

**THE COMPARISON OF SIGNIFIERS AND SIGNIFIEDS
OF ISLAMIC THEMES IN *SUMERU* FROM *GENSHIN IMPACT***

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for Gaining
the Bachelor Degree in English Department



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2025

A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

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Atas perhatiannya, kami mengucapkan terima kasih.

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MOTTO

"Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself. And that no hearts has ever sufered when it goes in search of its dreams, because every second of the search is a second's encounter with God and with eternity."

(The Alchemist)



DEDICATION

I dedicate this graduation thesis to:

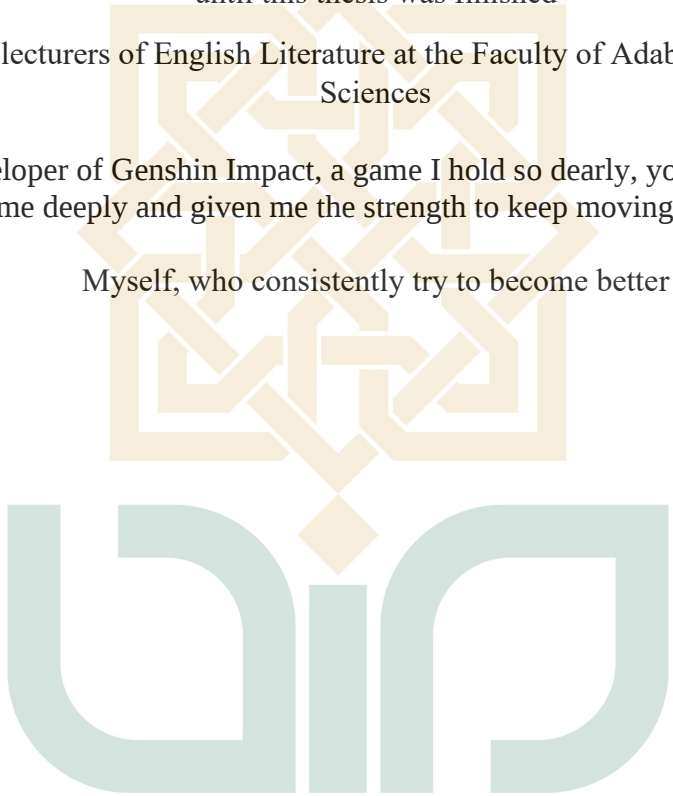
My Family, who always support me with their prayers, empower me, believe in me, and provide for all my needs

My advisor, Mr. Ubaidillah, who supported and directed me every step of the way until this thesis was finished

All the lecturers of English Literature at the Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences

The developer of Genshin Impact, a game I hold so dearly, your creation has inspired me deeply and given me the strength to keep moving forward in life

Myself, who consistently try to become better



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THE COMPARISON OF SIGNIFIERS AND SIGNIFIEDS OF ISLAMIC THEMES IN *SUMERU* FROM *GENSHIN IMPACT*

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ABSTRACT

In Genshin Impact versions 3.0 to 3.8, specifically in Sumeru region, several objects take references from Al-Quran and Islamic figures. Using Islamic themes is common in games, and in-depth research to build a world in a game must be done seriously, especially since Genshin Impact is a famous game that has millions of players. This research aims to see the comparison of the signifiers and signifieds use Islamic themes in Sumeru. Researchers will use the semiotic theory of Ferdinand De Saussure and will compare the signifiers and signifieds of terms in the game and their references. This is a descriptive qualitative research with referential identity method as data analysis technique and observation as the data collection technique. In the game, researcher found ten Islamic-themed terms: Gate of Zulqarnain, Wadi Al Majuj, Majuj, Harut & Marut, Thamud Oasis, Thamudians, Jinni, Alhaitham, Tighnari, and Yunus (Bigfish). From the analysis, there was not a single piece of data where the signifier and signified had perfect similarity compared to the reference. Despite the findings of the comparison, there is no evidence indicating any blasphemy or deliberate offence against Islamic beliefs.

