Losing Intentionally: Comedic Resistance to Meritocratic *Genshin Impact*

Honghan Song
University of Chicago
5801 S. Ellis Ave.
Chicago, 60637
Songhonghan7@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article explores how intentional failure in *Genshin Impact* functions as comedic resistance to the game's meritocratic culture. *Genshin Impact* promotes a meritocratic system through its mechanics, rewarding players based on skill, time, and labor investment. Through ethnographic research in Chinese player communities, this study examines how players disrupt this meritocratic culture by deliberately failing in exaggerated and humorous ways. Intentional failure transforms *Genshin Impact* into a site of cultural critique and collective resistance. By embracing comedy and humor, players challenge the game's emphasis on productivity and skill, creating a carnivalesque space in which norms and hierarchies are inverted. This disruption allows players to reclaim the essence of play, emphasizing creativity, community, and liberation over competition. The findings contribute to broader discussions on the politics of play, highlighting the potential for digital games to become spaces of subversion and critique, rather than mere tools for control and productivity.

Keywords

Failure, Resistance, Comedy, *Genshin Impact*, China

INTRODUCTION

"Yes! I finally got killed by the wild boar, ha-ha!" Jeremy Hooi, a live-streamer on YouTube, shouted excitedly in his *Genshin Impact*[1] video (2020, 1:59). His reaction was oddly cheerful as he celebrated the moment when a wild boar annihilated his character. Getting to the point of this "failure" was not easy. Hooi used Xiang Ling, a character dressed in traditional Chinese clothes, whose health points (HPs)[2] were dangerously low at 100 compared to her full HP of 9,351. He then showed his location on the game's map, an area filled with wild boars. Hooi's attempts to have Xiang Ling stomped by a boar turned into something of a comedy. He enthusiastically shouted, "Come on! Kill me!" as he chased the boar, only to watch it mysteriously disappear on top of a rock. "What? The boar just disappeared!" he said in disbelief (Hooi 2020). However, he did not give up. Soon, he led Xiang Ling to another boar and said, "Hopefully, it'll kill me" (Jeremy Hooi 2020). Finally, however, he attained his quirky goal, as a wild boar killed Xiang Ling.

Having a character commit suicide was not only Hooi's idea. Bai, a *Genshin Impact* video creator on the Chinese video platform Bilibili, has produced 11 parodistic *Genshin Impact* videos over 2 years that have accumulated nearly 15 million views, with recurring themes of characters' intentional deaths, voluntary combat failures, and the deliberate abandonment of quests. His videos begin with characters collectively jumping off a cliff (Baiwenruo-Bunjaku 2023). Thus, intentional failure in *Genshin Impact* has become a widespread phenomenon across video platforms (e.g., Bilibili) and the official *Genshin Impact* community forum, MiYou Club.

Meritocracy—a system that adjudicates advancement based on measurable skill and effort (Young 2017)- pervades *Genshin Impact*'s design, naturalizing status hierarchies by framing success as an exclusive product of individual capability (McCoy & Major 2007). Through procedural rhetoric (Bogost 2007), the game materially encodes this logic by quantifying player investment into three interdependent systems: narrative arcs, tiered progression, and skill-based validation. Narratively, players assume the role of the Traveler, transitioning from a marginalized outsider to a venerated savior. This transformation mirrors and legitimizes their own resource expenditure, positioning the avatar as a meritocratic proxy.

Structurally, the tri-level system[3] (Traveler/World/Character) institutionalizes labor-value equivalency. Traveler Level gates critical content (e.g., Inazuma[4] access), World Level scales resource scarcity against challenge intensity, and Character Level operationalizes combat efficacy—each demanding escalating time commitments (maxing one character requires 24 days of resin-gated grinding,[5]; ResinlessPlayer 2020). This architecture stratifies players into social castes: "Dalao" (elites at Lv. 55-60) wield prestige and influence, while "Mengxin" (newbies below Lv. 50) are infantilized as helpless novices (Ngai 2015). Crucially, skill validation occurs in domains like the **Abyss**, where frame-perfect combos[6] and elemental mastery[7]—broadcast on forums—reinforce the illusion that virtuosic play is universally attainable through diligence alone.

