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FOREWORD

This proceedings volume presents papers from the main symposium of the International Japanese Studies Research Workshop and Symposium (IJSRWS) 2025, which was held on 21–22 October 2025. Organized by the Center for Japanese Studies and the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia, IJSRWS 2025 took place between July and October 2025 as a series of three interconnected programs. These programs consisted of: (1) an Undergraduate Research Workshop; (2) an Online Seminar Series titled Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia; and (3) an International Symposium titled Digital Humanities for Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia, which served as the central event of the IJSRWS 2025 program.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Japan Foundation for its generous support, which made the implementation of IJSRWS 2025 possible.

We are also deeply thankful to the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) for their collaboration and support in the organization of the symposium. Our appreciation likewise extends to all presenters and participants whose contributions and active engagement greatly enriched the discussions and intellectual exchange throughout the event.

The the Center for Japanese Studies Universitas Indonesia looks forward to continuing similar initiatives in the future and remains committed to contributing to the further development of Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia and beyond.

IJSRWS 2025 Committee

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Discursive Construction of “Japanese-Style” in Indonesian Consumer Culture: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Branding and Local Adaptation

Edy Hariyadi¹, Bambang Wibisono², Asrumi³, Heru S.P. Saputra⁴, Zahratul Umniyyah⁵, and Moh. Bagus Zainur R.⁶

Abstract

This study explores the discursive construction of “Japanese-style” in Indonesian consumer culture by examining branding strategies, business naming practices, and digital promotional content. Since the 1990s, the widespread popularity of Japanese pop culture, such as anime, manga, and culinary, has strongly influenced Indonesian consumers' perceptions and value associations toward Japanese products. Utilizing the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995), this research investigates how local Indonesian entrepreneurs strategically appropriate and recontextualize Japanese cultural symbols, language, and imagery to enhance product appeal and cultural legitimacy. By analyzing selected digital advertisements, business names, and branding language that incorporate Japanese-sounding terms and aesthetic references, the study reveals how perceived Japanese values like quality and simplicity are blended with local Indonesian sensibilities. These discursive practices produce hybrid cultural identities, actively reinterpreting Japanese culture within the framework of domestic consumer expectations to resonate with both a sense of cosmopolitanism and local relevance. The research also highlights how digital platforms and apps serve as key sites for the circulation and transformation of these discourses. Ultimately, this study contributes to Japanese Studies and Digital Humanities by offering insights into the intersection of language, culture, and digital communication in shaping contemporary consumer identities in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Japanese-style branding, discourse analysis, hybrid identity, consumer culture, Indonesia*

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A. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, Japanese pop culture, particularly anime, manga, and culinary practices, has had a profound influence on consumer culture worldwide, including in Indonesia. The global reach of Japanese cultural exports has significantly shaped how Indonesian consumers view Japan, associating it with qualities like modernity, simplicity, and quality (Iwabuchi, 2002; Otmazgin, 2014). In Indonesia, these cultural influences have transcended entertainment and culinary sectors to deeply impact consumer goods, fashion, and branding practices. Local businesses, particularly in the retail, food, and lifestyle sectors, have increasingly adopted Japanese-inspired aesthetics, symbols, and even linguistic elements in their branding strategies. These influences are often reflected in the use of Japanese-sounding business names, logos, and visual elements that evoke images of traditional Japanese culture or contemporary Japanese pop aesthetics (Septiani & Marizar, 2022).

Despite the widespread integration of Japanese cultural elements, many of these brands do not represent authentic Japanese products or ideologies. Instead, they are examples of cultural hybridization, where Japanese elements are appropriated and reinterpreted within the local Indonesian context. This blending of Japanese cultural markers with local sensibilities is indicative of what can be termed a "pseudo-Japanese" discourse, which is carefully crafted through both linguistic and visual imitation to appeal to Indonesian consumers' imaginations and aspirations.

While there has been a considerable amount of research on Japanese cultural influence in various parts of the world, there is limited scholarly exploration of how these cultural elements are appropriated and recontextualized in Indonesian consumer culture. Previous studies have predominantly focused on the importation of Japanese culture or the global spread of Japanese media, with less attention given to how local entrepreneurs actively construct a "Japanese-style" identity in the Indonesian market. The lack of attention to the local adaptation and hybridization processes in Indonesian branding raises important questions about the ways in which national and global identities are negotiated in the realm of consumer culture.

This study aims to examine how the discursive construction of "Japanese-style" branding in Indonesia constructs cultural meaning through discourse, language, and semiotics. The research questions guiding this paper are:

1. How are Japanese words and visual elements used in Indonesian brand discourse?
2. How do local entrepreneurs recontextualize "Japanese style" to appeal to consumers?
3. What does this reveal about cultural identity, adaptation, and globalization in Indonesia?

The paper begins by providing a theoretical framework for understanding branding and discourse analysis in consumer culture. The next section discusses the methodology employed to analyze branding practices, focusing on the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Following this, the paper examines several case studies of Indonesian businesses that have integrated Japanese cultural elements into their branding, including an analysis of business names, logos, and promotional content. The findings are then discussed in the context of cultural hybridization and consumer identity construction. Finally, the paper concludes by reflecting on the implications of this hybrid branding practice for both Japanese Studies and the study of Southeast Asian consumer cultures.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Definition of Core Concepts

This section provides scholarly definitions for the key conceptual terms central to this study, establishing a clear analytical focus.

a. Japanese-Style Branding

In this study, "Japanese-style" branding is defined as the strategic, deliberate incorporation of specific cultural elements—visual aesthetics, linguistic symbols, and perceived national values—

from Japanese culture into the marketing and promotional strategies of Indonesian businesses. This appropriation often manifests through the use of Japanese-sounding names, minimalist design motifs, and packaging that invokes qualities widely associated with Japan, such as simplicity, precision, elegance, and high quality (Iwabuchi, 2002). These elements are strategically employed to evoke both a sense of global modernity and a perception of product excellence, appealing directly to Indonesian consumer aspirations.

b. Cultural Hybridization

Cultural hybridization refers to the dynamic process of blending cultural elements from disparate traditions to generate new, composite cultural identities or forms. Within the scope of this research, hybridization occurs when Indonesian entrepreneurs adapt Japanese symbols, language, and imagery and recontextualize them to resonate with local consumer practices and tastes. This process produces a hybrid “Japanese-style” that is neither purely Japanese nor exclusively Indonesian, but a novel combination that leverages the symbolic capital of Japanese culture while maintaining local familiarity and relevance. This blending allows products to be perceived as simultaneously cosmopolitan and domestically accessible.

c. Discourse

Drawing from Fairclough (1995), “discourse” is understood here as a social practice: the ways in which language, symbols, and visual representations are actively used to construct, maintain, and negotiate social meaning, identities, and power relations. In the context of this study, branding strategies that utilize “Japanese-style” elements constitute a specific form of discourse. This discourse constructs both a distinct cultural identity for the product and shapes consumer perceptions through carefully selected signs, linguistic choices, and aesthetic framings, ultimately influencing consumer behavior and identity formation in the marketplace.

2. Review of Previous Research

The existing literature provides a crucial foundation for understanding the mechanics of cultural transfer, semiotics, and identity negotiation in a globalized setting, particularly within Southeast Asia.

a. Japanese Popular Culture in Southeast Asia

The pervasive global influence of Japanese popular culture—Cool Japan—is well-documented, primarily through its exports of anime, manga, and video games. Iwabuchi (2002) highlights the role of these cultural exports in facilitating transnationalism and promoting Japan's “soft power.” In Southeast Asia, this cultural influx has been reinterpreted by local audiences. Nilan (2006), for example, explored how Indonesian youth engage with global media, including Japanese content, as a vital resource for identity formation. This scholarship establishes the pre-condition for this study: the widespread positive association and familiarity with Japanese culture among Indonesian consumers, which local businesses now seek to capitalize on.

b. Cultural Semiotics and Branding

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, is indispensable for analyzing how brands infuse cultural elements with desired meanings. Prior research, such as that by Septiani and Marizar (2022) on Shabu Kojo Restaurant in Bandung (see Figure 1), demonstrates how the adoption of specific Japanese design aesthetics (like minimalism and certain architectural motifs) acts as a potent cultural code in Indonesian business. These symbols function beyond mere decoration; they signify a specific, high-end, and sophisticated brand identity, associating the product or service with the positive cultural capital of Japan. This semiotic function confirms that Japanese-style branding operates as a system of cultural communication.



Figure 1. Shabu Kajo Restaurant in Bandung, West Java
Image source: <https://www.tripadvisor.co.id>

c. Appropriation and Cultural Hybridization

Research on branding and cultural exchange in Asia centers on the regional phenomenon of appropriation. Otmazgin (2014) details how Japanese popular culture is not passively consumed but actively regionally appropriated, blending Japanese elements with local sensibilities to create new, hybrid cultural forms. Similarly, Hariyadi et al. (2025) investigate the local engagement with Japanese culture, such as through cosplay in Jember, demonstrating how cultural exchange directly influences the consumption and integration of Japanese-inspired products at the community level. This body of work underscores that “Japanese-style” in Indonesia is inherently a hybrid entity forged through active local adaptation.

d. Consumer Identity and Globalization

In the context of increased globalization, the consumption of foreign products is closely tied to the negotiation of personal and cultural identities. Studies like Hariyadi (2014) on Indonesian students in Japan and Otmazgin (2014) on Asian consumers show that consuming Japanese products and practices allows individuals to navigate their place in a globalized world. For Indonesian consumers, the adoption of “Japanese-style” products serves as a means of projecting a cosmopolitan, modern, and aspirational identity without fully relinquishing local cultural grounding.

3. Identification of Gaps

While existing literature extensively covers the consumption of Japanese media and the resulting cultural familiarity, there is a significant gap in research regarding the discursive production and strategic appropriation of Japanese elements by local Indonesian businesses. Specifically, studies have not fully examined:

1. How Indonesian entrepreneurs systematically select, adapt, and recontextualize Japanese language (naming practices) and aesthetics to create a codified “Japanese-style” that is optimized for the local marketplace.
2. The discursive mechanics (the “how” and “why” behind the language and visuals) of this branding, particularly how the discourse frames Japanese values (e.g., precision, simplicity) to achieve cultural legitimacy and consumer desirability.
3. The role of digital media platforms and apps as the primary sites for the rapid circulation, transformation, and ultimate authentication of these hybrid branding discourses in contemporary Indonesia.

This study aims to address these gaps by applying CDA to deconstruct the specific texts and contexts that constitute the “Japanese-style” branding discourse in the Indonesian consumer sphere.

4. Theoretical Foundation

The analysis is anchored in a dual theoretical framework that provides both a macro-level critical lens and a micro-level interpretive tool.

a. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The primary framework is Norman Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which emphasizes the non-neutral relationship between language, power, and ideology. CDA is the ideal foundation because it provides a method for analyzing the three interconnected dimensions of discursive events: the Text (the branding language, images, and symbols), the Discursive Practice (the process of production and consumption by entrepreneurs and consumers), and the Social Practice (the underlying socio-cultural and economic structures, such as globalization and consumer aspirations).

In this research, CDA will illuminate the power dynamics at play: how the discourse of "Japanese-style" branding functions ideologically to associate products with positive global capital (quality, modernity) and how this contributes to the construction of a desirable, hybrid consumer identity within the Indonesian market. It moves beyond simply describing what the brand says to examining what the brand does in relation to Indonesian consumer culture.

b. Cultural Semiotics

Complementing CDA is the use of Cultural Semiotics to interpret the signs and symbols inherent in the branding material. Semiotic analysis will function as a powerful tool within the Text component of CDA. It helps uncover the signifiers (e.g., minimalist typography, Kanji characters, specific color palettes) and the deeper signified meanings (e.g., quality, authenticity, global connectivity) associated with "Japanese-style" branding.

By applying semiotic theory, this study will decode the cultural codes that Indonesian businesses use, demonstrating how the "Japanese-style" is not a static imitation but a strategic construct imbued with connotations of cosmopolitanism that are specifically adapted and recontextualized for the local consumer landscape. Together, CDA and Cultural Semiotics provide a comprehensive and rigorous framework for analyzing how Indonesian businesses engage with and appropriate Japanese culture and how these practices simultaneously shape and reflect contemporary consumer identities in Southeast Asia.

C. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design rooted in an interpretive and critical approach to textual analysis. The methodology is structured to systematically deconstruct the linguistic and visual components of branding discourse, linking these micro-level textual choices to broader socio-cultural and economic dynamics in Indonesian consumer culture. The combined application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Cultural Semiotics provides the necessary rigor to move beyond mere description toward critical explanation.

1. Data Corpus and Selection Criteria

The data corpus for this research consists of artifacts of commercial communication from Indonesian businesses that explicitly employ "Japanese-style" branding. The analysis focuses on three main categories of data, sourced primarily from digital platforms (Instagram, TikTok, brand websites, and e-commerce marketing materials):

- a. Linguistic Data (Naming Practices): Business names and taglines that incorporate Japanese terms, phonemes, or grammatical structures.
- b. Visual Data (Aesthetics and Imagery): Logos, typography, color palettes, and specific motifs.
- c. Contextual Data (Promotional Content): Digital advertisements, social media captions, and product descriptions that frame the brand narrative and associate the product with specific Japanese values (e.g., "authenticity," "simplicity," or "craftsmanship").

A sample of approximately 25–35 distinct brand artifacts will be purposely selected, focusing on high-visibility sectors within Indonesian consumer culture, such as the Food and Beverage (F&B)

industry, fast fashion, and lifestyle retail, where the appropriation of foreign cultural aesthetics is most prevalent.

2. Data Analysis Procedure: CDA and Semiotic Integration

The analysis will proceed in three interconnected stages, aligning with the three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis proposed by Fairclough (1995): Text, Discursive Practice, and Social Practice. Cultural Semiotics will be integrated primarily during the analysis of the Text.

Stage 1: Textual Analysis (Cultural Semiotics)

a. Linguistic Elements

The study analyzed the linguistic features of business names, slogans, and promotional captions, focusing on morphology (word formation), phonology (sound play), wordplay, and the use of pseudo-Japanese elements (e.g., mixing Japanese-sounding terms with Indonesian words). This allowed for an understanding of how language is used to evoke a sense of authenticity or affiliation with Japanese culture.

b. Visual Elements

The analysis also focused on the typography, color schemes, aesthetic symbols (e.g., torii gates, katakana, and other Japanese motifs), and overall design elements of logos and signage. The use of these visual cues is critical in conveying Japanese cultural identity.

Stage 2: Analysis of Discursive Practice (CDA)

This stage examines the process of recontextualization—how the branding text was produced and how it is interpreted by the target audience. Key questions addressed are:

- a. Appropriation: How are Japanese cultural elements selected, adapted, and combined with local Indonesian elements to produce a hybrid identity?
- b. Intertextuality: What cultural narratives are implicitly or explicitly referenced, and how do these intertextual links provide cultural legitimacy to the Indonesian product? This phase focuses on the strategic choices made by the entrepreneurs.

Stage 3: Analysis of Sociocultural Practice (CDA)

The final stage linked the findings from the previous two levels to broader sociocultural practices in Indonesia. This involves analyzing the ways in which the Japanese symbols and aesthetics in branding connect to larger cultural values in Indonesian society, particularly those related to modernity, quality, and prestige.

This stage examines how branding practices that incorporate Japanese cultural symbols resonate with local consumers in urban areas, where there is a high demand for products that reflect a cosmopolitan, globalized identity. The research connects these practices to Indonesia's urban popular culture, where Japanese elements are seen as cool, modern, and aspirational.

Through this multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, the study explores how Japanese-style branding practices in Indonesia are not merely imitative but actively engage in the construction of hybrid identities, blending Japanese cultural symbols with Indonesian cultural meanings. This approach provides insights into the intersection of language, culture, and consumer behavior in contemporary Indonesian society.

D. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This study analyzed a multimodal data corpus of commercial artifacts from Indonesian businesses—including brand names, visual signage, and digital promotional materials—that strategically deploy “Japanese-style” branding. The data set, comprising examples from businesses across the food and beverage (F&B) and retail sectors, reveals a systematic pattern of cultural appropriation characterized by linguistic and visual hybridization (see Table 1).

Indonesian businesses adopt a “Japanese-style” branding strategy. This includes the use of Japanese-sounding names or imagery to convey a sense of quality, sophistication, or novelty, even though the products or companies may not be Japanese at all, such as: Wakai, a shoe brand that sounds Japanese but is actually an Indonesian brand; Hokben, short for Hoka Hoka Bento, a Japanese-inspired fast food chain, but actually an Indonesian company; Ryuusei, a fashion brand, with a name that invokes a Japanese aesthetic; Sapporo, Matsunichi, and Sekai are electronics brands, which sound distinctly Japanese; Indofood Ichi Ocha, and Kokumi are beverage brands that lean on a “Japanese” flavor or name for appeal; and Sakura Oil Filterm a product that uses the iconic “Sakura” (cherry blossom) symbol. These are to highlight how these brands use linguistic and visual cues to evoke a Japanese identity, even when their origins are local. This can be understood in the context of cultural appropriation, where elements of Japanese culture are borrowed or imitated to appeal to consumers, often for commercial gain.

The blending of languages (e.g., using Japanese terms or characters) and visuals (e.g., imagery associated with Japan) creates a hybrid cultural product that might seem authentic but is often a strategic marketing choice. The findings are structured according to the application of Cultural Semiotics (Stage 1) and the critical analysis of Discursive and Sociocultural Practice (Stages 2 and 3) as guided by the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework.

Table 1. Comparison of Japanese vs Indonesian Linguistic Forms in Branding

Brand / Expression	Possible Japanese Meaning / Form	Indonesian Linguistic or Cultural Meaning	Discursive Function
Royal Kashimura	Looks like a Japanese surname	Wordplay from “kukasih murah” (I give it cheap)	Creates “Japanese” aura while humorously signaling affordability
Onokabe	No real meaning in Japanese	From Javanese “ono kabeh” = “everything is available”	Suggests abundance → fits <i>all you can eat</i> concept
Jiganasuki	Looks similar to “suki” (like/love, as in <i>sukiyaki</i>)	a pun from Sundanese or mixed phonetic form	Blends local identity with Japanese culinary association
Kendo (Kentang Dowo)	剣道 (<i>kendō</i> = Japanese martial art of swordsmanship)	Real Japanese word: <i>kendo</i> = “the way of the sword”	Local pun: “Kentang dowo” (long potato fries)
Wakai	<i>wakai</i> = young	Real Japanese adjective meaning “young”	Local Indonesian brand name for casual shoes
Hanasui	<i>hanasui</i> = flower + water or pseudo-Japanese	Similar sound to Shinzui, a cosmetic brand from Japan	Indonesian skincare brand, marketed as “Japanese quality”
Kenji / Mayasi	<i>Kenji / Mayashi</i>	Real-sounding Japanese names	Indonesian snack brands with faux-Japanese identities
Kobe (flour brand)	神戸 (<i>Kōbe</i> = Japanese city)	Real Japanese toponym	Indonesian brand name for seasoning / flour

1. Linguistic Hybridization: The Semiotics of Puns

A prominent and innovative finding is the consistent practice of linguistic hybridization, where Japanese-sounding words are fused with local Indonesian or Javanese linguistic expressions. This is a profound example of recontextualization (a key feature of CDA’s Discursive Practice) and

demonstrates the strategic application of cultural semiotics to achieve both global allure and local relatability.

In this practice, the Japanese-sounding name acts as a signifier of quality and foreign, cosmopolitan appeal, while the hidden or overt local pun serves as the actual signified meaning, grounding the brand in local humor and affordability. Examples include:

- a. “Kashimura”: Superficially resembling a Japanese surname, the name is a phonetic play on the Indonesian phrase “kukasih murah” (I give it cheap) (see Table 1). This strategic fusion allows the brand to simultaneously evoke a sophisticated Japanese aura (symbolic capital) while directly communicating affordability to the cost-conscious Indonesian consumer.
- b. “Onokabe”: While meaningless in standard Japanese, the term is directly derived from Javanese, “Ono kabeh,” meaning “everything is available” (see Table 1). This successfully signifies the concept of a rich, all-you-can-eat offering, leveraging Javanese familiarity within a seemingly Japanese F&B context.
- c. “Nasi Goreng Shogun”: This name humorously associates the high-status military title “Shogun” (a Japanese signifier of power and hierarchy) with the most common and everyday Indonesian dish, Nasi Goreng. The addition of the local nickname “Cak” (Javanese for ‘elder brother’) immediately domesticates the term, transforming prestige into familiarity.

These cases demonstrate that the use of Japanese phonetics is not a mere translation but a creative tool for translanguaging in a commercial setting, maximizing appeal by balancing foreign symbolic capital with local comprehension and humor.

2. Visual Signifiers and Simulated Aesthetics

The visual branding practices further confirm the strategic use of simulated aesthetics to generate *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu, 1984). Businesses incorporate iconic Japanese visual elements, not as precise replicas, but as highly stylized signifiers intended to evoke specific meanings:

- a. Symbolic Motifs: The use of Torii gates in restaurant signage and the incorporation of Chochin lanterns or noren curtains evoke a connection to Japanese tradition and aesthetic refinement. These visuals function as high-status markers, associating the dining experience with sophistication and quality (the signified meaning).
- b. Script and Typography: The deliberate use of Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji scripts (e.g., しゃぶ古城, 剣道, and シヤクムラ) is a powerful visual signifier (See Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4). For the majority of consumers who cannot read the script, the illegibility itself signifies “Japanese” authenticity, which automatically translates into a perception of modernity and cosmopolitan taste.



Figure 2. Royal Kashimura Japanese Shabu & BBQ restaurant at Bandung, West Java
Image source: Retno A., T. (2018)



Figure 3 and Figure 4. Snack stall of 剣道 Kendo (Kentang Dowo “Long Potatoes”)
Image source: <https://restaurantguru.com/KENDO-Kentang-Dowo-Jember>

c. Youth Culture Adaptation: In retail and fast-fashion sectors, elements of Harajuku style (a visual signifier of Japanese youth rebellion and eclecticism) are simplified and combined with local fashion sensibilities. This creates a specific, cosmopolitan, and youthful “vibe” that resonates with the Indonesian urban demographic aspiring to global trends.

Crucially, these visual cues operate as a selective simulation of Japanese culture, focusing only on elements that convey simplicity, precision, and elegance. This aesthetic strategy allows the brand to tap into the positive ideology (CDA’s Social Practice) that Indonesian consumers associate with Japan—a blend of high technology, aesthetic mastery, and refined taste.

3. Discursive Function: The Floating Signifier and Ideology

The analysis reveals that “Japanese style” in Indonesian branding functions as a floating signifier—a cultural symbol whose meaning is not fixed but can be strategically filled or replenished according to local market needs and consumer aspirations. This aligns with the ideological component of CDA, where discourse shapes and negotiates cultural values:

a. Ideology of Quality: Given the historical association of Japanese products (automobiles, electronics) with high standards and precision, the simple presence of a Japanese signifier (a name, a font) is highly effective in conveying reliability and excellence, justifying a premium price or suggesting product superiority over purely local or other foreign competitors.

b. Ideology of Modernity and Aspiration: In the Indonesian urban context, adopting Japanese elements signals a cosmopolitan lifestyle. The branding discourse suggests that by consuming a “Japanese-style” product, the consumer is participating in a global, cutting-edge culture. This discourse actively constructs consumer identity, appealing to the growing Indonesian middle-class desire for upscale, modern experiences.

4. Local Appropriation and the Hybrid Third Space

The overall discourse generated by these branding practices confirms that Indonesian businesses are not engaged in passive imitation but active local appropriation. This process transforms Japanese cultural capital into a tool for Indonesian cultural expression and economic branding.

The strategic use of puns and localized phonetics (as seen in “Onokabe” and “Kashimura”) acts as an act of local agency. It is a way for Indonesian entrepreneurs to “play Japan,” making the foreign element accessible, relatable, and entertaining. This dynamic blending, where global cultural elements are negotiated, transformed, and integrated into a new, localized form, perfectly exemplifies the concept of the Third Space (Bhabha, 1994).

The resulting hybrid identity is critical: it allows products to benefit from the prestige of Japanese global imagery while simultaneously ensuring the brand narrative remains grounded, humorous, and relevant to the Indonesian marketplace. This ensures commercial success by appealing to both the consumer’s desire for global sophistication and their comfort with local cultural codes.

The findings highlight that through linguistic hybridization and selective visual simulation, Indonesian businesses actively construct a “Japanese-style” branding that is both globally informed

and creatively reinterpreted. These branding practices are a powerful discourse reflecting a dynamic, hybridized consumer culture in contemporary Southeast Asia.

E. DISCUSSION (ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION)

The findings of this study provide a critical analysis of the “Japanese-style” branding phenomenon in Indonesian consumer culture, moving beyond a superficial description to examine the discursive and ideological mechanisms at play. By applying the combined framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Cultural Semiotics, this discussion synthesizes how local Indonesian entrepreneurs actively construct and deploy hybrid commercial identities that resonate with both global aspiration and local sensibility.

1. The Ideological Function of the Floating Signifier

The analysis confirms that “Japanese style” functions as a potent floating signifier within the Indonesian marketplace. As observed through the lens of CDA (Fairclough, 1995), discourse is never neutral but is deeply intertwined with ideology and power. In this context, the symbolic representation of Japan has become unmoored from its direct cultural referent and is strategically filled with locally relevant ideological content that drives consumer desire.

The research identified two primary ideologies mobilized by this discourse:

- a. **Ideology of Quality and Precision:** The simple act of affixing a Japanese-sounding name or minimalist aesthetic is a powerful mechanism for conveying reliability and excellence. This is a direct consequence of the historical success of Japanese global brands (electronics, automotive industry) which established an international association between “Made in Japan” and high standards. Indonesian businesses leverage this established cultural capital to justify premium positioning or simply instill consumer confidence, a critical discursive move in a market where quality perception is paramount.
- b. **Ideology of Modernity and Cosmopolitan Aspiration:** The use of stylized Japanese elements in urban F&B and lifestyle branding signals a consumer's engagement with a refined, cutting-edge, and cosmopolitan lifestyle. This branding discourse constructs a desirable consumer identity, particularly appealing to the growing middle class who seek to negotiate their global identity through consumption. By buying into “Japanese-style” products, consumers are effectively purchasing a membership in a globally-informed, modern social sphere, allowing the brand to capitalize on consumer aspirations rather than just product features. This strategic ideological deployment reveals how local businesses engage with macro-level socio-cultural practices, using a global aesthetic to reinforce domestic hierarchies of taste and status.

2. Semiotic Recontextualization: Decoding the Hybrid Text

The textual analysis, guided by Cultural Semiotics, revealed the mechanism of semiotic recontextualization—the core process of creating the hybrid brand identity. The linguistic and visual data demonstrate that appropriation is not passive imitation but active, creative blending.

a. Linguistic Puns and Hybridity

The most striking finding is the use of linguistic puns (e.g., Kashimura, Onokabe). Semiotically, this represents a deliberate split in the communicative text:

- **The Signifier (Japanese Phonetics):** The sound and look of the name function as the global code, signaling quality and foreign prestige.
- **The Signified (Local Pun):** The underlying Indonesian/Javanese meaning (e.g. “Onokabe” (everything is available): “Takashimura” (I give it cheap) functions as the local code, ensuring accessibility, humor, and a clear message about product value or offering.

This dual coding is a brilliant commercial strategy. It allows the brand to simultaneously appeal to the consumer's desire for global sophistication while satisfying the local demand for value and familiarity. The entrepreneur's discursive practice is thus one of high-stakes mediation between a foreign signifier and a local signified.

b. Visual Simulation and Selective Coding

Visually, the branding employs selective simulation. Elements such as Torii gates and pseudo-Kanji scripts are not used to reproduce a faithful Japanese environment but to create a highly curated, distilled aesthetic. The resulting visual style is a stylized representation—a “Japanese-flavored” environment—that efficiently communicates refinement and high status without the cost or complexity of genuine cultural immersion.

3. Local Agency and the Third Space

The finding of Local Appropriation directly addresses a key gap in the existing literature, which focuses solely on the unidirectional flow and passive consumption of Japanese cultural exports (Iwabuchi, 2002). This study, instead, emphasizes the agency of the local Indonesian entrepreneur in the production of commercial discourse.

The creative fusion of cultural elements—particularly the use of puns and humor in branding (e.g., Cak Shogun, and Kendo)—is an act of discursive negotiation. It is a form of cultural play, where the Indonesian business community is actively “playing Japan” by transforming a foreign cultural resource into a tool for domestic market expression.

This dynamic blending perfectly illustrates the formation of a Hybrid Third Space (Bhabha, 1994). The resulting “Japanese-style” brand identity is an in-between space: It is not the original Japanese culture, as evidenced by the linguistic puns and selective aesthetics; and It is not purely Indonesian, as its symbolic power is derived from Japanese cultural capital.

Instead, it is a new, composite cultural text—a commercial hybrid that serves as a powerful means for Indonesian consumers to engage with a globalized world while remaining firmly grounded in their local linguistic and cultural humor. The successful construction of this hybrid discourse ensures commercial viability by appealing simultaneously to the consumer's longing for cosmopolitan experience and their comfort with the familiar and entertaining local code. The overall findings underscore that “Japanese-style” branding in Indonesia is a discourse of adaptation, aspiration, and agency, transforming global cultural flows into strategically tailored local economic value.

F. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored how Indonesian businesses construct “Japanese-style” branding through a process of discursive hybridization rather than mere cultural imitation. By utilizing linguistic, visual, and narrative strategies, businesses in Indonesia appropriate Japanese cultural symbols to create a flexible and dynamic brand identity that signifies quality, modernity, and sophistication.

The findings show that “Japanese style” is not a static representation of Japan but a hybridized symbol that is recontextualized to fit the tastes and values of Indonesian consumers. Through wordplay, visual elements, and cultural references, these brands engage in creative appropriation and identity negotiation, blending global cultural flows with local sensibilities.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that Japanese-style branding in Indonesia serves as a source of aesthetic, symbolic, and humorous capital. It is not a “foreign culture to be worshipped” but a flexible commodity that can be parodied, localized, and strategically used to negotiate class, values, and lifestyles in Indonesia's urban consumer culture. This research contributes to the broader understanding of how global culture is localized through branding practices, offering insights into the dynamic intersection of language, culture, and identity in contemporary consumer markets.

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Nihonkoku Shoukan: A Desire to Unleash the Power of the JSDF

Fathoni Hermanto⁷

Abstract

During the second term of Shinzo Abe's administration (2012–2020), the Japanese government carried out military build-up on a larger scale than the previous periods and continued to increase significantly. However, on the other hand, this military build-up has not been matched by the enforcement of Japan's territorial sovereignty. Over the past decade, there have been violations of territorial sovereignty and endangered Japanese citizens abroad. This sparked diverse responses from the Japanese people, one of which is expressed through popular media. Therefore, this research discusses the *manga Nihonkoku Shoukan* (2018-present) by Minorou. This study will analyze how fantasy constructs the depiction of the JSDF in the *Nihonkoku Shoukan*. Furthermore, this study aims to explain the connection between the representation of the JSDF in *Nihonkoku Shoukan* and the issues of ambivalent pacifism and the ambiguity of the JSDF's role. This study will use Susan J. Napier's framework on modes of fantasy. This study argues that the *Nihonkoku Shoukan* attempts to emphasise the importance of drawing clear boundaries around the form of Japanese pacifism, so that the ambiguity of the JSDF's role can be resolved.

Keywords: *JSDF, Susan J. Napier, modes of fantasy, Japan's pacifism*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the second term of Shinzo Abe's administration (2012-2020), Japan's military build-up has risen to a level that was never achieved after Japan's defeat in World War Two (Heginbotham & Samuels, 2017). This development has been shaped by growing regional tensions in East Asia, particularly involving China and North Korea, and has been accompanied by increased defence spending and efforts to strengthen the operational capacity of the JSDF (Hornung, 2021; Japan Ministry of Defense, 2020).

Then there was an attempt to reinterpret Article 9⁸, which limits Japan's capabilities in the field of defence, by drafting and passing Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security (2015). This legislation allows for the expansion of Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF) operations both domestically and internationally. This includes providing logistical assistance to other countries' military forces, rescuing Japanese citizens abroad, and deploying United Nations Peacekeepers overseas (Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

On the other hand, following the enactment of this legislation, Japan has faced a series of threats to its sovereignty. Regional security issues and the safety of Japanese citizens abroad also pose direct challenges to Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security (2015). Several of Japan's neighbouring countries continue to violate its territorial sovereignty, and there have been a number of incidents that have endangered the safety of Japanese citizens abroad.

This situation has placed the Japanese people in a position of uncertainty regarding their own country's national security. Some Japanese citizens are concerned that Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security (2015) will actually drag Japan into armed conflict with other countries. Meanwhile, others are demanding that the Japanese government take a firm stance in dealing with ongoing security issues. These diverse responses have been expressed in various ways, such as demonstrations and surveys (VOA, 2015; The Mainichi, 2023; Kyodo News, 2025). Another form of response has been conveyed through popular media. Since 2015, the JSDF has often been represented in various popular media in Japan, such as *anime*, *manga*, films, and others.

Currently, there have been several studies discussing how the JSDF is portrayed in popular media, especially since 2015. Michael Cserkits (2021) attempts to explain the motives behind the production of the *anime* titled *Gate: Jieitai Kanochi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri* (2015). In his article, Cserkits argues that this *anime* was used as a propaganda medium to increase public trust in the JSDF. According to Cserkits, this is demonstrated by portraying the JSDF as heroic and neutral despite being under pressure from the Japanese parliament.

Takayoshi Yamamura (2017) attempts to explain the JSDF's direct involvement in several popular media productions and examines how this involvement affects these popular media products. In his argument, Yamamura attempts to counter several other arguments that criticise the JSDF for interfering in popular culture production. He reveals this through findings that the JSDF plays a passive role in collaborations with popular media producers. Yamamura argues that the JSDF's various collaborations in *anime* production are driven more by entertainment purposes than by ideological intentions.

Paul Martin (2018) attempts to explain the position of the *manga* titled *Gate: Jieitai Kanochi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri* (2011) in the discourse of 'pop nationalism' in Japan. Martin argues that in practice, the *manga* attempts to separate nationalism from state politics, but the narrative that emerges actually shows inconsistencies in the depiction of the JSDF. According to Martin, this inconsistency in separating nationalism and state politics demonstrates that this work is not a popular media product that is entirely apolitical.

This study will contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding the representation of the JSDF in popular media, focusing on a *manga* titled *Nihonkoku Shoukan*. This *manga* adapts a novel of the same title by Minorou, who also wrote the *manga* version, with illustrations by Chiharu Takano. The

⁸ Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution (*Nihonkoku Kenpō*) emphasises that Japan renounces the use of military force to resolve international disputes.

manga began serialisation in ComicWalker on June 24, 2018, and is still ongoing at the time of the writing of this study. The *manga* is set in the Japanese archipelago, which has been summoned to another world where countries have varying levels of civilisation, ranging from medieval magic to World War II technology. The *manga* depicts the Japanese government engaging in diplomacy through various measures, one of which is direct military action by the JSDF. This narrative aligns with the rising regional security issues and JSDF military development that occurred around 2015 to 2018, when the *manga* was created and serialized.

This study will analyze how fantasy constructs the depiction of the JSDF in the *manga Nihonkoku Shoukan*. Furthermore, this study aims to explain the connection between the representation of the JSDF in *Nihonkoku Shoukan* and the issues of ambivalent pacifism and the ambiguity of the JSDF's role.

METHOD

The analysis in this study will use Susan J. Napier's framework on fantasy to analyse the depiction of the JSDF in the *manga Nihonkoku Shoukan*. Through her book entitled *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing contemporary Japanese animation* (2005), Napier explains that:

In other words, Japanese animation is far more than simply an escape valve for the masses. It is also far more than simply a "reflection" of contemporary Japanese social currents or "compensation" for Japanese social anxieties (p. 33).

Through this statement, Napier emphasises the complexity of the narrative dimension of *anime* as a form of fantasy media. Although Napier's framework was developed primarily through the analysis of *anime*, this study adopts her concept of *modes of fantasy* as a textual and contextual analytical lens, allowing its application to *manga* without assuming medium-specific features. Napier mentions that there are three modes used, which are (1) the apocalyptic, (2) the festival, and (3) the elegiac. The apocalyptic mode depicts crisis or destruction, whether physical or non-physical; the festival mode evokes depictions that overturn identities or hierarchies; and the elegiac mode evokes depictions of loss or nostalgia (Napier, 2005, pp. 12–13). The three modes do not serve to categorise a work rigidly, but rather they appear or do not appear and are combined within a work (Napier, 2005, p.14). This research will focus on analysing the dialogue and visuals of the *manga Nihonkoku Shoukan*, which depicts the JSDF.

