

THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION OF THE CHARACTER NICK LOWELL IN THE WORLD OF YAKUZA AND JAPANESE SOFT POWER IN FILM THE OUTSIDER

Syahla Nasywa Fadhila

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Sylvia Octa Putri

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Pitri Haryanti

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how the adaptation process of the character Nick Lowell in the Yakuza world and how the film *The Outsider* contributes to the spread of Japanese soft power. This study uses the theory of cultural adaptation and soft power as aspects of international relations with qualitative research methods. The results of the study show that the adaptation process experienced by the character Nick Lowell is analyzed through two stages, namely the cultururation adaptation stage and the cross-cultururation adaptation stage. In the first stage, Nick begins his adaptation by understanding the communication that is established between Nick and the *Yakuza* members. The communication makes him begin to understand and adjust to his new culture, which in the adaptation process enculturation occurs where Nick as the recipient of the message succeeds in understanding what his interlocutor is trying to convey to him. Furthermore, in the second stage, Nick's cross-cultural adaptation begins to interact with *Yakuza* culture, starting from understanding social rules, following the customs of *Yakuza* members, and implementing it until they are accepted him as part of *the Yakuza*. The spread of Yakuza culture as Japanese soft power is shown by introducing Japanese culture, values, and aesthetics to international audiences. This film is not only entertaining, but also sparks global interest in Japan, both in terms of tourism, language, and culture.

Keywords: The Outsider, Film, Soft Power, Japan

INTRODUCTION

Film is a form of literary work that has universal appeal because it is able to combine audio, visual, and narrative elements to convey stories, ideas, or messages to the audience (Huda, 2017). Not only as entertainment, but also as a medium for cultural representation and social identity. Through film, the cultural values, history, and ideology of a society can be displayed and communicated to a wider audience.

Japan, known as a country rich in cultural heritage that also attracts the world's attention, with a unique value system and rules that bind its followers. One of them is the Yakuza, an organization known as the Japanese mafia, where they highly uphold the rules concerning honor, tradition, rituals, and symbols that govern the lives of its

members (BBC News Indonesia, 2024). The Yakuza, an organization that emerged in the 17th century among Japanese feudal society groups, has been widely used as the subject of various films, both in Japan and abroad. This is also done as a form of Japanese soft power to introduce its culture. The representation of Yakuza in films often shows their side of life, starting from the traditions they practice, the loyalty they show, and internal and external conflicts, as told in the film *The Outsider*.

The Outsider, directed by Martin Zandvliet, released in 2018, tells the story of Nick Lowell, an American soldier who becomes involved in the Yakuza world in post-war Japan after successfully escaping prison with the help of a Yakuza member. As a foreigner in an environment with rules and values that are very different from his native culture, Nick must undergo a complex adaptation process in order to be accepted into the Yakuza group. Over time, he begins to follow the Yakuza lifestyle, undergoes various tests to prove his loyalty, until finally becoming part of the organization. As a film that raises the theme of cultural cross-culturalism, *The Outsider* depicts how an individual adapts to a culture that is very different from his origin and how this film reflects the Yakuza culture which is not only depicted as a criminal group, but also part of a cultural heritage with values of honor and strong loyalty. Through this film, Japan indirectly promotes its cultural appeal to international audiences, which is in line with the concept of soft power in increasing global influence through cultural narratives and media.

Based on the description above, this study aims to analyze how the process of adaptation of Nick Lowell's character in Yakuza world and the film *The Outsider* can become Japan's soft power. Specifically, the questions in this study are:

1. How is the process of adaptation of Nick Lowell's character in the Yakuza world?
2. How does the film *The Outsider* contribute to the spread of Japan's soft power?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been no previous research that uses the film *The Outsider* as a research object, but there has been previous research that examines similar films that use Yakuza as the background of the plot. Previous research was conducted by Hasugian (2019) entitled "Traditional Elements in *Yakuza* Films やくざ (*Yakuza*)", Fikri (2018) entitled "Analysis of Narrative Structure and Cinematic Elements in the Film *Yakuza Apocalypse* by Takahashi Miike", Soemantri (2019) entitled "Cultural Adaptation of Indonesian Students in Australia", Utama (2018) entitled "Doraemon Manga as Japanese Soft Power". The differences from previous research are combined about analysis cultural adaptation and soft power in international relations perspectives using qualitative method with note-taking techniques and literature study.

Kim (2001) in Soemantri (2019) argues that cultural adaptation is an interactive process that develops through the interaction of individual immigrants with their new cultural environment. Intercultural adaptation occurs because of the suitability between the interaction or communication of individual immigrants with the communication patterns that have been adopted by the community and the local cultural environment. Cultural adaptation is a process in which an individual learns and understands the rules and customs that exist in a new culture. Furthermore, Gudykunst and Kim (2003) in Utami (2015) emphasized that the adaptation carried out by immigrant individuals must have different ways to adjust to the challenges they face in order to be useful for their new environment.

