

The Influence of Culture in Character Design in Open World Games in terms of Roland Barthes' Visual Semiotic Theory

Gloria Christiana Damayanti¹, Peter Ardhianto²

^{1,2} Visual Communication Design, Faculty of Design and Architecture, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Jl. Pawiyatan Luhur IV/1, Bendan Dhuwur, Kota Semarang, Jawa Tengah 50235

E-mail: 19110025@student.unika.ac.id

Abstract

The emergence of identification, way of life, and norms that apply to society are interrelated and formed by the existence of culture. Culture that carries these three things coexists with humans and becomes an important aspect of life. Open World Game is a game that invites players to create a player-made world. By creating a culture, Open World Game raises a culture that exists in the world to create and shape the identity of its characters. One of them is Genshin Impact. Genshin Impact raises several cultures in the world, one of which is Sumeru which elevates Middle Eastern culture. Through the Semiotic Theory put forward by Roland Barthes, the author analyzes the role and application of this culture to the visual characters in the Genshin Impact Open World Game.

Keywords: *Visual Analysis, Open World Game, Graphic Design, Design Critique.*

Corresponding author Received: July 17, 2023; Accepted November 6, 2023; Published December 2023
© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Faculty of Art and Design Universitas Sebelas Maret.
This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC-SA license.

INTRODUCTION

Open World Game is a type of game played with players being able to create and live in their own world in a game, players can explore the world in the game as well as interact with other people or NPCs (Non Playable Characters), and design the world with the player's imagination (Götz, 2021). With the formation of the world in the game, the role of characters is needed in the running of the narrative as conveyed by an expert, Alfons Christian as an educator of Visual Communication Design of Soegijapranata Catholic University in his interview about the role of semiotics of signs, namely the existence of signs as symbols that convey messages to the lives lived by society.

In the application of the interview, the symbols formed in the narratives of NPCs and game characters raise symbols from a society formed into a culture. This is related to the existence of Roland Barthes's Semiotic Theory, namely Myth is the main trigger for the emergence of a culture, where later with the myth will give rise to a sign that triggers Denotative and Connotative meanings in the omens and markers of the event.

The number of characters in open-world games that are made, not infrequently also raises an element of culture as a character portrayal so that it becomes a contrasting characteristic and can be a differentiator in each character created, to promote the character by using cultural elements in the character development in the game. In cultural theory, culture is present and develops as an identity, way of life, and philosophy or norm that moves in society. Through this, culture has indirectly been deeply ingrained and coexisted with society since it was born into the world.

The influence of the use of its own cultural elements on consumers is very influential because of the pride and trust that has bound strongly in each individual and in the midst of world civilizations exposed to foreign cultures, these cultures can still survive and be known through these characters in the application of culture to each world map created, in addition to that through visuals of the cardboard clothes, the visuals of the open-world game setting, and the way of life applied to the characters. So many players are interested in getting to know and learn about this culture through character portrayals from the game developer.

METHODS

The author uses qualitative research methods to find the value of culture contained in the application of a particular culture in the development of open-world game characters, reinforced using Roland Bathes' semiotic theory. in his book (Barthes, 1977) Barthes explains that the semiotics of signs exists because of the existence of myths that arise and refers to culture, this semiotics discusses Denotation as the meaning of Defisional (clearly visible from a sign), and Connotation as an association – a sociocultural and personal association of a sign that is polysemy (multi-interpretation), and a myth that becomes a reference for connotations and denotations. Myth is intended for several ideas, namely (1) The second order semiotic system is built on the principle of connotation. (2) The dominant ideology today. (3) The means of distorting the facts so that the public will take it for granted without resistance. (4) Be a deceiver for the reader because it will think "natural or It does happen". So that the semiotics of signs can be a reference as a basis for theory in research written by the author to analyze the phenomena that occur.

