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**PLAYING VIDEO GAMES FOR CULTURAL DISSEMINATION:  
Representation of European Culture in the Video Game Genshin  
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**PLAYING VIDEO GAMES FOR CULTURAL DISSEMINATION:**

**Representation of European Culture in the Video Game *Genshin Impact***

Master's Thesis

MA Asian Studies: History, Arts and Culture of Asia

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## Introduction

When the first video game *Pong*,<sup>1</sup> produced by Atari in 1972, was released, it was hard to imagine that these giant pixels would ever be able to represent real life people.<sup>2</sup> But people had ambitions and nowadays some video games have such visual graphics that it is hard to discern them from film or game engine. With this, video games have taken on many different forms, creating adventure games, massive multiplayer games, roleplaying games, racing games, and the list goes on. However, as with nearly everything humans love to do with artforms, nearly every video game genre is brimming with story, or in gaming terms, *lore*. Some games have such extensive lore that complete book series are written by the video game developers, such as the *World of Warcraft (WoW)* franchise<sup>3</sup> or *The Elder Scrolls* universe<sup>4</sup>, whereas others make do with a small page of lore which covers the most important subjects of the story. And what is a story without its characters and cultures? Now that video games are advanced enough to actually look like real life people with each their own quirks and characteristics, representation was one of the first things that was to be deployed. While fantasy and sci-fi games are filled with many unique mystic *races*, a term used to refer to the different kind of appearances, many video games stick to ‘just’ humans.<sup>5</sup> But our world of ‘just’ humans is replete of all kinds of cultures and peoples, and video games also love to portray this.

While many articles concerned with video games and representations of race are often focused on black or other minority characters, this research will instead focus on the representation of European inspired cultures. Many game studies have been done on white

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<sup>1</sup> While there is indeed a video game which is deemed as the real first video game, *Tennis For Two* (1958), I am keeping to the fact that *Pong* (1972) was the first commercially successful video game.

<sup>2</sup> David Ellis, *The Official Price Guide to Classic Video Games: Console, Arcade, and Handheld Games* (House of Collectibles, 2004), 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> “Novels,” Wowpedia, accessed February 28, 2023, <https://wowpedia.fandom.com/wiki/Novels>.

<sup>4</sup> “Lore:Main Page,” UESPWiki – The Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages, accessed February 28, 2023, [https://en.uesp.net/wiki/Lore:Main\\_Page](https://en.uesp.net/wiki/Lore:Main_Page).

<sup>5</sup> Nathaniel Poor, “Digital Elves as a Racial Other in Video Games,” *Games and Culture* 7, no. 5 (2012), 376-377.

characters in video games that were made by Western video game companies, think of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*<sup>6</sup>, *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)*<sup>7</sup>, or *World of Warcraft*<sup>8</sup>, but none would seem to analyse how cultures are represented in video games. The aim of this study is to discuss how European culture is represented in the Chinese video game *Genshin Impact*, and whether this representation is diminished in comparison to the portrayal of the Chinese culture. The world of *Genshin Impact*, Teyvat, is heavily influenced by real-life locations and cultures,<sup>9</sup> which miHoYo has pointed out in the past.<sup>10</sup> There is a lack of studies of looking at how Chinese video games represent foreign cultures. *Genshin Impact* has often been analysed in the portrayal of the Japan-inspired characters and the China-inspired characters<sup>11</sup>, yet the European characters are missing, thus more the reason to focus on these instead.

Before delving into *Genshin Impact*, there will be a discussion on the state of video gaming in China, European history in China as well as European stereotypes most Chinese people could have. Afterwards, a brief look will be taken at the video game *Overwatch* (2016) which is produced by the American video game developer Blizzard Entertainment. All American and European influenced characters will be analysed, compared and discussed. The reason why only *Genshin Impact* will be analysed as Chinese video game is because from 2000 to 2015, there was a complete ban on gaming consoles, which resulted in very few Chinese games actually going global. Most video games that were made during this period lack representation of any foreign cultures, often only showing Chinese cultures. Besides this, the focus will only be on *Genshin Impact* to narrow down the scope of the study.

Therefore, the research question of this thesis goes as follows; To what extent is the representation of European culture in the Chinese video game *Genshin Impact* diminished compared to the representation of the Chinese culture?

## Literature Review

For the research, several different sources will be looked at. The main sources will be focused on representation, especially in video games and also films, due to the lack of research on this in video games, as well as culture in China, and the Chinese gaming industry. There will not be a focus on the representation of blackness in Chinese games nor black stereotypes in China. Dikötter<sup>12</sup>, Cheng<sup>13</sup> and Johnson<sup>14</sup>, for example, have focused on the experiences of blacks and blackness in China. Instead, the focus will be on European characters explicitly, as too little research or articles are done on this specific focus. From the sources found and analysed, many gaps were found which led to the current research question.

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<sup>6</sup> Poor, "Digital Elves."

<sup>7</sup> Melinda C. Burgess et al., "Playing With Prejudice: The Prevalence and Consequences of Racial Stereotypes in Video Games," *Media Psychology* 14, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>8</sup> Franklin Waddell et al., "White Man's Virtual World: A Systematic Content Analysis of Gender and Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Games," *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research* 7, no. 2 (May 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Souvik Dutta, "Genshin Real Life Locations," *Reddit*, January 15, 2023, [https://www.reddit.com/r/Genshin\\_Impact/comments/10cctay/genshin\\_real\\_life\\_locations/?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=web2x&context=3](https://www.reddit.com/r/Genshin_Impact/comments/10cctay/genshin_real_life_locations/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3).

<sup>10</sup> miHoYo, "Are we in Sichuan or Teyvat!?" Facebook, last modified October 22, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/GenshinImpact/posts/800530297463829>.

<sup>11</sup> Xingwei Wang, "Chinese Games and Cultural Dissemination: A Case Study of "Genshin Impact"," *Communications in Humanities Research* 8, no. 1 (October 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Yinghong Cheng, *Discourses of Race and Rising China* (Basingstoke: Springer, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> M.D. Johnson, *Race and Racism in the Chinas: Chinese Racial Attitudes toward Africans and African-Americans* (Bloomington: Author House, 2007).

Race and skin colour in China at first were based on economic and technological inferiorities as Lan points out.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese race felt inferior to the white Westerners on these levels and through reform and industrial progression that happened at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sought to get on the same rank as the West. Dikötter also mentions the need for a Chinese race as a cultural Chinese identity due to the defeat of the war with Japan and the Opium Wars. It created a national cohesion.<sup>16</sup> With the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, a shift has taken place. There is a feeling of superiority compared to the West here in a new imagined ideal of China, despite it being a fantasy identity.<sup>17</sup> This idea of Chinese superiority over the West is also found back with a study done by Aramberri and Liang, who focus on Chinese travel magazines to Europe. They state that the Chinese now are not so much interested in the old culture of Europe as they expected. They argue that China nowadays takes pride in their own modernity, with special regard to their architecture and traditional culture. The reasons Chinese tourists go to Europe, it would seem, is for the mass consumer culture, such as big malls and buying European popular brands. There is no emphasis on medieval Europe or when white Europeans are portrayed, they are shown doing activities that is assumed with modern life.<sup>18</sup>

Besides this newfound importance of traditional Chinese culture and its perceived superiority, other sources focus on European migrants working in China and how they are treated, such as the studies by Shanshan Lan<sup>19</sup> or Yang Liu & Fred Dervin.<sup>20</sup> These studies support the claims that while whiteness first held a superiority and preference position in China, especially with finding work, it now would seem that this advantage is waning and one's whiteness is not favoured anymore. A study by Chris Berry on the *Wolf Warrior* film series discusses how the Chinese characters are portrayed opposed to white American or European characters.<sup>21</sup> Here too, no idealization of the West is made. Instead, the American characters are aggressive, talk of inferiority of the Chinese people and are only busy with war and making money off people. Hu and Guan in their study on *Wolf Warrior* also discuss how the Western image is mostly concerned with a macho man, whereas the Chinese posses a perfect balance of *wu* and *wen*, or brawny and cerebral characteristics. There is a use of the "mind" by the Chinese characters, whereas the Western/*American* characters are macho and 'dumb'.<sup>22</sup> When compared to the articles done on representation of white Europeans and Americans through a white man's lens, we find none of these kinds of portrayals. Instead, as Richard Dyer points out, most portrayals of white characters are often hyper-muscular men acting the heroes and virginal white women.<sup>23</sup>

The other important topic my research is focused on is video games. Here, representation is mainly focused on minority representation in American or European video games, such as how many black characters there are and their importance in the game, as well

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<sup>15</sup> Shanshan Lan, Willy Sier, and Aldina Camenisch, "Precarious whiteness in pandemic times in China," *Asian Anthropology* 21, no. 3 (2022).

<sup>16</sup> Frank Dikötter, "Race in China," in *China Inside Out: Contemporary Chinese Nationalism and Transnationalism*, ed. Pál Nyiri and Joana Breidenbach (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Kevin Carrico, *The Great Han: Race, Nationalism, and Tradition in China Today* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Julio Aramberri and Chunmei Liang, "The Chinese Gaze: Imagining Europe in Travel Magazines," *Journal of China Tourism Research* 8, no. 3 (2012).

<sup>19</sup> Shanshan Lan, "The foreign bully, the guest and the low-income knowledge worker: performing multiple versions of whiteness in China," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 15 (2021).

