



MAPPING DIGITAL GAME CULTURE IN CHINA: FROM INTERNET ADDICTS TO ESPORTS ATHLETES

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[Mária Koscelníková](#)

When the term *video game* is uttered, many gamers imagine a huge culture, a multitude of genres, and millions of possible ways how to play and enjoy them. Especially in Europe, foreign and local video games are available, and we do not have to think either about the way we play them or how we choose them. When it comes to games, European gamers are not particularly prejudiced. Discussions about playing video games tend to stay on gaming fora, occasionally in newspaper or lifestyle magazines. In Europe, we do not distinguish between good and bad games based on the amount of money we must pay for them in terms of items, DLCs or other locked options and we simply play games regardless of their specifics. Marcella Szablewicz, however, wants to show us a different world. Regarding digital games and culture, China is nothing like you would expect. Full stadia of video game fans during eSports events or massive online viewership may create an illusion of a carefree Chinese gaming environment, but not many people know that the journey of many Chinese gamers and fans towards digital games is tough and bitter. Marcella Szablewicz's book presents the reader with the complexity of Chinese culture and society. The first chapter introduces the origins of her long-term complex research of Chinese culture and gaming habits. With regards to the historical and political situation in China, digital games play a key role in the lives of many Chinese. Through situational analysis, the following six chapters reveal the causes of the great popularity of digital games in China, the origins of Chinese devotion to them, as well as many social behaviours and cultural references.

The second chapter of the book informs the reader about the most important place for Chinese gamers – Internet cafés. Due to China's political ideology, as well as social conventions, many Chinese gamers have found refuge under the rooves of Internet cafés, where they could escape the high expectations that Chinese society places on an individual. The popularity of the Internet has attracted many Chinese, but it has also drawn a substantial amount of negative public opinion that has led to restrictions. That, however, did not make Chinese gamers stop visiting Internet cafés and they have always remained an important part of their lives. The popularity and availability of the Internet also caused the rise of Internet addicts. Chinese public opinion on Internet addiction was negatively influenced by the popular Internet cafés. Panic in the media gained the attention of Chinese officials as well as medical professionals and Internet addiction became a problem. The third chapter of Marcella Szablewicz's book depicts the concept of the Internet as a kind of spiritual opium and the consequences of its use that resounded with the Chinese public. Historical and practical data perfectly illustrate the changes China has undergone and its public mood. We can see how the widespread popularity of the Internet, a welcome technological advance, negatively impacted Chinese Internet cafés, contributed to the creation of a new clinical disorder, and led to digital game restrictions and licensing of the available foreign games.

As previously mentioned, for a European reader and gamer, China is a completely foreign environment. High expectations laid on Chinese society have easily persuaded Chinese gamers what to do in their leisure time. Digital games as a problem-free and skill-building environment absorbed many hours which Chinese gamers have spent gladly. Chinese culture is extraordinarily complex and sometimes weird, as proved by Marcella Szablewicz's fourth chapter where she presents two different ways of thinking about video games in China: *danji* and *wangluo*. Along with the patriotic spirit embedded in Chinese history, these two concepts completely change the Chinese gaming environment. The chapter discusses patriotic leisure, pro gaming and shaping digital gaming culture in China. The next chapter discusses the issue of the previously mentioned *wangluo* games and stories of the people who play them in more detail. The concept of sideways mobility is introduced, as well as a more specific understanding of digital games as a means of productivity boost and escape. Combined with the cultural differences of *wangluo* gamers, we learn about the necessity of digital worlds and their importance for Chinese gamers. In the era of wireless smartphones, many Chinese gamers use immobile mobility and they stay connected with digital games even more.

The strict Chinese environment, high social and patriotic expectations placed on an individual, and economic differences have created many social gaps that Chinese gamers moderate or ventilate through culture and humour. The sixth chapter of the book discusses cultural elements like memes, slang, and affective intensities that Chinese gamers are familiar with. These important cultural elements help them soften the tough conditions they live in, and we learn about their impressive abilities of joke deciphering, the unique concept of losers and gay friends or emotions that attract them to the spiritual homeland digital games represent. Chinese digital game culture stuns the reader and offers many untouched concepts. The last chapter of the book concludes with the challenges and changes China experienced upon the emergence of the Internet and digital games. Chinese digital game culture must face public opinion, and the tough, adamant, historical and political background that still shapes the Chinese today. The book is a great contribution to the ever-expanding series of books on video games in general, and it is an important book for every researcher, since it helps broaden their horizons. After reading this book, you will see China differently.

[Author of the review](#)

Mgr. Mária Koscelníková

Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra
Faculty of Arts
Štefánikova 67
949 74 Nitra
SLOVAK REPUBLIC
koma274@gmail.com