This study will use twelve pages of *manga* as the main data for textual analysis. These pages or scenes were selected because they depict similar narrative patterns that are repeated throughout the *manga*. Thus, these repeated depictions can be understood as a representational strategy that allows for an interpretation of the *manga's* perspective on issues that occurred during its production period. Then, as supporting data, this study will use data from the Japanese government and media reports used to map the contextualisation of the period in which this *manga* was produced.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Textual Analysis: Representation of the JSDF

The JSDF is the main subject of this *manga*. Twelve pages will be used for the main analysis in this section, divided into two categories that describe the JSDF.

1. Immediate Military Responses

In this *manga*, the military response is depicted as a direct measure taken by the Japanese government in response to military actions by other countries that threaten Japan's allies or the Japanese people.

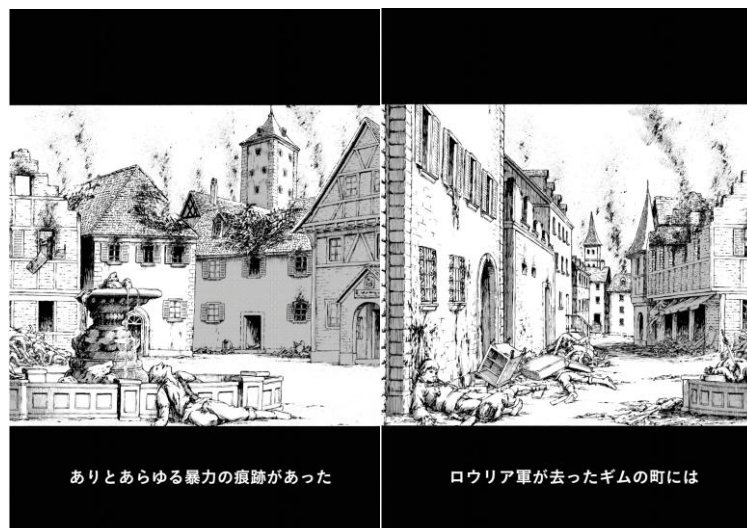


Figure 1. The massacre of the Qua-Toyne people, who were allies of Japan (Chapter 4, p.130 & p. 131)

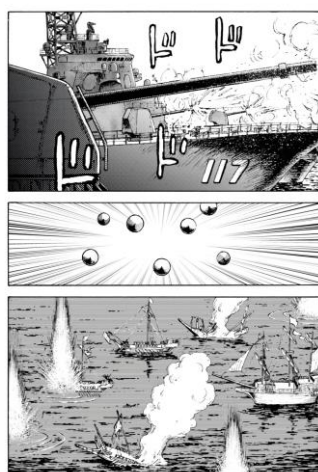


Figure 2. Military support provided by the Japanese Government (Chapter 6, p.30)

In these scenes, Japan's ally in the *manga*, Qua-Toyle, is depicted as undergoing military aggression from another country. This aggression is depicted as involving the massacre of Qua-Toyle civilians (Figure 1). In response to this situation, the Japanese government is depicted as offering direct military assistance in the form of JSDF deployment. The JSDF then participates directly in battles alongside Qua-Toyle (Figure 2).

The scene in Figure 1 allows for an apocalyptic interpretation, in which a crisis is depicted. The scene depicts a destroyed city with corpses lying around and civilians as the main victims, which can be categorised as a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998)⁹ and is morally intolerable, thus allowing it to be read as a form of crisis. The crisis is depicted as drawing the Japanese government into a crucial position where a direct attack on its allies could have an impact on Japan's security. This creates a sense of urgency to respond in the form of military support.

The depiction of the Japanese government's response, as shown in Figure 2, can be interpreted through the fantasy of a festival in the form of a restructuring of the JSDF's role. The scene in Figure 2 depicts the JSDF dominating the battle, in which there are three JMSDF (Japan Maritime Self-

⁹ The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) is a treaty concerning international crimes related to genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression.

Defense Force) ships, which are also depicted as being larger so that they can easily defeat the entire enemy fleet. The JSDF is depicted taking steps to use full force to resolve the crisis. This is in contrast to the JSDF's role in passive self-defence.

In this context, the depiction in this scene evokes imaginative forms of possibilities that could occur in reality. Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security (2015) explains that military support for other countries that are Japan's allies can be provided if the conditions experienced by those countries endanger Japan. Thus, the apocalyptic fantasy mode in these scenes serves to construct a depiction of the JSDF's use as a possible extreme response.

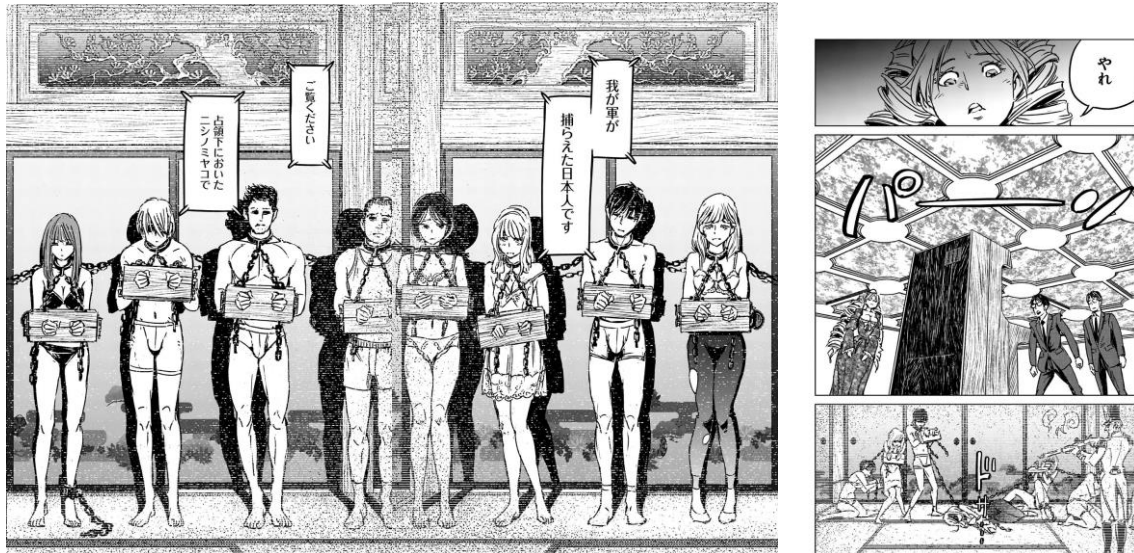


Figure 3. Japanese citizens who were taken hostage and executed (Chapter 31, p. 12, p.13, & p. 19)

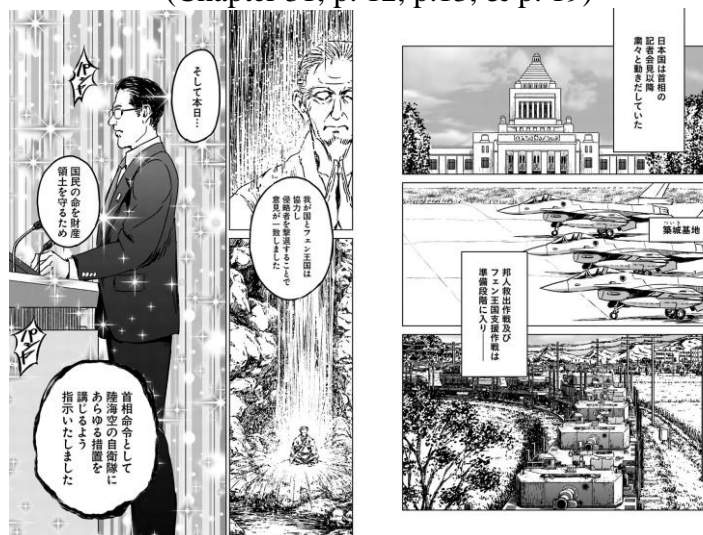


Figure 4. The Japanese Prime Minister ordered the JSDF to conduct military operations (Chapter 31, p.29 & Chapter 32, p. 42)

Several scenes depict another country, known in the *manga* as the Parpaldian Empire, arresting, taking hostage, and executing Japanese citizens within its occupied territories (Figure 3). In response, Japanese diplomats engage in diplomatic efforts by making demands that are practically impossible for the Parpaldian Empire to fulfil. The depiction of these demands can be read as an attempt by the Japanese government in this *manga* to leave the Parpaldian Empire with no choice but to go to war. In the next scene, the Japanese Prime Minister orders the JSDF to take any measures necessary to expel the Parpaldian Empire from its occupied territories (Figure 4).

These scenes allow for an apocalyptic mode of reading in which a crisis is depicted. In Figure 3, the depiction of hostages chained like slaves and the live broadcast of executions without clear justification can be seen as acts that violate international law as stated in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) and indicate a moral crisis. Therefore, proportional responses under the Japanese constitution, such as diplomatic negotiations, official protests, sanctions, and other non-military actions that could be taken, are depicted as irrelevant. Thus, Figure 4 depicts the Japanese Prime Minister as legitimizing unconstitutional actions, whereby offensive measures by the JSDF, which should not be permitted under the Japanese constitution, become necessary to resolve the crisis. Furthermore, the depiction of the Japanese National Diet Building¹⁰ receiving less space on the page than JSDF combat vehicles indicates that military measures are prioritised over diplomatic measures.

Historically, a similar event in this scene also occurred in 2015, when two Japanese citizens were captured, taken hostage, and ultimately executed by ISIS¹¹ (BBC News, 2015 & NBC News, 2015). However, these incidents were not followed by military retaliation from the Japanese government due to constitutional limitations. This shows that in these scenes, apocalyptic fantasy serves to construct the JSDF as an imaginative response to unresolved structural limitations in the historical context.

Several scenes reveal a recurring pattern, depicting a moral crisis that subsequently legitimises extreme responses that transcend constitutional boundaries. These extreme responses trigger a shift in the role of the JSDF from passive defence to offensive measures involving direct attacks on enemy nations. These depictions emphasize that fantasy can serve as a form of imagination of the concerns of some Japanese people regarding the ambiguity of the JSDF's role by depicting military measures being taken instead of diplomatic measures.

2. Use of Prohibited Weapons

Several scenes in this *manga* depict military responses that exceed the normative limitations regulating the use of a country's military force. This is illustrated by the depiction of the use of prohibited weapons.

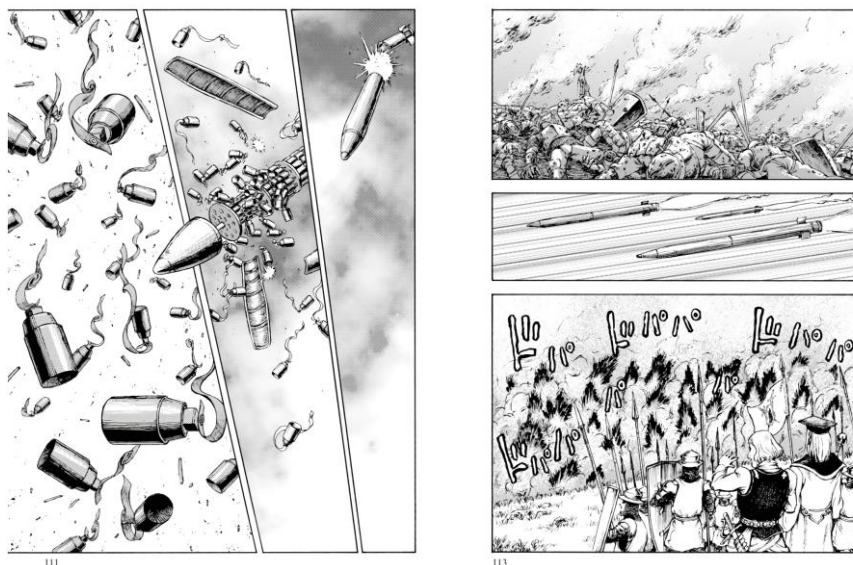


Figure 5. The JSDF uses cluster munitions (Chapter 9, p. 111 & p. 113)

¹⁰ The National Diet Building is the Japanese parliament assembly building located in Tokyo.

¹¹ The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is a jihadist militant group that was established to overthrow the legitimate government of Iraq following the 2003 Iraq War.

The scene depicts a Qua-Toyle fortress under attack and requesting assistance from the JSDF. The JSDF responds by providing supporting fire to Qua-Toyle, firing artillery directly at the enemy forces. The attack is depicted as successfully wiping out the enemy forces in a single strike (Figure 5).

This scene can be interpreted as a festival mode, presenting an image that transcends the limitations that bind the JSDF's identity as a military force. The scene in figure 5 depicts the JSDF using weapons with cluster munitions¹², the use of which can be categorised as a war crime according to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (2008)¹³. This is contrary to the characteristics of the JSDF, which require the use of weapons with minimal casualties. This is also supported by the dialogue in this scene:

JSDF Personnel: 『「クラスター爆弾禁止条約」により姿を消したはずだが異世界で現役復帰か・・・』

JSDF Personnel: “*It has been retired due to the prohibition of Convention on Cluster Munitions, but I see they put it back into service in the other world.*”

(Chapter 9, p. 95)

This dialogue shows that the narrative in this manga is aware that the use of such weapons is prohibited internationally. On the other hand, the scene also depicts actions that the Japanese government can carry out in a situation where it is not bound by these norms.

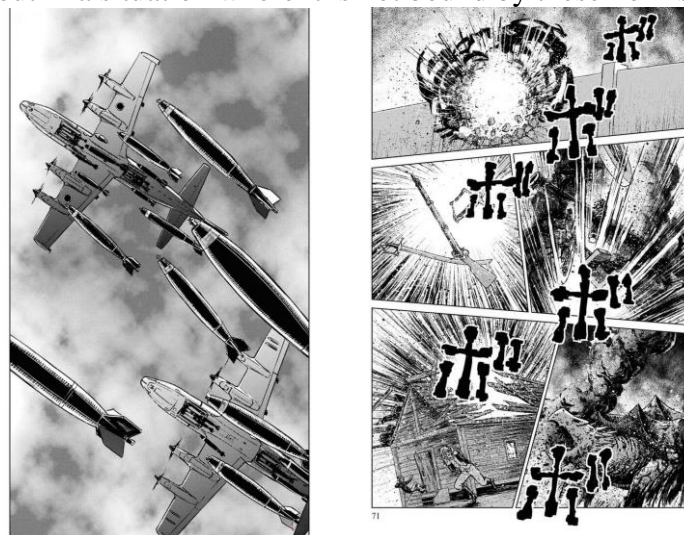


Figure 6. The JSDF carried out air strikes with carpet bombing (Chapter 43, p. 69 & p. 71)

The scene depicts the JSDF conducting offensive military operations against enemy territory with the objective of neutralizing that country's military capabilities. The operation is depicted as focusing on a large-scale air strike that successfully and totally destroys enemy military objects (Figure 6).

The scene in Figure 6 depicts the JSDF conducting a carpet bombing¹⁴ attack, which can be categorised as a war crime under the Geneva Convention (1977)¹⁵. The depiction of the JSDF attacking another country's territory and using destructive methods exceeds the limits that should be set to restrain the use of force in resolving conflicts. Therefore, this scene can be interpreted as a

¹² Cluster munitions are explosive weapons capable of releasing multiple smaller explosive objects.

¹³ The Convention on Cluster Munitions (2008) is an international treaty that specifically prohibits the use of cluster munitions in warfare.

¹⁴ Carpet bombing is a method of bombing an area by dropping a large number of bombs.

¹⁵ The Geneva Convention is an international agreement that establishes humanitarian law regarding the treatment of non-combatants in warfare.

festival mode in which the JSDF is depicted as being able to carry out actions that are supposed to be restricted.

Both scenes depict the JSDF taking decisive action in the form of attacks using methods that are against the law. This depiction is not intended to criticise international law or the Japanese constitution itself, but rather to emphasise a more proactive and decisive defence measure than in reality. Thus, the festival mode in both scenes serves as a fantasy of the Japanese government being able to act more freely and decisively than its normative position in the real world.

After analyzing the scenes textually, the author observes that this *manga* attempts to obscure the boundaries that limit the role of the JSDF. This is done using what Napier refers to as apocalyptic mode and festival mode. Both modes serve to construct a fantasy of JSDF identity that is freed from its limitations. The author argues that the depiction of leaps beyond constitutional and normative boundaries in this *manga* attempts to reaffirm the concerns of some Japanese people regarding the ambiguity of the JSDF's role.

Contextual Analysis: The Ambivalence of Pacifism and the Ambiguity of the JSDF's Role

In the second half of the 2010s, alongside the production and serialization of the *manga Nihonkoku Shoukan* (2018), the Japanese government increased its national defence capabilities to a more significant level than in the previous period. This was demonstrated by an increase in the military budget from ¥4.78 trillion in 2015 to ¥5.01 trillion in 2020. This increase in the military budget was allocated for the purchase of new military vehicles and research related to national defence (Japan Ministry of Defence, 2024). This includes the purchase of defence missiles, fighter jets (147 units of F-35 made in the US), and the construction of domestically made warships (two aircraft carriers and four submarines) (Hornung, 2021; The Straits Times, 2018; Japan Ministry of Defence, 2020). The enactment of Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security (2015) reaffirmed the Japanese government's commitment to national defence. This legislation provides a legal basis for the JSDF to take more proactive defence measures, including legitimising the possibility of entering into war with other countries. This series of measures has sparked concerns that Japan is abandoning its pacifism (Gustafsson, Hagström, and Hanssen, 2018; Hughes, 2022; Kitaoka, 2023). This issue has also been criticised by some of Japanese people through a series of demonstrations that took place around 2015 and in the 2020s, demanding that the Japanese government return to complying with its constitution as a pacifist state (The Guardian, 2015; VOA, 2015; & The Mainichi, 2023).

On the other hand, amid the Japanese government's efforts to assert its sovereignty, a series of events have occurred that threaten Japan's sovereignty. This is shown by the increasing number of violations of territorial sovereignty, both air and sea, by neighbouring countries and acts of terrorism that threaten the safety of Japanese citizens abroad. A number of territorial violations that occurred from 2016 (the year Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security (2015) came into effect) to 2018 (the year the *manga Nihonkoku Shoukan* was serialized) are shown in the following table:

Year	Country	Type of Violation	Number of Violation
2016	China	Maritime violation	121 times
2016	China & Russia	Airspace violation	1168 times
2017	North Korea	Airspace violation (Missile Launch)	7 times

2017	China	Maritime violation	79 times
2017	China & Russia	Airspace violation	904 times
2018	China	Maritime violation	106 times
2018	China & Russia	Airspace violation	999 times

Table 1. Violations of Japan's territorial sovereignty 2016-2018 (Ministry of Defence, 2017; Ministry of Defence, 2025; & Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025)

Then, within the same period, a number of incidents occurred that directly endangered the safety of Japanese citizens abroad. In 2016, a terrorist attack in Dhaka, Bangladesh killed seven Japanese citizens (The Japan Times, 2016). Then, a Japanese journalist was held hostage by a militant group in Syria for three years from 2015 to 2018, who was finally rescued through diplomatic efforts by the Japanese government together with Qatar and Turkish government (BBC News, 2018). This shows that the increase in Japan's national defence capabilities is not in line with the lack of decisive action expected by some Japanese people due to constitutional ambiguity (Hagström & Isaksson, 2019; Lenhardt, 2022; & Kadir, 2025). where Article 9 and Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security (2015) conflict with each other, thereby obstructing the JSDF in carrying out its duties. Ongoing security issues have also raised doubts among some Japanese citizens about the JSDF's position as the front line in protecting Japan's sovereignty (Kyodo News, 2025).

The diverse opinions among the public regarding how the JSDF should act and position itself as a defence institution in Japan are in line with the creation of the *manga Nihonkoku Shoukan*. This *manga* expresses its opinion by portraying the JSDF and the Japanese government as more decisive in their decision-making. This is particularly reflected in the depiction of the more liberal use of military measures in dealing with conflicts in the *manga*. The *manga* presents the JSDF as one of the opinions that emphasizes the importance of clarity in the Japanese government's stance in dealing with national security issues that continued to arise during that period.

CONCLUSION

The *manga Nihonkoku Shoukan* presents representations of the JSDF depicted through 1) Immediate Military Responses and 2) Use of Prohibited Weapons. These two themes are viewed through Napier's framework of apocalyptic mode and festival mode. In this *manga*, the two modes function causally. The apocalyptic mode is used to depict moral crises, such as violations of humanitarian law, which justify extreme changes in roles that can be seen through the festival mode. Both modes construct a fantasy about the identity of the JSDF, freed from the limitations that bind it in crisis situations. Thus, the author argues that the representation of the JSDF in this *manga* attempts to show the concerns of some Japanese people about the ambiguity of the JSDF's role.

Minorou's *manga* was serialized during a period when Japan's defence capabilities had increased significantly, raising concerns that Japan was abandoning its pacifism. At the same time, Japan faced a series of violations of its sovereignty, both territorially and in events that directly endangered Japanese citizens. This raised doubts about the function of the JSDF as a national defence institution. These various opinions were in line with the Japanese government's depiction of military action as a form of decisiveness in decision-making. The author argues that the *manga Nihonkoku Shoukan* attempts to emphasise the importance of drawing clear boundaries around the form of Japanese pacifism, so that the ambiguity of the JSDF's role can be resolved.

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1986 Japanese Red Army Violence in Jakarta: Attack on Status?

Fesa Husnayovari¹⁶

Abstract

On May 14, 1986, three major incidents occurred in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. First, a rocket landed on the grounds of the United States Embassy, causing panic and temporarily closing the embassy. Shortly afterward, a rocket was launched from the nearby President Hotel, targeting the Japanese Embassy. Although the rockets failed to detonate, the incident shocked those working there. A car bomb then exploded in the parking lot of Wisma Metropolitan I, the home of the Canadian Embassy. Unlike the previous attacks, this one caused a fire and several injuries. A joint investigation by Japanese and Indonesian police concluded that Tsutomu Shirotsuki, a member of the Japanese Red Army, was responsible. The Japanese Red Army was a left-wing militant group with a long history of violence. Several studies have been conducted on the Japanese Red Army, but none have focused on the specific attacks in Jakarta and interpreted the sequence of events leading up to them. The purpose of this paper is to explore the incidents of these attacks and attempt to explain the meaning behind them. The method I use for this paper is an analysis of digitized media archives and the use of supporting literature. A few days before the attacks, United States President Ronald Reagan visited Bali, Indonesia, to attend a meeting on ASEAN-USA relations. This visit is said to have elevated Indonesia's status as an ally of the United States and the Western alliance. Using the World and Status Order Theory by Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, I argue that the attacks in Jakarta can be interpreted as an attack on Indonesia's status as an anti-communist state and a close ally of America and the Western world.

Keywords: *Japanese red army, nihon sekigun, terrorism, Jakarta incident*

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INTRODUCTION

On May 14, 1986, the United States Embassy in Jakarta received an uninvited guest. A rocket landed on the grounds of the embassy building and could explode at any moment. The embassy was closed to the public, and all visitors were asked to leave. Shortly afterward, another rocket was fired, this time landing on the Japanese Embassy. As if those two shocking incidents weren't enough, a car exploded in the parking lot of Wisma Metropolitan I, which housed the Canadian Embassy (Tempo, 1986).

That same day, the Kyodo News Agency and the Yomiuri Daily received anonymous phone calls claiming to be from the Anti-Imperialist Brigade. This group claimed responsibility for the violence. They also stated that the attack was a response to the G7 Summit held the previous week in Tokyo. The summit condemned international terrorism and accused Libya of being a state sponsor of terrorism, as it had also been hit by a rocket attack during its opening (Tempo, 1986).

The investigation, conducted through a collaboration between the Indonesian National Police and the Japanese National Police, pointed to Tsutomu Shirosaki, a man said to be linked to the left-wing militant organization the Japanese Red Army, or Nihon Sekigun (Tempo, 1986). Until the end of his life, Shirosaki denied these accusations (Asahi, 2024; Sankei, 2016). The author realizes that the use of the name Japanese Red Army in the title of this article may be considered biased towards mainstream media coverage or statements from authorities, but this was done because this event was already generally known to be linked to the Japanese Red Army. Therefore, this article will also include Shirosaki's confession and denial, and the extent of his connection to the organization.

PROBLEMS

This attack is one of the major attacks that, for some reason, is rarely discussed in the media today. One question that may remain unresolved is the motive behind the attack. Of course, this article does not intend to find answers to that question. Rather, it attempts to dissect the events that occurred and the background to the incident.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From my research, I found no papers that specifically analyzed the 1986 Jakarta attacks, let alone linking them to status. However, I did find an article titled "Hijackers, Bombers, and Bank Robbers: Managerial Style in the Japanese Red Army" by Patricia G. Steinhoff (1989), which explains how the Japanese Red Army worked and operated. Then, there's also the article "The Japanese Red Army (JRA) in Southeast Asia 1972-1990: An Analysis of the Terror Group's Strategy and Presence in the Region" by Aloysius Anthony Lim Cheng H.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the early sociologists to analyze status and refer to it as social honor was Max Weber. He referred to it as *stande* or social rank, which typically involves claims of positive or negative privilege in social estimation. This typically refers to how one lives, formal modes of cultivation, empirical or rational instruction, and the prestige of birth or occupation. The position achieved through social rank is usually expressed through intermarriage, frequent meals together, monopolistic appropriation of privileged opportunities, and other social rank-related conventions. Social rank can be determined by class, particular or ambiguous kind. Possession of money and position as a businessperson can pave the way for this. Social rank can also be increased through one's lifestyle, including occupation, through hereditary charisma acquired as descendants of someone with a certain social rank, and through the appropriation of political or hierocratic ruling power as monopolies (Weber, 2019).

In the "Status and World Order" (2014), Deborah Welch Larson, T.V. Paul and William C. Wohlforth define status as collective beliefs about a country's ranking on valued attributes. These attributes include culture, wealth, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, coercive capabilities, and diplomatic clout. Status manifests in two distinct but related ways in international politics. First, as a member of a defined club of actors. Second, as a ranking within that club. Membership in international society is a status that is pursued, and once achieved, it is recognized by others. Furthermore, within the club, a hierarchy exists that determines who is a leader and who is a subordinate. In other words, status is collective, subjective, and relative (Larson et al., 2014).

As a reflection of collective beliefs, status transcends individual country perceptions. There are often differences in perceptions about a country's ranking within an organization, but there is also agreement on who is the leader. Subjectivity is also a significant factor influencing status because status cannot be measured by material attributes but rather by the perceptions of others. Some attributes that form the basis of status can be measured, such as economic status or military strength. However, others, such as cultural achievements, soft power, and moral authority, cannot be measured. Even within measurable indicators, differences can occur, for example, a country can have a strong military but a weak economy. Status is also relative to others, meaning it cannot be enjoyed by all. However, this does not mean that status is always zero-sum (Larson et al., 2014).

METHOD

This research uses qualitative methods involving the analysis of digitized media archives and literature. Examples include the digital archive of Tempo magazine from 1986 and public papers retrieved from the Ronald Reagan Library website. I also used several sources explaining the status and history of the Japanese Red Army.

INDONESIA IN 1986

In 1986, Indonesia was under the New Order government led by former general President Suharto. The New Order's attitude towards the West and Japan was described as both open and guarded. Openness here refers to Indonesia's openness to credit, assistance, investment, and foreign capitalist markets. However, Indonesia was also guarded or suspicious of foreign influence. This was influenced by the history of the nationalist revolution against Dutch and Japanese imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries. The majority of the elites who controlled Indonesia's foreign policy at that time were said to be open to establishing relations with the West. This openness was evident in the attitude of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Mochtar Kusumaatmadja (Liddle, 1987). Suharto himself was known as a central anti-communist figure in Indonesia. The New Order he led was said to have been involved in the mass slaughter of people considered communists after the murder of several generals, allegedly masterminded by the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965 (Irfani, 2025).

REAGAN'S VISIT

On March 5, 1986, the White House announced that United States President Ronald Reagan would visit Bali from April 29 to May 2, 1986. Then, in May, Reagan would visit Japan from May 4 to May 6, 1986. On April 25, 1986, President Reagan made a remark about his trip to Indonesia and Japan (Reagan, 1986). Reagan's visit was described as a symbolic event reaffirming Indonesia's position as an anti-communist, politically stable, and economically growing ally of the United States (Liddle, 1987).

At the Summit of Industrialized Nations (G7) Economic Summit, seven countries—the United States, Japan, and others—issued a Statement on International Terrorism, which condemned international terrorism, agreed to strengthen global cooperation, exchanged information on potential

threats and preventative measures, restricted and boycotted Libya, and more (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1986).

ATTACK ON JAKARTA

Just under two weeks after Reagan's arrival in Bali, three attacks occurred in Jakarta. On the morning of Wednesday, May 14, 1986, a cardboard collector saw two men unpacking a 1 x 1 meter crate in front of the east entrance of Pekan Raya Jakarta exhibition area, about 400 meters from the United States Embassy. The two men removed two cylinders from the crate, which were also used as supports. They then stood the two cylinders at a 45-degree angle toward the US Embassy building. A foreigner then arrived, and the three operated something inside the crate and then left. An explosion was heard a few minutes later, and the two cylinders shot into the air as rockets. One rocket landed in the front yard of the US Embassy, while the other landed in the back garden. However, both rockets landed without exploding. This incident occurred at 11:15 a.m. (Tempo, 1986).

At 11:30 a.m., Japanese Embassy Counselor Takaichi Yoneda was receiving guests in his office and was startled by the sound of an explosion. The sound came from a rocket that had struck the embassy wall. Initially, it hit the iron sunshade on the fourth floor wall and then hit the iron curtain on the third floor, but this rocket also failed to explode. The bomb squad arrived at the Japanese Embassy at 12:00 p.m. and discovered that the rocket had been launched from the President Hotel, located approximately 60 meters across from the Japanese Embassy. This was discovered after smoke appeared in room 827 of the hotel. In the hotel room, two beds were still intact, but two wired irons were found connected to an electrical outlet with a green transformer attached, and a Lorus Quartz timer was also found (Tempo, 1986).

Thirty-five minutes later, an explosion occurred in the parking lot of the Wisma Metropolitan I office building on Jalan Sudirman. The explosion involved a time bomb hidden in the trunk of a brown Mitsubishi Lancer sedan with license plate number B 1897 XG. At least five cars caught fire, and several people suffered burns. Wisma Metropolitan I is where the Canadian Embassy is located (Tempo, 1986).

The investigation focused on the guest staying in Room 827 of the President Hotel and the driver of the Lancer B 1897 XG, as witnesses' leads varied. On Friday, May 16, at approximately 11 a.m., the director of National Car Rental (NCR) visited the police station. His office had served President Reagan and his entourage in Bali about a week earlier, using all of its vehicles. To fill the gap in Jakarta, NCR had rented a Lancer B 1897 XG from someone. On May 6, a Japanese man identifying himself as Shunsuke Kikuchi called to rent a car from May 7 to 10. The next day, Kikuchi, speaking English with a Japanese accent, arrived and rented the Lancer. Kikuchi was described as being 170 cm tall and wearing a short-sleeved shirt, dark trousers, and leather shoes. He appeared cheerful and had paid for the four-day car rental. On May 10, Kikuchi returned to the NCR office to extend the car rental until May 14. The car rental agreement with NCR stated that Kikuchi's residence was at the President Hotel, room 827. Furthermore, it was stated that the Lancer had been parked at the President Hotel for three days. Police concluded that Kikuchi was the perpetrator and estimated he had been living in Jakarta for some time. This was because he arrived alone at the NCR, drove himself without a driver, and refused to be shown a map of Jakarta. He likely used three passports: one to enter Indonesia, a second passport in Kikuchi's name, and another to leave Indonesia. Investigations revealed that Shunsuke Kikuchi's passport was stolen from a prospective teacher in Yokohama (Tempo, 1986).

In June 1986, the perpetrator's identity was finally revealed. Indonesian police found 19 fingerprints in room 827 of the President Hotel, with 10 belonging to one person. The ten fingerprints were sent to be matched with Japanese police records and revealed to belong to Tsutomu Shirosaki, who was said to be a member of the Nihon Sekigun, or Japanese Red Army. Shirosaki was born on December 5, 1947, in Okayama City, west of Osaka. In 1977, he attended Tokushima University and became interested in the student movement that was gaining popularity across Japanese campuses. In

1970, Shirosaki joined the Kyosando-Sekigun-Ha, or faction of the Red Army. A year later, Shirosaki participated in robbing several post offices and banks in Chiba and Kanagawa to raise funds for the Red Army. (Hutabarat, 1986)

JAPANESE RED ARMY

Discussing the Japanese Red Army, or Nihon Sekigun, means discussing the long history of left-wing militant movements in Japan. At least three groups used the Sekigun name. First, the Sekigunha, or Red Army Faction, led by Shiomi Takaya in 1968. Second, the United Red Army, or Rengo Sekigun, formed in Lebanon in 1971. Third, the Nihon Sekigun, or Japanese Red Army, was originally the international base of the Sekigunha, or Red Army Faction, in Lebanon and active since 1971 (Steinhoff, 1989).

Over the course of their development, they had three dimensions of activity. First, rhetoric or wild demonstrations, which eventually became sudden direct action or propaganda by deed. Second, from mass activity or large groups to elite activity or small groups. Finally, from prior publicity or mass participation to secrecy, generating mass media publicity (Steinhoff, 1989).

Their organizational chart arranged assignments based on the status of each member university. For example, their first leader was a student at an elite university. In other words, status is something they care about (Steinhoff, 1989).

DISCUSSION

Referring to the theory of Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, it is possible that Reagan's visit to Indonesia to attend the ASEAN event further solidified Indonesia's position as a close ally of the Western world and enhanced its status within the Western world. The mass killings of suspected communists in Indonesia in the 1960s seemed to form the basis for Indonesia's stance as an anti-communist state. Furthermore, the G7 Summit in Tokyo focused specifically on condemning terrorism and left-wing militancy. Here, the status of the left-wing movement was widely criticized by the seven major powers. The Japanese Red Army, along with its predecessors, was a group concerned with and aware of the importance of status. The weak preparation and failure of the two rocket attacks and the attacks on three Western embassies in Indonesia suggest that these attacks were merely status attacks. This could be the Japanese Red Army's way of getting media attention.

CONCLUSION

The violence in Jakarta, 1986, can be interpreted as a form of political communication that signaled tensions in Indonesia's pursuit of international status. The question posed in the title "Attack on Status?" aims to capture the uncertain and symbolic nature of the attack. I acknowledge that this paper still has many shortcomings, but it is hoped that while condemning all forms of terrorism, we must also be aware of the many global tensions and resistance that arise from Western domination of marginalized groups like Palestine.

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Implementation of Digital Humanities for Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia: Role, Contribution, and Challenge

Hendra Manurung¹⁷ and Mitro Prihantoro¹⁸

Abstract

This paper aims to describe analytically the roles, contributions, and challenges faced in implementing digital humanities for Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia. It employs a qualitative methodology and literature review to understand the applications of digital humanities. Digital humanities have presented a new paradigm in Japanese studies in Southeast Asia by offering the integration of computational methods and digital technology into humanities research. In the context of Japanese Studies, the implementation of DH facilitates access to and preservation of historical, cultural, and archival resources through the digitization of collections, including manuscripts, letters, artworks, and Japanese literature. This innovation broadens the reach of research, enabling collaboration across countries and disciplines, and enriching the learning and teaching experience through online platforms and virtual interactions between researchers in Japan and Southeast Asia. This strategic role is evident in the use of digital media for cultural diplomacy through "Cool Japan," the use of manga, anime, and cultural heritage to strengthen bilateral relations, and build a positive image of Japan in the region. These key contributions to Japanese Studies include greater public access to digital collections, the formation of a cross-border research community, and innovations in data analysis methods such as big data, modeling, and spatial research.

Keywords: *Digital humanities, Japanese studies, Southeast Asia, role, challenge*

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1. INTRODUCTION: A CONFLUENCE OF DISCIPLINES AND REGIONS

Japanese Studies, as an academic field, has traditionally been anchored in philology, history, literary criticism, and the social sciences. Its epistemological foundations were largely laid in North American, European, and Japanese institutions, often framing Japan as a distant object of study. Southeast Asia's engagement with Japan, however, is far from distant. Historically, it is rooted in a dense tapestry of interactions, from the pre-modern maritime trade and the cultural imprint of the Japanese diaspora in the 17th century, to the traumatic experiences of the Pacific War and the contemporary dominance of Japanese economic and popular culture influence.

This proximity and complexity however still demand a methodological toolkit capable of navigating multilayered histories, progress of historical development, multilingual sources, and transnational flows. The entry of Digital Humanities (DH) as an interdisciplinary field that applies computational methods to traditional humanities questions while also critiquing the very digital tools it employs. Thereafter, as Anne Burdick et al. posit, "The digital humanities integrate the methodological repertoire of the humanities with the tools and perspectives of computing, offering new models for knowledge production, new forms of authorship, and new ways to organize research and teaching" (Burdick et al., 2012, p. 3). Therefore, for Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia at present, DH is not merely a trendy add-on; it is emerging as a vital infrastructure for addressing regional research imperatives, challenging hegemonic narratives, and fostering a more inclusive and dynamic scholarly ecosystem.

