

# Visual Hermeneutic Reception In The Character Xiao In The Game Genshin Impact

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## Abstract

Video games have evolved beyond mere entertainment into complex visual and narrative systems capable of conveying layered meanings through character design. This study aims to analyze the visual hermeneutic reception of the character Xiao in Genshin Impact using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, which emphasizes interpretation through symbols and layered meanings. The research adopts a qualitative approach through visual observation and literature review, focusing on costume design, color composition, and symbolic elements embedded in the character's appearance. The findings indicate that Xiao's character design represents deeper philosophical and emotional values. Philosophically, the character reflects a duality between purity and suffering, manifested in his role as a divine guardian (Adeptus) and his traumatic past as a Yaksha. This duality is visually articulated through contrasting color schemes, intricate costume details, and symbolic accessories. Emotionally, Xiao embodies solitude, inner conflict, and resilience, expressed through muted tones, sharp design lines, and restrained ornamentation that suggest both strength and burden. These elements construct a narrative that emphasizes transcendence alongside psychological struggle. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that visual elements in character design function not merely as aesthetic components but as narrative devices that communicate cultural, symbolic, and psychological meanings, contributing to a deeper understanding of visual hermeneutics in contemporary video game studies.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Genshin Impact, developed by miHoYo, is not merely an ordinary action role-playing game. Released in 2020, the game quickly captured players' attention with its expansive open world, engaging gameplay mechanics, and compelling character designs (Kusnadi et al., 2021). Set in the fantasy world of Teyvat, players explore various regions, encounter diverse characters, and complete numerous challenges. One of the key elements that make Genshin Impact particularly appealing is its playable characters. Each character not only possesses unique skills and combat abilities but also features distinctive visual designs. Every character embodies a specific style and design uniqueness, reflecting the cultural and environmental diversity present in the world of Teyvat.

In this context, the character Xiao is selected as the focus of visual hermeneutic analysis due to the complexity of his visual construction, which integrates cultural symbolism, mythological references, and philosophical depth. Unlike many other characters, Xiao embodies a layered identity rooted in Chinese mythological figures such as the Yaksha and Adeptus, while simultaneously presenting a strong visual duality reflected in his costume design, color

composition, and symbolic attributes. This complexity makes Xiao a relevant subject for hermeneutic interpretation, as his visual design not only serves aesthetic purposes but also conveys deeper narrative, cultural, and emotional meanings.

Xiao, known as the “Bane of All Evil,” is one of the most prominent characters in Genshin Impact. As an Anemo element user, Xiao demonstrates exceptional combat abilities and radiates profound power. Beyond his combat skills, Xiao’s appeal also lies in his unique visual design. At first glance, Xiao appears as an introverted and enigmatic character. He wears elegant traditional Chinese attire, dominated by green tones with accents of gold, white, black, and purple. This composition creates an impression of grace and tranquility. However, beneath this calm exterior lies a powerful aura that alludes to his constant battle against darkness. The scope of his visual design, from costume elements to color schemes and symbolism, forms a rich and challenging visual narrative. To explore the meanings embedded within Xiao’s visual design, this study adopts Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic approach. Paul Ricoeur, a French philosopher, contributed profound ideas on interpretation and understanding. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics integrates linguistic and phenomenological aspects, emphasizing the importance of narrative in comprehension. He views interpretation as a process involving a dialogue between the text and the reader, where meaning is not solely derived from the text itself but also shaped by the reader’s experiences and context (Hardiman, 2015). Therefore, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics provides a powerful analytical framework for uncovering the meanings behind Xiao’s visual design, opening a window into narrative layers that might be overlooked by casual observation.

Despite the growing body of research in game studies, a clear research gap can be identified. Existing studies on Genshin Impact predominantly focus on gameplay mechanics, monetization systems (such as gacha), player engagement, and narrative structures. Meanwhile, studies that specifically examine character visual design tend to approach it from aesthetic, stylistic, or semiotic perspectives, often treating visual elements as static representations rather than dynamic texts open to interpretation. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the application of hermeneutic frameworks, particularly Ricoeur’s interpretative theory, in analyzing visual design within digital game characters. This indicates a gap in understanding how visual elements function as interpretative texts that mediate cultural meaning, narrative depth, and player reception, especially in characters that embody complex cross-cultural symbolism such as Xiao.

