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## Playing with Friends and Families – Current Scene of Reality Games in Beijing

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### A Trend of Playing in Reality

“Players are getting tired of screen-based games,” Shigeru Miyamoto of Nintendo said, “It is important to offer something perceptible.” (Lin 2007) The statement not only intendeds to advertise Nintendo’s new product - Wii, but indirectly illustrates the trend of playing in reality, and the close combination of games and physical environments. In fact, reality games are getting popular in Beijing.<sup>1</sup> There are three cases will be analyzed to illustrate the idea of reality games: Firstly, Seek Bou Journey is a serial of treasure hunts similar to riddle-solving tasks like (*The Da Vinci Code 2006*); Killer Game, secondly, a mod game from Dimitry Davidoff’s “Mafia”, provides social activities of role-playing and mind reading; Thirdly, the unreleased Majoy turns screen based combats in reality, and becomes the industrial catalyst to the development of Beijing’s CRD (Capital Recreational District). The three games, played in the physical environment, have characteristics and purposes beyond the traditional screen-based games.

### Discovering Beijing through Seek Bou Journey

*“Zizhu Yuan Park is on the west of Beijing Zoo and out of Xizhimen. It used to be a reservoir. During the Ming dynasty, people built the Zizhu temple on the north bank of*

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<sup>1</sup> It mainly stressed ‘reality’ as opposed to ‘virtual reality’ even though some games require electronic equipments.

*the reservoir, that's why we call the park "ZizhuYuan". In the west, there is a place called "Bamboo", which is mysterious and somewhat haunted with dangling metallic plates. Find the first plate in the south. The first password should be the third character counting from the end."*

*Tips for "password in Bamboo"<sup>2</sup>*

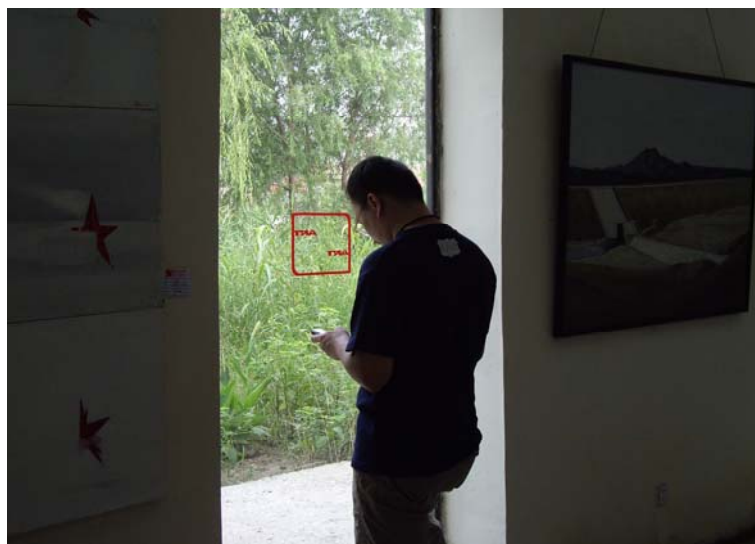


Figure 1: Player are checking out the tips through a text message.

Seek Bou Journey, first introduced in summer 2006, is the generic term for a series of riddle-solving treasure hunts played within downtown Beijing. It is a game with simple purposes of both hunting treasures as well as getting acquainted with the history. (Figure 1. Player are checking out the tips through a text message.) As Beijing features geographically diversified cultures, potential playgrounds are pretty easy to find. Thanks to such diversities, Seek Bou Journey comes with different kinds of tasks in serial form, representing a tour enriched with culture connotation. Up to now, there are already eighteen Seek Bou Journeys. The succession of these theme-based hunts proves the game is not a spark of temporary interest. It has monthly growth of a hundred participants. Sixty percent of the entire participants are in an age range of twenty-five to thirty, and most of them claim that they enjoy such "learning while playing" hunts. With vast supports, the founder, Changxun, has put forward more hunts focusing on not only educating the players but also commercializing Seek Bou

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<sup>2</sup> From the game of "Password In Bamboo Grove". [http://event.mosh.cn/jx/index\\_5292.html](http://event.mosh.cn/jx/index_5292.html).