This article explores the tripartite theme of role, contribution, and challenge in the implementation of DH for Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia. It explains that DH significantly plays a *role* in democratizing access, innovating methodologies, and forging regional and international collaborations. Its primary *contributions* lie in preserving fragile archives, enabling new forms of textual and spatial analysis, and visualizing historical and cultural connections that were previously opaque.

Yet, these advances are tempered by profound *challenges* related to resource allocation, digital literacy, and the philosophical reconciliation of computational logic with humanistic interpretation. Therefore, by examining this interplay, this article aims to provide a comprehensive state-of-the-field analysis and a roadmap for future development.

2. THE ROLE OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES: REFRAMING JAPANESE STUDIES IN A SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONTEXT

The implementation of DH in Southeast Asian Japanese Studies is not a passive process of technology transfer. It is an active reconfiguration of the field's priorities and possibilities. Its role can be understood through three key lenses: as a methodological disruptor, a decolonizing agent, and a collaborative bridge.

2.1 Methodological Disruption and Expansion

Traditional Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia, often housed within language and literature departments, has historically relied on close reading, translation, and historical analysis of a canon of texts. While these methods remain indispensable, DH introduces a complementary "distant reading" approach, as conceptualized by Franco Moretti. Moretti argues that by focusing on "units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes or genres and systems" (Moretti, 2013, p. 48), scholars can identify patterns and trends across vast corpora that are invisible to the naked eye.

For a Southeast Asian researcher analyzing the representation of the region in modern Japanese literature, for instance, traditional methods might involve a deep dive into a handful of novels by prominent authors like Natsume Sōseki or Ōe Kenzaburō. Thereafter, a DH approach, however, would allow for the computational analysis of hundreds or thousands of texts from

databases like Aozora Bunko. Using natural language processing (NLP) and text mining, the scholar could track the frequency and semantic context of keywords like "Nan'yō" (South Seas), "Tōnan Ajia" (Southeast Asia), or "Jakarta" across different historical periods, revealing shifts in Japanese imperialist, post-war, and contemporary economic imaginations of the region. This macro-analytical role empowers scholars to make evidence-based claims about large-scale cultural phenomena, moving beyond anecdotal evidence.

Furthermore, DH expands the very definition of a "text." It enables the analysis of non-traditional materials crucial to Southeast Asian-Japanese interactions, such as digitized propaganda leaflets from the Japanese occupation, post-war trade magazines, manga, anime fan subtitles (fansubs), and social media data. As Timothy R. Tangherlini and Peter Leonard note, "The promise of the digital humanities lies in its ability to help us see the familiar in new ways, and to make the unfamiliar familiar through the aggregation, analysis, and visualization of data" (Tangherlini & Leonard, 2016). This role is pivotal for a region where popular culture and digital media form a primary conduit for contemporary engagement with Japan.

2.2 Decolonizing Knowledge and Creating Polyvocal Archives

Manurung and Prihantoro (2025, p. 2) stated that, the bilateral relationship between Indonesia and Japan represents a strategic partnership between two countries in East and Southeast Asia. This relationship encompasses not only economic and cultural aspects but also has important implications for maintaining regional stability in East Asia, a region known for its complex geopolitical dynamics and high potential for tension. In Asia Pacific, Japan views Indonesia as an important strategic partner in the region, while Indonesia views Japan as a model for economic and technological development.

Meanwhile, a significant role of DH presence in Southeast Asia is its potential to challenge and decentralize the Euro-American and Japanese-centric hegemony in knowledge production about Japan. Much of the primary source material for studying Japan's historical relationship with Southeast Asia is housed in Tokyo, Washington, D.C., or Leiden, physically and intellectually distant from the communities whose histories they document. DH, through digitization and open-access platforms, can repatriate these archives in a digital form, placing them in the hands of local scholars.

This act of digital repatriation is a form of academic decolonization. It allows Southeast Asian researchers to interrogate these sources from their own epistemological standpoints, asking questions that may be overlooked by scholars from the metropole. For example, a Filipino historian using digitized records from the Japanese Military Administration (1942-1945) can use topic modeling to identify latent themes related to local resistance, collaboration, and everyday life under occupation, offering a narrative that complements or challenges the grand strategic narratives found in official Japanese or American war histories.

This aligns with the concept of "postcolonial informatics," which, as Roopika Risam suggests, involves using digital tools to "recover marginalized voices, deconstruct colonial discourses, and create spaces for alternative epistemologies" (Risam, 2019, p. 3). A DH project initiated in Singapore or Indonesia on the Japanese occupation can deliberately link and contextualize documents from multiple national archives, creating a polyvocal and transnational narrative that resists a single, authoritative history. The role of DH here is not neutral; it is inherently political and empowering, fostering a Japanese Studies that speaks *from* Southeast Asia, rather than solely *about* it from the outside.

2.3 Fostering Regional and Transnational Collaboration

Japanese Studies programs in Southeast Asia indeed are often small and isolated, operating with limited resources. DH provides a powerful impetus and infrastructure for collaboration, both within the region and with partners in Japan and beyond. The technical and financial demands of DH projects—building a digital archive, developing a text analysis tool, creating a complex geospatial

visualization—often necessitate multi-institutional partnerships. These collaborations can take several forms:

- **Intra-regional Networks**

Universities in Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines should continuously collaborate on a shared digital repository of oral histories from survivors of the Thai-Burma Railway or other wartime experiences, pooling technical expertise and research resources.

- **North-South Partnerships**

Institutions in Japan, with their advanced technological infrastructure and rich archival holdings, can partner with Southeast Asian universities to co-create digital projects. This model moves beyond the traditional dynamic of the Global North providing valid resources and the Global South providing reliable data.

Instead, it can be a genuine collaboration where Southeast Asian scholars contribute crucial contextual knowledge and research questions that shape the project's direction. As Miyake Curator and Toshihiko Suzuki argue, international DH collaborations require "a mutual understanding of each other's academic cultures and a shared commitment to open data and equitable credit" (Miyake & Suzuki, 2021).

- **Cross-disciplinary Teams**

DH projects naturally bring together linguists, historians, computer scientists, and librarians. This breaks down the silos that have traditionally constrained humanities research and fosters a more holistic understanding of the Japan-Southeast Asia relationship.

In this role, DH acts as a binding agent, creating a cohesive and resilient community of practice for Japanese Studies across Southeast Asia, reducing intellectual dependency, and amplifying the region's collective scholarly voice.

3. THE CONTRIBUTION OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES: TANGIBLE IMPACTS AND PROJECTS

The theoretical roles of DH are given substance through concrete contributions and pioneering projects. These contributions are already beginning to reshape research and teaching in the field, albeit in a nascent stage.

3.1 Digitization, Preservation, and Enhanced Access to Archives

The most immediate and visible contribution of DH is the rescue of fragile and dispersed physical archives through digitization. The regional climate in much of Southeast Asia that high humidity, risk of flooding, and insect damage often poses a constant threat to paper-based materials. Furthermore, many crucial documents related to Japanese-Southeast Asian history are held in private collections or small, underfunded local museums, inaccessible to most researchers. Therefore, DH projects are addressing this directly. For instance:

- **The Philippine-Japanese Historical Documents Digitization Project**

A collaborative effort between universities in the Philippines and Japan, this initiative focuses on digitizing personal diaries, letters, and photographs from the World War II era. These materials, which offer granular, human-level perspectives on the occupation and its aftermath, are being transcribed, translated, and tagged with metadata, making them searchable and analyzable for the first time.

- **The Dutch East Indies / Indonesian Archival Collections**

Several projects, often led by Dutch or Indonesian institutions with Japanese partners, are digitizing colonial-era records that contain extensive information on pre-war and wartime Japanese activities in the archipelago. The "Japan in the Dutch East Indies" collection at Leiden University Libraries, for instance, is being progressively digitized, providing remote access to a wealth of material for scholars in Jakarta, Bangkok, and Singapore.

However, the contribution here is twofold in preservation against physical decay and democratization of access. A graduate student at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok can now examine high-resolution scans of a Japanese propagandist's report from 1940s Java Island without the prohibitive cost of international travel. This levels the academic playing field and enables a new generation of Southeast Asian scholars to engage with primary sources.

3.2 Computational Analysis of Text and Language

Beyond access, DH provides powerful analytical tools. Text mining and NLP are being applied to Japanese-language corpora to uncover patterns and trends. A linguist at the National University of Singapore might use these tools to analyze a corpus of Japanese language textbooks used in Southeast Asia from the 1980s to the present. Therefore, by tracking changes in vocabulary, grammar structures, and cultural references, the researcher can trace the evolution of Japan's "soft power" and the shifting motivations for learning Japanese in the region, from economic necessity to cultural affinity driven by anime and J-pop.

Similarly, sentiment analysis can be applied to a large collection of Japanese news articles about ASEAN from sources like the Asahi Shimbun or Yomiuri Shimbun databases. This can quantitatively measure the tone and framing of Japanese media coverage of Southeast Asia over decades, revealing underlying attitudes and biases that might be difficult to discern through qualitative analysis alone. As Matthew L. Jockers writes, "The macroanalytic approach... allows us to see the forest rather than the trees, to identify the norms and the exceptions, the rules and the outliers" (Jockers, 2013, p. 6). For Southeast Asian scholars, this "forest-level" view of Japanese discourse about their region is an invaluable contribution.

3.3 Geospatial and Network Analysis

A significant strand of Japan-Southeast Asia relations is defined by movement: of people, goods, and ideas. DH's spatial and network analysis tools are uniquely suited to mapping these flows.

- **Geospatial Mapping**

Using historical GIS (Geographic Information Systems), researchers can map the locations of Japanese companies, cultural centers, and migrant communities across Southeast Asian cities over time. For example, a project could visualize the expansion of Japanese automotive manufacturing clusters in Thailand from the 1960s to the present, overlaying this data with infrastructure development and labor migration patterns. This transforms abstract economic data into a tangible spatial narrative of regional integration.

- **Network Analysis**

This method is ideal for studying the complex web of relationships between Japanese officials, local elites, and business leaders during the occupation or in the post-war development era. By building a database of individuals and institutions and coding their relationships (e.g., financial ties, familial connections, and political affiliations), scholars can use network analysis software like Gephi to visualize the structure of power and influence. This can reveal key brokers and isolated actors, providing a more nuanced understanding of collaboration and resistance than a purely textual analysis might allow.

A compelling example is the potential for a project on the "Koa Kunrenjo" (Rise Asia Training Institutes) established by the Japanese military in various Southeast Asian countries. Mapping their locations and analyzing the network of instructors and trainees could provide new insights into Japan's pan-Asianist ideology and its local reception.

3.4 Digital Pedagogy and Public Humanities

The contributions of DH extend beyond research to the classroom and the public sphere. Digital storytelling platforms, interactive maps, and virtual exhibitions are being used to teach Japanese history and culture in a more engaging way. A university in Malaysia might develop a virtual tour of historic Japanese sites in Penang, integrating archival photographs, oral history clips, and 3D models. This makes the learning experience immersive and directly connects students to the local manifestations of a global history.

Furthermore, DH facilitates the crucial move towards public humanities. Many of the digitized archives and digital projects are, or can be made, accessible to the public. This allows descendants of war survivors, members of the Japanese diaspora, and curious learning citizens to explore their own histories. It transforms academic knowledge into a public mindset and scientific resource, fostering a broader societal understanding of the deep and multifaceted relationship between Southeast Asia and Japan.

4. THE CHALLENGES: NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL FRONTIER

Despite its immense potential, the implementation of DH in Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia faces a formidable array of challenges. These obstacles are technological, financial, human, linguistic, and epistemological.

4.1 The Digital Divide and Infrastructural Disparities

The most fundamental challenge is the uneven distribution of digital infrastructure across Southeast Asia. While Singapore and Malaysia boast high-speed internet and advanced computing facilities, universities in rural areas of Indonesia, the Philippines, or Laos may struggle with unreliable internet connectivity, limited bandwidth, and outdated computer labs. This "digital divide" creates a two-tiered system where well-resourced institutions can pioneer DH projects while others are left behind, potentially exacerbating existing academic inequalities within the region.

Therefore, as P.P. Arya and M. Kumar note in the context of Global South academia, "Without a robust and equitable digital infrastructure, the promise of DH to democratize knowledge remains a mirage" (Arya & Kumar, 2020). The high cost of proprietary software for GIS, text analysis, and data visualization further widens this gap. The reliance on free, open-source tools, while a viable alternative, often requires a higher level of technical expertise to install, maintain, and use effectively.

4.2 Funding Support, Sustainability, and the "Project-ization" of Research

DH projects are capital-intensive. They require funding for hardware, software, specialized staff such as programmers, data curators, and often, paid licensing fees for copyrighted materials or databases. Securing sustained funding is a major hurdle. Much of the available funding comes in the form of short-term grants, which leads to the "project-ization" of DH research: a flurry of activity for two to three years, followed by stagnation as the grant ends and the principal investigators move on to the next funded project.

The long-term sustainability of digital projects is a critical concern. Who will maintain the server, update the software, and migrate the data to new formats five or ten years after the project's launch? This "digital decay" threatens to render valuable projects obsolete or inaccessible, wasting the initial investment. As Trevor Owens starkly puts it, "Digital information is fragile... We must actively work to preserve it, or we will lose it" (Owens, 2018). For Southeast Asian institutions with

precarious long-term budgets, this presents an almost insurmountable challenge without dedicated institutional support and international partnerships focused on digital preservation.

4.3 Scarcity of Human Capital and Interdisciplinary Training

There is a critical shortage of individuals who possess the dual expertise in Japanese Studies and digital methods. A historian of Japan may be deeply knowledgeable about the Shōwa period but lack the programming skills to perform network analysis. Conversely, a computer scientist may be an expert in data mining but have no understanding of the Japanese language or the historical nuances of the data they are processing.

Bridging this gap requires new forms of training. However, postgraduate programs in Southeast Asia that combine DH and Japanese Studies are virtually non-existent. Scholars are often forced to engage in self-teaching or attend short workshops, which may provide introductory skills but not the deep, sustained training required for sophisticated research. This skills gap creates a dependency on technical staff, who may not be integrated into the scholarly process from the outset, leading to a disconnect between the research questions and the digital execution.

4.4 Linguistic and Technical Barriers

The Japanese language itself presents a unique set of technical challenges. Its writing system, which combines logographic Kanji with syllabic Hiragana and Katakana, complicates tasks like Optical Character Recognition (OCR) and text parsing. While OCR for modern printed Japanese has improved significantly, it remains highly error-prone for historical documents, handwritten texts, or materials with complex layouts. This means that many digitization projects require massive investments of time and money for manual correction and transcription, a process often outsourced to low-wage labor, raising ethical questions.

Furthermore, many of the most powerful DH tools and tutorials are developed for and documented in English. A Southeast Asian scholar who is fluent in Japanese and their native language may still struggle to navigate the Anglophone-dominated world of DH methodologies, creating an additional layer of exclusion.

4.5 Epistemological Resistance and the "Two Cultures" Divide

Finally, there is a significant challenge of academic culture. Traditional humanities scholars may view DH with skepticism, questioning whether computational methods can truly capture the nuance, ambiguity, and deep contextual meaning that are the hallmarks of humanistic inquiry. Is topic modeling a valid way to understand the themes of a novel? Can a network graph ever explain the complexity of a human relationship?

This "two cultures" divide, as identified by C.P. Snow, persists. Promotions and tenure committees in Southeast Asian universities, often steeped in traditional scholarly outputs like monographs and peer-reviewed journal articles, may not know how to evaluate a digital archive, a piece of software, or a data visualization. This creates a disincentive for early-career scholars to invest the considerable time and effort required to become proficient in DH. As Stephen Ramsay remarked, "Do you have to know how to code? I'm a tenured professor of digital humanities, and I say 'yes.' But this is a controversial stance" (Ramsay, 2011). This debate over the very definition of DH expertise further complicates its institutional adoption.

5. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A STRATEGIC AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The implementation of Digital Humanities in Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia stands at a critical juncture. Its potential to transform the field is undeniable. By serving as a methodological disruptor, a decolonizing force, and a collaborative bridge, DH is reframing how Japan is studied from a Southeast Asian vantage point. Its contributions truly in preserving fragile archives, enabling

computational analysis, and mapping historical networks are already yielding new insights and creating more inclusive knowledge ecosystems.

However, this promising trajectory is precarious. The challenges of the digital divide, funding instability, a shortage of trained personnel, linguistic-technical barriers, and epistemological resistance are substantial and systemic. They cannot be overcome by individual scholars alone. They demand a concerted, strategic effort at institutional, national, and regional levels. The path forward must involve:

First, Strategic Investment. Universities and funding bodies must prioritize investments in digital infrastructure and the creation of dedicated, sustainable funding lines for DH projects and their long-term maintenance.

Second, Curriculum Reform. Postgraduate programs must be developed that seamlessly integrate DH methodologies into Japanese Studies, producing a new generation of "bilingual" scholars fluent in both humanistic inquiry and digital tools.

Third, Strengthened Partnerships. Intra-regional and North-South sustainable collaborations must be deepened, moving beyond one-off projects to establish long-term frameworks for shared infrastructure, data governance, and capacity building that prioritize equity.

Fourth, Critical DH Practice. Interdisciplinary scholars who concern with the future of Japanese Studies must continue to engage critically with the digital tools they use, questioning their biases and limitations, and ensuring that the drive for quantification does not erase the subjective, interpretive, and ethical dimensions of humanities research.

In conclusion, the journey of integrating Digital Humanities into Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia is as much about the advance of technology as it is about epistemology, politics, and community. Therefore, if navigated with strategic foresight, collaborative spirit, and critical self-awareness, this integration will not merely augment existing research; it will fundamentally enrich it. It will empower Southeast Asian scholars to construct their own authoritative, nuanced, and polyvocal narratives about Japan, firmly placing the region on the global map as a vital and innovative center for one of the world's most dynamic fields of study.

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Persona Duality and Online Identity Construction of *Ame* in Video Game *Needy Streamer Overload*

Lulu Nabiha Nurilailati¹⁹

Abstract

Turkle (1999) suggests that the virtual world dramatizes and concretizes cultural shifts toward observing identity as multiple and flexible. As one of many forms of cyberspace, literature in video games can narrate the multiplicity and flexibility of identity, which is evident in a Japanese video game titled *Needy Streamer Overload* (2022). This research discusses the dual personality and the online identity construction of the video game's protagonist called *Ame*, which separates her real self from her online self by being a live streamer whilst having mental distress in her real self. The research data are texts that relate to persona duality and the online identity construction of *Ame*. I examine the nonlinear narrative aspect with a descriptive analysis method to describe theme and story facts as elements of a narrative's imaginative characteristics (Stanton, 2007), using the ergodic literature theory of Aarseth (1997), which argues that readers should engage in the literature by making choices to progress with the story, and online identity theory of Turkle (1999) to interpret *Ame*'s persona duality and online identity construction. The result of this research is to find how *Ame* separates her real life and online personas and constructs her identity to entertain her viewers.

Keywords: *Ergodic literature, Needy Streamer Overload, online identity, persona duality*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Video games, a derivative term from computer games and television games, encompass the activities of operating home consoles, mobile games, arcade games, PC games, and smartphone games. According to Roth (2025:2), video games emerged in Japan during the 1970s to 1980s, and are categorized by the largest industry association for computer and video games in Japan, The Computer Entertainment Suppliers' Association (CESA), under computer games, which are then divided into PCs, tablets, smartphones, and cellphones. Among the varying types of video games, adventure games, as quoted from Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca (2020:36), generally focus on puzzle-solving within a narrative framework. This narrative-driven video game is typically called visual novels, which exist as one kind of video game rich in its story, combining various genres that are presented through a series of framed stories (Pratama, D., Wardani, W.G.W., Akbar, T., 2018).

Needy Streamer Overload (WSS Playground, 2022) is one example of a livestream simulation visual novel. The brief description of *Needy Streamer Overload* is as follows.

‘NEEDY STREAMER OVERLOAD is a “multi-ending ADV” depicting daily life with “OMGkawaiiAngel”, a young girl with a rather extreme need for approval attempting to become the #1 “Internet Angel” (streamer).

Needy Streamer Overload on Steam (WSS Playground, 2022).

Needy Streamer Overload introduces Ame as a protagonist, which can be described as a “menhera girl” within Japanese popular culture, referring to a female character who is emotionally unstable, loves obsessively, and engages in stereotypical self-injurious behaviors, such as wrist cutting (Seko & Kikuchi, 2022:1). The term *menhera* is used rather often in a Japanese subculture context rather than specific mental diagnosis such as bipolar disorder, as it is not mentioned canonically in-game. Although Ame’s actions throughout the game are leaning toward BPD or Borderline Personality Disorder which indicates unstable mood, self-image, interpersonal relationships and impulsiveness of behavior (Chapman, J., Jamil, R.T., Fleisher, C., Torrico, T.J., 2024), I would like to examine the interesting object with a perspective of duality of a personality and identity construction in virtual world, introduced by Sherry Turkle (1999).

In her essay, namely “Cyberspace and Identity” (1999:643), Turkle explored the notion that the virtual world dramatizes and concretizes cultural shifts toward observing the multiplicity and flexibility of an identity. I understand this concept as when a person is faced with the computer and its varying online features, they can construct themselves differently and have limitless possibilities of expanding their identity from the authentic to inauthentic in the internet. This idea of Turkle (1999) is interesting to examine using *Needy Streamer Overload* as an object material, where it is evident from the protagonist, Ame, that her personality is rather dynamic than static, and is perceived as multiple and flexible when she switches her identity to OMGKawaiiAngel, an aloof and cheerful livestreamer.

In previous research using *Needy Streamer Overload* as one of its object materials, Wei (2024) in the article titled “Player Attitude Toward Mental Disorder Depictions in Video Games: Implications for Cognition and Recovery”, analyzed the attitudes of players toward the depiction of mental disorders and pointed out the design direction and points for attention when designing games representing mental disorders in the future. However, Gutiérrez Carrera and Blom (2025), in their article titled “Suicide Livestreams in *NEEDY STREAMER OVERLOAD*”, specifically discussed the suicide livestream subject in the video game used for this research. They focused on two endings: one in which Ame livestreams her suicide, and the second, the ending where she stops obeying the player and finds happiness on her own. Despite these discussions that led to *Needy Streamer Overload*’s core ideas about mental health issues, I focus more on the duality of Ame’s persona and the construction of her online identity, which often appears in the video game. Another research by Boudreau, Bowman, Consalvo, and Phelps (2024) in their article titled “Playing the (Streaming) Fame

Game: (Re)presentations of success, challenges, and demand in streaming simulation games”, *Needy Streamer Overload* is used as one of the object materials to discuss the content in streaming simulation games using demand theory. In research concerning *Needy Streamer Overload*, I have not yet come across research that discusses persona duality and online identity construction of Ame; hence, through this research, I will discuss the persona and identity topic that may stand out from the issues in the past research.

Thus, I present my research questions as follows: (1) Using Sherry Turkle’s theory of persona duality and identity construction, how does Ame differentiate her authentic self from her online persona? and (2) How does Ame engage her viewers with the online identity she constructs? These questions would result in the findings on how a particular character in a video game could represent the issues related to persona duality and online identity construction. Before elaborating the answer to the research questions, I present this research by explaining the (1) Introduction, (2) Theoretical framework which includes factual structure (Stanton, 2007), narrative of a video game (Aarseth, 2012), persona duality and identity construction (Turkle, 1999), (3) Method, (4) Result, and lastly, (5) Conclusions and Limitations.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Factual Structure

Robert Stanton (2007:22) defines character, plot, and background as the essential elements of a story. Character combines the desire, emotion, and moral principles of specific individuals (Stanton, 2007:33) that exist within a story, and the character that mostly appears throughout the story is what is called the main character. Meanwhile, plot generally refers to the chain of events in a story that is made from causal occurrences. The fewer characters there are, the tighter the plot becomes (i.e., a character’s action could easily impact another) (Stanton, 2007:26). The last element, background, is the surrounding environment in a story, which interacts directly with ongoing events (Stanton, 2007:35).

These theory is used for the descriptive analysis of aspects in a fiction—in this context, narrative of a video game—in which Stanton continued to describe factual structure as a story in one point of view (2007:22). However, it is unlikely that Stanton’s definition can cover the whole nature of a video game’s storytelling, as Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca (2020:234) argue that fiction in video games work on different parameter from the usual representational media, and that literary theories should not be applied without considering their specific properties. Therefore, in addition to the essential elements of a story introduced by Stanton (2007), discussions regarding the factual structure in a video game will be assisted further by Espen Aarseth’s narrative theory of video games (2012).

2.2 Narrative in Video Game

According to Aarseth (1997:1), readers—or players in a game context—should create a nontrivial effort to engage in a narrative by making choices to progress with the story, and call this concept an ergodic literature. Aarseth (2012:2) challenges the idea that “games” are just games, arguing that they are actually complex software that can represent crossmedia forms like film, text/novel, graphic novel, and even simulating board games and sports. As Aarseth (2012:2) notes in an essay titled “A Narrative Theory of Games,” games and stories share similar elements, though the line between games and narratives is not always clear (Aarseth, 1997:5). These elements include what Aarseth refers to as “world,” “objects,” “characters,” and “events” (2012:2). I will describe these elements as follows:

- a. World: game worlds are virtual structures that have an objective existence, even though they only exist within computing machines (Aarseth, 2012:3). Aarseth divides the main types of

- landscape structure of a game world as (1) the linear corridor, (2) the multicursal hub-shaped labyrinth, and (3) the open world (2012:3).
- b. Objects: determine the level of player agency in the game and can be flexibly categorized as (1) static, non-interactable objects, (2) static, usable objects, (3) destructible, (4) changeable, and (5) creatable (Aarseth, 2012:4).
 - c. Characters: classified in terms of their depth/shalowness and potential for player control, can be categorized as (1) bots (robots), (2) shallow characters (slightly insignificant existence), and (3) deep characters (likely rich in their characteristics) (Aarseth, 2012:4).
 - d. Events: rely on their status and the presence of kernels; what makes a story recognizable and satellites; what appears as discourse in a story, which allows us to identify how games contain one or several potential stories (Aarseth, 2012:3-4). Categorized as (1) fully plotted (pure story), (2) dynamic satellites (playable story), (3) dynamic kernels (multipath or quest games), and (4) no kernels (pure game).

2.3 Persona Duality and Identity Construction

In an essay titled “Cyberspace and Identity” (1999:643), Turkle focuses on the key element of how online life impacts identity, namely that people can create and project their constructed personae into the virtual world. Key topics of Turkey’s argument are described below:

- a. Persona duality: Turkle (1999:643) argues that the relative anonymity of online life has created opportunities to express rarely explored aspects of the self, including the simultaneous examination of multiple parts of oneself. In the virtual world, people can engage in identity play by simply changing their names and adjusting their online presence. Some may feel a sense of uncomfortable fragmentation, while others may experience relief, and some may undergo moments of self-discovery (Turkle, 1999:643). Additionally, Turkle (1999:644) discusses “windows,” the computing term used as a powerful metaphor for cycling through virtual environments, which enables people to exist in several contexts at once, fragmenting the self by playing multiple roles. This idea suggests that an individual’s identity on the computer is the sum of their distributed presence (Turkle, 1999:644).
- b. Identity construction: an individual can present themselves as an extension of their authentic self in online life (Turkle, 1999:645). For example, people who log in to their accounts online can create an identity, portraying personalities different from their own, which is only possible through access to the virtual world. In the modern world, people choose to log into various accounts on their computers and interact with others (Turkle, 1999:646). Turkle mentioned that they may find themselves playing different roles, allowing them to explore unexamined aspects of themselves and challenge their ideas about a single self (1999:646).

Upon these definitions, I conclude that Turkle’s idea of the multiplicity and the flexibility of self can be defined as both “persona duality” and “identity construction” in the virtual world.

3. METHODS

To analyze the research questions mentioned earlier, I use a qualitative-descriptive approach. According to Nassaji (2015:129), a phenomenon and its characteristics—such as a narrative inside a video game—can be described using qualitative analysis methods. The primary data for this analysis comes from texts within the video game *Needy Streamer Overload*, collected by taking screenshots of in-game interfaces that display relevant texts useful for the discussion. Specifically, the texts are obtained from four interactive game interfaces: Ame’s personal chats with P-chan; Ame’s social media posts; KAngel’s livestream sayings; and KAngel’s social media updates. These data are collected randomly during gameplay. After gathering sufficient data, I describe the elements using Stanton’s (2007) factual structure of character, plot, and background, combining it with Aarseth’s

(2012) narrative structure in video games, which includes world, objects, characters, and events, to understand the context of the data. Then, Turkle’s (1999) persona duality and identity construction theory is applied to align the data with the research questions. Finally, I conclude the analysis with representative statements based on my interpretations.

4 RESULT

4.1 Game Elements

In the result and afterward, *Needy Streamer Overload* will be abbreviated as NSO to ease the discussions. When players first open the video game, it shows a warning from KAngel about the issues that may trigger the players, and that having a Japanese world setting, the game is fictional and does not have any correlation with real-life occurrences. Players can click ‘Cancel’, which leads to the game shutting down itself, or ‘OK’ to proceed with the game, which then leads players to options of Data 1, Data 2, and Data 3 to begin the game at any save point. When players are new to NSO, the game guides them to a fresh start, where Ame welcomes them and helps them log in to KAngel’s streaming account. After logging in, the game will start in the morning.

NSO tells the story of Ame, a girl who has just moved out of her house and strives to become a livestreamer with 1 million followers, while players have at most 30 days to interact with Ame and decide her ending. At the beginning of the game, she received an email that she needed to pay the rent for her place to stay by the 10th day, and that required her to get monetization from her livestream by targeting 10,000 followers. Players are referred to as “P-chan” by Ame, who plays the role of Ame’s producer and also her lover, who lives together with her. P-chan can manage Ame’s activities, which impact her stats meter, consisting of stress, affection, and mental darkness. The stats meter is shown inside the Task Manager interface, which also shows KAngel’s followers, and is the game mechanic that will further affect Ame’s actions and the turning of events in the video game, including her Tweeter posts, streaming ideas, and JINE messages she sends to P-chan.

4.2 Characters

In NSO, there is only one character: Ame, and she is the only character with the potential for player control. Although Ame is one person, she has a distinguishable characteristic with her online persona, OMGKawaiiAngel (further mentioned as KAngel). In this section, I will explain both Ame and KAngel in a table below.

Category	Ame	OMGKawaiiAngel
Self	Authentic self	Online persona
Physical appearances	Black hair with twin tails, her bangs covering one of her eyes, black and red colored clothing	Blonde hair with hint of purple, pink and blue colored curling twin tails, hologram colored <i>seifuku</i> (sailor uniform) clothing
Personality	Honest, sensitive, obsessive, insecure and lonely	Heartwarming, confident, kind and sweet

Figure 1. Differences between Ame and KAngel based on her self, physical appearances, and personality.

According to the above table, Ame and KAngel have several notable characteristics that are opposing one another. Ame is the character that players can interact with at any time during morning, dawn, and evening, in which players can give her options to play, sleep, hang out, or surf the internet. These choices will affect her stats meter; some can significantly increase or decrease her stress, affection, or mental distress level. Ame will appear as long as she is not in her livestreamer mode; however, in livestreamer mode, she switches her appearance and personality to a whole different

identity. KAngel emerges during her social media interactions and livestreams, a separate personality of Ame, the protagonist that we mainly interact with. If we discuss the ludic aspect of NSO, the players' choices lead to several livestream options and may impact their characteristics. The dual persona of Ame and the online identity of KAngel are evident either way. This is shown through narratives from her Tweeter posts and JINE messages. The data can be found regardless of which ending the player settles in.

On one of Ame's JINE messages to players or P-chan, she confessed about the meaning behind her name, "Ame", which can mean "rain" (written by *kanji* 雨) and "candy" (written by *kanji* 飴). She told P-chan that the definition of "rain" suits her better because of her gloomy personality, rather than emphasizing on the "candy" definition that depicts her sweetness. This is evident in the passage below, taken from Ame's JINE message.

"That reminds me... I never told you the story behind my name, did I?"

"Yeah I say my name is Ame and all and I usually just make the excuse that its bc ame means candy and I'm so sweet aha but that's not what it actually is. im a little embarrassed by it tbh...
"aside from 'candy,' ame can also mean 'rain' and... yeah that's what my name is actually meant to be"

"Guess being called 'rain' suits the gloomy person I am..."

Needy Streamer Overload (WSS Playground, 2022)

According to the above passage, Ame tells the background behind her name and informs players about how she looks down on herself as a gloomy person by the "rain" definition, not the "candy" definition, which she thought did not suit her personality.

4.3 Plot

NSO serves as an adventure game in which players can play for up to 30 days. As the day goes by, the players can manage Ame's activities that will result in several ending routes, and the story can even stop before the last day (i.e., when players fail to help Ame reach 10,000 followers, Ame leaves P-chan, and the game is over). The plot in NSO has a dynamic kernel, as players' choices affect Ame's continuation of the story, and when the game is over, players can reload the game from any day through the data options.

4.4 Background

In NSO, the time is divided into three different periods: morning, dawn, and evening. From morning to dawn, players can decide which activities Ame should do during the day before she streams in the evening. Her narratives about persona duality are clear, whether the time period is morning, dawn, or evening, as long as the events players choose in-game are significant enough to appear in Ame's texts—the kernels that exist in NSO. Ame is shown in a room, facing the webcam so that players can see her idle movements. Her facial expression changes based on the stats meter that tracks her stress, affection, and towards the webcam. KAngel, although she mostly appears only in her livestreams, is also depicted as being in the same room setting as Ame.

4.5 Ame's Persona Duality and Online Identity Construction

In this section, I will examine the data taken from NSO in-game screenshots and describe how Ame differentiates her real self from KAngel, her online persona. To grasp the differences between two personalities at the same time, most of the data are in-game screenshots of Tweeter, where both KAngel and Ame made posts that depict their thoughts. Tweeter posts can be updated through the social media feature at any time, and they will also be updated after ending KAngel's livestreams. After describing her persona duality, I will describe how she constructs KAngel identity to engage her livestream viewers.



Figure 2. In-game screenshot of Tweeter showing KAngel and Ame’s posts.

In the presented image, it was shown that KAngel posted for the first time after she did her first livestream, under the username “@x_angelkawaii_x”, which will be referred to as Ame’s main account. On top of it was Ame’s post on her private account, under the username “@raincandy_U”. On Ame’s main account, KAngel’s post reflects her enthusiasm to greet her followers, saying that she will work hard for her streams in the future. Meanwhile, on her private account, Ame posted her worry about how people would react to KAngel’s internet presence, which turned out to be wrong. This shows Ame’s duality when logging into her main account and her private account. Aside from her dual personality, the above image also shows that KAngel mentions herself as “your internet angel” to her followers, alongside a picture of herself posing toward the camera. Her persona duality is also evident from the passage below.

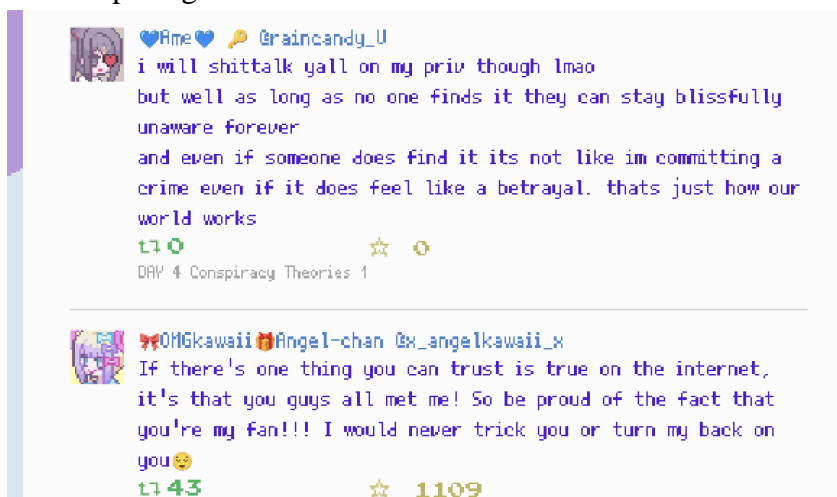


Figure 3. In-game screenshot of Tweeter showing KAngel and Ame’s posts.

On the lower part of the second image, Ame posted on her main account, telling her followers to trust that they have met her and how proud she is that her followers are her fans. Furthermore, she said that she will not betray them by being KAngel’s fan. However, she posted on her private account that she will talk badly behind her fans as KAngel since she is able to post anything on her private account, and does not care whether or not people will find out. This depicted her persona duality when shifting from her public account to her private account.

