

The relationship between Gold Raid Team and World of Warcraft's Economy On Chinese
Servers

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Background Introduction

NCTY was the operator of WoW in China, but it lost its license on June 7th 2009.

NetEase got the license from Blizzard Entertainment and has run WoW in China since June 7th 2009.

Game time cards: In Chinese server, we only have 30 Chinese yuan and 15 Chinese yuan game time cards. 30 Chinese yuan card can apply game time of 4,000 minutes.

DKP: Dragon kill points (usually abbreviated with the acronym DKP) designate a kind of currency which is earned by participating in endgame raids and spent by acquiring loot from endgame bosses. The term DKP is also frequently used to designate raid-level loot system in general. The most popular systems for endgame loot distribution are point-based (and thus DKP systems) (WoWWiki).

Introduction

World of Warcraft (WoW) has been released for almost nine years since 2004. Although the numbers of subscribers of WoW has fallen down to 8.3 million, WoW is still the largest subscriber-based MMO in the world by a significant margin (Haas, 2013). Because of the nine-year's development, WoW has formed a mature world that has its own economy. In this research paper, I mainly focus on one specific economic phenomenon called the gold raid teams, which exist on Chinese servers.

We can easily understand from its name that the purpose of a gold raid team is to earn gold coins (the currency in WoW) from selling equipment and other items including mounts to a group of other players. These gold raid teams initially appeared on Chinese servers and then spread to the Taiwanese servers and other servers. However, this kind of team is prohibited on American and European servers because of one policy, which is that all virtual currencies and goods are owned by Blizzard Entertainment according to the "WORLD OF WARCRAFT TERMS OF USE". That policy means players could only use virtual currencies and goods they earned themselves while playing, and players are prohibited to sell items in a raid for gold or even real money. But, the situation is not the same in China. Blizzard Entertainment does not have permission to open a filiale in China, so it has to license the game to a Chinese server. But both the NCTY and NetEase do not enforce these rules, it seems like nobody is supervising this wrong economic phenomenon and a gold raid team has been gradually accepted by all players. In fact, it has now become an essential part on Chinese servers and unique scenery among all servers.

The gold raid teams initially appeared when the maximum level that characters could gain was level 60 because it was too expensive to fix in-game avatar equipment at that time. Some players on Chinese servers decided to sell equipment that they did not need to get some

gold. Their purpose was simple in the past. Then the gold raid teams came to their peak in 2008 because the Chinese servers agent at that time called NCTY released patch 3.05 that increased the maximum level to 80, but the Wrath of the Lich King expansion with content for those levels did not come to the Chinese servers until 2010. During that period of time, players used level 80 characters to complete level 70 raid content. Obviously, it was much easier than before to farm those raids. Players did not even need a guild or fixed team to participate in these raids to get good equipment. Thus, some players in the game world organized teams to raid together to earn gold. After a period of time, some guilds found that this was the easiest way to earn gold and also created their own gold raid teams. They would take two or three buyers with them and sell equipment to the buyers. The gold raid teams players were called workers and the buyers were those people buying any items including equipment and mounts from the gold raid teams. Buyers could buy gold with real money on websites like Taobao (Chinese EBay) and 17173 (a website that players could trade any virtual goods on) or sell cards in the game world.

In this research paper, I mainly research the relationship between the gold raid teams and WoW's economy. The following three research questions are addressed in this study:

- Does a gold raid team influence the normal life of players?
- Does a gold raid team have any benefits and drawbacks?
- Does a gold raid team influence the flow of gold?

Method

Interviews and a survey were used in this research. This research mainly used qualitative and quantitative research methods.

For the interview part, I interviewed ten gold raid leaders in the game world to ask their attitudes about the gold raid teams. And also, twenty non-gold raid leaders players were interviewed in the game world.

For the gold raid teams leaders, the questions were:

- How long have you been a gold raid leader?
- How many hours do you play in a week?
- How much gold could you get from one gold raid?
- How many gold raids do you lead in a week?
- Do you enjoy being a gold raid leader?
- Do you think that gold raid is good for the game world or not?

