Representation of Japanese Sociocultural Elements
in the Anime Series Attack on Titan

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Abstract. Japanese manga has been known for its representation of Japanese daily life through its genre of slice of live. However, while not too related to depiction of everyday life, the manga stories based on imaginative and fantasy worlds have managed to relate to the condition of contemporary Japan. Attack on Titan (進撃の巨人), an anime series adapted from manga series by Hajime Isayama, was selected as the subject of study due to its theme that represented sociocultural conditions in the real world of Japan while using the fictional world as its background and setting. The research employs qualitative descriptive and content analysis is utilized as the method to analyze the sociocultural elements within the Attack on Titan. It also utilizes Mayring's Step Model of Inductive Category Development, to identify and categorize the sociocultural elements within the anime. The findings show that Attack on Titan uses symbolism to effectively represent Japanese culture and sociocultural conditions. This provides novelty and depth to the animation while conveying the creator's intentions and cultural themes.

Keywords: Japanese Animation, Content Analysis, Sociocultural Elements, Cultural Representation.

1. Introduction

Animated films are a visual communication technique with the fundamental potential to clarify complex matters, reveal the unseen, and convey information quickly and succinctly [1]. Studies have supported the effectiveness of animated films as a visual communication form, both in conveying traditional and contemporary cultural elements [2-4]. As Yui [5] explains in this digital era, all cultural products distributed through electronic media are connected to two contemporary cultural tendencies: postmodernity and glocalization. Glocalization is globalizing a culture while adapting to local tastes or needs. Nowadays, exposure to popular culture is abundant in our surroundings, therefore enabling its influence on society. According to Ahmad [2], pop culture can be described as the widespread dissemination of cultural elements within a particular society, encapsulated through the community's everyday language or lingua franca. One of the examples of how pop culture had a big influence around the world is the

culture of Japanese animation, known as anime. Through globalization and glocalization, anime has also become a subculture in many countries around the world.

The term "anime" originates from the Japanese pronunciation of the word 'animation', which is written in katakana as アニメーション (animeshon), abbreviated as 'anime'. Napier [4] argues that anime is an ideal artistic medium for expressing hopes and anxieties arising from contemporary life's uncertainties. In his research, Munggaran [3] concludes that anime tends to depict the environment in the background art as a form of symbolic relation to nature and as a representation of the nation's identity. Therefore, by studying anime, we will get an idea of the sociocultural conditions that occurred in Japan at a certain time, according to the year of release or production of a particular anime title or series.

 With this perspective, this study focuses on the representation of Japanese sociocultural elements in the anime through the case study of Attack on Titan (進撃の 巨人), an anime series adapted from manga series by Hajime Isayama. This anime series was selected as the subject of study due to its theme which represents sociocultural conditions in the real world of Japan while using the fictional world as its background and setting. Attack on Titan is also one of the most popular and famous anime series in Indonesia.

This research encompasses all the main series episodes (88 episodes as of July 2023) of Attack on Titan anime. It aims to: (1) provide valuable insights into how anime can express and explore cultural themes; (2) demonstrate the potency of animation as a medium to portray and discuss complex sociocultural matters in a visually engaging and thought-provoking way; (3) develop an analytical framework for creating animated works that effectively convey meaningful messages and represent prevailing sociocultural issues in society; and (4) provide insights on the relationship between the sociocultural content within the anime of Attack on Titan with its popularity among its audiences.

2.   Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative descriptive method. The analysis is based on literature on anime as a medium of representation, anime as a medium of sociocultural critique, and the sociocultural conditions of Japanese society. Method of Content Analysis is used to analyze the visual components found in the case study material related to the predetermined sociocultural elements in the literature review. This method involves the process of coding and categorizing the text based on themes or concepts that emerge during the analysis.

  The Mayring's Step Model of Inductive Category Development is utilized to examine each episode of Attack on Titan in detail and explore the sociocultural codes that appear in the anime to ultimately formulate the categories of sociocultural themes in a more general form.

3.   **Preliminary Findings**

Ahmad [2] states that in general, anime could be categorized into anime that focuses on specific cultural themes, and anime without specific cultural themes. Furthermore, Ahmad [2] explored that anime without specific cultural themes usually would feature the themes of (1) Apocalyptic, which refers to themes about the end of the world; as Japan is the only nation that experienced the atomic bomb; (2) The art of interval, which conveys the balance between silent & noisy scenes, to emphasize on the feeling of being there through series of 'unconnected scenes' to produce emotional attachment within the audiences; (3) The elegiac mode and relation to nature, which refers to the moment of reflection and self-awareness, through the depiction of natural processes, such as rain drops, cloud movements, etc.; (4) The culture of cuteness about the depiction of cute or kawaii characters (such as the genre of 'moe'); and (5) The representation of everyday life, that portray of everyday Japanese scenery through settings and real-life references as the background.

