

# Dataminers, Beta Testers, and Fan Translators: Leaks as Cultural Capital in Gacha Game Communities

**Hyerin Shin**

Waseda University

1-24-1 Toyama, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Japan  
Graduate School of Letters, Arts and Sciences

+81-08-5691-3750

hyerin.shin@toki.waseda.jp

## Keywords

fan labor, leaks, datamining, cheating, cultural capital, fandom hierarchy

## INTRODUCTION

In November 2023, COGNOSPHERE, the global publishing arm of the Chinese developer miHoYo, issued a Digital Millennium Copyright Act subpoena to unmask the personal information of accounts dedicated to *Genshin Impact* (miHoYo 2020) “leaks”—unauthorized disclosure and dissemination of the game’s upcoming content (Chalk 2024). This was but one of many attempts in the company’s ongoing efforts to combat leaks—including but not limited to non-disclosure agreements for beta testers, bans, and legal actions against domestic and international leakers. However, despite the looming legal threats, leaks remain a core part of community discussion not only among *Genshin Impact* fans but also for players of gacha games as a whole. When navigating online fandom spaces for gacha games, it is not uncommon to encounter information on new characters, features, and even story cutscenes months before they are officially announced.

This paper is an aca-fan, netnographic investigation of fan communities surrounding leak communities in gacha gaming spaces involving two case studies. The first is an autoethnography of my own role as an administrator and fan translator for GRAY RAVENS, a fan website for the gacha game *Punishing: Gray Raven* (Kuro Games 2019). Here, I analyze and reflect upon the process by which the website’s volunteers translate and publish the information from the game’s beta tests and content exclusively available in the Chinese version of the game for the international fandom. I then examine the community response to the translated information, demonstrating the usefulness of access to the game’s future content in players’ in-game progression and spending habits. The second case study is a survey of *Genshin Impact*’s leak communities, drawing on interviews conducted with anonymous beta testers and dataminers who have agreed to participate in this study, as well as my investigations of relevant online communities, including both closed spaces (such as leakers’ Telegram chats and private Discord channels) and open communities (such as public social media accounts and forums), in English and Chinese.

Based on the observations from the two case studies, I first suggest understanding leaks as a popular, accepted form of “cheating” in gacha games, using the definition of the

Proceedings of GachaCon 2026

© 2026 Author(s). This work is openly licensed via [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

term proposed by Mia Consalvo (2007, 2) as an alternative way to play a game and an activity that can “challenge game companies in understandings of who controls the game space”. However, the role of leaks in the context of the relationship between gacha game players and the gacha monetization model can align with utopian, anti-capitalist perspectives in fan studies, such as the perspective presented in Henry Jenkins’ seminal work *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (1992), that interpret participatory culture as a force of resistance against the proprietors of commercial cultural production. Here, I posit that leaks can be understood as a form of paratext that provides “another way to shape and form player understandings of what a game is or could be” (Consalvo 2017) in regards to how gacha games want players to interact with its monetization system—my investigations suggest that leaks are widely disseminated within gacha gaming communities as an acceptable means to combat the predatory nature of the games’ monetization system as they help undermine the fear of missing out. On the other hand, leaks themselves function as a form of cultural capital that establishes and reinforces hierarchies within fandom. By leveraging fans’ demand for leaks, leaks take on the role of “fan leaders” (Chin 2018), and in some cases, demonstrate the capitalistic order that leaks supposedly help combat when access to leaked information is monetized.

By bringing to light an underexplored (and legally precarious) fan practice in gacha gaming spaces, this paper provides a rare inside look at the social and cultural dynamics of leaker networks and invites readers to further consider how fan labor interacts with exploitative monetization systems inherent in gacha games.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Chalk, Andy. “Court Orders X to Reveal the Identities of Genshin Impact Leakers.” PC Gamer, 23 September 2024. <https://www.pcgamer.com/games/rpg/court-orders-x-to-reveal-the-identities-of-genshin-impact-leakers/>
- Chin, B. “It’s About Who You Know.” In *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, edited by P. Booth, 243-255. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Consalvo, M. 2007. *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*. Cambridge, MA, USA; London, England: The MIT Press.
- Consalvo, M. 2017. When Paratexts Become Texts: De-centering the Game-as-text. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34, 2, 177–183.
- Jenkins, H. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Kuro Games. 2019. *Punishing: Gray Raven*. Online Game. Kuro Games.
- miHoYo. 2020. *Genshin Impact*. Online Game. COGNOSPHERE.

## **BIO**

Hyerin Shin is a PhD candidate at Waseda University, Graduate School of Letters, Arts and Sciences. Her research interests include East Asian translations, adaptations, and appropriations of Shakespeare’s plays, game studies, fandom studies, and utopian studies. She currently serves as a senior editor at Press Start, a peer-reviewed student journal for game studies.