ANALYSIS OF THE ANIME YASUKE CHARACTER
IN THE DISSEMINATION OF JAPANESE SOFT POWER

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how the Yasuke anime functions as a tool of Japanese soft power through depicting the acculturation process of non-Japanese characters into Japanese culture. Using Berry's (1997) Acculturation Theory of assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. This research highlights key scenes that show Yasuke's adaptation journey. The results show that this acculturation narrative supports the global image of Japan as a strong, inclusive, and prestigious country. In addition, the use of dramatic techniques such as dialog and character reactions reinforce the characters' emotions, making Yasuke's story more appealing to a global audience. As such, Yasuke serves not only as entertainment, but also as a cultural diplomacy tool that broadens Japan's appeal on the world stage.

Keywords: Literature, Anime, Yasuke, Characterization, Soft Power, Acculturation.

INTRODUCTION

Knowing the culture of a nation is one of the keys that is very important to create a harmonious relationship in relations between nations (Mulyawan Setiana, 2014) . The development of international relations has resulted in various forms of diplomacy that are strongly related to culture known as public diplomacy (Yani & Lusiana, 2018) . Soft power has become a key element in modern diplomacy, where cultural appeal becomes the main tool to influence other countries without military or economic power. Japan is one country that has successfully utilized its popular culture, especially anime, as a means of soft power to attract the world's attention. One effective medium in conveying culture is literature

Literary works contain the value of beauty and a picture of life experienced by the author, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, literary works can be considered as social or cultural documents, which describe life (Febrianty, 2016) . Literary works are not only presented in written form, but also literary works are presented in visual form such as anime which is a typical animation from Japan. Anime is one of the popular media that has a great influence in spreading Japanese culture throughout the world.

In anime, characterization plays an important role in the course of the story and conveys a message or culture to the audience. Characterization is when characters in a work of fiction or drama appear either directly or indirectly, and invite readers to interpret their qualities through their words and behaviors (Nurgiyantoro, 2019). One interesting aspect of characterization is how characters from different cultural backgrounds can adapt in a new environment. The concept of cultural adaptation, such as cultural acculturation, becomes relevant in understanding how characters or characters in literary works adjust to a culture that is different from their origin.

One interesting example is the anime Yasuke (2021), which tells the story of a black African samurai who once fought under the command of Oda Nobunaga. This anime tells the journey of a legendary samurai from Africa who once fought under Oda Nobunaga. After Nobunaga's defeat, Yasuke lives as a boatman in a remote village until he meets a girl named Saki who has mysterious powers. When Saki becomes the target of the Daimyo, a powerful wizard who wants to utilize her powers, Yasuke is forced to protect her. On their journey, Yasuke faces mercenaries and Daimyo allies, while Saki struggles to control her powers. With the help of new allies, Yasuke infiltrates the Daimyo's castle and fights an epic duel. In the culminating battle, Saki finally mastered her powers and defeated the Daimyo. After their victory, Saki returns to her village, while Yasuke accepts his past and begins a new journey as a ronin with a clearer purpose.

Previous research shows how Japanese popular culture, particularly anime, is used as a soft power tool. Dimas Gemires (2021) analyzed how the film Rurouni Kenshin was used as a Japanese soft power tool at various international festivals. Rahmah, Fatimah, and Purba (2024) examined the representation of black characters in the anime One Punch Man, The Promised Neverland, and Shaman King, highlighting stereotypes and global imagery. Hafizhah, Juariah, and Permatasari (2023) discussed cultural acculturation in the anime Haikara-san ga Tooru, highlighting characters who go against traditional norms. Zenit (2017) highlights the use of dramatic techniques in building complex characters in the anime Sakurasou no Pet na Kanojo. Wisanggeni (2019) examines how the Samurai Champloo anime functions as a tool of Japanese cultural diplomacy through soft power strategies. The anime blends traditional Japanese culture with elements of Western culture, such as beatbox and rap, to broaden its global appeal.

