

## Research Article

# Japanese Soft Power in Indonesia on Anime Entitled *Ufo Baby*: Study of Popular Culture

Risa Yuliani\*, R.M Mulyadi, M. Adji

Universitas Padjadjaran, Jatinangor, Indonesia

\*Email: [risa11003@mail.unpad.ac.id](mailto:risa11003@mail.unpad.ac.id)

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## Abstract

Anime as Japanese popular culture has been successfully consumed by mass in many countries. It indicates that Japan's strategy to make anime one of its soft powers has been successfully accepted by the world community. In Indonesia, since anime entered the television, the enthusiasm given by the community has been good and positive. Anime is liked by various circles, especially children, even today. *Ufo Baby* is one of the shows on RCTI, even though it's not as global as Doraemon, for example, but apart from an interesting storyline, this anime also incorporates many elements of Japanese culture. The aim of this study is to explain the soft power of Japan in Indonesia on anime entitled "*Ufo Baby*". The research method uses a qualitative approach with interpretive analysis. The researched part is scenes from anime that contain cultural elements. The approach used is John Storey's cultural theory and Nye Joseph's theory of soft power. Data collection was conducted to examine the influence of Japanese culture on Indonesian society by using interview techniques. The results of this study reveal that in the *Ufo Baby* anime there are elements of soft power culture used by Japan. From the results of research, the culture shown in anime has an influence on Indonesian society marked by the community's participation in celebrating traditional Japanese festivals and the discovery of many typical Japanese goods sold in local shops.

**Keywords:** Anime; Japan; Popular Culture; Soft Power

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## 1. Introduction

In this era of globalization, which makes it easier to exchange or mix cultures between countries as it is today, it creates new cultural trends such as popular culture. Popular culture is a mass culture as a culture that is produced and consumed on a mass basis, stated by (Crothers, 2013). In addition (Avenue et al., 2015) explains about four "popular" meaning, namely popular with many people, low-level work, works made with the aim of pleasing people, culture for themselves that people make. In short, popular culture can be interpreted as a culture that is made

to please people and is liked by many people. Popular culture today is almost owned and developed by many countries. One of the countries whose popular culture is famous almost all over the world is Japan.

Japan is known as a developed country which is also still very thick with its traditional culture and is famous for its popular culture. The term Japanese popular culture is more accurately described as *taishuu bunka* which means mass culture (Kamei-Dyche, 2017). Kato also added that mass culture means culture that is not only liked by Japanese people,

but also people from other countries. Japanese popular culture includes *anime* (cartoons), *manga* (comics), J-pop (as Japanese songs are called), games, technology, films, and *dorama* (Japanese television dramas). Because of its popularity and the rapid development of Japanese popular culture, it is used by the organizers of the Japanese state apparatus as an attraction for Japan to attract international attention. The attraction in question is Japan's ability to lure other countries without an element of coercion which is known as soft power.

Soft power is a concept that has a meaning, the skill of a country that does not use the military and economy to achieve its goals but prefers to use its attractiveness (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015) reveals about culture into two aspects; first, high culture or high value culture such as works of art, literature, and education for the elite and second, popular culture that is liked and can attract the masses. There are three sources of soft power which are the culture of a country, political values, and foreign policy (Callahan, 2015). Soft power through culture that characterizes a country must have an attraction to be able to influence other countries. The culture in question can be in the form of art, technology, food, literature, or entertainment that focuses on attracting the masses. Therefore, it can be said that besides being able to be used as a diplomatic tool between nations, it can also be a source of soft power (Philip et al., 2019).

Director of the Marubeni Research Institute, Tsutomu Sugiura said that Japan has found a new place in this world, as well as benefits through its cultural obsession around the world, especially popular culture. Japan's soft power has succeeded in influencing Asian countries through its popular culture over the last few decades, for example through art, fashion, hairstyles, food, animated films, and comics (Brienza, 2015). According to

Farina (2018), when compared to other countries in Asia, Japan has more potential soft power. It is proven by the many works and creativity of the people that can be well received, not only in the country but in various countries. One of Japan's soft powers which is the main focus in this research is anime.