Keywords: *Semiotic, Game, Genshin Impact, Islamic themes*

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ABSTRAK

Pada Genshin Impact versi 3.0 hingga 3.8, khususnya di wilayah Sumeru, terdapat beberapa objek yang mengambil referensi dari Al-Quran dan tokoh-tokoh Islam. Penggunaan tema Islam merupakan hal yang lumrah dalam game, dan riset mendalam untuk membangun dunia dalam game harus dilakukan secara serius, apalagi Genshin Impact merupakan game terkenal yang memiliki jutaan pemain. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat perbandingan penanda dan petanda yang menggunakan tema Islam di Sumeru. Peneliti akan menggunakan teori semiotika Ferdinand de Saussure dan akan melakukan perbandingan untuk menemukan tingkat keakuratan dari penanda dan petanda dalam game dan referensinya. Ini adalah penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan metode padan referensial sebagai teknik analisis dan observasi sebagai teknik pengumpulan data. Dalam game tersebut, peneliti menemukan sepuluh istilah bertema Islam: Gate of Zulqarnain, Wadi Al Majuj, Majuj, Harut & Marut, Thamud Oasis, Thamudians, Jinni, Alhaitham, Tighnari, dan Yunus (Bigfish). Dari analisis yang sudah dilakukan, tidak ditemukan satu pun data yang penanda dan petandanya memiliki kesamaan yang sempurna dengan referensinya. Terlepas dari temuan perbandingan tersebut, tidak ditemukan bukti yang menunjukkan adanya penistaan atau pelanggaran yang disengaja terhadap keyakinan Islam sendiri.

Kata kunci: *Semiotika, Gim, Genshin Impact, Tema Islami*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

From update version 3.0 to 3.8, particularly during *Sumeru* chapter, *Genshin Impact* incorporates various objects inspired by Islamic themes. In version 3.6, the game utilises Islamic themes to name several objects. *Sumeru* is one of the seven countries within *Genshin Impact*. This area presents nature conditions of tropical rainforest and desert environments, so *Sumeru* takes references from countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. All references from Middle East, particularly Islamic themes, including names of items, characters, creatures, animals, and areas, will be the primary focus in this paper.

In *Sumeru*, a location known as the Gate of Zulqarnain exists. However, the name and the reference associated with this location do not have similarity that reflect the narrative presented in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah Al-Kahf verses 94-98. In these verses, Zulqarnain is depicted as an honourable figure who assists a group of people in constructing a barrier to protect them from the threats posed by Gog and Magog. Those verses do not cite a "gate" but a massive wall or barrier made from iron and copper (Anggraini & Rosyidi, 2023, p. 13). That barrier was built between two mountains to seal off the threat (Anggraini & Rosyidi, 2023, p. 13). Based on the indication of such dissimilarity, the researcher considers it necessary to conduct a more in-depth investigation to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Like in novels or films, games, especially RPG (Role Playing Games) games, always have a theme. RPG is a type of digital and interpretative game (Oliveira, 2018, p. 112). The game has a storyline that has been set in a scenario, and the players will be the main characters in the game's story (Sabrini, 2022, p. 151). A game's theme is the core concept or idea defining the narrative, setting, and aesthetic. Themes can vary from broad genres like fantasy, science fiction, horror, survival, heroism, or exploration. The theme influences everything from the visual design to the gaming mechanics, establishing the game's tone and feel. In addition, the game provides a scenario made up of a collection of auditory and visual interests that allow players to enjoy the gameplay that the game has provided (Trisnadoli et al., 2016, p. 1250). By defining the theme, the player provided with an immersive context by game developers will emotionally and intellectually connect with the game.

Several RPG games use Islamic themes, such as *Assassin's Creed* and *Genshin Impact*. Between *Genshin Impact* and *Assassin's Creed*, *Genshin Impact* is the most well-known game in recent years. Frequently, *Genshin Impact* has become an award winner every year since it was released, such as Best Mobile Game 2021 in The Game Award program, got nominated as Best Ongoing Game in 2022, managed to win the 2023 PlayStation Partner Award in the nomination for The Grand Award, etc (Genshin Impact, 2023). The number of awards means that *Genshin Impact* has great content and is loved by people worldwide. Unlike *Assassin's Creed*, which can only be played on PlayStation and PC, *Genshin Impact* can also be played on mobile phones. Because of that, *Genshin Impact* gets more

players. As of March 2024, *Genshin Impact* has over 62 million players. As it becomes more popular, *Genshin Impact* has to be more careful in world-building inside the game, and with its great reputation, this game is vulnerable to criticism.

