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HAVE YOU EATEN YET?

GENSHIN IMPACT AND CHINESE FOOD CULTURE

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Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association November 02, 2026, Vol. 7 No 3, pp. 31-59. ISSN 2328-9422
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ABSTRACT

This paper will argue that understanding Genshin Impact's treatment of food and drink is essential to interpreting the game. There is academic precedent for such a food-inspired interpretation (Morrissette, 2020; Stang, 2021; Waszkiewicz, 2022). Methodologically, the argument is supported via a close reading of Genshin Impact informed by food and game studies. It opens with a review of the literature on food, followed by food in games, before leading into the close reading of Genshin itself. From this reading, the paper finds that the game promulgates a particular

Chinese perspective on food that homogenizes its various in-game cultures even if the food presented is different, highlighting the challenges of regional food branding (Cwiertka and Miho, 2020) in a globalised world.

KEYWORDS

Genshin Impact, food, digital games, close reading, Chinese culture

INTRODUCTION

Genshin Impact is a 3D role-playing game (RPG) in which players take on the role of the Traveler. After a cosmic battle, the Traveler – who may be male or female, but in either case, is functionally identical – arrives in the magical land of Teyvat, separated from their sibling. The Traveler quickly encounters Paimon, a fairy who serves as the Traveler's companion and the player's guide. Together, the two embark on a journey to find the Traveler's sibling while getting caught up in the politics and conflicts of Teyvat. *Genshin* is primarily a single-player game, though up to four other players can be invited into the host's game world to fight enemies together or enjoy other activities. Nevertheless, only the host player can undertake quests to progress the game's narrative. The game may be played on PC, mobile, or PlayStation 4 and 5.

Genshin is also a "gacha" game, so-named after the "gachapon" machines in Japan, in which users pay money for a random item, typically a collectible toy. In *Genshin*, players must use the gacha mechanic to collect new characters for their team. The monetization model is relevant because it has catapulted the game to remarkable financial success, with revenue reported to have hit $10 billion USD by 2025 (Obedkov, 2024), less than half a decade since the game was released. Its sustained popularity and profitability have led Chinese game developer miHoYo to rebrand itself as HoYoverse and publish other gacha games following *Genshin*'s model. It has also inspired

other companies to create similar games, such as Chinese developer Kuro Games' *Wuthering Waves* (Kuro Games, 2024).

Food is a constant presence in *Genshin Impact*. While playing, Paimon will often ask for the time and place of the next meal. In fact, so frequent are such interjections that one bemused online commentator (Reddit user kyuven87, 2024) was inspired to post to *Genshin*'s subreddit community: "Does EVERYTHING in this game center around meals?" The commentator could be forgiven for their hyperbole: besides the game narrative, which often pushes the player to join various banquets and feasts, there is a cooking mini-game to play, foodstuffs to find, and over 200 recipes to collect (and more in each update), with representative dishes taken from real-world cuisines such as Chinese, Italian, English, French, Indian, Turkish, and Mexican, among others.

However, perhaps the foregrounding of food is not surprising given that *Genshin* is a Chinese game, and food in China is more than just a necessity for survival; it is culturally significant. There is a very old but still well-known Chinese adage that may be translated[1] as "for the Emperor, the people are everything; for the people, food is everything" (Book of Han, Vol. 43, c. III CE). H. J. Lin and T. Lin (1972, p. 46) write:

> From the Chinese point of view, the enjoyment of food is a facet of the art of living. The gourmet has practiced his vocation almost everywhere. These are the scenes through which he moved: the hills and fields, terraced and green, at the side of which stood a shabby farmhouse where a simple meal was being prepared; craggy mountains marked by a steep path, beside which sedan chair-bearers paused, drinking strong bitter tea; a charming courtyard, in which a scholar was ladling rain water for tea; countrywomen at New Years' time, shaping glutinous rice balls between their palms; the crab feasts by moonlight; the temples and the monks and vegetarian food, and the mingled essences of the teeming streets. These were the

1. The original Chinese is as follows: 王者以民為天、而民以食為天.

> scenes of life itself, in which eating was one of the more dependable pleasures.

More contemporaneously, a commonplace greeting in the country is not "how are you?" but rather "have you eaten yet?" Food is also relevant to modern business: Chinese national newspaper The People's Daily has reported that an overwhelming "93.1% of [Chinese] tourists consider food experiences a key aspect of their journeys" (People's Daily Online, 2024). It is therefore not an understatement to say that food occupies an important position in Chinese culture.

