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Analyzing the Representation of Ganbaru Values in Anime Blue Period through Roland Barthes' Semiotic Approach

Herlinda Dwi Lestari^{1*}, Rino Andreas²

¹Communication Science Department, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, 57161, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Keywords

Representation; Ganbaru; Japanese Culture; Semiotics Anime is a mass communication media that influences conveying a cultural message to the audience, so anime can show a country's culture. This study aims to analyze the representation of the *ganbaru* value contained in the character Yatora Yaguchi and how the anime can be an inspirational tool for the audience. This research seeks to identify how *ganbaru* values are packaged through signs, symbols, and audiovisuals. In this study, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative method and analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The sample used was purposive sampling, where data collection was carried out based on criteria relevant to the study. Based on the study's results, Yatora Yaguchi shows *ganbaru* values as follows: 1.) Hard Worker, 2.) Fighting to the Last Breath, 3.) Determined to Find a Solution and 4.) Never Give Up. There are also positive effects, such as not giving up easily, and negative effects from the pressure to high standards. With this analysis, it can be understood that the Yaguchi character is a representation of the form of *ganbaru* values in culture in Japanese society.

1. Introduction

The power of film can easily change the public's view of a country. This is because film is a medium that can convey information and a means of communication to spread culture from abroad. Films often depict the realities of life within a society, but they tend to exaggerate cultural representations. This is because such portrayals serve as a form of marking that is intended to be emphasized (Puspitasari, 2021). The cultural reality presented in the film is in language and customs, then these customs are displayed in audio and visuals. Indirectly, many films raise the cultural values of the place where they are produced (Tamsil, 2021). Therefore, it can portray the realities of life within a society, become a tool for cultural promotion.

Representation is a depiction of cultural groups and social institutions that are not limited to stereotypes (Hackley, 2014). Representation can also include how cultural identities, values, and norms are conveyed through media and various forms of communication. Burton also explains that stereotypes often generalize meaning, while representation has a broader meaning that gives rise to the complexity of identity in culture.

Representing something can also be called describing it, by bringing up an idea in our brain, then explaining the similarity in the object of thought, so that it can produce a concept. The concepts in the human mind can be translated through language, so that we can string together ideas with written language, body language, photos, and visuals (Noviana, Simanjuntak, 2022).

In this context, Japan uses media as a system of concepts and language to represent and introduce their culture to a wider audience, Japan popularizes culture through shows shown in the media. By spreading various influences through J-Pop (Japanese Popular) (Ortez-Arevalo, 2022). Japan not only describes the image of their culture, but Japan can also symbolize and replace traditional cultural elements that are packaged with modernization so that they can be accepted by the entire global

²Applied Communication, Universitas Sebelas Maret, 57126, Indonesia

^{*}Corresponding author's email: herlindadwi6@gmail.com

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audience, including Indonesia. It's no wonder that the number of anime viewers in Indonesia has grown rapidly. Media content popularized by Japan, such as anime, serves as a way for Japan to represent the identity of its local culture. By representing their culture, global audiences can influence perceptions and understanding of Japanese culture (Iwabuchi, 1998).

One of the most recognized aspects of Japanese culture is the concept of ganbaru (頑張る). The word ganbaru means to persevere and to do one's very best beyond what is considered good. According to Suseno (2018), the word ganbaru means fighting with all one's might until the last drop of blood. Ganbaru can also be used to support and give fighting spirit to others and yourself. Ganbaru is intended for someone or yourself when you are having difficulties, or are struggling with problems, or something difficult happens in your life. Hirose and Shoji (in Ambari 2017) explained that ganbaru is an attitude of working diligently, being tenacious, and never giving up to get maximum results.

According to the Japanese dictionary, *ganbaru* can be interpreted as "doko made mo nintai shite doryoku suru" It means to endure no matter how far one must go and to strive until the very end. *Ganbaru* can be seen as an attitude or philosophy of life in Japanese society for dealing with life challenges, such as working hard, being patient, persistently seeking solutions, and never running away from problems (Suseno, 2018).