Religious themes in games frequently explore the ideas, rituals, values, and cultural features connected with a specific religious tradition. Besides, games can also delve into religious history, recreating historical events, places of worship, and significant religious figures. In the virtual world, like in the game, we can discover real-world content relating to philosophical and religious notions. Engaging with symbols in virtual environments might also imply engaging with their underlying meanings (Kim, 2012, p. 6). If these meanings correspond to real-world religious concepts, the virtual experience may relate not just to the virtual environment, but also to real-world information, beliefs, and potentially even elements of reality (Kim, 2012, p. 6). In other words, the experience has the potential to bridge the digital and physical worlds, making it more relevant to gamers.

The Gate of Zulkarnain and Wadi Al-Majuj are two very eye-catching area names on the in-game map for Muslim players. Shortly after being released, *Genshin Impact* caused a stir among Muslim players worldwide. A lot of statements such as "Genshin presents elements of the apocalypse", "Games that can make you repentance", "Religion in a game?", "It's scary", popping up on social media. In addition, there are also many posts that use dramatic sound to convey the content of Gate of Zulqarnain and Wadi Al-Majuj. To name those areas, *Genshin Impact* uses Islamic theme from Al-Qur'an surah Al-Kahf, and these two names are closely related to the doomsday event that Muslims believe in. Because there was an uproar,

and *Genshin Impact* is a popular game, the comparison of the Islamic themes and their references is important. Using Islamic themes in the game could pose risks if it is not approached with a sense of responsibility. A deviation in the meaning of Islamic terms within the game may lead to misinterpretation and potentially be perceived as a form of blasphemy. Therefore, researcher want to see the Islamic theme that *Genshin Impact* uses to build *Sumeru* Is it the same as the reference or different?

This research will examine objects with Islamic terms in *Sumeru* region using semiotic theory from Ferdinand de Saussure. Semiotic method is a discipline that examines all aspects of signs and symbols, aiming to interpret the meanings conveyed within them (Fitria, 2021, p. 241). The researcher uses Saussure's theory because this theory provides a framework to analyse the meaning. This research data is from the terms that use Islamic themes either from Al-Quran or Islam figures. The signifiers and signifieds of the names in the game and their references will be compared. This research aims to find out how compatible objects that use Islamic themes are with their references.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the research background described above, the researcher formulated a question that will be answered in this research. The questions are:

1. How do the signifiers and signifieds of Islamic terms used in *Sumeru* reflect or diverge from their original religious references?

1.3 Objective of Study

This research will examine objects with Islamic terms in *Sumeru* region using semiotic theory from Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). The data of this research is from the names that use Islamic references, either from Al-Quran or Islamic figures. The signifiers and signifieds of the objects in the game and their references will be compared. This researcher aims to find out how similar or identical objects that use Islamic themes are with their references.

1.4 Significance of This Study

This research will be a scientific study of popular opinions about the object that uses Islamic themes in the game. Several objects related to the Day of Judgment in Islamic beliefs used to cause a stir among Muslim players who play the game. Therefore, this research is expected to become a more scientific discussion for the people who play *Genshin Impact*, especially for the Muslim players, because this research has used various references in its analysis.

1.5 Literature Review

Many studies use semiotic theory. One of the studies that used Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is "A Semiotic Analysis of Digital Educational Games with Religious for Children" (Aygul & Gurbuz, 2021, p. 51). This study discusses the denotation and connotation meanings of signs from four religious educational games for children. The result of this study is that digital educational games with religious themes function for children's religious socialisation, but the signs and contents need to be pedagogically controlled (Aygul & Gurbuz, 2021, p. 51). Another example is the research entitled "Ferdinand De Saussure's Semiotic Study of the Poetry "Paman Doblang" by W.S. Renda" (Agustin, 2023, pp. 1–2). This

research uses Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. This research aims to understand a poem by analysing the signifier and the signified in the poem's text.

Those two studies applied semiotic theories from two experts, Roland Barthes and Ferdinand de Saussure. From the two studies with semiotic theory, the researcher decided to use Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory for this research. The researcher needs to know the signifiers and signifieds of the names with Islamic themes in game and their references. The difference between this research and the previous study that also used Saussure's semiotic theory is in the purpose of its application. In the previous study, the theory was used to gain a deeper understanding of a poetry. In contrast, in this research, the theory is used to observe the comparison of the research objects.