Penanda (Signifier)	Pertanda (Signified)	
Tanda Denotatif (Denotative Sign)		
Penanda Konotatif (Connotative Signifier)		Petanda Konotatif (Connotatif Signified)
Tanda Konotatif (Connotative Sign)		

Picture 1 The thinking scheme of Roland Barthes's Theory of Semiotics

In addition to this idea, researchers are also looking for data that can strengthen the use of Roland Barthes semiotics, namely Mark Semiotics, to be applied in game characters and the game world, namely in the form of structured interviews directly with Visual Communication Design Educators Catholic University Soegijapranata, Alfons Christian H., S.Ds., M.A. related to semiotics, as well as visuals of several scenes in Sumeru from the Genshin Impact Youtube channel by Game Developer immediately. Visual data in the form of images that support the visualization to be studied which is obtained from the Official Twitter page and the Official Fanpage Website of Genshin Impact, journal attachments, research, and also theories put forward by scientists.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Genshin Impact is the best-selling open-world game at the moment, with its success in the gaming market, Genshin Impact raises a historical concept that can be an attraction in its sales. This culture is processed by a game developer, namely Hoyoverse, in order to attract the attention of players by raising the cultural background of the social community. The following is the result of an analysis from the author related to culture raised using Roland Barthes's Theory of Semiotics.

Based on the analysis carried out on the character of Candace, the author analyzes the character Candace in the Open World Game Genshin Impact raises a figure who is influential in Egyptian civilization, one of which is the Kingdom of Kush, the Kingdom of Kush is an African Kingdom in the Egyptian civilization. According to Pranata, Galih. (2021), This kingdom has an office named Kandake / Candace which means "Queen Mother" This position has authority equivalent to that of a king, where the queen can rule together with the king. This position was given to the queen during the royal era so that when the king went to war, the kingdom did not experience a government vacuum. In the Kingdom of Kush, the most famous Kandace was Kandake Amanitore, Amanitore was famous for his courage and wisdom at the time of ruling the glorious Kingdom of Cush in his time. Kandake can also play the role of war leader, besides that she also has an important role in creating the crown prince of the kingdom, but if he does not please kandake can overthrow the crown prince.

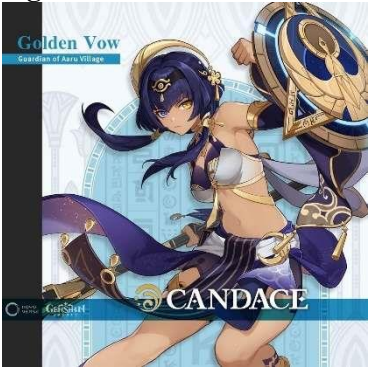
<p>Denotative Sign Candace's character in Genshin Impact looks dashing and authoritative with armor and a flat expression that looks focused on her enemy's target.</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier Inspired by a queen from the Kush Kingdom named Kandace Amanitore who is famous for her authority as an independent queen and can rule the glorious Kush kingdom during her reign. According to Pranata, Galih. (2021), Kandace / Candace is a clan from Africa meaning "Queen Mother".</p>	<p>Connotative Signified As can be seen from the characteristics of her clothes, Candace is a person from the upper class and wears a full Armor that depicts her gallantry and accessories worn on the head that signify a power that she wields in her role as the protector and guardian of Aaru Village just like the role of Kandace Amanitore.</p>
<p>Signifier</p>  <p>Candace's character in Genshin Impact</p>	<p>Signified Is one of the Genshin Impact characters who lives in Aaru Village in the middle of the desert in the Sumeru Region. This character is the protector of Aaru Village and is the most respected person and used as a role model because of his courage and wisdom.</p>
<p>Connotative Sign Candace's character is inspired by Kandace Amanitore who rules the Kingdom of Kush, this character depicts courage and wisdom in deciding decisions and solving problems, is a brave and swift character in facing all obstacles and enemies that will confront her colony, this can be seen from his expression and poses on the image as well as some attributes of armor carried by her.</p>	

Table 1. Candace Character Analysis relating to the Culture of the Government of the Kingdom of Kush



Picture 2. Replica of Queen Amanitore
Source: Török, L., 2002

In the semiotics of Roland Barthes, the myth raised is a character created from the very famous Kandake Amanitore, so the character Candace itself is taken from the depiction of the queen, and in addition the game setting that takes the middle eastern civilization triggers the possibility of taking the role of several famous figures who are in that civilization to serve as a foothold in the development of the game's character. This is in line with the opinion of the expert, Alfons Christian about the culture on which a game began and involved a human mindset. In addition to Candace, some of the characters sampled by the author also adapted from egyptian civilization, namely as follows.