In this article, I argue that intentional failure comedically signifies resistance to *Genshin Impact*'s meritocratic culture. Players resist the meritocratic evaluation standards in *Genshin Impact*, which heavily rely on players' technical skills and labor investment, by creating videos of intentional failure, utilizing humorous physical movements, and engaging in carnivalesque and purely playful behaviors.

This meritocratic system obscures three contradictions, making players' comedic resistance meaningful for three reasons. First, it masks the asymmetry of gaming capital (Consalvo 2007) — where prior action-game expertise advantages some players, yet attributes outcomes solely to in-game effort. Players orchestrated "suicides" subvert this fallacy by exposing how "skill" is contingent on external privileges, not universal merit. Second, progression mechanics dissolve work-play boundaries, transmuting leisure into "obligation" (Yee 2006). Intentional quest failures comedically detonate this compulsion, transforming labor into a carnival—a defiant reclaiming of play as a form of unproductive joy. Third, by replicating real-world selection logics (Jagoda 2020), Genshin entrenches the core violence of meritocracy: valorizing striving while erasing inequities. Bug-exploiting boundary-breakers enact algorithmic disobedience, proving "player agency" can hack achievement ideology itself, turning procedural constraints into tools of emancipation.

The article is structured as follows. First, I explain how scholars interpret intentional failure and how this act contributes to game studies. Next, I present the results of my ethnographic research to demonstrate how players intentionally fail in the game. Next, I will showcase the reasons and meanings of intentional failures, and how players' collective creation of intentional failure represents the disruption of the forced labor investment in the game and returns to pure play.

UNDERSTAND FAILURE IN GAMES

Failure is one of the most critical mechanisms in games. According to Anable (2018, 104), "Playing video games means willfully setting oneself up for failure". Due to the inevitability of failure in games, it always motivates people to learn how to better utilize the rules and enhance their abilities and winning rates.

Game scholars have studied failure in games for its transformative value. Jesper Juul (2013, 5) regarded failure as a paradox that can give players feelings of inadequacy while motivating them to play more. Through this paradox, "not just the outcome but the process of failure in games that entails positive experiences" (Jagoda 2020). Failure is punished by losing energy and lives or triggering game termination and setbacks (Juul 2008). Thus, failure is a learning model that can help foster the development of gameplay ability (Gee 2006) and make players reconsider their strategies (Juul 2013). Beyond gaming literature, modern psychological and affective theories provide lenses to examine player behaviors. Learned Helplessness Theory (Abramson & Seligman, n.d.) has been juxtaposed with communication modes associated with failure (Juul, 2008). Implicit Theories, which segment thinking patterns into growth and fixed mindsets, offer insights into players' cognitive responses to failure (Dweck et al., 1995). Affect theories, as proposed by Tomkins (1963), elucidate how failures induce negative sentiments and simultaneously facilitate their alleviation (Anable, 2018). Thematic analysis highlighted that failures furnish learning opportunities, emotional experiences, and facilitate social interactions (Foch & Kirman, 2021).

However, as the relationship between players and games continues to evolve, failure in games has also manifested in various forms and given rise to different interpretations. Jack Halberstam (2011, 3) introduced the concept of the queer art of failure through the study of cartoons: Under certain circumstances, failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may, in fact, offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world. Similarly, Bonnie Ruberg (2017, 210) drew from queer studies to argue that failure allows us to "embrace the paradox, to explore alternate longings and nonnormative desires as they speak to us from within our play". These two scholars encourage the exploration of the cultural and political meanings of failure. From this perspective, failure does not signify a lack of success but represents a rebellion and resistance to dominant values. Exploring the different ways in which players handle failure can help us understand how they survive within the limitations and controls of game systems.

In today's increasingly complex video games, players have begun to use failure as a means of self-expression, creating new ways to play and even breaking various in-game limitations. Some even form teams to strategize how to lose more gracefully or search for hidden Easter egg mechanics. Their intentional failure echoes what Certeau states, "intellectual creativity as persistent as it is subtle, tireless and scattered over the terrain of the dominant order and foreign to the rules laid down" (2011, 38). This

failure represents "everyday forms of resistance" that "do not take the form of collective action" (Scott 1989) and is "integrated into social life and is a part of normality; not as dramatic or strange as public confrontation" (Vinthagen & Johansson 2013). Users resist in a non-confrontational manner because they believe direct conflict with the game company would not lead to any meaningful change, while quitting the game would render the money, time, and emotion they have invested in the game sunk costs.