Up to the current discussion, it is visible that Ame has been showing her differing personalities when she is off-screen as her authentic self, and when she is on-screen as KAngel. Another evidence is presented as follows.

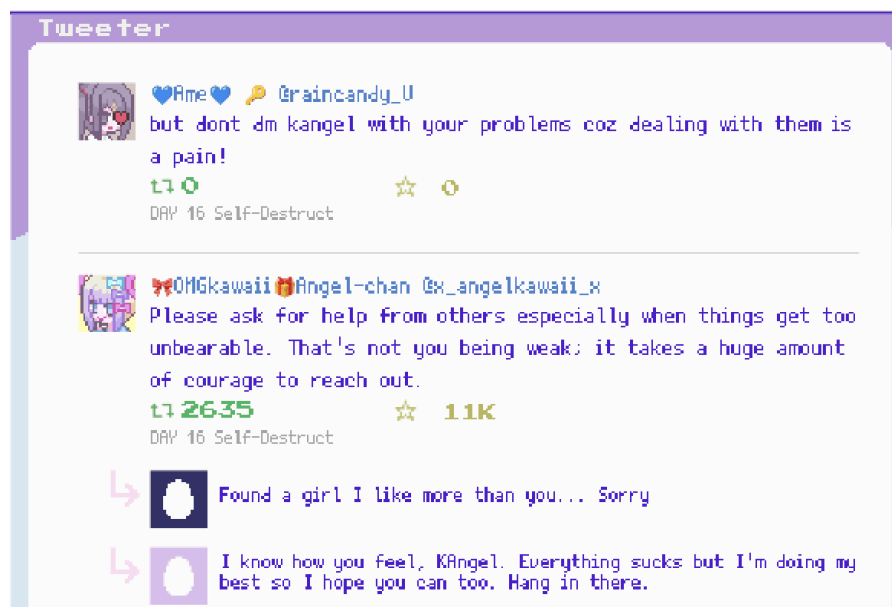


Figure 4. In-game screenshot of Tweeter showing KAngel and Ame’s posts.

From the above-presented image, Ame, as KAngel on her main account, tells her followers to ask for help whenever things get too unbearable, and encourages them to reach out. Meanwhile, on her private account, she continued her passage on her main account that her followers should not message KAngel with their problems because she feels that dealing with others’ problems is a pain. Aside from her persona duality, it shows how she constructs KAngel to be a heartwarming person, embodying the self-label of “internet angel” that heals people, even though she can post opposing thoughts on her other account.

Based on the previously presented images, it is evident how KAngel engages her viewers through social media and entertains them by giving them care and attention as a public figure. Not only on her Tweeter posts, Ame also talks sweetly during her livestream as KAngel to her followers. KAngel’s words toward her followers are presented below.

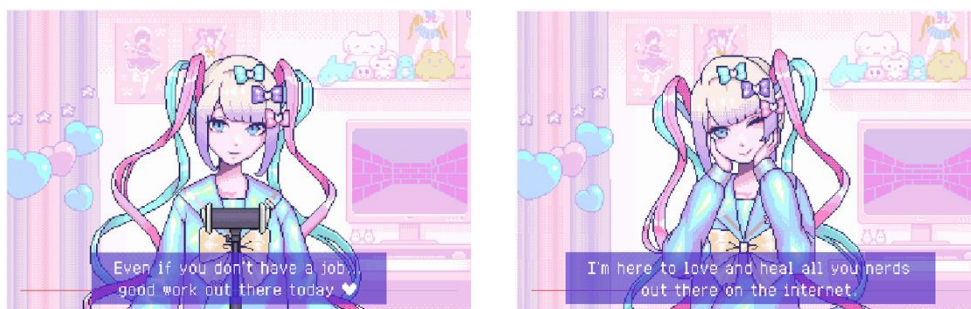


Figure 5. In-game screenshots of KAngel during her livestream.

From the above images, it is shown that Ame brands KAngel as someone who will love and heal nerds—how she calls her viewers—on the internet, telling them that they have worked hard in real life before they turn into her livestreams. This depicts how Ame constructs her livestreamer identity as an extension of her authentic self, which, as Ame, she leans more into as a lonely and gloomy individual, rather than a cheerful person who assures her surroundings with love.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Based on the results and findings, I describe my conclusions and limitations as follows.

- 1) Ame is a girl with a dual personality: her authentic self (Ame) and her internet self (KAngel). She separates her personality by logging into different accounts on social media, which are “@x_angelkawaii_x” as her main or public account as KAngel, and “@raincandy_U” as her private account, where her characteristics differ. This is in line with Turkle’s (1999) statement that people on the internet can describe themselves differently from their authentic selves in the virtual world, fragmenting their identities multiply and flexibly.
- 2) On Ame’s main account, she is depicted as an honest, sweet, and approachable individual who entertains and spreads positivity to her followers. However, she talks differently on her private account and is rather toxic, contrary to her identity she constructs. This further proves Turkle’s (1999) notion that people can create and portray themselves differently by accessing the internet, expanding possibilities an individual may achieve under the limitless boundaries online.
- 3) This research discusses Ame’s persona duality and online identity construction, but does not rely on the game mechanism that gives players choices that will affect her actions and stats meter through interacting with her or by texting her through chats.
- 4) This research solely focuses on her persona duality and online identity construction. Further research could disseminate the representation of Japanese subcultures evident inside NSO.
- 5) Though a fictional work, Turkle’s theory can be used to describe a character’s identity, which may reflect a real person’s behavior.

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Sexuality Education Films in Postwar Japan: Scripts as Historical Sources

Miwa Matsumoto²⁰

Abstract

This study examines the development of educational and enlightenment practices concerning sexuality in postwar Japan through the medium of film and visual materials. Focusing on two film scripts produced with government involvement—*The Road to Purity* (1951) and *The Marriage Classroom* (1953)—it explores how postwar authorities and educators utilized film as both a scientific and moral instrument for reshaping sexual values in the aftermath of war and occupation. While *The Road to Purity* employed graphic visualizations of venereal diseases to evoke fear and emphasize the importance of chastity, *The Marriage Classroom* took a softer, didactic approach, embedding health examinations and eugenic marriage ideals within the frameworks of social education and rural modernization. These films reveal how early postwar sex education was closely aligned with broader national agendas, including public health reform, population control, and the reconstruction of moral order.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the use of film as a pedagogical tool was not confined to schools but extended into adult and community education. From the mid-1950s onward, local governments and public health institutions began producing their own visual teaching materials, integrating sexuality education into the expanding infrastructure of postwar social education, family planning, and rural improvement. The visual pedagogy of sexuality in postwar Japan thus illustrates how the state sought to visualize, discipline, and modernize the intimate sphere of everyday life.

Keywords: *Postwar Japan, sex education, purity education, eugenic marriage, educational film*

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INTRODUCTION

The 1950s are often referred to as the “golden age of postwar Japanese cinema,” a period during which an extraordinary number of films were produced. In postwar Japan—marked by the end of the war, the presence of the Allied Occupation forces, and their eventual withdrawal—an atmosphere of instability coexisted with a sense of liberation. Within this social climate, films addressing themes that had been suppressed during the war years began to appear. However, as cinema increasingly influenced youth culture, opposition movements also emerged, and debates about the “harmful effects of film” gained public attention. Thus, the so-called golden age of postwar Japanese cinema was simultaneously a period when the social impact of film became a major subject of discussion.

During the same period, growing interest in “audiovisual education” led to active debates on the introduction of audiovisual materials into school and social education. Particularly from the late 1940s through the 1950s, the educational potential and influence of film and visual media became a focal point of attention. The use of film in education also attracted interest in “purity education” (*junketsu kyōiku*), which is considered to be Japan’s first officially implemented form of sex education after the war. In 1949, Ochimi Kufushiro of the Ministry of Education’s Purity Education Committee stated the following:

(Editor’s note: Regarding “For Purity Education...”)
14. Concerning “what methods are most effective,” it is stated that “the means to be employed—such as pictures or films—should vary in countless ways according to the child’s age.”
...
16. Concerning “the relationship between films, theater, books, magazines, and purity education,” it is written that “we cannot overstate how great an influence films, theater, books, and magazines have upon public morals. I believe that we must work together with these media as we move forward with social education.”²¹

This paper focuses on how films attracted widespread attention as educational materials in postwar Japan’s “sex education,” examining this phenomenon in relation to the administrative development of education on sexuality and its broader social background. By consulting contemporary sources, it explores how films dealing with sexuality were developed as educational tools and in what ways they were regarded as effective or useful.

There is already a substantial body of research on postwar Japanese films that address sexuality. Chika Kinoshita²²’s study of “pregnancy films” analyzes works depicting pregnancy within the context of Japanese film history and media culture, exploring the social and cultural meanings surrounding pregnancy and reproduction. Kinoshita’s research identifies “pregnancy films” as a distinct genre in postwar Japan and examines how these films reflected and shaped views of women’s bodies, motherhood, the family system, and social values. According to Kinoshita, such films frequently depict women’s bodies as being used for the public good, prioritizing social and familial roles over women’s individual will. These portrayals are closely linked to the postwar reinforcement of the family system and the period’s population policies, in which women’s reproductive capacity was treated as a matter of national concern.

²¹ Kufushiro Ochimi, *Why Is Purity Education Necessary? — Purity Education Series*, Printing Bureau, 1949. (久布白落実『純潔教育はなぜ必要か—純潔教育シリーズ』,印刷局,1949年.)

²² Chika Kinoshita, “The Wife’s Choice: Genealogy of Postwar Democratic Abortion Films,” in Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano (ed.), *Postwar Japanese Cinema Studies: Reading the 1950s*, with Taishi Nishimura, Koji Toba, Hideyuki Nakamura, Hideaki Fujiki, Chika Kinoshita, Kenji Tanigawa, and Han Nami, Seikyusha, 2012, pp. 143–160. (木下千花「妻の選択—戦後民主主義的中絶映画の系譜」200(143-60),ミツヨ・ワダ・マルシアーノ(編著),西村大志・鳥羽耕史・中村秀之・藤木秀明・木下千花・谷川建司・ハン・ナミ『「戦後」日本映画論—1950年代を読む』青弓社,2012.)

Roland Domenig²³ (2007, 2009) discusses films dealing with “sex” in postwar Japan. He focuses particularly on how the social and cultural changes that took place after the war influenced education and “enlightenment” related to sexuality. According to Domenig, postwar “sex education films” were produced with the aim of disseminating sexual knowledge among young people and reconstructing the disrupted sexual morals of the postwar period.

He also examines “birth control films” (Basu-kon eiga), which were designed to teach audiences about sex—especially contraception—and notes that medical and public health professionals were often involved in their production. Furthermore, Domenig analyzes the subgenre of “sex education films” known as “seiten films” (Seiten eiga), which gained popularity from the 1950s through the 1960s. These films, he points out, emphasized not only education but also entertainment, often incorporating content that stimulated “curiosity.”

In other words, “seiten eiga” were socially recognized as “educational,” yet their erotic elements contributed to their commercial success, giving them significant cultural influence.

Domenig points out that while such films contributed to the spread of sex education, they also contained strong elements intended to attract audiences, thereby blurring the line between education and entertainment. He further argues that the history of “sex education films” in postwar Japan developed amid diverse influences—such as social values surrounding sexuality and the commercial strategies of the film industry—and that, as a result, the boundary between films made for “sex education” and those classified as “pornographic” became highly ambiguous and unstable.

Yoshiko Nakayama²⁴ focuses particularly on *Otome no Seiten* (*The Maiden’s Bible*), which is regarded as the first “seiten film.” Nakayama points out that through films and other media, the “crisis of chastity” was depicted and critically evaluated, thereby shaping the norms of youth sexuality. In fact, films produced and released during the same period were frequently discussed in magazines and roundtable talks, where the ideal of “chaste” heterosexual norms was repeatedly presented to readers.

As such, previous studies have revealed that during the period of the Eugenic Protection Law and postwar democracy (1948–1956) (Kinoshita, 2012)²⁵ films dealing with sexuality in educational contexts attracted considerable attention as tools for education and “enlightenment.” They have also shown that these films developed under various restrictions faced by those involved in their production and exhibition, and that their reception by audiences did not necessarily align with the intentions of the filmmakers or exhibitors (Domenig, 2006).

Building upon these preceding studies, this research focuses on educational and enlightenment films dealing with sexuality in the early postwar period, specifically examining the intentions of those involved in their production and exhibition. It poses the question: *What did the authorities expect from the use of films in sex education?* In other words, this study seeks to clarify who attempted to educate whom, and in what manner, through the medium of film in early postwar Japan. Furthermore, by considering the broader social and institutional background, the study aims to position films dealing with sexuality—previously discussed separately across different disciplines—as integral components of postwar Japan’s “sex education.”

Therefore, this study uses materials distinct from the commercially produced films repurposed for sex education that have been the focus of previous research. Instead, it examines films produced under the involvement of government agencies and their affiliates. Specifically, this paper analyzes

²³ Roland Domenig “Midnight Eye feature: A History of Sex Education Films in Japan: Part2: The Post-War Years and the Basukon Eiga” (MIDNIGHTEYE visions of Japanese cinema, 2007)

Roland Domenig “Midnight Eye feature: A History of Sex Education Films in Japan: Part3: The Seiten Films” (MIDNIGHTEYE visions of Japanese cinema, 2009)

²⁴ Yoshiko Nakayama, “*Otome no Seiten* and Chastity: The Sexuality and Media of New System Junior and Senior High School Students,” *Osaka University Journal of Japanese Studies*, No. 30, 2011, pp. 143–158.

Yoshiko Nakayama, “Chastity as Depicted in the Magazine *Heibon*,” in Shizuko Koyama, Kanako Akaeda, and Erika Imada (eds.), *A Postwar History of Sexuality*, Kyoto University Press, 2014.

²⁵ As defined in Kinoshita (2012), the periods are categorized as follows: the *Abortion Law Period* (from the prewar era to 1948), the *Eugenic Protection Law and Postwar Democracy Period* (1948–1956), the *Pregnancy Film Period as Youth Culture* (1956–1965), and the *Fetal Period* (1965–1974).

two surviving film scripts: “*Social Education Hygiene Film Scenario (Tentative Title): The Road to Purity*” (1951) and “*A 16mm Color Film Using a Silent Tape Recorder: Marriage Improvement Film (Tentative Title): New Marriage Classroom Script*” (1953).

At the time, educational practices utilizing films were attracting considerable attention, and many records of such initiatives remain. In addition to commercially produced films—highlighted in earlier studies—some films were created explicitly for educational purposes with the sponsorship of relevant government ministries or organizations, while others were independently produced by local municipalities. However, in most cases, the actual films are no longer extant, and only the scripts or scenarios survive today.

Film scripts: “*Social Education Hygiene Film Scenario (Tentative Title): The Road to Purity*” (1951)

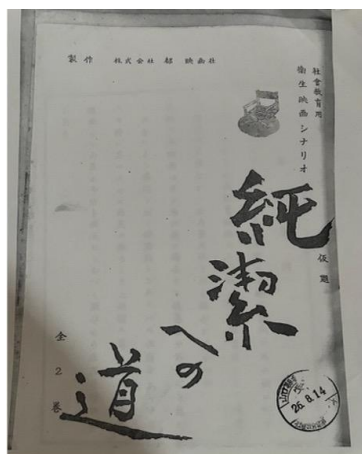


Figure 1: “*Social Education Hygiene Film Scenario (Tentative Title): The Road to Purity*” (1951)

The basic information about “*Social Education Hygiene Film Scenario (Tentative Title): The Road to Purity*” is as follows. It was produced by Miyako Film Company under the supervision of Ryunosuke Nakahara, a health officer at the Ministry of Health and Welfare. The producer was Kiichiro Kanai, the script and direction were by Hisao Shimasaki, the cinematography by Kiyosada Shirota, and the narration by Kinshiro Iwao.

At the beginning of the script, under the section titled “Purpose of Production,” it states:

“Previous films on venereal disease prevention were restricted from being shown to minors, and thus could not be actively utilized as educational or health promotion films, resulting in limited dissemination. Therefore, this film is structured so as not to provoke disgust or curiosity even among younger viewers, and aims to help all people—especially the youth—scientifically understand both the fear of venereal diseases, which have been regarded as ‘secret illnesses,’ and the value of chastity, thereby promoting genuine prevention.”

As indicated in the “Purpose of Production,” the content of the film deals with *venereal diseases*. The script includes instructions to show scenes such as “a male patient with flat condyloma around the anus,” “a patient with hair loss on the back of the head,” “a patient whose nose has collapsed,” and “a patient with a hole in the skull.”

Alongside these visual instructions, the script provides a corresponding narration:

“At this stage, swelling known as flat condyloma—where many syphilis germs reside—appears around the anus. Hair at the base of the head may begin to fall out, the lymph glands behind the ears become prominent, the throat may be affected causing hoarseness, and the

throat may turn red without pain. These symptoms recur over a period of three to seven years, gradually damaging tissues throughout the body. Eventually, a condition called *gummatous syphilis* develops, causing severe changes in the skin, muscles, and bones. For example, when it affects the nose, the nose collapses; when it affects the head, holes may form in the skull.”

At the end of the film, the script instructs that scenes be shown of health examinations taking place at public health centers, schools, and factories. The narration concludes with the following message:

“Only when each of us correctly understands this social disease can we build a healthy family. Let us all work together and put this into practice. For the eradication of social diseases—scientific measures are essential!”

“A 16mm Color Film Using a Silent Tape Recorder: Marriage Improvement Film (Tentative Title): New Marriage Classroom Script” (1953).

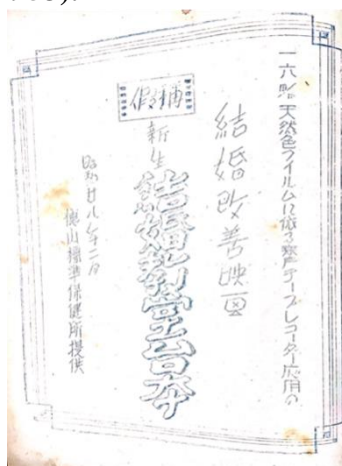


Figure 2: “A 16mm Color Film Using a Silent Tape Recorder: Marriage Improvement Film (Tentative Title): New Marriage Classroom Script” (1953).

“A 16mm Color Film Using a Silent Tape Recorder: Marriage Improvement Film (Tentative Title): New Marriage Classroom Script” was produced in February 1953 under the sponsorship of the Tokuyama Standard Public Health Center in Yamaguchi Prefecture. Although the film itself is no longer extant, when the script was discovered, it had been preserved as part of the audiovisual materials formerly held in the audiovisual library of the Yamaguchi Prefectural Library.

While details about its screening remain unclear, an issue of *School Physical Education* (Vol. 6, 1953) introduces a teaching plan titled “Our School’s Attempt: Guidance Plan for Purity Education (Junior High School Girls)” from Fukakusa Junior High School in Kyoto City. In the section for “Third-Year Students,” under the “Conclusion (Reflection on Units 1, 2, and 3),” the plan lists: “1. Slide screening: ‘Marriage Classroom’; 2. Reflection: Discussion with parents (excluding students).” This is most likely an example of an educational slide presentation based on this film script.²⁶

Including the cover page, the script consists of sixteen pages, each divided into five lines. The project was planned by Eiji Miyake, director of the Tokuyama Standard Public Health Center, and structured by Eiji Miyake and Asamon Kinoshita. Filming and editing were carried out by the Tokuyama Standard Public Health Center and Asamon Kinoshita. The film was produced by Yamaguchi Prefecture, the Yamaguchi Prefectural Board of Education, the Yamaguchi Prefectural Headquarters for the Promotion of the Rural Renewal Movement, and Tokuyama City.

²⁶ Japan School Physical Education Research Association (ed.), *School Physical Education* (Vol. 6), Nippon Taiiku-sha, 1953, pp. 67–72. (日本学校体育研究連合会編『学校体育(6)』日本体育社, 1953, pp. 67-72.)

Its sponsors included the Yamaguchi Prefectural Council for Women’s Issues, the Tokuyama Women’s Association, the Tokuyama Council of Social Welfare, and the Tokuyama Public Health Center Health Education Promotion Support Association.

The script is organized into five sections: “Story,” “Main Filming Locations,” “Narration,” “Sound Recording,” and “Remarks.” It contains twenty cut scenes in total.

For example, in Scene 1, the instructions read:

- **Story:** “A lavish wedding ceremony is held, with luxurious decorations and a lively banquet.”
- **Main Filming Locations:**
 - (i) A luxurious wedding hall
 - (ii) Ornate furnishings
 - (iii) A bustling banquet hall filled with dancing and merrymaking
- **Narration:** “This is a familiar scene of an extravagant wedding—something we have all seen or perhaps experienced ourselves.”
- **Sound Recording:** “Western music, synchronized; popular songs.”
- **Remarks:** “Criticizing the conventional ostentatious wedding.”

These detailed instructions indicate a carefully structured visual production plan (see Table 1).

The plot centers on a man named Masao Yamada, who, after graduating from university, returns to his hometown, meets a woman named Sumiko Ogawa, and eventually becomes engaged and married after finding employment. The story provides a detailed depiction of this process. It also portrays Yamada’s involvement, upon his return, in the rural hygiene movement—he takes a position at the village agricultural cooperative and serves as chair at a youth group meeting on marriage reform. These details suggest that the film reflected a range of contemporary government and social policies of the time.

Story	13. The engaged couple visits the public health center to undergo a medical examination.	14. Masao Yamada, in accordance with the marriage improvement campaign, personally delivers the engagement gifts.	15. Sumiko Ogawa also personally visits Masao Yamada’s home to return the engagement gifts.
Main Filming Locations	(i) Yamada and Ogawa entering the public health center (ii) Insert shot of the health center signboard (iii) The two at the reception desk (iv) Waiting room (insert of the sign “Waiting Room”) (v) Preliminary examination (vi) Medical examination (clinic) (vii) X-ray (viii) Blood sampling (ix) Laboratory (blood testing)	(i) Yamada entering Ogawa’s home (ii) Yamada presenting the engagement gifts before her parents and Sumiko (iii) Long shot of the engagement ceremony (iv) Insert of the medical certificate (v) Insert of the ring and fan inscribed with their names (vi) Insert of the marriage oath document (vii) Insert of the gift list (viii) Sumiko bringing tea (ix) Sumiko receiving the gifts and handing over a receipt (insert of the receipt) (x) Yamada taking his leave; parents and Sumiko seeing him off	(i) Sumiko entering Yamada’s home (ii) Sumiko presenting the engagement gifts before Yamada and his parents (iii) Insert of the medical certificate (iv) Inserts side-by-side: tie pin, fan inscribed with their names, marriage oath document, and gift list (v) Handing over the receipt (vi) Sumiko leaving, accompanied by Yamada and his parents (vii) Yamada’s younger siblings holding Sumiko’s hands and walking with her

Narration	The couple, now quietly engaged, visits the public health center for a medical examination.	The engagement gifts symbolize a promise never to break their marriage vows — today is the day to deliver them. Eternal love and trust.	The unchanging joy of engagement — Sumiko visits Masao’s home, her heart filled with hope.
Sound	Western music	Western music	Western music
Remarks	The health center should be modeled after the Tokuyama Model Health Center. Prepare templates: - Medical certificate - Ring - Fan - Marriage oath document - Gift list - Receipt Items to be considered: family register	Prepare templates: - Medical certificate - Ring - Fan - Marriage oath document - Gift list - Receipt Items to be considered: family register	

Table 1: “A 16mm Color Film Using a Silent Tape Recorder: Marriage Improvement Film (Tentative Title): New Marriage Classroom Script” (1953). Story 13, 14, and 15

Among the scenes, this study focuses particularly on Scenes 13, 14, and 15 (see table).

Scene 13, “*The engaged couple visits the public health center for a medical examination,*” depicts the two undergoing a medical checkup—including physical examination, X-rays, blood sampling, and blood testing—at the Tokuyama Model Public Health Center.

Scenes 14 and 15—“*Masao Yamada, in accordance with the marriage improvement campaign, personally delivers the engagement gifts,*” and “*Sumiko Ogawa personally visits Masao Yamada’s home to return the engagement gifts*”—include directions for placing the medical certificates alongside the engagement gifts.

At that time, educational and enlightenment activities related to sexuality were conducted as part of broader initiatives in social education and the New Life Movement, and the use of films and slides was recommended as an effective method. This film was likely one such example. Within these movements, “eugenic marriage” (*yūsei kekkon*) was widely promoted. “Eugenic Marriage Consultation Offices” were established throughout the country, and department stores hosted exhibitions on the topic. Numerous related publications appeared, advocating that since venereal diseases, along with tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, were terrifying illnesses that could affect heredity, people should undergo medical examinations to prevent transmitting such diseases to future generations.

Whereas *The Road to Purity* sought to instill fear through depictions of illness, *The Marriage Classroom Script* employed a softer approach, using film to promote the idea that receiving a medical examination could prevent the hereditary transmission of venereal and other infectious diseases.

In this way, the use of film and other visual media was regarded as an effective means of sexuality education and enlightenment at the time. The films discussed in the first section were intended for school-age children within classroom settings, while the scripts examined in the second section appear to have been influenced by various contemporary social policies and were likely aimed at older audiences—as tools for social education, adult education, and rural education.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the development of educational and enlightenment practices dealing with sexuality in postwar Japan through the medium of film and visual materials. By focusing on two

government- or institutionally produced film scripts—*The Road to Purity* (1951) and *The Marriage Classroom* (1953)—the analysis has shown how postwar authorities and educators sought to use film as a scientific and moral tool to reshape sexual values in the aftermath of war and occupation.

Whereas *The Road to Purity* attempted to instill fear through the visualization of venereal diseases, *The Marriage Classroom* approached sexuality in a more subtle, didactic manner, embedding health examinations and “eugenic marriage” ideals within the framework of social education and rural modernization. Both films reveal how sex education during the early postwar period was closely linked to broader state agendas, including public health reform, population control, and the reconstruction of moral order.

Furthermore, this study has demonstrated that the use of film and visual media was not confined to schools or youth audiences. Rather, these materials served as instruments of adult and community education, extending from urban centers to rural regions. As the 1950s progressed, such initiatives were institutionalized through local governments and public health agencies, integrating sexuality education into the expanding postwar infrastructure of social education, family planning, and rural improvement.

In sum, postwar Japan’s visual pedagogy of sexuality—emerging from the intersection of education, health policy, and cinema—illustrates how the state and allied institutions attempted to visualize, regulate, and modernize the intimate sphere of everyday life. These practices not only shaped the early forms of postwar sex education but also laid the groundwork for later discourses on purity, morality, and reproduction that continued into the 1960s and beyond.

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Miwa Matsumoto is a Research Fellow at the Research Institute for Promoting Intercultural Studies (PROMIS), Kobe University. Her research focuses on postwar Japanese history, particularly the intersection of sex education, purity education, and population policy in the early postwar period. She is currently engaged in archival research on Shinozaki Nobuo’s family planning and educational film materials, aiming to explore how visual media shaped public understandings of sexuality in modern Japan.

Anxiety Experienced by Students Learning Japanese at Job Training Institute

Muhammad Syafiq²⁷ and Arianty Visiaty²⁸

Abstract

For Indonesian internship candidates who want to work in Japan, language skills are certainly a key focus. These skills are not only an administrative requirement, but also essential for adapting to the Japanese work environment and culture, which are very different from those in Indonesia. However, in the process, many of them experience anxiety due to the demand to master Japanese in a short period of time and the knowledge that they will be required to communicate in Japanese at their workplace in Japan. This study aims to identify and analyze the forms of anxiety experienced by learners at the Job Training Institute (LPK) during the Japanese language learning process in the classroom. This study uses a survey method with a research instrument in the form of a questionnaire based on the Japanese Language Anxiety Scale In Class (JLAS-IN) (Motoda, 2000). The questionnaire was given to 69 respondents who were prospective interns studying Japanese at LPK. In addition to the questionnaire, follow-up interviews were conducted with 5 respondents. The results of this study indicate that learners at LPK do not feel anxious when learning Japanese. This study is expected to contribute to the field of language teaching, particularly in understanding the anxiety experienced by prospective Indonesian Japanese language trainees at LPK, as well as providing evaluation material for LPK in improving the effectiveness of Japanese language training.

Keywords: *Anxiety, LPK (Job Training Institute), trainees, Japanese Language Anxiety Scale (JLAS-IN), Japanese language learning*

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, learning foreign languages is important for the younger generation because foreign languages not only serve as a means of communication, but also increase opportunities for employment both at home and abroad. According to data from the Indonesian Ministry of Migrant Worker Protection (2025), the number of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) placed in January 2023 was 24,015 and in January 2024 was 27,211, while in January 2025 the number decreased to 25,643. Based on this data, it can be seen that the placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers in January 2025 decreased from January 2024, but still showed an increase compared to January 2023. There are five countries that are the main destinations for Indonesian migrant workers in January 2025, with Malaysia in first place with 8,014 workers, followed by Hong Kong (7,245), Taiwan (5,516), Singapore (1,161), and Japan (1,122).

In order to work in Japan, there are several things that prospective workers must learn, including language proficiency and the skills required in the workplace. This is where the Job Training Institute (LPK) plays a role. According to the Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia (2023), the LPK is an agency or organization that is authorized to conduct job training, either as a government or private institution. The duties of LPKs are outlined in the Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia (2016) in Ministerial Regulation No. 17 of 2016, which states that: Job training is a series of activities to provide, acquire, improve, and develop work competencies, productivity, discipline, attitude, and work ethic at a certain level of skill and expertise in accordance with the level and qualifications of the position or job. In accordance with this Ministerial Regulation, LPKs not only focus on work competencies but also train attitudes and work ethic. This also applies to LPKs that train prospective workers to work in Japan. Prospective workers trained at LPKs not only learn the Japanese language but also Japanese work culture. For prospective workers who will work in Japan, language skills are very important because they greatly affect the smooth running of work in the workplace. However, because Japanese has its own uniqueness compared to Indonesian, it is not easy for Indonesian learners of Japanese to learn and master it. On the other hand, the demand to master Japanese in a short period of time and the knowledge that they will be required to communicate directly in Japanese at work causes prospective workers to experience a high possibility of anxiety.

Merriam Webster defines anxiety as a feeling of uneasiness or restlessness due to thinking about bad things that may or may not happen (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Meanwhile, according to Zeidner & Matthews (2011), anxiety is a condition in which a person feels worried and even afraid. For people who experience anxiety, this can happen because of small things that may not be a problem for other people. Not only that, Zeidner & Matthews (2011) also say that anxiety is basically a person's reaction to external pressure, even though sometimes the reaction is excessive. This is what causes prospective employees who are learning Japanese at LPK and experiencing anxiety to be unable to focus on their studies because they are more preoccupied with their anxiety. This anxiety is not only a minor distraction, but it can also destroy the entire learning process. As stated by Krashen (1981), one of the factors that makes it difficult for people to learn a language, or even gain anything from the language learning process, is having high anxiety.

The anxiety experienced by learners at LPK when learning the language can be categorized as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety is not just ordinary anxiety felt by people, but foreign language anxiety has its own characteristics that specifically arise when learning a foreign language. In the case of Japanese language learners at LPK, FLA can be a serious obstacle that disrupts concentration, reduces motivation, and worsens their ability to absorb learning material optimally.

There have been many studies discussing anxiety in learning foreign languages in the classroom, for example, Astriyanti et al. (2023) who researched the anxiety levels of English learners based on linguistics. In this study, it was found that English learners had moderate anxiety levels with the highest speaking skills. On the other hand, learning Japanese is different because Japanese has its

own rules, which present different difficulties, as in the study by Istiqomah et al. (2015), which examined the difficulties of learning Japanese at a vocational school in Semarang and found that the highest level of difficulty was grammar. Meanwhile, another study related to anxiety in using Japanese is a study on the anxiety of Indonesian workers by Azzahra & Visiaty (2025). Azzahra & Visiaty (2025) researched the anxiety experienced by Indonesian workers in Japan, meaning anxiety felt outside the classroom. The results of this study show that the anxiety most felt by Indonesian workers is when they have to interact with Japanese people directly without supervision and are required to do so professionally. Research on the anxiety felt by Indonesian learners of Japanese in the classroom, especially at LPK, has never been conducted. Therefore, this study focuses on the anxiety felt by Indonesian learners of Japanese who study Japanese at LPK. Through this study, it is hoped that it can contribute to providing an overview to LPK regarding the anxiety felt by Indonesian learners of Japanese, and contribute to improving Japanese language skills through Japanese language learning in a comfortable and enjoyable classroom.

RESEARCH METHODS

To obtain data, this study used a quantitative and qualitative approach (mixed methods) with survey and interview research methods. The respondents of this study were 69 Japanese language learners studying Japanese at a Job Training Institute (LPK). Meanwhile, five respondents who had completed the questionnaire were selected for interviews. The research instrument was a Likert scale questionnaire with four options as a data collection tool (1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Agree, 4. Strongly agree). There were 23 questions in this questionnaire. These questions refer to the JLAS (Japanese Language Anxiety Scale) created by Motoda (2000), specifically the JLAS-IN (Japanese Language Anxiety Scale In Class), which was adapted to the context and needs of the study to describe the level of anxiety felt by Japanese language learners at the LPK.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety

Anxiety, according to Zeidner & Matthews (2011), is a condition in which a person experiences uneasiness, with uncertainty being the cause of anxiety. This can occur suddenly and make a person feel uneasy even though the situation may not necessarily be dangerous. In addition, López-Ibor (1987) states that anxiety is a reaction that arises when one feels threatened. It typically occurs due to rapid changes or conditions that impose mental stress, such as stressful life situations. Anxiety also arises when learning a foreign language. As stated by Young (1991), there are at least six factors that cause anxiety among foreign language learners, namely 1. personal and social relationship problems, 2. learners' beliefs about the language learning process, 3. the teacher's approach to teaching language, 4. interaction between teachers and learners, 5. learning activities in the classroom, 6. tests in language learning. Within reasonable limits, anxiety can be a natural human mechanism for remaining alert, but if it continues to arise uncontrollably, anxiety can have a negative impact on a person's life. This condition can arise in any situation, even when learning a foreign language, where there are many factors that influence the emergence of anxiety.

Foreign Language Anxiety

Anxiety in foreign language learning, or Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), is a type of anxiety that arises specifically when a person is learning or using a foreign language. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), FLA is not a common form of anxiety, but rather a unique form of anxiety because it involves self-perception, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors that are directly related to the language learning situation in the classroom. MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) add that FLA often arises in learners because they already have negative thoughts, which cause anxiety, panic, and lack of focus that affect their performance. Thus, the striking difference between ordinary anxiety and FLA lies in the context

in which it occurs. Anxiety in the classroom is general and can occur in all subjects, while FLA only arises in the context of foreign language learning and is closely related to language communication skills.

Japanese Language Anxiety Scale

Motoda (2000) explains that the Japanese Language Anxiety Scale (JLAS) is designed to measure the level of anxiety experienced by Japanese language learners. The JLAS itself is divided into two parts, namely the Japanese Language Anxiety Scale In Class (JLAS-IN), which focuses on anxiety in classroom learning situations, and the Japanese Language Anxiety Scale Out Class (JLAS-OUT), which measures anxiety in the use of Japanese outside the classroom environment.

In the JLAS-IN section, Motoda (2000) further divides the types of questions into three parts, namely:

- a. Anxiety in Speaking Activities (発話活動における緊張), speaking directly in Japanese, especially in formal settings such as classrooms, is often a source of great pressure for learners. The fear of making pronunciation mistakes, not being able to find the right words, and not being able to express opinions or ideas fluently can trigger high levels of anxiety.
- b. Anxiety Toward Uncertain Situations (状況把握の不確かさに対する不安), refers to feelings of uncertainty, confusion, or not understanding the context of the learning process, including what the teacher is saying in class. They do not fully understand what is happening or do not know what they should do.
- c. Anxiety Toward Japanese Language Ability (日本語力に対する心配), reflects feelings of embarrassment, inferiority, and fear of negative judgment from others, especially teachers or classmates, due to Japanese language skills that are perceived as not good enough. Even when they actually have sufficient understanding. This lack of confidence arises because they feel that the Japanese they use is still incorrect, unnatural, or grammatically incorrect, and they worry that these mistakes will make them look bad in the eyes of others.

RESULT

Anxiety in Speaking Activities

Based on the results of questionnaire processing using descriptive statistical analysis, the following results were obtained. Anxiety in Speaking Activities based on the questionnaire results shown in Table 1 below, judging from the overall mean (mean=2.11), it is known that the majority of the 69 respondents disagreed with the statements related to anxiety in speaking activities (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9). This shows that most respondents did not feel anxiety when speaking.

Among all statements, the mean for statement P4 (I feel anxious when speaking Japanese loudly in class.) showed a tendency to strongly disagree, mean=1.72. This means that respondents were not very anxious when they had to speak loudly in class. This is reinforced by the statements of MU and IS in the interview, who stated that they did not feel anxious because they understood that this was a rule at the LPK and were already accustomed to it.