For non-gold raid leaders players, the questions were:

- Do you ever join a gold raid team? If you do, what is your work? Workers or buyers?
- How many times do you work for or purchasing items from a gold raid in a week?
- How much do you earn or spend at one time?
- Do you enjoy playing in a gold raid?
- Do you think that gold raid is good for the game world or not?

In the survey, I posted those survey questions on a famous Chinese website called National Geographic Azeroth Forum (NGA) that was the most professional online forum of World of Warcraft in China. The questions of the survey were the same as those for non-gold raid leaders players in the interview but also included some additional questions about level and the number of characters that they had.

Results

In the first part of interview, all ten gold raid leaders expressed a positive attitude to the gold raid teams. However, six of them were more enthusiastic than other four gold raid leaders. Almost all the leaders would play World of Warcraft for more than 40 hours per week. Some of them, who were still gold raid leaders, could play more than 60 hours per

week. By comparison, the average time of non-gold raid leaders players was 30 hours per week. One of those gold raid leaders could play 80 hours per week, which meant more than ten hours per day. In the interview, he said,

I am a college student. But you know, in Chinese college, students don't have too much work to do. Now, because all students are preparing for the final exam, there is nothing to do without playing WoW. I will sit in front of the computer when I wake up. In addition to taking a meal, I play WoW until I want to sleep.

Among all interviews of the gold raid teams leaders the average income for a gold raid leader in one raid is about thirty thousand gold. On the server that I did my research, its game time cards price was eighteen thousand. And they would lead three gold raids in a week on average. Thus, the average total income for a gold raid leader in a week was about ninety thousand gold. This method of earning gold was much more quickly than earning gold by doing daily missions and trading in auction house. When I was interviewing one of those gold raid leaders, he expressed more excited than others when answering the money question,

I do have too much money that can be used in playing a game. But the gold raid teams give me a chance to be a rich man. I can buy any things I want in the game world because I earned too much gold in last year by doing the gold raid teams. I love the gold raid teams. I love living in the game.

In both the survey and interviews with the non-gold raid leaders players, almost all of them expressed support for the gold raid teams. The main reason to participate in a gold raid team was the mechanism of distributing equipment in guild, DKP. For new players, they did not have enough DKP, which meant they could not get powerful equipment from guild raid teams. The gold raid teams gave them a chance to become powerful more quickly. Of the twenty non-gold raid leaders players interviewed, nineteen of them would participate in a gold raid team per week and ten of the nineteen would take more than two gold raids because

they had more than five characters. But there was an exception. The player was a main member of one of the top three powerful guilds on the Chinese servers. In the interview, he said he only participated in a gold raid team for once as a worker. At first he thought there was not a huge difference between the gold raid teams and no-gold raid teams and the only difference was the distribution of equipment. However, when the leader began to sell items he engaged in some unethical behavior. The leader would ask some workers to drive up the price. For instance, the price of Deathbringer's Will (iLvl 264) was sold at 30,000 gold in most gold raid teams. But this leader sold it at a starting price of thirty thousand gold and some workers began to drive up the price. A buyer bought this item with a final price of fifty thousand gold. This phenomenon was common in all gold raid teams this player said. He did not like this transaction mode so he decided not to participate in the gold raid teams from that time.

Discussion

The determining factors of World of Warcraft economy are the generation, distribution and consuming of gold. The generation and consumption of gold determine the level of inflation for the whole economy of WoW. On the whole, WoW's entire economy is in the expansion state. We can obtain this result from the game time cards price of Chinese servers. The original price of a card was 2,000 gold on my server about three years ago. Then the price went up to 10,000 gold when Wrath of the Lich King was released in China. Now the card has come to 20,000 gold on almost all Chinese servers.

On a server, gold coins have three sources, gold from missions, killing monsters and selling goods to NPCs. The first source is basic, fixed and the least profitable. The expansion of "fast food" (leveling up using raids not missions) decreases the return on investment of this method. But this does not cause the expansion of the whole economic situation. The reason is the second and third sources. The most obvious method is getting

gold from Karazhan. A rogue can get gold from monsters except bosses. Then the player will reset the raid and the monsters that have been killed will appear again. This method can bring an income of 600 gold per hour. It was one of the most significant reasons that caused an overabundance of gold when the maximum level was 80 on Chinese servers.