The themes of Attack on Titan revolve around humanity being "colonized" by the Titans, the savage giant creatures resembling humans. Then it dwells further into the theme of oppression toward minority races, political warfare, and many more, as the result of how humanity would react in such harsh conditions that strongly correlates with the theme of Apocalyptic. The anime also presents universal themes of adventure and the transformation of human personality, way of thinking, and maturity through the journey of its main protagonist, Eren Jaeger.

In the final season, issues of race, ethnicity, and history become more explicit, thus igniting heated arguments and questions among fans in the online and offline discussion forums about the anime's meanings, its connections to sociocultural politics in Japan, and whether it provides the real representation of what happened in the Japanese society nowadays.

Attack on Titan is an anime that does not prominently depict literal elements of Japanese identity. Instead, identity is represented through the depiction of various elements such as norms, values, and sociocultural conditions prevalent in Japanese society at a specific time. For example, the portrayal of activities, habits, and interactions by many characters in Attack on Titan exhibit similarities with those in the Japanese society.

4,   **Research Findings**

Based on the data obtained from observations of the reaction toward Attack on Titan anime among its fan-based community, as well as the research questions and objectives analysis of the first step of Mayring's Step Model of Inductive Category Development, the following criteria for categories and levels of abstraction are established:

Table 1. Category Criteria and Level of Abstraction

Category Criteria	Level of Abstraction
The impact of sociocultural conditions on an individual's development	Sociocultural factors and interactions between individuals and their surrounding environment
The state between hope and despair.	Development of moral values between good and evil
Depiction of social constructs and self-identity.	Concerning personal and social concepts

After establishing the category criteria and levels of abstraction, the next step is to code the study material through several iteration phases. The first coding stage is conducted to formulate categories that align with the designated levels of abstraction. The results from the coding process are as follows.

Table 2. Category and Category Definition

No.	Category	Category Definition
1.	**Terror and Trauma**	Any event that causes an overwhelming feeling of danger and triggers trauma
2.	**War and Military**	All kinds of events and war figures that show or are a symbol of the identity of the Japanese nation
3.	**People**	Race, ethnicity, figures that can become symbols or representatives of Japanese society
4.	**Religion**	Religious practices shown that might become the representation of Japanese society
5.	**Language and Communication**	All forms of expression and communication movements that reflect Japanese society.
6.	**Nature and Residence**	Everything related to the geological forms of the earth, plants, animals, and man-made objects can represent or show the identity of the Japanese people.
7.	**Agriculture**	Everything related to knowledge, activities, and results related to farming and animal husbandry in Japanese society

8.	**Values**	Ethics, norms, and social values are agreed upon by the common people and reflect the Japanese nation
9.	**Nationality**	All forms of symbols, systems, and behavior of figures that show or are a symbol of the identity of the Japanese nation
10.	**Social Class**	The division of society based on hierarchical levels whose members share similar values, interests, and behaviors

Based on the established categories, the analysis manages to identify the types, forms, and frequency of sociocultural elements in the 88 episodes of Attack on Titan anime, resulting in the identification of 87 forms/items of sociocultural elements, with a total of 1722 occurrences. 'Values' appear with a dominating frequency of 525 instances (30%), thus providing symbols of the influence of Japanese cultural heritage in shaping the narrative of Attack on Titan.

Next, the categories with the highest frequencies are "War and Military" (20%) and "Terror and Trauma" (15%). This is related to the premise of the Attack on Titan story, which revolves around the struggle of humanity against the terror brought by the Titans.

Table 3. The frequencies of appearances of the various sociocultural elements in Attack on Titan

No.	Category	Total of Item	Frequency	Percentage
1.	**Terror dan Trauma**	7	250	15%
2.	**War and Military**	11	347	20%
3.	**People**	7	160	9%
4.	**Religion**	3	25	1%
5.	**Language and Communication**	8	152	9%
6.	**Nature and Residence**	13	101	6%
7.	**Agriculture**	3	19	1%
8.	**Values**	25	525	30%
9.	**Nationality**	5	52	3%
10.	**Social Class**	5	91	5%
	Total	**87**	**1722**	**100%**

5.   Analysis of the Visuals of Attack on Titan

5.1   Depiction of 'Values'

In Japanese culture, ethics is heavily influenced by principles such as honor (*meiyo*), discipline (*kunren*), and social responsibility (*giri*). Honor is highly valued in Japanese culture, and individuals are expected to maintain personal dignity, respect elders, and maintain the good reputation of their families and social groups. Discipline is also an important value that is emphasized in education, work, and everyday life.

