青
Feng Zhenluan 馮鎮巒
Fengdu 酆都
Fengyuexuan youxuanzi 風月軒又玄子

Gao Zhao 高兆
Gong Zizhen 龔自珍
gongshi (ambassador) 公使
gongshi (engineer) 工師
Gu Ruopu 顧若樸
Guan *furen* 關夫人
Guangdong tushuo 廣東圖説
guanji 官妓
"Guanjü" 關雎
Gujing jingshe 詁經精舍
Guo Pu 郭璞
guoshou 國手

Hailing yishi 海陵佚史
Han Wo 韩偓
Hoi Ha 海下
Hong Loumeng 紅樓夢
Hong Mai 洪邁
Hong Zun 洪遵
Honglou ren jing 紅樓人鏡
Hongye 紅葉
Hou Yi 后羿
Hua Chengyu 華晨宇
Hua Mulan 花木蘭
Huacheng 花晨
Huan Wen 桓溫
Huang Bosi 黄伯思
Huang Ji 黄機
huangtang 荒唐
huanqing 歡情
Huanqiu lansheng tu 環球攬勝圖
Huayue hen 花月痕
Huiniang 蕙娘
Huiqiong 慧瓊
hulu wen 葫蘆問
Huolang tu 貨郎圖

ji 技
Ji Jiang 姬姜
Ji Kang 嵇康
jiang dao li 講道理
Jiang Xingge 蔣興哥
Jiang Yan 江淹
Jiangxian 絳仙
jianxia 劍俠
jiaoshi 教士
jigu chuanhua 擊鼓傳花
jikouling 急口令
Jin ping mei 金瓶梅
Jin ping mei cihua 金瓶梅詞話
Jin Yixiang 金挹香
Jing Ke 荊軻
Jinghua yuan 鏡花緣
Jingshan 京山
Jinshi 金氏
Jintong 金童
jirang 擊壤
jiu lianhuan 九連環
jiu se 酒色
Jiu xi shiba jian 九溪十八澗
jiuling 酒令
Jueshi zhenjing 覺世真經
Junqin 俊卿

kai 鎧
Kangxi 康熙

Lan sheng tu 攬勝圖
Langshi 浪史
Langzi 浪子
Lengquan ting 冷泉亭
Li Bai 李白
Li Boyuan 李伯元
Li Qingzhao 李清照

Li Song 李嵩
Li Yu 李昱
Li Yu 李漁
Li'an 理安
Liancheng bi 連城璧
Liangchu qingzhong yi 量處輕重儀
Liaozhai zhiyi 聊齋誌異
Liezi zhu 列子注
Ling Mengchu 凌濛初
lingguan 令官
liqing 離情
Liu Bei 劉備
liubo 六博
Longyang de taoshu 龍陽的套數
Lu Ban 魯班
Lu Han 鹿晗
Lü Bu 呂布
Lü Tiancheng 呂天成
Luk Keng 鹿頸
lunchuan 輪船
Lushu 陸姝

Ma Rong 馬融
"Mang" 氓
maqiu 馬球
Mashi 麻氏
meiren 美人
meiren qiyong 美人七詠
Meng Jiao 孟郊
Mengqi 夢奇
ming 命
"Choumou" 綢繆
Mo Zi 墨子
Mozuizi 磨嘴子
Mudan ting 牡丹亭

Nei Lak Shan 彌勒山
Nianyang 念秧
Niu Aiqing 鈕愛卿
Nongyao 農藥
"Nüyue jiming" 女曰雞鳴

paixi 牌戲
Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮
Pat Sin Leng 八仙嶺
pingdian 評點
pingmin yezonghui 平民夜總會
pingze 平仄
Pu Songling 蒲松齡
Pushuang 譜雙

qian jie ling 遷界令
qiandao 牽道
qiangou 牽鉤
Qiao Ji 喬吉
qiaofu 樵夫
qiaoling 巧令
Qilu deng 歧路燈
qing 情
Qinglou meng 青樓夢
Qingyun ji 青雲集
qiong, qiongce 瓊，瓊畟
qipan shike 棋盤石刻
qiqiao 乞巧
qiuqian 鞦韆
"Qiye" 耆夜
Qu Yuan 屈原
Quyuan 曲園
Quyuan moxi 曲園墨戲
Quyuan zazuan 曲園雜纂
quzi ci 曲子詞

ren ta qingbo 任他輕薄
Rou putuan 肉蒲團
rouhu 肉壺
Ruan Ji 阮籍
Ruiyu 瑞玉
Ruizhu 瑞珠

rushi 儒士
Ruyi jun zhuan 如意君傳

sai 賽
san guo sha 三國殺
Sanhua Yuanzhu 散花苑主
Sanqiao'er 三巧兒
sanqu 散曲
Santai shan 三台山
Sanxia wuyi 三俠五義
Sha Tau Kok 沙頭角
Shaji "殺雞"
shangren 商人
Shek Pik 石壁
Shentong youxi 神通遊戲
sheng guan tu 升官圖
Sheng you tu 勝遊圖
Shengxian qiao 昇仙橋
Shi'er huashen yi 十二花神議
Shiji 史記
Shishuo xinyu 世說新語
shuanglu 雙陸
shuangsheng 雙聲
Shui Hau 水口
Sima Guang 司馬光
Sima qian 司馬遷
Sima Xiangru 司馬相如
Siwuxie huibao 思無邪匯寶
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Suqiu 素秋