In terms of culture, *Genshin Impact* has been researched by several people. The first research was titled "Preliminary Study into The *Genshin Impact*'s Aesthetics: The Sustainability of Visual Culture Through The Character Design" (Agung & Wiwaha, 2023, p. 113). This study examines one of the characters in *Genshin Impact* named Raiden Shogun and the purpose of this study is to find out how *Genshin Impact* adapts and represents the aesthetic values of Japanese culture in Raiden Shogun (Agung & Wiwaha, 2023, p. 116). Then the second research is entitled "Becoming 'Beautiful Fighting Girls' Re-Imaginations of Women Warriors In Chinese Video Games" (Li, 2023, p. 62). One of the research case studies examined one of the characters from *Genshin Impact* named Shenhe, and the purpose of the research was to see how Shenhe's representation as a reconstruction of post-socialist Xi'er from the socialist classic film *The White-Haired Girl* (Li,

2023, p. 65). The third study is entitled "Impact of Culture on *Genshin Impact* Game Texts Translation" (Liu, 2023, p. 156). Unlike the first and second studies, which only examined the cultural aspects of a character, this third study examined cultural and linguistic aspects. This third study examines translations relevant to Chinese literature, Chinese food, and Chinese toponymy in *Genshin Impact* to clarify the characteristics of the translation, as well as see the advantages and disadvantages of the translation.

These studies focus on the same subject as this research, specifically about *Genshin Impact* and its cultural aspects. Although there have been many studies in terms of culture, no one has discussed Islamic themes in the Middle Eastern-like world built in *Genshin Impact*. Therefore, the researcher decided to utilise that topic for this research.

1.6 Theoretical Approach

Semiotic can be defined as *semeion*, which means *sign* in Greek. Semiotic is a branch of science that deals with signs, starting from sign systems, and the processes that apply to using signs (Ambarini & Umayana, 2012, p. 27). In the evolution of modern semiotic history, two pioneers from Western countries have made significant contributions to the renowned field (Sandera & Totu, 2014, p. 5). They are Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a linguist from Switzerland, and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), an American philosopher. Even though they do not recognize and know each other's studies, both were born with similar desires and thoughts to develop the field of meaning, by explaining and searching for the meaning behind signs and symbols (Sandera & Totu, 2014, p. 5). Saussure's theory

is based on the principle of dichotomy or duality, which states that a sign has two focal components. They are signifier- the sound pattern (sound image) and signified- the concept (the outcome/the interpretation/conception of the signifier) (Sandra & Totu, 2014, p. 5). Signifiers are seen as physical forms, such as concepts in literary works. Meanwhile, the signified is seen as the meaning behind the physical form in the form of values (Ambarini & Umay, 2012, p. 35). In contrast to Saussure, Pierce's theory is based on trichotomy theory. Peirce classified signs into three aspects, they are *representatum* (something that represents), *referent* (something or object that is represented), and *interpretant* (meaning or interpretation in someone's mind) (Hastangka, 2018, pp. 357–358).

Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory will be used for the analysis in this research. There are a total of twenty objects that will be analysed using Saussure's semiotic theory. Those twenty objects consist of ten objects from the game and ten of their references. The objects from the game and their references will be analysed by determining their signifier and signified. Then, to see the similarities or the differences between each object from the game and its reference, the researcher will compare their signifier and signified. For example, the signifier and signified from area named Gate of Zulqarnain will be compared by its reference from the wall made by Zulqarnain in Qs Al-Kahfi (18): 94-98).

The use of Islamic themes in *Genshin Impact* can be viewed as a variable that explore how Islamic elements are integrated into the game. The variable of Islamic themes in *Genshin Impact* can be investigated by Islamic culture, history, characters, and locations. These themes serve as a framework for analysing how the

game interacts with Islamic narratives and aesthetics, and how the elements are represented in the game's world.

After finding every object within *Sumeru* that uses Islamic themes and their references, Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory will be used to analyse these elements. Saussure's theory will define the signifier and signified from every object. Then, by using this theory, the similarities or differences of each object and its Islamic theme reference can be evaluated through a comparative analysis of the signifier and signified. By comparing the signifieds and signifiers, this research will reveal how well *Genshin Impact* use Islamic themes in its own content.

This research hypothesises that the Islamic themes in *Genshin Impact* are used for aesthetic reasons, especially since *Sumeru* looks like Middle Eastern. The developers might include things like character, creature, place, and item design to create a visually appealing world that connects with players' view of Eastern cultures, one of which is Islamic culture. However, *Genshin Impact* seems to be careful of using these Islamic themes. They tried to avoid any misunderstandings or issues.