Accordingly, the novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach that combines visual design analysis with Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory to interpret a digital game character as a “text” rich in layered meanings. Unlike prior studies that isolate visual elements as purely aesthetic components, this study positions Xiao’s design as an interpretative field where symbolism, mythology, and narrative converge. Additionally, this research introduces the concept of visual hermeneutic reception, emphasizing not only the constructed meaning within the design but also how these meanings are potentially received and interpreted by players. In this regard, the implications of this study extend beyond the analysis of a single character. Theoretically, it contributes to expanding hermeneutic inquiry into the domain of visual and interactive media, reinforcing the view that visual design functions as an interpretative text. Conceptually, it offers a new perspective through the notion of visual hermeneutic reception as a framework for understanding the relationship between design, meaning, and audience interpretation. Practically, the study provides insights for designers and game developers on how visual elements can be strategically constructed to convey cultural narratives and emotional depth. More broadly, this research underscores the importance of visual design as a critical site of meaning production in contemporary digital games, particularly in globally distributed titles such as Genshin Impact.

Based on the above considerations, this study seeks to explore and analyze the visual hermeneutic reception of Xiao’s character in Genshin Impact. It aims to examine each visual element, including costume design, color selection, symbolism, motifs, and the interconnectivity among these elements. By employing Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory as a theoretical foundation,

the study is expected to reveal the meanings and narratives embedded within the character's visual design. The scope of this research is limited to Xiao's visual design and does not cover other aspects of Genshin Impact, such as gameplay mechanics or the overall narrative of the game. The primary focus remains on the analysis of visual elements, with the objective of providing deeper insights into how visual design can shape and enrich players' experiences within the game.

## **2. METHODS AND THEORY**

### ***2.1 Methods***

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the visual design of the character Xiao in Genshin Impact. The data used in this study consist of both visual and textual sources. Primary data are obtained through direct visual observation of the character Xiao within the game, including screenshots, official character illustrations, and in-game representations. Secondary data are collected through a literature review of relevant academic sources, including previous studies, books, and scholarly articles related to visual hermeneutics, character design, and cultural symbolism. In this study, the role of the interpreter is positioned as the researcher. The interpretation is conducted through the researcher's analytical perspective, supported by theoretical frameworks, cultural references, and experiential engagement with the game as an active player. This study does not aim to generalize player perceptions, but rather to produce an in-depth interpretive analysis.

The data analysis process follows a hermeneutic interpretive cycle adapted from Ricoeur's theory, consisting of several stages. First, the researcher conducts an initial observation to identify key visual elements of the character, including costume structure, color usage, and symbolic components. Second, these elements are categorized and described based on their visual characteristics. Third, the identified elements are interpreted by connecting them with cultural, philosophical, and symbolic references derived from relevant literature. Fourth, the interpretation is deepened through a reflective process in which the relationship between individual elements and the overall character narrative is examined. Finally, conclusions are drawn by synthesizing the interpreted meanings into a coherent understanding of the character's visual narrative (Hardiman, 2015).

### ***2.1 Theory***

This study applies a visual hermeneutic approach by interpreting visual elements as a form of symbolic "text" through the framework of Paul Ricoeur. This perspective allows the researcher to explore meanings embedded within visual structures, including costume design, color composition, and symbolic attributes. Ricoeur's hermeneutic perspective emphasizes that meaning is constructed through a reflective dialogue between the "text" (in this case, the visual design of the character) and the interpreter. Central to this approach is the concept of the hermeneutic circle, in which understanding emerges through a continuous movement between parts and the whole. Through this framework, visual elements are not merely aesthetic components but are understood as carriers of cultural, philosophical, and emotional meaning.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***3.1 Result***

#### ***3.1.1 Costume Design and Visual Narrative of Xiao's Character in Genshin Impact***

The costume design of characters in Genshin Impact functions not only as an aesthetic element but also as a medium of visual narrative. In this context, Xiao, an Anemo element user, presents a costume design that integrates symbolic, cultural, and mythological references. Anemo, representing the wind element within the game's elemental system (Qolby & Anggapuspa, 2022), reinforces the association between the character and themes of movement, transience, and

balance. Based on statements from the game's development team, Xiao's character is influenced by a combination of Chinese folklore and religious traditions, including Taoist deities, Yaksha figures, and mythological bird entities such as Peng. These references indicate that Xiao's design is constructed through a synthesis of cultural symbols that contribute to a layered narrative identity (Zhongyuan, 2021).