<sup>20</sup> Yang Liu and Fred Dervin, "Racial marker, transnational capital, and the Occidental Other: white Americans' experiences of whiteness on the Chinese mainland," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 5 (2020).

<sup>21</sup> Chris Berry, "Wolf Warrior 2: Imagining the Chinese Century," *Film Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>22</sup> Tingting Hu and Tianru Guan, "'Man-as-Nation': Representation of Masculinity and Nationalism in Wu Jing's *Wolf Warrior II*," *SAGE Open* 11, no. 3 (2021).

<sup>23</sup> Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

as how they are portrayed and what role they play.<sup>24</sup> Articles that do focus on whiteness in video games, connect certain races in video games to white people, such as the work of Nathaniel Poor. Poor argues that in Western video games, elves often have been tied to educated White males, who are most of the time the purest and most intelligent race in the context of the video game as well.<sup>25</sup> In terms of Chinese video games, the main focus lies on how Chinese themselves are portrayed in their own video games and what is of importance in this portrayal, such as the research of Na Li “Playing the past: Historical videogames as participatory public history in China.”<sup>26</sup> Here, the historical representation of figures is to inspire citizenship, patriotism, and nationalism among the Chinese players. Qiaolei Jiang and Anthony Fung also argue that China’s game industry is aiming for nationalistic tendencies among their player-base.<sup>27</sup>

As can be seen from the articles and books discussed above, there are quite some gaps in understanding. While studies do focus on the representation of white Americans and Europeans in Chinese films to a certain extent, they do not discuss why they could be presented like that. There is a big difference between the portrayal of white American and European characters in Chinese films, such as the *Wolf Warrior* series’ white aggressors, while in games, these characters often take on a fairy tale like representation as will be argued later. Besides this, there is a complete gap on how European characters are presented in video games, most studies only focusing on the economic and political side of Chinese video games, on Chinese characters, or the historical representation of characters. When they are discussing cultures, it is only on China’s cultural representation in *Genshin Impact*, as is done in the studies by Wang<sup>28</sup>, Soyoo<sup>29</sup>, or Greting et al..<sup>30</sup> Discussion and studies on European representation is, in my opinion, scarce in general. Besides this, there is little to no work on whether Occidentalism plays a role in video games.

These gaps show us the need to research more on how European characters and cultures are represented, and in this case, through the eyes of Chinese game developers. Findings in the discussed articles, however, will contribute to my own research as it lays down a basis that there indeed is a certain way European characters are portrayed in games and films, as well as the great difference between Europeans and the Chinese in regard to history. There is little to no research concerning stereotypes in Chinese games, and thus, did this result in the current research question: To what extent is the representation of the European-inspired culture in the Chinese video game *Genshin Impact* diminished compared to the representation of the Chinese-inspired culture?

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<sup>24</sup> Burgess, “Playing With Prejudice.”

<sup>25</sup> Poor, “Digital Elves.”

<sup>26</sup> Na Li, “Playing the past: Historical video games as participatory public history in China,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 27, no. 3 (2020).

<sup>27</sup> Qiaolei Jiang and Anthony Y. Fung, “Games With a Continuum: Globalization, Regionalization, and the Nation-State in the Development of China’s Online Game Industry,” *Games and Culture* 14, no. 7-8 (2017).

<sup>28</sup> Xingwei Wang, “Chinese Games and Cultural Dissemination: A Case Study of “Genshin Impact”,” *Communications in Humanities Research* 8, no. 1 (October 2023).

<sup>29</sup> Ali Soyoo, “Video Game and Culture: A Case Study of EFL Student Players' Views on Their Acquisition of Cultural Knowledge and Sensitivity,” *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* 13, no. 2 (December 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Miranda Greting, “What Inspires Retellings - A Study of the Game Genshin Impact,” in *Interactive Storytelling: 15th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling*, ed. Mirjam Vosmeer and Lissa Holloway-Attaway (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2022).

## Methodology

The hardest part about analysing video games is the fact that every player, especially in the case of massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG) or open-world role-playing games (RPG), experiences and decides their own playthrough. This is also the case with *Genshin Impact*. Unlike films and books, where the viewer or reader is led through a static experience of the story, video games are personal experiences of the story. Some players never play through storylines which other players do play, preferring, for example, to just grind on clearing dungeons to get the best items. Due to this, there are several approaches one can take when studying video games. The most common is the distinction between the ludology approach and the narratology approach. Whereas the narratology approach is mostly concerned with how the story unfolds throughout the video game, ludology is focused on the game mechanics, such as how hard it is to finish a certain level or gear, or to reach a certain achievement. Because this thesis's focus is on the representation of white American and European characters, the narratology approach will be followed.

Ludology, as just stated, is mostly the study of the game mechanics of the video game. In the earlier understanding of ludology in terms of video games, narrative is something that is causal, happening through gameplay. Narrative is not primary, but secondary. Narratology, on the other hand, sees narrative as a loose fictional frame and could be said to be primary.<sup>31</sup> Game mechanics are secondary and often not included with the narratology approach. Narratologists try to find recurrent structures which can be found in all the narratives which are present in the video game. While analysing these structures, focus is placed on how the narrative is told and by whom, not so much on the content of the narrative. Lastly, characters and motives are foregrounded instead of the action and structures.<sup>32</sup> While in the early days of studying video games there was a great debate on the two fronts on how to approach video games, either ludology or narratology<sup>33</sup>, nowadays there is a push of combining the two as they are inseparable in video games<sup>34</sup>.

While I agree that gameplay itself is also of great importance of analysing a video game, in this thesis the main focus will be on the narrative and presentation of certain characters and thus gameplay will not be involved. Instead, it will be text-based, following the storylines of the characters that meet our criteria, without paying much attention to, for example, the skill sets of these characters. In *Genshin Impact*, the focus will lay on the characters hailing from Mondstadt. While analysing these, extra attention will be paid to their storylines, appearance and their behaviour in comparison to characters who hail from Liyue. As a side note, characters or lore that was added to *Genshin Impact* after the launch of the 3.0 patch,<sup>35</sup> *The Morn of a Thousand Roses Brings*, which introduced a new region called Sumeru, as well as the characters and lore that were added in the 4.0 patch,<sup>36</sup> *As Light Rain Falls Without Reason*, which added Fontaine to the *Genshin Impact* world map, will not be included in the analysis. I have not been able to play through these regions yet and thus have no experience of any of the storylines here nor do I have the time to play this through within the timeframe of this thesis. It should be important to note that while researching certain characters, lore that was added to the said characters by these patches will be included in the

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<sup>31</sup> Lei Chen, David Dowling, and Christopher Goetz, "At the nexus of ludology and narratology: Advances in reality-based story-driven games," *F1000Research*, March 2023, 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Barry, "Narratology," in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 232-233.

<sup>33</sup> Gonzalo Frasca, "Ludologists Love Stories, Too: Notes from a Debate that Never Took Place," *Proceedings of the 2003 DiGRA International Conference: Level Up 2* (2003).

<sup>34</sup> Amy M. Green, *Storytelling in Video Games: The Art of the Digital Narrative* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> This patch was released on August 24, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> This patch was released on August 16, 2023.

analysis if this supports my research. What will be missing from this analysis is that personal gameplay is lacking and thus only narratives and lore will be researched and discussed.

In terms of analysing video gaming regulations in China, official state documents, such as the “Mobile Game Content Standard (2016 Edition)”<sup>37</sup> and the National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA) will be looked at. Besides this, secondary sources which deal with video game regulations in China will also be taken into account.

## Chapter 1: Video gaming in China

Video gaming was first introduced in China in the form of console games which were imported from Japan in the late 1980s, nearly one decade after the video game industry was being established in the United States. This import of video game consoles, however, was extremely expensive because of the import tariffs, which rated 130% for general duties, alongside a 17% rate of value-added tax. The 1990s saw many foreign gaming companies reluctant to start business in China and resulting in a piracy and black market boom to satisfy the Chinese consumers. Besides the high import rates, the traditional Chinese moral standards posed a problem for the development of the video game market as well. These standards were based on the restriction of entertainment with the judgement that gaming would result in the moral slump of the youth. Video gaming was restricted right from the bat by both social pressure as well as government regulations as this entertainment form was dubbed “digital heroin” as well as “contamination of spiritual civilization.”<sup>38</sup>

Due to this understanding of video gaming as “digital heroin,” the Chinese State Council passed the No. 44 Notice in June 2000 which restricted video game arcades and computer gaming. It also banned the manufacturing and selling of digital gaming devices. Despite this seemingly hard ban, video games which could be played on personal computers (PC) were not banned, resulting in the boom of the PC video game market in China and the strong decline of video game console and arcade market in the years up and until 2015. PC gaming therefore was the main video game entertainment in China, which was mostly done in Internet cafés as people did not own video games nor their own PCs. With this boom in PC gaming, the Chinese corporation Tencent was able to grow immensely, which is currently responsible for a third of China’s video game revenue and nowadays the world’s largest game company as it has assets in Activision Blizzard, Ubisoft, Paradox Interactive, Grinding Gear Games, Riot Games, Epic, and Miniclip. These companies were all American or European based video game companies, which have now been mostly taken over by Tencent.<sup>39</sup>

In an earlier document, the Electronic Publications Regulation, video game content is scrutinized intensely starting from the 1990s. Video game companies were not to provide forbidden content which would violate the basic principles of the Chinese constitution, jeopardize the nation-state’s unity, safety, and sovereignty by promoting violence, eroticism, and superstition, or deteriorate youths’ morality or physical and psychological health. This censorship, as Liao argues, “emphasized the state’s interest in social unity as a political and ideological agenda.”<sup>40</sup> Since 2014, China has the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) focused on Internet governance, and besides the aforementioned violations, politically

<sup>37</sup> Todd Kuhns, “Mobile Game Content Standard (2016 Edition),” AppInChina | Fearlessly Enter the World’s Largest App Market, last modified May 24, 2016, <https://www.appinchina.co/government-documents/mobile-game-content-standard-2016-edition/>.