(1)

MU: “**We are required to speak loudly here.** Actually, there is a purpose behind it, it helps us memorize kotoba and bunpou more easily. For example, when we create reibun, we must present them loudly. There’s a clear reason for that, so I think it’s normal.”

(2)

IS: “For me, we are required to speak loudly here so that our message becomes clear and can be properly conveyed when we speak. If we speak softly, the listener might not understand what we’re

trying to say. So, **we are trained to speak loudly to ensure that our message is delivered clearly to the listener.**”

In MU's statement, it can be seen that MU feels that speaking loudly is something that must be done, so they do not feel it is a problem. Meanwhile, IS states that speaking loudly is not a problem because it has become a habit at LPK. This shows that low anxiety levels enable learners to speak more clearly and loudly. Conversely, individuals with high anxiety levels tend to speak softly or unsteadily. These findings are in line with the results of a literature review by Trajano et al. (2016), which states that high anxiety levels can affect a person's voice quality, causing vocal disorders and increasing voice-related symptoms.

This data also shows that respondents only tended to agree with statement P6 (I feel anxious in class when I cannot remember the Japanese words I usually know.) with a mean of 2.57. This shows that anxiety affects the fluency of language productivity, in this case when speaking. This is reinforced by (Horwitz et al., 1986), which states that anxiety can cause forgetfulness, one of which is forgetting vocabulary.

Based on the interview results, all five respondents confirmed that they often forget Japanese when they are anxious. One example is seen in the following statement by UU.

(3)

UU: “When I was sitting at my desk, I might have already memorized some parts, **but when I got in front of the class, I suddenly went blank and got confused about which part to say first.**”

In the above statement, it appears that the respondent forgot what he had memorized earlier because he was anxious. This is consistent with what Horwitz et al. (1986) said about anxiety causing forgetfulness.

However, from the overall results, it can be concluded that respondents did not feel tense when speaking. This may be due to the comfortable and relaxed classroom atmosphere. When the classroom atmosphere is comfortable and relaxed, it reduces and prevents learner anxiety. This is in line with the affective filter hypothesis. This hypothesis states that if the learners' affective filter is low, it will be easier for them to accept input and master the language (Krashen, 1982). The classroom atmosphere is inseparable from the teacher. As stated by MU during the interview, teachers influence the classroom atmosphere. In statement (4), MU said that the level of anxiety depends on how teachers teach in the classroom.

(4)

MU: “The level of anxiety also **depends on the teacher, because each teacher has a different way of teaching.**”

Table 1 Descriptive statistics related to anxiety in speaking activities

Anxiety in Speaking Activities				
No	Statement	N	MEAN	SD
P6	I feel anxious in class when I cannot remember the Japanese words I usually know.	69	2.57	.977
P3	I feel anxious when giving an oral presentation in Japanese in class.	69	2.36	.907
P5	I feel anxious that I might mishear Japanese in class.	69	2.26	.965

P8	I feel anxious when doing role-play in Japanese in class.	69	2.22	.855
P2	I usually feel anxious when speaking Japanese in class.	69	2.06	.765
P1	I feel anxious when I think I will be called on.	69	2.00	.857
P9	I feel anxious when suddenly being asked a question by the teacher.	69	1.96	.915
P7	I feel anxious when participating in a discussion in Japanese in class.	69	1.84	.760
P4	I feel anxious when speaking Japanese loudly in class.	69	1.72	.838
Average			2.11	.598

Anxiety Toward Uncertain Situations

The results of the questionnaire on anxiety about uncertainty (Table 2) show that the majority of respondents agreed with statements P10, P11, P12, P13, and P15, although there were still slight differences of opinion (mean=2.50). Statements P10, P11, P12, P13, and P15 all refer to situations of incomprehension, both incomprehension of content and incomprehension due to the speed of speech. This is in line with the statement by Sofyan & Mushrihah (2019), who say that learners often have difficulty understanding speech because teachers speak at a high speed and learners have limited vocabulary. When teachers continue to speak quickly, learners tend to feel anxious and have difficulty grasping or understanding the content of the message being conveyed. One example of anxiety seen in the interview data is the anxiety depicted in statement P10 (I feel anxious when the content of the Japanese lesson is difficult and I cannot understand it.) This can be seen in the following data (5). Data (5) shows that remaining silent and turning to a friend is a sign of UU's anxiety when he does not understand the teacher's explanation.

(5)

UU: ” **It definitely happens**, for example when the teacher explains a bunpou topic and asks about it, but we still don't understand. When that happens, **we usually stay silent or, umm... look at our friends.**”

Regarding the element of uncertainty in the situation, there were also statements that the majority of respondents tended to disagree with, namely statements P14, P16, and P17. This means that learners do not feel anxious when the teacher does not understand the Japanese they are speaking (P14), when the teacher does not understand what they are asking (P16), and when there is a lot to learn (P17).

When comparing statements P10, P11, P12, P13, P15 and statements P14 and P16, it can be said that learners feel more anxious when understanding the language than when producing the language being learned. This is in line with research conducted by (Ran et al., 2022), which states that the highest level of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is experienced by students in the listening skill. The study shows that learners feel very anxious when listening to English, both inside and outside the classroom, with the highest average listening anxiety score compared to the other three skills (speaking, reading, and writing).

Regarding statement P17 (I feel anxious when I have to learn many things in Japanese class), learners tend not to feel anxious about the amount of things they have to learn. This is because learners try to manage their time and set priorities. As described in the concept of time management in the

Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) by Oxford & Ehrman (1995), time management is one of the important factors that influence learning success, especially for adults such as LPK learners. With good time management skills, learners can study more efficiently and reduce the anxiety that arises from the many demands of learning, as seen in the statements by UU in data (6) and IS in data (7) below.

(6)

UU: “So, umm... There are many things we have to do here. For example, memorizing kotoba, preparing for tomorrow’s shiken, fukushuu previous lessons that we sometimes forget, because they might appear again in the next test. Then, we also have to memorize things like houkoku and others. Sometimes, it’s hard to decide which one to memorize first, **so we really have to manage our time carefully.**”

(7)

IS: “Maybe, umm... for that, **it’s all about time management. We have to prioritize the things that are most important first.** For example, we should probably memorize houkoku first, and then focus on memorizing kotoba afterward.”

Table 2 Descriptive statistics related to anxiety toward uncertain situations

Anxiety Toward Uncertain Situations				
No	Statement	N	MEAN	SD
P13	I feel anxious when I cannot follow the speed of Japanese in an audio recording.	69	2.86	.912
P11	I feel anxious when the teacher speaks Japanese too fast.	69	2.78	.820
P12	I feel anxious when I cannot keep up with the pace of the Japanese lesson.	69	2.68	.915
P15	I feel anxious when I do not understand Japanese in a recording.	69	2.64	.923
P10	I feel anxious when the content of the Japanese lesson is difficult and I cannot understand it.	69	2.59	.913
P14	I feel anxious when the teacher does not understand my Japanese.	69	2.26	1.024
P16	I feel anxious when my question is not conveyed properly to the teacher.	69	2.23	.926
P17	I feel anxious when I have to learn too many things in the Japanese lesson.	69	1.90	.894
Average			2.50	.672

Anxiety Toward Japanese Language Ability

Based on the overall survey results, in terms of anxiety about Japanese language ability, it shows that most respondents do not feel anxious or afraid about their Japanese language ability, as can be seen from the overall mean (mean=2.11).

From the statements with “not anxious” answers above, it can be seen that learners are not anxious about other people's views of their language skills (P18, P19, P20, P23), nor are they anxious about their own ability to learn Japanese (P22).

Among the respondents' answers related to language ability, statement P18 (I feel anxious that other students will laugh at me when I speak Japanese.) is a statement with a tendency to strongly disagree (mean=1.70). This can be seen in the MU statement in data (6) and the IS statement in data (7), which state that they do not feel anxious about being laughed at by their classmates.

(8)

MU: “**Sometimes it actually becomes a joke.** Like, ‘**Oh, this is wrong, it should be like this,**’ or ‘**Oh, that’s how it is.**”

(9)

IS: “Here, **everyone supports each other.** So, um... even if we make mistakes, our friends correct us. **They might laugh a little,** but um... **they still help and support us instead of mocking or bullying.**”

In MU's statement, it is clear that MU is not worried about being laughed at and considers it a joke. Meanwhile, in IS's statement, it is also clear that IS is not worried about being laughed at.

IS's statement also clarifies the questionnaire answers regarding not feeling anxious about other people's views on Japanese language ability (P18, P19, P20, P21). This is in line with the opinion of Huang et al. (2010), who stated that support from friends is very important for language learners because learners spend a lot of time together learning and facing similar challenges. Support from classmates is not only in the form of friendship, but can also help facilitate the learning process. Statement (7) shows that classmates are very supportive and helpful to each other, making learners feel comfortable in class.

Statement 23 (I feel anxious that the teacher will scold me when I use Japanese incorrectly.) also has a disagreement response (mean=2.43). This means that the respondents did not feel anxious about being scolded by the teacher when using Japanese in class. This means that the classroom atmosphere was relaxed and comfortable, so that the learners' affective filter was low and they could use Japanese in class without anxiety, as stated by (Krashen, 1982).

Although on average the respondents did not feel anxious about their Japanese language skills, there was one statement that tended to elicit feelings of anxiety, namely statement P21 (I feel anxious that my Japanese ability is lower than that of other students.). This shows that the respondents compared their abilities with those of their classmates and felt anxious if their language skills were lower than those of others. This is in line with the results of Kadir et al.'s (2018) study, which shows that some learners have low self-perception because they feel that their friends are more proficient in foreign languages, thus causing a lack of confidence and anxiety in the learning process.

As shown in RS's statement in data (8), RS often feels anxious when he feels that his abilities are lower than those of his classmates.

(10)

RS: “**Often, sensei.** For example, if my ability is lower than, um... other friends who study more diligently, or if there’s something I don’t understand from what sensei explained earlier, we can ask our friends or *senpai* about it later in the evening.”

Another statement came from UU, who admitted that he sometimes felt inferior when seeing other people's achievements, although those feelings did not make him despair. On the contrary, that anxiety actually motivated him to try harder and catch up with his friend.

(11)

UU: “Not really, but that feeling of, um, what sensei mentioned earlier (feeling inferior) **is still there**. However, I don’t feel down because of it; sometimes it even makes me want to catch up and improve myself.”

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics Related to anxiety toward Japanese language ability

Anxiety Toward Japanese Language Ability				
No	Statement	N	MEAN	SD
P21	I feel anxious that my Japanese ability is lower than that of other students.	69	2.55	1.132
P23	I feel anxious that the teacher will scold me when I use Japanese incorrectly.	69	2.43	1.050
P22	Even during lessons, I feel anxious that I do not have the ability to learn Japanese well.	69	2.06	.938
P20	I feel embarrassed when I make mistakes in Japanese in front of other students.	69	2.03	.874
P19	I feel anxious that other students think my Japanese is poor.	69	1.88	.993
P18	I feel anxious that other students will laugh at me when I speak Japanese.	69	1.70	.880
Average			2.11	.751

CONCLUSION

Through the results of this study, it can be concluded that Japanese language learners do not feel anxious during the learning process at LPK. This applies to speaking activities, uncertain situations, and language skills. This is due to the comfortable classroom environment, which allows learners to relax. This condition is due to the positive attitude of the teachers, who appreciate every effort made by learners and conduct interesting and enjoyable learning activities. In addition, classmates support each other, preventing learners from feeling anxious. This is in accordance with Krashen (1982), who said that the lower the affective filter, the easier it is for learners to accept learning and master the language. A comfortable and enjoyable classroom atmosphere allows learners to open their emotional filters, calming them down and increasing their motivation and confidence. This makes it easier for learners to absorb the learning material into their brains.

Of the 23 statements, only 7 conditions made learners anxious. In terms of speaking activities, learners feel unable to remember the Japanese they actually know when they feel anxious. In terms of situational uncertainty, learners feel anxious about situations of incomprehension, whether it be incomprehension of the content of speech or learning material, or incomprehension due to the speed of speech. Meanwhile, in terms of language ability, learners feel anxious when their language skills are lower than those of their classmates.

In terms of learners' anxiety that makes it difficult to remember vocabulary, the advice that can be given is to encourage learners to dare to speak even if their grammar is not yet perfect. And emphasize the most important thing in communication, which is the delivery of the message. In terms of not understanding the content of Japanese speech, the advice that can be given is to provide lessons on listening strategies, while for not understanding the speed, the advice that can be given is to use teacher talk, which is to adjust the speed and choice of vocabulary according to the learner's ability level, especially at the basic level. For anxiety related to a lack of confidence in language ability compared to other classmates, the advice that can be given is to provide motivation to be more confident.

This study has two main limitations. First, the study was only conducted at one Job Training Institute (LPK), so the results cannot be generalized to all LPKs in Indonesia, which may have different teaching methods and learning environments. Second, the respondents in this study came from various levels of Japanese language proficiency, without any separation based on specific levels such as basic, intermediate, or advanced. This means that the results of the study cannot specifically describe the level of anxiety experienced by learners at each level of language proficiency. Therefore, future research is needed on language anxiety in the classroom with respondents from various LPKs, as well as research that looks at language anxiety at each level of Japanese language proficiency.

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From Folklore to Movie: The Structure of “Scary” in Japan

Muhammad Umar²⁹

Abstract

As fear is one of the oldest emotions of human beings as quoted by Oates (1998) from Lovecraft, scary as a nature of things is also as old as fear, human beings, and their culture. This is why every civilization around the world, and its cultures, have their own scary folklore. For example, Japanese *yokai* folklore describes a creature known as *yokai* that possess various characteristics, most of which have a scary appearance and can do things that can affect humans who come into contact with them. Nowadays, not only in folklore, but scary and fear also manifest in more contemporary forms, such as movies. Considering its relation to folklore, what we can see from almost all horror movies is that they also feature creatures with similar characteristics and abilities to those found in folklore. This initial observation of folklore and horror movies led me to a hypothesis that both share similarities in their structure. Thus, the analysis conducted from the perspective of structuralism—with some readjustments to make it applicable to analyze movies—to discuss the similarities between *yokai* and three Japanese short-horror movies. I conclude that both have similarities in their structures of fear and the scary, which are related to experience, along with strange noises that are not understandable by human senses, occurring as a numinous occurrence, and sometimes occurring in a house.

Keywords: *Folklore, short movies, structuralism, scary*

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INTRODUCTION

Scary can never be separated from fear. In this paper, fear is understood as an emotion caused by scary things, and since fear is one of the oldest emotions of human beings, as Oates (1998) quoting Lovecraft suggests, scary as a quality of things is just as ancient as fear, humanity, and culture itself. Every civilization across the world has produced its own scary folklore—*hantu* or *siluman* in Indonesia, *vampires* in Europe, *jiangshi* in China, *chupacabra* in America, and *yokai* in Japan. Despite their differences, these folklores share a common structure: they centre on creatures with frightening appearances and powers that can disturb human life. Thus, folklore everywhere seems to articulate fear through scary creatures.

In the present day, scary and fear are not confined to folklore but also appear in modern cultural forms, especially movies. The horror genre shows how fear continues to be one of humanity's strongest emotions. As Bantinaki (2012) notes, fear can even have a paradoxical effect—producing positive emotions through the experience of fear. Although this paper does not focus on that paradox, it is important to note that horror movies often rely on creatures similar to those in folklore. For example, *The Conjuring* (2013) and its sequels feature demonic spirits with traits that resemble folkloric beings.

These observations lead to a hypothesis: folklore and horror movies share structural similarities. This paper examines these parallels through the lens of Levi-Strauss' structuralism, focusing on yokai folklore and three Japanese short horror films. Since structuralism analyses how concepts are organized within the collective mind of a society, the aim here is to explore how fear is structured in Japanese society and what function it serves.

Existing scholarships provide valuable background. Research on yokai ranges from its narratives, images, and conceptualizations (Geraskov & Ziniakova, 2024; Reider, 2019; Ryūhei, 2021; Yasui, 2017), to its sociocultural connections (Donovan, 2024; Williams, 2015), and its role in contemporary media (Donovan, 2024; Papp, 2010). Meanwhile, studies on Japanese horror often focus on how folklore or traditional theatre influences anime, manga, or film (Sarkar, 2023; Wetmore, 2023), with others attempting to categorize Japanese horror media more broadly (La Marca, 2023).

However, research combining yokai, Japanese horror, and structuralism remains scarce. Some scholars apply post-structuralist or related approaches (Aoyagi & Kovacic, 2021; Balgimbayeva, 2020; Hudson, 2018), but few directly address “scary” as it appears in both folklore and horror cinema. This paper, therefore, seeks to contribute by examining how fear is structured through yokai folklore and Japanese horror films, while also filling a gap in previous research.

FILM AND STRUCTURALISM: MATERIALS, METHODS, AND THEORY

As mentioned before, this paper will discuss *yokai* folklore and Japanese horror movies through the perspective of structuralism. However, since I have found that structuralism has not been appropriately used in the study of movies, due to the different objects used in the discussion, I will start by explaining how structuralism will be used in this paper.

First, this paper's analysis is indeed based on the basic principle of Levi-Strauss' structuralism, referring to Ahimsa-Putra (2012) and how he used structuralism in his analysis in his book. In his book, he states that he wrote the book as an introduction and references to understand structuralism and how to apply it in research, which at the time there was still a lack of sources to learn structuralism in Indonesia. But, in some parts of his book, he is also stating that his analysis has differs from Levi-Strauss' analysis. Thus, it will be more appropriate—as Wibowo (2017) claims his analysis—, if I say my analysis will be more similar to Ahimsa-Putra's structuralism analysis style, than Levi-Strauss' style.

However, as I mentioned earlier about the different objects of analysis, my analysis still has some differences with Ahimsa-Putra's, both in principles and method used. It is because Ahimsa-Putra only used structuralism to analyze stories, tales, or literary works, whereas Levi-Strauss only

used it to analyze myths. In my analysis, I will use it to analyze movies or films, which have fundamental differences from Ahimsa-Putra's and Levi-Strauss' object of analysis. All of their objects are composed of words, phrases, and sentences, either oral or written. However, movies are composed of at least two components: audio and visual. Audio components are related to every aspect that can be heard by the viewer, such as dialogue, music, sound effects, etc. Video components are related to every aspect that can be viewed by the viewer, such as scenes, visual effects, cinematography, etc.

These differences in composing components between stories, tales, myths, and movies surely imply their fundamental units which must be identified to do structural analysis. This is because, basically, these units carry meanings. The meaning that is carried by these units can only be understood by connecting these units and seeing how the relation of these units, Levi-Strauss called this paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis (Ahimsa-Putra, 2012b). Levi-Strauss used this principle after being influenced by Roman Jakobson's theory of phonemes in phonology. This is why, in Levi-Strauss' structuralism, these units are called as *mytheme* in his analysis of myths. In his analysis, *mythemes*, which are words or sentences that carry meaning, are the fundamental units. However, the meaning or values of these *mythemes* are not independent of context; thus, we can see these meanings only if we see the relation between these units. Ahimsa-Putra, in his analysis on stories and tales, used the term *ceriteme* to call these units—retrieved from the word *cerita* in Indonesian, which means stories. Which, in his book, *ceritemes* are words, phrases, sentences, parts of/or whole of a paragraph that have a relation with other *ceritemes*. Thus, as *mytheme*, by analysing this relation, we can see what meaning is carried by *ceriteme*.

In my analysis, with differences of those fundamental units of stories; myths; tales, and movies, I try to formulate the fundamental units of movies in structural analysis, which I call it as *cineme*, to distinguish it from *mytheme* and *ceriteme*—as used by Levi-Strauss and Ahimsa-Putra. *Cineme* is composed of a set of elements or aspects of both audio and visual that show particular things or meanings considered important in the analysis. It is because movies convey meanings not only through the dialogue spoken by the actors, but also through visual and audio effects, background music, etc. Even in some cases, we can see some scenes that have no dialogue at, but convey a certain meaning that we can understand by watching the scene and its relation to the other scenes.

Following Ahimsa-Putra's approach in his analysis of *Bajo's Tale* (2012a), I also divide the movies used in my analysis into several parts. While Ahimsa-Putra referred to these as “episodes,” I use the term “part.” In his method, the division was based on clear textual indicators that marked topic or episode changes. In contrast, my division relies on the assumption that there is a transition between each part of the movie. These assumptions are not based on the conventional act structure in cinematographic narrative theory (Cutting, 2016) but are instead observed through how *cinemes* reveal different stages of the story. Such transitions are often imperceptible without careful attention to the film's visual and narrative flow.

Furthermore, while Ahimsa-Putra divided the tales due to their length, I separate the movies to better analyze how *cinemes* construct meaning. Each part consists of *cinemes* that are contextually linked and mutually defining. This method allows for a clearer understanding of how *cinemes* are positioned and related to one another. Through these relations, the structure of the movies and the meanings embedded within each part can be more effectively revealed.

Yokai Folklore and Three Japanese Horror Short Movies: Result

Yokai Folklore

“*yokai* (妖怪), variously translated as monster, spirit, goblin, ghost, demon, phantom, specter, fantastic being, lower-order deity, or, more amorphously, as any unexplainable experience or numinous occurrence.” (Foster, 2009)

The story of the existence of *yokai* can be considered as folklore—as defined by Waterman (‘Definitions of Folklore’, 1996)—a story that is orally communally shared, told, and passed down generation to generation by people in a society. As it cannot be separated from Japanese society, of the term ‘*yokai*’ itself cannot be separated from Japanese society’s cultural understanding. This is why it is quite complicated to translate the term ‘*yokai*’. Foster, in his writing, which was quoted earlier, also used several terms to define *yokai*. However, Foster’s definition of *yokai* is not wrong either. But for me, it will be more appropriate to refer and focus on his amorphous definition of *yokai*, because there is no single word that has an equivalent meaning to the term ‘*yokai*’.

Shortly, *yokai* is an explanation for every occurrence or human experience that is not understandable by human senses, with or without the appearance of an entity (Foster & Shinonome, 2015). To quote Foster & Shinonome, the existence of *yokai* is in liminality, between real and fiction, reality and imaginary, believe or not. At this point, we can say that tales of *yokai* have—at least—a function: to make occurrences that cannot be understood by human senses more understandable to Japanese society. Even if it cannot be completely acceptable to human senses, at least *yokai* can bring those occurrences to the liminal spaces of the human mind.

Yokai have various forms, characteristics, and places to belong (Meyer, 2012, 2015, 2019; Meyer & Davisson, 2021). Some of them can bring bad luck to humans and even be dangerous, while others just ‘live’ with humans and even can give good luck to humans. Looking at the numbers, there is significant belief in *yokai* in Japanese society. Some of them show some similarities with three short movies that would be explained in the next part.

Utsukushi Warashi



Figure 1. Illustration of *Utsutsuki Warashi* (Meyer, 2012)

Utsukushi warashi belongs in the storage room in a human’s house, and is depicted as a child that usually makes weird and creepy noises. One of their characteristics is the dirty footprints they leave in the house. Their existence actually does not bring any direct badness to humans who live in the house that they belong to. However, they can give an uncomfortable feel or vibe in the house. Even if they do not bring any badness directly, bad luck will befall the owner of the house, if they try to repel *utsukushi warashi*. (Meyer, 2012)

Nando Babaa



Figure 2. Illustration of *Nando Babaa* (Meyer & Davisson, 2021)

It is depicted as a granny with a short body and ‘bad’ looks, who belongs in a closet in a human house. The darker and dirtier the closets, the more they like it. Moreover, because of their shy nature, they prefer a closet that is rarely opened by humans. Basically—and usually— they are not dangerous to humans. They will hide whenever the closet they belong to is opened by a human. But if someone suddenly opens the closet, they could be shocked, scream, and chase whoever did it. In some regions in Japan, *nando babaa* is believed to have a more dangerous nature, because they can steal a newborn baby. But, this could be because of ambiguity between *nando babaa* and another *yokai* called *yama uba*, who belongs in the mountains. (Meyer & Davisson, 2021)

Makuragaeshi



Figure 3. Illustration of *Makuragaeshi* (Meyer, 2015)

They are believed to have various and not homogenous forms, but they are usually depicted as monks or samurais with small bodies—child-sized. They belong and just stay in the bedroom, and usually are not dangerous to humans. Sometimes they just prank humans when someone sleeps in the same bedroom with *makuragaeshi*, by replacing the pillow from the head to the feet. Or in another case, they also walk on the ashes in the house and walk around the house, leaving dirty footprints. Even in most cases believed to be not dangerous, some cases show more dangerous and scarier things that are done by *makuragaeshi*. For example, they are lifting a *tatami* that was used for sleeping, and slamming it with the person inside to the floor. In another case, they also sit on a sleeping person’s chest until they are out of breath. When they are out of breath, *makuragaeshi* will take their soul, causing them to die. (Meyer, 2015)

Three Japanese Horror Short Movies

These are horror short movies that were screened at the online event of the Japan Film Festival 2024, from June 5 until July 9, 2024. These movies are titled “Best Wishes to All”, “The Invitation”, and “Closet” (Japan Film Festival, 2024). While they have different plots, backgrounds, and directors, these short movies still show structural similarity. This similarity leads to assumption mentioned

before, that they have the same structure. Actually, there is another one titled “Karakasa”, but only three of the mentioned ones clearly showed structural similarity. In this part, I will only shortly introduce those movies to give brief overview to the movies due to the word limit³⁰.

“Best Wishes to All” by SHIMOTSU Yuta (2023)

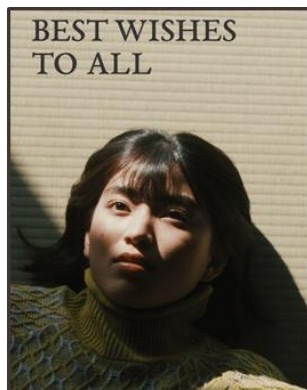


Figure 4. Poster of Best Wishes to All (Japan Film Festival, 2024)

This movie tells a story of a female student who visits her grandfather and grandmother in her hometown. However, in her grandparents’ house, she experienced some weird things such as hearing strange noises. Eventually, she discovered that her grandparents were holding someone hostage in one of the rooms in their house for sacrifice. At the end of the movie, she gave her grandparents a sardonic look, making the viewer guess whether she would follow what her grandparents had done or even consider them as a sacrifice.

Closet by NAKANO Hiroto (2023)



Figure 5. Poster of Closet (Japan Film Festival, 2024)

The movie is about a man who appears to dislike his job and struggles to keep his room clean and tidy. One time, he heard a noise from his closet. When he checked it, he saw a hand, and it pulled him to his closet. Then, someone who was physically identical to him appeared from the closet, but it seemed like he was a “different” person. It was because he seemed to love his job and kept his room clean and tidy.

³⁰ Should you want to read the full version of the partition, please contact me through email.

The Invitation by MIENO Hiroho (2023)



Figure 6. Poster of the Invitation (Japan Film Festival, 2024)

This movie is about a policewoman who investigates a house after receiving a report about it from the emergency call center. She came with her partner, a policeman, who was dragged into a closet while he was checking the house. Long story short, the daughter of the house killed her parents, and she was the one who made the report to the emergency call center. In the end, there is no further explanation regarding the condition of the police officers. However, it was perhaps implied that they also became the murder victims.

Residence, Noise, and Transformation: Analysis of Structure of Three Short Movies

Even these three short movies have different plots or storylines, but all of them show the same pattern. In *Best Wishes to All*—hereafter referred to as *BWtA*—the student, as the main character, went to her grandparents' house. In that house, she heard a strange noise from a part of the house, to be exact, the room at the end of the corridor. After that, she saw an entity, which was a man who had been imprisoned and was to be sacrificed by her grandparents. After that, she entered the room where the man had been imprisoned, of her own will. From that moment, she showed a different characteristic, which was evident in her cynical gaze at her grandparents. Either she became hateful towards her grandparents, or she even became a person like her grandparents who imprisoned another person. This scene, where she gave a cynical gaze was the last scene from the movie, and there is no further explanation about it, but it is enough to show that she has been transformed, especially in his characteristics.

In *Closet*—hereafter referred to as *C*—, the main character, an office worker, has been in his room and heard a noise coming from his closet. After that, he saw an entity in his closet that was not human. Then he was dragged by that entity into his closet. After this moment, we can see that he has been transformed—or perhaps replaced—by the entity from his closet. This entity has an identical look as the main character. But we can now see that he has changed, from his characteristic of hating to loving it, from letting his room be messy all the time to making it tidy and clean.

Then in *The Invitation*—hereafter referred to as *TI*—, the main character, a policewoman accompanied by her partner—a policeman, visited a resident's house after receiving a report from the police emergency call center. Slightly different from two movies mentioned earlier, the analysis of this movie focused on what happened to the main character's partner. In this movie, the policeman heard a strange noise from a closet in that house. When he checked the closet, he found a body wrapped in plastic and swarmed by flies. After that, the policewoman saw that her partner was dragged into the closet. In the final scene, there is also no further explanation about their condition. But, the most likely condition is that they have been killed and have been a victim in that house.

From my explanation above, it is that a pattern emerges regarding residential places, noise, and change or transformation in these three short movies. Even though they still have differences in some aspects, as in the focused character in the analysis, or the first location setting—moving or

not—. However, it is still related to a residential place, whether self-owned or not. They are also experiencing strange noises from part of a house. All the focused characters from these three movies also move into the source of the noises, either of their own will or forced by another entity. At the end of the movies, as a result of moving into the source of the noise, they have undergone a transformation in his/her characteristics, looks, or even death—perhaps.

So, if we juxtapose and position these cinemes and the patterns they reveal emerge from three short movies in a paradigmatic and syntagmatic relation, we can see a particular structure is carried by these movies. These structures are visualized as in Figure 7.

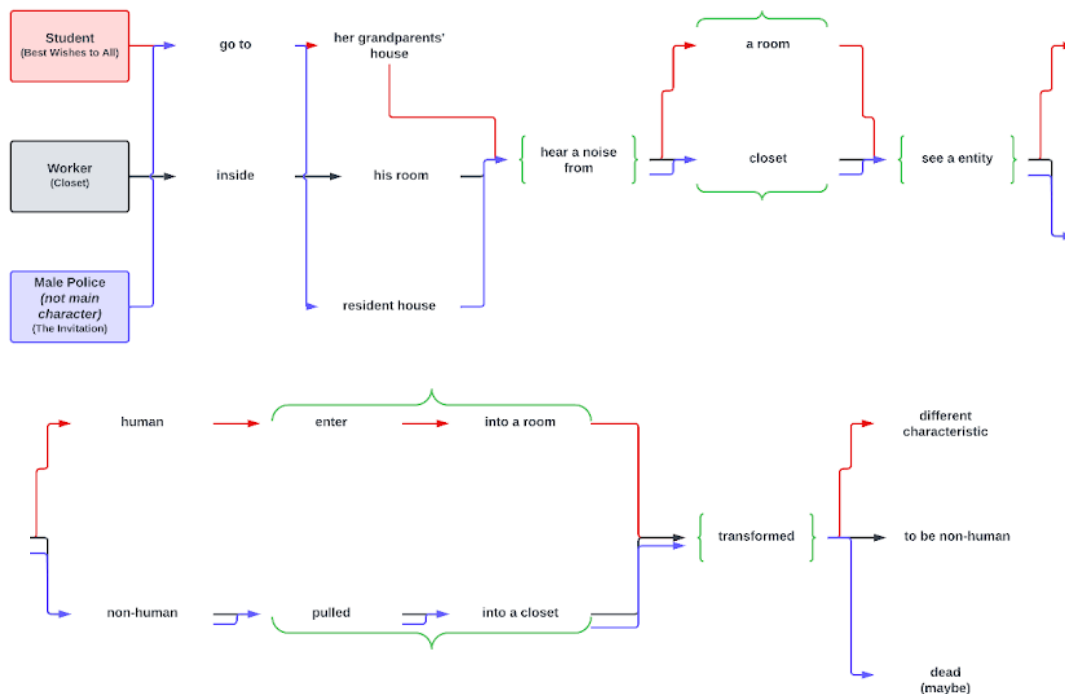


Figure 7. Structure of three short movies

From this structure, we can see how cinemes carry meaning that correlates with the other cinemes. As can be seen from cinemes in the 5th part of BWtA, the 3rd part of C, and the 4th part of TI, that these cinemes’ meaning can be understood as “scary and strange thing, started with strange noise first”, just after we juxtaposed and positioned these cinemes in a paradigmatic and syntagmatic relation with the other cinemes. Hence, the relations between these cinemes and the other cinemes, whether from the same movies or from the other ones, will be visible and understandable.

Thus, from the whole relations of the cinemes that show the structure shown in Figure 7, we can conclude that the meaning of that structure and the whole cinemes is: a strange, mysterious, or scary noise and occurrence made up by a certain entity in a room or a particular part of a house; this entity has the ability to transform/kill humans.

From Folklore to Movie: The Structure of “Scary” in Japan

If we look deeper, the three folklores of yokai mentioned before also have a similar repeated pattern. They show that all of the yokai have a weird appearance that is often considered scary. Moreover, these yokai often make a strange noise, with or without their appearance. These three yokai can also have a negative impact on humans, although in some cases, this kind of ability is rarely found. This negative effect can be discomfort, bad luck, or even death. Further, these patterns also show a particular structure, which is: a strange, mysterious, or scary noise and occurrence made up by yokai in a room or particular part of a house; this entity has the ability to affect and give a negative effect to humans.

We can observe a structural similarity between the three horror short films and the three *yokai* previously discussed. Both represent *surface structures*—a system of relations between units based on directly observable characteristics (Ahimsa-Putra, 2012b, p. 61). By recognizing these surface structures in the films and *yokai*, we can identify the underlying *deep structure*. According to Ahimsa-Putra, deep structure is constructed by the researcher through analyzing the relations among surface structures, though it is not always empirically visible and requires interpretive sensitivity. From the relation between both surface structures, the deep structure that emerges suggests that “scary” phenomena often begin with a mysterious noise coming from a specific space within a house—commonly a storage room or closet—and involve an unseen entity with the power to affect humans.

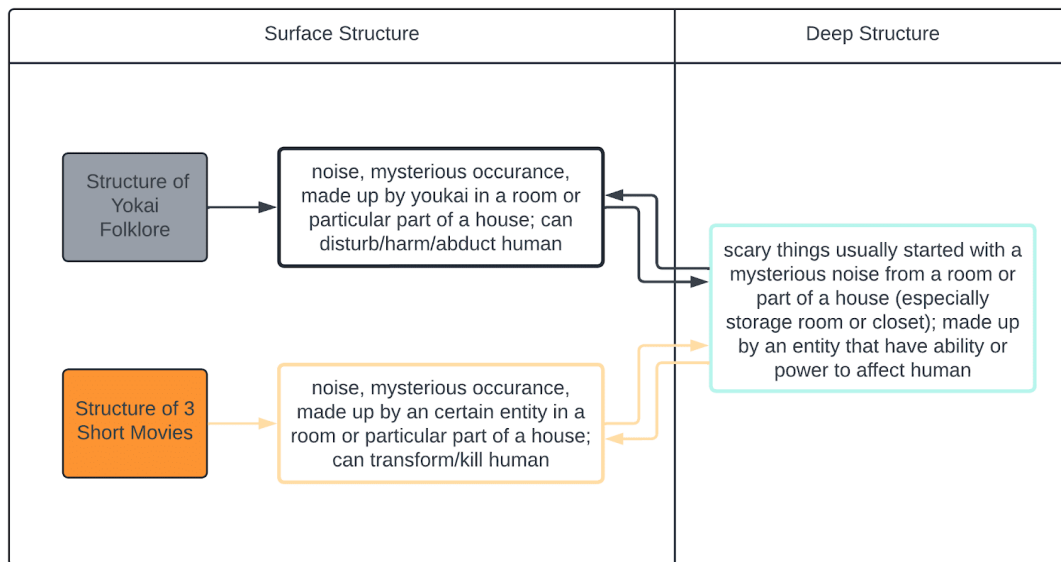


Figure 8. The surface structure of yokai folklore and three horror short movies, and its deep structure. Surface structure shows how deep structure, and deep structure manifested in surface structure.

This deep structure represents how “scary” exists in the minds of Japanese people. Based on the analysis, “scary” is associated with strange noises or occurrences caused by a certain entity that has the ability to affect humans. With this same deep structure, we can observe a transformation—one that occurs when different myths, stories, folklore, or films share the same deep structure while differing at the surface level. The manifestation of “scary” in *yokai* folklore thus aligns with that in the three short horror films, as both are shaped by the same deep structure. Transformation, therefore, happens only within the surface structure, while creators—consciously or not—operate within the boundaries set by the deep structure. This corresponds with Ahimsa-Putra's (2012b) conclusion in his analysis of Umar Kayam's story: that a storyteller's creative freedom remains restrained by an underlying structural order.