As such, this paper will investigate food in *Genshin Impact* through a close reading of the game, looking both at the food-related gameplay and the importance of food in the story. The objective is to determine how the pervasive Chinese culture of food has influenced the construction of the game's mechanics, world, characters, and narrative. Before proceeding to the close reading, the paper will first interrogate the literature of food studies and of food in game studies.

FOOD STUDIES AND CHINESE FOOD

Contemporary food studies is defined (Berg, 2003) by its interdisciplinary nature: "economists, psychologists, nutritionists, agronomists, geologists, geographers, archaeologists, environmental scientists, legal scholars, political scientists, and historians..." (p. 17) all bring to the table their own methodologies. Of particular relevance to *Genshin Impact* – a game where the player travels to unique digital countries and samples their foods – is the study of culinary tourism, which explores how food and food culture impact (and are impacted by) the touristic experience of traveling to new places.

Long (1998) identifies three perspectives on culinary tourism and how it impacts food culture. The first holds that culinary tourism is a form of capitalist hegemonic expansion and cultural appropriation (Goody, 1982; Mintz, 1985; Montano, 1997; Heldke, 2001), while the second suggests that it is a sign of growth and prosperity, transforming food from sustenance to an aesthetic form with implications

for social class and power (Appadurai, 1981, 1986; Bourdieu, 1984). Long offers a third "more optimistic interpretation" that "sees culinary tourism as the willingness of humans to experience the cultural worlds of other people, as the result of curiosity about other experiences and other ways of life" (p. 45).

A key political component of culinary tourism is the notion of "place branding", which Cwiertka and Miho (2020) explore in their book *Branding Japanese Food*. Place branding is defined as "the broad set of efforts by country, regional, and city governments, and by industry groups, aimed at marketing the places and sectors they represent" (Papadopoulos, 2004, p. 36). Cwiertka and Miho argue that place branding theoretically underpins gastrodiplomatic efforts by modern nation-states to make certain foods and dishes "symbolic signifiers of a nation" (p. 8). In the case of Japan – and it is potentially implied in other nations as well – this branding of certain dishes "is a modern construct that reveals more about Japan's 20th-century transformation than about age-old culinary traditions" (p. 9). Branding "reconfigures" food and food practices and puts them at the service of commercial endeavours – such as attracting tourists to visit.

The study of food in China specifically has dynastic connections with good health. Li and Hsieh (2004), for instance, explore how "many traditional Chinese foods...are associated with a therapeutic or health-promoting effect" (p. 147), making the daily selection of what to eat a matter of fundamental importance. Chinese food may therefore be considered a part of the larger framing unit that is Chinese traditional medicine – see, e.g., Wu and Liang (2018), who highlight how traditional medicinal texts such as "*Canon of the Yellow Emperor* [黃帝內經], *Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica* [神农本草经], *Invaluable Prescriptions for Ready Reference* [千金要方], [and the] *Principles of Correct Diet* [饮膳正要]" all discuss the essentiality of diet to good health.

Besides physical health, Simoons (1991) argues that the maintenance of personal spiritual balance is essential to understanding Chinese food culture (p. 22). He traces this idea to a conflation of traditions and religions – Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist – that

utilize the concept of yin (阴) and yang (阳). Balance leads to good health and good spirits; imbalance, to disease and bad moods. Meals are constructed around the concept of balance: rice[2] (饭) – or other starchy foods – are balanced with "cai" (菜), which refers to the "accompanying dishes that make a meal tasty" (p. 15), and may include meat, fish, or vegetables. Food is classified as either "hot" (热) or "cold" (寒) (p. 23), based on its perceived medicinal and nutritional properties, which adds another variable to the balancing act of meal-making.

Beyond the sphere of health, food serves a key function in social relations. "Social gatherings in China invariably involve a meal" (1991, p. 26), Simoons writes. This is evident at major festival times, wherein different foods are prescribed to be eaten with family: for example, at Chinese New Year a fish should be the centrepiece of a large supper, at the Mid-Autumn Festival one should eat moon cakes (a kind of sweet pastry), and at the Dragon Boat Festival glutinous rice balls wrapped in bamboo leaves are eaten alongside dinner.

It is not only the living who enjoy such tasty meals: food offerings to ancestors reflect "the wish that a link between living and dead family members be maintained, and it reaffirmed in a sacred context the loyalty and unity of the family" (p. 30). Wu (2018) has also studied this topic and found that the relationship between ancestors and the living is not necessarily transactional – i.e., living family members are not simply exchanging food for ancestral blessings – but rather a complex back-and-forth cultural mélange of familial duty, cherished memories, and spiritual balance.