<sup>38</sup> Sara Liao, “Japanese Console Games Popularization in China: Governance, Copycats, and Gamers,” *Games and Culture* 11, no. 3 (2016): 276-281.

<sup>39</sup> Steven Messner, “Censorship, Steam, and the Explosive Rise of PC Gaming in China,” Pcgamer, last modified December 24, 2019, <https://www.pcgamer.com/its-time-to-pay-attention-to-china-inside-the-worlds-largest-pc-games-industry/>.

<sup>40</sup> Liao, “Japanese Console Games,” 281.



harmful content, vulgar content and non-political misinformation has been added to the list of what cannot be present in digital space, including video games. The problem here is that there are no clear lines of when something is considered ‘politically harmful content’ in China. Some have been recognized, which includes “inciting ethnic hostility or racial discrimination, or disrupting ethnic unity.”<sup>41</sup>

When looking at the many video games which are banned in China, the most recurring reason for a ban is for the violent and vulgar content it contains. Popular examples of such banned games are *Battlefield 4*, *Fortnite* and *Paladins*.<sup>42</sup> Besides this content, political statements are also something that results in immediate bans. The most noticeable video game that falls under this category is *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, which was immediately pulled off Taobao, the Chinese equivalent of eBay, after people started using their personal islands as a canvas for Hong Kong pro-democracy protests.<sup>43</sup> When video game companies are aiming to publish a video game in China, they have to keep these vague restrictions in mind. Especially with the growing dominance of China in the video game market, Oliver Holmes makes a valid point that video game developers will start to censor themselves as soon as possible to avoid anything that might not sit well with China.<sup>44</sup> Besides the need to be concerned with censorship, video game developers should also be occupied with how they design their video games. In an interview with a designer at Riot, the video game developer of *League of Legends* who wished to enter the Chinese market, was told to be precise in the styles of dresses from across Asia. If this was mixed up, it could be taken as offensive, ridiculous or confusing to the Chinese players. Alongside this advice, the characters in the video game should not be “grotesque” but instead “pretty, young, more anime style,” as Chinese gamers would prefer this.<sup>45</sup>

When taking a look at the government’s stance on video games, the medium would seem to be quite important in terms of spreading their soft power. China understands soft power as part of the Chinese government’s national policy during Hu Jintao’s presidency and great emphasis is placed on culture as the medium through which to spread it.<sup>46</sup> Soft power would act as a means to rejuvenate the Chinese nation as well as endure the threats of foreign forces. The foreign forces in question are especially the United States, as they muddle the country’s image through prejudicial images.<sup>47</sup> With Xi Jinping’s assuming the presidency, even more emphasis was placed on the importance of Chinese traditional culture, “bringing the Chinese Dream to life.” Xi continues to stress that literature and art are two important

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<sup>41</sup> Jufang Wang, *Regulation of Digital Media Platforms: The case of China*, (University of Oxford: The Foundation for Law, Justice and Society, 2020).

<sup>42</sup> Matt Hirsch, “5 Popular Video Games Banned in China,” Bold TV, last modified July 27, 2022, <https://boldtv.com/matthew-hirsch/2022/07/27/5-popular-video-games-banned-in-china/>.

<sup>43</sup> Helen Davidson, “Animal Crossing Game Removed from Sale in China over Hong Kong Democracy Messages,” The Guardian, last modified April 14, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/14/animal-crossing-game-removed-from-sale-in-china-over-hong-kong-democracy-messages>.

<sup>44</sup> Oliver Holmes, “No Cults, No Politics, No Ghoul: How China Censors the Video Game World,” The Guardian, last modified July 15, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/jul/15/china-video-game-censorship-tencent-netease-blizzard>.

<sup>45</sup> Holmes, “No Cults, No Politics, No Ghoul.”

<sup>46</sup> Jintao Hu, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive for New Victories in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects” (Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China), (15 October 2007), <http://www.china.org.cn/english/congress/229611.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Ferdinand, “Westward ho - the China dream and “One Belt, One Road”: Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping,” in *China’s Relations with Central and Eastern Europe: From “Old Comrades” to New Partners*, ed. Weiqing Song (London: Routledge, 2017), 11-12.

factors which speak for the spirit and mood of the era of modern China.<sup>48</sup> Soft power is thus distributed through cultural media, as could also be seen with film. Here, the CCP would approve only films that were properly displaying China's culture as to their tastes. Yet, when the CCP would meddle with these films shown at international film festivals, they would not attract much attention and were often deemed as underwhelming.<sup>49</sup>

Genshin Impact is especially quite beloved by the CCP as seen with many CCP influenced news outlets. Great representation of the Chinese traditional cultures are in such detail that it glorifies nearly every aspect. CCP influenced news outlets are filled with *Genshin Impact*, ever praising how the Chinese culture is portrayed, but hardly ever making mention of the representation of the European cultures that are visible. An article by China Daily mentioned that "64 out of the top 80 most popular mobile games in the market have developed distinctive Chinese cultural elements and up to 68 percent of the overseas game users have widely accepted games that contain Chinese culture,"<sup>50</sup> indicating that there is a great importance placed upon the representation of Chinese culture as it will make the nation more liked in the eyes of foreign players.<sup>51</sup> miHoYo themselves also state that including the traditional Chinese culture in the video game greatly serves the game's success, such as the Chinese festivals, cultural activities and references.<sup>52</sup>

While it is hard to argue whether these perceptions are from the CCP's position on how video games should represent themselves or whether it is to satisfy Chinese consumers, we can see the impact this has on video games. Video game developers will limit themselves and adhere to the demand of China's market so as not to be banned and become popular. Especially with the last two points, representation is indeed important in video games, be it for the eyes of the consumer or the Chinese government.

## Chapter 2: Representation

Before we delve any deeper into the analysis of the representation of European characters, we first have to establish what is understood with representation. Representation, as Stuart Hall explains, is how we give things, people, and events in our culture and surroundings meanings and interpretations. Meaning in culture and the world needs to be interpreted for it to be understood. This needs to be communicated in a 'language'.<sup>53</sup> Hall touches upon this concept through 'systems of representation', elements have certain thoughts, concepts, ideas, signs or feelings which we understand for what they mean.<sup>54</sup> For thoughts, concepts, ideas, signs and feelings, the representation of these results in different understandings in every culture, think of for example colours. While red is often symbolised as the colour of love and danger in Western cultures, in China, red is associated with luck and celebration. White is also a colour which holds different meanings in the West and China. While in the West, white is often

<sup>48</sup> "Xi Jinping's Talks at the Beijing Forum on Literature and Art," China Copyright and Media, last modified October 16, 2014, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2014/10/16/xi-jinpings-talks-at-the-beijing-forum-on-literature-and-art/>.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Clark, "Projecting influence: Film and the limits of Beijing's soft power," in *Screening China's Soft Power*, ed. Paola Voci and Luo Hui (London: Routledge, 2019), 27-28.

<sup>50</sup> Quanlin Qiu, "Gaming Firms Gearing Up for Overseas Edge," China Daily, last modified February 15, 2023, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202302/15/WS63ec2109a31057c47ebaec7.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Xiaomin Cai et al., "A Study on Online Game Genshin Impact and the Dissemination of Chinese Culture," in *Communications in Computer and Information Science*, Lizhu Zhou et al. (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2023)

<sup>52</sup> 马清, "Going Digital for Going Popular -- Tech Empowers Traditional Chinese Culture," China Daily, last modified April 30, 2023, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202304/30/WS644e0baca310b6054fad0901.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013, xix-xx.

<sup>54</sup> Hall, *Representation*, xx-xxi.

associated with purity and innocence, making it occur at weddings, in China and other Asian countries, white symbolises death.

Already with these two colours, we see an immense difference in the understanding of certain things and how they are represented. Someone from a Western background would not immediately think of happiness and luck the moment he enters a room which is designed with a primary colour of red. Instead, he might think of a love room or even think it is maybe filled with danger. Representation, or stereotyping as we can also dub it, creates a concept for people from the same culture or environment to make sense of something quick and compare it to themselves.<sup>55</sup> Most importantly, stereotyping thus is a way for ‘Othering’ and also happening with people and culture. As Hall explains, stereotyping naturalises differences, sets boundaries and ‘excludes everything which does not belong.’<sup>56</sup> It is preserving order found in cultures, creating the Us and Them. Such stereotyping and representation come out of experiences a culture has with another culture or social group. A typical German stereotype is that they are always drinking beer and have little to no sense of humour. There is an overestimation and simplification of this representation. Stereotypes exaggerate the differences that are present between two groups. Besides this, the most important part is that stereotypes are dependent on context. Often, history plays a part in the stereotyping of people.