By recognizing the deep structure, then we get further questions: does yokai folklore have functions as *model of* and *model for*? If yes, have these functions also appeared in three horror short movies? Based on how yokai folklore exists in Japanese people, as explained by Foster & Shinonome (2015)—as mentioned earlier—, yokai folklore serves as a model for Japanese people to understand mysterious occurrences that happen around them. And with recognizing the characteristics of those yokai, so yokai folklore also has a function as a model for Japanese people on how to act regarding those mysterious occurrences and how to interact with their environment.

Regarding the second question, data on the functions of these three horror short films are largely inaccessible. Only *BWtA* provides some indication through a statement by its director, Shimotsu Yuta, in a video uploaded by JFF+ (2024). Yuta explained that the film was inspired by an urban legend called “The Law of Conservation of Earthly Emotions,” which claims that the total of

happy and unhappy people on earth equals zero. This idea led him to explore the notion that one's happiness may depend on another's suffering, making *BWtA* a cinematic model illustrating this concept. From his message, we can conclude that *BWtA* has been a *model of* "The Law of Conservation of Earthly Emotions", that helps people—at least Yuta himself—to understand this law. Nevertheless, what is stated before does not mean that these movies do not have those functions. It could be due to my own limitations. Therefore, these questions could be a topic for further research agenda. Especially how movies in a more contemporary context have a function in society, regarding folklore, which has the same deep structure as movies.

CONCLUSION

Even if it will be redundant, this part will summarize the conclusions obtained through the structural analysis of yokai folklore and three horror short movies screened at the online event of Japan Film Festival 2024. First, from both surface structures—yokai folklore and the three horror short movies' surface structure—shows that both share the same deep structure. Second, therefore, a transformation happened, from the yokai folklore's surface structure to the mentioned short movies' surface structure. Third, yokai as folklore has both functions, as *model of* and *model of* to Japanese people. But neither of these functions is clearly recognizable from analysed short movies, due to limitations of data and information.

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Imagining Japan: Cultural Branding and Visual Storytelling in Indonesian Snack and Beverage Packaging

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Abstract

Japanese popular culture increasingly occupies a prominent position in Indonesia's creative industries, including the food and beverage sector, particularly through product packaging. This study examines how local packaging constructs an imagined Japan and functions as a medium of cultural branding. The objectives are to analyze the synergy of textual and visual elements, identify cultural hybridization processes, and reveal cultural narratives embedded in packaging. Data were collected through direct observation in retail outlets and online searches of local food and beverage products adopting Japanese elements. Analysis proceeded in three stages: (1) identification of textual and visual elements, (2) interpretation of signs using Barthes's semiotic framework, and (3) cultural branding analysis to explore the formation of brand myths and hybridization. Findings indicate that Japanese vocabulary and script, cultural icons, and distinctive colors construct a visual narrative positioning Japan as a symbol of aesthetics, modernity, and global quality. Simultaneously, these aesthetics merge with local identity through adaptations of taste, price, and everyday consumption contexts, producing a hybrid identity distinctive to Indonesian products. This interpretation focuses on packaging representation without direct investigation of consumer reception, leaving scope for future studies that address how audiences negotiate these narratives in practice. In conclusion, local Indonesian product packaging emerges not merely as a container, but as a cultural medium that negotiates global aspirations and local identities, demonstrating how imagining Japan becomes a strategic branding practice in the era of globalization.

Keywords: *Branding, brand myth, cultural hybridity, Japaneseness, packaging, visual narrative*

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, Japanese popular culture has become one of the most influential cultural forces globally, transcending geographical boundaries through media, lifestyle, and consumer products. In Indonesia, this influence is not only visible in entertainment such as anime, manga, and J-Pop but also permeates the creative industries, particularly the food and beverage (F&B) sector. One significant medium that represents the presence of Japanese culture is product packaging, which serves as a site for cultural negotiation, visual storytelling, and identity formation.

Product packaging now functions as more than a mere physical container—it has become a medium of visual communication that conveys brand identity, experiential promise, and cultural narratives to consumers. Design elements such as illustration, typography, color palette, and symbolism play a key role in shaping consumer perceptions of quality, authenticity, and preference (Li&Li, 2022). In the F&B sector, the role of packaging has become increasingly crucial—not only as an aesthetic attraction but also as a space of cultural representation (Ampuero & Vila, 2006; Silayoi & Speece, 2007).

In Indonesia, the adoption of Japanese aesthetic elements in local F&B packaging has become increasingly widespread. Various products—from Japanese-style green tea beverages to local snacks and ramen—borrow visual elements such as sakura motifs, kawaii illustration styles, or Japanese scripts to attract young consumers familiar with Japanese pop culture (Kristanto et al, 2024; Lieber-Milo, 2021). This practice can be understood as a form of cultural hybridization, namely the adaptation and recontextualization of foreign cultural symbols within local consumption practices (Dukut, 2024). This phenomenon opens up the possibility that local products use Japanese symbols to differentiate themselves in a competitive market while simultaneously triggering consumers's imaginations about Japan.

The semiotic approach, particularly Roland Barthes's framework of denotation, connotation, and myth, is relevant to interpret the layers of meaning embedded in packaging. At the denotative level, visual elements refer to literal objects or symbols; at the connotative level, they embody symbolic and cultural meanings related to values, emotions, or ideologies. Through collective reading, these signs may even function as 'myths' that reinforce specific cultural narratives and legitimize consumption practices.

Furthermore, the cultural branding framework emphasizes that brands can construct and sell 'identity myths' that resonate socially, distinguishing products not only through functional attributes but also through cultural narratives that link the brand to consumer aspirations (Holt, 2004; Kristanto et al, 2024; Dukut, 2024). In the context of local F&B packaging, Japanese aesthetics may function as a form of visual storytelling that weaves identity narratives and negotiates between locality and global modernity.

Although design and marketing studies have highlighted the aesthetic aspects of packaging, there is still little research that systematically combines Barthesian semiotic analysis with cultural branding and cultural hybridization theory, particularly on local Indonesian F&B packaging that adopts Japanese imagery. Existing studies tend to be fragmented—focusing on consumer preferences or marketing strategies—without linking denotative-connotative readings of signs to broader branding practices (Li & Li, 2024; Bryce, Scholes & Simon, 2023). Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the construction of Japanese imagery in local F&B packaging: from the denotative level to branding implications and forms of cultural hybridization.

Recent research further reinforces the urgency of this study. Dong & Li (2025) demonstrated that traditional cultural symbols can influence consumers's emotional value and purchase intentions. Li & Li (2022) found that design aesthetics, including aspects of traditional culture, positively influence purchase intentions through perceived value, with a stronger influence on consumers who value traditionalism. Although Duarte et al. (2024) focused on sustainable packaging, the mechanisms they summarized—perceived value, emotional response, and willingness to pay—are theoretically relevant to cross-cultural aesthetics as well. In the Indonesian context, Prabowo & Aji (2021)

emphasized the relationship between visual packaging and emotional value, which impacts purchase intentions, while Puspitasari, Suryadi & Widodo (2022) highlighted the attachment of Japanese identity to snack and beverage products. However, the majority of these studies still emphasize marketing strategies and consumer behavior, rather than the construction of visual and narrative meaning within the packaging itself.

Thus, this study is designed to answer the questions: how visual and textual elements on local Indonesian F&B packaging construct an image of Japan, how the meaning of these signs can be interpreted through Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis, and how cultural branding strategies and forms of cultural hybridization are reflected in the packaging narrative. The main objective of this study is to examine packaging as a medium for cultural narrative that allows consumers to "imagine Japan" in a local context, as well as to enrich the study of the relationship between branding, popular culture, and the creative industry in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretive design. This design is appropriate for examining the cultural meanings embedded in the visual and textual representation of packaging, as well as enabling deeper interpretation of the signs, symbols, and narratives formed. The focus of the research is directed toward how Indonesian local snack and beverage packaging adopts Japanese imagery through sign construction, brand myth formation, and cultural hybridization practices.

The analytical framework combines three complementary perspectives: (1) Barthes's semiotic analysis (1972) are denotation, connotation, myth, (2) Holt's theory of cultural branding (2004), and (3) Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity (2012). Together, these perspectives allow exploration of how packaging constructs multi-layered meanings and cultural negotiations through visual and textual strategies.

The data consist of visual documentation of Indonesian snack and beverage packaging collected from retail stores and online marketplaces. The samples were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) locally produced brands in Indonesia, (2) packaging that explicitly incorporates Japanese cultural elements, and (3) wide market availability in Indonesia from the year 2020 to 2025. Supporting data include promotional images, website descriptions, and social media materials.

The research data consist of primary data in the form of visual documentation of product packaging obtained through direct collection from markets, retail stores, and e-commerce platforms. The secondary data include product information from official brand websites, promotional materials, and online catalogs featuring packaging images.

The analysis was conducted in three stages: (1) identification of textual (Japanese character, vocabulary, slogan) and visual elements (color, typography, illustration, symbol), (2) semiotic interpretation using Barthes's framework, and (3) the analysis of cultural branding and cultural hybridity, which examines how packaging functions to construct brand myths while simultaneously presenting strategies of cultural hybridization by blending Japanese aesthetics with local identity in both visual and narrative constructions.

With this design, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Indonesian local F&B product packaging functions not only as a marketing medium but also as a site of cultural representation, cultural hybridization practices, and the formation of a brand's symbolic identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Representation of Japan through Textual and Visual Synergy

The packaging of local Indonesian food and beverage products that adopt Japanese nuances demonstrates the integration of visual and textual elements that work synergistically to build product identity. The integration of the two is not merely decorative but also presents a cultural image that consistently marks the packaging as "Japanese." At this stage, the identification and categorization of visual and textual elements demonstrate how Japanese symbols are presented, processed, and integrated into the brand's communication strategy.

1.1 Textual Strategy

From a textual perspective, three main strategies emerge on the packaging. First, the use of Japanese vocabulary such as matcha, ramen, takoyaki, dorayaki, and suki. These words serve as markers of both taste and lifestyle, with meanings directly associated with Japan. The presence of the word matcha, for example, not only indicates a green tea variant but also signifies the authenticity and elegance of Japanese tradition. Similarly, the word suki ("like"), which most Indonesian consumers understand through exposure to Japanese anime and dramas, serves more as a marker of authentic atmosphere than information about the actual taste. Another interesting example can be seen in Figure 1, namely the packaged tea product Ichi Ocha, where the use of the words ichi (meaning "one") and ocha (meaning "tea") act as branding elements that direct consumer perceptions toward a simple, fresh, and authentic Japanese image, even though the product is locally produced.



Picture 1. Ichi Ocha Packaging

(Source: <https://www.indofood.com/product/ichi-ocha/product>)

Second, the use of Japanese characters—both Kanji (抹茶 matcha; 和風 wafuu; 日本風 nihonfuu), Katakana (ヨーグルトティー yoguruto ti-; ラーメン ramen; ソフトケーキ softokeki; ピーナツ pi-natsu), as well as Hiragana (おいしい oishii; いちご ichigo; りょくちや ryokucha)—become language visualization strategies. These characters are not only used to write native Japanese vocabulary, but also to write Indonesian words or phrases. On some snack packaging, for example, Katakana characters are used to write the names of local flavor variants such as スリカヤパンダン (surikaya pandan), thus creating an authentic impression and strengthening the image of “uniquely Japanese” in the product.



Picture 2. Dorayaki Sari Kue-Pandan Srikaya Flavor Packaging

(Source: <https://www.sariroti.com/id/produk-kami/produk>)

The analysis demonstrates that Japanese elements on Indonesian F&B packaging function as signifiers of quality, aesthetics, and global modernity. Japanese typography, such as hiragana and kanji, is used not only as a decorative element but also as a cultural marker suggesting authenticity and sophistication. Color palettes associated with Japan—such as red-white combinations, pastels, or matcha green—are often integrated to evoke freshness and minimalist elegance.

Although most consumers don't understand their literal meaning, Japanese characters serve as identity ornaments that provide cultural legitimacy. The presence of these characters creates a sense of authenticity, emphasizes differentiation from similar products, and strengthens consumers' association with the "Japanese image."

Third, some packaging uses English slogans or taglines combined with Japanese words or phrases, such as "Premium Collection Japanese Ramen," "日本風ピーナツ (nihonfuu pinatsu/Japanese-style peanuts)," "Japanese pancakes," "Authentic Japanese cheesecake recipe," "Japanese-style cakes," or "Japanese-style sticks." This hybrid form emphasizes global aspirations while simultaneously demonstrating cultural differentiation. In branding, this strategy works to reach young, urban consumers accustomed to code-mixing in their daily lives.



Picture 3. Indomie Premium Collection Packaging
(Source: <https://www.indomie.co.id/Product/Category/6>)

1.2 Visual Strategy

Visual elements reinforce the representation of Japan through four main categories: color, typography, illustration, and iconography. First, color is a key marker in the image of Japan. Green dominates matcha (green tea)-based products, directly associating them with Japanese tea traditions. Pastel or pink colors are often used to emphasize the kawaii feel, an aesthetic style closely associated with Japanese popular culture and highly sought after by the younger generation. These colors are not only aesthetic but also serve to identify specific market segments, particularly young female consumers who identify with cute, sweet, and lighthearted images.



Picture 4. Cimory Milk Matcha Flavor Packaging
(Source: <https://cimory.com/product-detail.php?category=dairy&subcategory=milk&brand=Milk%20250%20ml>)

Second, the typography used on the packaging also hints at Japanese nuances. Some products utilize calligraphy-style fonts or brushstrokes that resemble traditional Japanese writing, while others combine Latin letters with manga- or anime-style visuals. These typographic choices are not merely aesthetic decisions, but part of a visual strategy that balances readability with cultural appeal.



Picture 5. Sukro Oven-Spicy Bawang Flavor Packaging
(Source: <https://duakelinci.com/id/brand/sukro>)

Third, illustrations and iconography add a more explicit layer of representation. Anime/manga-style characters, kawaii icons, and anthropomorphic figures appear on various packaging, as seen in Figure 6, reinforcing associations with Japanese popular culture already familiar to Indonesian consumers.



Picture 6. Suki Packaging
(Source: <https://siantartop.co.id/portfolio/wilco-3/>)

Fourth, traditional Japanese cultural symbols such as Mount Fuji, koinobori, Japanese temples, Torii gates, cherry blossoms, and green tea cups are also widely used as globally recognizable visual markers.



Picture 7. Gery Salut-Matcha Latte Flavor Packaging
(Source: <https://garudafood.co.id/gery>)

Furthermore, the visualization of Japan's image is also expanded through the use of popular culture icons in the form of collaborations between local brands and anime characters. One example can be seen in the Bakpia Kukus Tugu Jogja snack product, which collaborates with the animated character Doraemon, as shown in Figure 8. As an icon of Japanese popular culture known across generations, the Doraemon logo and figure function as a strong cultural signifier. Its presence connects local products with the cheerful, child-friendly, and kawaii image of Japan, and expands the visualization of the "Japanese image" from being based on tradition to being more pop and contemporary. This strategy broadens market appeal, particularly in the children and family segments, and strengthens positive perceptions of the product through association with a globally popular Japanese character.



Picture 8. Bakpia Kukus Tugu Jogja Packaging
(Source: <https://bakpiakukustugu.co.id/>)

Thus, Japanese cultural symbols, both traditional like cherry blossoms and Mount Fuji and popular ones like Doraemon, serve different yet complementary functions. While traditional symbols emphasize authenticity and elegance, popular cultural icons convey a cheerful, relatable, and accessible image for a wider audience, especially the younger generation. The combination of the two creates a rich spectrum of Japanese imagery that effectively builds cultural associations on local product packaging.

1.3 Text and Visual Synergy

The synergy between textual and visual elements creates a more powerful representational experience than either would achieve alone. Words like matcha or suki gain representative power when paired with the color green or illustrations of green tea powder. Conversely, the symbols of sakura or Mount Fuji become more meaningful when accompanied by Japanese phrases that signify cultural origins. In other words, the representation of Japan on packaging works through the convergence of text and image, forming a cohesive message about Japanese authenticity, aesthetics, and lifestyle.

This integration also serves a strategic role in branding. For local Indonesian products, the application of Japanese aesthetics is not merely decorative, but rather a mechanism for distinguishing themselves from competitors in an increasingly crowded market. Japanese visual and textual elements are used to enhance their value, providing a global image, cultural authenticity, and emotional appeal. This allows consumers to "imagine Japan" in their everyday consumption experiences, even though the products are entirely produced and distributed locally.

This initial analysis demonstrates that local Indonesian F&B packaging conveys Japanese representation through complementary visual and textual strategies. Japanese vocabulary and script serve as identity ornaments, conveying a sense of authenticity, while color, typography, illustrations, and cultural symbols reinforce Japanese nuances in a form easily recognized by consumers. These findings provide the foundation for the next analysis stage, which examines the layers of denotative, connotative, and mythological meaning using Barthes's semiotics, as well as interpreting the cultural significance of branding and cultural hybridization.

2. Reading Signs: A Semiotic Analysis of Japanese-Themed Packaging

Roland Barthes's semiotic approach provides an important framework for understanding how Indonesian local food and beverage product packaging constructs cultural meaning through sign representation. By distinguishing three layers of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth, this analysis allows us to trace the shift from tangible visual and textual forms to embedded cultural associations and ideological narratives that shape consumer perspectives. Through this framework, packaging functions not merely as an aesthetic medium but also as an arena for the production of cultural meaning that legitimizes everyday consumption practices.

One of the most prominent sign strategies is the use of Japanese characters and vocabulary. Kanji characters such as 抹茶 (matcha), 和風 (wafuu), or 日本風 (nihonfuu); Katakana such as ラーメン (ramen) and ソフトケーキ (sofutokeki); and hiragana, such as いちご (ichigo) and りょくちや (ryokucha), appear consistently on various packaging. Denotatively, these elements simply refer to the name of a specific product or flavor. However, connotatively, these characters serve as markers of the presence of an image of "Japanese authenticity," even though most Indonesian consumers do not understand their literal meaning. In this context, Japanese characters function more as identity ornaments than as a means of verbal communication.

At the mythic level, their presence constructs a narrative of Japan as a symbol of global quality, modern aesthetics, and aspirational status. When consumers purchase products labeled with Japanese characters, they are not only consuming a taste but also affirming the aspirations of the urban middle class, namely the symbolic desire to access and display a cosmopolitan lifestyle associated with prestige and modernity. This aspiration is not solely related to economic mobility, but also to symbolic mobility, namely the effort to build self-image through the consumption of global products.

From the perspective of global cultural theory, Arjun Appadurai refers to this phenomenon as part of "imagined worlds," where consumers imagine themselves as part of the global world through access to cultural signs (Appadurai, 1996). Meanwhile, Mike Featherstone highlights how modern consumer culture shapes "aestheticized consumption," that is, consumption mediated by images, styles, and symbols that convey social meaning and identity (Featherstone, 2007). In this context, Japanese script on packaging is not simply a design element, but a means of producing meaning that enables urban middle-class Indonesian consumers to negotiate their position within the global cultural landscape. Thus, Japanese imagery functions as a symbolic bridge between local consumption and the global imagination, making packaging a crucial space for the formation of brand myths and the construction of contemporary cultural identities.

Japanese vocabulary such as matcha, ramen, takoyaki, dorayaki, ichigo, ryokucha, and manzoku also play a similar role. Denotatively, these words indicate flavor variants or product types. However, the connotations are far more complex, linking products to global lifestyles, international culinary trends, and Japan's image as a center of culinary innovation. For example, matcha not only signifies green tea but also suggests a premium wellness lifestyle; while manzoku (contentment) conveys the idea of an optimal, quality-oriented consumption experience. At the mythic level, this vocabulary positions the consumption of local products as a symbolic form of participation in the Japanese lifestyle, even though the products are entirely produced and consumed within the Indonesian context.

Similar meanings operate through visual symbols. Icons such as cherry blossoms, Mount Fuji, Japanese shrines, Torii gates, or green tea powder denotatively depict easily recognizable, tangible objects. However, connotatively, these icons associate Japan with the romanticization of nature, spirituality, aesthetics, and cultural exoticism. At the mythic level, these visuals function as imaginary portals that allow Indonesian consumers to "bring Japan" into their domestic spaces, namely Japan as an ideal land of harmony, tradition, and beauty. At the popular cultural level, manga-style typography, anime characters, and kawaii icons extend this image by marking Japan as a global center of creativity and youth culture. This representation is not merely decorative; it functions as a cultural code that connects the product to the emotional experiences, pleasures, and identities of Indonesia's young generation, familiar with anime and fandom culture.

Color and typography serve as complementary visual codes that reinforce this construction of meaning. The green color of the matcha variant, for example, is not just a literal representation of green tea but also carries associations of freshness, health, and Japanese elegance. Calligraphy-style typography conveys a classic and traditional feel, while manga/anime-style typography conveys a youthful, dynamic, and elegant feel.

3. Cultural Branding and Japanese Hybridization in Local Products

After examining the textual and visual elements and interpreting them through Barthes's semiotic framework, the third stage of analysis aimed to understand how these representations of Japan function within broader meanings constructed through the frameworks of cultural branding (Holt, 2004) and cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 2012; Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008). Within this framework, the packaging of local food and soft drink products serves not only as a means of communicating taste but also as a medium for constructing a brand myth, a cultural narrative that links local products to the global image of Japan. This narrative enables the image of Japan to transform into symbolic value inherent in products and everyday consumption.

Language and visuals serve as two key pivots in the formation of a brand myth. Vocabulary such as matcha or ichigo are not simply flavor labels but cultural codes that direct consumers' imaginations toward Japan as a modern, aesthetic, and aspirational nation. The use of Kanji and Katakana reinforces the sense of authenticity, while visual symbols such as cherry blossoms, Mount Fuji, Torii gates, or illustrations of anime characters broaden their emotional resonance. Through this strategy, packaging embodies the image of Japan in a simple, recognizable, and accessible form for consumers across social classes. Product consumption becomes not merely a purchase but also a symbolic participation in an imaginary, constructed lifestyle—a cultural branding practice that imparts emotional and ideological value to the product.

However, the representation of Japan in local packaging is not a direct imitation. It is the result of a hybridization process, a meeting of global symbols with local practices. Japanese aesthetics, borrowed through language and visuals, are adapted to domestic preferences and local market structures. First, product flavors and formulas are adapted to Indonesian consumer tastes, for example, with sweeter, savory, or spicier flavors than the Japanese version. Examples include dorayaki cakes with martabak and pandan srikaya flavors.



Picture 9. Dorayaki Sari Kue-Martabak Flavor
(Source: <https://www.sariroti.com/id/produk-kami/produk>)

Second, the price is positioned to be affordable for the middle class, unlike premium Japanese imports. Third, distribution through popular retail chains like Indomaret and Alfamart makes these Japanese-style products part of everyday consumption. Fourth, the local language continues to dominate packaging information, while Japanese serves as a symbolic element. Fifth, the local design style, with its dense composition and bright colors typical of the Indonesian market, combined with Japanese icons, creates a visual identity that is distinctive and distinct from the original packaging.

These five strategies reflect what is known in cultural branding as strategic localization: brands adopt global cultural symbols (in this case, Japanese aesthetics) to build an emotionally resonant brand myth, but adapt them to the local market context for accessibility. Meanwhile, within the framework of cultural hybridity, these practices demonstrate how Japanese symbols are negotiated and reworked within the Indonesian cultural space. Japanese imagery is not simply reproduced but rearticulated into a form more familiar to local consumers, through taste, price, distribution, and visual appearance. The result is packaging that is "Japanese in an Indonesian version," where the global and the local intertwine without mutually negating each other.

It's also important to note that the meaning of this brand myth isn't singular. Middle-class urban consumers may interpret it as a sign of a global lifestyle, while younger generations may associate it more with Japanese popular culture, which they consume through anime or manga.

Although this study did not conduct a direct reception survey, this reading, derived from cultural branding literature and previous studies, provides an informed interpretation of the potential meanings produced and circulated through packaging.

Thus, the packaging of local Indonesian F&B products serves a dual function: as a cultural branding medium that constructs the Japanese brand myth as a symbol of globalization and lifestyle aspirations, and as an arena for cultural hybridity that negotiates global symbols with local practices. This process demonstrates how Japanese imagery is not simply borrowed but reworked into a new visual and cultural identity, one that is both local and global. These findings reinforce packaging's position as a cultural text within the global popular culture landscape and open up opportunities for further exploration of the relationship between branding, hybridization, and consumption.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to understand how the packaging of local Indonesian food and soft drink products constructs images of Japan through visual storytelling strategies and cultural branding practices. The findings indicate that textual elements, such as Japanese vocabulary and script; and visual elements, such as the sakura icon, Mount Fuji, brushstroke-style typography, and the distinctive color of matcha, function not only as aesthetic ornamentation but also as narrative devices that shape the brand myth of Japan as a symbol of aesthetics, modernity, and global quality. Thus, packaging becomes a strategic medium that embeds cultural imagery into everyday consumption practices.

Furthermore, the findings also demonstrate that this image of Japan does not emerge as a single representation, but rather through a process of symbolic negotiation and cultural hybridity. Japanese aesthetics combine with local tastes, pricing strategies, the Indonesian language, and the distinctive design of the domestic retail market to create a form of localized hybridity that distinguishes Indonesian products from pure Japanese imitations. This process demonstrates how "imagining Japan" operates as an effective branding strategy in the local market.

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study expands the understanding of packaging as a cultural text and an arena for popular cultural representation in the era of globalization. The findings reinforce the relevance of Holt's cultural branding framework and Barthes's semiotics in interpreting the construction of cultural meaning across borders. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a strategic reference for creative industry and food and beverage (F&B) players in Indonesia in designing culturally aware branding that balances global symbols with local affinity.

A limitation of this study lies in its focus on packaging representation without involving consumer reception. Therefore, future research is recommended to incorporate empirical methods such as surveys, interviews, or consumption ethnography to understand how cultural narratives within packaging are truly negotiated within the consumer experience.

Overall, this study confirms that packaging is not simply a commercial medium, but a cultural space where global imagery and local identities meet, negotiate, and shape an "imaginary Japan" that is consumed on a mass scale. These findings enrich the study of cultural globalization and offer an analytical framework that can be applied to other popular culture contexts.

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Japanese Public Transport Etiquette: A Learning for Indonesians in Using Public Transportation

Prastika Herlianti, S.T.³⁵

Abstract

This study learns how Japanese public transport etiquette can be adapted and how effective digital learning tools can help Indonesians adopt these behaviors. Japanese society is known for its discipline and having certain etiquette in using public transportation is one of them. Japan is one of the countries that has a highly efficient public transportation system and its people are accustomed to using it, particularly, but not limited to, people in the urban areas. Japan tourism even provides guidelines for tourists to follow local etiquette. In Indonesia, although public transport etiquette exists, awareness is largely limited to urban populations such as Jakarta. Even then, adherence often depends on factors such as age, behavior, and education. The level of self-awareness also seems to influence the understanding of using public transportation in a certain manner to create mutual comfort and keep it organised. In most cases, those order and discomfort are disturbed due to a certain group of people who cannot adapt to the applicable ethics. The analysis of this study is to identify the gap between Japanese and Indonesian in applying public transport etiquette and further understanding of what can be improved for Indonesian to learn, adapt and have the discipline to apply the etiquette in using public transport.

Keywords: *Etiquette, public transport, behavior, adaptation, learning*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Japan is well known as a pedestrian and public transportation friendly country. Passenger service began in 1872, marking the beginning of Japan's modern public transport, when the nation's first railway began operating between Shimbaisi, in Tokyo, and Yokohama. Along with the development of other land transportation and air transportation, important railway services have gradually shifted to long distance intercity transport, such as commuter lines and Shinkansen (Web Japan, n.d.). From the 1920s to 1960s the system grew rapidly, including the operation of the subway, linked up operation to commuter lines, and extended their service to suburbs. Compared to Indonesia, the use of public transport, especially land transportation, has been known since the 1930s in various forms. Buses and trains are also the public transport commonly used in Indonesia. The history of Indonesia's land transportation development is related to the establishment of DAMRI (Djawatan Angkoetan Motor Republik Indonesia), which began in 1943 during the Japanese occupation in Indonesia. ジャワ運輸事業社 (*Jawa Un'yu Jigyōsha*) and 自動車総局 (*Jidōsha Sōkyoku*) were the previous names before it merged in 1946 under one institution. Later this institution helped the local government by being one of the contributors in running the public bus service. Meanwhile, the commuter line in Indonesia has been operating since 1925, then underwent regeneration in the 1970s and later became known as KRL Commuter Line. Japanese technology has had a great influence on the development of the transportation system in Indonesia. Imported from Japan since 1976, the government continues to collaborate through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Japan Railway Technical Services (JARTS), to bring in trains that are used for KRL in Indonesia until today.

The development of public transport is centered in Jakarta and has continued to expand, adapted to accommodate the mobility demands of urban society. Not only residents of the capital, the mobility of residents in the neighboring cities also depends on the effectiveness of its public transport. It plays an important role for the socioeconomic life at the heart of the nation. More public transportation alternatives continue to be developed, such as Transjakarta in the bus category and Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) in the train category. Long history of public transport development in Indonesia, unfortunately, this development is not followed by the user's awareness in applying etiquette and certain manners. Due to the limited development of public transportation in the capital, people in the urban areas are more likely to become accustomed to using it appropriately, however, only certain groups of people adapt to and are able to apply this etiquette in their daily mobility. The passengers in each public transport category have their own persona, which can be very diverse. Furthermore, many people come to Jakarta from various regions and backgrounds.

Similar residents also reside in the urban areas of Japan, for example in Tokyo. However, for years society in Tokyo has grown alongside the development of public transportation, especially train service (The Jakarta Post, 2019). One of the distinct factors is the presence of social and cultural norms, which significantly influences an individual's behavior. Respectful and disciplined behavior of the Japanese people is cultivated by *meiwaku*, a concept that shapes many unspoken rules and navigates Japanese society, which has been taught since early age. In contrast to Indonesian, this kind of principle is not taught evenly, one of cultural factors that influences their understanding of creating social harmony based on ethics. This paper will identify the background of Indonesian passengers which affects their behavior in using public transport and an aspect of inadequacy that can be improved, reflecting on the Japanese social culture.

2. METHODS

This study used a multi-method approach; data gathered from journals and articles, literature review, observation, and descriptive analysis. Datasets are used to generate comparison in support of discussions. Literature review is used to find out the results of previous research, gather secondary data, and use them to strengthen analysis. Descriptive analysis is a qualitative method that is used for

providing detailed description and summary of phenomena. It also adopts phenomenological approach, a form of qualitative enquiry that emphasizes experiential, lived aspects of a particular construct which how the phenomenon is experienced at the time that it occurs (Nelson, 2011). These methods are employed to describe current findings of analysis and insights that later can be used for further cases or development.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

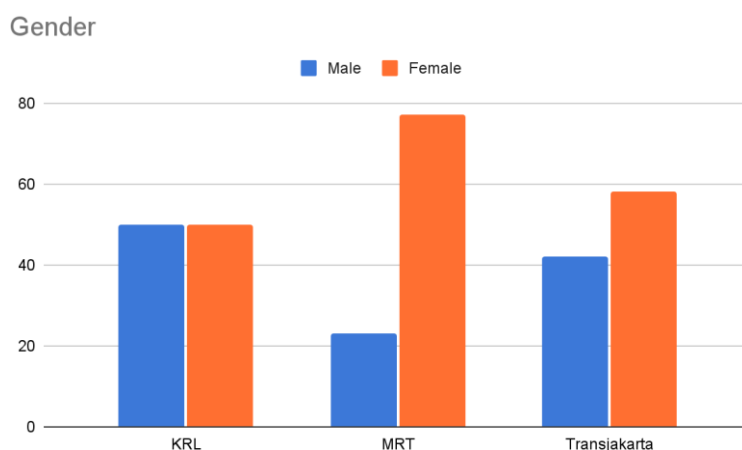
3.1. Passenger's Profile

Many complaints regarding passenger comfort when using public transport caused by the lack of etiquette implementation in their mobility. In the KRL Commuter Line, overcrowded conditions are well known among passengers and are exacerbated by people who ignore implementing public transport etiquette. A similar situation also happens in Transjakarta at some of the busiest routes. In 2019 during the MRT service trial, many people from various backgrounds came to try and became a controversy when people found out that some of the participants had some kind of 'picnic' around the platform, littering, even hanging around inside the train. Passenger conduct transgressions can be seen often such as talking too loud and eating inside the train or bus, taking the wrong seats or not sharing the priority seats when commuting with these services. Although we can spot a distinct character when observing the passengers of KRL Commuter Line, MRT, and Transjakarta. KRL and Transjakarta tend to be overcrowded because of its lower fare and extensive routes compared to MRT, which might seem more exclusive since the route is still limited and has a higher fare.

Gender

Among these three public transport options, the numbers of female passengers appear to be greater than male passengers, within 50-80%.

Figure 1. *Gender Comparison of KRL, MRT, and Transjakarta Passengers*



Note. Data processed from existing journals (Kurniati, 2020; Nazwirman & Hulmansyah, 2017; Putri, 2022).

Age

Majority of KRL passengers come from within the 18-30 age range (69%); the largest at 21-25 (32%), followed by 18-20 (20%) and 26-30 (17%). As for MRT, passengers come from productive ages with an age range of 15-64 (98%); the largest number within 21-30 (40%) and 31-40 (21%) comes second. For Transjakarta, the users dominated within the age of 15-25 (50%), followed by 26-35 (17%) and 36-40 (14%).

Education

High school graduates appeared to be the most dominant educational background among all passengers, followed by bachelor graduates.

Table 1. *Level of Education Comparison of KRL, MRT, and Transjakarta Passengers.*

	KRL	MRT	Transjakarta
High School	57%	51%	48%
Diploma	10%	6%	15%
Bachelor	26%	42%	36%
Master/Doctorate	7%	1%	1%

Note. Data processed from existing journals (Kurniati, 2020; Nazwirman & Hulmansyah, 2017; Putri, 2022).

Occupation

The largest number of KRL and Transjakarta passengers are private employees. Meanwhile, the number of students and private employees of MRT users are nearly balanced.

Table 2. *Occupation Comparison of KRL, MRT, and Transjakarta Passengers.*

	KRL	MRT	Transjakarta
Student	15%	48%	30%
Private Employee	72%	43%	35%
Government Employee	7%	1%	30%
Others	6%	8%	5%

Note. Data processed from existing journals (Kurniati, 2020; Nazwirman & Hulmansyah, 2017; Putri, 2022).

Occupation and level of education appeared to be quite a factor among the passengers. Education is not merely a vehicle for academic achievement, it helps in shaping an individual's self-awareness by fostering emotional intelligence and critical reflection (Yunting, 2025). Self-awareness is often seen as an important component in self development, providing individuals with greater understanding on how their actions impact themselves and the others (Carden et al., 2021). Self-awareness is important in understanding personal values, beliefs, and experiences that influence one's ethical decision-making process (Fiveable, 2025).

**3.2. Descriptive Analysis
Social Culture Differences**

Based on the passenger persona of MRT, where the users are dominated by passengers with mobility to work in the central business district, they seem to be easier to comply with and implement public transport etiquette. The behavior analysis of MRT passengers indicates that, regarding the

negative reviews during the service trial, the users became more careful as social sanction seemed to influence their behavior. Moreover, people were not accustomed to the difference of facilities across each mode of public transport (Pambudi & Hidayati, 2020). The habit of disregarding rules perceived as minor happens because of the long-rooted culture in Indonesian society. Transgression against rules often happens because of undisciplined lifestyle, social culture that tends to accept and condone violation of rules, along with low legal awareness (Hasibuan, 2016). This phenomenon reflects the behavior of people in using and treating the existing public transportation prior to the MRT.

Figure 2. *Passenger Persona MRT Jakarta*



Note. From “Passenger Persona: Mengenal Pengguna Jasa MRT Jakarta”, n.d., <https://jakartamrt.co.id/id/info-terkini/passenger-persona-mengenal-pengguna-jasa-mrt-jakarta>

Humans as individual beings and part of society are mutually responsible for each other (Prasetijowati, 2025). Self-awareness in humans plays a role in forming an understanding of morals, ethics and a sense of responsibility. Even with different social backgrounds, having strong principles in social culture can unite how they behave. Implementing etiquette is bound to having the principle of ethics. As part of maintaining public facilities, implementing etiquette in using public transport is important to maintain mutual comfort. Lack of adherence to a commuter ‘code of conduct’ can cause emotional discomfort or annoyance among passengers, and might even discourage public transport usage (Schimkowsky, 2022). In Indonesia, the lack of early education and awareness regarding the use of public transport causes people not accustomed to using it.