This research extends previous studies by examining how the Yasuke anime not only represents Japanese soft power, but also uses acculturation narratives to strengthen the appeal of Japanese culture in the global arena. This study aims to analyze how the Yasuke Anime film can become Japan's Soft Power? Specifically, the questions in this study are (1) How dramatic techniques are used to describe Yasuke's cultural adaptation journey in the Yasuke anime. (2) How does the Yasuke Anime Film Contribute to the Spread of Japanese Soft Power?

This research uses a qualitative method with a narrative analysis approach. The data analyzed includes key scenes in the Yasuke anime that show the main character's adaptation into Japanese samurai culture. Dramatic techniques are also used to explore the representation of characters and their interactions in the context of acculturation.

The results of this study show that the Yasuke anime utilizes acculturation narratives of non-Japanese characters to reinforce the image of Japan as an influential and culturally attractive country in the eyes of the world. Yasuke is portrayed as experiencing various types of acculturations, such as assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization, which ultimately highlights the appeal of Japanese culture as an exclusive element that still appeals to a global audience.

This research contributes to the understanding of how anime can be used as an effective cultural diplomacy tool. In addition, this research also highlights the importance of the representation of non-Japanese characters in anime as a strategy to build a modern, powerful and influential global image of Japan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anime has developed into an effective soft power tool for Japan in introducing its culture to the international community. Through interesting characters and stories, anime is able to build a positive image of Japan in the global eyes. One approach that has begun to emerge is to feature non-Japanese characters who experience acculturation to Japanese culture, as seen in the anime Yasuke.

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The research that will be made explains how Yasuke's character in the Yasuke anime is seen through dramatic techniques, the process of cultural adaptation using Acculturation Theory and the concept of soft power.

The concept of soft power itself was first introduced by Joseph Nye, a political scientist from Harvard University, in his book entitled "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power" (1990) and then further developed in "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" (2004). Nye defines soft power as the ability to influence others through the appeal of culture, values and policies, rather than through coercion or material rewards (hard power).

However, while many studies have addressed anime as soft power and the representation of non-Japanese characters, there are still gaps that have not been explored. Previous research tends to discuss stereotypes or cultural fusion, rather than deep acculturation of non-Japanese characters into Japanese culture. In addition, dramatic techniques that reinforce the character's acculturation journey have also not been widely discussed in the context of soft power.

This research aims to fill this gap by analyzing the Yasuke anime, which features non-Japanese characters undergoing a process of acculturation to Japanese culture. The analysis will also explore the dramatic techniques used, in order to understand how the anime reinforces the appeal of Japanese culture as a tool of global cultural diplomacy.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a narrative analysis method to understand how Yasuke's character is constructed in the anime Yasuke (2021). The main data used in this study are scenes in the anime that illustrate Yasuke's characterization through dramatic techniques (Altenbernd & Lewis). Dramatic techniques describe characters indirectly, meaning that their traits, dispositions, and behaviors are not clearly explained or described. Characters are described through words, actions, and behaviors. (Gusti Gede Eka Paramartha et al., 2021). This technique consists of conversation techniques, behavior, thoughts and feelings, stream of consciousness, character reactions, reactions of other characters, setting description, physical description.

In addition, this research also applies Acculturation theory (Berry 1997) to analyze how Yasuke experiences the process of cultural adaptation in the Japanese samurai environment.

The term "acculturation" is used to describe the process of adopting a new culture by taking on the attitudes, values and habits of that culture occurs when individuals from one culture move to a different culture. Physical and

psychological changes caused by adaptation to survive in a new or different cultural environment are signs of acculturation (Utami, 2015). Berry found five models of acculturation: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. (1) Assimilation is when a person loses their original cultural identity and gains a new identity in the new culture in which they live. (2) Integration is when a person maintains their original cultural identity while interacting with their host culture. (3) Separation is when a person chooses to have a lower level of interaction with their host culture, desires a closed relationship, and tends to restore their indigenous culture. (4) Marginalization is when a person chooses not to identify with their indigenous or host culture. In many cases, they leave their indigenous culture only to find that they are not accepted by their host culture and would acculturate if they were given the opportunity to do so (Utami, 2015).