Journey.

Similar to the rapid-growing (*Geocaching 2000*)<sup>3</sup>, the hunts may consequently help boost tourism. Although there are some tasks resembled to those counterparts in Geocaching, most tasks in Seek Bou Journey are designed with regional cultural details. For instance, in the thirteenth Seek Bou Journey - "The Art of Food", a task was to find tips from a chain restaurant belonged to historically famous Huatian Group. The players must eat specific dishes to acquire the tips. There would be a great discount in reward and the restaurant is thus promoted in an innovative way. By collaborating with other businesses, tasks in the hunt feature potential of being parts of direct-marketing events as well as commercialized activities. It is also likely the future Seek Bou Journeys become tourist packages; according to Changxun, a contracted Seek Bou Journey has been working on tryout routes and will be announced the first quarter of 2007.

## Playing a Role in Killer Game

*"Although I have lived in Beijing for twelve years, playing Killer Games for two months is surprisingly helpful to better understand Beijing people."*

*-----Rex, Killer Game player*

Killer Game, derived from "Mafia" that is invented by Dimitry Davidoff in 1986, provides a roll-playing and mind-reading game that is fun and enlighten. Basically the game involves players sitting around a table arguing over who is the killer, with each individuals trying to prove their innocence. (Figure 2. It comes the night. Please close the eyes.) Situated either indoors or outdoors, Killer Game has got an educational nature that helps players develop their ability of reasoning, self-expression, as well as

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<sup>3</sup> Geocaching, released in 2000, is a series of GPS-based treasure hunts. See website <http://www.geocaching.com>.

team-working. First appeared at Shanghai in 1999, the Killer Game had gotten quite popular among PR practitioners, journalists, and IT professionals in merely a year.<sup>4</sup> So far, the players are not limited to specific social groups; especially the new “web” Killer Game has provided a virtual alternative that help broaden the range of participants.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the game has evolved gradually from a leisure activity into a paid entertainment in Beijing. A novel phenomenon named “Killer Bar”, has soon become one of the indoor entertainments like video arcades, KTV, comic house, and net café.



Figure 2 : It comes the night. Please close the eyes!

*“During the game, I’m encouraged to speak to those attractive girls whom I dare not to chat with before.”*

*-----Nelson, Killer Game player*

The Killer Game provides a dramatically simulated situation that a player detaches himself from inner personality while remains physical existence. Although there are negative viewpoints from domestic observers that the game actually promotes “liar”, it is believed by most of local players that the game positively “observes and understands human behaviors”. As Wang Kaiyu mentioned, “the game promotes the fittest survives. Lying is one of the strategies that are adopted by the

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics retrieved from Xclub. See website <http://www.xclub.com.cn/Forums/games/TopGame1.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Like Internet Killer Game. See website <http://www.killbar.com/>

individual team members who eventually gain the majority.”(Fen, Yung 2006) Should the Killer Game help improve team-working? It is hard to answer. However, it's known some local corporations have introduced the Killer Game into their HR training programs to improve employee's teamwork and self-expression skills. (Yung, Yu Mo 2006)

Along with the popularity of Killer Game, the “Killer bar” immerges at Beijing. To be part of the Asian “cabinet entertaining” cultures, the bar basically provides standardized tools to facilitate fair games and comfortable environments. For instance, “Xclub”, found in 2004, is the first specialized bar for the Killer Game. With fairly low service charge, Xclub has members of more than 1.5 millions. It is now the most authoritative commercialized model, and has more than 20 chains national wide.

The Xclub incorporates an Integrated Gaming Console with the functions of Judging, Player ID, Charting, and PA system. (Figure 3. The Judge system of the Integrated Gaming Console.) The Console soon inspires other game-related businesses such as software and hardware development, and pushes the making of by-products like toys, masks, and magazines. So far there are about 10 console manufacturers. With implementing the console, playing the game is not necessary in a Killer Bar, but places like KTV, net café, comic house, restaurant, and dating club.