Reflecting on the rapid development of public transport in Japan, where people have been accustomed to using it, along with disciplined behavior that has been formed since an early age. They are known for their strictness to rules to maintain social order. *Meiwaku* at the heart of Japanese social harmony is more than just a concept, it reflects a societal expectation. Japanese society places high value on social harmony, with each person expected to consider how one’s behavior affects other people which extends beyond family and friends to encompass all social interactions, including those with strangers (Aki, n.d.). For the Japanese this mindset has been developed in early education, fostering awareness of how individual actions impact others. It continues on a daily basis such as interactions with family and friends, how they behave in public places, and being respectful towards others in a polite manner.

When using public transportation in Japan, there are some things to be aware of to avoid causing *meiwaku*, including; seating etiquette, boarding and disembarking etiquette, handling and positioning of luggage and belongings, hygienic practices, and use of mobile devices (Schimkowsky,

2022). Most of this etiquette has been adapted in Indonesian public transportation. Only the practice still depends on each individual in accepting and level of awareness to adopt these behaviors. When observing the transgression of passenger conduct, it is likely because of their tendency, instead of creating mutual comfort they only prioritise personal ego over collective mobility norms. For example, rushing to board the train when they should allow passengers to disembark first. They should recognise that this act is not only considered rude, but also poses a danger to the safety of passengers, however, they would rather take the risk than sacrifice their personal interest.

In general terms, *meiwaku* is close to personal ethics. Personal ethics is any ethical system that has been chosen in some way as a moral guide in the particular life of an individual (Jacorzynski, n.d.). It determines the beliefs on right or wrong and good or bad. These principles influence everyday choices, behaviors, and experiences. Unlike societal rules, personal ethics are internal and shaped by factors such as upbringing, culture, religion, and individual experience (Williams, n.d.). The practice of personal ethics is not just about making the right choices, but to create a harmonious life that not only benefits oneself. Personal ethics as moral commitment means to subscribe to certain values and attempt to apply them in practice (Jacorzynski, n.d.); it is the force which guides one's behavior. A well-developed personal ethics can be applied to various contexts and situations (Fiveable, 2025), so when the fundamentals are strong it will be easier for society to adapt to various situations while maintaining consistency in its core principle.

Existing Media Awareness

Although various methods in raising awareness of public transport etiquette have been implemented in Indonesia, its effectiveness requires further evaluation to determine its compatibility for the users' profile. Signages placed across stations, bus stops, and inside the train or bus, digital infographic, and educational videos played inside the train are some of the initiatives that have been running to promote etiquette awareness. However, how it is displayed, illustrated, and accessed remains uncertain; particularly regarding its compatibility with the passenger's interest and behavior. Although the media exists, if it has not been promoted well, society may not be interested in learning and remains heedless.

Figure 2. Infographic of Public Transport Etiquette



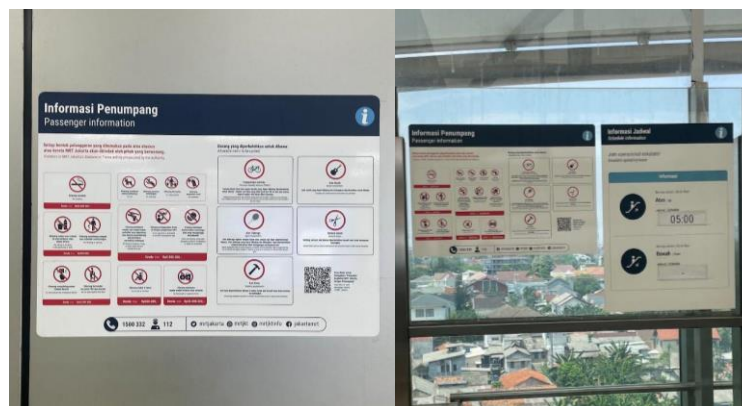
Note. From “Etika Naik Transportasi Umum”, by T.Nurrahim, 2022,
<https://indonesiabaik.id/infografis/etika-naik-transportasi-umum>.

Figure 3. Existing Media Promoting Public Transport Etiquette in MRT



Note. Comic poster inside the station and educational video played inside the train.
From personal archive, 2025.

Figure 4. Existing Signage of Passenger Information Inside MRT Stations



Note. From personal archive, 2025.

Figure 5. Existing Signages of Passenger Information Inside KRL Commuter Line



Note. From personal archive, 2025.

Figure 6. Existing Signages of Passenger Information Inside Transjakarta



Note. From personal archive, 2025.

Passenger's lifestyle and behavior affect the way they comprehend information. For example, the busy workers may pay minimal attention to their surroundings when commuting, especially during rush hour. This causes information and notices placed inside the station/bus stop and train/bus being overlooked. Looking at digital media such as infographics or website notices, some concerns included how this information is being promoted and the appeal of the content for people to access it. In Japan, Tokyo manners posters provided by railway companies are the go-to tool for addressing passenger conduct-related issues for the majority of transport providers in the area. The design itself is another factor that indicates their preferences; instead of a formal pictogram-based layout, Japanese manner posters utilise innovative visual designs featuring complex and appealing imagery, humor, and cultural references (Schimkowsky 2022). Society tends to be bound to trends, it is important to consider factors that can effectively capture their interest. Therefore, how the information is being displayed should be adjusted according to society preferences and characteristics. Take example on how Indonesians easily consume social media in various formats; this highlights the need to explore content formats for promoting awareness that are easier for them to comprehend and relate to. Trends such as short videos are likely to be easier to consume within a wide range. How it is executed to make it more appealing (e.g. funny tone, visually pleasing) or taking collaboration can also be considered. Digital media serves as the medium and its application needs a communication strategy in order to be effective in achieving the desired outcome.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper addressed and discussed the early findings of the gap between Indonesian and Japanese behavior in using public transport. Although the system in Indonesia has adopted developments and some etiquette practices from Japan, significant differences remain as reflected in its irregularity. One of the factors is the lack of understanding why adhering to etiquette is important. Public transport systems continue to be developed to accommodate the growing mobility needs of its users and to create a desirable comfort is a mutual process. When society is expected to adapt to the growing technology or system, it is important to prepare them to be ready by having a strong foundation to learn further implementation of ethics. Therefore, personal ethics is needed for society with strong individuals as a fundamental that tides them to commit to certain values. It is a structured set of principles, values, and guidelines that individuals use to navigate moral dilemmas (Fiveable, 2025). Shaping them in an early stage will ease the process of having order in various situations. In this case of using public transportation, it is more than just teaching them instructions on how to board, deboard, and so on. Before expecting them to adhere to rules, it is also necessary to first instill an understanding of social harmony and how to maintain it.

In the practice of raising awareness, rather than relying only on standard media that is used for instructions and warnings (e.g. signage, poster, and video), the way it is displayed needs further evaluation regarding the compatibility of the passenger's character and behavior. The issue may not be limited to the visual, other possibilities can also be found on how the information or content is being accessed and consumed. By understanding these factors, further strategy on how to educate and communicate the needed materials for improvement should be adjusted according to Indonesian society needs, from socialisation of personal ethics in early age to promoting etiquette learning across various groups of passengers.

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**Difficulties in Translating Onomatopoeia in Manga by Junior Japanese Language
Department's Students**

Sissy Nurvidati Rahim, M.Si.³⁶

Abstract

This is a continued research. University of LIA Japanese Language Department's junior students' translation of onomatopoeia in manga was researched to find the causes why they had difficulties in translating onomatopoeia. The manga used was chapter 1 of *Dragon Ball 1* and chapter 1 of *Tensei Shitara Suraimu Datta Ken – Kureiman Revenge 1*. The students were junior (6th semester) students who had taken the Fiction Translation class. This research used a qualitative method and descriptive approach. The translated manga was seen with theories from Chang (2000) about Japanese onomatopoeia categories and Sun (2015) about translation difficulties' factors. It was found that from 53 data of inequivalence, 2 data caused by Translation Factor with Text Difficulties, and 51 data caused by Translator Factors, which were: 23 data caused by the individual's cognitive capabilities and 28 data caused by past experience and training. It seems that most of the difficulties met by the students are caused by their lack of experience and knowledge, and the lecturer needs to provide more training in manga translation.

Keywords: *Manga, translation difficulties, manga translation, onomatopoeia translation, Japanese onomatopoeia*

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A. INTRODUCTION

Japanese popular culture is one of the prevalent Japanese cultures that has spread across the globe. The consumers of Japanese popular culture are not only the Japanese, nor people who understand Japanese, but also other people who have interest in it. Those popular culture has many forms, i.e., anime, J-Pop music, manga, drama, film, game, and so on (Tsutsui, 2010; Freedman dan Slade, 2018).

Manga or Japanese comic is a big part of Japanese popular culture. Hidetoshi Kato (1989) said that if translated into Japanese, Pop Culture became '*taishuu bunka*' or mass culture; '*minshuu bunka*' or folk culture; or '*minzoku bunka*' or ethnic culture. Because of those differences, usually in Japanese popular culture are written in katakana, 「ポップカルチャー」. The main difference was: in '*taishuu*', there are egalitarian meaning in the word, and there is no distinction between the 'elite', the 'masses', the 'educated/literate people' and the 'uneducated/illiterate people'. Kato also said that in research about Japanese pop culture, the research never stood up as 'only' researching popular culture, because the material always connected to other field of science.

Jennifer Prough (2018: 265) said that recently the word 'manga' has many descriptions, as in comic book or graphic novel from Japan, a dynamic black and white page filled with characters with big eyes, spiky hair, school uniforms, and *chibi* (small and chubby) figures. Manga is famous for featuring long narratives containing heavy human problems and stories aimed at various ages in comic form. Nowadays, manga has become a specific genre in the world's popular literature.

To enjoy it, those who do not understand Japanese need help, in the form of a Japanese translation. And with that reason many people interested in Japanese popular culture started to study Japanese (Freedman and Slade, 2018). They studied it to enjoy Japanese popular culture by themselves, and also to translate it to their own language for others to enjoy. And this includes Indonesian young people.

About translation, Peter Newmark (1988:5) said that translation is "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text." Then, Marilyn Gaddis Rose (in Larson 1991:5) explained that in translation, translators process the language to convey a form of information. In this process, there are three stages, which are understanding the source material (source text) in the first language; then the translator transfers this understanding into the second language; then this understanding is expressed in the form of material (text) in the target language that can be understood.

Students from Japanese Language Department at University of LIA started to take translation classes from the 4th semester, in Introduction to Translation Class. Then Japanese-Indonesian Translation class in 5th semester. For those who are interested in minoring in translation, they also take elective courses like Fiction Translation class in 6th semester. In these classes students were taught in translating manga. In translating dialogues and onomatopoeia. And, in those classes, it was found that students are struggling in translating onomatopoeia in manga.

This research is a continued research from one which had been presented in ASJI Annual International Symposium 2024 (Depok, November 28-29th 2024), entitled "Difficulties in Translating Onomatopoeia in Manga by Japanese Language Department Students". The previous research had not been published. This research, Difficulties in Translating Onomatopoeia in Manga by Junior Japanese Language Department's Students was done with the main differences: the source of data used, and the main theory used in analyzing the data. Data used in this research was obtained from onomatopoeia in manga translation in Fiction Translation class, done by 6th semester (junior) students in the 2024-2025 school year.

David Linder (2014), made a difference between translation difficulties and translation problems. According to him, "Translation problems are those points which prove a challenge for all translators in a particular language combination, while translation difficulties are rooted in the individual translator as a product of his or her educational or cultural background and experience." Thus, he emphasized translator abilities as the source of translation difficulties. Alireza Akbari and

Winibert Segers (2017) said that translation difficulties could be seen as a problem from cognitive resources usage in translation. And, in translation assessment, translating acts has to be done in a designed way, in order of difficulties for the learners. Research about Indonesian difficulties in translating English text was done by Arono and Nadrah (2019).

Onomatopoeia are words that imitate sounds (<https://kbbi.kemendikbud.go.id>) which also represent movement (Azari and Syarififar, 2017). Onomatopoeia was used in texts to enrich depiction of movement, scene, situation, and so on. Nevertheless, students were found to struggled in translating it. And so, in this research we searched what difficulties encountered by students in translating onomatopoeia in manga and why the students had those difficulties.

Previous research done in 2024, entitled “Difficulties in Translating Onomatopoeia in Manga by Japanese Language Department Students” which had been presented in ASJI Annual International Symposium 2024 (Depok, November 28-29th 2024). The theory used in this research was Translation Strategies theory from Mona Baker (2018). In this research it was found that students had difficulties in translating onomatopoeia in manga because the source text did not have an equivalent word in target text, or the source text might have a similar word but with a different context. And, in their attempt to translate onomatopoeia, students tried to use many idiom translation strategies from Baker. Most of them used “similar form and meaning” idiom translation strategy and “paraphrasing” strategy. Students also encountered problems because they did not fully understand the meaning of the onomatopoeia in the source text, and they tried to create new words that they felt similar with perceived meaning in their minds.

A related research was done by Arono and Nadrah, titled Students’ Difficulties in Translating English Text. (2019). In this article they found that students had three translation errors, which were: idiom, ellipsis, and textual meaning translation. They also found that students had difficulties in translation because of the lack of vocabulary, they found difficulties in translating Islamic texts, found difficulties in understanding literature texts, and found difficulties in translating because of grammar problems. Students were also influenced by several factors that made them creating errors, which were their lack of understanding of the term ellipsis, inability to identify ellipsis, idioms, and textual meaning, translating spoken language, and the majority of students do not understand the background of the text content.

The next related research to onomatopoeia translation was from Yaqubi, M., Tahir, R. I., & Amini, M. (2018). In their article, Translation of Onomatopoeia: Somewhere between Equivalence and Function, it was found that onomatopoeia translation was difficult for the translator because of the difference in language and culture, that came in two stages: in identification and in expression function translation. In this article it also stated that a few of the onomatopoeia were difficult to translate because of the lack or equivalent word in the target language, or the translator regarded a word as an onomatopoeia and omitted its expression function translation.

About translation difficulties, Rofifah Yuba Huwaida and Nova Yulia wrote an article titled Analisis Jenis Onomatope Dalam Buku *Kotobazukan: Yousu No Kotoba* Karya Gomi Tarou (2018). In this article, it was found that: (1) the most used onomatopoeia in Gomi Tarou’s *Kotobazukan: Yousu no Kotoba* were *giyougo*, with 360 onomatopoeias. And in its sub-category, the imitation of the activity or behaviour of living things were found as the most used sub-category onomatopoeia with 329 data found. (2) Onomatopoeia was not only in one category, but in many different categories. We have to regard the sound source and the use of onomatopoeia in a situation. (3) Onomatopoeia usage would be easier to understand with visual aids as in illustration and others.

This research aims to find and identify what difficulties found by students in translating *giongo* and *gitaigo* onomatopoeia in manga, and to find why they have those difficulties. From this research, it was hoped that Japanese learners who are also interested in translation—especially manga translation—could have a more in depth understanding in translating onomatopoeia from Japanese to Indonesian. And, for the students learning Japanese translation, it could help in translation classes.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

Research methods used were qualitative methods by descriptive analysis, in analyzing primary source of translation data from students, and students in Fiction Translation class' interview. Then, descriptive analysis was also done to secondary data from books, articles, and dictionaries in onomatopoeia and its translation.

This research was a continued research from a research done in the 2023/2024 academic year, which used data from 6th semester and 5th semester. The previous research had been presented in ASJI Annual International Symposium 2024 in November 28-29 2024.

This research used data from Fiction Translation class in 2024/2025 academic year, and used a more specific theory. Data used were onomatopoeia from Akira Toriyama's *Dragon Ball 1* chapter 1, and *Tensei Shitara Suraimu Datta Ken – Kureiman Revenge 1* chapter 1 from Kajika Kou and Fuse. The translated onomatopoeia was identified, its equivalency was checked, then the inequivalent translation's difficulties was also checked.

Steps taken in this research were: students could use dictionaries, translation application, and/or AI (artificial intelligence) in translating manga. The chapters were translated by all of the students, but they were responsible for their part of the chapter translated. The results then presented in class. From the results, onomatopoeia was identified by the researcher, the translated results were checked, equivalency checked, and when translation errors were found, the reason why they translated it as it was were asked to the translator (student who was responsible for the error part).

Theories mainly used in this research was from Sanjun Sun, to identify the source of the difficulties, was it from Translation Factor or from Translator Factor. Then the sub-factors were also searched. The researcher decided from the interviews in class about which was the source of the difficulties found in the errors.

C. RESULTS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

From the origin in Greek, the word 'onomatopoeia' came from making (*poiein*) a name or a word (*onoma*) from the sounds of nature. Thus onomatopoeia could be described as words that imitates nature's sounds (Yaqubi et.al, 2018). Sasamoto (2022) said that onomatopoeia were words that imitates sounds from an act or an object which associated with the expression.

Huwaida (2018) quoted Kaneda Ichi (in Sanjaya, 2013:5) who said that Japanese onomatopoeia could be classified in five types, which were *giseigo*, *giongo*, *gitaigo*, *giyugo*, and *gijougo*. Chang (1990) said that *giongo* and *gitaigo*—that also called mimesis and onomatopoeia—had a “vast number, extremely subtle nuances and high context, present an area of special difficulty for the student of Japanese,” (1990: v).

According to Chang, *giotaigo/giongo* essentially could be divided into several parts, namely sound symbols that describe human emotions and conditions (*gijougo/psychomimes*), sound symbols that describe nature phenomena and states, and human actions (*gitaigo* or *giyugo/phenomimes*), onomatopoeia for animate objects—including human voices (*giseigo*), and sounds of nature (*gion'go*). Chang also stated that mimesis and onomatopoeia acted to fill the emptiness and to convey expressions when there was no appropriate descriptive verb was found. And the onomatopoeia and mimesis made language feel alive (Chang, 1990; v).

In manga translation, students said that onomatopoeia was one part that was very hard to translate (Rahim, 2024). In this, Daniel Linder (2000) said that translation difficulties were difficulties from the translator's educational or cultural background and experience. This also stated by Sun (2015) and Akbari and Segers (2017). Akbari and Segers also said that difficulties in translation could be seen as result of using cognitive resources in translating action. They said that in measuring translation difficulty, researcher has to mind four factors, which were: 91) the source of translation difficulty, (2) the measurement of translation (source text) readability, (3) the measurement of translation difficulty by means of translation evaluation products, and (4) the measurement of mental workload.

Sanjun Sun (2015) stated that source of translation difficulties could be divided into two categories, Translation Factors and Translator Factors. In Translation Factors, there are: text difficulty, lexical and syntactic complexity, content and subject matter, and text type. Sun quoted Nord (1991/2005) that there were four categories in translation problems that translator had to solve, without regarding their competence level. Which were: text-specific translation problems, pragmatic translation, cultural translation problems, and linguistic translation problems. Sun emphasised that the main difference between text difficulty aspect and translation-specific difficulty aspect was the concept of: equivalence and Translator Factor. This factor covered the individual's cognitive capabilities and their past experience and training. This factor also known as "Translating Competence" which was to personal qualities, skills and abilities, and exists indifferent degrees (Englund Dimitrova in Sun, 2015). Sun also used Translation Competence model from PACTE Group in 2003. This model comprises of five sub-competences, which were: 1) bilingual sub-competence, 2) extra-linguistic sub-competence, 3) knowledge about translation sub-competence, 4) instrumental sub-competence, and 5) strategic sub-competence.

Translated onomatopoeia in manga which was used as data in this research was from the translated results in Fiction Translation class, by 6th semester (junior) students in Japanese Language Department, University of LIA. Fiction Translation class carries a load of 2 credits and includes translation training focused on various works of fiction, such as picture books, folk tales, poetry and song lyrics, manga, short stories, and children's novels. The class which contributed in this research was done in the second semester of 2024/2025 academic year, and includes seven students with good Japanese language skills (average equivalent to N3 on the JLPT).

In the manga translation part, students translated *Dragon Ball 1* chapter 1 and *Tensei Shitara Suraimu Datta Ken – Kureiman Revenge 1* chapter 1. The translation process was done in team format, but each student translated and handled their own part of the source text. The text was divided by dialog balloon number or number of pages. Students has to translate the dialog balloon text and onomatopoeia text in the manga.

From the translated result of *Dragon Ball 1* chapter 1, 55 data of onomatopoeia was found, with 21 inequivalent results. And from those inequivalent results, 3 data of not translated onomatopoeia was also found. Then, when the factors that cause these difficulties was searched, according to Sun's theory, it was found that in *Dragon Ball 1* chapter 1 translation results there was 2 difficulties from Translation Factors, and specifically from Text Difficulty sub-factor. From the point of Translator Factors, 9 data was found from individual Cognitive Capabilities sub-factor, and 10 data from Past Experience and Training sub-factor.

In the translated results of *Tensei Shitara Suraimu Datta Ken – Kureiman Revenge 1* chapter 1, 83 data of onomatopoeia was found. In those, there was 32 data of inequivalent results. From the inequivalent results, 14 data was not translated. When the cause of translation difficulties was searched, it was found that in this manga translation process Translation Factors did not occur. But there were 32 data of Translator Factors. In those 14 data from individual Cognitive Capabilities sub-factor and 18 data from Past Experience and Training sub-factor.

The following table displays the factors causing difficulties in translating onomatopoeia in mangas *Dragon Ball 1* Chapter 1 and *Tensei Shitara Suraimu Datta Ken – Kureiman Revenge 1* Chapter 1.

Table 1: Factors in Translation Difficulties when translating onomatopoeia in manga

Manga	Data Found	Inequivalence	Not Translated	Translation Factors	Translator Factors	
					Cognitive Capabilities	Past experience and Training
<i>Dragon Ball 1</i> chapter 1	55	21	3	2 (text difficulty)	9	10
<i>Tensei Shitara Suraimu Datta Ken – Kureiman Revenge 1</i> chapter 1	83	32	14	-	14	18
Total	138	53	17	2	23	28

The data that was not translated were regarded as translation difficulty, from of the Past Experience and Training sub-factor. Because of translator’s—students’—lack of past experience and training, they missed or ignored some of the onomatopoeia. In the other side, translation difficulties because of Text Difficulty sub-factor could be seen in the onomatopoeia *jiro jiro* (じろじろ, to stare at someone unreservedly or impudently with curiosity (Chang, 1990: 58)) and the onomatopoeia *piko piko* (ピコピコ, from the word *piku piku*, ぴくぴく, stronger twitching action than *hiku hiku* (Chang, 1990:236)). From Chang’s explanation, both were *gijougo* and used as symbols of sounds that describing human emotion and condition.



Picture 1: Onomatopoeia for *jiro jiro* and *piko piko*

Students had difficulties in translating those two words, because there was no equivalent word in Indonesian. This difficulty was in accordance with Yaqubi et.al., opinion, which stated that the lack of equivalent onomatopoeia in target language was one of the causes of difficulty in translating onomatopoeia. Students translated *jiro jiro* to “emmm... emmm... emm...,” which did not match the basic meaning of the onomatopoeia. They did not translate it as a movement of the character or ‘how he stared at the other character’, but as a voice from the character. Students also translated *piko piko* by rewriting the word in the Latin alphabet, as “piko piko” because—as he explained it in class—“I did not understand what the word was.”

In Translator Factors, especially in difficulty because of cognitive capabilities sub-factors, students’ difficulty when translating onomatopoeia could be seen when they tried to translate *gitaigo* or symbol of sounds that describes nature phenomenon or conditions and human actions. For example, as shown in Picture 2, they tried to translate the sound of a mask breaking due to being kicked during a fight, *MEKI* (メキ) and the sound of someone being kicked so hard that they bounced, *BAKII* (バキイ).

Students translated those two words to “Sriiit..” and “Suuiingggg...,” which did not describe the sounds and movements shown at the picture/illustration. This error was the result of difficulty because of cognitive abilities sub-factor, due to student’s inability to imagine the sounds that occurs, and the inability wrote them in words and letters.



Picture 2: Onomatopoeia of *MEKI* and *BAKII*

Comparing this research’s results to previous research by Rahim (2024), supporting evidence was found that students still lack in experience and they have difficulty to find the equivalent word or the right onomatopoeia in target language, because they did not understand what they read, especially in *gijougo* and *gitaigo* onomatopoeia. They translated the onomatopoeia from source text as they could, but with their lack of understanding, the results did not match, or—as shown in previous results—students tried to create their own ‘new’ onomatopoeia, that is still not equivalent to source text.

D. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As a conclusion of this research, it was found that the main factor of students' difficulties in translating onomatopoeia, which resulting in translation errors were Translator Factors, with 51 data. In those data, 23 data showed difficulties with the sub-factor of Cognitive Capabilities and 28 data with the sub-factor of Past Experience and Training. Translation Factors only found in 2 data, with sub-factor of Text difficulty. This means that the training given to students in translation practices—especially in translating onomatopoeia when translating manga—are lacking, and needs to be increased.

It was also found that students' vocabulary in both source language (Japanese) and target language (Indonesian) needs to improve. Students need more exposure in manga and other books to increase their vocabulary, especially in Indonesian.

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Thrown into the City: Alienation and Existence in Ryohgo Narita's Light Novel *Durarara!!*

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Abstract

Literary works are a medium for authors to express their views on human existence and life. Ryohgo Narita, through his novel titled *Durarara!!*, presents the character of Celty Sturluson, an Irish mythological figure named Dullahan, known as the headless horseman who lives amidst the hustle and bustle of Ikebukuro. The loss of her head becomes a metaphor for the search for identity while also giving rise to existential anxiety about death. This study aims to analyze the representation of Celty's anxiety and alienation in urban spaces and how it is related to Martin Heidegger's existentialist thought, particularly the concept of Being-toward-Death. The study method used is qualitative with textual reading and an existentialist philosophical approach. The findings indicate that Celty's alienation in the big city, along with her anxiety about death, contributes to her journey toward existential awareness. Celty's acceptance of the loss of her head signifies a pivotal moment in her understanding of life's purpose as a form of "existence." The depiction of Celty's character can be associated with a form of reflection of the dynamics of the existential struggle faced by individuals amidst the alienation and chaos of urban spaces, such as the city of Ikebukuro.

Keywords: *Alienation, Heidegger' existential, Durarara!!, light novel*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although literature and philosophy are separate fields of study, scholars often regard them as closely interconnected. Quincy (2024) notes that both disciplines explore fundamental issues concerning human existence, morality, and the nature of reality. Through language and storytelling, literature reflects human contemplation about our place in the world. Furthermore, Mahayana (2008) urges the literature, across its various genres, to play a significant role in expressing philosophical reflections and perspectives on the meaning of human experience. In this context, the meaning of life is often conveyed through issues that question the nature of human existence. Within a philosophical framework, questions that investigate human existence often explore the meaning of life in this context. These existential issues commonly appear in literary works, for instance, in characters' experience of alienation or their anxiety about impending death. Therefore, Warren and Wellek's (1993) urging that literature is closely intertwined with philosophy is a logical conclusion, as literature consistently engages with existential themes.

Novels, as a literary genre, are often used as a medium to convey philosophical ideas. Light novels, a type of lighthearted novel prevalent in Japanese literature, also incorporate these ideas. Young readers typically enjoy this type of novel, which often features illustrations to depict the story. Logan (2022) classifies light novels as light reading material that focuses more on dialogue, plot, and individual character development or a single storyline. In other words, this type of novel is termed a slice-of-life story, or a snippet of everyday life that is relevant to its reader.

In keeping with its target audience of middle and high school students, light novels are dominated by stories about the lives of schoolchildren with diverse themes, such as fantasy, the supernatural associated with magic, or even frightening figures taken from urban legends. The society views urban legends (Fatimah, 2022; Tibererwa, 2025) as contemporary myths that people believe to exist in real life that reflect society's fears, morals, and cultural values. Rahwati (2021) states that myths are narratives told collectively in society about things that happened in the past and are accepted as true. In other words, urban legends consist of stories told collectively and believed by many to be true. One example is the many mystical stories that tell of supernatural legendary figures, such as the Irish urban legend figure named Dullahan.

Roselin (2022) states that Dullahan is a mythological figure of urban legend originating from the mythology of the Celtic people, a group that inhabited ancient Europe whose presence was believed to be a sign of someone's death. If someone sees the Dullahan, then the person will die in a terrible state. According to the legend, the Dullahan figure can be a man or woman travelling on a headless horse.

The Dullahan myth became a theme in Japanese literary and cultural products such as the light novel series *Durarara!!*. This novel was written by Ryohgo Narita and illustrated by Suzuhito Yasuda. *Durarara!!* consists of 13 series and was first published in April 2004 and continued until 2014. The light novel has garnered significant popularity among readers. Consequently, it has been adapted into other media, including *manga*, a PlayStation game, and an internet radio station titled *Durarara!!*. In the novel, the character Celty Sturluson embodies the mythological figure of the Dullahan, illustrating the daily life of Ikebukuro's residents.

Durarara!! tells the story of Celty Sturluson, an Irish Dullahan who travels to Ikebukuro in search of her missing head. In line with her role as a messenger of death in folklore, Celty was originally tasked with riding a headless black horse and traveling in a carriage to deliver news of death while splashing blood on those who saw her. However, after losing her head, she forgets her duties, loses her sense of identity, and begins to question the meaning of life. The emergence of philosophical questions creates in Celty a deep sense of alienation and anxiety toward death. Her greatest fear is that if someone destroys her head, she will die as well. Therefore, she embarks on a journey to search for her missing head, believing that once she recovers it, she will regain her memory, her identity, and her purpose in life, thus allowing her to reclaim control over her death. Celty's journey, which takes place in modern-day Japan and revolves around her anxiety about mortality,

reflects the author's philosophical contemplation of human existence. Her fear of death appears to be closely intertwined with the existence of ideas found in Heidegger's philosophy.

According to Heidegger (as cited in Hardiman, 2020), anxiety is an ontological experience that arises when an individual becomes aware of their nonexistence. In other words, anxiety arises when a person pauses from routines of daily life and becomes aware that their existence is ultimately shaped by the inevitability of death. In confronting death, human beings encounter nothingness, which is the essential nature of the death concept, and this confrontation brings about anxiety. For Heidegger, death is central to the question of "Being" precisely because humans are mortal. The human pursuit of meaning in life stems from the consciousness of morality, which reduces existence to potential nullity. Therefore, Celty's anxiety and fear of death in *Durarara!!* become compelling subjects for philosophical analysis. Thus, this study examines how Celty's anxiety about death reflects a philosophical perspective rooted in existentialism. Her experiences in the light novel *Durarara!!* will be examined through Heidegger's existentialist philosophy as an interpretive framework to analyze the nature of her anxiety and its connection to the search for meaning in life. Based on these concerns, this study investigates the development of the storyline in *Durarara!!* portrays Celty's alienation and anxiety about death and how these experiences reflect an existentialist perspective.

The previous study regarding the light novel *Durarara!!* has primarily approached the work from cultural and psychological perspectives. Naik (2019) analyzed *Durarara!!* as a case study to discuss the emergence, characteristics, and cultural significance of light novels in Japan, emphasizing their role in shaping and popularizing the genre. Erika (2018) uses light novels to examine personal identity through literary archetypes by analyzing the character Anri Sonohara in comparison with Cadence Sinclair Eastman from *We Were Liars*. Despite these valuable contributions, previous studies have not examined *Durarara!!* from a philosophical perspective, particularly in relation to existentialism, alienation, and anxiety about death.

Research on this light novel using Heidegger's existential philosophy (Tatap, 2022) can enhance our understanding of modern human existence anxiety, particularly in relation to experiences of alienation, the search for identity, and anxiety about death within the context of contemporary urban life.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative research employs textual analysis to examine the light novel *Durarara!!*, focusing on Celty Sturluson's journey as she confronts anxiety about death and experiences alienation from her identity within a modern urban context. The textual analysis focuses on the development of the storyline surrounding Celty's search for her missing head. The next stage involves interpreting the character's actions, behavior, dialogue, and key interactions with others to identify expressions of alienation and anxiety about death, as well as the strategies she employs to cope with these experiences. To explore the relationship between Celty's anxiety and the existential condition of human existence, this study adopts Heidegger's existentialist philosophy as an interpretive framework, as it provides a theoretical lens for understanding the connection between death, anxiety, and being.

According to Heidegger (cited in Hardiman, 2020; Aho, 2023), humans are referred to as *Dasein*, or "being-in-the-world," meaning they possess the capacity to be aware of and question their existence. However, in everyday life, *Dasein* often becomes absorbed into social patterns known as *Das Man*, resulting in an inauthentic mode of existence. When immersed in *Das Man*, humans become alienated from their true selves.

This alienation becomes evident only when anxiety (*Angst*)—an existential form of anxiety without a specific object—emerges that reveals the fragility of existence and its foundation in nothingness. Through this awareness, humans come to realize that they are ultimately moving toward death, the most personal and unavoidable possibility. The recognition of death then compels humans

to confront their existence authentically, which involves accepting limitations, seeking the meaning of life, and taking responsibility for their being. Through this approach, the study aims to reveal how Celty's experiences symbolically represent the human condition and offer insight into the existential dimension of life and death.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Development of the Storyline in *Durarara!!*

Durarara!! presents the urban legend of Celty Sturluson, a Dullahan from Ireland who arrives in Ikebukuro in search of her missing head. The story is set in the early 2000s, as indicated by the characters' use of online chat rooms, computers, modern transportation, and recognizable landmarks such as Sunshine 60 and the Metropolitan Expressway. The narrative primarily unfolds in Ikebukuro and extends to parts of Shinjuku. Before coming to Japan, Celty existed as a traditional Dullahan who brought omens of death in Irish mythology. However, unlike the mythological figure, she is unaware of her purpose. She merely "exists," following routine without questioning it. When Celty awakens in the mountains twenty years earlier and discovers that her head and most of her memory are missing, she feels alienated and incomplete. Driven by this loss, she travels to Ikebukuro to reclaim her identity, beginning an existential journey to understand who she is and why she exists.

Upon arriving in Ikebukuro, Celty encounters Shingen and Shinra Kishitani, who offer her shelter in exchange for studying her. Previously, her only companion was her horse, Shooter. In this new environment, Celty begins forming social relations, adapting to society, and slowly constructing a new sense of self. Despite establishing routines, she remains unsettled, as the absence of her head constantly reminds her that something essential is missing. Celty's anxiety becomes the driving force of her journey. She cannot fully assimilate into everyday life because she senses an unresolved void within herself. This anxiety reaches a turning point when she encounters Mika Harima, a girl with a similar face and stitches around her neck. Celty fears that her head has been merged with another person, threatening her identity and her control over life and death. She faces a painful dilemma: reclaim her head through violence or abandon the search entirely. Seeking certainty, Celty meets Mika. To her surprise, Mika's head is her own, not Celty's. This revelation confirms that the root of Celty's anxiety is not merely the loss of her head but the fear of death and the possibility of non-existence. As Celty gradually accepts her condition, she becomes momentarily willing to relinquish her head if it means preserving life. After this, Celty chooses to stay in Ikebukuro with Shinra. She stops obsessing over her head and settles into daily life. Celty begins to drift into everydayness, forgetting the possibility of death.

A year later, her anxiety returns when she sees a news report showing a severed head in public. She recognizes it as her own. This moment shocks her and shatters her belief that the head was safe. Once again, she is forced to confront the fragility of her existence and the possibility of death. Celty eventually recovers her head after twenty years of searching. At the end of the story, Celty chooses not to return to Ireland but to remain in Ikebukuro with Shinra. Through her long journey, she discovers the meaning of her existence and embraces her identity.

3.2 Representation of Celty's Alienation and Anxiety in the Light Novel *Durarara!!*

The story development in *Durarara!!* shows Celty's alienation and anxiety about death through a series of events she experiences. The narrative begins with a flashback to Celty's past life in Ireland as a Dullahan before she lost her head and wandered to Ikebukuro. The Dullahan in this mythology is feared because of its direct association with death. However, *Durarara!!* reinterprets this figure. Celty is not depicted as conscious of her role as messenger of death. In fact, she never questions the reason for her existence.

According to Heidegger's perspective (in Hardiman, 2020:56), this condition reflects *thrownness*—a state in which humans (*Dasein*) are cast into the world without choice. In this context,

Celty is portrayed as just beginning to recognize her immersion in the world as a Dullahan who merely “exists,” living in an unreflective routine. She has yet to question the purpose of her existence because she remains bound by habitual actions. No existential event has yet disrupted her daily life or compelled her to confront her being. Celty simply functions within the limited form of existence she understands. Thus, she represents a *Dasein* that exists without awareness of its origin or direction, forming the foundation for her emerging sense of alienation and existential anxiety.

Celty arrived in Ikebukuro, a bustling city in Japan, twenty years ago, after waking in the mountains to search for her head—and most of her memory—gone. All she remembered was her name, Celty Sturluson, and that she was a Dullahan. The loss of her head caused deep anxiety and alienation, compelling her to wander to Ikebukuro in search of it. The narrative below describes this moment of alienation.