Visually, Xiao's costume incorporates elements that resemble traditional Chinese garments, particularly through the use of a high collar structure and layered clothing composition. The costume is also decorated with ornamental motifs that resemble stylized cloud and wind patterns, which are commonly found in Chinese visual culture and are associated with harmony, spiritual movement, and the connection between the human and the divine realms. Rather than functioning purely as decoration, these motifs reinforce the character's identity as an Adeptus and a being associated with transcendental forces. From a visual hermeneutic perspective, these elements can be interpreted as representations of Xiao's dual identity. The structured form of the costume reflects discipline and restraint, while the flowing and dynamic elements symbolize freedom and spiritual transcendence. This combination constructs a visual narrative that reflects both stability and movement, aligning with the philosophical and symbolic meanings embedded within the character design.



**Figure 1.** The Costume of Xiao: “Vigilant Yaksha” in Genshin Impact (Zhongyuan, 2021)

As illustrated in Figure 1, the details of Xiao's costume, such as hand embroidery and gold ornaments, function not only as decorative elements but also as carriers of symbolic meaning. From a visual hermeneutic perspective, these elements can be interpreted as representations of spiritual protection, status, and transcendence. For example, the use of gold ornaments in traditional Chinese visual culture is often associated with power, divinity, and authority, indicating Xiao's role as a guardian figure.

In addition, the costume incorporates stylized motifs, particularly cloud and wind patterns, which are commonly found in Chinese artistic traditions. These motifs symbolize harmony, spiritual movement, and the connection between the earthly and the divine realms. Within the context of Xiao's character, these visual elements reinforce his identity as an Adeptus, a being that exists between the human and the divine worlds.

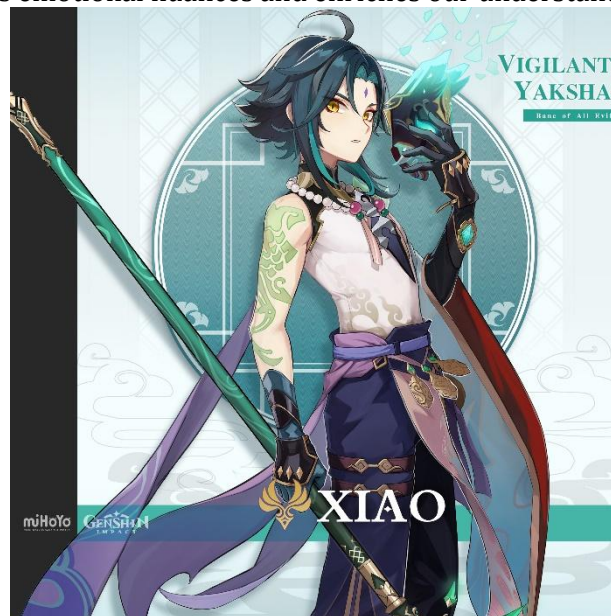
The high and structured collar, which resembles the traditional *cheongsam* form, can be interpreted as a representation of restraint and discipline. In contrast, the long and flowing elements extending from the back symbolize continuity and transcendence, suggesting the

character's prolonged existence beyond ordinary human temporality. According to Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, these visual elements can be understood as a "text" that conveys meaning through symbolic structures, where interpretation emerges from the relationship between visual form and cultural context.

Furthermore, the combination of fitted and loose costume elements reflects a duality between control and freedom. The fitted upper garment indicates limitation and restraint, while the wide and flowing sleeves represent openness and spiritual liberation. This duality constructs a narrative that reflects Xiao's internal tension between his duty as a guardian and the burden of his past, thereby transforming the costume into a medium of philosophical and emotional expression.

