# Roland Barthes' Semiotics Analysis of Characters From Liyue in The Game Genshin Impact

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## Abstract

This research aims to find out about the semiotic elements in the characters in the game Genshin Impact as well as the meaning of the semiotic elements in the characters in the game Genshin Impact which have a relationship with culture in China which can be useful in general. The type of research used is qualitative research with descriptive analysis using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.  The techniques used to obtain the results of this research are exploring, searching, writing and collecting data. Based on the results of research and discussion, it shows that, firstly, in the game Genshin Impact, every character from Liyue that is described has semiotic elements that represent the appearance of each character, such as signifiers, signifieds, denotative elements and connotative elements. Second, every character in the game Genshin Impact, especially from Liyue, is explained as having meaning in denotative elements, and connotative elements starting from appearance, clothing and the myth behind each character.

**Keywords:** Semiotic Elements; Character; Game; Denotative; Connotative

## Introduction

In today's digital era, it has driven a lot of economic growth, innovation and inevitable connectivity. Countries in all parts of the world are starting to compete to optimize the potential of their digital economy, and China has become one of the main players who has succeeded in creating a strong and innovative digital economy. China is the largest digital consumer market in the world today, and therefore the Chinese government understands the huge potential that this sector has in its country. China's strategy in building a strong digital economy has produced many impressive results such as a strong foundation of digital infrastructure, investment and innovation, strong government support for the startup ecosystem, as well as a focus on digital consumers and e-commerce, excellence in intelligence artificial, and the government's effective role in regulating and developing the digital economy, China has succeeded in becoming one of the global leaders in the digital economy even after being hit by the pandemic. The economic recovery that occurred in China in this decade quickly brought China to the world stage. Be it in general industries such as electronics, to culture and entertainment, especially in the sub-cultural aspects of video games, films and animations that they produce. China has also benefited from the progress of their video game industry, which can now compete with a number of top games from various countries.

Many media today use history and culture as references in their creation, one of which is games. Many games use the history and culture of a place or country as a

reference, whether in character creation, story line creation, character or place design, and much more. Game companies in China also use a lot of history and culture from both their country and other countries. The use of history and culture in games is also one of the attractions of a game because apart from being able to play, players can also gain insight or learn about the history and culture of the place or country that is used as inspiration for the game. One game that uses history and culture as a reference is Genshin Impact, Dynasty Warriors, Mobile Legends, and many more. These games highlight several cultures from several countries such as China, Japan, and others.

Culture according to Tylor (1871) is a complex system that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, abilities and habits acquired by humans as members of society. Koentjaraningrat (1997) also believes that culture is a whole system of ideas and feelings, actions, and works produced by humans in social life. Culture is a habit that has been going on for a long time and has become a particular custom in a community and region. These habits usually come from people's minds who observe what can be learned and applied to help their work and everyday life. The results of these habits produce what is known as culture. Culture itself is formed from many complex elements, including religious and political systems, customs, language, tools, clothing, buildings, myths and works of art. Language, like culture, is such an inseparable part of the human being that many people tend to think it is inherited genetically.

Myths are stories of a nation or country about gods and heroes in ancient times which contain interpretations about the origins of the universe, humans and the nation itself which have deep meanings which are expressed or told in a supernatural way. According to Barthes (1957) myth is language, so myth is a communication system and myth is a message. Barthes also believes that myth is a semiological system, which means it is a system of signs that humans interpret. Myths can also be said to be the product of a social class that already has dominance.

One game that uses the culture and myths of a country as a reference as explained above is Genshin Impact. Genshin Impact itself is a game that can be played for free on various platforms such as Mobile, PC, even Playstation 4 and 5. This game has an open world action RPG genre which was released by a Chinese company in September 2020 called miHOYO which has changed its name to HOYOVERSE in last 2021.

The Genshin Impact game is a game that can be played with friends or anyone online and in real time with the co-op feature in the game so that players don't feel bored playing alone. In the game there is also a gacha or pull system, which is a system where you can get better characters or weapons using a random lottery system with different levels of excellence ranging from three stars to five stars which makes many players more interested in playing it. In the game we can also go on adventures and fight together, not only that, the Genshin Impact game also has an exciting storyline which has made this game receive many awards even before it was released a year ago in 2020, including Best game and User Choice Award at the 2020 Google Play awards. as well as Best Mobile Game and Best Role Playing at The Game Awards 2020.

The game Genshin Impact tells the story of a player as a traveler from another world who is looking for his twin brother who was separated because of an unknown god. The beginning of the story begins when two twin travelers fight a god named unknown god. At the beginning of the story, we can choose one of the two travelers, namely Lumine (female) and Aether (male). After that we will be stranded in a world

called Teyvat and we will meet our travel guide named Paimon who is a small creature that resembles a fairy.