## 2.1 European culture in China

European culture in China has a complex history, especially when talking about white people. While nowadays yellowness is often ascribed to Asian people, this only became the description of Asian people after the nineteenth century. Instead, whiteness was often seen as a marker of civilization by the European travellers.<sup>57</sup> Before this, Chinese people described themselves as white, which dates back to the time the *Shijing* or *Book of Odes* was written. In a passage, the fairness of a princess is described with six different objects of which three are white: young white grass, tree-grub, and melon-seeds. Starting with the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, Chinese started to describe themselves as yellow due to the rise of nationalism that was at play.<sup>58</sup> Because of the many backlashes China had suffered, ranging from the defeat against Japan and the Opium Wars, China had a strong need to create a unifying concept. This was to be done through a universal race, the “yellow” race and the Han race, which emerged as opposition to foreign powers and the Manchus who were still in power in China. Now, the reformers, such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei, created the concept that the “yellows” (the Chinese) and the “whites” (Westerners, Europeans as well as Americans) competed over the “degenerate breeds of “browns,” “blacks” and “reds.”<sup>59</sup> “White” started to be associated with Americans and Europeans.

From this moment, China also started to import culture from Japan and Europe, as they noticed that Japan, the “small weak kingdom” had profited greatly from studying the West. The main activity of the study tours which were then sent abroad by China was not to make the West understand the “Orient” nor share their Chinese culture, but only to become a “strong nation” themselves.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Pedro Bordalo et al., “Stereotypes,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131, no. 4 (November 2016): 1754-1755.

<sup>56</sup> Hall, *Representation*, 247-248.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 23-27.

<sup>58</sup> Frank Dikötter, “Racial Discourse in China: Continuities and Permutations,” in *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 13-14.

<sup>59</sup> Dikötter, “Race in China,” 185-188.

<sup>60</sup> Wang Mingming, *The West As the Other: A Genealogy of Chinese Occidentalism* (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2014), 247.

The sentiment of the reformers was the joint competition over the “inferior races,” but the Chinese soon saw that the West did not treat them equally, which was felt for example with the Treaty of Versailles (1919). When the Communist Party took power in 1949, the concept of race changed again, focussing now more on the idea of the unified Han people and its 56 *minzu*. Thus, race and skin colour in China were based on economic and technological inferiorities as Lan points out.<sup>61</sup> The Chinese people felt inferior to the Westerners on these levels, so through reform and industrial progression sought to get on the same rank as the West which happened at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most importantly, they sought to modernize and get rid of traditional Chinese culture, which could for example be seen with the Four Olds activities during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>62</sup> Dikötter also mentions the need for a Chinese race as a cultural Chinese identity due to the defeat of the war with Japan and the Opium Wars. It created a national cohesion, a sense of “Chineseness”.<sup>63</sup>

Now, with the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, a shift has taken place. Whereas race was first connected to economic and technological superiority, race in China is currently more concerned with cultural superiority. This is especially prevalent in the way many Chinese pay extra attention nowadays to their traditions and what they deem as traditional Chinese culture. Carrico, for example, discusses the importance of Han Clothing and how followers of this movement stress how different this way of clothing is from the West. In an anecdote, the Han Clothing follower claims that Western men dress themselves in suits that do not fit them and women “walk around with their breasts and buttocks hanging out,” violating everything that seen as proper. The Han Clothing Movement’s clothing, however, is aligned with proper attires which are deemed elaborate and fitting to one’s position in life. Besides clothing, food and architecture are also of great importance to this idea of the “real China.” Here the Han-supporter also states that Western food is contaminated and that architecture of the West is falling apart. There is a feeling of superiority compared to the West here in this imagined ideal of China, despite it being a fantasy identity.<sup>64</sup> This idea of Chinese superiority over the West is also found back by Aramberri and Liang, who focus on Chinese travel magazines to Europe. They state that the Chinese now are not so much interested in the old culture of Europe as they expected. They argue that China nowadays takes pride in their own modernity, with special regard to their architecture and traditional culture. The reasons Chinese tourists go to Europe, it would seem, is for the mass consumer culture, such as big malls and buying European popular brands. There is no emphasis on medieval Europe or when white Europeans are portrayed, they are shown doing stuff that is assumed with modern life.<sup>65</sup>

This shift could also be connected to the rise of Occidentalism in China. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the post-Mao period, as a counterreaction against Said’s “Orientalism,” Chinese Occidentalism took form. It has two forms, on the one hand official Occidentalism and on the other anti-official Occidentalism. The idea of Occidentalism is the essentialization of the West, with several stereotypes which present the West. Official Occidentalism is used by the Chinese government as a means to essentialize the West to support its own nationalism so as to, as Chen puts it, further suppress the Chinese people. Europe and the US are constructed to a Chinese imagination which supports the CCP’s reign.<sup>66</sup> The West is moulded in such a way it thus makes China, for example, a more favourable place or gives a more positive sentiment to those who live in it or are perceiving it.

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<sup>61</sup> Lan, “Precarious whiteness.”

<sup>62</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 575.

<sup>63</sup> Frank Dikötter, “Race in China,” in *China Inside Out: Contemporary Chinese Nationalism and Transnationalism*, ed. Pál Nyiri and Joana Breidenbach (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005).

<sup>64</sup> Carrico, *The Great Han*.

<sup>65</sup> Aramberri and Liang, “The Chinese Gaze.”

<sup>66</sup> Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-discourse in Post-Mao China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 5.

Anti-official Occidentalism is purveyed by groups of intelligentsia who seek to liberate from the political situation of China by especially paying attention to the positive sides of the West which are not imagined.<sup>67</sup>

## 2.2 European stereotypes in China

Through these historical events, we can glimpse at the way the Chinese perceive race, and most importantly, Western foreigners. White people in China are, as Lan points out, firstly seen as ‘foreigners’ and secondly as ‘white people’.<sup>68</sup> With the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the way ‘foreigners’ were represented shifted with each decade. As Brady states, in the early days of the CCP’s power, ‘foreigners’ were either friends or enemies with the CCP. This shifted again in the early reform era dating between late 1970s to the 1990s. Now, ‘foreigners’ were to be estimated on basis of their contribution to the economic progression of China. This led to the fusion of ‘whiteness’ with ‘foreignness’: the majority of foreign workers which were successful, were white Westerners. Whiteness thus came to be associated with wealth and social prestige. At first, this image of the prestigious white Westerner was deemed as a threat in the 1980s, while with the inauguration of China to the WTO in 2001, this changed once again. The WTO caused a more diverse amount of white Westerners to enter the Chinese economy.<sup>69</sup> Whereas they were first deemed as a threat for China, white Westerners were now seen as bolstering the Chinese economic prosperity. The census that white Europeans could teach Chinese children English the best and would result in the best prosperous results for the future, was especially booming in the last two decades. Especially when looking at Europe, Chinese people tend to perceive it as a continent filled loads of traditional and aesthetical countries, who also offer good education.<sup>70</sup>

The sentiment that Europe and the US are viewed as wealthier, technologically and socially more developed, and have an abundant culture and history, has been present for a long time. Nowadays, this is feeling is especially prevalent towards European culture under young Chinese people. Interestingly enough, this group has quite favourable feelings towards Europe. In the case of the US, however, this bias has once again shifted. In 2019, according to a study done by Hannah, the Chinese opinion on the US was “somewhat favourable” at 40.5%.<sup>71</sup> In a new study done in 2021 by Liu, Li and Fang, this opinion has changed to 46% of very unfavourable views towards the US and somewhat favourable now hangs on to a meek 16%.<sup>72</sup> Reasons for this massive change in just 2 years could be attributed to the presidency of Trump during the Covid-19 pandemic, which included many finger pointing at China as the cause of the crisis, as well as the wish of the US to gain freedom in navigation operations in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. When looking at the European countries, the United Kingdom is perceived most negatively by the Chinese, close to 50% having negative feelings. Reasons for this might be that the UK and the US have been close partners on antagonistic topics, such as the research in the origin of the pandemic and condemning policies in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. Germany is perceived as the most favourable European country by the Chinese. This may be contributed to the fact that the

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<sup>67</sup> Chen, *Occidentalism*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Lan, “The foreign bully,” 3547.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 3549.

<sup>70</sup> Gab from China, “What Do Chinese Think of Europe or Europeans?,” June 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJOUPrP8saY>.

<sup>71</sup> Mark Hannah, *From democracy promotion to democracy attraction: how the world views American-style democracy*, Eurasia Group Foundation, May, 14.

<sup>72</sup> Adam Y. Liu, Xiaojun Li, and Songying Fang, “Unpacking “the West”: Divergence and Asymmetry in Chinese Public Attitudes Towards Europe and the United States,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 52, no.1 (2023).

economic relations between Germany and China under the leadership of Angela Merkel have been crucial to the country as well as not picking sides in the China-US conflict.<sup>73</sup> It should be noted that the feelings of the Chinese are mostly based on Western governments' stances and actions about China, instead of the Western people themselves.

With these statistics in mind, let us look at the stereotypes that Chinese attribute to Europeans. A video by *Gab from China* asks random Chinese people what they think of Europeans and Europe.<sup>74</sup> The general sentiment that the interviewees give about Europe is that it has a rich history and culture. It is a place of classical and religious art and traditional architecture, alongside historical figures. They are described as gentlemen and ladies, often referring to the Victorians or the Napoleon era. It would seem they get this idea mostly from TV-series. Most countries discussed are Italy, Britain, Germany and France. Italy and France are seen as very artistic, romantic and poetic, whereas Britain is often seen as prosperous and gentlemanlike. Germany is the odd one out, often described as a country full of beer, music and enjoying life, with high quality products and a good work environment. When describing Europeans in general, they are tall and have fair skin, they are laid-back, bold, open-minded, extroverted, and free, as well as quite individualistic and casual. Also, they are not very strict with planning life, love or careers. When looking at the countries environments, they are often described as having beautiful forests, clean air and their distinctive architecture, often referring to redbrick houses or castles. It is interesting to see that the only countries that are seen as "Europe" are the Western countries. What we can see here, is that European stereotypes are abundant in China. They either seem to be influenced by politics or cultural entertainment, such as films, books or art depicting or hailing from Europe.