Denotative Sign Cyno's character is full of authority, quiet but lively and alert, and always focused on facing the opponents he encounters.	
Connotative Signifier Inspired by the figure of Ancient Egyptian mythology, Anubis. According to Aizid, R. (2018) Anubis was the patron God of Ancient Egyptian society, Anubis was in charge of washing the dead, also in charge of transporting the spirits of the deceased to the afterlife and weighing charity and sin as long as the person lived in the world.	Connotative Signified Cyno portrays a mysterious and quiet impression, but is always ready and focused in the face of enemies, with the distinctive black dog mask he wears depicting Cyno working as a guard who moves behind the scenes of royal justice and seems mysterious, and lively.
Signifier	Signified Cyno is described as a Mahamantra Judge where he is in charge of prosecuting the Sumeru society, he has the authority to determine the punishment of all Sumeru people, the punishment must be commensurate with the wrongs committed, if indeed a person must get the death penalty, he has the right to kill the person on the spot



indiscriminately.

Cyno characters in Genshin Impact

Connotative Sign

Cyno's character is adapted from the mythological figure of the Ancient Egyptian god named Anubis. Having many similarities, starting from the tasks carried out, physical form, and the character presented, really describes the God Anubis.

Table 2. Cyno's Character Analysis relating to the Culture of Ancient Egyptian Rule of the Pharaoh's Order

In the analysis carried out by the author, Cyno's character adapts the figure of the Egyptian God called Anubis, According to Budge (2012), this God is a patron god for the Kun Egyptian people around the Nile. This god is in charge of delivering the deceased Human Spirit to the afterlife, but Anubis is also in charge of weighing the charity and sin of the spirit before entering the afterlife. Similarly, with Cyno's character in Genshin Impact, the only difference is that Cyno is in charge of prosecuting or intrograting sumeru criminals, he is tasked with weighing and deciding the appropriate punishment for the criminal, as well as executing the criminal with his power.



Picture 2. Anubis who is holding a Spirit who is weighing his sins and goodness while in the world
Source: Budge, 2012

In addition to Candace's character, there is also an analysis of other Sumeru Characters and NPCs from the Open World Game Genshin Impact which depicts an Academia or an educated People.


<p>Denotative Sign Alhaitam's character is very strong and intelligent, quiet but has a very brilliant mindset, and two Academia residents who are like students or higher-ups who are educated Sumeru.</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier Inspired by the Akkadian – Sumerian Society, according to Aizid, R. (2018), the Akkadian – Sumerian Society was filled with ambitious and educated people, and had a high standard of living during the Mesopotamian Era during the reign of King Sargon.</p>	<p>Connotative Signified The character of Alhaitam and the other two NPCs was created based on the Mesopotamian Legend which depicts educated people and a high and ambitious lifestyle, found in a style of clothing that looks formal and dominates the green and black colors (Typical Color of Ancient Egypt Nile Civilization)</p>
<p>Signifier</p>  <p>Alhaitam (Top), NPC Hosseini (Bottom Left), and Soraya (Bottom Right) characters</p>	<p>Signified Alhaitam's character is described as a senior Academia official, where he serves as the secretary of academia, others are Hosseini as a researcher who is an academician and Soraya who is also an Academia researcher. These three characters depict an Academia filled with educated and rule-abiding society.</p>
<p>Connotative Sign The three characters above adapt the life patterns and identities of the Ancient Egyptian Civilization of Mesopotamia and the Nile.</p>	

Table 3. Character Analysis of Alhaitam and NPC Akademia Sumeru

Researchers found some similarities in the way of life and identity applied to the characters of Alhaitam and Hosseini and Soraya, where from the identity that is very thick with the population of the civilization of King Sargon's reign, namely Akkadia - Sumeria which is synonymous with a learned and high lifestyle and is synonymous with green and black. In egyptian civilization, black is likened to fertility, and green is likened to

birth because it symbolizes God Osiris who is the God of Death and Life. This is as stated by the expert opinion, Alfons Christian, that the culture raised by the game makers on the characters is very important because it describes the character's performance in the game. Based on the visuals that have been presented by the game developer Genshin Impact, the author analyzes the relationship between several visuals in the game setting and mesopotamian culture, through the Semiotics of Roland Barthes, the author can analyze as follows.