Figure 3 : The Judge system of the Integrated Gaming Console

## Experiencing Reality CS with Majoy

Majoy is general term that represents a serial of digitalized task-based reality games. (Figure 4. Players gear up for the next task..) Similar to (*Counter-Strike 1999*), it is a war game with battling tasks like flag-catching and hostage-rescuing. The name of Majoy stands for both game and game developer. Like classic RPG game, the players take different roles along with the change of playgrounds situated at the “Majoy city”.



Figure 4 : Players gear up for the next task.

Majoy city is located at the Shijingshan Sculpture Park, somewhere in the western suburb of Beijing. In the semi-closed park, players manage to complete tasks using a number of digital equipments provided by the game operator - such as PDA, force feedback rifle, and sensor-attached outfits etc. (Figure 5. The Majoy players access battle information via networked PDA.) Although the game is similar to that of (*Counter-Strike 1999*), the real gaming experience is distinct from the formers. The tasks in Majoy are far more complex with various battling gears, and are closer to realistic battles that acquire a great deal of physical exercises and teamworks. In a typical catch-the-flag task, the players wearing heavy equipments constantly need to run between distance information posts. The game helps players to achieve physical fitness, as well as to practice teamwork simply because it is impossible for a single player to manage survival without team backups.



Figure 5 : The Majoy players access battle information via networked PDA. Currently still in operational testing, a WAN-enabled “Majoy engine” will soon be released and it is adaptive to various tasks. Therefore, the game shall go beyond existing venues, and the players may continue playing at either physical or virtual playgrounds via various network devices . With such flexibility, Majoy will be capable to offer more immersive experiences.

Majoy represents not only the world’s leading entertainment, but also a Chinese entrepreneurial “dream”. At present, the game is situated at Shijingshan where is the designated CRD(Capital Recreational District). According to a research proposal

undertaken by the Ministry of Science and Technology, the regional government has already invested thirty billion of RMB for the recreational facilities and projects. These projects, both completed and planned, include Majoy-city 、Dotman Cyber Recreation District 、China Electronic Sports Development Center, Shijingshan Theme Park, and Capital Steel Remains. With the support of nation's best technological and educational facilities, there is no doubt that the CRD becomes a showcase among all the other domestic projects. Majoy has now been escalated to both municipal and national level, and has already attracted large attentions. (Ministry of Science and Technology 2006) However, it remains a mystery why the Majoy developer touchdowns at Beijing where the game can only be available 6 months annually due to the weather condition.<sup>6</sup> The game seems overwhelmed under an optimistic political climate, and is not surprised the future of Majoy is somewhat over-estimated despite the unfavourable weather issue.

## The Advantage for Reality Games

China features many inherent advantages of social inclusion and spatial diversity for implementing reality games. This is a place now catches global attentions and attracts tremendous gold rushers who insanely invest new leisure and recreational facilities. In fact, a typical Chinese city often has such commonality of "amazingly high density of diversified spatial usage for the entertainments". Take Beijing for example: an average household usually has entertainments such as Karaoke system, home theatre, video game console, and integrated media center; a single commercial building may accommodate serviced-club, tea house, Internet cafe, comic house,

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<sup>6</sup> The game will, at best, generate 400 millions of the revenue from the tickets. However the game developer seems unusually optimistic about making another 1100 millions through other channels.

KTV/MTV, and Killer bar; regional public spaces have Majoy-city, Dotman, Shijingshan Theme Park, Pleasure Land, Trans Global Festival. As for most of Chinese players, they usually act like a sponge absorbing virtually every single new thing, yet expecting the infusion of novel and crazy ideas. After 3G and Wi-Fi cover the entire city for it is getting ready for the Olympics, will this soon open a door for Beijing citizens to experience a more pervasive existence of games?

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