

A video game on 'gold diggers' is fuelling a sexism debate in China

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Kelly Ng

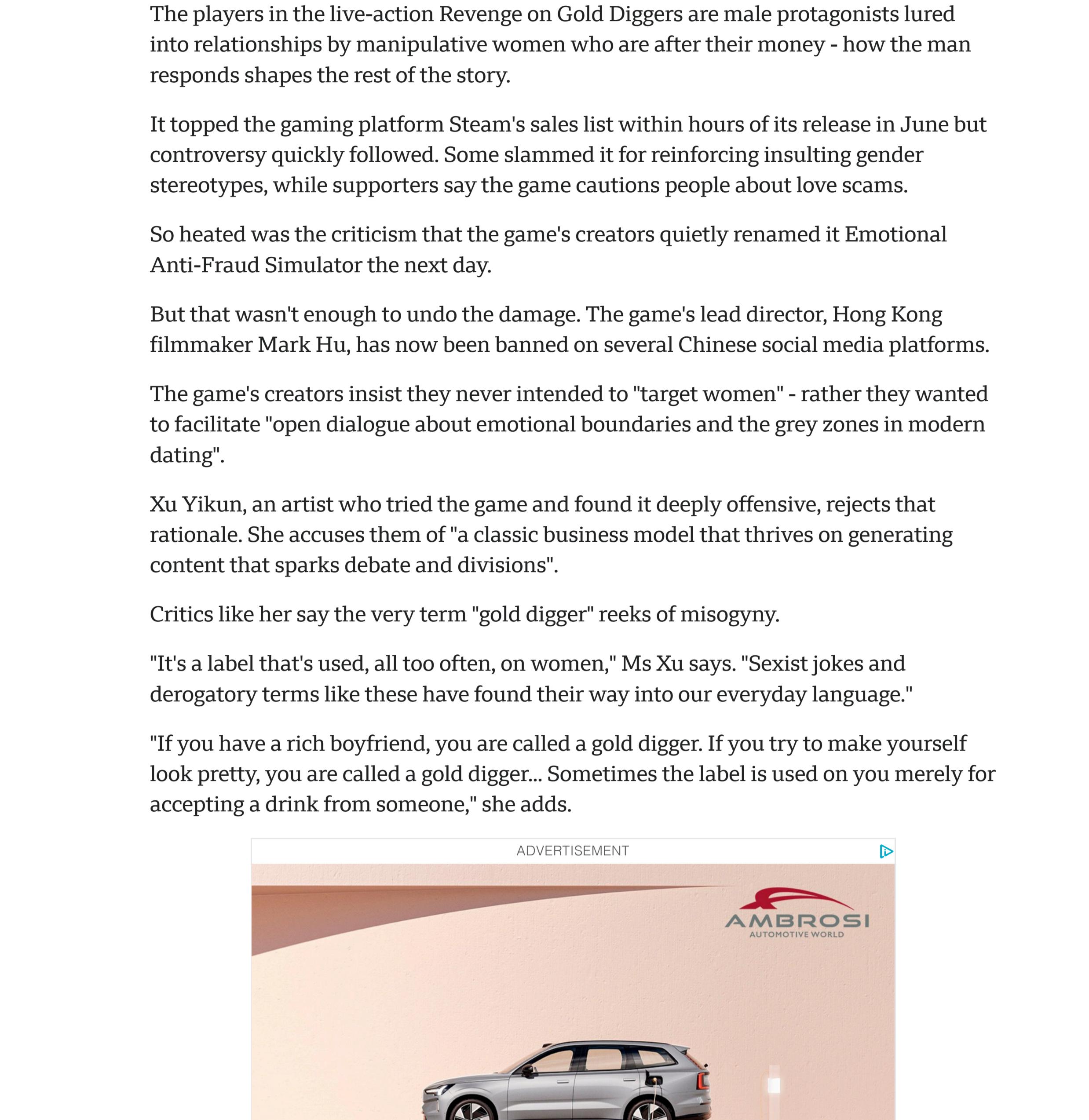
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The game has been renamed following a backlash

"He's more obedient than a dog... If only more of these dumb ones come along," boasts a woman in a new video game that has fueled a debate on sexism in China.

The players in the live-action *Revenge on Gold Diggers* are male protagonists lured into relationships by manipulative women who are after their money - how the man responds shapes the rest of the story.

It topped the gaming platform Steam's sales list within hours of its release in June but controversy quickly followed. Some slammed it for reinforcing insulting gender stereotypes, while supporters say the game cautions people about love scams.

So heated was the criticism that the game's creators quietly renamed it *Emotional Anti-Fraud Simulator* the next day.

But that wasn't enough to undo the damage. The game's lead director, Hong Kong filmmaker Mark Hu, has now been banned on several Chinese social media platforms.

