From Dragon-Slaying to Dragon-Taming: How *Genshin Impact* Reinvents Western Conceptions of Dragons

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INTRODUCTION

Genshin Impact, a Role-Playing Game (RPG) released by MiHoYo in 2020, invites players to embark on a heroic journey filled with magic and supernatural beings and creatures such as dragons. The figure of the dragon is found in many cultures all over the world. Its mythological origins make it a consistent motif in fantasy fiction, where dragons serve narrative purposes, acting as obstacles to the progression of heroes and as powerful foes to slay for rewards (Young 2010, Tolkien 2014, Young 2016, Fitzpatrick 2019, Houghton 2024).

Medieval literary traditions feature a similar pattern, as both epic poetry and chivalric romance narrate heroic quests of dragon slaying. The antagonism between heroes and dragons is often highlighted by the latter's evil characterization. Most prominent examples of such dragons are Fafnir, from the *Poetic Edda*, and the dragon in *Beowulf*.[1] Indeed, the former is portrayed as particularly evil and wicked, while the latter is described as a dangerous and fearsome creature decimating populations (Tolkien 2007, Honegger 2019). These images were reinterpreted across time—most specifically for cultural, racial, and political purposes during the Renaissance and the Romantic era onwards—thus explaining dragons' omnipresence in post-medieval fantasy fiction (Torres-Horgueta 2025).

Genshin Impact weaves these Western conceptions into its narrative, specifically in Mondstadt, influenced by German culture and mythology. Yet, the narrative moves on from these conceptions to offer a glimpse at Chinese ones during Liyue's questline, directly following Mondstadt's in the first release of the game.

In Chinese mythology, dragons are supernatural beings capable of controlling weather and water. Also named Loong (Zeng 2008, Gao 2025), they are objects of worship, shielding humans from floods and droughts, which is historically consistent with the agricultural environment of Ancient China. As such, they are helpers of heroes as well as symbols of prosperity and vitality, omnipresent in Chinese classical literature (i.e. as metaphors of Chinese poets' ambitions and ideologies), material

culture (e.g. in ceramics and paintings) and cultural practices (e.g. dances and dragon-boat races in rituals and festivities). This phenomenon notably reaches its height with representations of Chinese emperors as dragons (Yang et al. 2005, Chen and Honegger 2009, Xu and Deng 2024).

The aim of this paper will thus be to uncover the diverse uses of dragons in *Genshin Impact*, while taking into account their multicultural symbolism. To do so, I will proceed with a comparative analysis of the narrative, gameplay and aesthetical elements related to dragons in Mondstadt and Liyue. The narrative trajectory of dragons derived from this analysis will help identify the forms of hybridization and globalization at play, thus questioning the wider cultural and social implications behind these processes.

BIO
Emilienne Parchliniak is a Ph.D student at Sorbonne Paris Nord University, France, under the supervision of Prof. Marjolaine Boutet (Pléiade, Sorbonne Paris Nord University) and Prof. Vincent Berry (Experice, Sorbonne Paris Nord University). After completing her Master's dissertation, which focused on a narrative analysis of medievalism in *Genshin Impact*, she is now expanding her research on the reception of medievalism by Western players of the game. Her doctoral thesis is entitled: "Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Medievalism: the influence of the Chinese videogame *Genshin Impact* on Western players."

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ENDNOTES
[1] Both the Poetic Edda and Beowulf are epic poems, that is long poems describing and glorifying the deeds of heroes in extended prose. The former is a collection of anonymous Nordic mythological and heroic poems composed between the 9th and 12th centuries, while the latter is an Old English poem composed between the 8th and 11th centuries.

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