Kim (2001) in Surmayanto and Malik (2023) found two stages of adaptation, namely cultural adaptation and cross-cultural adaptation. The cultural adaptation stage is a basic communication process such as message delivery, medium, and message recipient. In this process, encoding and decoding will emerge, a process that occurs when someone interacts with a new culture. In addition, there is the sending of messages by local residents in a new environment that can be understood by newcomers, this is called enculturation. This enculturation occurs during socialization. The second stage, namely cross-cultural adaptation, is an adaptation process that includes three things, such as acculturation, deculturation, and assimilation. According to Kim (2001) in Soemantri (2019), the acculturation process occurs when immigrants have gone through the socialization process and can begin to interact

with their new culture. Where immigrants begin to understand and follow the values and norms adopted by their new culture, but previous cultural patterns also still influence the adaptation process, which is also called deculturation. The third thing that is the most perfect stage of adaptation is assimilation. Gudykunst and Kim (2003) in Utami (2015) assimilation is a condition where immigrants are considered able to minimize the old culture so that they look like natives of the new environment they live in.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative method. According to Moleong (2017) in Fairus (2020), qualitative research is research that understands phenomena in depth by describing them in the form of words and language. The object of research used in this study is the film *The Outsider* directed by Martin Zandvliet released in 2018. The data collection techniques used are observation and note-taking techniques and literature study. Sudaryanto (2012) in Devi (2023) stated that the observation and note-taking technique is a set of methods or techniques to conclude facts that are in the research problem. Where this observation and note-taking technique is carried out by repeatedly watching and observing the film *The Outsider*, followed by recording the data needed in written language. Then, search for and read other sources such as books, journals, and articles to clarify the theoretical basis used.

DISCUSSION

1. The Process of Adaptation Nick Lowell's Character in the Yakuza World

A. Culturation Adaptation

Nick is an American prisoner in Japan who helps a Yakuza member named Kiyoshi to get out of prison. To repay Nick's actions, Kiyoshi helps Nick get out of prison by ordering his members to pick him up. Once he is released from prison, Nick begins to go through the adaptation stage. The following figure was obtained:



Figure 1

Figure 1 shows that after Nick was free from prison he immediately met with other Yakuza members, then Orichi asked Nick "Can you speak Japanese?" and Nick answered "A little". Then in the next data:



Figure 1

Orichi gives Nick a job at Kiyoshi's request to solve their group's problems with Americans by saying "We have a problem with your American friend. We've tried to understand them. Maybe you can help us." And Nick without thinking long agrees to the request.

Based on the attached data, it shows that there is communication between Nick and one of the Yakuza members, Orichi. The communication that is established when Nick interacts with Yakuza members makes him begin to understand and adjust to his new culture. The activity of interacting with a new culture is the first stage of adaptation, namely cultural adaptation. By communicating, there will be a process of delivering and receiving messages that can be understood by each other, this Nick has entered the enculturation stage, where Nick as the recipient of the message succeeds in understanding what the other person is trying to convey to him.

B. Cross-Culturation Adaptation

Next, when the first stage of culturation adaptation has been carried out, the next stage, namely cross-culturation adaptation, will occur. At this cross-cultural adaptation stage, the process of acculturation, deculturation and assimilation will occur. The character Nick as a newcomer to his new environment, namely the Yakuza, will definitely carry out cultural acculturation, where Nick begins to socialize with the rules or rituals that are usually carried out by the Yakuza and applies them so that he can be accepted into the Yakuza group. This is accordance with Liu and Huang (2015) in Haryanti (2024) that cross-cultural adjustment is the process of a person interacting with and adapting to a foreign environment. Also according to Zhang and Hussian (2021) in Haryanti (2024) It is a learning process where individuals learn new skills, cultural norms, and behaviours to adapt to a host culture. The following data was obtained:



Figure 3.

Without any dialogue Figure 3 shows that Nick begins to understand the social rules in the Yakuza such as paying respect to superiors, following the customs of the Yakuza by committing violence as a form of revenge or problem solving or even killing. Where this also shows that the western norms and values that Nick previously adhered to such as the formal legal system began to be replaced by Yakuza values and slowly left the mindset of "outsiders" by trying to internalize the mindset of a Yakuza member. This proves that Nick has experienced the process of acculturation and deculturation. Then, in the next data:

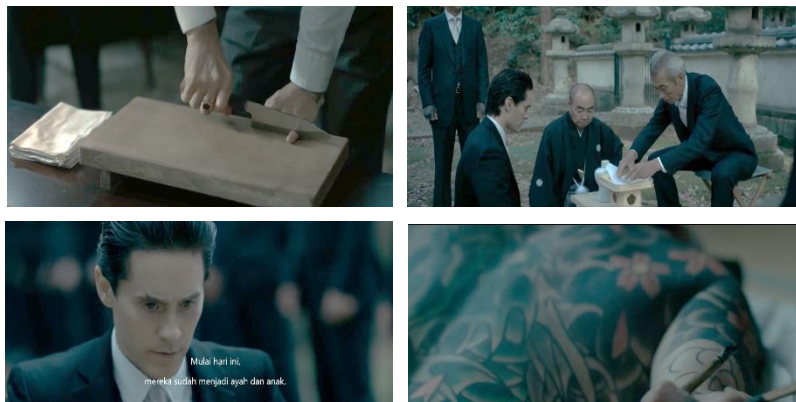


Figure 4.

Figure 4 shows that, "Starting today, they have become father and son" Nick was officially appointed as part of the Yakuza after successfully showing loyalty and honor to the group by cutting off a finger or called *yubitsume* which was done as proof of regret and disobedience to the boss. Nick's inauguration as a new member is called the *sakazuki* ceremony, which is a brotherhood ritual where new members (Nick) are symbolically accepted into the Yakuza group by sharing a cup of sake with the boss. In addition, Nick also got a tattoo which is considered a symbol of the Yakuza. Based on the descriptions, it shows that Nick has reached the stage of full assimilation, where Nick not only understands and accepts the Yakuza culture but is also recognized as part of them.

2. The Outsider's Contribution to the Spread of Japanese Soft Power

The Outsider (2018) plays a significant role in the spread of Japanese soft power through the representation of Japanese culture, values, and aesthetics presented in its narrative. Although the film is set in the world of *Yakuza* and violence, it subtly introduces elements of Japanese culture that appeal to international audiences. Here are the film's contributions to the spread of Japanese soft power, namely:

A. Introducing Japanese Culture and Values

The Outsider depicts the life of *the Yakuza*, which although often associated with crime, also reflects traditional Japanese values such as loyalty, honor, and social hierarchy. The film shows how the main character, Nick Lowell (Jared Leto), attempts to understand and adapt to the complex Japanese culture. Scenes featuring *Yakuza rituals*, such as sake ceremonies or formal meetings, introduce the audience to aspects of Japanese culture they may not have previously known. International audiences are increasingly interested in learning about values such as bushido (the samurai code of conduct) and how these values influence social life in Japan.

B. Showcasing Japanese Aesthetics and Visuals

The film features stunning visuals, from the modern Tokyo cityscape to the traditional Japanese countryside. This depiction not only reinforces the aesthetic image of Japan, but also entices viewers to visit and explore the

country. Scenes set in traditional temples, narrow city streets, or the natural scenery of the Japanese countryside create a strong visual appeal. The beautiful visuals and distinctive atmosphere in the film can trigger viewers' interest in Japanese tourism, whether exploring the modern city or the quiet countryside.

C. Promoting Japanese Music and Arts

The Outsider uses Japanese music and art elements to create an authentic atmosphere. Traditional Japanese music, such as the shamisen, and contemporary music are used to enhance the feel of the story. The use of traditional Japanese instruments in the film's soundtrack tells an immersive viewing experience and introduces the audience to the richness of Japanese music. Viewers may be interested in exploring more about Japanese music and art, which in turn strengthens global interest in Japanese culture.

D. Highlighting Cultural Conflict and Adaptation

The film depicts the cultural conflict experienced by the main character, Nick Lowell, as a foreigner trying to integrate into Japanese society. This reflects the universal theme of adaptation and acceptance, which is relevant to a global audience. Nick Lowell's character must learn Japanese, understand social norms, and face prejudice as a foreigner. His process of adaptation reflects the challenges many people face in a multicultural context. This theme appeals to viewers from a variety of cultural backgrounds, as many can relate to similar experiences in their own lives.

E. Enhancing Japan's Image as a Complex and Interesting Country

The Outsider depicts Japan as a country rich in tradition and modernity. The film shows the dark side of Japan (the world of the Yakuza) as well as the beauty of its culture, creating a complex and interesting picture. Although the film focuses on the criminal world, it also shows positive elements such as loyalty, honor, and the beauty of Japanese culture. International audiences get a deeper perspective on Japan, which is not limited to common stereotypes such as advanced technology or anime.