taju 踏趜
"Tangwen" 湯問
Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖
taoxiang qiu 陶響球
"Teng Wengong xia" "滕文公下"
Tiantai pusajie shu 天台菩薩戒疏
Tin Hau 天后
Ting Kok 汀角
"Tong Li Shiyi zui yi Yuanjiu"
"同李十一醉忆元九"
tongxin ling 同心令
touhu 投壺
touzi 骰子
Tsat Muk Kiu 七木橋上下村
tu 圖
Tung Chung 東涌

wan 玩
Wan yi pian 玩易篇
Wang Qiugui 王秋桂
Wang Shizhen 王世貞
Wang Xianzhi 王獻之
wang yin 網癮
Wei Zi'An 魏子安
weiqi 圍棋
Weiyangsheng 未央生
weizhi 圍直
"Weizi" 微子
Wing Lung Wai 永隆圍
Wusheng xi 無聲戲
Wuxing zhan 五行占
Wuzhe daoren 無遮道人

xiake 俠客
"Xiangdang" 鄉黨
xianglian 香奩
xianglian zhi ti 香奩之體
xiangpu 相撲
xiangqi 象棋
xiangyan shi 香豔詩
Xiangyun 香雲
Xiaobawang 小霸王
Xiaojiao 小嬌
xiaoling 小令
Xiaoshuo lin 小說林
xiaoyao you 逍遙遊

Xihu sheng you tu 西湖勝遊圖
Ximen Qing 西門慶
Xinding yapai shu 新定牙牌書
Xiuta yeshi 繡榻野史
Xixiang jiuling 西廂酒令
Xu Changling 徐昌齡
xuan xian zhi tu 選仙之圖
Xuanxue 玄學
Xue *po* 薛婆
xuege 穴骼

Yan'er mei 眼兒媚
Yanji tu 燕几圖
Yang Fengchun 楊逢春
Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環
Yao Shu 姚淑
Yao Zi'ang 姚子昂
yaonie 妖孽
yaotou 藥骰
Yau Ma Tei 油痲地
"Ye you si jun" 野有死麇
yehe hua 夜合花
yi 藝
Yicui yuan 挹翠园
Yijian zhi 夷堅志
Yinjiu geshi 飲酒歌詩
Yishi shi 異史氏
you ren you yu 游刃有餘
You Tong 尤侗
you xin 遊心
You yi lu 遊藝錄
you yu yi 遊於藝
Youtai xianguan 右台仙館
youxi 遊戲
Youxi bao 遊戲報
Youxi shijie 遊戲世界
Youxi zazhi 遊戲雜誌
Youxi zhuren 遊戲主人
youwan 遊玩
yu 娛
Yu Da 俞達
Yu Yue 俞樾
Yuan Dan 袁耽
Yuan Mei 袁枚
Yuelao 月老
Yuen Long 元朗
Yuen Shek Dung 圓石洞
yueshu 約束
Yuesu 月素
yufu 漁夫
Yunqi 雲棲
Yunü 玉女
Yushan 虞山
Yushi mingyan 喻世明言
yushi 羽士
yuweng 漁翁

Zaijia lü yao guangji 在家律要廣集
zau kekkat 走乪咳
Zhang Heng 張衡
Zhang Kejiu 張可久
Zhang Youqing 章幼卿
Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡
Zhaodai congshu 昭代叢書
Zhen Shuangnan 真雙南
zhen 真
zhenqing 真情
Zheng Hui 鄭卉
"Zhongfeng" 終風
zhongqing 鍾情
Zhongyong 中庸
zhushuai 主帥
Zibuyu 子不語
ziyi 緇衣
zou cheng 走城
zou hu 走虎
zou niujiaosai 走牛腳塞
zou tongqian 走銅錢
Zuili yanshui sanren 檇李煙水散人

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“ is book makes a significant contribution to the history of games and play in China. It is a unique and fascinating compilation of scholarship that playfully probes the meaning of play itself and will be read with great interest by scholars in China studies and games studies alike.”
MARCELLA SZABLEWICZ / author of *Mapping Digital Game Culture in China: From Internet Addicts to Esports Athletes*

Games as global and connected phenomena have been examined in the rising scholarly field of game studies, but relatively little has been published on the history of games and gaming in China. *Weiqi* (a.k.a. Go), one of the world's oldest board games, originated in China; a variety of Chinese card, dice, board, sport, and performance games have been developed over the millennia; and China is quickly becoming a major player in the contemporary digital game industry. In exploring games and practices of play across social and historical contexts, this volume examines representations of gender, class, materiality, and imaginations of the nation in Chinese and Sinophone contexts, while addressing ways in which games inhabit, represent, disrupt, or transform cultural and social practices. Both analog and computer games are represented in analyses that draw connections between the traditional and the modern and between local or regional and higher-order economic, cultural, and political structures. Among the topics explored are rock carvings of board games, *weiqi* cultures, scholars' and courtesans' games, gambling, games based on literature, video-game politics, and appropriation of Chinese culture in video games.

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