1.7 Methods of Research

1.7.1 Type of Research

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a language semiotic analysis approach from Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory perspective. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) said that qualitative research uses a natural setting to interpret the phenomena that occur and is conducted using various existing methods (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). Descriptive research also aims to develop a

systematic, objective, and accurate representation of the facts, characteristics, and interrelationships among the phenomena under investigation (Aflahah, 2014, p. 83). The researcher utilises this research method because it is essential to uncover the meaning of each object.

1.7.2 Data Sources

Primary data and secondary data will be used in this research. Primary data are the signs in the form of names that use Islamic terms in *Sumeru* from *Genshin Impact*, such as area names, character names, animal names, item names, etc. Other than that, primary data also takes the form of signs from the original Islamic reference that *Genshin Impact* uses. It can be from Al-Qur'an or Islamic figures. The secondary data refers to information used to complement primary data, such as books, journal articles, website articles, and YouTube videos relevant to the research topic.

1.7.3 Data Collection Technique

The data collection techniques include: (1) observation, the researcher will focus on names that contain Islamic themes in game, (2) in-depth observation, the researcher aims to identify the original sources utilised by *Genshin Impact*, (3) deriving conclusions through comparisons (Qulub & Rusmawati, 2024, p. 118). Data is collected by playing, completing the missions, and exploring the area in-game. Furthermore, researchers also search for information or popular opinions about objects on the internet, such as in YouTube videos, TikTok videos, and official or unofficial Genshin websites. For the reference data from Al-Qur'an that *Genshin Impact* uses, researchers will use Al-Quran verses and their meanings from

an application called Al-Quran English released by PT. Dalfindo Cipta Karya. Then, for the other Islamic references, such as Islamic scientist and prophets, the data will be collected from their biography.

1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis is the process of transforming collected raw data into meaningful facts and insights that can be understood, either qualitatively or quantitatively (Alem, 2020, p. 2). This process typically includes breaking down complex information into smaller components and reorganising them to support clearer understanding and informed conclusions (Alem, 2020, p. 2). The data analysis method of this research is the identity method. The identity method is a data analysis method that utilises tools external to the language being studied (Muhammad, 2011, p. 226). The identity method used in this research is the referential identity method. This method is used to identify the reference of each term with Islamic themes in the game.

The stages of data analysis might be organised as follows: (1) identifying every object that uses Islamic themes. (2) Comparing the signifiers and signifieds of the objects' names in the game and their Islamic references. (3) Explaining the the comparison. The secondary data will strengthen the analysis, especially for the original Islamic reference that *Genshin Impact* uses.

1.8 Paper Organisation

This research will be composed of four chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. The introduction consists of the background of the study, research question, objective of the study, significance of the study, literature review,

theoretical framework, method of the study, and paper organisation. The second chapter is the theoretical framework. The content of this chapter is the explanation of the theory used in this research, namely, semiotics by Ferdinand De Saussure. The third chapter is the discussion chapter. This chapter consists of an analysis explanation of the semiotic theory data. The fourth chapter is the final chapter, consisting of the conclusion and suggestions for the research.



CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1 Conclusion

HoYoverse adopts Islamic themes not to educate or convey compatible religious information, but to construct a believable and immersive fictional world that resonates with a diverse global audience. Semiotic approach reveals that while some terms may share similar signifiers, there is no exact correspondence between these ten in-game terms and their original Islamic signifieds. None of the analysed signs presented complete similarity in their cultural or religious representation. Despite this, no findings suggest any form of blasphemy or intentional disrespect toward Islamic beliefs. The use of Islamic themes in *Genshin Impact*, particularly visible in the in-game region of *Sumeru*, appears to serve a primarily aesthetic and atmospheric function. The developers utilise elements such as characters' names, places' names, creatures' names, and tribe names that draw inspiration from Middle Eastern, particularly Islamic themes, to enhance the immersive experience of the game's fantasy world.

4.1 Suggestion

After completing this research on the Islamic themes in *Sumeru* from *Genshin Impact*, the researcher acknowledges that there is still significant potential for further exploration. Many aspects remain open for deeper investigation. For future research, examining this topic about *Genshin Impact* from other cultural perspective is recommended. However, the researcher is also aware of the limitations present in this study. Therefore, constructive criticism and suggestions

from readers are highly welcome to enhance and guide future research toward more comprehensive and insightful outcomes.



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