Ganbaru is one of the reasons why Japanese people become workaholics, where this culture not only encourages Japanese workers to work hard, but also inspires them to love their work, understand and be responsible for what they have done, and build good character in terms of physical, emotional, and social (Winata, et al., 2018).

The value of *ganbaru* held by the Japanese people enables them to live more comfortably and has contributed to making their country one of the most developed nations in the world. One of the works entitled "Japan as number one" by Ezra Vogel, helps create "Miracles Japan", "It serves as an advertisement for Japan's abilities. not only in Asia but also globally. In the book it shows Japan's position in the international arena, and the author agrees that its national cultural values such as *ganbaru* have contributed to Japan's success (Widarahhesty, 2020). By making *ganbaru* as an analysis material, it is hoped that it will become a learning experience and motivation for developing countries like Indonesia to be able to emulate these cultural values and implement them in everyday life, to work harder.

One of the Anime Series that has a *ganbaru* value is "Blue Period" or in Japanese, ブルーピリオド Burū Piriodo. This anime series comes from a manga illustrated and written by Tsubasa Yamaguchi, published from June 24, 2017, to November 22, 2023. The Anime series was produced by Seven Arcs studio with the same title and directed by Koji Masunari. Released on October 2, 2021, to December 18, 2021, has a total of 12 episodes.

There is a relevant literature review on the topic being discussed, namely the first one entitled *Ganbaru* Values in Anime: The Wind Rises (2013). By Putri et al., in 2024. The problem investigated in this study is whether the value of *ganbaru* is present in the animated film *The Wind Rises* (2013). This study found an evident *ganbaru* value by the main character, Horikoshi Jiro.

In the next relevant study entitled "Analysis on the Cultural Concepts in the Movie Spirited Away" written by Bocong Sun in 2020. This study discusses a detailed analysis of the relationship between Japanese culture and metaphor in the film Spirited Away with the concept of semiotics. And it results that the film produced by Ghibli can touch the deepest minds and hearts of adults, even though in the film, Ghibli still uses traditional Japanese style anime full of oriental metaphors.

In the theory of representation developed by Stuart Hall (1997), representation is an important practice to create a culture. In this way, culture can create experiences, share concepts, and use the same codes. Representation can also create stratification regarding the characteristics or traits of several social class cultural groups that are believed to be normal. This causes the stereotype to become a perspective that is attached, potentially leading to unconscious 'prejudices' (Andreas, 2021).

In essence, motivation is the drive that stimulates a person to remain enthusiastic in pursuing individual needs. Motivation can be categorized into two types: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Uno, 2021). In Herzberg's theory, motivating factors such as recognition, challenge, and

achievement are particularly relevant to the Japanese cultural context. This can be seen in the value of *ganbaru* as a motivating factor for Japanese people to fulfill their responsibilities. Japanese people who have a workaholic nature only fulfill the need for self-actualization, which is the highest need in Maslow's hierarchy (Bari, Hidayat, 2022)

One of the moral principles highly upheld by Japanese society is hard work. This motivation is fostered through an educational system that emphasizes productive use of study time and a conducive learning environment, allowing the motivation to be sustained into their working lives, shaping strong work ethic, discipline, and dedication. As a result, Japan has become one of the leading countries in Asia, and even in the world, with rapid economic growth and significant global influence (Sukaimi & Said, 2019). Meanwhile, a common issue among Indonesian society is the tendency to feel lazy, struggle with time management, and lack discipline (Irawan et al., 2024)

Based on the background that has been discussed above. The researcher wants to examine how the *ganbaru* values represented by the character Yatora Yaguchi play a role in individual self-development and motivation. This research will provide insight into how anime can be an inspirational tool for viewers in developing discipline and a spirit of never giving up in facing their life challenges, especially in terms of education, career, and self-development. By embracing these values and applying them in Indonesian society, it can be an achieved a better quality of life.