### 3.1.2 Color Selection and Emotional Representation of Xiao's Character in Genshin Impact

The selection of colors in the visual design of Xiao in Genshin Impact is not merely an aesthetic decision, but rather a powerful medium for conveying deep emotional representation by the character's creators. Within the framework of visual hermeneutics, this study examines how each chosen color constructs emotional nuances and enriches our understanding of the character.



**Figure 2.** Colors of Xiao's Character in Genshin Impact  
(Anonim, 2022)

As illustrated in Figure 2, Xiao's character design features lighter tones in the upper part of his outfit, while progressively darker colors dominate toward the lower sections. There are five primary colors present in his visual appearance:

- 1) White: White is one of the principal colors in the Chinese *Wu Xing* (Five Elements) system, symbolizing purity and cleanliness (Wulanningrum, 2019, Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). It is also associated with the Yin–Yang philosophy in Taoist belief, representing the Yin aspect. In this context, the use of white can be interpreted as reflecting Xiao's purity and wisdom as a divine guardian (Adeptus).
- 2) Green: Green represents Xiao's Anemo Vision, symbolizing wind, which conveys coolness, calmness, balance, and harmony (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). This color signifies Xiao's role as the Anemo wielder who brings tranquility and equilibrium to the region of Liyue .
- 3) Black: Black is another principal color within the *Wu Xing* system, symbolizing suffering, destruction, darkness, and death. However, it may also represent honor. In Chinese opera, characters with dark (black) facial features are often portrayed as stern yet honorable figures. Black is also associated with the Yang element in Yin–Yang symbolism (Prasetya & Anggapuspa,

2022, Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). Thus, it can be interpreted that Xiao embodies strength while carrying a dark and painful past as a Yaksha.

4) Purple: Purple symbolizes eternity, spirituality, and nobility. In Chinese opera, characters with purple facial features are often depicted as noble or supernatural beings (Dafrina et al., 2022, Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). In this sense, Xiao can be interpreted as a mysterious and mystical figure.

5) Gold: Gold is one of the primary colors in the *Wu Xing* system, representing wealth, perfection, prosperity, and high social status. It is often paired with red during Chinese New Year celebrations as a symbol of good fortune and prosperity (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996, Prasetya & Anggapuspa, 2022). From a hermeneutic perspective, the use of gold can be interpreted as a symbol of Xiao's significant role as a guardian figure who contributes to the prosperity within the game's narrative.

The combination of white, green, black, purple, and gold creates a compelling contrast. These colors represent both the light and dark aspects of the burdens carried by an Adeptus as the protector of Liyue, resembling the Yin–Yang concept. They are unified within the visual design to produce a complex and, at times, paradoxical impression. Hermeneutic theory guides us in understanding how the interplay of these colors enriches Xiao's characterization, revealing a balance between darkness and light within the character.

### 3.1.3 Symbolism and Philosophical Meaning in Xiao's Visual Design in Genshin Impact

The symbolism embedded in Xiao's visual design in Genshin Impact does not merely function as decorative embellishment, but also incorporates layers of profound philosophical meaning. Within the framework of visual hermeneutics, this study explores the symbolism inherent in the character's design, uncovering insights into the values, beliefs, and philosophical concepts that underpin it.



**Figure 3.** Character Design Details of Xiao in Genshin Impact (Zhongyuan, 2021)

As illustrated in Figure 3, several symbolic elements are employed in the creation and development of Xiao's character in Genshin Impact. These symbols include:

### 1) Mask "Yaksha"



**Figure 4.** Nuo and Yaksha Mask  
(Zhongyuan, 2021)

One of the most prominent symbols in Xiao's costume design is the "Yaksha" mask carried by the character in Genshin Impact. This Yaksha mask is inspired by the Nuo mask from Chinese cultural and religious traditions, which is traditionally used to ward off evil spirits, disease, and to invoke blessings during ritual performances, particularly at the end of the Chinese New Year celebrations (Fukushima, 2005). In both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the term "Yaksha" refers to supernatural beings endowed with extraordinary powers (Sutherland, 1991). This symbolism connects Xiao to transcendental forces and emphasizes his exceptional combat abilities. Furthermore, the "Yaksha" mask embodies spiritual values and protective functions. Xiao, known as the "Bane of All Evil," utilizes this symbol as a manifestation of courage and determination in confronting and overcoming dark entities.