While scholarship has illuminated failure's dual nature in games—as a catalyst for skill development (Juul 2013; Gee 2006) and a site of subversive potential (Halberstam 2011; Ruberg 2017)—less examined is how players practically enact such subversion through intentional acts of failure. Ethnographic observations of *Genshin Impact* communities reveal that intentional death — from Hooi's boar-chasing theatrics to Bai's mass cliff-jumping spectacles—function as tactical refusals of the game's meritocratic regime. Grounded in de Certeau's (2011) framework of 'tactics,' this study traces how players repurpose failure to transform forced game mechanisms into *playful dissent*.

METHODOLOGY

The findings of this paper are based on my year-long ethnographic research conducted within the game *Genshin Impact* and on platforms such as Bilibili and MiYou Club.

I first observed my own and other players' daily behaviors, failure scenarios, and their consequences in *Genshin Impact* through participatory observation. Every day, I logged into the game for one hour—the average daily time most *Genshin Impact* players spend. I spent the first half-hour completing my tasks and the second half-hour seeking opportunities to play online with other players. In addition, I watched and read fan-made videos and strategy posts created by players on Bilibili and Miyou Club, interacting with other players in the comment sections and through bullet comments (*danmaku*) regarding the content of the videos and posts.

After collecting observational data on players' daily behaviors and failures, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 players. The players were 22–25 years of age, all having acquired higher education, with 13 males and 7 females. Predetermined questions included their daily behaviors and time spent in *Genshin Impact*, their spending on the game, reasons for failure, feelings after failure, and the frequency with which they watch *Genshin Impact* comedy videos on Bilibili and Miyou Club. As four interviewees were video creators, I also inquired about their motivations, sources of inspiration, and the benefits they gained from creating videos. All interviews were conducted via the online meeting platform Tencent Meeting.

I used thematic analysis to interpret my data. First, I reviewed the data and generated initial codes such as "choosing to fail" and "rejecting efficiency." These were then grouped into broad themes such as "resisting meritocratic expectations," "redefining success," and "comedic effects," showing how players intentionally avoided optimal strategies in favor of exploration and enjoyment.

For ethical considerations, I obtained informed consent from all participants during observation, recording, and interviews. To protect participants' privacy, all names in this article are pseudonyms.

FINDINGS

In this section, I will present three patterned tactics of intentional failure in Genshin Impact: the intentional character deaths to unlock obscured narrative, engineered quest failures to build players' rules, and the strategic bug hacking to circumvent algorithmic constraints. These are not random acts but ceremonial counter-conducts, ludic, deliberate, and systematically deployed. Below, thick descriptions dissect how players engineer deaths, abort quests, and exploit bugs, interwoven with their voiced motivations. Each practice weaponizes game mechanics against the very systems designed to penalize failure, transforming punishment into sites of agency.

Intentional Character Deaths: Unlock Obscured Narrative

In a video on Bilibili, characters Barbara, Albedo, and Klee stand atop an elevated slope while observing fireworks. Abruptly, Jean pushes Albedo and Klee off the precipice from behind, resulting in immediate character deaths. Their terminal dialogue—*"I feel really tired"*—audibly accompanies their demise. Deliberate character deaths also manifest during combat sequences. For instance, content creator Larry deploys Zhongli—a character emblematic of protection and stability—against Tartaglia, a recklessly combative antagonist. After activating Zhongli's Elemental Skill (E-key) to summon a stone pillar, Larry positions Zhongli atop the structure and maintains stasis until Tartaglia eliminates him. Danmu (bullet-screen comments) reflect viewer perplexity, interspersed with recurrent "hahahaha" responses to the absurd spectacle. (Lunuomiasimaji 2024)

As one interviewee, Fuyanguai, articulates:

> *"I aim to observe specific characters' death animations and voice lines."*

Her motivation of intentional failure is not anomalous. A Bilibili search for Genshin death yields thousands of videos documenting character expiration. Among these, creator YeYouyou's video *If This Were the Finale: Character Death Moments*, viewed 400,000 times, compiles death sequences within a four-minute montage. To capture obscured voice lines—dialogues exclusively triggered upon death—Yeyouyou recurrently subjects characters to assaults by the Cryo Hypostasis boss within a domain. (2024) Characters remain inert for over 20 iterations until mortality reveals hidden audio.