Elements of ethics, norms, and social values in Japanese culture greatly influence the way of interacting, working, and living in society. Honor, discipline, cooperation, politeness, and respect for others are the basis for establishing behavior that is respected and recognized in Japanese society. Although there is diversity in culture and values among individuals, these elements broadly constitute the moral framework followed and upheld in Japan.

The culture that symbolizes the social relations of Japanese society is the culture of drinking alcohol with colleagues, known as "nomikai". Nomikai is considered a way to strengthen relationships between colleagues and create stronger bonds in the workplace. In the anime Attack on Titan, several scenes show soldiers drinking alcohol while on duty, during discussion sessions with superiors, and while chatting with friends and colleagues to relax.

The culture of mutual cooperation refers to the spirit of working together and helping each other to achieve common goals. In the context of Japanese society, cooperation is often seen in various activities such as cleaning the classroom after school, caring for gardens, or helping neighbors with their daily needs. This spirit of cooperation emphasizes the importance of togetherness and collective interests above individual interests. In the anime Attack on Titan, this culture can be seen when they clean the empty house they will live in as a temporary military base. The culture of mutual cooperation was also seen when there was a post-war food crisis, with all the refugees working together to grow crops.

The kimono shown in the Attack on Titan anime is a irotomesode kimono, which is a type of formal kimono worn by married women only on special and important occasions. In the anime, this kimono is worn by Kiyomi Azumabito, a descendant of the country's Hizuru shogun clan while attending an important party. The appearance of the Azumabito family crest on the kimono is also a depiction of Japanese culture.

5.2   Depiction of 'War and Military'

Visualization of scenes with the theme 'War and Military' is dominant in the anime Attack on Titan, with representations that are closely related to the events and

experiences experienced by the Japanese people when they participated in World War II.

Table 4. Depiction of War in real Japan and secenes in the anime

Real life Japan	Depiction on the Attack on Titan
The Nippon Kaigi organization whose mission is to increase the supremacy of the native Japanese race and change the constitution to be in line with their beliefs	Members of "Jaegerist" who have a mission to bring back the supremacy of the Eldians by supporting Eren to carry out the "Earth Shake"
Japanese surprise attack on the Pearl Harbour military base.	Marley's surprise attack on the Shiganshina district
Destruction of the port, sea and air fleet at Pearl Harbor military base by Japanese military	Bombardment of the port of Liberio by Paradis troops with the power of the Colossal Titan

Another content that is strongly related to the Japanese military is the use of swords. Although the use of swords does not have direct connections to Japanese culture, it could be associated with Japan's traditional weapon, the Katana, utilized by Samurai both in warfare and martial arts. Thus, the preference in using swords instead of guns could be associated with the pride toward the Samurai and Shogunate golden era, where fighting with swords was considered more noble than using guns.

5.3   Depiction of 'Terror and Trauma'

Two items in the category 'Terror and Trauma' stand out with significant frequency: "Witnessing Death and Massacre" and "Fear Reactions". The scenes in Attack on Titan reflect the conditions of Japanese society during World War II. While both Japan and the United States were engaging in war, the ultimate victims were the civilians. In Attack on Titan anime, the series do not portray the war between Japan and the United States realistically, but more on the determination, fighting spirit, and the impact of wartime conditions.

Table 5. Depiction of Terror and Trauma in real Japan and in the anime

Real life Japan	Depiction on the Attack on Titan
Kamikaze attacks were carried out by the Japanese during World War II by crashing their airplanes into targets that they would destroy.	The Eldian suicide squad that become Marley's army. They are assigned to carry bombs and destroy the enemy's anti-Titan iron train
At the end of World War II, citizens throughout Japan suffered	Distribution of food rations to refugees within Rose's walls by the soldiers.

from poverty, hunger, and food shortages. To ensure that the population gets food, rations are put in place.	
The dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by American troops after Japan ignored orders to surrender unconditionally.	Eren's "Earth Shake" destroyed all land outside Paradis Island. The goal is to eliminate countries that threaten the peace in the future

The results of the analysis revealed three categories that have significant roles in the narrative of Attack on Titan, namely "Values", "War and Military" and "Terror and Trauma". A reflection of the customs, values, and norms applied by Japanese society is depicted in the behavior of the characters in the anime. Then, the appearance of important events in Japanese history during World War II has also been found. Even though their appearances do not match chronologically, the appearances are consistent and repeated. Moreover, while the war between Japan and America in World War II was not directly shown in the storyline, the appearance of these scenes creates an unsettling familiar impression. This is what makes Attack on Titan anime seem familiar, new, thought-provoking, and disturbing at the same time. The analysis also shows the five main themes in the Attack on Titan narrative that are apparent: (1) Terror and crisis due to war, (2) social relations, (3) patriotism, (4) discrimination, and (5) symbolism and mythology.