### 2). Jade Accessories on Xiao



**Figure 5.** Jade Accessories  
(Zhongyuan, 2021)

As illustrated in Figure 5, jade symbolizes success, prosperity, and good fortune. It is also widely regarded as a symbol of longevity and even immortality. Green jade, in particular, is the most common type and is often associated with the concept of heaven or the divine in religious rituals (Taube, 2005). In ancient Chinese medical beliefs, jade powder mixed with water was considered an elixir capable of strengthening the body and prolonging life. For the deceased, this substance was believed to slow the process of bodily decomposition (Prasetya & Anggapuspa, 2022). From a hermeneutic perspective, the presence of jade in Xiao's character design in Genshin Impact can be interpreted as a symbolic reference to his divine origin and his existence as a long-lived, celestial being.

### 3). Cloud and Wind Motifs



**Figure 6.** Cloud and Wind Motifs on Xiao's Costume in Genshin Impact (Zhongyuan, 2021)

As illustrated in Figure 6, the cloud and wind motifs in Xiao's visual design in Genshin Impact are not merely decorative elements, but rather convey profound symbolism related to nature and the dynamics of life. Clouds, often associated with uncertainty and transformation, reflect the transient and ever-changing nature of the life experienced by the character. Wind, as the Anemo element, is not only central to Xiao's combat abilities but also functions as a philosophical symbol. It represents freedom, vitality, and constant change. From a hermeneutic perspective, these symbols construct a narrative of Xiao's journey as an immortal being within the game. This interpretation provides insight into how the character navigates existence with a sense of freedom inherent within his nature.

#### 4) Necklace and Waist Ornaments



**Figure 7.** Xiao Necklace (Prasetya & Anggapuspa, 2022)

As illustrated in Figure 7, Xiao's necklace in Genshin Impact is an adaptation of the *Vajra*. In Sanskrit, the *Vajra* refers to an ancient weapon symbolizing both lightning representing immense power and the diamond, signifying indestructibility (Campbell, 2009). In Buddhist traditions, particularly within Tibetan culture, this object is also associated with the *phurba* (or *kila*), a ritual dagger commonly used to subdue evil spirits and eliminate spiritual obstacles. The *phurba* is typically crafted from precious metals, bone, or composite materials, symbolizing a powerful instrument for warding off malevolent forces. The dagger-like form at its tip represents the act of confronting and cutting through the three fundamental roots of negative traits: ignorance, desire, and envy. These three sides also symbolize mastery over the past, present, and future (Prasetya & Anggapuspa, 2022). Within Xiao's character design, the use of the *Vajra* serves as a symbolic synthesis, combining the meaning of the *vajra* as an indestructible and supreme force with the *vajrakilaya* (*phurba*) as a ritual weapon used to defeat evil entities.



**Figure 8.** Waist Ornaments  
(Prasetya & Anggapuspa, 2022)

Meanwhile, as illustrated in Figure 8, the waist ornament worn by Xiao in Genshin Impact is adapted from a censer, a vessel traditionally used for burning incense or aromatic substances, particularly in religious rituals. Such objects are commonly made from materials such as bronze, stone, porcelain, or copper, and are produced in various forms, sizes, and engraved patterns. Censers have been utilized for centuries across different cultural contexts. In China, censers are typically filled with dried aromatic plants or scented oils and are used in religious ceremonies, including funeral rites and offerings of prayer (Staub et al., 2011). The necklace and waist ornament together reflect the mystical and spiritual dimensions of Xiao's character. These elements contribute to the impression of longevity and reinforce the character's enigmatic and otherworldly presence.