This practice reveals narrative dimensions that are often overlooked by most players. As commenter *guwosheng* observes:

> *"I previously overlooked Kaveh's death line: 'Do not… trample my ideals.' Its pathos profoundly resonates."*

Players further cultivate affective bonds through death sequences. One user *Yizhikeaidishansi,* interprets Furina's demise:

> *"As Focalors, she may have nightly questioned her capacity to endure 18,000 days of duty. Yet even in expiration, her final cognition orbits Fontaine."*

Another participant *Xianyuzhanguo* reflects:

"I initially utilized Razor tactlessly, evading threats until his mortal whimper—'I want to go home'—prompted conscientious protection."

Upon total party expiration, randomized system prompts appear. User *Uluqiumingshan* methodically documented 57 distinct death interface notifications by orchestrating deaths across disparate locales in Teyvat[8] (2025). This taxonomic endeavor catalyzes player speculation regarding designers' intentionality, as *Xujunzhaoxia* notes:

"Developers must revel in observing their embedded nuances finally unearthed."

Character fatalities also serve as a means to fulfill achievement criteria. Interviewee Jiang clarifies:

"Certain achievements necessitate deaths (e.g., boar-induced mortality) or intentional quest failure (e.g., neglecting timed objectives). Fulfilling these yields in-game rewards."

Content such as Liuyingzz's Bilibili tutorial, *Hidden Achievement Guide: Post-Game Inaccessibility*, which has been viewed 3.954 million times, exemplifies unconventional methodology. (2020) The Nearly Defeated by a Boar at Age Ten achievement requires a plunge-falling to death from terrain at first. Then the character needs to be revived via food-based HP restoration to sustain critical vitality. Finally, the player needs to seek a lethal boar collision. This process inspires iterative exploration of other potential ludic Easter eggs, effectively positioning players as co-creators of game rules.

Strategic Bug Hacking: Circumvent Algorithmic Constraints

Genshin Impact's achievement system frequently mandates repetitive failures (e.g., 100 intentional deaths), yet players strategically circumvent manual labor through bug exploitation or automated scripting. When queried about discovering hidden achievements, interviewee Yu, who is also a video creator focusing on showing players how to get the hidden achievements, disclosed:

"I datamined them. Just follow 'Cocogoat. Work Achievements on WeChat—it's comprehensive."

Acknowledging data mining's illegality in China, Yu noted transnational legal arbitrage:

Generally, overseas data mining and domestic mining will be prosecuted. But as long as you post achievement guides after version updates, it's fine."

Bilibili content creators significantly propagate these practices through instructional media. Content creator ZivZiwei's tutorial, *Complete Achievement Gap-Filling Tool*, attracted 567,000 viewers by demonstrating systematic achievement tracking via the *cocogoat.work* platform. (2024)

Simultaneously, creator BetterGI's video, *Fully Automated Resource Gathering*, reached 134,000 viewers, showcasing robotic scripting techniques for automated material collection and combat operations. (2025)

Within these communities, user fumoyunhua's public commentary exemplifies that narrative dissent through demands for automated cutscene-skipping functionality. (2025)

Interviewee Erqi's verbatim testimony contextualizes automation's necessity:

>*"I deploy scripts to expedite labor like 100 failures or dailies. Genshin's homogenized tasks are unbearably tedious manually. I automated all my games—I play for curated experiences, not employment. When joy fades but quitting feels worse, scripts replace grind."*

Among 20 interviewees, Tian's unedited account reveals ludic guilt:

>*"I log 30+ minutes daily for artifact grinding. New content demands more. I adore Rosaria, but exhaustion mounts. Neglecting her gear feels like betrayal."*

Her abrupt 11:30 PM departure — "Unfinished dailies!" — underscores this compulsion.

The artifact system's stochastic rewards mechanize labor, as Lee critiqued:

>*"I never know when satisfaction comes. Completion—max levels, optimal stats—hooks you, even without strength pursuit."*

Despite Genshin's promise of playful freedom, meritocratic imperatives ("completionism," "ultimate states") inevitably colonize player agency. Thus, when players enact intentional failure, such as suicide runs or quest sabotage, within repetitive gameplay cycles, they deploy comedic reframing to metabolize systemic distress. This transforms punitive mechanics into sites of agency, where laughter dismantles the tyranny of the grind."