6.   Discussion

As one of the most popular anime in Indonesia, Attack on Titan is a fascinating subject for study. Its themes are notably depth, revolving around humanity being "colonized" by Titans, the savage giant creatures resembling humans, and the subsequent events within the human community such as oppression of minority races, political warfare, and more. The complex storyline with many action and war scenes, along with the journey of the main protagonist can attract the attention of audiences.

Nonetheless, some debates within the Attack on Titan fandom community on Discord, YouTube, and Reddit have arisen. The unexpected plot twists and the development of the main character Eren in the final season of the anime have been judged as the main drive of its controversy among fans and audiences. The thought-provoking themes, promising premises, and dynamic, aesthetically explicit visuals depicting scenes of violence add to the uniqueness and appeal of Attack on Titan in the eyes of the public.

Another topic of discussion that has emerged among the anime fan community regarding the popularity of Attack on Titan is the strong references to historical events during World War II. The plot, themes, and visualization of fascism used by Hajime Isayama in Attack on Titan have brought discussions in news channels, discussion forums, and social media debates to try to understand the fine line between the allegory played by Isayama and his personal political beliefs in the creation of Attack on Titan.

Even though there was a lot of debate and discussion, Isayama's silence meant that the audience had the freedom to interpret and project their prejudices onto the fictional world he created.

In the final season of Attack on Titan, issues of race, ethnicity, and history become increasingly explicit, which increasingly sparks heated debate and questions about the meaning of the visualized themes and their relationship to sociocultural politics in Japan. Therefore, this research tries to analyze how the sociocultural elements of the Japanese nation are visualized in anime.

7.   Conclusion

This research concludes that:
1.   The context of the content in Attack on Titan is influenced by Japanese culture, displayed through narratives and symbolism throughout the series.
2.   The characteristics of a society can be represented in a fantasy world and visual style that is not directly related to the society being depicted, but they have strong similarities & connections.
3.   It relates to previous findings on the representation of socio-culture through popular culture products.
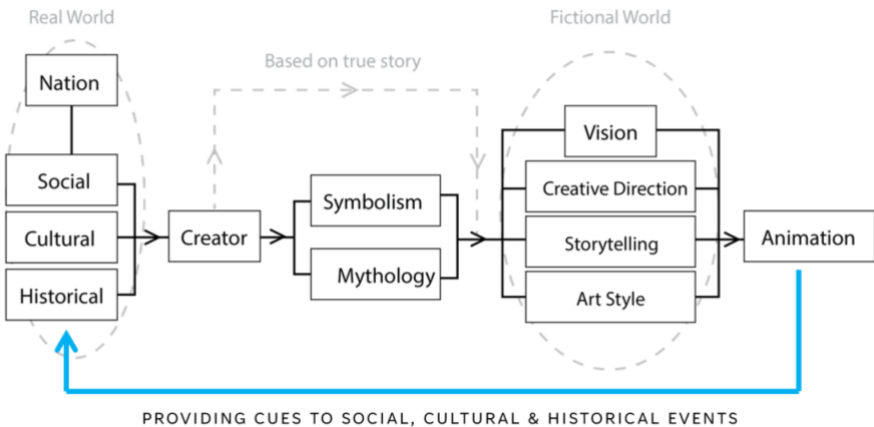
Fig 1. Use of elements of symbolism and mythology for depiction sociocultural issues in the anime.

These findings demonstrate the dynamic relationship between anime, fantasy, and sociocultural representation of Japanese culture. Moreover, it also shows that anime series like Attack on Titan can serve as a platform for expressing and exploring cultural aspects while managing to captivate the interest of diverse audiences. The utilization of symbolism in creating the fictional world in Attack on Titan provides significant artistic advantages that offer a simultaneous sense of familiarity to the viewers. Through the

non-literal adaptation process from history-based events, the creators successfully maintain a sense of novelty and imagination, while the audiences are able to feel a sense of familiarity and engagement in enjoying the work.

The use of symbolism embedded in characters, plot, and setting adds dimension to the story, bringing forth deeper meanings and stimulating the curiosity of the audience. It is successful in inviting viewers to understand the emotional and philosophical layers within the narrative. In this regard, Attack on Titan establishes its ability to combine mythological aspects with advanced storytelling, creating an intriguing and captivating fictional world. In the end, Attack on Titan manages to establish a reflective emotional and intellectual connection between the audience and the story, enriching their understanding to create a unique and satisfying experience.

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