### Chapter 3: Case study

*Overwatch* is an online multiplayer first-person shooter (FPS) developed by Blizzard Entertainment. You can play as a character with its own unique abilities. While the game itself has no in-game storytelling, the lore is shared through transmedia storytelling, such as comics, short films and short stories. The story of *Overwatch* is set sixty years into the future after the "Omnisc Crisis," which was a conflict between AI robots and humans. The world is based on our real world, thus representing many cultures and countries. Each character hails from a country. Currently, the countries represented in the game are the US, Mexico, Canada, Brazil, Egypt, Nigeria, Nambini, Australia, South Korea, Japan, China, India, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, France, Britain, the Netherlands, Thailand, Peru, Singapore, and Russia. Most characters hail from the US, such as Cassidy, Soldier:76, Ashe, and Reaper. In the case of Europe, Tracer hails from the UK, Moira from Ireland, Widowmaker from France, Reinhardt from Germany, Brigitte and Torbjörn from Sweden, Sigma from the Netherlands, Zarya from Russia, and lastly Mercy from Switzerland.

When analysing the lore of all these characters, it is especially noticeable that the characters hailing from the US have the most typical and accurate representations of the American culture. Examples are Cole Cassidy (see fig. 1), who is a stereotypical cowboy, but in a cyberpunk style. He is known for being lawless and also showing little emotions. Another typical American character is Soldier:76 (see fig. 2) who embodies the militaristic side of the US. His character is portrayed as a hardened soldier, quite muscled and with an outgrown buzzcut. He was a militaristic prodigy and was always at the top of his class. Both Cole Cassidy as Soldier:76's backgrounds state their hometown, such as Texas for the former and Bloomington for the latter.

<sup>73</sup> Liu, "Unpacking "the West"," 122.

<sup>74</sup> Gab from China, "What Do Chinese Think of Europe or Europeans?."



*Figure 1, Cole Cassidy, Overwatch*



*Figure 2, Soldier:76, Overwatch*

While the American characters can be pinpointed quite clearly what it refers to, the European counterparts are harder. Reinhardt (see fig. 3), for example, is a German knight, all donned in great armour, but only his favourite food and accent would give away his connection to the country. The same counts for Torbjörn and his daughter Brigitte (see fig. 4), Mercy, and Tracer their hobbies and favourite food only referring to their ethnicities. Besides this, their backgrounds are also less detailed with referral to their culture. Most of their stories

could be given to any character without knowing what their possible ethnicities might be. Appearance-wise, only Reinhardt would depict a German inspired knight, while the others show little to no ties to their culture.



*Figure 3, Reinhardt, Overwatch*





Figure 4, Brigitte and Torbjörn, *Overwatch*

### 3.1 Genshin Impact

*Genshin Impact* is an action role-playing game (RPG) developed by miHoYo in 2020. The game is an anime-style open-world which takes place in the world of Teyvat, which is influenced by our own real world's nations and cultures. Currently, there are six nations active in the game: Mondstadt emulating mostly Germany, as well as other elements from central medieval Europe; Liyue mirroring China; Inazuma on Edo-period Japan; Sumeru inspired by West and South Asia; Fontaine based on the Belle Époque period of France<sup>75</sup>; and lastly, Snezhnaya on Russia.<sup>76</sup>

The nation that is especially directly inspired by real-life nations and cultures is Liyue. There are many places in Liyue that are directly copied by many popular sites in China, which have been confirmed by miHoYo themselves.<sup>77</sup> Some examples are the Jueyun Karst area that is based on Zhangjiajie National Forest Park and the Luhua Pools which are a replica of the Huanglong National Park.<sup>78</sup> Another landmark found in *Genshin Impact* is Tianmen Mountain (see fig. 5), also found in Zhangjiajie, which is replicated in the game as the arch of mount Tianheng (see fig. 6). Counting all the sites found in *Genshin Impact* that are directly inspired by real-life cultural sites in China, we come at around 7.

<sup>75</sup> Bruno Yonezawa, "Genshin Impact 4.0: Which Real-World Country Fontaine Is Based On," ScreenRant, last modified July 18, 2023, <https://screenrant.com/genshin-impact-40-fontaine-region-france-belle-epoque/>.

<sup>76</sup> Moon, "Stepping into Teyvat – Genshin Locations in Real Life [+ Future Region Speculation]," HoYoLaB – Official Community, last modified April 21, 2021, <https://www.hoyolab.com/article/311525>.

<sup>77</sup> miHoYo, "Are we in Sichuan or Teyvat!?"

<sup>78</sup> Julia Schultz, "Genshin Impact's Liyue Compared To Real-World China," ScreenRant, last modified May 25, 2022, <https://screenrant.com/genshin-impact-liyue-china-comparison-architecture-landmarks-map/>.



Figure 5, Mt. Tianheng in Genshin Impact



Figure 6, Tianmen Mountain, China. Image from [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tianmen_Mountain.jpg).

In the case of the other nations, such direct copies are less clear, for each nation coming only at around 3 that *might* be inspired by some sites. Mondstadt seems to be a mixture of Germany, Switzerland and France, whereas Inazuma is clearly based on Japan, but has no

direct copies of real life landsites. They are only taking parts and using it to portray the culture. Examples of this include Mont-Saint Michel (see fig. 7), which would seem to be the inspiration for the city of Mondstadt (see fig. 8), as well as Himeji Castle (see fig. 9), which seems to have inspired the Tenshushaku palace in Inazuma (see fig. 10). While comparing these to the abundance of Chinese cultural sites in the game, they seem to be less accurate and mostly seem to take the main elements to refer to the culture, but not directly copy it into the game.



Figure 7, Mont-Saint Michel, France. Image from [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 8, Mondstadt City



Figure 9, Himeji Castle, Himeji, Japan. Image from [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Figure 10, Tenshukaku, Inazuma.

### 3.1.1 Mondstadt

With this abundant representation of Chinese heritage sites in the game in mind, let us turn to the playable characters that are present in the game. The amount of playable Mondstadt characters add up to 20, whereas Liyue characters come to 18 as of the current patch 4.3 *Roses and Muskets*.

Mondstadt is known as the nation of “freedom” that worships the Anemo Archon and God of Freedom, Lord Barbatos. Its culture is described as casual and laid-back, which is mostly derived from their belief in freedom above all else. In Mondstadt, alcohol plays a major role economically and socially. Due to this, there is a large drinking culture present in the nation, which has also led to a high amount of alcoholics. The nation is also quite religious, having the Church of Favonius which is devoted to the Anemo Archon, Barbatos, also known as Venti. This Church is managed by the Knights of Favonius, an order of knights that protects Mondstadt. These knights act as the lawmen of the nation and they follow a strict code of conduct. This code pushes for three virtues of knighthood: modesty, honesty, and self-control, which are understood to be the pillars of Mondstadt’s freedom.<sup>79</sup> Barbatos, or Venti, refuses to directly govern his people of Mondstadt, because of his love for freedom. Despite this, he has many devotees, but many of these doubt his existence is real.<sup>80</sup>

The land of Mondstadt itself is full with fresh fruits such as apples and grapes. Apples are made into cider, whereas the grapes are mostly used for wine, resulting in the many wineries in Mondstadt. Crops such as carrots and radishes can also be found to be harvested in Mondstadt. In the Mondstadt cuisine, dairy products, besides alcohol, are also components that are often used. The architecture that paints the typical Mondstadt feeling is Gothic style and Fachwerk, also known as timberframing. The Gothic style is typical for Europe during the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, whereas Fachwerk is a typical German tradition. The typical music that is played in Mondstadt is accompanied by a lyre and harp. Barbatos is also often depicted as a bard with his Holy Lyre. In the case of festivals and holidays that are present in the Mondstadt culture, they have the Windblume Festival, which is a celebration of love and friendship, the Ludi Harpastum, a fifteen-day festival which commemorates how Barbatos taught his people to brew wine and live freely, and lastly the Weinlesefest which revolves around new wine.<sup>81</sup> The last one is based on the real life annual tradition in Germany’s wine regions.<sup>82</sup>

The fashion style that most Mondstadt people wear is inspired by the traditional German garments *Tracht* (see fig. 11). Men can be seen to be wearing lederhosen, whereas women’s attire is mostly based on the dirndl (see fig. 12). The sisters of the Church of Favonius, however, are recognisable for their typical religious habit as can be seen in figure 15. These habits take direct inspiration from the Roman catholic nuns’ religious habits (see fig. 16). The Knights of Favonius wear typical plate armour uniforms that are brass-accented and plain (see fig. 17). They are often seen wearing a sword. Women wear grey knee-length skirts with white plate armour worn on top. The armour of the Knights do not necessarily resemble any typical German or Swiss kind of knight armour and would mostly be inspired by current ideas on fantasy knights.

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<sup>79</sup> “Knights of Favonius Handbook – 5th Edition,” Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Knights\\_of\\_Favonius\\_Handbook\\_-\\_5th\\_Edition](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Knights_of_Favonius_Handbook_-_5th_Edition).

<sup>80</sup> “Barbatos,” Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Barbatos>.

<sup>81</sup> “Mondstadt/Culture,” Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Mondstadt/Culture>.