<p>Denotative Sign One of the Sumeru Academia is Pardis Dihya is a garden that serves as a research on plants that grow throughout the Sumeru Forest</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier Similar to the architectural style of the Mesopotamian civilization, namely Sumerian or Sumeru. According to Barker, H. (2022), At this time the most famous relic is the dominant architectural style with domes and chisel reliefs contained in the building. In addition, it carries the theme of Babylonian architecture which is unique and dominant with the fertility of the garden above it.</p>	<p>Connotative Signified Akademia Sumeru one of them Pardis Dihya is an iconic building of Sumeru that depicts the research center of all forest plants that surround Pardis Dihya.</p>
<p>Signifier</p>  <p>Pardis Dihya Architecture Visualization</p>	<p>Signified Pardis Dihya is one of the most beautiful architectural forms and depicts the characteristic of Sumeru architecture in the Akademiya section, namely the dome and surrounding lush greenery.</p>
<p>Connotative Sign Pardis Dihya adapted Babylonian architecture as seen from its dome style and reliefs, as well as decorations filled with plants and shades of green and abundant water.</p>	

Table 4 Architectural Analysis of Academia and Pardis Dihya with Babilonia Hanging Garden

The author finds similarities with the Babylonian architecture used in Pardis Dihya, namely the domes and reliefs found in Pardis Dihya, besides that Sumeru is identical to many plants and surrounded by lush forests that depict the Mesopotamian civilization, namely on the Nile which is a land surrounded by greenery and abundant water. Similarly, with the expert opinion, (Alfons Christian, 2022) that culture in a game is certainly based on a message, meaning, or a symbol. Which makes the culture known among the public. So in this case, the Pardis Dihya which is described as the hanging garden of Babylon and the civilization of ancient Egypt is very clearly visible. In addition to Pardis Dihya, there is also the residence of King Dessert who inhabits desert life, which borders the Caravan Ribat (Sumeru Border with Desert), which is as follows.

<p>Denotative Sign The tomb of King Dessert and Aaru Village is one part of Sumeru's dark history, because it was the reign of Dessert who was too crazy for power until he finally died due to the war with Rukhadevata (Dewi Sumeru) who at that time opposed King Dessert's rule.</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier King Dessert in Genshin Impact is like a Pharaoh who ruled all of Ancient Egypt. Meanwhile, Aaru Village is a form of civilization from ancient Egypt. According to Budge, E. A. W. (2012), Pharaoh and his Dominion constituted a civilization most famous for the fertility and prosperity of ancient Egypt.</p>	<p>Connotative Signified King Dessert's Tomb adapts the Pyramids and Spinxes. in the Desert Region, it is also an adaptation of the Ancient Egyptian Civilization in the reign of Pharaoh.</p>
<p>Signifier</p>  <p>The Tomb of King Dessert</p>  <p>Aaru Village</p>	<p>Signified The Tomb of King Dessert is the tomb of the king who ruled in the Desert Region. This tomb was buried in ruins due to the war and the great desert storm so it was located underground. While the picture below is Aaru Village, it is a witness to the history of dessert rule and the war between Rukhadevata and himself that eventually killed him. So now Desert is an outcast area from Sumeru.</p>
<p>Connotative Sign It depicts the atmosphere of Aaru Village which is mostly inhabited by adventurers and some of the outcast people from Sumeru and because of its remote area, they still believe in the power of the extinct King Dessert. This chronicles the extinct Ancient Egyptian civilization but at the end of the Ancient Egyptian civilization the power of the Pharaoh is still felt and continues to be remembered by his people who eventually became immigrants.</p>	

Table 5. Desert Analysis of King Dessert's residence with Ancient Egyptian Civilization