Anime is an animation show or animation used by the Japanese (Susan J, 2005). Anime as a soft power as well as a forum for introducing Japanese culture in many countries is no longer in doubt, as evidenced by the fact that 30 countries have signed anime cooperation contracts with Japan, including Indonesia (Annett, 2014). The profit generated from the anime industry itself is very large for Japan. A 2016 report from the Association of Japanese Animation (AJA) through the Akiba Nation website shows that, since 2013, the anime industry has continued to grow by 171% (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). From these data, it can be concluded that anime has been well received by the world community as Japanese popular culture.

It must be admitted that the phenomenon of Japanese popular culture as soft power has attracted many researchers to discuss and research more deeply. For example, the journal, written by (Puji Wisanggeni, 2019), focuses on not only the traditional Japanese culture shown in the *Samurai Chaploo* anime series, but how elements of culture from outside have managed to blend into their native culture. There is also Rastiati (2015) who published a journal about cosplay as Japanese popular culture associated with the hijab as opposed to cosplay clothes, the entry of the Pokemon Go game as a popular culture that has spread throughout the world and how its influence can be found in journals written by Iqbal (2017).

In the previous paragraph, it has been described that there are several articles on Japanese anime popular culture

as soft power, but no one has discussed the *Ufo Baby* anime as the object of research. Therefore, the researchers are interested in discussing the soft power of Japan in Indonesia on anime entitled "*Ufo Baby*". This anime is not as global as its peers, such as *Doraemon*, *Dragon ball*, *Naruto*, *One Piece* and *Detective Conan*. However, this anime was chosen because it contains many elements of Japanese culture, even though the story is themed on the life of a junior high school child. The *Ufo Baby* anime itself entered Indonesia in 2002 and became one of the anime broadcasts on the RCTI television station. On the ufo-baby website, it is stated that *Ufo Baby* itself was previously a *manga* (as Japanese comics are called) which was published in the Japanese weekly magazine *Nakayoshi* in 1998. Then, it was made into an anime series with a total of 78 episodes. However, despite having many episodes, the authors limit the study to a few episodes. The research only focuses on episodes that show Japanese popular culture as soft power.

## 2. Methods

The research method in this study uses a qualitative approach with interpretive analysis. Research using a qualitative approach is a technique of collecting information through interactions carried out on the subject and object of analysis to obtain effective data and analyze it with a predetermined approach (Liang, 2019) Meanwhile, according to Bakhsh et al (2017), the use of interpretive methods focuses on "meaning making practices" and shows how the configuration of the results that have been observed. The use of this method has the aim of being able to understand and interpret the events shown in the *Ufo Baby* Anime.

The data in this study is in the form of scene by scene shown in the *Ufo Baby* anime which shows the existence of cultural elements contained in the dialogue and pictures. The data that has been

collected becomes a reference to be able to draw conclusions about understanding the message or meaning contained in the *Ufo Baby* anime. This interpretive analysis uses the story telling method or in the form of a narrative, several pieces of pictures related to this research are also included to further clarify the data. In addition, data collection to describe the influence of soft power in Indonesia is conducted through interviews.

Interviews are conducted with a group of 27-year-old young girls who are members of the Anime Addict group, which consists of 12 women and has been involved since they were in college. Sample is carried out using purposive sampling. This is because the interviews are conducted with only 4 members who like the *Ufo Baby* anime and personally influence them on Japanese culture. All informants are private employees currently working in Japanese companies and graduates of majoring in Japanese literature at a public university in Bandung. The informants include Anita (28), Novelia (28), Dinda (28), and Rini (28). All interviews are conducted via personal WhatsApp chat for approximately 10 minutes each.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Japanese Soft Power through Popular Culture

Japan as one of the developed countries has strong feeling with its culture, even though the flow of globalization is growing rapidly. In maintaining traditional cultural traditions, of course, requires cooperation and high awareness of the community. In addition, efforts from the government to support and develop activities and creativity related to culture are no less important, one of which is through anime. Almost everyone knows something about anime and admits that anime has become a symbol of Japanese culture. The seriousness of the Japanese government in making anime and *manga* as soft power can be seen from the stipulation of a

famous anime character, namely Doraemon as the Japanese Animation Ambassador (Brienza, 2014)