<sup>82</sup> “Weinlesefest,” Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Weinlesefest>.



Figure 11, Tracht. Image from [Wiki Media Commons](#).



Figure 12, Dirndl. Image from [Wiki Media Commons](#).



*Figure 13, Mondstadt women's attire based on the dirndl, NPC Margaret*



*Figure 14, Mondstadt men's attire based on the lederhosen, NPC Stevens*



*Figure 15, Church of Favonius habit, NPC Grace*



*Figure 16, nuns wearing religious habits of the Roman Catholic church*





Figure 17, Knights of Favonius uniform, NPC Lawrence.

With this in mind of the Mondstadt culture, we can turn to the playable characters of Mondstadt. Overall, nearly each Mondstadt character has something that is also found back in the just discussed culture of the nation. Many love alcohol, such as Kaeya, Venti, and Albedo, while only two are known to despise any alcoholic beverage. Diona, a young bartender, loathes it because her father is an alcoholic<sup>83</sup> and Diluc, the owner of the biggest winery of Mondstadt, the Dawn Winery, also despises it as he claims “it clouds his thoughts.”<sup>84</sup> In most quests that can be played which include characters from Mondstadt, there is quite often the event that alcoholic beverages will be drunk or offered. Often, to discuss an action plan, the player is invited to think it over with the characters in a tavern. A few examples are the quest *A Child’s Secret*,<sup>85</sup> *Poems Dedicated to the Wind*,<sup>86</sup> and *The Golden Apple Vacation Returns!*<sup>87</sup> Another place where a lot of events or quests start when dealing with Mondstadt characters, is in or around the Church of Favonius. Some examples for this are *Master’s Day Off*,<sup>88</sup> *Ending Note*,<sup>89</sup> and *Dishonorable Trial*.<sup>90</sup> Besides this, when Mondstadt characters are

<sup>83</sup> “Diona/Lore,” Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Diona/Lore>.

<sup>84</sup> “Diluc/Lore,” Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Diluc/Lore>.

<sup>85</sup> “A Child’s Secret,” Genshin Impact, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/A\\_Child%27s\\_Secret](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/A_Child%27s_Secret).

<sup>86</sup> “Poems Dedicated to the Wind,” Genshin Impact, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Poems\\_Dedicated\\_to\\_the\\_Wind](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Poems_Dedicated_to_the_Wind).

<sup>87</sup> “The Golden Apple Vacation Returns! (Quest),” Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Golden\\_Apple\\_Vacation\\_Returns!\\_\(Quest\)](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/The_Golden_Apple_Vacation_Returns!_(Quest)).

<sup>88</sup> “Master’s Day Off (Quest),” Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Master%27s\\_Day\\_Off\\_\(Quest\)](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Master%27s_Day_Off_(Quest)).

<sup>89</sup> “Ending Note,” Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Ending\\_Note](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Ending_Note).

<sup>90</sup> “Dishonorable Trial,” Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Dishonorable\\_Trial](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Dishonorable_Trial).

teamed up with non-Mondstadt characters and they are drinking together, they always have the highest tolerance, often having the non-Mondstadt characters get drunk.<sup>91</sup>

When looking at the backgrounds of all the Mondstadt characters, most seem to have had a troubled childhood, often being either alone as orphans or having very strict parents who pushed them to their limits of achieving greatness. The latter case happens with Jean and Eula, Jean being the Grand Master of the Knights of Favonius and descendant of the Gunnhildr Clan, and Eula a descendant of the noble Lawrence Clan. Jean was sternly raised to become the successor to the Clan, being trained in all the things and etiquettes a knight must know. Now, as an adult, she has become the Master of the Knights, where she takes her duties extremely serious, sometimes leading to extreme fatigue or even passing out.<sup>92</sup> Her hard work, however, pays off well and she is greatly liked and trusted by those of Mondstadt and even outside of Mondstadt. Eula had a similar upbringing, but now has ended up alone due to her leaving the clan. She was brought up to also become a woman of proper etiquette and virtue, following her clan's traditions of the Dance of Sacrifice, resulting in her exquisite swordsmanship. The Lawrence Clan compared to the Gunnhildr Clan, however, holds a very negative view in Mondstadt, as it is remembered for its tyrannical rule over the nation. For this reason, Eula is hardly accepted by everyone, even now she is an active and highly contributing member of the Knights of Favonius. In the latter case, we have Razor and Bennett. Razor is a very peculiar case, as he is a feral child, being raised by wolves, and thus being an orphan. Nevertheless, he is greatly loved by the few characters that meet him.<sup>93</sup> Bennett also is an orphan, but was raised by the Adventurers' Guild, calling all members as "Dad" and makes sure he can take care of all his aging 'dads'.

These story tropes are most prevalent among the Mondstadt characters. When looking at their personalities, nearly every Mondstadt character is described to be hard-working, dutiful, and has a great sense of justice. Even the one character who is perceived as intimidating, having a heart of stone and not necessarily good for nor being part of Mondstadt, Rosaria is incredibly focused on getting justice.<sup>94</sup> Appearance-wise, a lot of Mondstadt characters show the influences discussed before. Most notably are Jean, Noelle, Barbara, Rosaria, Venti, and Lisa. Jean and Noelle (figs. 18 and 19) are especially on point with the knight theme, bringing the Knights of Favonius uniforms to a new high with intricate ornaments and references to their own backgrounds. Barbara and Rosaria (figs. 20 and 21) are both members of the Church of Favonius, but polar opposites. Yet, the Church's habit is shimmering through both of their designs, Barbara, as her lore also states, showing her kind and healing side, whereas Rosaria shows through her darker shades her activities she has in the shadows. Lisa is a special case, showcasing a typical witch-like outfit (see fig. 22). Donned with a big purple witch hat, she embodies the witchcraft culture found in Europe, especially if we take her seducing and intellectual personality in mind as well.<sup>95</sup> Lastly, we have Venti (see fig. 23), the embodiment of Cologne's Prince of Carnival (see fig. 24), also explaining his carefree and playful attitude, as well as his love for rhyming in his speech.<sup>96</sup> In the case of representing *Tracht*, no Mondstadt character is shown wearing the typical fashion.

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<sup>91</sup> "The Golden Apple Vacation Returns! (Quest)."

<sup>92</sup> "When the West Wind Arises," Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/When\\_the\\_West\\_Wind\\_Arises\\_\(Quest\)](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/When_the_West_Wind_Arises_(Quest)).

<sup>93</sup> "The Final Riddle: A Secret Uncovered," Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Final\\_Riddle:\\_A\\_Secret\\_Uncovered](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/The_Final_Riddle:_A_Secret_Uncovered).

<sup>94</sup> "Rosaria/Lore," Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Rosaria/Lore>.

<sup>95</sup> Alison Rowlands, *Witchcraft narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561-1652* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>96</sup> "Venti/Lore," Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Venti/Lore>.



Figure 18, Jean, Genshin Impact.

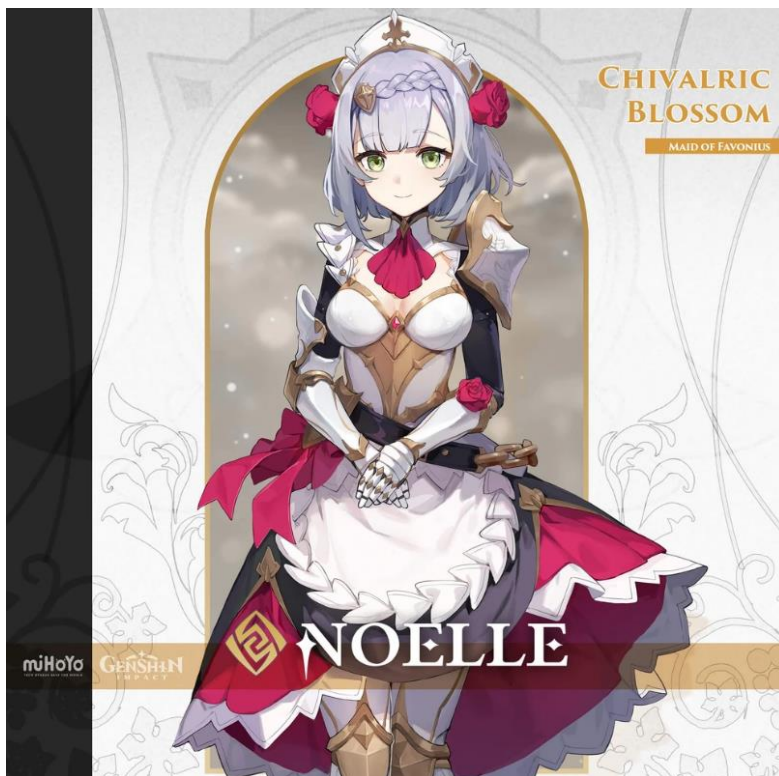


Figure 19, Noelle, Genshin Impact.



Figure 20, Barbara, Genshin Impact



Figure 21, Rosaria, Genshin Impact.



Figure 22, Lisa, Genshin Impact.



Figure 23, Venti, Genshin Impact.



Figure 24, Prince of Carnival (middle).