Food's sacred position in Chinese culture has also influenced its artistic creators. West (1997) explores food and performance during the Song (c. 960–1279) and Yuan (c. 1271–1368) dynasties, with particular emphasis on the Song. The Song period was one of cultural and aesthetic flourishing, being well known for its poetry, plays, and other

2. It is interesting to note that Japan and Korea also position rice (Brau 2004, p. 41) and harmony of foodstuffs (Chung et al 2016, p. 188) as culturally significant to their own national identities. Perhaps this speaks to the culinary cultural exchanges between these East Asian nations.

artworks. West argues that during this time "art, ritual, and food buttressed one another, each an inextricable architectural element of the performance of state and family seasonal sacrifices, rites of life, or celebrations of good fortune" (p. 68). He paints a picture of the Song capital of Kaifeng where "the close proximity of stages, tea houses, markets, and shops bespeak an intimate relationship between commerce, the stage, and food" (p. 74). Food and the appreciation of artistic entertainment went hand in hand.

Pan (2003) offers a philosophical view of Chinese aesthetic history and food. He notes that in the Analects, Confucius had the following wisdom to share about food:

> '[The gentleman] ... did not eat his fill of polished rice, nor did he eat his fill of finely minced meat.... He did not eat food that had gone off colour or food that had a bad smell. He did not eat food that was not properly prepared.... He did not eat food that had not been properly cut up, nor did he eat unless the proper sauce was available' (Analects, bk. 10, no. 8, p. 103). (p. 67)

Drinks are another significant element in Chinese food culture, and Pan highlights two in particular: tea and wine. These two are the ones that "have been synthesized with, and received the most attention in, Chinese literature and art" (p. 70). Wine is a "facilitator of artistic imagination" that awakens "drinkers to their optimum creative moments", whereas tea is "a scholar's drink" that "symbolizes noble thinking that sustains plain living" (ibid.). Tea and wine complement each other as yin and yang, with both needed to be taken in moderation for lofty thoughts and grand ideas to have any sustainability.

This section has offered a brief introduction to the food culture of China. Food is a complex cultural synthesis that represents aesthetic refinement, familial duty, spiritual balance, and a healthy life. Yet when considering food in *Genshin Impact*, there is an important distinction: it is not real food, but merely a representation of it. How is such a representation to be understood? The next section will

consider this question through a review of the existing literature on digital food.

DIGITAL FOOD: FROM CRAFTING COMPONENT TO AESTHETIC OBJECT

Food in digital games has been studied as a crafting component (Grow et al., 2017), as a collectable resource (Chang, 2012), as an ethical symbol of violence against animals (Ooijen, 2019), as inspiring subcultural fan communities (Lamerichs, 2020), and as representative of American economic and consumerist anxiety in the *Fallout* series (Morrissette, 2020; Stang, 2021). Perhaps most relevant among these works to this study is Tyler's (2022) analysis of meat in games as a part of cooking/food systems. Tyler identifies food with different functions across digital games: "as a means of sustenance to keep characters alive, as a restorative to replenish fading health, as a means of temporarily enhancing an avatar's capabilities, and as a resource that can be spent on permanently improving the game's units" (p. 81).

Tyler's functions are similar to the categories found in Waszkiewicz's (2022) book *Delicious Pixels*, a landmark study of food in digital games. In their book, Waszkiewicz challenges the presentation of food and cooking in games, especially drawing on queer methodologies to explore topics related to disordered eating, erotic sensualities, and gendered food practices, among others. They break down food in digital games into specific categories of gameplay that can aid in more focused analysis: "[the] gathering of the ingredients, cooking, and presentation" (p. 22).

Waszkiewicz is also interested in the aesthetics of video game food, writing about "the intersections between the visual appeal of food and the intimacy between the characters who eat it or between the game and the player" (p. 100). Interestingly, Waszkiewicz identifies "not only in Japan but also other Asian countries, food's presentation and aesthetics are intrinsic parts of their culture" (p. 101). Therefore, they suppose, it is "not surprising that many of the games that emphasize the aesthetics of their food are productions of

Japanese studios" (ibid.), concluding that in Japanese games "food [is displayed] as art, continuously drawing attention of the players and characters alike towards it" (p. 114).

