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GDD 201

Controversies Regarding Character Design in *Genshin Impact*

Genshin Impact, by HoYoverse, is a popular open-world action RPG with [tens of millions of players](#). While it is recognized for various elements such as its combat and worldbuilding, one of its most notable features is its intricate character designs. Each character has a unique outfit, with many wielding weapons that complement their aesthetics. With a cast of over eighty playable characters and more on the way, players are likely to find at least one that resonates with them. However, beneath the multitude of well-crafted designs lies a significant issue: a lack of meaningful representation. Both fans and critics have expressed concerns over how *Genshin Impact* handles gender and race, which has led to massive backlash. For example, Screen Rant, a well-known entertainment site, has an [article](#) where they discuss the lack of diversity in *Genshin Impact* designs. An analysis of specific designs will show how *Genshin Impact* poorly represents different cultures and creates gender stereotypes.

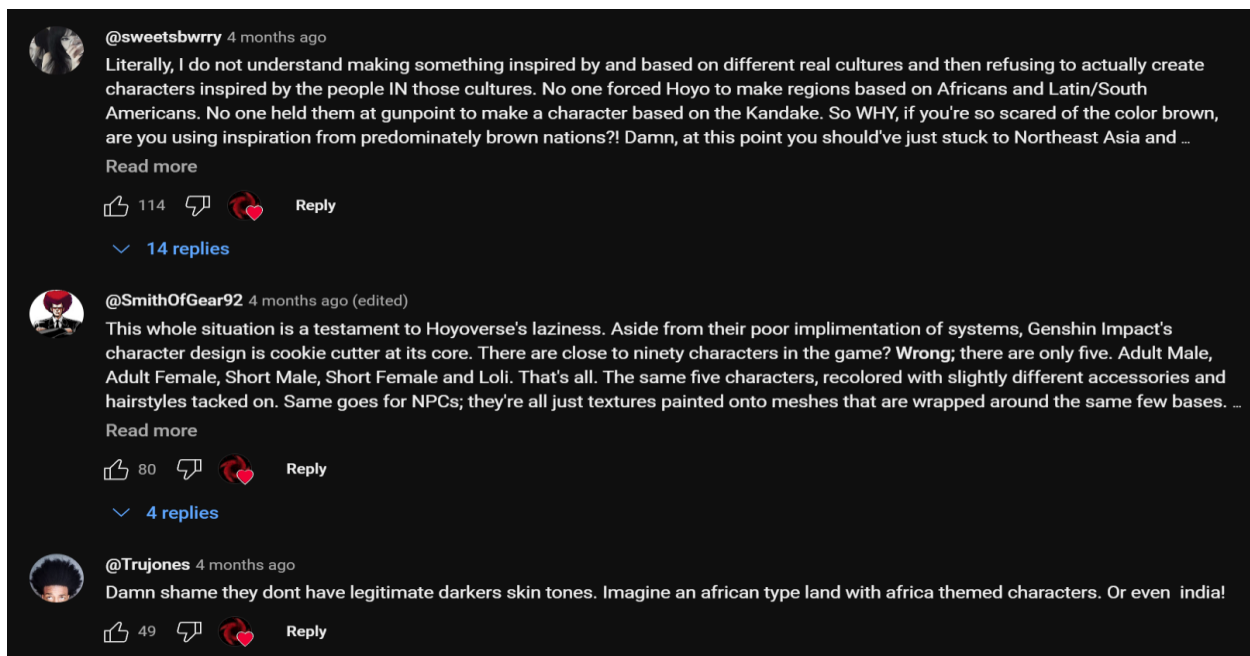
One of the major controversies in the game's fandom started in 2022. This controversy began when Sumeru, the fourth region in the game, was released. The designs and aesthetics in Sumeru are based on multiple cultures, such as Egypt, India, and Persia. These countries are made up of people with diverse cultures and backgrounds, and [some players took issue](#) with how some characters were white-washed, despite resembling certain figures from these countries.¹

¹Regarding race, whitewashing is making a character whiter than the person they are based on.



A commonly discussed example is Candace. She is based on the Sudanese queen Kandake, but she is clearly more fair-skinned than the actual queen, leading to concerns over the inaccurate representation of an important figure in Sudanese history. Due to the flaws in Sumeru character designs, such as this one, the hashtag [#FixSumeru](#) trended on Twitter