Hayao Miyazaki, one of the well-known authors of the Studio Ghibli anime stated that anime has a "limited animation" style that was popularized through Japanese studios and only broadcast for television (Posadas, 2014). According to Hernández-Pérez (2019), originally anime came from a *manga* in the form of pictures with dialogue in it and made into a book, while anime is an adaptation of *manga*. Japanese anime has its own characteristics that distinguish it from cartoons originating from America. The storyline,

moral message and fantasy displayed have cultural elements and there are many positive things that we can learn. This is one of the factors that anime can be well received in many countries. In addition, another factor is that the Japanese always pour high creativity so that it produces good quality as well (Hui, 2013). It is no wonder that nowadays many people from various countries come to Japan to learn how to draw anime. The above explanation further supports the statement that anime as Japan's soft power has succeeded worldwide.



Figure 1 Main female character bathing in *Ofuro*



Figure 2 Miyu's Mother Sleeping on *Futon*

### 3.2 Analysis of Japanese Soft Power on the Anime Entitled *Ufo Baby*

The soft power that Japan carried out through the anime media *Ufo Baby* is to include and display several Japanese cultures such as *Chanoyu* and *Matsuri*

*Mikoshi*, objects used by Japanese people such as *Futon*, *Onsen*, *Ofuro*, and *Yukata*, or their trademark food such as *Misoshiru* and *Dango*, divided into several scenes in the episode. This is the main attraction for some people to observe more and want to

know more about things related to Japan (Chan & Wong, 2017).

In the first episode, the object displayed on *Ufo Baby* as part of Japanese soft power is *Ofuro* (Figure 1). *Ofuro* is a typical Japanese bath. In an article about bathing culture in Japan published on the Japanese station website, it is stated that the Japanese habit before entering *Ofuro* is to wet the body, use soap, and shampoo in the shower first. It must be considered because *Ofuro* is used only for bathing and later the water is used for one family. This is to save water and not throw away after use. *Ofuro* in the anime *Ufo Baby* appears in the first episode which shows a scene where Miyu as the main character is bathing in *Ofuro* as soon as she arrives at her new residence.

In this scene, it is shown that both Japanese houses and Japanese inns have small square-shaped baths with quite deep water. Thus, when people bathe, the water will cover their shoulders; but because the width and length of the tub is small, people who bathe can only sit while bathing with their knees folded. Still referring to the same article, Japanese culture before bathing must pay attention to the order of bathing based on the oldest person in the house. If there are guests who come, then the guest must be a priority.

In the same episode, there is a traditional Japanese food called Misoshiru. *Misoshiru* is one of the traditional Japanese foods in the form of soup which is usually served with a Japanese first dish menu (Zhang & Chiu, 2020). The basic ingredients used to make *Misoshiru* are fermented soybeans, rice, salt, or yeast (Stefanello et al., 2019). *Misoshiru* is shown in the scene where Kanata as the male lead offers Miyu if she wants to add more *Misoshiru* to their dinner dish. In Indonesia, this typical Japanese *Misoshiru* soup has spread widely in Japanese restaurants in Indonesia so that Japanese foodies know about Misoshiru. In addition, in large supermarkets and online sales via

e-commerce platforms, they also sell a lot of mishosiru cooking ingredients. It indicates that Japanese food introduced through anime has succeeded in becoming popular culture in Indonesia.

In the 6th episode, one of the typical Japanese drinks is shown, ocha, as part of Japanese soft power. *Ocha* is known as green tea originating from Japan. This drink is shown through the scene when Miyu's mother comes to visit Kanata and Miyu's residence after coming from America. His mother drank a typical Japanese green tea, namely *ocha* while saying that Japanese tea is the best. In Japanese restaurants in Indonesia, *ocha* is often served in their drink menu, which is a sign that Japan's soft power over Indonesia has succeeded. Talking about ocha, it cannot be separated from the tradition of drinking tea or *Chanoyu* which is a tradition of Japanese society for a long time. However, even though this tradition has been around for a very long time, it is still being preserved by the Japanese people. *Chanoyu* is a tradition of formal tea drinking which is carried out with complicated stages in serving drinks made from green tea powder and will later be given to distinguished guests (Yu & He, 2018)

In the same episode, a Japanese bed called a *Futon* is shown (Figure 2). *Futon* is a traditional Japanese mattress that is thin and filled with cotton, consisting of two thin mattresses; the first serves as a base for sleeping and the other is used as a blanket (Puspitasari et al., 2014). *Futon* is featured in the scene when Miyu's mother falls asleep on the *Futon* from exhaustion after her long journey from America. This scene caused some people to be attracted to the feeling of sleeping on a *Futon*. This is evidenced by a statement from an informant named Anita (28) who even went to Japan because of *Ufo Baby* and felt sleeping on a *Futon*.