2. Method

This study uses qualitative descriptive research. Qualitative is a method that does not measure but explores to find a meaning. Qualitative research is also more descriptive; the data collected is in the form of words or pictures (Fiantika, et al., 2022). The object of this research is the anime "Blue Period". The population in this study was all the scenes and dialogues from the anime of Yatora Yaguchi as the main character. This study uses purposive sampling, a technique in which samples are deliberately selected based on specific criteria. The samples in this research consist of image clips featuring scenes and dialogues of Yatora Yaguchi from the anime Blue Period, which represent the cultural value of *ganbaru*, such as perseverance, resilience, and strong determination.

Before analyzing the data, the researcher will first watch the entire Blue Period anime. After watching the whole video, the researcher will categorize the values that form the basis of *ganbaru* and extract scenes that contain elements of this cultural value in the anime. After being selected for several scene pieces, later on, those containing dominant signs will be selected again. After that, the researcher will conduct observations and analysis of the anime by looking at the myths of the *ganbaru* values contained in it. Then the researcher will analyze the data using Roland Barthes' semiotic method, The data will be described to see the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth to obtain elements of representation of Japanese cultural values, *ganbaru*. By applying elements of images, dialogue, settings, and properties. The corpus in this study consists of signs, both verbal, such as words contained in anime scenes, and non-verbal signs, containing scenes that represent the fighting spirit or Japanese cultural values.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Presenting Results

The anime Blue Period (2023) tells the story of Yatora Yaguchi, who becomes fascinated by a painting during an art class. Yaguchi decides to pursue a career in fine arts, despite having no formal experience or training in the field and begins to study and hone his skills in painting. Yatora Yaguchi faces challenges such as competitive art school entrance exams, self-doubt, and the pressure of following an unconventional career path. In the anime Blue Period (2021), there are *ganbaru* values that are reflected in Yaguchi. The *ganbaru* values are: 1.) Hard Worker, 2.) Fighting to the Last Breath, 3.) Determined to Find a Solution and 4.) Never Give Up. Here is the explanation.

3.1.1 Hard Worker

Table 1. Ganbaru's attitude towards hard workers, episode 7

Scene Dia juga pe<mark>kerja keras.</mark> Apalagi, dia berkembang sangat pesat.

Mentor: "Yaguchi Yatora, He is a hard worker, moreover, he is developing very fast."

Dialog

Figure 1. Yaguchi is entering the art room



Yaguchi: "There's one week left, how I use this one week might change the outcome in a big way.

Figure 2. Yaguchi is thinking about painting.



Figure 3. Yaguchi is chatting with his friend.

Yatora Yaguchi: "Why are you here, Koi-

Koi chan: "I'm attending an information session around here, do you want to eat with

Yaguchi: "I want to go home and paint."

Denotation: The signs in the scene above are indicated by the items carried by Yaguchi, such as stationery, and the setting, which is located in a classroom.

Connotation: The scene above reflects the value of ganbaru, showing Yaguchi's strong determination to learn. This can be seen from the expression he shows and the many items of painting he is carrying. The canted angle can also describe Yaguchi's anxiety when he thinks about the time he will spend just painting. When his friend asked him to eat together, Yaguchi refused because he preferred to go home and go back to painting. This scene shows Yaguchi's thoughts, which are very dedicated to painting. Even though he is tired after coming home from lessons, his thoughts are still focused on the desire to continue painting.

Myth: The scene contains the myth that people who have no talent in art can achieve or surpass geniuses by working hard. This is described in the sentence "he also works hard, moreover, he is developing very rapidly". In this myth, it can be interpreted that the value of ganbaru is that relentless hard work will always bring results or success. The Japanese emphasize the importance of hard work, dedication, and putting in the best effort in all endeavors (Yokoyama et al., 2022)

