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Gaming while Aging

The Ludification of Later Life in *Pokémon GO*

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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 *Crazy 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-

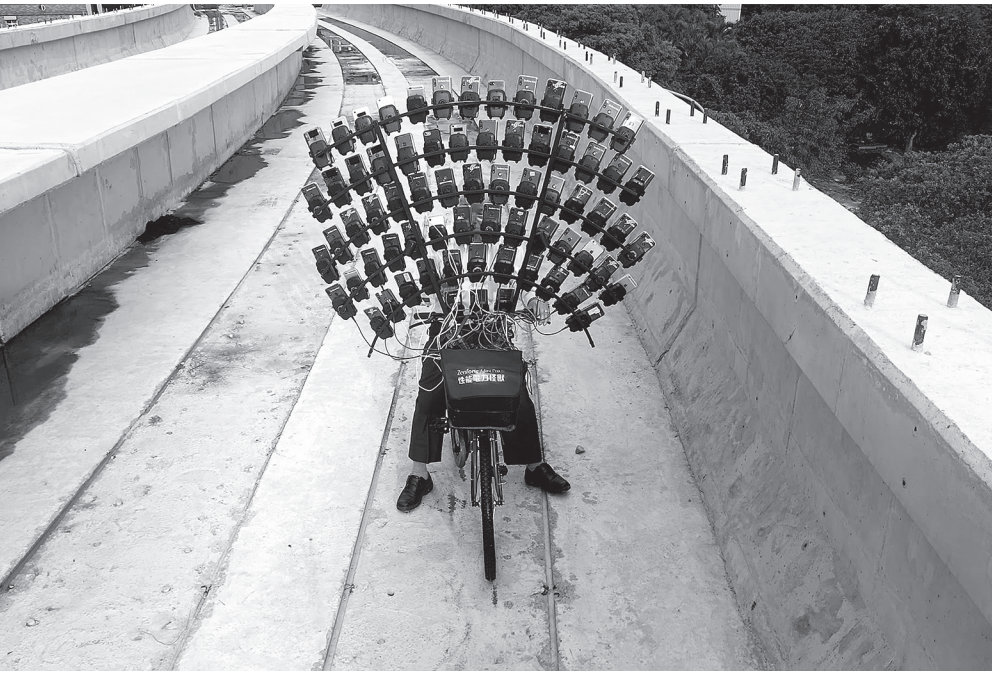
ered misspent or wasted, for they cannot be converted to anything with economic value other than pure pleasure. In the modern market economy, the work ethic of productivity and efficiency has led to what Bataille calls a "closed system" of exchange, in which no pleasure cannot be reinvested to more useful 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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