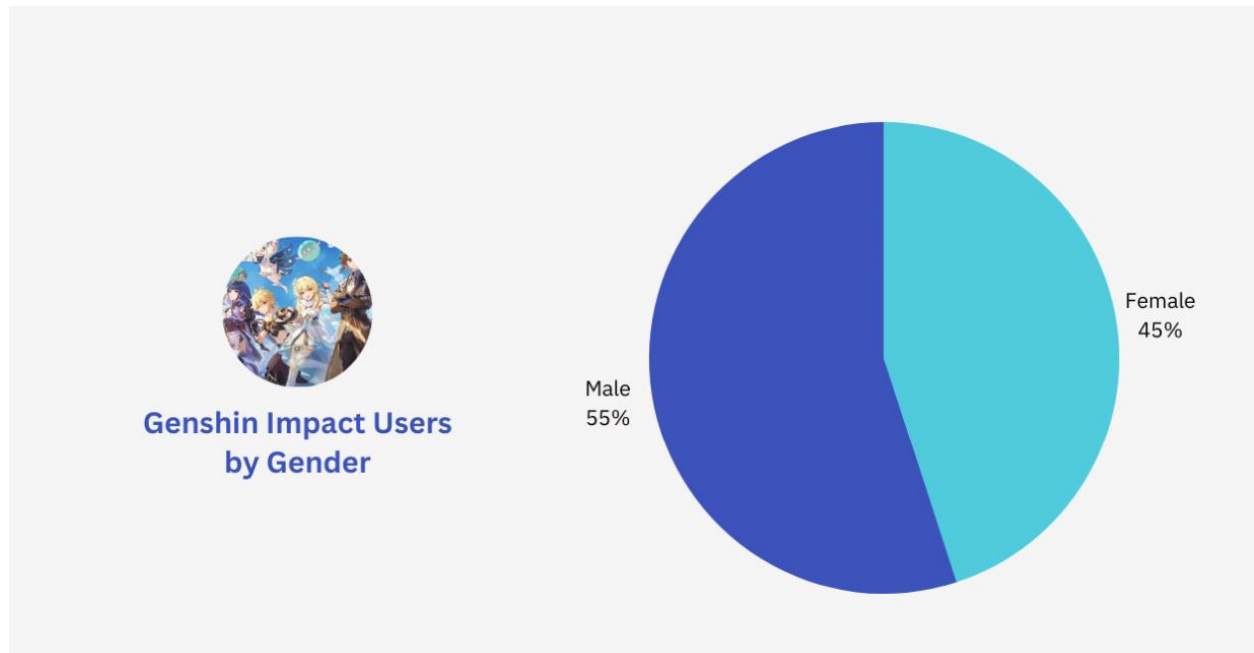
and Reddit at the time, and people still make posts with that hashtag to this day. Content creators, particularly those who have experienced racism, also released videos calling out the whitewashing and the broader issues it raises. VoidEnigma, a YouTuber who creates *Genshin Impact* content, is a person of color who uploaded a [video](#) about their thoughts on how HoYoverse poorly handled Sumeru. This video received support and many comments agreeing with the YouTuber, showing that many people share similar concerns about Sumeru.



The controversy is important because the game not only misrepresents the cultures and figures Sumeru and other regions draw from, but also reminds many players of their personal struggles with racism. One study on the cultural impact of video games says that “In a context in which the relationship between people and technology is becoming increasingly closer, the cultural implications of video games allow for consideration beyond the merely ludic, involving cultural, social and educational aspects” (Mario Cerezo-Pizarro et al., 2023). Therefore, accurate cultural representation in a popular game like *Genshin Impact* is crucial, and the failure to do so can be harmful—especially for the players whose cultures are being incorrectly portrayed. By failing to truly represent these cultures, *Genshin Impact* not only alienates some of its player base but also creates harmful stereotypes that diminish the cultural significance of the figures and regions the game claims to care about.