3.1.2 Fighting to the Last Breath

Table 2. Ganbaru's attitude to Fighting to the Last Breath, episode 7

Dialog Scene Yaguchi: "But people who enjoy this situation must be mentally strong, right? Tapi orang yang menikmati situasi seperti ini pasti sangat kuat mental, 'kan? Figure 4. Yaguchi is looking in the mirror Teacher: "You are serious, aren't you, Yaguchi?" Yaguchi: "I already know, I know that confident people enjoy things much more interestingly in this world. That's why I always pretend to be confident." Aku sudah tahu. Figure 5. Yaguchi contemplating Yaguchi: "But I can't fool the scary thing in the painting. I have to enjoy it, otherwise-Aku havus manikmatinya. Jika tidak, maka= Figure 6. Yaguchi painting

Denotation: Yaguchi is seen looking in the mirror in the bathroom while thinking about the situation he is facing. After looking in the mirror, Yaguchi finally returns to painting, but his mind remains unfocused. This is indicated by the sentence "I have to enjoy it, otherwise—"

Connotation: The scene shows Yaguchi looking in the mirror, evaluating what happened to him. He believes that someone who can enjoy the same situation as he does is mentally strong. In the connotation signified in the sentence "—that's why I always act confident," and taken at a camera angle that positions Yaguchi smaller in a large space. Thus, strengthens the feeling of insecurity experienced by Yaguchi.

Myth: The myth in the scene shows that never giving up is a mental strength. This condition is the pressure of high expectations of oneself; it can be interpreted as the formation of a mentality after facing something difficult. This is also depicted in the dialogue "people who enjoy situations like this must be really strong mentally, right?" showing Yaguchi's awareness of how difficult it is to deal with pressure, so he convinces himself not to give up on the situation he is currently facing. Thus,

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this scene shows that the ability to continue to survive even though in doubt is an important aspect in achieving goals (Suseno, 2018).

3.1.3 Determined to Find a Solution

Table 3. Ganbaru's attitude to Determine to Find a Solution, episode 7

Scene
Tugasmu sekarang adalah kemampuan beradaptasi.

Figure 7. Yaguchi is consulting with the supervising teacher

Supervisor: "Your current task is adaptability."

Dialog

Yaguchi: "I'm not very adaptable, huh?

Supervisor: "Well, maybe like that. What do you think about when you paint?

Yaguchi: "I think about what the person who made the question is thinking, or how to cover up my weaknesses."



Figure 8. Yaguchi is consulting while listening to the evaluation.

Supervisor: "What you lack is selfishness."

Yaguchi: "Huh? Aren't I selfish enough? I chose art because of my selfishness."

Supervisor: "Yes, that's right, but the more appropriate term is the ability to enjoy something?"



Figure 9. Yaguchi is talking with his friend.

Koi-chan: "hey Yaguchi, I kind of understand what your teacher said.

Yaguchi: "eh?"

Koi-chan: "You can read the situation, understand and say what is expected. You may not know it, but you can use your feelings as a weapon, right?

Denotation: The signification in this scene can be seen through the use of a high-angle camera shot, which highlights Yaguchi's vulnerable and weak condition. This is reinforced by a dialogue where Yaguchi consults with his teacher and receives feedback such as, '...what you're lacking is selfishness,' and '...the ability to enjoy something?' but when thinking about it Yaguchi still does not understand the meaning of his teacher's words until finally, he meets his friend.

Connotation: The context in the image clip illustrates that consulting a teacher can help you find out and evaluate the problems that occur. Additionally, talking with a friend can make us feel better, as expressing his feelings allows Yaguchi to gain a new perspective on the issues he is experiencing., it can make Yaguchi have a new perspective on the problems he is experiencing, this help Yaguchi find a way out of the confusion point that he experienced while preparing for the university entrance exam.

Myth: There is a cultural belief that sharing one's problems is a way to begin overcoming them. This reflects one of the core values of *ganbaru*. In Japanese culture, when someone says "*ganbatte ne*" to another, it serves as a word of encouragement and emotional support (Artha, Arsal, 2024). Within the concept of *ganbaru*, seeking advice or opinions from others often leads to new perspectives or solutions that the person facing the problem may not have considered. This is exactly what Yaguchi and his friends demonstrate. The use of *ganbaru* in this context encourages the individual to persevere and ultimately triumph over the difficulties they are facing (Suseno, 2018).