### 3.1.2 Liyue

Liyue, as discussed before, is directly inspired by China. In the game, the nation is known as the nation of “contracts,” which is Rex Lapis’, the Geo Archon, ideal. Liyue is known as the bustling centre of commerce and trade, as well as the centre of Teyvat’s currency production, the Mora. People from Liyue are therefore known to be avid traders as well as very focused on the use of contracts. They are more rigid and less casual compared to Mondstadt’s people. Whereas Mondstadt’s scenery is filled with lush plains, Liyue is recognisable from its rocky and mountainous terrain, with terraced rice fields and uninhabitable plains. Liyue’s architecture is traditional ancient Chinese architecture, making use of many bilateral symmetry, enclosed open spaces and feng shui. The cuisine in Liyue is divided into two, the Li style, which focuses on the bold, rich flavours coming from the mountains, and the Yue style, which uses lighter-flavoured seafood. This is quite similar to, although very simplified, the Northern and Southern cuisine styles of China. Liyue’s economy is heavily reliant on their harbour as well as their mining and smithing industry. Whereas the Knights of Favonius are the lawmen in Mondstadt, Liyue is governed by the Liyue Qixing, which is composed of seven powerful businesspeople who dictate the rules that are set forth by Rex Lapis. At the top of the Qixing, you have the Tianquan, a position that is held by Ningguang, who focuses mainly on the law, whereas the Yuheng, Keqing, focuses on land development, employment, construction and real estate. To protect areas of interest, Liyue’s Qixing has a military force called the Millelith. Liyue as the nation itself also has ancient protectors called the adepti. These adepti have signed a contract with Rex Lapis to protect the nation from threats. Liyue also has some festivals, such as the Lantern Rite Festival, Moonchase Festival and the Rite of Descension. The Lantern Rite Festival is based on the Chinese New Year festival and the event always takes place around the same time as the real life celebrations.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>97</sup> “Lantern Rite Festival,” Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Lantern\\_Rite\\_Festival](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Lantern_Rite_Festival).

Liyue's fashion is extremely rich and broad, every piece being inspired by Chinese culture, although not necessarily from one specific dynasty. Women are seen wearing qipao (see fig. 25, 26 and 27), Tang suit jackets, and Tang shirts, whereas men are seen to be wearing changshans (see fig. 28 and 29), the male equivalents of qipao, as well as tangzhuang (see fig. 30 and 31). Looking at the military uniforms of the Millelith (see fig. 32), inspiration is taken from especially Qing dynasty military armour (see fig 33). While no specific dynasty is said to be taken inspiration from, when looking at most Non-Player Characters (NPCs) as well as playable characters, their outfits seem most likely to be based on the Qing dynasty.



*Figure 25, Liyue's women attire based on the qipao. NPC Linlang.*



Figure 26, Liyue's women attire based on the qipao. NPC Siyu.



Figure 27, women celebrating Chinese New Year in various styles of Qipao (cheongsam). Image from [Wiki Media Commons](#).

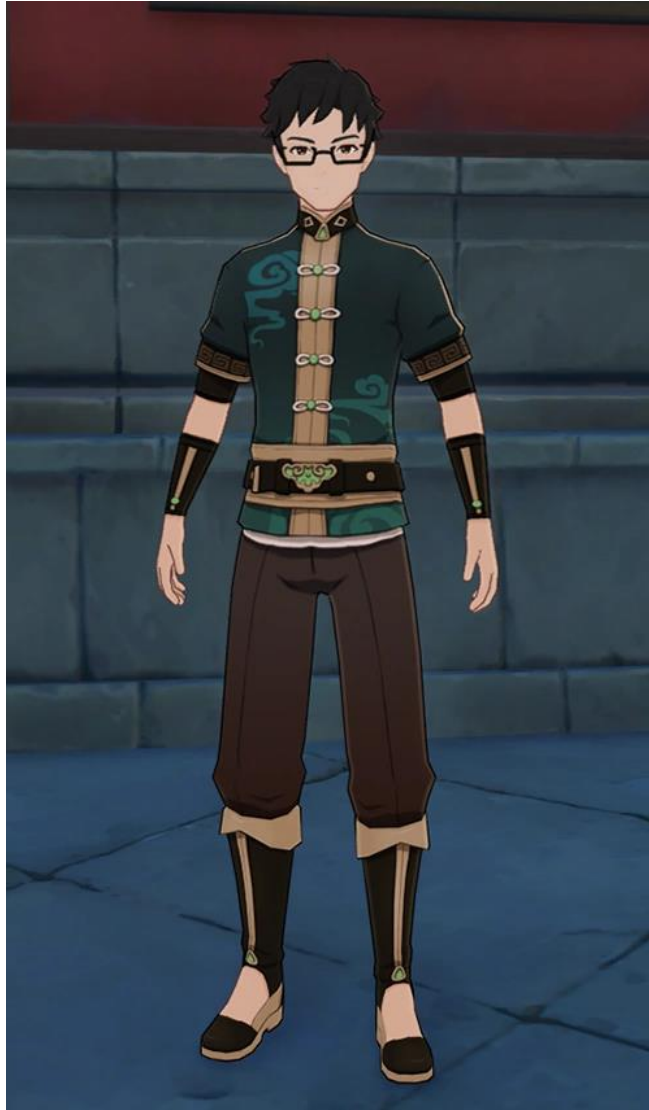




Figure 28, Liyue's men attire based on the changshan, NPC Herbalist Gui.



Figure 29, Changshang. Image from [Taobao](#).



*Figure 30, Liyue's men attire based on the tangzhuang, NPC Xu.*



*Figure 31, Tang suit jacket. Image from [Best Chinese Clothing](#).*



Figure 32, 兆惠 officer bannerman of the Qing Army during Qianlong's era. Image from [Wiki Media Commons](#).



*Figure 33, Millelith uniform, NPC Zhenhai.*

With this in mind, we can take a look at the playable characters from Liyue. The same with the Mondstadt characters, nearly all of Liyue's playable characters possess a great ability in doing business. These are Baizhu, Beidou, Ganyu, Hu Tao, Keqing, Ningguang, Yanfei, Yelan, and Zhongli. When the player goes to Liyue, one of the first quests that takes them there is concerned with business.

The ones that are not known for their skilful tradesmanship, are instead extremely well versed in traditional arts, such as painting, theatre, music, cooking, poetry, or writing. Those that portray these characteristics are Xiangling, Xingqiu, Xinyan, Hu Tao, and Yun Jin. The last thing that also often returns with Liyue's playable characters, if they are not into business or culture, they have godlike powers and are half-human, also known as adepti. These include Ganyu, Shenhe, Xiao, Yanfei, and Yaoyao. Overall, nearly all personalities are ambitious, polite, studious, serious, and reserved. Each and every character knowledgeable in the traditional culture of Liyue, some to a greater extent than the other, but still, it is of great importance for all of them. These three typical features of Liyue characters leads to the player also often finding himself at businesslike places, places of arts and culture, and places of divine powers. The most recurring business places are Yujing Terrace,<sup>98</sup> Ningguang's Jade

<sup>98</sup> "Rite of Descension," Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Rite\\_of\\_Descension](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Rite_of_Descension).

Chamber<sup>99</sup> or Liyue Harbour. Arts and culture often brings the player to bookshops, as well as restaurants, where also plays are performed, such as Yanshang Teahouse.<sup>100</sup> With the adepti, quests often take place the mountain of the adepti's gods, such as Mt. Tianheng,<sup>101</sup> Mt. Aocang,<sup>102</sup> and Mt. Hulao.<sup>103</sup>

In the case of character backgrounds, most have a very ambitious and study-heavy upbringing. Examples are Yun Jin, Xingqiu, Ningguang, and Keqing, While in Mondstadt, this has often led to negative relationships with the parents, Liyue's characters thrive under it. They often perceive it as pride and continuing family traditions, with an exception of Xingqiu. Xingqiu is the sole character who decided to not follow his family traditions in the Feiyun Commerce Guild, instead pursuing his writing and collecting career.<sup>104</sup> Ningguang is also the only known character from an impoverished background, having worked herself to extreme riches thanks to her incredible knack for business. She now holds the position of Tianquan, and thus has not necessarily continued a family tradition.<sup>105</sup>

Another story trope found back in Liyue's characters, is that they often had a very lonely upbringing or are still quite shy of people. Ningguang is one of these examples, as she had to fend for herself from a young age already. Others who show these backgrounds are Xiao, Shenhe, Baizhu, and Yelan. Despite being quite lonely, each of these characters is extremely well in making sure their job is done properly and well and always want the best for everyone around them. Xiao is a yaksha adeptus who fought in the Archon Wars for the Geo Archon, Zhongli. Since then, he has lost his fellow yakshas due to the karmic debt that came along with the contract and ended up being alone and has little intention to getting close to people. Despite this, he is incredibly focused on protecting Liyue, even if it costs his life.<sup>106</sup> Shenhe is a really special case, as she was used as a sacrifice by her own father to return her mother back to life. This has led her to murdering her own father and eventually being adopted by the adepti. This resulted in her not having much experience with normal people, characterising her with an indifferent personality, but also murderous tendencies. Nevertheless, she is keen on helping the player with protecting Liyue,<sup>107</sup> as well as protecting those she considers friends.<sup>108</sup>

Appearance wise, many playable characters from Liyue portray Chinese influences. Ningguang can be seen as the paragon of traditional Chinese culture when only taking a look at her character design (see fig. 34 and 35). She is known for carrying around an opium pipe (fig. 37), a symbol of wealth during the Qing dynasty,<sup>109</sup> which she holds with her nail guards (fig. 38), also a popular accessory during the Qing dynasty, which once again indicated one's wealth.<sup>110</sup> Her long hair is adorned with a hairpin, which has been an accessory for the

<sup>99</sup> "Equilibrium," Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Equilibrium>.