Japanese games have been a particular point of reference for game studies food scholars, typically focusing on the food's presentation (as per Waszkiewicz's categories). Ryn (2013), for instance, analyses the gestural history of *Cooking Mama* (Office Create, 2006), finding it somewhat lacking. Westerlaken (2017) plays *Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo, 2017) while observing vegan values as part of a process of feminist conscious reflection. Bjarnason (2021) explores how *Final Fantasy XV* advertises a Japanese brand of cup noodles (harkening back to our discussion of branding and culinary tourism) as a part of a transmedial analysis of the game. Chui (2025) looks at eating as a form of culinary tourism in the board game of *sugoroku*, while Navarro-Remesal and Zapata (2025) have studied the nostalgic food presented in the Japanese studio Gagex's games.

In contrast to Japanese food and games, the digital representation of Chinese food in games has received limited academic attention. Cui et al. (2021) see the inclusion of Chinese food in games as part of a project of integrating "Chinese traditional cultural elements into games and make games [into] a cultural dissemination medium (Peng, 2014)" (p. 485). Wu (2023) also understands games as vehicles for cultural transmission, but does not include food in his analysis of how the culture of the Tanka minority group could be preserved through gamification. Dong and Mangiron (2019) explain how certain games will localize food names in their Chinese translations to adapt the game for the Chinese market, but do not comment further on the cultural choices implicit in such localizations.

There is still much work to be done to understand the aesthetics of Chinese food as it is represented in games. The next section will make a start on this effort with a close reading of *Genshin Impact* informed by the cultural context of Chinese food. What role is food taking on in the game? Is it an extension of food aesthetics, the desire to represent something sensually beautiful? Or could food's inclusion be a point of national culinary pride?

GENSHIN IMPACT: A GASTRONOMIC JOURNEY

Background

In terms of academic research, *Genshin* has informed discussions around gacha games (Woods, 2022), as well as "loot boxes", another lottery-based mechanism that is similar if not identical to gacha (Xiao, 2023). The game's characters, which are the primary draw to engage with the gacha system, have therefore been a matter of consideration (Greting et al., 2022; Blom 2023; Blom, 2025). These articles do not mention the food in the game, since food is not part of the gacha.

Another strand of research on *Genshin* concerns the possibility for the game to act as a vehicle for the spread of Chinese culture or soft power (Adams, 2022; Sun, 2023; Wang, 2023; Wardaya et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). These articles explore the Chinese branding in *Genshin*. Among these, some Chinese authors express pride at the game's ability to spread Chinese culture to an audience that may be assumed to be unfamiliar with it. Cai et al. (2022), for instance, note that "the dishes in *Genshin Impact* also have detailed recipes, which have attracted many foreign gamers to make replicas of them. We [Chinese game developers] should be brave enough to name something Chinese – Baozi is 'Baozi' and Jiaozi is 'Jiaozi'" (p. 466). Fan (2023) reaches a similar conclusion when discussing the game's "Moonchase Festival":

> ... [The event] is obviously a good choice for cultural communication with good public acceptance and a window to attract foreign people to learn about traditional Chinese culture. During this event, many foreign players tweeted that they also want to taste authentic Chinese food and experience the wonderful Chinese story through their tongues. (p. 3)

Notably, these articles focus on the food in the game's Liyue region – the region inspired by China. They do not touch upon the

representations of food in other regions that may have been inspired by other cultures, nor do they comment on the gameplay systems associated with the food in the game.

Food Systems in Genshin

Food in *Genshin* has three of the four functions described by Tyler: it is a collectable (1) resource that may be used as a (2) restorative, or to temporarily (3) enhance one's characters. And as per Waszkiewicz's categorization of food systems, in *Genshin* food can be collected from the game world as ingredients and cooked into recipes, while it is also lavishly presented within the flow of the narrative.

Food ingredients in *Genshin* may be discovered in the game world at the player's leisure, with food collection points (e.g., plants and animals) reappearing on a daily basis, making it effectively limitless, or as Ooijen (2019) might argue, perpetuating the myth of the infinite bounty of the natural world. These ingredients, with some exceptions[3], cannot be consumed directly. They need to be cooked with other ingredients as part of a recipe (*Genshin Impact* Wiki, Food).

Recipes are given as rewards for completing various quests, and may also be purchased from shop vendors within the game world. The price of the recipes is purely in terms of in-game currency (gold coins known as "Mora" in-game) that can be earned easily and quickly through play, making the barrier to collecting recipes very low. Recipes (Figure 1) are classed into five "qualities" represented by different colours. They are further differentiated by the benefits they offer to the player: offensive, defensive, stamina (allowing for easier and quicker exploration), and elemental (a factor of combat engagements).