3.1.4 Never Give Up

Table 4. Ganbaru's attitude to Never Give Up, episode 11

Scene

Figure 10. Yaguchi is grounded from his sleep.

Dialog

Yaguchi: "But when I thought of it as a motive, my eyes got used to it right away.

...Damn, my eyes are hard to open...

I fell asleep. But I'm a bit calmer now."



Figure 11. Yauchi's mentor asks about Yaguchi's condition.

Yaguchi: "My eyes hurt. Then my head gets dizzy. And my rash itches. Ah, this is sad. How can it happen at times like this"

Teacher: "It just so happens at times like this. Maybe it's because my eyes are tired and stressed

But it's already this bad on the first day."



Figure 12. Yaguchi, who is scratching his allergy unconsciously

Yaguchi's friend: "Yaguchi-san, your hand!"

Yaguchi: "I scratched it without realizing it"

Denotation: The signification in this scene is shown through Yaguchi collapsing in pain when he wanted to enter the exam room. He even falls asleep during the test.

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Connotation: There is a scene where Yaguchi scratches an itchy rash on his hand, attached to the sentence "I treated it unconsciously". This appears when Yaguchi is tense due to pressure, causing the stress effect that he experiences. Marked by the sentence "but when I consider it a motive, my eyes immediately get used to it," also shows that if he relaxes, the effects of the stress subside. The itchy rash that Yaguchi has indicates that someone who is struggling to get into art college has a fairly severe level of stress

Myth: The myth presented in this scene is that everyone must fight until exhaustion. This is conveyed through visuals of rashes, sore eyes, and dizziness experienced by Yaguchi, physical effects resulting from his persistence and dedication. His teacher also says, 'That's exactly why it happens in moments like this,' a line that signifies how stress-related illness is considered normal. This illustrates the myth within the value of *ganbaru* that everyone must push themselves to the point of fatigue. Doing your best means you have endured long enough and continued to work hard toward achieving a goal (Safira, et al, 2023).

3.2 Discussion

In the anime Blue Period, Yaguchi as the main character in this anime shows perseverance and hard work to achieve his dreams, but on the other hand, Yaguchi also shows the side effects of excessive hard work pressure, resulting in stress, fatigue, neglect of personal well-being, which are characteristics of workaholism.

The meaning of ganbaru in the anime Blue Period is reflected in the character of Yatora Yaguchi, where the spirit of "never giving up" drives him to keep working hard, even in the face of difficulties. At first, the motivation shown by Yaguchi throughout his journey stems from extrinsic motivation. Ganbaru is often driven by the hope of achieving in a strict education system. Where the excessive tutoring learning environment can encourage motivation, especially for those who have high achievement motivation, perfectionism, attention to detail, and high self-efficacy, driven by societal pressure and the desire to be accepted (Benafla, 2023). However, over time, his motivation changed to intrinsic as he fell in love with art. This motivation that arises is a desire caused within himself (Ena, Djami, 2020). With such a strong drive to master the art of painting, Yaguchi is even willing to sacrifice his rest time and well-being to achieve the high standards he sets for himself. The perseverance and ambition a closely related to the concept of workaholism, because there is an excessive focus on the results and achievements that he wants to achieve.

Not all nations have a uniquely distinctive cultural character, but Japan is known worldwide for having unique cultural products such as *ganbaru*. The word *ganbaru* or hard work describes the Japanese work culture, where both students and the general public are recognized for their ethos, strict discipline, enthusiasm, and organizational skills. During the Meiji Restoration period, the state played a strong role in its modernization process. It is no surprise that the value of *ganbaru* is ingrained in Japanese society; this is also represented by Yaguchi. In his pursuit of entering university, Yaguchi continues to try and survive in any situation faced, so that he can reach the point of success. Finally, Yaguchi managed to enter the university he was aiming for. Yaguchi's success was not instant, but achieved through continuous effort. This is shown when Yaguchi's position is someone who is just starting to learn art, he goes through times where he is at the bottom. When he lacks drawing techniques that it puts Yaguchi in an insecure phase, but he continues to move forward. Yaguchi shows that discipline in learning and practicing is the key to achieving success (Sumikawa, 1999).