<sup>100</sup> "Seagaze Sunset," Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Seagaze\\_Sunset](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Seagaze_Sunset).

<sup>101</sup> "The Floating Palace," Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Floating\\_Palace](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/The_Floating_Palace).

<sup>102</sup> "Custodian of Clouds," Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Custodian\\_of\\_Clouds](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Custodian_of_Clouds).

<sup>103</sup> "Moulder of Mountains," Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Moulder\\_of\\_Mountains](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Moulder_of_Mountains).

<sup>104</sup> "Xingqiu/Lore," Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Xingqiu/Lore>.

<sup>105</sup> "Ningguang/Lore," Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Ningguang/Lore>.

<sup>106</sup> "Xiao/Lore," Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Xiao/Lore>.

<sup>107</sup> "Bygones Times Like Dust Passing," Genshin Impact Wiki, [https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Bygones\\_Times\\_Like\\_Dust\\_Passing](https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Bygones_Times_Like_Dust_Passing).

<sup>108</sup> "Shenhe/Lore," Genshin Impact Wiki, <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Shenhe/Lore>.

<sup>109</sup> Xavier Paulès, "Drugs and Social Transgression: Women and Opium in Canton in the 1930s," *L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*, no. 3 (January 2016), 5.

<sup>110</sup> Michelle Tiu, "Cixi by Katherine A. Carl: Dressed to Empress," Things That Talk, <https://thingsthattalk.net/en/ttt:TypSPU/stories/dressed-to-empress>.

Chinese people since ancient times (fig. 39).<sup>111</sup> Lastly, Ningguang is seen wearing a white and yellow qipao. Yellow is the colour associated with the emperor in ancient China, and Ningguang holds the highest possible position in Liyue society as Tianquan.<sup>112</sup> While Ningguang is overflowing with references to many traditional Chinese fashions, other characters are also brimming with it. Shenhe and Beidou both enjoy traditional hairpins, in Shenhe's case this being a haircomb, also known as *shubi* in China.<sup>113</sup> Shenhe and Beidou, alongside Ganyu and Yelan also sport the traditional qipao.



Figure 35, Ningguang, Genshin Impact

<sup>111</sup> Donglei Li, Hui'e Liang, and Adele Zhang, "Flaunting and Consumption: Women's Headdress in the Ming Dynasty of China," *Fashion Theory* 26, no. 3 (2021): 384-386.

<sup>112</sup> Tin Christopher Hang, "Chinese Color Theory—The Symbolism of Color in Traditional Chinese Culture," A to Z Directory – Virginia Commonwealth University, <https://www.people.vcu.edu/~djbromle/color-theory/color01/Chinese-Color-Theory-The-Symbolism-of-Color-in-Traditional-Chinese-Culture.html>.

<sup>113</sup> "Chinese Hair Ornaments - Hairpins, Crowns, Decorations," ChinaFetching.com, <https://www.chinafetching.com/tradition-of-china-hair-ornament>.





*Figure 36, Ningguang with her opium pipe, Genshin Impact*



*Figure 37, Opium pipe*



Figure 38, oil painting of Empress Dowager Cixi, painted by Katherine A. Carl. Portraying nail guards, earrings and head coiffure.



Figure 39, Chai, Chinese hairpins

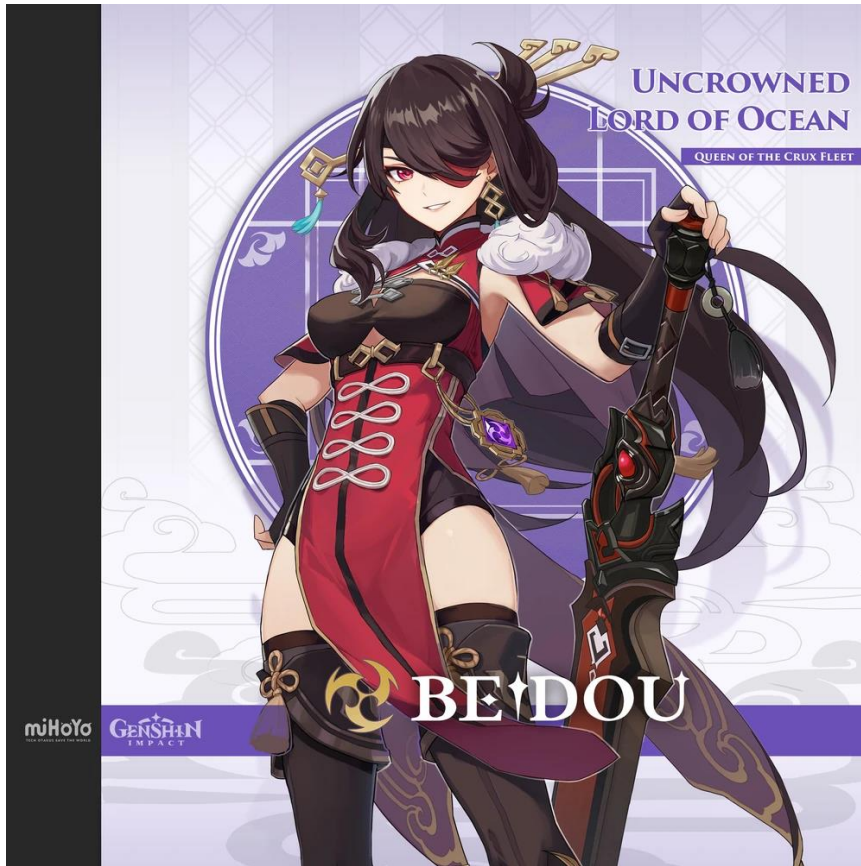


Figure 40, Beidou, Genshin Impact



Figure 41, Shenhe, Genshin Impact

When looking at the Liyue men, Zhongli and Xingqiu are seen wearing clothing inspired by the tangzhuang. Zhongli is especially a special case, as he is seen wearing many Chinese symbols that refer to sovereignty, some of these being part of the Twelve Symbols of Sovereignty (see fig. 42).<sup>114</sup> Other references that riddle his design all hold the concept of auspiciousness in the understanding of Chinese culture.<sup>115</sup> The list of references to Chinese culture continues to go on, such as with Hu Tao, Qiqi and Chongyun's references to Chinese Daoist exorcism and jiangshi, and Xiao's Hindu and Buddhist design origins. There are so many references, it is worthy of a paper of its own.



Figure 42, Zhongli, Genshin Impact

<sup>114</sup> Courtney Fu and Serena Gao, "Genshin Impact and Proliferation of Culture: A Study of Liyue's Fashion," Issuu, last modified August 2, 2021, [https://issuu.com/asianoutlook/docs/spring\\_21\\_mag\\_final\\_final\\_/s/13001931](https://issuu.com/asianoutlook/docs/spring_21_mag_final_final_/s/13001931).

<sup>115</sup> Wang, "Chinese Games and Cultural Dissemination," 24.



Figure 43, Xingqiu, Genshin Impact

## Conclusion

What can be noticed, when looking at their influences regarding China and Europe, China has way more accurate and subtle representations than the European influences. It is easy to pinpoint where many aspects of many Liyue characters' ornaments come from, while those of Mondstadt are way harder to find. Often, it is questionable from what culture it hails from or that it is even accurate historically. When there are references made to European culture, you need a keen eye to decipher it. There are less historical references to the European culture as well as less representations of it. Ningguang is an embodiment of traditional Chinese culture, while no Mondstadt character has any depiction of Europe. While Europe is obviously many different cultures which makes it hard to represent one specifically, it is clear from the analysis that Germany and Switzerland are the main inspiration, already making it easier to narrow down to a paragon. It could be argued that Venti is a possible character of representation as the Prince of Carnival, but even so, it just represents the festival of Germany, not necessarily Germany's cultural and traditional history as is the case with Ningguang.

Adding to this, players are engulfed with references to real life Chinese culture and traditions, be it with the representation of the NPCs and playable characters, or with all the events and quests that are influenced by traditional Chinese culture. A possible reason for this might be a form of Occidentalism. There is a certain way the game wishes to portray Europe which adheres to the Chinese view of the continent while at the same time glorifying the traditional culture of China. When looking at the typical stereotypes Chinese people have of Europe, freedom and alcohol often is discussed. Yet, arts and culture is also part of their answer, which would seem to be missing in the culture of Mondstadt. Instead, Liyue is represented as having the most intricate fashion, culture and characters that possess artful skills.

So, is this representation of the European culture in *Genshin Impact* diminished compared to the Chinese culture? As discussed before, Germany was most preferable in the eyes of the Chinese people, whereas the US was ranked the lowest. When looking at *Genshin Impact*, the culture of Mondstadt is mostly referring to Germany, with here and there some surrounding countries also playing a part. When looking at video games such as *Overwatch* and their representation of other cultures, the American culture is most detailed and worked out. Reasons for this could be the background of the game developers themselves. Obviously, a team mostly made up of Americans have more information and knowledge about their own culture than foreign cultures, and this is also the case with the Chinese developers. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see how video games are portraying cultures and what the possible intentions might be, be it Occidental or purely for the video game's story itself. Whether or not this is the case, I think it is of great importance we take into consideration the impact video games have on their players. Representation in books, films and video games have great influence on how people perceive certain cultures, ideas and thoughts.<sup>116</sup> When taking into account the CCP's stance on Chinese culture and soft power this most likely plays a role, regarding their view on how video games can attribute to this and their view on European culture.

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<sup>116</sup> Soyooof, "Video Game and Culture."

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