3. Some fruits (e.g. apples) and varieties of mushrooms (but not all mushrooms) can be consumed by the player directly. The full list of forageable foods is as follows: Apple, Bulle Fruit, Candlecap Mushroom, Starshroom, and Sunsettia.

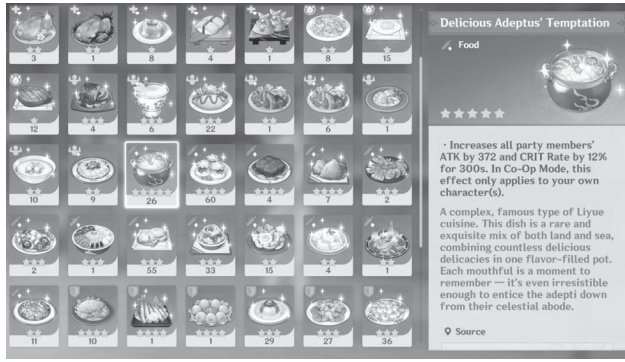


Figure 1. *A page of a player's inventory showing different prepared recipes. ©miHoYo*

Most of the higher quality dishes involve meat or fish (or both) as a key component, reminiscent of what Tyler writes about meat as giving strength to the consumer. That being said, there is a diverse range of both vegetarian and meat-based recipes, which would support a vegetarian or vegan playthrough of the game. Recipes in the game have wonderful bespoke illustrations and mouth-watering descriptions, putting one in mind of Waszkiewicz's notes on food aesthetics. Certainly, the visuals are designed to appeal to players and motivate them to collect and craft the recipes.

In order to cook food, players must be at a source of fire, typically a wood fire at one of the campsites scattered around the map. Once there, a menu option will appear: "Cook." Selecting this option will open the cooking mini-game screen. Players will then be able to choose a recipe to cook from among known recipes (Figure 2). If a player owns a character who offers a special cooking bonus, they may select that character to help prepare the dish. Almost every character in the game has a special dish that they can cook – another encouragement to engage with the game's gacha system.



Figure 2. *Preparing to cook a simple dish. ©miHoYo*

The cooking mini-game itself is rather simplistic (Figure 3). The chosen recipe is shown in the centre of the screen, along with a bar above the top of the recipe. The bar has three areas: empty, yellow, and orange. A white clock-hand accompanied by the sound of the ticking of a clock moves across the bar (indicative of cooking time). Players stop the clock-hand when it reaches either the yellow or orange portion of the bar to successfully cook the food. If the clock-hand stops in the empty area, the players will still get the food, but it will be "suspicious." If it's in the orange area, which is smaller than the yellow area, the food will offer better benefits. The clock-hand does not move very fast, so it is trivial to get perfect food every time. Once players have cooked the same dish 20 times, they may "auto-cook" as many as they like, skipping the mini-game entirely.

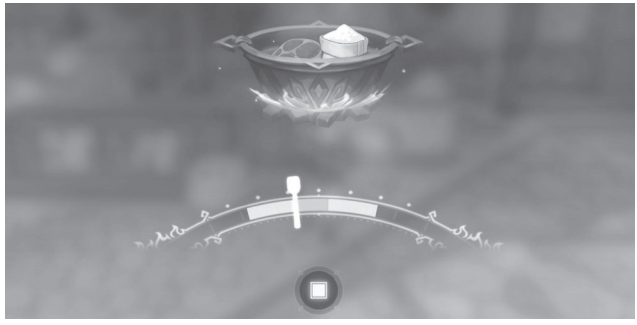


Figure 3. *The cooking mini-game in progress. ©miHoYo*

Preparing recipes is an important gameplay feature, especially for new players, for whom it serves two purposes: (1) it allows the player to heal their characters without the use of a dedicated healer and (2) it offers exploration bonuses, making it easier to progress around the enormous world map. As the player reaches the end game, the offensive bonuses that food can provide to character statistics such as critical hit rate and critical hit damage can smooth the way to clear difficult fights. The player is therefore consistently incentivized to engage with *Genshin*'s food throughout their gameplay experience.

Though preparing the recipes themselves for consumption is important to the game, the cooking process itself is a drastically simplified rendition of what cooking the actual recipes involves in terms of labour, skill, and knowledge. Chinese dishes especially are noteworthy for the technical complexity of certain recipes, which *Genshin* fails to represent: the focus is on the end product, rather than how to get there. The art and craft of cooking are underrepresented in *Genshin*.