In Teyvat itself, 4 countries have been released, namely Mondstadt, Liyue, Inazuma, and Sumeru. Each country has inspiration from the original country, such as Mondstadt which was inspired by Germany, Liyue which was inspired by China, Inazuma which was inspired by Japan, and Sumeru which was inspired by countries in West Asia such as Egypt. Each country has different gods and idealism. Mondstadt with a god named Barbatos is the Anemo god who has the ideal of "Freedom", Liyue with a god named Morax or Rex Lapis is a Geo god who has the ideal of "Contract" or agreement, Inazuma with a god named Raiden Shogun or Baal is the Electro god with the ideal of "Eternity" or immortality, and Sumeru with a god named Buer or Rukhadevata who was replaced by Lord lesser Kusanali who is the Dendro god with the ideal of "Wisdom". Our journey starts from Mondstadt then to Liyue then to Inazuma and finally as of March 2023 is Sumeru but there will be other countries that will be released in the game such as Fontaine, Natlan, Snezhnaya, and Khaenri'ah in the future. Every playable character in this game has powers thanks to the vision they have. Vision itself is a gift or gift from God as a form of recognition to the recipient of the vision. There are 7 types of vision powers in the game, namely: Anemo (Wind), Geo (Rock), Electro (Lightning), Dendro (Plant), Hydro (Water), Pyro (Fire), Cryo (Ice).

The country of Liyue is also led by a god named Morax or Rex Lapis who has the ideal of "Contract", namely that this god really values the agreements or contracts he has made and if he breaks the contract he will receive appropriate retribution. In Liyue there are also many characters made based on Chinese mythologies, such as the mythological animal Qilin (麒麟) which is taken and used in the game as its animal form, namely Ganyu (甘雨 Gānyǔ) and there is also the mythological animal Xiezhi (獬豸) which is its form. animals from Yanfei (烟绯 Yānfēi). The god character in Liyue was also made based on a reference to the god in China, namely the god Zhongli Quan (鐘離權) with the same name in the game, namely Zhongli (钟离 Zhōnglí). The god Zhongli quan (鐘離權) is one of the eight gods famous in China, while in the game he is also depicted as one of the seven gods from the seven countries who exist to lead Liyue Country.

With the many references used starting from native culture and mythology, many Genshin Impact game players have become more interested in playing. By using video game media as a forum to introduce history to players, they can also broaden their knowledge and learn about the history of other countries indirectly. Because nowadays, not many people really understand history anymore or like studying history or culture, let alone visiting history museums to learn. Using culture and mythology as an indirect reference can also allow China to introduce some of the culture and mythology that exists in their country to the world through this game. Based on the background above, the researcher found problems that made the writer interested in researching the game Genshin Impact, especially regarding the Chinese characteristics used in creating the characters and knowing about the denotative, connotative and mythical elements.

## Research Methods

Bogdan & Biklen (2007) explain that qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of speech or writing and the behavior of the people being observed. A qualitative approach is expected to be able to produce a

more in-depth description of speech, writing, and/or behavior that can be observed from an individual, group, society, and/or particular organization which is studied from a complete, comprehensive, and holistic point of view. Qualitative research aims to gain a general understanding of social reality and participant perspectives. This research uses qualitative research methods with descriptive analysis, on the object studied, namely the game Genshin Impact. The reason researchers use qualitative research is because basically, qualitative research aims to discover characteristics and phenomena such as those in the game Genshin Impact. In this research, the researcher describes the semiotic elements starting from the denotative, connotative and mythical elements that exist in the characters from Liyue in the game Genshin Impact and then describes the meaning of each of the elements mentioned above in more depth.

## Results and Discussion

This research contains the semiotic elements that exist in the characters from Liyue in the game Genshin Impact, including the denotative, connotative and mythical elements of each character described. As of August 2023, there are a total of seventy playable characters in the game Genshin Impact, including Mondstadt, Liyue, Inazuma, and Sumeru. Of the total of seventy playable characters currently, a total of eighteen characters from Liyue are currently playable.

**Table 1.** Zhongli Semiotic Table

| Signifier | Signified |
|---|---|
|  | A man aged around twenty-eight to thirty years old, dark brown hair with long golden gradients tied back, wearing very formal clothes, and carrying a polearm. |
| Denotative Sign | |

| | An adult man wearing formal clothes carrying a weapon that looks like a stick with a sharp tip or a polearm poses as if he is ready to fight. | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Conotative Sign | | An adult man wearing formal clothes with many motifs, one of which is a dragon, who carries a stick with a sharp tip that looks ready to fight. He looks very calm, straight, tough, handsome and brave. |

## Zhongli
### Denotative Meaning

Zhongli (钟离 Zhōnglí) in the game Genshin Impact is a god whose archon name is "Morax" which is the god of contracts. He is called the god of contracts because he is a god who really values contracts, trade, money and others, even the name of the money in Teyvat is taken from the name of his god name, namely "Mora", because Liyue itself is the largest trading center city in Teyvat. In the game Genshin Impact, Zhongli is said to be a geo-elemental god or rock god who rules the country of Liyue. However, in the game he is told that the people of Liyue know him as a god with his exuvia form, which is a dragon with the name Rex Lapis.