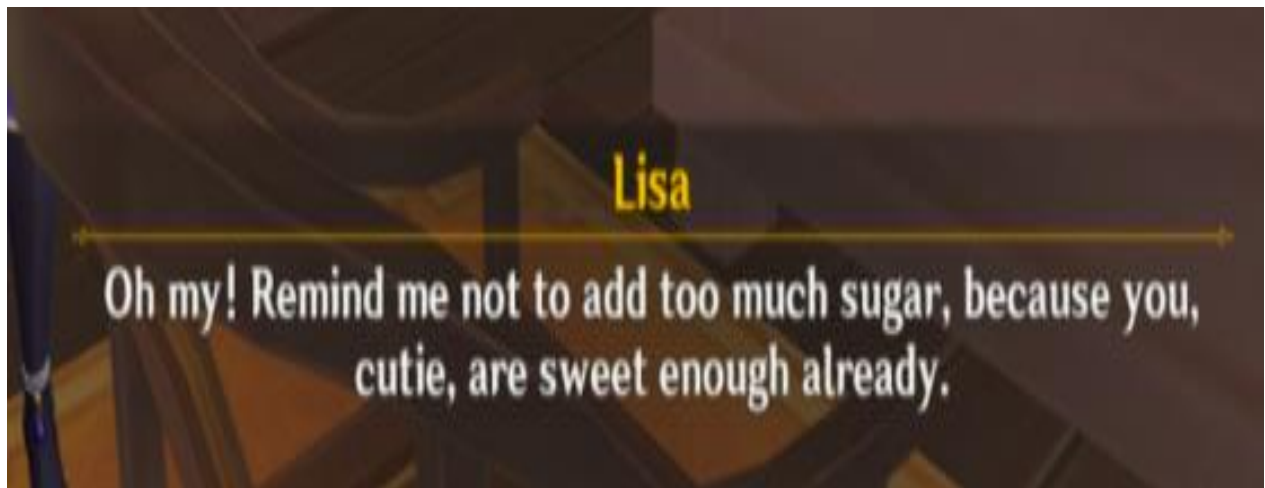
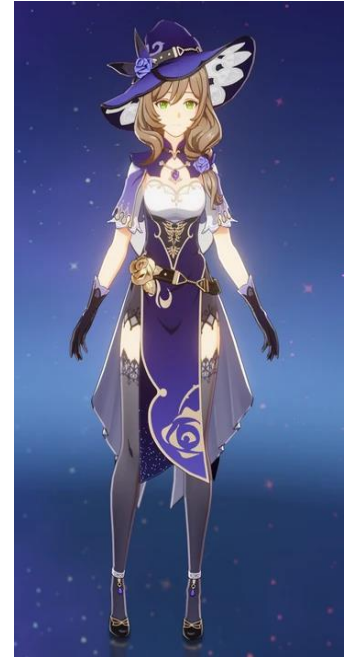
Another significant problem in *Genshin Impact*, which is also related to inclusivity and diversity, is the oversexualization of the female characters. A big part of the game is the infamous gacha system where players can collect characters, which allows them to use those characters while exploring and while in combat. Players can use “primogems,” which are earned for participating in different quests and events, to use on the gacha system. Players can also spend money for more primogems. Different types of players collect certain characters for many reasons. For example, one player might get a character because that character is strong, while another player might get them because they like their lore. Since the game is free to download, they try to design characters to be highly appealing, encouraging players to spend money in the gacha system to acquire them. The game relies on this strategy, generating billions in revenue from character banners alone. This tactic has proven effective, seeing as the game surpassed five billion dollars in revenue by early 2024. Other mobile games have reached this milestone before, but “*Genshin Impact* is the fastest to do so” (Fragen 2024). Unfortunately, it is highly suspected

that this approach has contributed to many of the female characters in the game being designed with revealing outfits, a choice believed to cater to the majority of the game's player base, which makes up about 55% of the audience, as shown in the following image by Priori Data. Whether or not a character is free-to-play, their designs are still essential in bringing in revenue because spending money also makes it easier to enhance the characters.



One prime example is Yae Miko. Her design, which includes revealing clothing and seductive speech, has been a point of controversy in *Genshin Impact*. Her teasing mannerisms often contribute to her portrayal as a sexually charged character, overshadowing her role as an important Shrine Maiden who aids the protagonist. Despite this, her first gacha appearance generated significant revenue, gaining fifteen million dollars. This demonstrates that while some may critique her design, many players are drawn to her character and are willing to invest heavily to play as her.

As said before, free-to-play characters have also earned the game some money. One of these characters is Lisa, one of the first characters you meet. She is a powerful mage and a librarian who is very smart. However, her wit is often overlooked because her design is seen as sexualized due to her low-cut and form-fitting top. The outfit also reveals her thighs. Her personality reflects this design, seeing as she is flirtatious and seductive. This highlights a broader trend in video games where female characters are often made to be overtly sexual, despite contradicting their backstories, thus leading to their well-written lore being put aside and forgotten about.



Although Lisa is free-to-play, many players still spend money to unlock her constellations² or enhance her abilities. While she is available for free, her full potential can be unlocked through the game's gacha system, which incentivizes players to spend money. Additionally, she has an alternative outfit. Players could obtain the outfit for free in a limited-time event, but now they must spend about twenty dollars to get it if they did not participate in

² Constellations are gained by pulling the same character multiple times in the gacha. They make characters stronger.