Player Suanrushusheng's video *When All Characters Die Mid-Ultimate Moves?* which garnered 297,000 views, weaponizes failure through slapstick theatrics by depicting characters perishing during special attacks in grotesquely contorted postures. (2023)

This visual absurdity prompted viewer Youyiyiming to offer sardonic commentary:

>*"Half these deaths look like pulled muscles!"*

This resonates with Bai's creative manifesto against grinding's alienation:

>*"Facing endless artifact runs and exhausting quests, have we forgotten the journey's true meaning? Recreating Teyvat's daily warmth with friends—that's genuine play."*

Comedic Group Performance: Build Players' Rules

Intentional failure videos composed by players present an alternative narrative of what failure can be. For instance, Fiona, a video creator on Bilibili, produced two episodes of the *Skill Showcase*, which featured a common theme—all the characters in *Genshin Impact* jumped from high places while activating their skills mid-fall. While players might expect these videos to showcase the characters performing stunning skill animations, they took a different turn—most characters died before their skill

animations finished. A closer look at the videos revealed the author's deliberate design—keeping all characters with one-tenth blood to ensure they died after falling from high places. (Eeehuadiaoling 2022)

Another *Genshin Impact* video composer, Bai's *Not Like Acting* series, starts with a similar plot. Characters collectively jump off a cliff and fall to death from a height, a common way to die in *Genshin Impact*. This outcome presents a major difficulty to newcomers unfamiliar with the game's terrain while exploring the map.

Bai had a QQ group with 1,500 members specifically to recruit players willing to join him in recording humorous videos. He handled all the brainstorming, planning, and editing himself. However, the recording process was far from smooth:

> *I have a lot of actors, and basically, every episode of video recording doesn't use the same group. Every simple shot has to be retaken repeatedly. For example, the scene where I jumped off a cliff was recorded ten times and took over 20 minutes to get right because the three characters cannot synchronize and fall together off the cliff.*

Despite the frustration, the Bai's QQ group players continue to sign up enthusiastically for Bai's video recording sessions. Nevertheless, the labor does not disappear; instead, it shifts to making the video, with the essence of "play" reintegrated into the game through the production process.

Players contribute ideas, participate in video recordings, and deliberately fail in QQ groups, which creates a carnival within the game space. In this context, they do not need to worry about whether their actions have meaning, primarily whether they affect their ranking, improve their character's strength, or complete daily tasks tied to meritocratic values. Another video creator, Lunuomiasimaji once posted a video titled *Failure Compilation* (2023) on Bilibili, which did not show his failures from unsuccessful challenges, but rather how his characters stayed alive in the *Active Failure* (Lunuomiasimaji 2024) recording.

What matters to these players is how they creatively and humorously showcase their desired "deaths" in the video. Xin, one of my interviewees, recorded in MiYou Club how he set more challenging tasks for himself in the game by using a low-level character to defeat high-level monsters. Regardless of success or failure, he always took a photo with the beast he had challenged.

Unlike Bai's self-directed creations, Xin's videos originate from participatory forums where users propose challenges. For example, one community member tasked him with defeated by the Electro Hypostasis. In response, Xin articulated his philosophy during our interview:

> *"I immerse myself to experience this world—to uncover every character's story and feel this fantasy realm's unfolding wonders—not to be shackled by daily quests."*

As a persistent yet unconventional player (with over 1,200 consecutive logins), Xin actively rejects routine tasks, attracting a community of like-minded players. This ethos resonates with a challenge sponsor's confession to Xin:

"Gaming's essence is witnessing the world's stories with heart... yet I've grown numb to mechanical play."

DISCUSSION

Resist Skills: The Humor of Active Failure

Turning this difficulty into a deliberate act and spreading it on social media and game forums is a parody of unintentional failure. Linda Hutcheon (2000, 110) explained,

> Parody is an integrated structural modeling process of revising, replaying, inverting, and trans-contextualizing previous works of art. Parody also implies another kind of "worldly" connection. It is an appropriation of the past, of history, its questioning of the contemporary by "referencing" it to a different set of codes, is a way of establishing continuity that may, in itself, have ideological implications.