Zhongli's appearance in the game is in the Archon quest chapter I: Act II - Farewell, Archaic Lord. He appears in the form of a mortal man with the appearance of an adult male who looks around twenty-eight years to thirty years old with the name Zhongli, but Zhongli has already appeared in the Archon Quest mission Chapter I: Act I – Of the Land Amidst Monoliths, with his exuvia dragon form. The character Zhongli has a connection with Chinese culture, including in the character design, starting from the clothes, hairstyle and the shape of the dragon, which has meaning in Chinese culture.



**Figure 1.** Zhongli from Genshin Impact
**Source:** Hoyoverse

In the picture above, researchers found that Zhongli's design itself has many patterns, styles or motifs. The motifs for the clothing designs used by Zhongli himself were made based on references from twelve different motifs known as "The Twelve Symbols of Sovereignty" or also known as Twelve ornaments, which were introduced

in the Zhou Dynasty (1050 - 771 BC). which was usually used by emperors or high-ranking officials at that time. However, over time, the twelve ornamental symbols have lost their sacred meaning, but the motifs are still often used in Chinese clothing today. The twelve ornaments are also a figurative representation of the universe and correspond to the twelve months of the lunar year. Throughout the reigns of emperors in ancient times, these symbols of imperial authority were embroidered on the sacrificial robes of every Emperor. The robe is a symbol of the Emperor as the Son of Heaven and ruler of the universe.



**Figure 2.** Twelve Symbols of Sovereignty
**Source:** Quora

As the god of Liyue, it is appropriate for Zhongli to use the motifs of the twelve ornaments. On the clothes worn by Zhongli, researchers found four dragon motifs or dragon scales on each side of the bottom of the clothes that Zhongli wore. The dragon motif in the twelve ornament motif symbolizes the strength of the empire and the emperor's ability to adapt. Apart from that, researchers also found that on the back of Zhongli's clothes there was a symbol (fu 黻) which looked like two opposing Hanzi letters 己 (Jǐ) which had the meaning of oneself. The 己 symbol in the twelve ornamental symbols symbolizes the ability of an emperor to differentiate between good and bad deeds, and also to reflect on himself to ensure that he has done good and correct deeds as an emperor.

Apart from the design of the clothes used, researchers also found that Zhongli's long, ponytailed hair also has meaning. Long hair in ancient Chinese history has a meaning as social status, ethnicity and belief. This meaning comes from the sayings of Confucius in the spring and autumn (771 – 476 BC), who said that long hair was a sign of piety and virility, because a person's hair, skin and body had been given to them by their parents, so they should appreciate the gift without destroying it. In those days cutting someone's hair was considered worse than sentencing someone to death. Previously, the punishment for a crime was that the perpetrator of the crime would be punished by having their hair cut.

Then in a scene in the Archon Quest mission Chapter I: Act I – Of the Land Amidst Monoliths, Zhongli appears in his exuvia dragon form. It is said in that scene that the people of Liyue are holding The Annual Rite of Descension or 请仙 Qǐng Xiān or a sacred ceremony to summon their god in the form of a dragon, then the dragon falls from the sky and is then declared dead. In this scene, researchers found many signs about Chinese culture.

**Figure 3.** Zhongli's Dragon Form
**Source:** Hoyoverse

In the picture above, researchers found a dragon, as well as a place to put incense, whose shape is very typical, depicting Chinese culture itself. Dragons themselves in Chinese culture are a symbol of goodness and good luck, different from the perception of people in Europe who consider dragons to be evil creatures and have bad meanings. China is very distinctive about dragons because they are considered a symbol of the Chinese race itself. Chinese people around the world also often call themselves proudly that they are descendants of the dragon or long de chuan ren. The dragon in the Genshin Impact game scene itself symbolizes that it is a form of the god they worship and is the protector of Liyue or the place where they live.

### *Connotative Meaning*
As a god who leads the country of Liyue, it is appropriate for Zhongli to be described as someone who looks very calm, straight, tough and brave, like an emperor in general. If you look at the splash art when you get the character Zhongli in the game, you can see that Zhongli is truly depicted as someone who has great power like a god.


**Figure 4.** Zhongli's Splashart
**Source:** Deviantart

In the splash art, it can be seen that Zhongli is surrounded by many rocks with golden shades like the color of his clothes, which shows that these rocks are a form of Zhongli's power as a geo god or a strong rock god.

### *Myth*
The reference used in making Zhongli in the game Genshin Impact is an original legend in Chinese mythology, namely the god Zhongli Quan, who is one of the eight gods famous in China. He is both a great and famous god, and also the oldest god in

his group. They are also both described as gods related to stones, Zhongli who has the power of stones to protect Liyue and Zhongli Quan who uses alchemy to make silver stones which are used to help the poor.


**Figure 5.** Zhongli and Zhongli Quan
**Source:** Hoyoverse

## Conclusion
There are two conclusions that can be drawn from this research, firstly, each character has a semiotic element that represents the appearance of the character, because each character has a signifier, a signifier, a denotative element and a connotative element, for example, like Zhongli, the signified is an adult man, the denotative element is that he is a man. is carrying a weapon, the connotative element is a soldier who is ready to fight. Second, each character has meaning from semiotic elements that represent the appearance of each characters, like zhongli's clothes there is dragon pattern in his clothes that represent that he is an emperor.

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