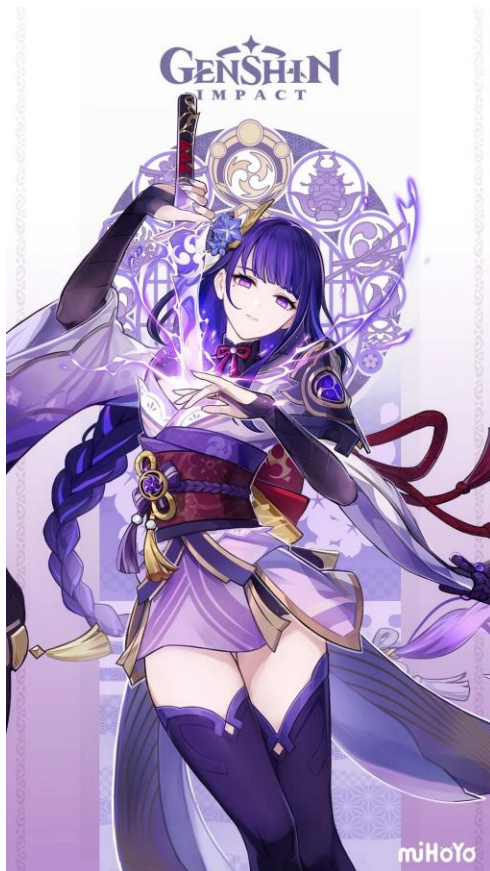
the event. As a result, the developers still earn money from characters who are free by giving them cosmetics or better abilities, which are easier to obtain by paying for them.

Designs like Lisa's and Yae Miko's have led to problems within the *Genshin Impact* community. For example, strong female characters typically share the same physique as characters who are not canonically strong. This has led to players diminishing their true strength and capabilities. This becomes even more apparent when comparing female characters to male characters. Male characters are typically given more muscles than female characters, making the men look stronger, even if that is not the case. As a result, female characters may appear weak when they are not.

Research regarding gender diversity in video games shows that design choices such as the ones in *Genshin Impact* reinforce already existing stereotypes about women's strength. Warr (2022) claims a reason fewer women play games than men "may be because of the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of women in video games." In a male dominated field, it makes it hard for female gamers to be recognized for their unique skills and talents rather than just their gender. When female characters are designed to appeal to the male gaze, it can make women who play these games feel lesser. According to Tabares (2023), "The misrepresentation of women in video games creates a hostile environment by the men and developers within the gaming community. This type of behavior is created by developers appealing to the male gaze and profiting off fan service that the male part of the gaming community wants to see." Given that *Genshin Impact* is a game that likely profits from fan service, it has led to a harmful community when it comes to how women are treated. Therefore, the female designs not only diminish experiences for women playing the game, but it also makes them feel less welcome in gaming communities. As a result, HoYoverse continues to alienate part of its audience just so they can make more money. I am someone who has personally had

negative experiences with the fandom because of men in the fandom saying the game was not made for me. Therefore, the sexualization of women's designs in *Genshin Impact* is harmful toward a major part of the community.

Furthermore, this reflects what happened during Gamergate, a harassment campaign that targeted women in the gaming industry. Female developers received severe backlash and threats. Sarkeesian, one of the female developers, had to flee her home for safety. This campaign showcased how toxic cultures in gaming can marginalize women, discouraging them from being part of these communities. This proves that media that prioritizes fan service over accurate representation, such as *Genshin Impact*, harms women who enjoy it.



Additional examples of cultural insensitivity combine issues by containing multiple forms of misrepresentation at once. One example of this is the Raiden Shogun. As the ruler and leader of Inazuma, a region inspired by Japan, she wears a kimono, which is a traditional Japanese outfit. However, her outfit exposes her thighs and chest. This is different from real kimonos, in which modesty and comfortability are valued. In addition, she is a character who is supposed to be highly regarded for her strength, and some have claimed her to be the most powerful character in the game. On that account, her design not only misrepresents the Japanese culture, but it is also another example of the

sexualization of women in the game.

When considered in isolation, the Raiden Shogun's design may seem tame. However, when her outfit is analyzed in the context of its inspiration—traditional Japanese attire—the issues with her intricate design become more apparent. The exposure of certain body parts in her kimono-like outfit undermines her background and status as a leader. This is particularly significant because, as the ruler of Inazuma, she holds a position of cultural and political authority, which her design fails to fully respect. Despite the backlash her design received from players who care about inclusivity, her first featured banner did extremely well because others found her design appealing.



HoYoverse has been avoidant when responding to criticism about their character designs. They have somewhat acknowledged feedback by giving few characters more censored outfits, but this is only a start. On the bright side, HoYoverse's lack of response has led to the fanbase creating a boycott. The boycott agenda is to ask players to spend less money on the game until these issues get fixed. Although there is yet to be no significant change, there has been a [petition](#) to include darker-skinned characters in the game, and it has reached over 100,000 signatures, meaning that the boycott is gaining traction. If players mutually agree to continue this boycott, HoYoverse will either suffer or fix these issues. Ultimately, *Genshin Impact* has character designs that create stereotypes involving race and gender, and HoYoverse still profits from this. These stereotypes are harmful toward parts of the community who feel marginalized. Despite negative feedback, there has been little change. Thankfully, due to the boycott that has started, there is some hope that *Genshin Impact* will have more inclusive designs in the future.

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