#### 5). Tattoo



**Figure 9.** Xiao's Tattoo in Genshin Impact  
(Anonim, 2023)

As illustrated in Figure 9, the tattoo on Xiao's right arm in Genshin Impact reflects his identity as an Adeptus and a spiritual guardian of Liyue. The tattoo takes the form of a mystical creature associated with Xiao's original form, resembling the Fenghuang from Chinese mythology. From a hermeneutic perspective, this element can be interpreted as a representation of Xiao's longevity and immortality, reinforcing his status as an eternal and transcendent being. Beyond its symbolic representation, Xiao's visual design also reveals an internal contradiction that reflects a deeper hermeneutic tension. While the costume elements project divinity, elegance, and spiritual authority, other visual aspects such as the darker color tones, sharp facial expression, and Yaksha identity suggest suffering, violence, and psychological burden. This contrast indicates that Xiao is

not merely a glorified guardian figure, but a character constructed through a continuous struggle between transcendence and trauma.

### **3.2 Discussion**

This study demonstrates that the visual design of Xiao in Genshin Impact operates not merely as an aesthetic construction, but as a complex system of meaning integrating cultural symbolism, philosophical values, and emotional narratives. Through the application of visual hermeneutics grounded in Paul Ricoeur, the findings reveal that Xiao's costume, color composition, and symbolic attributes function as a coherent "text" that communicates layered interpretations. The interplay between structured and flowing costume forms, contrasting color schemes, and symbolic ornaments constructs a narrative of duality, reflecting both transcendence and suffering. In relation to existing literature, these findings reinforce the view that visual elements in character design serve as carriers of cultural narratives and identity. This study extends prior work by emphasizing how meaning emerges through a hermeneutic process, particularly through the interaction between visual structure and interpretation. The integration of Chinese mythological references, such as Yaksha figures, jade symbolism, and wind motifs, demonstrates how traditional cultural elements are recontextualized within contemporary game design. At the same time, the analysis highlights a consistent duality across Xiao's design, which can be interpreted as an existential tension between duty and trauma, moving beyond purely aesthetic or archetypal readings.

An important contribution of this study is the recognition that minor visual elements, such as ornaments, tattoos, and accessories, carry significant narrative weight. These details actively construct meanings related to immortality, spiritual protection, and moral conflict, challenging the assumption that they function merely as decorative additions. From a theoretical perspective, the findings affirm the relevance of Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, particularly the hermeneutic circle, in understanding how individual visual components gain meaning through their relation to the whole. Practically, this suggests that coherent integration of symbolic and cultural elements can enhance the depth and emotional resonance of character design.

However, this study has several limitations. The interpretation is inherently subjective and based on the researcher's perspective, limiting generalizability. In addition, the focus on a single character restricts broader comparative insights, and the absence of audience reception data means that alternative interpretations are not explored. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating comparative analyses across multiple characters or games, as well as integrating audience-based approaches to examine how meanings are constructed by different viewers. Expanding the theoretical framework with complementary perspectives, such as semiotics or visual culture studies, may also enrich future analyses.

Overall, this study contributes to the field of visual communication design by demonstrating that character design in digital media functions as a rich site of cultural and philosophical meaning. Through a hermeneutic approach, it highlights how visual elements operate beyond aesthetics to construct narratives of identity, tension, and transcendence, thereby advancing understanding of visual storytelling in contemporary digital contexts.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that Xiao's character design in Genshin Impact is constructed through an integrated interplay of visual elements that function as carriers of philosophical and emotional meaning. The findings reveal a central duality between transcendence and suffering, expressed through the interaction of costume structure, color composition, and symbolic attributes, which collectively construct Xiao's paradoxical identity as both a protector and a bearer of trauma, reflecting an internal tension between duty and personal suffering. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that these visual elements do not operate independently but form an interconnected narrative structure that produces meaning through their relational composition.

Through a hermeneutic approach grounded in Paul Ricoeur, Xiao's design can be understood as a form of visual text, where meaning emerges from the dynamic interaction between visual structure and interpretative engagement. This research contributes to expanding the application of hermeneutics into digital visual media while introducing the concept of visual hermeneutic reception as a framework for understanding meaning-making in character design. The findings highlight that visual design in digital games extends beyond aesthetic function, serving as a medium for articulating complex cultural narratives and emotional depth, thereby enriching both narrative construction and player experience.

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