Cultural Recipes: Teyvat's Nation Branding

There are 228 recipes in the game for the player to collect (*Genshin Impact* Wiki, Food; Food/List; Dishes by Region) in early 2026, excluding six special limited-time recipes for the Lantern Rite Festival (*Genshin*'s equivalent to Chinese New Year, running simultaneously with that holiday) as well as the character-specific recipe variants. These recipes are relatively evenly split between regions, with one notable exception (see Figure 4 below).

Region Name	Real World Analog	# of Collectable Recipes
Mondstadt	German/Germanic	35
Liyue	China	61
Inazuma	Japan	39
Sumeru	South Asia/Middle East	39
Fontaine	France/Western Europe	27
Natlan	Indigenous cultures from around the world	27

Figure 4. *Recipes categorised by in-game region*

There is a predominance of Chinese food represented in *Genshin* by a significant margin. This in itself is nothing surprising given that *Genshin* is made by Chinese developers and the importance of food to Chinese culture has been established. Despite the preponderance of Chinese food in the game, there is more non-Chinese food in the game when all the other regions are taken together. Why would miHoYo spend valuable development time building up a host of recipes and food collectables for each region? We might understand it with reference to the culinary tourism and the nation branding discussed in our overview of food studies. Specifically, the developers are utilising the logic of nation branding cuisine in order to "sell" each new region.

Genshin's ongoing nature makes it necessary to continuously employ various marketing strategies to draw players back into the game. The game has two kinds of updates: "major" updates that introduce new regions to explore, and "minor" updates that offer new collectable characters or mini-games. *Genshin* players may find themselves drifting away from the game during the minor updates, as there is simply much less content for the player to engage with.

Each major update region, on the other hand, offers a bevy of content, including new quests to complete, places to wander, and, of course, recipes to cook. One of the first things that the Traveler does in each new region is head to the local tavern to establish their base of operations. Inevitably, the taverns always have food on the table to represent the uniqueness of the new regions.

In effect, the developers are using the logic of nation branding food to attract players to pick up the game again after each major update. After visiting the starting town, players may find recipes to both enhance their characters further and cook the food they find on the tavern tables for themselves, becoming active participants in the food culture of the new region. The representation of food, then, is a commercially driven development prospect, utilised to market the game's major updates and bring players back through virtual culinary tourism.

Interestingly, several of the game's collectable characters overtly lean into the culture of food as selling points for their personalities. Xiangling, one of the first playable characters released when the game launched in 2020, is a restaurateur as well as a fighter specializing in spicy cuisine (and fiery attacks). Varesa, released in March 2025, is a young woman from the Natlan region, described as "a warrior of great strength" for her tribe. Her character quest and personality are singularly themed around her prodigious appetite, implied to be the source of her power. Then, May 2025 saw the release of Escoffier, a French-themed cook[4] from the Fontaine region whose white hat and coat are unmistakably a chef's. With characters both old and new, their connections with food are major selling points.

Food in the Narrative

In contrast to the branding of Teyvat's nations using the game's collectable food, the food presentation in the narrative across *all* regions draws almost exclusively on Chinese food culture or at the very least a Chinese perspective on food. This has a homogenising effect on the developer's virtual nation branding efforts while also highlighting the importance of understanding cultural perspectives for interpreting narrative.

4. Escoffier even takes her name from the famed French chef Georges Auguste Escoffier.

Food is a frequent presence and occasionally the driving force in the *Genshin* story (Figure 5): as previously discussed, when visiting new towns or meeting character companions for the first time, the player will be greeted with a meal. In Mondstadt, Venti, the god of the region, prefers to meet the player at a local tavern for some Dandelion Wine. In Liyue, Zhongli, Liyue's retired god, always has a pot of tea brewing for the player, if he hasn't already ordered food. Ayaka, a political leader of Inazuma, meets with the player early on for hot pot. Upon arrival at Sumeru City, a kind noblewoman and her guardian Dehya treat the player to a lunch at a popular restaurant. In Fontaine, the player meets Navia, a rich heiress who lavishly prepares a sumptuous afternoon tea for the player following a difficult court trial. And in Natlan, before beginning the region's grand ritual tournament, a huge feast on the eve of the event is an absolute must for the aspiring champions.