In Genshin Impact, this manifests as players appropriating the game's meritocratic codes to establish subversive continuity, reframing failure not as personal deficiency but as systemic satire.

Through the parody of accidental failure, deliberate failure subverts feelings of shame, anger, and depression with humorous body performance. In the meritocratic world of *Genshin Impact*, failure is not the end but the starting point for a fresh beginning. The game offers tips on improving performance while encouraging players to face failure with an optimistic attitude, recognizing it as a necessary step on the road to success. According to Anable (2018, 104), "It requires that many of us fail, and it also relies on our putting an optimistic spin on failure or wallowing in self-loathing and shame so as not to experience failure as a compelling reason to revolt". Deliberate failure videos reject this coercive optimism, exposing the absurdity of 'productive failure' narratives by celebrating unproductive, humorous futility.

These active failure videos feature rich and hilarious physical performances. As Bergson (2014, 16) stated, "The attitudes, gestures, and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine". In the videos of Fiona and Bai, the characters move like wind-up robots queuing up for failure, which makes failure a predictable event intersecting with the limitations of the game mechanics that can be encountered and controlled.

Simultaneously, the humor of active failure also comes from the arrangement of the video program, similar to early American cinema. Tom Gunning (1994, 96-97) argued that the humor of early cinema "works through interruption rather than development… Considered as a structure of explosive interruption, the early gag film shows a display of an action whose temporal development is prompt rather than setting up an extensive working out of plot and characterization". The sudden interruption reinforces the abruptness of the action's conclusion, causing the audience to laugh at the absurdity.

Comedy characterized by interruption brings humor to the audience and represents an "absolute disruption of the order of normality" (Gunning, 1994). Per Jenkins and Karnicks (1994, 156), these are the "disruptions and transgressions arising from a desire to break free from constraint". A sudden interruption during combat or being

knocked while standing still ironically critiques the culture of meritocracy that praises and rewards. Indeed, people skilled in combat techniques strive to perform dazzling, continuous, high-damage attacks; therefore, an interruption indicates a mistake in their execution. However, the humorous physical performances in active failure videos utilize numerous "interruptions" to dismantle the elitist image long cherished in games, conveying to other players that mistakes do not hold significant meaning.

Resist Labor: Carnivalesque in Games

Meritocratic failure signifies inefficient behavior, representing wasted time investment in game progression. Time operates as a skill metric epitomized by dungeon[9] countdowns, where delays or failure denote inferior ability. When grinding demands excessive repetition, such as artifact farming with minuscule optimal stat probabilities, failure imposes punitive labor, compounding effort without guaranteed returns. This temporal economy mirrors real-world productivity regimes, where time becomes a currency and inefficiency equates to personal failure. Players internalize this logic, perceiving extended combat durations or repeated domain attempts as individual shortcomings rather than systemic design flaws.

Players subvert this temporal economy through carnivalesque acts aligning with Huizinga's observation of sacred play spaces generating rapture and enthusiasm Huizinga (1980, 132) argued, "The play-mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action, mirth, and relaxation follow". Empirical manifestations include synchronized cliff-jumping, transforming fall damage punishment into fun, and characters being automated into wind-up robot dances that satirize grinding dehumanization. Such collective performances create temporary zones of exception where standardized efficiency metrics dissolve into chaotic celebration. The mechanical precision of scripted movements in BetterGIs videos, for example, parodies assembly-line labor, while the deliberate clumsiness of players' death compilations exaggerates bodily failure into art.

The relaxed, festive, and enthusiastic play atmosphere aligns closely with the spirit of the medieval carnival. Through his study of François Rabelais' stories, Bakhtin (1984, 303-368) summarized the characteristics of carnival: "The free expression of the body, vulgar behavior, and humor fill the space, and language becomes informal and multi-meaning". In this space, "social norms and hierarchies are temporarily broken, and ordinary people can challenge authority, engaging in anti-traditional and anti-normative behaviors". Per Sicart (2017, 4), "Carnivalesque play takes control of the world and gives it to the players to explore, challenge, or subvert. It exists; it is part of the world; it turns upside down. Through carnivalesque play, we express ourselves, taking over the world to laugh at it and make sense of it too".