F. Encouraging Interest in Japanese Language and Culture

The film uses Japanese extensively, which may spark viewers' interest in learning more about Japanese language and culture. Dialogue in Japanese, including everyday phrases and special terms, introduces viewers to the Japanese language. Viewers interested in Japanese language and culture may be encouraged to learn more, either through language courses or cultural exploration.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study indicate that the process of cultural adaptation experienced by the character Nick Lowell in the Yakuza world is explained through two stages, namely the cultural adaptation stage and cross-cultural adaptation. Where in the first stage, namely the cultural adaptation stage, Nick begins his adaptation by understanding the communication that is established between Nick and one of the *Yakuza* members, Orichi. The communication that is established when Nick interacts with *Yakuza* members makes him begin to understand and adjust to his new culture, which in the adaptation process enculturation occurs where Nick as the recipient of the message succeeds in understanding what his interlocutor is trying to convey to him. Furthermore, in the second stage, Nick's cross-cultural adaptation begins to interact with *Yakuza* culture, starting from understanding social rules, following the customs of *Yakuza* members, and implementing it until they are accepted as part of *the Yakuza*. In addition, The Outsider also contributes to the spread of Japanese soft power by introducing Japanese culture, values, and aesthetics to international audiences. Although set in the *Yakuza* world, the film successfully shows the complex and interesting side of Japan, from tradition to modernity. By combining cultural elements, stunning visuals, and universal themes about conditions, The Outsider strengthens Japan's image as a country rich in history, culture, and deep values. The film is not only entertaining, but also sparks global interest in Japan, both in terms of tourism, language, and culture.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was supported through the International Conference on Business, Economics, Social Sciences, and Humanities (ICOBEST) programs, hosted by Universitas Komputer Indonesia (UNIKOM). I express my gratitude to UNIKOM for giving me the opportunities to write my first research with an international title through this program. Furthermore, I also wish to express my gratitude to Mrs. Sylvia and Mrs. Pitri as the second and third authors who have helped and participated in writing this research.

REFERENCES

- Devi, R., E., P. 2023. Analisis Morfem Bebas Dan Terikat Pada Puisi Guillaume Apollinaire. *Disertasi*. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. Bandung. <https://repository.upi.edu/100300/>
- Fairus, F. 2020. Analisis Pengendalian Internal Atas Sistem Dan Prosedur Penggajian Dalam Usaha Mendukung Efisiensi Biaya Tenaga Kerja Pada Pt Pancaran Samudera Transport, Jakarta. *Skripsi*. Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Indonesia Jakarta. Jakarta.
- Utama, A. W. 2018. Doraemon Manga as Japanese Soft Power. *Disertasi*. Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing JIA. <https://repository.stba-jia.ac.id>
- Soemantri, P., N. 2019. Cultural Adaptation of Indonesian Students in Australia. *Discourse Scientific Journal Communication Science* 18(1): 46-56. <https://www.journal.moestopo.ac.id/>
- Surmayanto, E. dan M. Ibrahim. 2023. Komunikasi Antar Budaya dalam Bingkai Teori-Teori Adaptasi. *Nusantara Hasana Journal* 3(2): 42-51. <https://nusantarahasanajournal.com/>
- Utami, S., S., L. 2015. Theories of Intercultural Adaptation. *Communication Journal* 7(2): 180-197. <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/108215>
- Fikri, I., A. 2018. Analysis of Narrative Structure and Cinematic Elements in the Film Yakuza Apocalypse by Takahashi Miike. *Skripsi*. Universitas Diponegoro Semarang. Semarang. <http://eprints.undip.ac.id/>
- Huda, Y. 2017. Membangun Realisme Ruang dan Waktu Dengan Penerapan Long Take Pada Sinematografi Film "Culikan". *Skripsi*. Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta. Yogyakarta.
- BBC News Indonesia. 2024. *Yakuza: Asal Usul Mafia Jepang yang Sangat Ditakuti dan Bagaimana Nasibnya Kini*. <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/cv2xdyk8lzdo>. 25 Februari 2025 (14:50).
- Hasugian, L., R. 2019. Traditional Elements in Yakuza Films やくざ (Yakuza). *Scientific Journal of Cultural Sciences* 14(1): 86-113. <https://journal.unhas.ac.id/index.php/>
- Haryanti, Pitri. 2024. Factors Affecting Indonesian Internship Students' Cross-Culturation Adaptation in Japan. *Atlantis Press*, 98-112. <https://www.atlantis-press.com/article/126002303.pdf>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Syahla Nasywa Fadhila, email: syahla.63821035@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id

Syahla Nasywa Fadhila is a student at Universitas Komputer Indonesia majoring in Japanese Literature.

Sylvia Octa Putri, email: sylvia.octa.putri@email.unikom.ac.id

Sylvia Octa Putri is a lecturer at Universitas Komputer Indonesia, which teaches subjects that are related to international relations.

Pitri Haryanti, email: pitri.haryanti@email.unikom.ac.id

Pitri Haryanti is a lecturer at Universitas Komputer Indonesia, which teaches subjects that are related to literature and literature study.