"Fighting to the Last Breath" has a negative correlation with the value of *ganbaru* due to pushing ourselves too hard, which leads to physical exhaustion and mental disorders described as rashes, sore eyes, and dizziness. The imbalance between effort and self-care that occurs in Yaguchi results in burnout and the inability to maintain productivity in the long term (Widarahhesty, 2020). The disease suffered by Yaguchi is a negative impact of trying to the end, causing effects on physical health triggered by a chaotic mentality. Therefore, Yaguchi needs to integrate self-care into the *ganbaru* culture to reduce the risk of mental health disorders.

Meanwhile, "Determined to Find a Solution" reflects a positive association with the value of *ganbaru*. Because the value of *ganbaru* to encourage Yaguchi is in the Verbal motivation carried out by Yaguchi's friends through calming words that help him stay focused and motivated without

forcing himself too hard, his mentor plays a critical role by providing evaluative guidance, which has a substantial impact on Yaguchi's development. There is Non-verbal motivation as a symbol of deep emotional support (Bari, Hidayat, 2022). The non-verbal motivation is conveyed through a talisman given by Yaguchi's mother when Yaguchi is taking the exam. Through this gesture, Yaguchi gets positive encouragement to continue to be enthusiastic in achieving her dreams. The cultural value of *ganbaru* can have positive or negative impacts depending on how it is implemented. Strong encouragement or the involvement of people around can have a big influence in terms of worsening or improving Yaguchi's mental/physical health.

According to Stuart Hall, representation is a fairly important concept in communication studies (Hall, 1997). In the process, representation in anime is often simplified, reduced, or even added to a value to facilitate understanding in communicating to a wider public (Radja, Sunjaya, 2024). This is done because representation often involves media such as anime as a communication tool to spread a culture to the public. As a result, anime producers have the power to choose, edit, and present stories and narratives that match the message they want to convey. Consequently, the audience engages in an interpretive process based on the concept of a 'second reality.' This leads to the creation of a secondary reality in the anime world, where communication about *ganbaru* conveys the values of perseverance and hard work as the key to success towards achieving the desired ideals. In this sense, the concept of *ganbaru* is culturally constructed by a producer.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the discussion analysis, it was found that the representation of the concept of *ganbaru* appears in several scenes conveyed by Yatora Yaguchi. Thus, the *ganbaru* played by Yaguchi is in line with or supports the main idea of the theory of representation according to Stuart Hall (1997). It does not merely reflect reality but actively constructs meaning through symbols such as dialogue content, imagery, and cinematic elements. This means that the media does not convey meaning neutrally, but rather constructs reality according to certain interests, ideologies, or points of view.

Thus, the conclusion is that the *ganbaru* concept embodied by Yatora has both positive and negative side effects. The positive effects represented are strong determination, perseverance, and a hardworking nature. On the other hand, negative effects were experienced in the Yaguchi case, such as excessive focus on Yaguchi's results and his efforts to meet high standards, which reflect a typical form of workaholism. The constant pressure to achieve and remain productive often leads to negative impacts such as stress, exhaustion, and neglect of personal well-being. Indirectly, the cultural values of *ganbaru* show the impact on mental/physical health (deterioration), and often ignore health factors, both mental and physical.

Ganbaru has a concept that is suitable if applied to Indonesian culture. With the positive effect of creating humans who can compete, are competent, disciplined, and have a fighting spirit to change social status, so that they can improve individual economic problems, spread by anime and mass media. The author hopes that in future research, more researchers will discuss the concept of ganbaru, the concept of ganbaru with the Roland Barthes theory approach is still rarely used; with increasing research, it is hoped that it can complement the shortcomings of this research and add new insights.

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