Chapter 12
Working Behind Playing:
Tamed Fan Labour and Its Stabilizing Function in the Chinese Mobile Gaming Fan Community

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ABSTRACT
With the rise of game broadcasting appearing in video sharing or streaming platforms, there is a new social phenomenon in which active fans expertizing in gaming could transcend to become tamed labour fans. This is a new role in the fan community and it enjoys paramount profitable benefit via the sponsorship of game companies. This article will investigate the nature of this new role of tamed fan labour and explore how it functions in the fan community, especially in terms of relieving fans’ resistance against the game companies and consolidating the fan community by revealing their affinity for their fan. Using the example of a successful Chinese mobile game app, “Tower of Saviour”, this article will shed light on this rethinking of the fan structure, as well as on Chinese fan studies that show how tamed fan labour can benefit game companies in the Chinese cultural context.

INTRODUCTION
“Gaming could be a career pursuit”. This is the most common answer cited by gaming aficionados when they are interviewed about their perception of “gaming as working”. This answer is almost certainly true in Digital Age society. The game industry is one of the largest entertainment industries and is the paramount online cultural consumption market globally (Newzoo, 2016). Various ambitious professions can be found within this thriving industry, in both its production and consumption aspects. “Professional gamer” and “online game live streamer” are probably the major job titles on the consumption end of gaming, similar to other online occupations like bloggers, online Youtubers and online celebrities (Rich, 2009). Just imagine the more than 10 million gamers from various age groups who play famous online
competitive games like Dota2, Zerg Invasion, Minecraft or League of Legends (LOL). The excitement and passion of those 10 million gamers makes gaming profitable in the commercial market. Consequently, e-sport and game live streaming have become popular in online gaming activities.

In the example of LOL, thousands of live streams from different countries can be found on Twitch every day, and the live streaming videos have been viewed by nearly a million people. The huge popularity of the video game LOL stems from its multi-playing nature; it allows multiple players to compete in online battles in a mythical setting. LOL involves a high level of competition among players and requires, for instance, an excellent command of strategy, teamwork, familiarity with gaming skills and fast gaming reaction time. This makes watching the battle online highly exciting; hence the demand of game live streaming rises. Attribution to the growing viewership and proliferation of competition between amateurs, different regional or international electronic competitions (or e-sport) are facilitated by game developers. Large numbers of e-sport teams are established, and hundreds of top professional gamers are recruited. In these ways, gaming has become a career path for gaming professionals and live streaming lovers.

Game live streaming is the main focus of this paper. In the academic world, the term “game live streaming” is still poorly defined. It is generally understood as an online activity in which people broadcast their live video, with the aid of a computer or camera, on the internet. People participating into game live streaming are generally called “game streamers” or “game broadcasters” (henceforth “game streamer”). These game streamers start out as fans with active participation in online platforms. The reason for their game video sharing could be based upon showcasing game critique, commenting, satire, information exchange or simply sharing the joy of their gaming expertise. This is a major type of fan-labour activity and a peripheral gaming business, as described in the introduction. There are three major income sources for popular game live streamers. They may obtain considerable subscription fees from the online sharing platform while, at the same time, they raise crowdfunding on their fan page and seek donations from fans. Felix Kjellberg, nicknamed PewDiePie in the gaming community, is recognized as the most successful game streamer in the world; he earns $7.5 million USD annually and his channel has had 10 billion views. Kjellberg’s story shows how live streaming of gaming can turn into a lucrative career.

The last source of income for a game streamer is more controversial but also important in the structure of fan communities, as this paper proposes. In the Chinese fan community, especially, some outstanding game streamers may receive a considerable amount of sponsorship from game developers whose games they endorse. Being hard-core active fans, normal game streamers would participate in fan community activities like posting threads or discussing different issues on fans’ forums, as well as producing fan labour-like live streaming. In contrast, the game streamers who are sponsored by game developers would also participate in official activities or conventions held by game developers, where they become the representatives of the gamers in the opinion flow. In other words, since the sponsored game streamers would represent the game companies sponsoring them, commercial considerations would begin to impact their live streaming content as soon as they began to be sponsored. This would show up specifically in areas like the style of their speech, as well as their tone and language use. All of these would be heavily influenced by the gamer streamer’s now-consuming goal of promoting the game company.”

This part of the paper will define game streamers sponsored by game developers as “tamed labour fans”. This is a relatively newly defined term to describe such recruited active fans; these fans are “tamed” by the production sector and have become salaried labourers. This definition highlights the transformation of the fans’ nature, the critical meaning of labour in Neo-Marxist sense and the hybridity of being