Aspects analyzed include how Yasuke deals with social barriers, how he conforms to samurai norms, and whether he is truly accepted within the community

DISCUSSION

This anime show that the Yasuke anime successfully combines the acculturation narrative of non-Japanese characters with representations of Japanese culture, making it part of Japan's soft power strategy. Yasuke's acculturation process in this anime can be seen through four types of acculturations according to Berry (1997): assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization.

1. Assimilation: Yasuke's Changing Cultural Identity as a Tool for Improving Japan's Image

Figure 1. Data 1

Figure 2. Data 2

When Oda Nobunaga renamed "Eusebio Ibrahimo Baloi" to "Yasuke," Yasuke lost his original identity and gained a new identity as part of the Japanese samurai culture. This illustrates the process of assimilation where individuals let go of the culture of origin in favor of the host culture (Berry, 1997). In the context of soft power, this moment shows how Japan not only displays samurai culture, but also creates a narrative that Japanese culture has the power to "change" and "accept" outsiders. This supports the image of Japan as a country with a culture so strong that it can attract and shape the identity of foreign individuals - an appeal that can influence global perceptions.

2. Integration: Showcasing Japan as an Inclusive and Culturally Strong Country

Figure 3. Data 3.

Yasuke retains the moral values of his culture while living as a Japanese samurai. For example, he said, "Where I come from, it is everyone's duty to protect the children," even though samurai culture at that time emphasized loyalty to the master. This reflects integration, where individuals adopt a new culture without losing their old identity (Berry, 1997). In the context of soft power, this presents Japan as a country that is not only culturally strong, but also inclusive and able to adapt to outside values. This narrative strengthens Japan's global appeal, especially to international audiences who see Yasuke as a symbol that Japanese culture is not exclusive, but can harmonize with other values.

3. Separation: Japan Remains Strong Despite Cultural Resistance.

Figure 4. Data 4.

Figure 5. Data 5.

Yasuke rejects some samurai norms that conflict with his personal morals, such as when he refuses to celebrate a war victory and says, "Death is part of the conflict, it doesn't mean I have to enjoy it." This illustrates separation, where individuals maintain their home culture and reject the host culture in certain situations (Berry, 1997). In the context of soft power, this scene highlights that despite the difference in values, Japanese culture is still seen as attractive. Japan is positioned as a country with a solid culture, yet remains flexible enough to allow different perspectives to be present in its narrative. This makes Japanese culture appear more dynamic and globally appealing.

4. Marginalization: Yasuke and the Symbol of Outsider Struggle, Japan as a Prestigious Country.

Figure 6. *Data 6.*

Figure 7. Data 7.

When Yasuke is rejected by other samurai and considered "not one of us," he experiences marginalization or loss of his original identity but is also not fully accepted in Japanese samurai culture (Berry, 1997). In the context of soft power, Yasuke's struggle as an outsider who is finally recognized creates an "underdog" narrative that attracts global sympathy. Japan is presented as a country with an exclusive and prestigious culture - only those who struggle hard can be recognized and respected. This narrative reinforces Japan's appeal as a culture that is both challenging and inspiring, ultimately strengthening Japan's position in the global arena.

Contribution of Yasuke Anime to the Spread of Soft Power

The anime movie Yasuke (2021) is one example of how Japan uses popular media, particularly anime, as a tool to spread its soft power to the globalized world. The anime, produced by MAPPA and distributed through Netflix, tells the story of Yasuke, an African samurai living in Japan in the 16th century. Through its unique narrative and stunning visuals, Yasuke not only entertains, but also introduces Japanese culture, history, and values to an international audience. The following is a description of the anime's contribution to the spread of Japan's soft power, namely through

1. Introducing Japanese Culture and History

Yasuke combines elements of Japanese history with fantasy fiction, creating a story that is both engaging and educational. The anime tells the true story of Yasuke, an African slave who was brought to Japan and later became a samurai under the service of Oda Nobunaga, one of the most famous daimyo (feudal lords) in Japanese history. The anime introduces global audiences to the Sengoku era, a period of warfare and political upheaval in Japan. Through its depiction of palaces, traditional dress, and bushido (samurai code of conduct) values, Yasuke creates a fascination with Japanese culture and history. Audiences who may not be familiar with Japanese history become interested in learning more about the Sengoku period, Oda Nobunaga, and the life of the samurai.