*"Gue dulu pergi ke Jepang karna suka banget sama Doraemon, terus beberapa"*

*anime juga gue suka, apalagi yang anak-anak sekolahan. Termasuk si Ufo Baby itu, makin-makin pengen traveling ke Jepang. Sampe akhirnya tahun 2009 gue pergi juga kesana... ngerasain nginep di ryokan pake Futon ala ala tidur orang Jepang haha."*

**Translation:** "I used to go to Japan because I really like Doraemon. Then, I also like some anime, especially school kids. Including the Baby Ufo anime, the more makes me want to travel to Japan, until finally in 2009 I went there too... I felt like I was staying in a ryokan sleeping on Japanese-style *Futon*, haha."

The experience told by Anita was felt by her because of the influence of watching anime series on Indonesian television, including the anime *Ufo Baby*. She managed to feel what it was like to use the *Futon* shown in the *Ufo Baby* anime.

Another Japanese food featured on *Ufo Baby* is *Dango*. *Dango* is a sweet food made from rice flour, shaped into rounds, and boiled. However, there is another

unique thing that is served on this *Dango* cake called *Mitarashi Dango*, namely the addition of a sweet and salty sauce on top that is made from shoyu (Weller et al., 2019). It can be said that the Japanese food contained in episode 15 has become quite well known to the Indonesian people since the *Ufo Baby* anime aired in Indonesia.

The introduction of traditional *Dango* cakes because of the *Ufo Baby* anime is supported by the opinion of an informant named Dinda (28). During the interview, the thing she remembered most about this anime is *Mitarashi Dango*. In fact, according to her, because she wanted to taste how *Dango* cakes tasted, she had to wait for an opportunity to go to Japan.

*"Aku akhirnya bisa ngerasain kue Dango itu pas ke Jepang tahun 2015. Rasanya unik sih..."*

**Translation:** "I finally could taste *Dango* cake when I came to Japan in 2015. The taste is really unique..."



**Figure 3** Miyu Wearing Yukata

In addition, there is a typical Japanese culture that is in this anime in the 18th episode, namely *Matsuri Mikoshi*. *Matsuri* is a celebratory ritual performed by the Japanese as a symbol of their religion (Wulandari, 2018) while *Mikoshi* has the meaning of the vehicle of the Gods which when implemented is carried out by being paraded by many people (Wulandari, 2018). *Matsuri Mikoshi* is shown in the scene where Miyu is invited by her classmates to take part in the change of season festival (*Matsuri Mikoshi*). *Mikoshi*

*Matsuri* attended by Kanata and Miyu is a festival of joy related to the Japanese belief, namely *Shinto*. In Indonesia, *Matsuri Mikoshi* has been held quite often during diplomatic events between Japan and Indonesia like the *Jak-jak Matsuri* event held at Plaza Tenggara GBK, Jakarta in 2019 (Van Hecken et al., 2019). It indicates that *Matsuri Mikoshi*, traditional Japanese culture, has entered and is well received by the Indonesian people.

In the *Mikoshi Matsuri* festival, usually women will look more graceful and

beautiful when wearing a *Yukata*. *Yukata* is traditional Japanese clothing that is informal, meaning that there is a type of *Yukata* that is used after bathing, at home, and festival events (Permana et al., 2019). In addition, there are many variations and colors in the *Yukata* because the material is made of thin cotton and seems simple; *Yukata* is also more often used in summer by the Japanese (Permana et al., 2019). It is shown by Miyu who were wearing her *Yukata* to the *Mikoshi Matsuri* festival (Figure 3).