The second determining factor of WoW is the consuming of gold. The first way is repairing equipment. It is a huge expenditure to a raid team, particularly in 60 levels because at that time, the sources of gold coins were very limited. But when the maximum level was 80, the reduction of the guild raid teams and the nerf of raids made the repairing cost of the entire server at a very low status, which was one of the expansion reasons. The second way to consuming gold is purchasing materials from NPCs (including transaction fees in auction house). This is divided into expenditure on common materials and the expenditure on luxury goods. The first category is stable because cost of the common materials is much less than repairing expenditures. The purchase of luxury goods should be designed by designers to reduce the expansion of WoW's economy, such as Motorcycle materials, the Dingarany elephant and rings. But I think this is a design failure because only a handful of people want to buy these goods. And most people prefer to save gold. Of course, this phenomenon has an indivisible relationship with the gold raid teams. The generation of the gold raid accelerates the circulation of gold coins, and players prefer to buy some equipment to enhance themselves than buy some luxury goods. For instance, the Dingarany elephant was sold at 16000 gold and the tiger and dragon of Zug were still sold at 16000 gold. All players would buy Zug's tiger and dragon not the Dingarany elephant. Another expenditure of gold is learning Riding skill. This was also one of the reasons why the economy in the first 60 levels was balanced. At that time the sources of the gold were rare, a senior Riding skill was 800G, and senior Riding skill was necessary to all players. So this was a very stable method to reducing expansion pressure. Although the senior Flying Riding skill was sold at 5000 gold

in 70 levels and 80 levels, the weakening of the field made it not necessary to a lot of people to learn. This made the expenditure of gold less than before.

The speed of production and expenditure of the gold on a server determines its economic level of inflation, inventory and liquidity of gold. At the beginning, the speed of gold production is greater than the speed of expenditure. We know that, when the speed of the two is exactly the same, the server's economy will be stabilized. That requires the speed of gold expenditure is greater than the speed of expenditure at some stages until two speeds are equal. Unfortunately, only in the first 60 levels World of Warcraft economy was stable. And in 70 levels and 80 levels, the speed of gold generation remained still greater than the speed of gold expenditure, which caused the increase of card price.

In fact, the flow of gold is a transfer from one player to another one. Determinants of the flow of gold are inventory and the degree of circulation. An inventory level of gold is very adequate, and the degree of circulation directly determine the prosperity of a server. The flow of gold mainly is the exchange of goods, such as transactions of consumables, materials, equipment (including mounts from raids). However, there is a special case, the transaction of cards and directly purchasing gold online by real money. It is like a gift and no exchange of goods happening in this kind of transaction. But it has a close relationship to players. Because of this kind of transaction that is relating gold to real money, gold cheaters and characters chives appears. Many people say that no gold raid teams no gold cheaters and characters chives. However, I want to say no online gold transaction no these wrong game activities.

Everything has double sides. The gold raid teams could help accelerating the speed of flow of gold. It is an inevitable result of economy's expansion. However, it also changes players' normal lives. More players will choose to buy some equipment in the gold raid teams when they get 90 levels rather than get equipment from basic raids. It is easier and more quickly to buy equipment in the gold raid teams. The gold raid teams restrain the

development of guild raid teams at some degrees because more players want to participate in the gold raid teams to earn gold and guild raid teams could not give them gold. It also causes some wrong behaviors like the leaders privately take possession of all gold earned. This is a very common phenomenon on Chinese servers.

Conclusion

The gold raid teams are an essential part of Chinese WoW players' lives. Almost every player will take one gold raid because of different reasons and demand. It is an inevitable result of economy's expansion. It offers a possible method to decrease the expansion degree and accelerate the flow of gold. However, the gold raid teams also cause some problems. We could not deny the gold raid teams just because of some problems. We still need to do more work on how to solve problems rather than blaming the gold raid teams.

References

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