2. Promoting Universal Values

Yasuke not only focuses on Japanese culture, but also displays universal values such as friendship, courage, and the fight against injustice. Yasuke's character, as an outsider struggling to be accepted in Japanese society, reflects themes of inclusivity and tolerance. Yasuke is portrayed as strong, loyal, and full of integrity, reflecting the bushido values honored in Japanese culture. However, he also brings a global perspective as an African adapting to Japanese culture. The anime attracts viewers from various cultural backgrounds, as its themes are universal and relevant to contemporary issues such as discrimination and identity.

3. Combining Traditional and Modern Elements

Yasuke successfully combines traditional Japanese elements (such as samurai, traditional dress, and martial arts) with modern elements (such as high-quality animation, hip-hop music, and fantasy fiction). This combination makes the anime appealing to both young and global audiences. For example, the music in this anime, composed by Flying Lotus, combines traditional Japanese elements with modern genres such as hip-hop and electronic. This creates a unique and exciting viewing experience for international audiences. By combining tradition and modernity, Yasuke broadens the appeal of Japanese culture to younger generations who may be more interested in contemporary content.

4. Increasing the Appeal of Anime as a Japanese Cultural Product

Yasuke is an example of how anime is an effective tool of Japanese soft power. Anime has long been an important part of Japanese popular culture, and Yasuke reinforces anime's position as a medium capable of conveying cultural and historical messages in an engaging way. The anime was released on global streaming platforms like Netflix, reaching millions of viewers around the world. Yasuke's popularity helps reinforce Japan's image as a creative and innovative country in the entertainment industry. Viewers who enjoy Yasuke may be interested in exploring other anime, which in turn strengthens global interest in Japanese culture.

5. Promoting Diversity and Inclusivity

Yasuke stands out for featuring an African protagonist in the context of Japanese history, a theme rarely explored in popular media. This demonstrates Japan's commitment to promoting diversity and inclusivity through its cultural content. Yasuke's story as an African samurai struggling to be accepted in Japanese society reflects the themes of diversity and tolerance. The anime also depicts the interaction between African and Japanese cultures, creating a rich and multidimensional narrative. The representation of diversity in Yasuke appeals to a global audience, especially from African and diaspora communities, who may feel connected to the story.

6. Encouraging Tourism and Interest in Japanese Culture

Like many other anime, Yasuke has the potential to drive interest in Japanese tourism. The anime's depiction of natural scenery, feudal castles, and traditional Japanese life could inspire viewers to visit Japan. Scenes featuring Oda Nobunaga's palace or the beautiful Japanese countryside could spark viewers' interest in exploring historical locations in Japan. The anime contributes to increased global interest in Japanese cultural and historical tourism, which in turn supports local economies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research concludes that the Yasuke anime successfully supports Japan's soft power strategy by incorporating cultural representations and the emotional journey of non-Japanese characters adapting to samurai society. Yasuke's acculturation process through assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization, shows how Japan builds a global image as a culturally strong country, while remaining open to outside elements. Each stage of Yasuke's acculturation displays a different side of Japan's image from its ability to form a foreign identity, to its position as an

exclusive culture that must "fight" to be recognized. In addition, the use of dramatic techniques strengthens Yasuke's emotional narrative, making the story more relatable and appealing to international audiences. This research contributes to a broader understanding of how anime functions not only as entertainment, but also as an effective cultural diplomacy tool for Japan on the global stage.

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