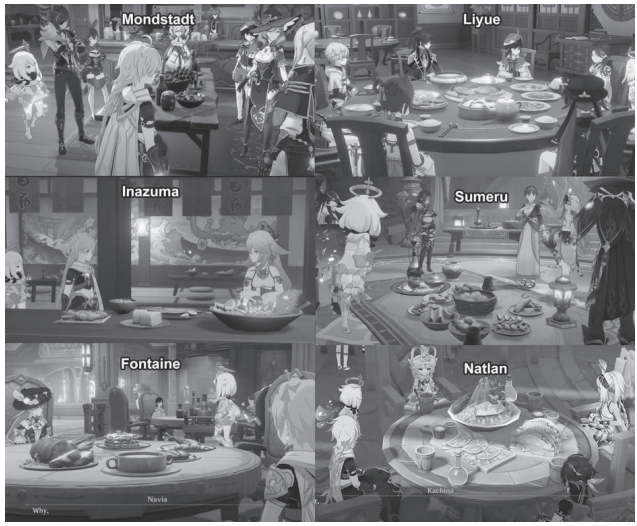


Figure 5. *Meals in different regions. ©miHoYo*

These meals serve a few narrative purposes. First, they allow the player to get familiar with the region, not only in terms of its culture but also its conflicts. These meals are typically heavy on exposition, giving the developers an opportunity to set the stakes for the narra-

tive direction and stories of the region in question. *Genshin*'s narrative, having now continued for over five years, is remarkably intricate, with long periods when the action effectively comes to a halt before another major update. Thus, these meals act as both expositions for new material and refreshers for players who might have forgotten what had happened before.

Second, joining the player at these meals are the companions that the player might guess[5] can be recruited at a later point via the gacha systems. As the player chats with the companions over food, they get the opportunity to learn about them and their idiosyncratic personalities. In a sense, the developers are giving players an opportunity through these meals to decide if they want to invest their valuable game resources to attempt to pull that character into their collection. This is another mechanism through which the gacha influences all aspects of the game's construction, even if, like food, it is not directly involved.

These regional meals, despite having unique (Teyvat nation branded) cuisine, assume Chinese food culture and table manners. The case of Fontaine and Navia is a good example. Fontaine mostly takes its inspiration from France, with hints of other European nations such as England, Scotland, and Italy. Navia, a local from Fontaine, meets the player and shortly thereafter treats them to a luxurious afternoon tea[6] with macarons (Figure 6). Humorously, she bakes these on the spot, whipping out a portable stove to do so with the help of her personal assistants.

5. Collectable companions are often clearly signalled by their detailed character models and ostentatious outfits, making it fairly easy to determine if the character will be made available via gacha.

6. In her visual design and choice of foods, Navia is clearly French coded. France is, notably, another country famous for its cuisine and rich food culture.



Figure 6. *Navia (top centre) makes tea for the player and Paimon (bottom left). ©miHoYo*

In part, her presentation of the tea signals her personal wealth, which is important to her character and the plot, but the fact that she meets the player and shortly thereafter offers them a meal is, arguably, not European. Someone from France might be more likely to invite an acquaintance for coffee and a stroll through a park, for instance. Yet from a Chinese perspective, Navia's meal can be understood as symbolic of her kindness and politeness, since sharing food in this way is essential for social relationship building in China. Therefore, from a European cultural perspective, Navia's sudden making of tea might be viewed as bizarre, bordering on the absurd, whereas from the Chinese cultural perspective, it goes to show her warmth of spirit and willingness to share her wealth.

Beyond these expository meals, there are several Archon Quests where food takes on a more central role in the narrative. One of the earliest and most notable examples of this is in Liyue. The player is on the hunt for Cloud Retainer, a powerful nature spirit known as an Adeptus, as they try to unravel the mystery of why Liyue's most powerful god suddenly died. After journeying across Liyue, the player arrives at a secluded plateau and a closed door. The only way to summon Cloud Retainer is to prepare an offering of food (Figure 7). Food offerings, primarily to ancestors but also to spirits, are still quite common across China, as explored by Simoons and Wu, and

are perpetuated and promulgated within the game through this quest.



Figure 7. *The offering to Cloud Retainer. ©miHoYo*

Later, in Sumeru, a nation roughly representative of the Middle East and Southeast Asia, the player gets trapped in a dreamlike world. In this dreamlike world, every day is repeated, and every day is part of the Sabzeruz Festival. In order to break the cycle and begin to escape the dream world, the player must go to a stall selling candies in boxes. The player can guess which candies are in which box (Figure 8). Of course, this is not known the first time the player does this. But by the third or fourth time, they can likely guess the contents of each box, having picked them on a prior repeated day. Food, in this case, serves as a tool for confirming the nature of the dream. This, again, hints at the Chinese religious connection between food and the spirit. Trapped in a nightmare, the only way out is to reflect on the reality of what one is eating.