In this analysis, King Dessert is inspired by Pharaoh, in the narrative given by Genshin Impact, King Dessert is the king who reigns in the Desert region. Because his power is very large and very famous throughout the desert land, he is even equal to a God or even surpasses the God, namely Rukhadevata. Rukhadevata herself is the incarnation of the Goddess of War whose role is to uphold justice throughout Sumeru. The relationship between King Dessert and Rukhadevata, is similar to that of Osiris and his wife Isis. In the Sumeru system, the whole people believe that the dead will experience life after death, because society will experience reincarnation. Similarly to the Ancient Egyptian civilization according to Aizid, R. (2018), who do not believe in the existence of Heaven or Hell, they believe in the existence of life after death so that the reincarnation

system itself runs on the belief of that civilization. So through this hypothesis, it is proven that Genshin Impact raised the Ancient Egyptian civilization in various visual aspects provided to Sumeru.

CONCLUSION

In the analysis that has been carried out by the author related to the topic of writing the Use of Culture in Open World Game Character Creation studied on Roland Barthes's Semiotic Theory, by sampling Genshin Impact in the Sumeru Region, it is proven that Sumeru adapted from the Ancient Egyptian Civilization, namely Mesopotamia and the Nile. Cultural Civilization acts as a myth that is deeply rooted in existing societies and becomes natural among the people. In accordance with Denotative Theory, all phenomena are clearly visible from a sign caused by the existence of the myth in the form of Ancient Egyptian Culture which is adapted to all the visuals in Sumeru. And connotatively, it can be multi-interpreted due to the processing and little mixing of many and perhaps less exposed Ancient Egyptian civilizations such as the Civilization of the Kingdom of Kush. so that through this adaptation, people became more familiar with the fact that the Kingdom of Cush had become a very successful kingdom in the Ancient Egyptian civilization. The use of sign semiotic theory plays an important role in referencing the application of culture in character building and narrative in open world games to attract players' trust and attention in the game by fostering curiosity and bringing out a sense of pride in the culture raised.

REFERENCES

- Aizid, R. (2018). *Sejarah Terlengkap Peradaban Dunia: NOKTAH*.
- Baker, H. (2022). *Reconstructing Ancient Babylon: Myth and Reality*.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Elements of semiology (Vol. 4): Macmillan*.
- Beça, P., Ribeiro, S., Aresta, M., Santos, R., & Veloso, A. (2022). *Scratch-Based Game Development Resource Set for a Toolkit to Game Design*. In (pp. 19-30).
- Budge, E. A. W. (2012). *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection: Dover Publications*.
- D'Andrea, F. (2021). *On our Doorstep. Simmel, Weber and the Making of Reality*. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science*, 21, 15-29. doi:10.34257/GJHSSHVOL21IS3PG15
- Götz, U. (2021). *On the Evolution of Narrative Mechanics in Open-World Games*. In (pp. 161-176).
- Török, L. (2002). *The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art: The Construction of the Kushite Mind, 800 Bc-300 Ad: Brill*.
- Pranata, Galih.(2021). *Amanitore, Kendake Terbesar dari Kerajaan Kush di Meroe,Sudan*.
<https://nationalgeographic.grid.id/read/132920881/amanitore-kendake-terbesar-dari-kerajaan-kush-di-meroe-sudan?page=all>
- Genshin Impact. (2022). *Candace Golden Vow Guardian of Aaru Village*.
<https://twitter.com/GenshinImpact/status/1561656393752809473>
- Genshin Impact. (2022). *Alhaitham Admonishing Instrution Sumeru Akademiya Scribe*.
<https://twitter.com/GenshinImpact/status/1601068389287575553>
- Genshin Impact. (2022). *Cyno Judicator of Secrets General Mahamatra*.
<https://twitter.com/GenshinImpact/status/1561655193393307648>
- Genshin Impact. (24 Agustus 2022). *Genshin Impact - Sumeru Gameplay Trailer | Gamescom 2022 [video]*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpJEta4ylaY>
- Fandom. (2022). *Sumeru / Culture*. <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Sumeru/Culture>