Such performances constitute what Sicart terms carnivalesque play, seizing control to turn the game world upside down. Examples include Bais challenge videos where players request defeat by trivial enemies, inverting power dynamics. The resulting laughter when a stray rock annihilates a team fulfills Bakhtin's vision of regenerative laughter that degrades. This laughter operates as a social leveler, dismantling achievement-based hierarchies by celebrating incompetence as a communal spectacle. When Xin publicly fails an Electro Hypostasis challenge requested by forum users, the shared revelry in his character's exaggerated death animations transforms private shame into a public, carnivalesque spectacle.

Thus, failure is no longer the opposite of success but the antonym of "failure that wasn't achieved," which helps to realize that "we need play precisely because we need occasional freedom and distance from our conventional understanding of the moral fabric of society" (Sicart 2017).

CONCLUSION

This article examines how intentional failure in Genshin Impact serves as a subversive and comedic response to the game's meritocratic culture. The concept of meritocracy is evident in the game's mechanics. These features create a system in which success is framed as a direct outcome of effort and skill, encouraging players to dedicate significant time and energy to achieve progress. However, this design overlooks inequalities among players, such as differing access to resources, prior gaming experience, and available leisure time. As a result, the game fosters a hierarchical structure that marginalizes less dedicated or skilled players while transforming play into an obligation rather than a source of enjoyment. Meritocracy in *Genshin Impact* also mirrors real-world societal systems that prioritize efficiency, competition, and performance. The emphasis on constant improvement blurs the boundary between work and leisure, forcing players into repetitive cycles of labor to maintain their in-game status.

Through ethnographic research, this article reveals how players resist these pressures through deliberate acts of failure. Players critique the game's rigid rules and meritocratic ideals by purposefully losing battles, allowing characters to die, and abandoning optimal strategies. These acts of intentional failure parody the game's algorithmic control, transforming feelings of frustration or shame into collective joy and humor.

Players' comedic performances of failure also disrupt the game's implicit demands for productivity and efficiency. By creating a "carnival" atmosphere, as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin, they invert hierarchies and norms, celebrating unpredictability, spontaneity, and humor. This carnivalesque resistance not only reclaims the game as a space for pure play but also fosters a sense of community among players who share and celebrate their intentional failures. They reshape the game's narrative through collaboration and shared creativity, shifting the focus from individual achievement to collective enjoyment and expression.

While this research focuses on Chinese players, future studies could expand to include global communities, examining how players in different cultural and national contexts resist similar systems. Such cross-cultural research could uncover diverse strategies of resistance, offering deeper insights into the global dynamics of gaming and power. This study demonstrates the transformative potential of play as a site for subversion, creativity, and cultural critique, reclaiming games as spaces for joy and freedom rather than control and productivity.

ENDNOTES
1 *Genshin Impact*, developed by Chinese game studio miHoYo, is a highly popular open-world action role-playing game that blends anime-inspired visuals, immersive storytelling, attracting a global audience and generating billions in revenue since its release.

2 Health points (HPs) refer to a numerical value that represents the amount of health or vitality a character has in a game, with lower HPs indicating greater damage or risk of defeat.

3 The tri-level system in games refers to the process of increasing a character's abilities, skills, or power through experience points (XPs) gained from completing tasks, battles, or objectives that often unlock new features or content as a result.

4 Inazuma is a region in *Genshin Impact* inspired by Japan. It features stormy landscapes and strong central authority, where the ruler enforces strict control over the use of elemental powers in order to maintain order and power.

5 Grinding in gaming refers to the repetitive and often tedious process of performing certain tasks or activities to accumulate rewards, experience, or resources, typically for character progression or in-game achievements.

6 In *Genshin Impact*, A, E, and Q are keyboard controls: A moves the character left, E activates a character's special ability, and Q triggers a powerful ultimate attack. These controls are part of the basic gameplay mechanics for navigating the game and engaging in combat.

7 The elemental reaction system in *Genshin Impact* is a mechanic where combining different elemental abilities (e.g., Fire, Water, and Electro) triggers various effects of damage (e.g., burning, freezing, or shocking) to enhance combat strategies.

8 Teyvat is the fictional world in *Genshin Impact* comprised of seven nations, each inspired by different cultures and elements, where players explore, battle, and uncover the secrets of its vast lands.

9 A dungeon in games is typically a contained, often challenging environment where players must navigate obstacles, defeat enemies, and solve puzzles to achieve specific goals or collect rewards.

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