EDITORIAL

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In October 2024, Chinese DiGRA celebrated its 10th anniversary with its annual conference hosted at Hong Kong Baptist University. In what would become Chinese DiGRA's largest conference to date, the call for papers attracted over 100 abstract submissions, and the event drew more than 150 attendees from fourteen countries and regions. However, all these metrics have since been surpassed by Chinese DiGRA's more recent 2025 and 2026 conferences, each larger and better attended than the last. Chinese DiGRA is growing rapidly. This is partially due to the efforts of chapter members and scholars who contributed to the conferences, but it also evidences a broader blos-

soming interest in researching games inside Greater China – perhaps even in Chinese game studies.

Chinese game studies remains a contested field. Previous editorials have argued against the *concept* of Chinese game studies from a variety of positions (Inwood, 2023; Liboriussen & Martin, 2016b; Zhang, 2026; Zhang, 2016). Ge Zhang argues that the invocation of *Chinese* game studies places China as an "anthropological object" (Zhang, 2016) – becoming a secondary and *othered* game studies, rather than existing as its own locus of theoretical contributions. Szablewicz (2024) elaborates on this position, noting that there is no American DiGRA nor American game studies; its assumed hegemony ensured that games studies is quietly, by default, American. Chinese game studies emphasises regional differences that arguably do not exist – it is just game studies.

Moreover, and as others have also argued (Deterding, 2017; Gekker, 2021; Nieborg & Hermes, 2008), current research on games does not benefit from a superordinate field of game studies. Alex Gekker argues that boundary work inside game studies, whether methodological or ontological, limits the cultural and political relevance of games research (Gekker, 2021). Games are no longer confined by their medium specificity, as their cultural contributions go beyond a contained field of study. Along these lines, Bjarke Liboriussen and Paul Martin have pointed out that studying Chinese games is not about studying games, but about studying society (Liboriussen & Martin, 2016a, 2016b). A superordinate field of game studies prioritises a dominant academic language that does not always engage in dialogue with other fields – Chinese game studies further limits this potential dialogue through academic gatekeeping that is slow to react to the emergent positionality of games within regional contexts.

The issues concerning the field of Chinese game studies are not limited to lessening the impact of regional research, either because of its location or its field. The papers in this special issue come from the Chinese DiGRA conference, but even the name Chinese DiGRA (compared to DiGRA Spain or DiGRA Australia, for example) belies positional struggles. In her editorial, Heather Inwood termed the

field Sinophone game studies, placing a focus on Chinese-speaking regions (Inwood, 2023). However, this linguistic focus does not capture the soft power and cultural influence of Chinese games in non-Sinophone countries. Other terms, such as the Sinosphere (Davies, 2022; Harrington, 2024), likewise strive to be more inclusive, but in turn generalise the specific – some concerns are specifically Mainland Chinese, for example. As Weiyu Zhang argues, Chineseness is an identity method (Zhang, 2023), and this field has not done the appropriate methodological work to justify its naming, which in turn risks making Chinese game studies appear to be academic or even nationalistic posturing.

There is space for game research around China as praxis, especially as both games and China's global influence continue to grow. Accordingly, the Chinese DiGRA conference series has given space to academic inquiries that have struggled to belong elsewhere. For example, the blending of the historical and mythological in wuxia, xianxia and cultivation games (Hao, 2024), the mediated lusory affection in *otome* and *bishōjo* games (and their paratextual reproductions) (Liu & Lai, 2024), the intricacies of Chinese platform specificities (Harrington, 2026; Pan, 2023), and the tensions between regulation and play (Xiao, 2023) have at times dominated the conversations at Chinese DiGRA, while being relative non-factors within the broader global (a word used with great hesitation) academic conversation, and despite their implications reaching well beyond the field's conceits.