***Figure 8**. A child tries to pick a box of candies and opens a box of bugs (onikabuto). ©miHoYo*

Food takes on a similar function during Fontaine's Act 3 and Act 4. The player conspires to infiltrate the Fortress of Meropide, Fontaine's high-security prison, to deduce the reasons behind the disappearance of an important diplomat. As a part of this challenge, they must figure out the secret rules of the prison to prove their worthiness to the sceptical but powerful prison warden. One of these rules has to do with the prison food: the player will be served a special meal if they work a certain number of days consecutively (Figure 9). Just like in Sumeru, then, noticing the differences in food helps the player to escape from prison and progress the narrative. Food, in particular the daily meal, is the key to reassessing and understanding reality.

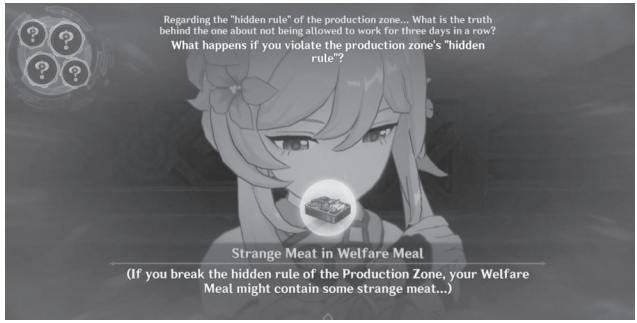


***Figure 9**. The player unravels the mystery of the strange meat. ©miHoYo*

Across all of its diverse regions, then, *Genshin*'s food occupies an

important position, and one that can only be explained with reference to Chinese food culture. Food is a marketable selling point for each new region, contributing to the branding for the game's major updates. The initial meal offers players a glimpse at what characters they might purchase in the weeks and months to come, and thus may be said to be a further commercial incentive. Yet even though the cuisine might be unique at each new place, its narrative treatment is distinctly Chinese. Characters inspired by French or Mesoamerican cultures still employ Chinese table manners. Paimon constantly reminds the player of the fundamental spiritual importance of the meal. Through the game's Archon Quests, the player learns about Chinese ancestor worship. To unravel the game's narrative mysteries, food is the answer.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Genshin has had a remarkable impact on the gaming landscape. Its exceptional financial success raised eyebrows, generated controversy for its gacha monetization, and introduced gamers across the world to Chinese culture. For over half a decade, it has continued to draw players back into its colourful world. And a big part of that story has been the food.

The presentation and function of food in *Genshin* are reflective of both local and global trends in food culture. On the one hand, the employment of nation branding marketing techniques to sell regions via their cuisine mirrors trends in culinary tourism both in China and across the globe. On the other hand, the disposition of the characters and the treatment of food in the narrative, drawing upon the wellspring of Chinese food culture – in every region – suggest that Teyvat's foods need to be understood from a Chinese cultural perspective.

There are a few interesting implications that arise from this study. First, it highlights that nation branding is not as simple as presenting different foodstuffs. The food might be detailed and beautifully presented, but it is not just the food itself that makes food culture

authentic: it is the people, how they act and talk around food, and indeed, how they cook – something underexplored in *Genshin*.

Second, the fact that *Genshin* uses the logic of nation branding for marketing its virtual world suggests that there could be some practical research on the comparative successes or failures of these digital experiments. Collaboration between regional tourism stakeholders and *Genshin*'s developers could reveal insights on how real places might more effectively brand their cuisine while respecting and preserving historical authenticity.

Third, the close reading of *Genshin* demonstrates the importance of cultural knowledge in analysing game narrative. It has been almost a decade since Liboriussen and Martin's (2016) call for "regional game studies", and this paper has served as a further proof of concept by demonstrating how *Genshin*'s narrative leans on a Chinese perspective on food culture. Furthermore, this paper has shown that studies of food in games have tended to rely – in the case of Asia – on analysis of Japanese games. While this may make sense given the size of Japan's game industry, there is surely more to be said about food in games coming from developers in China, among other Asian countries.

In September 2025, the *Genshin Impact Official Cookbook* by Thibaud Villanova was released, with over 60 recipes from the game's first four regions. Past, present, and future, food is the not-so-secret key to unravelling the complex cultural webs of Teyvat, and of all of the interconnected cultures from which the game draws its subject matter.

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