

Chihayafuru Anime as a Cultural Bridge between Japan and Indonesia: Literary Reception and Implications for Bilateral Relations

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to describe how the anime Chihayafuru functions as a cultural bridge medium between Japan and Indonesia through the lens of literary reception and cultural diplomacy. By highlighting the theme of the traditional game Karuta and the classic poetry Hyakunin Isshu, Chihayafuru introduces Japan's literary cultural heritage to audiences in Indonesia. This study uses a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. The results show that Chihayafuru successfully represents classical literature into an easily accepted popular culture. Positive reception from the Indonesian audience has encouraged the emergence of new cultural communities, such as Karuta communities in various regions. In conclusion, this interest contributes to the strengthening of people-to-people relations and provides positive implications for the success of public diplomacy (soft power) and Japan-Indonesia bilateral relations.

Keywords: *Chihayafuru, Karuta, Literary Reception, Cultural Diplomacy, Bilateral Relations.*

INTRODUCTION

Diplomatic relations between Japan and Indonesia have been strongly established in various sectors, one of which is through a cultural approach. In recent decades, Japan has actively used the "Cool Japan" strategy, where popular culture such as anime and manga are used as instruments of public diplomacy or soft power to strengthen a positive image in the eyes of the world (Azhari & Surya, 2024). Through this strategy, the Japanese government seeks to effectively increase nation branding in the international arena (Garmabar, Rifai, & Hakim, 2024).

Unlike general genres, the anime Chihayafuru is unique because it directly highlights Japanese classical literature, namely the poetry anthology Hyakunin Isshu, through the traditional sports game Karuta. The use of anime has proven to be an effective means of diplomacy and has been demonstrated through various titles, such as how *Shokugeki no Soma* promotes Japanese culinary culture in Indonesia (Gayatri & Konety, 2026), and how anime in general can be a capable educational medium for learning Japanese folklore (Nesa & Rahayu, 2024).

Although Japanese public diplomacy through anime has been widely discussed (Muslim & Nurifqi, 2023), there are still few studies that specifically examine the adaptation of classical literature into pop culture and its direct impact on communities in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to describe the reception of Indonesian viewers toward

Japanese classical literature in Chihayafuru and its implications for Japan-Indonesia bilateral relations. As explained by Putri, S. O., & Ismiati, N (2021), through visual representation in anime, specific cultural values can be consumed as an attractive Japanese national identity, thereby building deep interest and a positive image in the eyes of international audiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of anime as a diplomatic tool has been demonstrated through various titles, such as *Shokugeki no Soma*, which promotes Japanese culinary culture in Indonesia. This phenomenon is an integral part of a soft power strategy that actively packages popular culture to expand influence, reverse post-crisis economic stagnation, and increase global interest in Japanese values without coercion (Ashari, 2022). Although public diplomacy through anime has been widely discussed, there is little research specifically examining the adaptation of classical literature into pop culture and its impact on Indonesian society. The study of classical literature in popular media requires a reception approach that emphasizes audience interaction, interpretation, and psychological meaning of cultural texts that transcend language boundaries. Through visual representations in anime, specific cultural values can be consumed as an appealing Japanese national identity, thus building a positive image in the eyes of international audiences. This proves that cultural diplomacy strategies can be highly effective when audiences in the destination country feel both entertained and educated, ultimately measurably advancing the nation branding of the country of origin (Prabhandari, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method because it aims to describe in depth the phenomenon of audience reception and its socio-political implications. The approach used is library research synthesized with observations of the activities of Japanese fan communities and Karuta communities in Indonesia. Data were collected through literature searches related to cultural diplomacy, literary reception theory, as well as analysis of fan interactions on social media and Japanese cultural festivals in Indonesia.

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis conducted, the discussion is divided into three main findings:

Representation of Classical Literature in Chihayafuru

This anime successfully packages 100 Tanka poems (Hyakunin Isshu) into a dynamic competitive sport (Karuta). In line with the idea that anime is able to visualize traditional elements to be more relevant and easily absorbed by modern society (Nesa & Rahayu, 2024), Chihayafuru embeds ancient Japanese philosophical values into everyday teenage life. This effectively breaks the stigma that classical literature is rigid and boring. The success of the anime Chihayafuru in packaging classic poetry and the traditional game of Karuta into popular culture proves that the medium of fiction is very effective in bridging cross-cultural understanding. This literary reception approach is consistent with the idea that fictional works have the power to represent Japan's identity, history, and traditional social structures deeply to global audiences, much like how the novel medium was used to construct and introduce the values and class stratification of the samurai in the Edo era (Febrianty, 2016).

Season 1 episode 6 ("Tatsuta River in Parting"), in this scene, the character Kanade Ooe (Kana-chan) gives a warning and enlightenment to Chihaya and the other club members that Karuta is not just a sport of patting cards quickly, but the art of understanding literature. Kana explains the hidden meaning behind poem number 17 by Ariwara no Narihira ("Chihayaburu"). She explains that the poem is not just a description of autumn leaves falling on the Tatsuta River, but a high-level metaphor about a love that is so passionate and forbidden, that it "colors the river bright red." This scene is very crucial to discuss because it brilliantly dismantles the stigma that ancient literature is stiff and boring; on the contrary, a thousand-year-old poem actually contains an outpouring of human emotions that are still very relevant to the passion of youth.



Figure 1. shows Kana giving Chihaya a reprimand about karuta.



Figure 2. shows Kana explaining the meaning of the poem.

Indonesian Audience Reception

The Indonesian audience showed a very positive reception. Viewers do not only consume *Chihayafuru* as entertainment but also begin to internalize the work by learning how to play Karuta and memorizing ancient Japanese poetry. This phenomenon is evidenced by the birth of various Karuta communities in Indonesia, both at the university and general levels, which actively participate in various *Bunkasai* (Japanese cultural festivals).

Implications for Bilateral Relations

This active reception provides real implications for bilateral relations. First, there is a strengthening of people-to-people contact where fans in Indonesia interact with cultural practitioners in Japan. Second, the drive to understand anime or Japanese popular culture media such as soundtracks and literary works has been proven to contribute significantly to the development of Japanese language skills, especially in mastering vocabulary and grammar (Ali, 2023). Increased interest and language ability often lead to a desire to continue studies in Japan. This benefits both parties: Japan gains sympathy and strengthens its national identity (nation branding) peacefully through soft power (Garmabar, Rifai, & Hakim, 2024; Muslim & Nurifqi, 2023), while Indonesia gains opportunities for educational exchange and cultural preservation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the results of this study, it can be understood that *Chihayafuru* is not merely recreational viewing, but a bridge of interaction between classical Japanese literature and modern Indonesian society. The reception of the

Indonesian audience proves that language barriers and cultural distance can be overcome through appropriate pop-culture adaptation. Interest that began from the animation screen has transformed into real-world communities and improved language skills. Ultimately, this phenomenon supports the success of Japanese public diplomacy and strengthens the socio-cultural ties that facilitate strategic cooperation between Japan and Indonesia.

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