The concerns with Chinese game studies, which I discussed very briefly in this editorial, were squarely reflected in the papers chosen for this special issue, even if none of these papers were intentionally interfacing with this discussion. The papers herein stand well on their own right, yet the conference's liminal position – as foreign yet local, as perpetuating game studies, while resisting its global-north placement – has encouraged works that play with the academic and political weight that a Chinese game studies would carry.

In his paper "*Have You Eaten Yet? Genshin Impact and Chinese Food*

Culture", **Benjamin Horn** argues that *Genshin Impact*'s distinct regions brand themselves as unique nations through virtual food tourism, while remaining distinctly culturally Chinese through their use of food as a socio-narrative device, as the food culture Horn discusses is not diasporic, but local. By discussing the role of (virtual) foods in contemporary Chinese culture, and its digitised intermediary in *Genshin Impact*, Horn likewise shows the game's cultural blind spots as distinct cultures become reduced to their food's representational value, rather than the culture that it embodies.

Sunny Yang and Yaqi Liu explain how the Benjaminian aura is reproduced inside the *Migong* puzzle games in their paper *"Analogue Play as Aesthetic Encounter: Revisiting the Aura Experience in the Gamebook Migong Series"*. Yang and Liu revisit tried-and-tested game studies discussions on games as art and their aesthetic experience (Kirkpatrick, 2013). By looking at an analogue puzzle that combines historical reproduction, heavily ritualistic play patterns, and a strong focus on tactility and presence, they argue that this unique ludo-cultural artifact, steeped in both its referential past and its experiential present, contributes to arguments on games' auratic experience beyond previous discussions on hybrid and digital media.

"The Success of Chinese Mobile Games in Indonesian Esport", written by **Haryo Pambuko Jiwandono** examines the influence that Chinese game development is having on Indonesian gaming cultures. Jiwandono's paper shows that China's influence on games goes beyond being an object (or locus) of study. He argues that *MLBB*, a Chinese-designed game, has reshaped the esports market in Indonesia by capitalising on the local gap in competitive gaming, the Global South's heavier focus on mobile gaming, as well as by providing an esport model that local stakeholders could emulate.

Jamie W.T Tse discusses the (in)authentic representations of Hong Kong in her paper "*The Hong Kong Past Made in the Digital Present*". Tse argues that despite foreign-made games' non-representational, and perhaps even at times orientalist, depictions of Hong Kong, their existence allows for playful renegotiation. Gameplay opens a dialogue that not only seeks to rectify the inaccuracies in the

work but also preserves a Hong Kong that creates nostalgia even in those who have not quite experienced what they are nostalgic for. Read this way, these games do not simply misrepresent the city; they also keep alive a playable, revisable Hong Kong shaped through circulation, memory, and community interpretation.

In 2024, a decade after its founding, Chinese DiGRA had grown from a small regional initiative into one of the most vibrant communities for game scholarship. Its rapid expansion reflects not only the increasing significance of China within the global gaming industry, but also a recognition that many of the most pressing questions in contemporary game research cannot be adequately understood without engaging with Chinese histories, infrastructures, aesthetics, audiences, and political economies. At the same time, the debates surrounding the very idea of *Chinese game studies* force the field to continually interrogate what constitutes its object of study, whose perspectives are privileged, and how the term *Chinese* should be understood.

The four papers collected in this special issue demonstrate that there is no singular Chinese game studies. Instead, they reveal a diverse set of inquiries united less by geography than by a shared commitment to understanding how games circulate through Chinese and China-related cultural worlds. Whether examining food as a narrative technique, the aesthetic experience of analogue play, the regional influence of Chinese mobile games, or the contested memories embedded in digital representations of Hong Kong, these contributions show that research centred on China does not merely add new case studies to existing theoretical frameworks. Rather, these papers generate scholarship that can contribute not only to game research, but to cultural studies more generally.

Perhaps this is the enduring contribution and growing appeal of Chinese DiGRA. Rather than seeking to reinforce Chinese game studies as a bounded disciplinary territory, it has become a space where the larger relationship between games and society can be queried, reworked, and expanded.

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