今から20年程前……セルティが山中で目を覚ますと、自分の中から様々な記憶が欠落している事に気が付いた。それは自分の行動の理由であったり、ある程度より遡った過去の欠落であったりと様々だったが……確実に記憶しているのは、自分がデュラハンであるという事とセルティ・ストウルルソという名前、そして己の能力の使い方のみだった。傍らで自分にすり寄ってくる首無し馬の背を撫で…セルティは、そこで初めて自分の頭部が消えている事に気が付いた。

About 20 years ago... when Celty woke up in the mountains, she realized that she had lost memories... What Celty remembered was that she was a Dullahan named Celty Sturluson and how she could use her abilities. Celty stroked the back of the headless horse approaching her ... And there, for the first time, she realized that her head was gone.

(*Durarara!!*, Vol. 1, Pages. 82-83)

Celty’s condition illustrates Heidegger’s concept of *thrownness*, in which *Dasein* is cast into the world and absorbed in everyday routines (*Das Man*), rarely questioning its existence. When a disruptive event such as trauma or existential anxiety (*Angst*) occurs, however, *Dasein* is jolted out of routine and begins to confront the question of its being. For humans, death serves as the primary trigger for existential awareness because it exposes the possibility of becoming “nothing.” In contrast, Celty, as an immortal Dullahan, is detached from both time and death, causing her to lose awareness of her existence. Yet the loss of her head and memory compels her to face nothingness for the first time. This experience of anxiety opens a space for self-reflection, making her aware of her alienation and prompting her to question her being. Thus, in seeking her missing head, Celty embarks on an existential journey to reclaim her identity, confront her alienation, and face the possibility of her own non-being.

Celty’s journey to Ikebukuro brings her into contact with characters who support her search for her head, a metaphor for her lost identity. Celty, accompanied by her horse, Shooter, encounters Shingen Kishitani, an eccentric scientist, and his son, Shinra Kishitani, who practices illegal medicine. They offer Celty a place to stay, provided she agrees to be studied as a Dullahan. Celty’s interaction with Singen and Shinra reflects Heidegger’s concept of “being-with” or called *Mitdasein* (Moran, 2021), the way *Dasen* “exists” with others in everyday life, affirming that humans are social beings. Before the journey, Celty had only “been with” Shooter. However, after being “thrown” into a new world and seeking her head, her environment and relations change. The encounter with Singen and Shinra marks her first experience of *Mitdasein* apart from Shooter, demonstrating how *Dasein* constructs existence through social interaction.

Entering a new “world” in Ikebukuro, Celty was beginning to change. She develops a new routine, adapts to daily life, and begins interacting with others. However, she cannot fully immerse herself in this everyday life because anxiety continues to haunt her. This anxiety drives her to seek answers about her existence, which she associates with her missing head. According to Heidegger (in

Hardiman, 2020), Dasein does not need to remain in constant anxiety. Heidegger does not suggest that humans should live in fear; rather, anxiety functions as a trigger that makes Dasein aware of its thrownness and prompts it to question its Being. One way Dasein understands its existence is by experiencing moods and opening itself to the world and its possibilities. During her search, Celty encounters Mika Harima, a girl with a face identical to hers and stitches around her neck. Celty suspects that her head has been taken and merged with someone else's consciousness. This possibility generates a new form of anxiety: if her head truly belongs to another person, Celty will lose control over her existence and even her death. In this moment, she is confronted with emptiness and the threat of a total loss of identity.

Celty's encounter with Mika Harima, a girl who resembles her and has stitches around her neck, confronts her with the painful possibility that her head has been fused with another body and become a different individual. This triggers deep anxiety, as Celty feels trapped between two choices: reclaim her head by sacrificing a young girl's life or let it go and accept that her twenty-year search was meaningless. Seeking certainty and relief from this anxiety, Celty decides to meet Mika directly. However, to her surprise, she discovers that Mika's head is not the Dullahan's head she has been searching for, but Mika's own. This event confirms that the loss of her head is the source of Celty's existential anxiety. She keeps pursuing it because she fears facing her own death—fears losing control over her existence and the possibility of her “non-existence.” This is clearly expressed in her confession: “I am afraid, too.” “I am afraid of death.” (*Durarara!!*, Vol. 3, pp. 309).

Heidegger describes death anxiety (*Angst vor dem Tode*) as an existential moment that breaks through everyday life. According to Heidegger (Hardiman, 2020:105), death is inevitable—once a person is born, they will die. However, what humans truly fear is not death itself, but the possibility of death. Even after recognizing their thrownness and reflecting on their being, death remains ever-present in daily life. Celty's willingness to confront her fear of death, according to Heidegger (Hardiman, 2020:108), marks the beginning of Dasein's effort to understand its thrownness.

Celty's search for her missing head ultimately leads to the realization that she must acknowledge and confront her anxiety about death. She begins to accept her condition and open herself to the life she currently inhabits. When she meets Mika—still believing that her head has become part of another person—Celty is even momentarily willing to relinquish it. This awareness is reflected in the following quotation:

ああ、私には首が無い。私は化物だ。多くを語る口も、相手に情熱を訴える瞳も持たない。
だが、どうした。
それがどうしたというのだ。
私はここにいる。誰かにここに存在する。

“Oh, I have no head. I am a monster... I am here. I am here... I was born here now. To carve my presence in this city...”

(*Durarara!!*, Vol. 1, Hal. 284)

Celty's decision reflects Heidegger's notion of *authentic Dasein* (Hardiman, 2020:107), which involves the courage to embrace possibilities and “leap” into the existential void. Heidegger (Hardiman, 2020:105) explains that humans often confront death inauthentically—by finding comfort in the idea that “death inevitably befalls everyone,” they overlook the immediacy of their own mortality. In contrast, an authentic attitude requires recognizing death as a personal and ever-present possibility while continuing to live meaningfully. Through this stance, individuals remain self-aware, reflect critically on their existence, and accept the freedom and responsibility to define the meaning of their actions. This awareness is vividly embodied in Celty's statement:

…これが私の人生だ。私が長い年月をかけて歩いて来た道だ。恥じることなど何も無い。

“...*This is my life. This is the path I have been on for years. There is no shame in it.*”

(*Durarara!!*, Vol. 1, pp. 340)

This statement demonstrates that Celty has accepted the possibility of death, become more aware of her emotions, and continued to move forward despite the persistence of existential anxiety.

After deciding to continue living in Ikebukuro, Celty no longer considered returning to Ireland. She intended to stay with Shinra until the end of his life. At this point, Celty no longer sought to control her death or seek to retrieve her head, as long as it was safe. While the anxiety of death may still linger, Celty was no longer trapped by it. She began to drift into the routine of daily life and distance herself from the awareness of her being, forgetting the possibility of death through the comfort of her new life. For about a year, Celty felt at ease with her life. However, her peace was shaken when she saw a television news report of someone's head lying in the street. Upon seeing the image, Celty realized that the head was hers.

写っているのが、自分自身の『首』の写真に相違ない。

かつて追い求めて止まなかった自らの『頭』が、ネットを通して世界中の晒し者になっている事を確信したセルティ。

“The face of the severed head bore an eerie resemblance to her own... The one in the photo must be her own ‘head.’” She also realized that her “head,” which she had been chasing, was now exposed to the world via the internet.

(*Durarara!!*, Vol. 11, pp. 166)

This event shook her belief that her head was safe. All this time, although she did not know its exact location, her head had never appeared in public. This reappearance reawakened the anxiety she had felt a year earlier and forced her to reconsider the possibility of her death. Her worries centered on her head once again. However, Celty was not completely lost in anxiety because Shinra's presence calmed her. According to Heidegger (Hardiman, 2020:96), when Dasein allows itself to be drawn into the comforts of everyday life, it indicates a retreat from its authenticity. Thus, although Celty appears calm, this comfort actually signifies a distance from the authentic attitude she had previously achieved.

After twenty years of wandering in anxiety and fear of death, Celty ultimately regains self-awareness. Her condition reflects Heidegger's view of what would occur if humans ceased to contemplate the possibility of death. If people were immortal or possessed full control over their deaths, they would no longer need to reflect on the end of life. As a result, they would stop questioning the meaning of their existence or their purpose in the world, merely drifting through routines without reflection or direction. In such a state, humans would become indistinguishable from mere objects that exist without awareness. Without the uncertainty of the future or the recognition of mortality, life would lose its depth and meaning. Thus, death, as Heidegger asserts, is essential to Dasein's existence, for it is only through the awareness of death that life gains significance.

At the end of the story, after successfully recovering her head, Celty chooses to remain in Ikebukuro with Shinra and leave her former life in Ireland behind. Through twenty years of wandering, she discovers meaning in her existence. Celty exemplifies authentic Dasein by embracing life, acknowledging the inevitability of death, and being aware of the anxiety that sometimes arises, serving as a reminder of her reality as a being 'existing-toward-death.'

4. CONCLUSION

Celty's journey to Ikebukuro in *Durarara!!* represents an existential transformation from unreflective existence to authentic self-awareness. Initially portrayed as a mythical Dullahan bound to routine and devoid of purpose, she embodies Heidegger's concept of *thrownness*, merely "existing" without questioning her being. The loss of her head and memory becomes a disruptive event that triggers deep existential anxiety, compelling her to confront nothingness and begin searching for meaning. Throughout her time in Ikebukuro, encounters with others introduce her to *being-with* (Mitdasein), enabling her to construct identity through relationships. However, her missing head remains a persistent source of anxiety, symbolizing her lost identity and fear of death. Key moments—such as confronting Mika Harima and admitting her fear—mark the emergence of existential awareness. Celty begins to recognize death not as an abstract inevitability, but as a personal possibility that shapes her existence. Ultimately, her decision to stay in Ikebukuro with Shinra signifies the attainment of authentic Dasein. She accepts her mortality, acknowledges the anxiety that accompanies it, and chooses to live meaningfully rather than remain trapped in fear or habit. By recovering her head and redefining her life on her own terms, Celty affirms that the awareness of death grants life its significance. Her story demonstrates that authenticity arises when one confronts anxiety, embraces freedom, and actively shapes one's existence in the face of mortality.

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Gender and Japanese Cultural Analysis of “Reading the Air” in Spirited Away: “Miburi-teburi” Expression as Nonverbal Expression of Japanese Women

Yovinza Bethvine Sopaheluwakan³⁹, Rusmiyati⁴⁰, and Joko Prasetyo⁴¹

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the expressions of *miburi-teburi* (body movements and hand gestures) as a form of nonverbal language used by Japanese women in Hayao Miyazaki's film *Spirited Away*, using a gender and Japanese cultural approach centered on the concept of *kuuki wo yomu*—the ability to read social situations and adjust one's behavior harmoniously. Through semiotic analysis and nonverbal communication theory, this study examines how the main female characters—Chihiro, Lin, and Yubaba—represent the dynamics of gender identity, social relations, and Japanese cultural values.

The film reflects the evolution of Japanese female representation from submission to traditional norms toward a form of independence that maintains cultural sensitivity to the “social atmosphere” (*kuuki*). Furthermore, this study links this phenomenon to changes in communication patterns in the Japanese-Indonesian digital era, where nonverbal expressions are gradually being replaced by virtual forms of communication such as emojis, stickers, and avatars. This analysis shows that understanding *miburi-teburi* and *kuuki wo yomu* remains relevant in maintaining harmony in cross-cultural communication amid global digital transformation.

Keywords: *Miburi-teburi, nonverbal communication, Japanese gender, kuuki wo yomu, Spirited Away, digitization, Japan-Indonesia relations*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is not only a verbal system expressed through words, but also a series of nonverbal cues that have deep social and cultural meanings. In the Japanese context, nonverbal language is known by the term *mi buri-teburi* (身振り手振り), which refers to expressions of body and hand movements used to convey emotions, politeness, or social harmony without words. These expressions not only serve as a complement to verbal communication, but are also an important part of the ethics of interaction in Japanese society, which upholds the values of *wa* (和, harmony) and *enryo* (遠慮, restraint).

One interesting aspect of Japanese nonverbal communication is the concept of *kuuki wo yomu* (空気を読む), which literally means “reading the air.” This term describes a person's social ability to understand context, other people's feelings, and situations without having to express them explicitly. In Japanese society, the ability to read the “social air” is a measure of social intelligence and maturity, especially in environments that value group harmony. For Japanese women, *kuuki wo yomu* is often internalized as part of a social role that demands empathy, caution, and precision in self-expression.

The film *Spirited Away* (2001) by Hayao Miyazaki is a rich cinematic representation of these cultural expressions. Through its female characters—Chihiro, Lin, and Yubaba—the film displays various forms of nonverbal communication closely related to gender, morality, and social identity. Chihiro, as the main character, is portrayed as a young girl who is initially passive and awkward, but gradually learns to navigate the spirit world using gentle and thoughtful body gestures. Lin, as a firm but empathetic working woman, shows a balance between assertiveness and *omotenashi* (sincere hospitality), while Yubaba, a powerful older woman, reflects authority and control through dominant body movements and sharp gazes.

These three characters display the spectrum of Japanese women's nonverbal expressions in different social and cultural contexts. Through an analysis of their *miburi-teburi*, we can understand how gender and Japanese culture shape a unique pattern of communication—where strength and gentleness are not opposed, but complement each other. In the context of gender theory, this is in line with the view that femininity is not a form of weakness, but a complex social strategy to maintain balance in a hierarchical social structure.

Studies on *miburi-teburi* and *kuuki wo yomu* are becoming increasingly relevant in the era of digitalization. In modern Japanese society, many social interactions now take place in digital spaces through social media, instant messaging, and virtual platforms. This phenomenon is changing the way humans express themselves, with nonverbal cues being replaced by visual symbols such as emojis and stickers that serve to convey emotions and politeness indirectly. This change can also be observed in Indonesia, where people combine expressive and contextual values in digital communication. Therefore, cross-cultural analysis between Japan and Indonesia can reveal how these two societies navigate the challenges and opportunities in maintaining harmonious communication in the digital age.

Based on this description, this study attempts to answer three main questions:

1. What are the forms and functions of *mi buri-teburi* as a nonverbal language of Japanese women in the film *Spirited Away*?
2. How do these nonverbal expressions reflect the cultural value of *kuuki wo yomu* in the context of Japanese gender?
3. How does this concept of nonverbal communication remain relevant and comparable to Indonesian communication patterns in the era of digitalization?

This research is important because it provides a deeper understanding of the interaction between gender, culture, and nonverbal communication in Japanese society, as well as its contribution to cross-cultural dialogue between Japan and Indonesia. Using a semiotic and gender analysis

approach, this research not only dissects body movements but also the social meanings implied behind them.

THEORETICAL STUDY

This study is based on two main frameworks, namely (1) nonverbal communication theory and cultural semiotics, and (2) gender theory and Japanese cultural values. These two approaches complement each other in analyzing how the expression of *miburi-teburi* in the film *Spirited Away* reflects gender dynamics and the cultural principle of *kuuki wo yomu*.

According to Birdwhistell (1970), nonverbal communication is a complex system of social signs, in which every body movement, facial expression, and eye contact has a specific semantic value in a cultural context. He asserts that “no movement is truly neutral,” because all body movements contain socially understood meanings. In the Japanese context, this is in line with Edward T. Hall's (1976) view, which introduced the concept of high-context culture—a culture in which the meaning of a message is conveyed more implicitly through the context of the situation, tone of voice, or body language than through explicit words.

Japanese women's nonverbal communication is closely related to the values of *enryo* (politeness, restraint), *wa* (harmony), and *amae* (affectionate dependence). These values form social norms that require people, especially women, to be able to read situations and adapt to social expectations without causing conflict. This concept is called *kuuki wo yomu* (空気を読む)—literally “reading the air,” which is the ability to understand the social atmosphere without verbal explanation.

In gender theory, Judith Butler (1990) argues that gender is performative, that is, the result of repeated behaviors shaped by social and cultural norms. In the Japanese context, feminine performativity is demonstrated through gentle gestures, a bowed posture, and indirect speech. However, in modern society, these expressions are beginning to undergo a transformation, with women negotiating their independence without losing the expressive subtlety that is characteristic of Japanese culture.

These Japanese cultural values can also be explained through Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (2001), particularly the dimensions of collectivism and uncertainty avoidance. Japan is a highly collectivist society, where social harmony and group conformity are prioritized over individual expression. In this context, *mi buri-teburi* serves as a communication tool that maintains social balance between self-expression and conformity to norms.

Thus, these theories form the basis for analyzing how the female characters in *Spirited Away* express their social roles through body language and reading the atmosphere (*kuuki wo yomu*), and how this can be linked to the dynamics of nonverbal communication in Indonesia in the digital age.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. *Mi buri-Teburi* Representation and Gender in *Spirited Away*

The film *Spirited Away* features three main female characters—Chihiro, Lin, and Yubaba—each representing different phases of life and social positions of Japanese women. Through *mi buri-teburi* analysis, we can observe how their generational and social status differences influence the way they communicate and negotiate gender roles.

a. Chihiro: Gentle Femininity and the Process of Social Maturity

At the beginning of the film, Chihiro is portrayed as a passive, fearful, and awkward girl. Her body language is closed: shoulders slumped, eyes averted, and minimal movement. These gestures illustrate her psychological condition, which is not yet able to navigate the new social world—both the spirit world and the adult world. In the context of *kuuki wo yomu*, Chihiro does not yet have the ability to read the atmosphere and adjust socially.

However, as the narrative progresses, Chihiro begins to show changes. She learns to observe other people's expressions, respond with polite gestures such as bowing, look at them with empathy, and control her facial expressions. This transformation marks the growth of her emotional intelligence and *kuuki wo yomu* ability—a symbol of Japanese women's social maturity, which relies not only on words but also on sensitivity to situations and other people's feelings.

Chihiro's change in gestures also reflects gender performativity as described by Butler (1990). She studied the “social body” of Japanese women—how to behave politely, show enryo, and use body language to create harmony. However, Chihiro also displays courage and independence without losing her characteristic gentleness, showing that Japanese femininity is adaptive, not passive.

b. Lin: Balance between Assertiveness and Omotenashi

Unlike Chihiro, Lin represents young Japanese women who work hard in the modern world. Lin's gestures are more dynamic: her steps are quick, her gaze is direct, and her tone of voice is assertive. She does not simply follow social norms, but actively negotiates her gender role in a high-pressure work environment.

Nevertheless, Lin still demonstrates strong values of *omotenashi* (sincere hospitality) and empathy. In several scenes, Lin helps Chihiro with expressive body language—patting her shoulder, giving gentle gestures, or nodding with understanding. This shows a combination of strength and warmth, which in the context of *kuuki wo yomu* describes the ability to adjust expressions based on the social and emotional needs of the other person.

Lin's gestures depict modern Japanese women who live between two extremes: the demands of professionalism and traditional politeness. Thus, Lin has become a symbol of today's Japanese women—independent yet still maintaining refined nonverbal communication.

c. Yubaba: Power, Authority, and the Inversion of Femininity

Yubaba, an old witch and owner of a spirit bath (*onsen*), represents a generation of Japanese women who wield high authority but remain within the framework of patriarchal culture. Yubaba's body language is dominant: her shoulders are straight, her hand movements are broad, her voice is loud, and her facial expressions are firm. She uses *mi buri-teburi* as a means of control and power.

However, Yubaba's dominance does not mean she is detached from Japanese culture, which emphasizes harmony. At times, she displays *tatemaie* (polite public behavior) to maintain social balance with the workers at the bathhouse. This phenomenon illustrates how Japanese women in high social positions still internalize the value of *kuuki wo yomu* (reading the air) so as not to create disharmony in their social environment.

Yubaba shows another side of Japanese femininity: strength hidden beneath politeness. She symbolizes that nonverbal expression is not only a means of communication, but also an instrument of power in hierarchical cultures such as Japan.

2. *Kuuki wo Yomu* and Nonverbal Communication Ethics

The concept of *kuuki wo yomu* is not only applicable in films, but also reflects the communication ethics of Japanese society in general. According to Nitobe Inazō (1900) in *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, the core of Japanese morality lies in the ability to maintain harmony through self-control and empathy towards others. In the context of communication, this ability is manifested through sensitivity to body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions of the other person.

The film *Spirited Away* is a visual reflection of this value. For example, when Chihiro chooses to remain silent and bow her head as a sign of respect to spirits or superiors, this action is a form of “reading the air” that is characteristic of Japanese culture. In Indonesian culture, this is similar to the concept of “*tenggang rasa*” or “*ewuh pakewuh*”—that is, social awareness of not offending others.

However, unlike Japan, which emphasizes harmony through implicit means, nonverbal communication in Indonesia tends to be more expressive and contextual.

3. Relevance in the Era of Japan-Indonesia Digitalization

Digital transformation brings new challenges to how humans express emotions and politeness. In the digital space, nonverbal communication is reduced to visual symbols such as emojis, stickers, or reaction icons. According to Walther (2011), in computer-mediated communication (CMC), users attempt to “replace” nonverbal cues with digital signs to maintain emotional meaning.

This phenomenon is evident in Japanese society, which tends to adapt the value of *kuuki wo yomu* into the virtual world. The use of emojis with gentle expressions (^^, (^_^), or ☺) reflects a digital way of showing politeness and empathy. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the use of emojis is more varied and expressive, indicating a communication culture that is open but still oriented towards social harmony.

In the context of Japan-Indonesia relations, understanding these differences is important to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings. Digitalization opens up opportunities to strengthen the friendship between the two nations, but it also requires sensitivity to forms of digital nonverbal communication that carry their own cultural meanings.

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter outlines the methodological steps used to analyze the miburi-teburi expressions (body language and gestures) of female characters in the film *Spirited Away*, with a focus on gender analysis and the Japanese cultural concept of *kuuki wo yomu* (reading the situation).

3.1 Approach and Type of Research

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical type of research. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on an in-depth understanding (interpretation) of nonverbal communication phenomena in their specific context. The nature of the research is descriptive, as it aims to systematically and thoroughly describe the forms of miburi-teburi expressions that appear.

In addition, this study is also analytical in nature, as it not only describes but also analyzes the meaning behind these gestures using two main theoretical frameworks: (1) Gender Analysis to examine how nonverbal expressions reflect or negotiate the norms of femininity in Japanese culture, and (2) Cultural Analysis through the concept of *kuuki wo yomu* to understand how these gestures function as communication strategies in reading and responding to social contexts.

3.2 Research Object, Data, and Data Sources

The object of study in this research is the nonverbal expressions of miburi-teburi (body gestures, hand gestures, and facial expressions) displayed by female characters in the film *Spirited Away*.

The data source for this study is primary data, namely the animated film *Spirited Away* (Original Title: *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*), directed by Hayao Miyazaki and released by Studio Ghibli in 2001.

The research data consists of scenes and frames that explicitly show female characters performing significant miburi-teburi. The female characters focused on in the data collection are Chihiro/Sen (as the adapting protagonist), Lin (as the older sister/mentor figure), Yubaba (as the antagonistic authority figure), and Zeniba (as the wise authority figure). The data also includes the context of the dialogue and situation (setting and interactions) accompanying these gestures in order to understand their function in *kuuki wo yomu*.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through documentary study (film analysis) using observation and note-taking techniques. This process involved several stages:

- a. Film Observation (Observation): Researchers watched *Spirited Away* repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, character development, and visual context.
- b. Identification and Inventory: During the viewing process, the researcher actively identified and marked (e.g., with time stamps) relevant scenes featuring miburi-teburi female characters.
- c. Recording and Screen-Capture Techniques: Identified scenes are then recorded in detail in a codification sheet. These notes include: (a) Description of gestures (what movements were made), (b) Characters performing the gestures, (c) Context of the situation (what happened, who was speaking), and (d) Potential initial links to gender norms or *kuuki wo yomu*. Screen captures are taken at key frames to be used as visual evidence in the analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this qualitative study uses an interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three concurrent activities:

Data Reduction:

This is the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data (scene notes and screen captures). The researchers sorted the most representative and significant data for analysis. The data was classified based on character (Chihiro, Lin, Yubaba) and communicative function (e.g., gestures of subordination, gestures of authority, gestures of social adaptation).

Data Display:

The reduced data is then presented in the form of a concise descriptive narrative. The data is presented by describing the scenes, describing the miburi-teburi in detail (supported by screen captures), and explaining the context of the scenes. The data is presented systematically to facilitate the analysis process.

Conclusion Drawing/Verification:

This is the core stage of the analysis. Based on the data presented, the researcher performs an interpretation. Each gesture (miburi-teburi) that has been described will be analyzed through two lenses:

Gender Analysis:

- How do these gestures (e.g., bowing, covering the mouth, or assertive gestures) reflect expectations of femininity in Japanese society (e.g., enryo-sasshi or passivity) or challenge them?
- *Kuuki wo Yomu* Analysis: How do these gestures function as tools for characters to “read the situation”? Do the gestures indicate a failure to read the situation (such as Chihiro at the beginning of the film) or a successful adaptation (such as Chihiro at the end of the film) to maintain harmony (*Wa*) or navigate the social hierarchy at the bathhouse?

The process of drawing conclusions is iterative. Researchers continuously verify interpretations by referring back to the data (film scenes) and theories used to ensure the validity of the analysis.

3.5 Data Validity

To ensure the validity and objectivity of the research findings, theoretical triangulation techniques were used. Validity was achieved by analyzing data (the same miburi-teburi objects) using more than one theoretical framework, namely gender nonverbal communication theory and the Japanese cultural concept of *kuuki wo yomu*. The use of these two perspectives enabled the researcher to gain a richer, deeper, and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study, while reducing the bias of a single interpretation.

Semiotic Visual Analysis Table: Mi buri–Teburi in Spirited Away

Character	Time (min)	Scene Description	Body Movement Analysis (Mi-buri / Te-buri)	Cultural & Gender Meaning	Relation to Kuuki wo Yomu (Reading the Air)
Chihiro (1)	00:08	Chihiro enters the spirit world tunnel while holding her mother's arm in fear.	Shoulders slouched, head slightly lowered, hesitant steps, tightly gripping hands.	Symbolizes <i>amae</i> (a child's emotional dependence on parents). Represents feminine childlike dependency.	Unable to read social atmosphere; insensitivity to the surrounding "air" shows early social immaturity.
Chihiro (2)	00:46	Chihiro thanks Kamaji and Lin after being accepted to work.	Deep bow (<i>ojigi</i>), hands placed in front, eyes downcast.	A polite gesture expressing respect and humility of a young Japanese woman.	Shows emerging social awareness—Chihiro begins to grasp the "unspoken rules" of the spirit world.
Chihiro (3)	01:54	Chihiro stands firm before Yubaba to save Haku.	Upright posture, direct gaze, fists clenched beside the body.	Symbol of transformation toward maturity. Active femininity—brave yet polite.	Fully masters <i>kuuki wo yomu</i> : knows when to speak and when to stay silent.
Lin (1)	00:42	Lin first helps Chihiro in the underground kitchen.	Quick, efficient hand movements; sharp yet empathetic gaze.	Combination of strength and compassion; typical of modern Japanese working women.	High social sensitivity—balances authority and warmth effectively.
Lin (2)	00:58	Lin firmly scolds an evil spirit.	Points hand at spirit, frowning, chin slightly raised.	Representation of assertive femininity—bold yet maintaining etiquette.	Read the social situation accurately and act accordingly.

Lin (3)	01:45	Lin comforts Chihiro before she faces Yubaba.	Hand on Chihiro's shoulder, soft smile, gentle movements.	It reflects omotenashi (sincere hospitality) and empathy.	Understands Chihiro's emotions without words—an ideal example of <i>kuuki wo yomu</i> .
Yubaba (1)	00:53	Yubaba scolds her employees in the office.	Wide hand gestures, loud voice, sharp downward gaze.	Gesture of patriarchal power reclaimed by a woman; inversion of traditional gender norms.	Despite dominance, Yubaba maintains <i>tatemaie</i> —formal propriety in reprimanding.
Yubaba (2)	01:05	Yubaba signs Chihiro's work contract.	Slow yet firm hand movements, gaze full of control.	Symbol of Japanese formality and social hierarchy.	Indicates high social awareness—balances authority and harmony.
Yubaba (3)	01:59	Yubaba releases Chihiro with a gentle expression.	Faint smile, slightly lowered shoulders, hand on chest.	Shows maternal femininity behind authority.	Represents ultimate social harmony— <i>kuuki wo yomu</i> as a path to reconciliation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and Discussion of Problem 1

Based on the analysis of Hayao Miyazaki's film *Spirited Away*, it was found that *mi buri-teburi* (body movements and hand gestures) displayed by female characters function as a form of complex nonverbal communication that is rich in cultural meaning. The forms of *mi buri-teburi* that appear include hand movements, body positions, facial expressions, and the direction of gaze, which consistently reflect the values of politeness (*teinei*), humility (*kenson*), and social harmony (*wa*) in Japanese culture.

Structurally, the body movements of women in this film can be classified into three main categories: (1) expressive gestures, such as bowing the head and bending the body to show respect or apology; (2) representative gestures, such as gentle hand movements while speaking that reinforce verbal meaning; and (3) symbolic gestures, such as covering the mouth with the hand as a sign of refinement and self-control. Each of these movements not only serves to support the dialogue, but also becomes a medium for conveying traditional Japanese feminine values.

In terms of function, *mi buri-teburi* in *Spirited Away* serves to:

1. Construct Japanese female gender identity by presenting an image of women who are elegant, polite, and thoughtful in their actions.
2. Communicate emotions and social relationships, especially in situations where verbal expression is limited by norms of politeness.
3. Affirming the role of nonverbal culture in the film's narrative, as body gestures often convey moral and emotional messages more powerfully than dialogue itself.

These results show that *mi buri-teburi* functions as an integral nonverbal sign system in the representation of Japanese female characters in the film *Spirited Away*. Through subtle and meaningful gestures, this film not only depicts interpersonal communication but also reflects the aesthetic and ethical values of traditional Japanese communication. Thus, *mi buri-teburi* can be understood as a cultural code that strengthens characterization and narrative depth in Japanese cinema

Results and Discussion of Research Question 2

The results of the analysis show that the nonverbal expressions displayed by female characters in the film *Spirited Away* not only function as a means of emotional communication, but also reflect a Japanese cultural value known as *kuuki wo yomu* (空気を読む)—literally meaning “reading the atmosphere” or “understanding the social context without words.” This cultural value requires individuals to be able to subtly pick up on social cues and adjust their behavior to remain in harmony with the norms and feelings of those around them. In the context of gender, the ability to read the atmosphere is more often identified with feminine roles in Japanese society, where women are expected to be highly sensitive to the social and emotional dynamics of their environment.

The nonverbal expressions that reflect the value of *kuuki wo yomu* in this film can be seen through three main patterns. First, expressions of self-restraint (*jishuku hyōgen*), such as a gentle smile that is maintained even when experiencing emotional pressure. This shows social awareness to avoid causing tension in interactions and to maintain group harmony. Second, careful body movements, such as slow steps, orderly sitting positions, or restrained hand movements, represent an awareness of social space and the status of others. Third, eye contact and body orientation, which often avoid direct contact or show humility, are forms of respect for social hierarchy and interpersonal relationships.

Through these various forms of nonverbal expression, the female characters in *Spirited Away* demonstrate how *kuuki wo yomu* is used as a guideline for establishing communication that does not disrupt social harmony (*wawa* 和). They communicate not with explicit words, but through gestures, intonation, and body language that serve as an empathetic medium for understanding other people's situations and feelings without the need for verbal confrontation.

In the context of gender, this representation reinforces the traditional view that Japanese women are expected to be more “sensitive to the atmosphere” than men. Sensitivity to *kuuki* is considered a reflection of ideal feminine values—such as politeness, empathy, and self-restraint (*enryo* 遠慮). However, the film also presents a critical dimension to this role: the female protagonist's ability to *kuuki wo yomu* does not merely signify passivity, but also demonstrates social intelligence and emotional strength in the face of social and cultural pressures.

Thus, it can be concluded that nonverbal expressions in the film *Spirited Away* serve as visual representations of the value of *kuuki wo yomu*, which operates as a social mechanism to maintain harmony and regulate intergender relationships. These expressions emphasize that nonverbal communication in Japanese culture is not merely spontaneous behavior, but rather a form of cultural awareness that is rich in social and moral meaning.

The structure emphasizes aspects of cultural relevance, cross-contextual comparisons (Japan–Indonesia), and the adaptation of nonverbal communication values in the digital world.

Results and Discussion of Problem Statement 3

The results of the analysis show that the concept of nonverbal communication described through *mi buri-teburi* and *kuuki wo yomu* values in Japanese culture remains relevant in the context of global communication, including in Indonesia in the era of digitalization. Although the medium has shifted from face-to-face interaction to digital space, the basic principles of nonverbal communication—such as sensitivity to context, politeness, and self-control—remain an important foundation for maintaining ethics and social harmony.

In Japanese culture, nonverbal communication serves to read situations and adjust behavior without the need for explicit verbal explanations. This is in line with the culture of communication in Indonesia, which also upholds politeness, *tepa selira*, and social harmony (*rukun*). Both cultures place social context as the main guideline in determining the appropriate forms of expression and response. Thus, *mi buri-teburi* and *kuuki wo yomu* can be seen as concepts that are parallel to Indonesian communication values such as *ewuh pakewuh* (reluctance to offend others) and *tenggang rasa* (social empathy).

However, the relevance of this concept is being tested in the context of digitalization, where social interactions are increasingly shifting to online platforms such as social media and instant messaging applications. In the digital space, nonverbal elements such as intonation, facial expressions, or body gestures cannot be displayed directly, so users replace them with digital symbols such as emoticons, stickers, and visual reactions (emoji reactions). This phenomenon shows a new form of adaptation of traditional nonverbal communication into a digital semiotic system. In other words, nonverbal expressions are still present, but they are mediated by technology.

In the Indonesian context, digital communication patterns also show values similar to *kuuki wo yomu*—the ability to implicitly read social situations. For example, the timing of sending messages, the use of subtle punctuation, or the choice of certain emoticons often serve as a way to show empathy and digital politeness. This pattern shows that, even though the form of communication has changed, the substance of cultural values remains intact. This demonstrates the continuity between traditional communication ethics and modern technology-based communication.

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Figure	Time (minute)	Scene Description	Body Motion Analysis (Mi buri-Teburi)
Chihiro (1)	00:08	Chihiro entered the tunnel to the spirit world while fearfully holding her mother's arm.	Shoulders slumped, head slightly bowed, hesitant steps, hands clenched tightly.
Chihiro (2)	00:46	Chihiro thanked Kamaji and Lin after being accepted for the job.	Bow deeply (<i>ojigi</i>), place both hands in front of your body, and lower your eyes.

Chihiro (3)	01:54	Chihiro stood tall against Yubaba to save Haku.	Stand up straight, look straight ahead, and keep your hands clenched at your sides.
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Chihiro in *Spirited Away* illustrates the concept of “kuki yomi” (reading situations or atmospheres): In the context of the film, Chihiro must constantly “read situations” (kuki yomi) in order to survive in the spirit world. Her cautious gestures and expressions, observing her surroundings and trying to adapt without making mistakes, are a powerful visual representation of this concept.



Figure	Time (minute)	Scene Description	Body Motion Analysis (Mi buri–Teburi)
Lin (1)	00:42	Lin first helped Chihiro in the basement kitchen.	Quick and efficient hand movements; sharp but empathetic gaze.
Lin (2)	00:58	Lin rebuked the evil spirit in a stern tone.	The hand points toward the spirit, the eyebrows are lowered, and the chin is slightly raised.
Lin (3)	01:45	Lin calmed Chihiro down before facing Yubaba.	A hand on Chihiro's shoulder, a slight smile, a gentle movement.

Miburi Teburi Lin's Character

The following image is often associated with Lin's gestures in *Spirited Away*, which illustrate the concept of “kuki yomi” (reading situations or atmospheres): In the context of this film, it shows that Lin is a character who is sensitive to other people's feelings and able to express empathy, assertiveness, and support through mi buri teburi — the essence of nonverbal communication in Japanese culture.



Figure	Time (minute)	Scene Description	Body Motion Analysis (Mi buri–Teburi)
Yubaba (1)	00:53	Yubaba scolded her employees in the office.	Wide hand movements, loud voice, sharp downward gaze.
Yubaba (2)	01:05	Yubaba signed Chihiro's employment contract.	Slow but decisive hand movements, a gaze full of control.

Yubaba (3)	01:59	Yubaba let Chihiro go with a gentle expression.	A slight smile, shoulders slightly hunched, hands on chest.
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Miburi Teburi Character Yubaba

In these three gestures, Yubaba represents the full spectrum of *mi buri te buri* — from oppressive power to warm acceptance — showing that body language in Japanese culture is not merely an expression, but a bridge for reading and adjusting to the atmosphere.

(空気を読む/ *kūki o yomu*).



CONCLUSION

This study confirms that nonverbal communication in Japanese culture is a complex social strategy for maintaining group harmony. Through a semiotic analysis of the film *Spirited Away*, we can understand how body gestures reflect cultural and gender values.

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