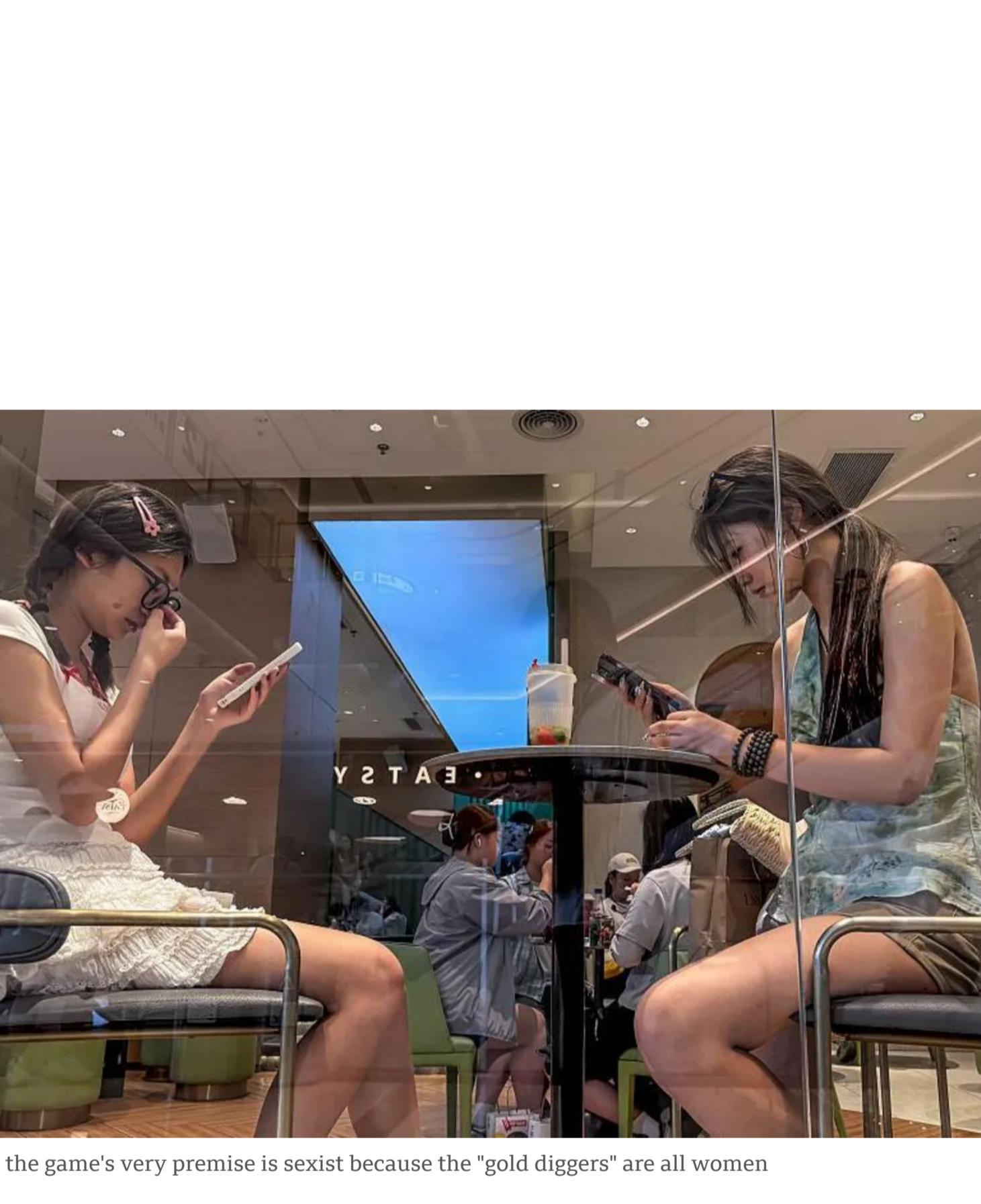
The game's creators insist they never intended to "target women" - rather they wanted to facilitate "open dialogue about emotional boundaries and the grey zones in modern dating".

Xu Yikun, an artist who tried the game and found it deeply offensive, rejects that rationale. She accuses them of "a classic business model that thrives on generating content that sparks debate and divisions".

Critics like her say the very term "gold digger" reeks of misogyny.

"It's a label that's used, all too often, on women," Ms Xu says. "Sexist jokes and derogatory terms like these have found their way into our everyday language."

"If you have a rich boyfriend, you are called a gold digger. If you try to make yourself look pretty, you are called a gold digger... Sometimes the label is used on you merely for accepting a drink from someone," she adds.



"Want to know if a man loves you? See how much he spends," says one of the women in the video game

Some players, however, find the criticism overblown.

"The game isn't trying to say that all women are gold diggers... I don't find it targeting either gender," says 31-year-old Zhuang Mengsheng, who used a pseudonym to speak to the BBC. "Both women and men can be gold diggers."

And yet, in the game all the "gold diggers" are women. From a fresh-faced online influencer to a go-getting entrepreneur they are all shown scheming to get the men to lavish money and gifts on them.

"Want to know if a man loves you? See how much he spends," one of them says.

The game has divided even local media. A newspaper from the central Hubei province said the game was "labeling an entire gender as fraudsters".

But Beijing Youth Daily praised it for its "creativity", citing the financial impact of love scams: around 2bn yuan (£279m; £204m) in 2023, according to data from the National Anti-Fraud Centre.

"We need to put a stop to emotional fraud without delay," it said in an editorial.

Controversy aside, sales of the game have continued to soar. It is now among China's top ten titles for the PC platform, surpassing even *Black Myth: Wukong* which is reportedly the most successful Chinese game of all time.

"I don't get why people are upset about this. If you aren't a gold digger yourself, why should you feel attacked by this game?" says a 28-year-old man.

"I actually thought the game's creators are very bold. These issues [like emotional fraud] aren't widely discussed enough in China."

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