The experience of using *Yukata* was felt by an informant named Novelia (28). She shared her experience of going to Japan when she was still in high school and tried wearing a *Yukata* while on vacation to Kyoto by renting it for 3000 yen for 2 hours. She learned about *Yukata* through the *Ufo Baby* anime that he watched in high school.

*"Kalau aku nonton Ufo Baby agak telat sih justru pas SMA kelas 1 liat si Miyu pake Yukata jadi pengen pake juga. Kebetulan pas ke Kyoto ada rentalnya, pake deh..."*

**Translation:** "When I watch *Ufo Baby*, it's a bit late, but when I was in 1st grade, I saw Miyu wearing a *Yukata*. So, I wanted to wear it too. Incidentally, when I went to Kyoto there is a rental there; then I used it..."

The influence of the *Ufo Baby* anime that the informant watched, made her have

an interest in visiting Japan and trying to use traditional Japanese, *Yukata*.

In episode 30, an object named *Samurai* appears. *Samurai* has the meaning of serving, a word used in ancient times as personal servants, because the loyalty of the *Samurai* to his master was like the loyalty of slaves to their masters in feudal times (Masaaki, 2021). The *Samurai* are featured in the scene where Wanya, an alien babysitter named Ruu, is on her way home from the supermarket. The presence of the *Samurai* is said to have attracted the attention of many people, causing a crowd. This episode shows that Japan is still including part of its historical elements in anime to be introduced to the world community.

In episode 36, *Onsen* appears as part of Japan's soft power. *Onsen* is defined as a hot spring used by Japanese people. The Japanese culture of going for a bath in an *Onsen* has been around for a long time because, in general, Japanese people like to take a hot bath, especially when winter arrives (Harisal, 2019). *Onsen* locations are usually in mountainous areas. Until now, there are tens of thousands of *Onsen* in Japan with the number growing every year (Harisal, 2019). *Onsen* is featured in the scene where Kanata and Kenta go to the mountain and soak in the *Onsen*. If you search on the Google page, several hotels in Indonesia even have *Onsen* facilities inspired by Japanese culture.



Figure 4 Koinobori Flag

The attractiveness of the *Onsen* was also felt by an informant named Rini (28). She expressed her interest in Japanese culture by questioning how Japanese people bathe in *Onsen*. She also experienced the sensation of soaking in an *Onsen* when she attended language school in Shizuoka, Japan. While enjoying the natural scenery, she took a hot bath like the Japanese. Her initial interest started when she watched the anime *Ufo Baby* in the same year she went to Japan.

*"Aku nonton Ufo Baby itu karena di kasih tau sama Anita, pas nonton jadi pengen rasain berendam di Onsen..."*

**Translation:** "I watched *Ufo Baby* because I was told by Anita; when I watched it, I wanted to feel like soaking in an *Onsen*..."

Another episode in the *Ufo Baby* anime that features things about Japan is episode 44. In this episode, the *koinobori* flag is shown. *Koinobori* is a flag that resembles a koi fish and every parent who has a son must raise a koi fish flag at his home (Kurniawan, 2019). This tradition has been going on for a long time and is still maintained by the Japanese people to this day. This flag is displayed at the festival which is held every 5th of May which makes Miyu, Ruu, and Wanya want to put up the *koinobori* flag. The display of the *koinobori* flag is in Figure 4.

#### 4. Conclusion

According to the analysis of the *Ufo Baby* anime as a source of Japanese soft power, it can be concluded that in the Japanese *Ufo Baby* anime has two sources of soft power, through culture and political values. The culture shown in the anime is about the Japanese bathing habit using *Ofuro*, *Misoshiru* soup, which is always served in the Japanese diet, *ocha* green tea, which is synonymous with Japan, the thin *Futon* bed has two layers, *Matsuri Mikoshi* which is held at the change of seasons, is shown *Samurai*, and the existence of *Onsen* where the Japanese like hot springs.

According to the culture that exists in the *Ufo Baby* anime, things that affect the Indonesian people are expressed through informants who like Japanese culture because they are inspired by watching the *Ufo Baby* anime series. The informants became interested in visiting Japan and trying and experiencing the culture that characterizes the Japanese people based on what they watched.

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