The Implementation of Cool Japan Strategy during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The 2020 global pandemic did a significant blow to creative industries worldwide, including animation production industries. Japan as one of the most prominent players in animation industries, with its popular animation style called *anime*, also suffered from the pandemic. This study aims to analyze the influence of the Cool Japan Strategy to Japan *anime* industry before and after the Covid 19 pandemic. This research uses the qualitative method of review and read with literature study. The results show that the Cool Japan Strategy has asignificant influence on the development of the *anime* industry, especially in terms of marketing and promotion. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on the *anime* industry, with a decrease in revenue and changes in consumer behavior. Nonetheless, Cool Japan Strategy helps the *anime* industry to adapt to these changes, especially through the use of digital technology. In conclusion, Cool Japan Strategy has an important rolein promoting the *anime* industry, and the ability to adapt to difficultenvironmental changes such as the pandemic can help the *anime* industry to continue to thrive in the future.

*Keywords***:** Cool Japan Strategy, *anime* industry, COVID-19, pandemic, popular culture

1. Introduction

Cool Japan is a policy derived from a program created by the Japanese government, which involves ministries and agencies to develop the cultural industry in the form of overseas content. Be it movies, drama series, animation series, and *manga* (comics). The Cool Japan strategy aims to maximize the role of popular culture products in increasing state revenue. This strategy has three stages: create "Japan Boom", open businesses abroad, and attract tourists to visit Japan (Japan Cabinet Office, 2016).

Before the 2000s, the Japanese government did not pay much attention to this program because it was considered not profitable and not important enough. The reason is that during the 1990s, Japan experienced difficult times due to an economic bubble that led to a decline in economic growth and a financial crisis (Morikawa and Kanematsu, 2018). This period caused the government to focus on economic recovery and neglect the promotion of Japanese popular culture to the outside world. Also, at that time, Japanese popular culture such as *anime* and *manga*, which are part of Cool Japan, were still considered as something that only young people were interested in and considered less classy. Therefore, the Japanese government paid little attention to the business potential and profits that could be generated from this industry. However, a few years later the program showed a significant increase, so the government finally paid attention to this Cool Japan which is a cultural industry program.

The enthusiasm of the international community in accepting creative content originating from Japan was quite large, so this popularity led the governmentto assume that this policy could stimulate the growth of Japan's domestic economy. In addition to economic benefits, the Cool Japan strategy also creates a positive brand image for Japan(Pratama, Alvine D., Puspitasari, Anggun, 2018).

One part of the Cool Japan strategy, which is on creative content, is the Animation series or *Anime*. *Anime* in Cool Japan is used as a medium to introduce Japanese culture and entertainment. The popularity of *Anime* is enough to influence many people so that *Anime* has gradually become the most famous form of animated series entertainment in the world. Also, *Anime* makes it easier for Cool

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Japan to spread its influence. *Anime* itself was first created in 1907. The word *Anime* consists of three characters of *katakana* writing which is an absorption of the English word "Animation", then pronounced as *Anime-shon* or *Anime*. 10 years after *Anime* was invented, precisely in 1917 *Anime* began to experience development in duration and visual appearance. Since then Japan has begun to seriously develop *Anime* as part of the Japanese industry. *Anime* reached wide popularity after Osamu Tezuka's "Astro Boy" *Anime* in 1963. Astro boy was the first Japanese *Anime* to be translated into English and then aired in the United States at that time. Astro Boy also succeeded in becoming a gateway that opened Japanese *Anime* to be increasingly produced and recognized by the world.

In addition, the Japanese Government also encourages the Japanese *anime* industry to develop overseas business and improve global competitiveness. Some of the ways to achieve these goals include:

a. Promote *anime* fairs and festivals**:** The Japanese government organizes *anime* fairs and festivals overseas to introduce the Japanese *anime* industry to the international market. This provides an opportunity for Japanese *anime* producers to showcase their products and build business networks with international companies.
b. Encourage foreign investment: The Japanese government provides incentives and facilities for foreign companies looking to invest in the Japanese *anime* industry. This opens opportunities for Japanese companies to partner with foreign companies to develop more innovative *anime* works and increase global competitiveness.
c. Provide financial support: The Japanese government provides financial support to Japanese *anime* producers who want to enter the international market. This helps Japanese *anime* producers to produce higher quality *anime* works and increase global competitiveness.

With the introduction of *Anime* to the international market, the Japanese government has utilized the popularity of *Anime* to attract foreign tourists to visit Japan. Some of the ways to achieve this goal include:

a. Build attractions based on *anime*: The Japanese government supports building attractions based on popular *anime*, such as Ghibli studio, Pokemon Center, and Gundam Front Tokyo. These attractions attract foreign tourists who want to experience the *anime* and *manga* they love.
b. Promote *anime* as a tourist attraction: The Japanese government is conducting promotional campaigns overseas to promote *anime* as a tourist attraction. The Japanese government is promoting locations used as settings for popular *anime*, such as Kyoto, Tokyo, and Hokkaido.
c. Encourage collaboration between the *anime* and tourism industries: The Japanese government encourages collaboration between the *anime* and tourism industries to develop *anime*-related travel packages. For example, there are tour packages that offer tours of popular *anime* filming locations, and tours of renowned animation studios.
d. Improve information and experience services for foreign tourists: The Japanese government is improving information and experience services for foreign tourists, such as providing *anime* and *manga* maps, providing tour guides who speak foreign languages, and providing more varied food menu options.

Through Cool Japan, the Japanese government seems to want to show the world that Japan is a peaceful and culturally rich country (Salim, Ryan C., 2016). Not only in traditional culture, but also popular culture such as *Anime*. The development of *Anime* to date as a Japanese popular culture is the result of policy strategies created by the Japanese government. In addition, the uniqueness of *Anime* such as its artstyle that seems attractive and detailed, and its voice acting that seems animated and dramatic are factors that support the popularity of *Anime* in the world. Cool Japan as a foreign policy related to diplomacy through the creative content industry including *Anime* has succeeded in

assisting and enhancing business development, innovation generation, and relationship building as a result of international interaction and cooperation. The rapid growth of *Anime* from year to year makes Cool Japan's strategy work well in promoting Japanese pop-culture. Thus, innovations are often made to *Anime* as a form of maintaining popularity and competing with other countries' creative industries. The purpose of this reasearch is to analyze the effect of Cool Japan's strategy on the *anime* industry before and after the pandemic, and to understand how the *anime* industry is adapting to changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Research Method

This research was conducted qualitatively. Data were obtained from various literature sources related to the *anime* industry and Cool Japan strategy, such as journal articles, books, research reports, and related documents. The data were then analyzed through a review and reading process using qualitative analysis techniques, such as data reduction, data organization, and conclusion drawing. The data analysis process began with reading and understanding literature sources related to the research topic. Furthermore, the data was analyzed by identifying the main themes, comparing and connecting between the themes, and drawing conclusions from the results of the analysis. The results of the analysis are then used to answer the research questions and illustrate how Cool Japan strategy influenced the *anime* industry before and after the pandemic, as well as how the *anime* industry adapted to these changes.

3. Discussion

According to Official Japanese Government site, the Cool Japan Strategy is the Japanese government's strategy to expand and introduce Japanese culture to the world. In this strategy, the Japanese government focuses on creative industries such as *anime*, *manga*, video games, and Japanese music, as well as food, fashion, and design. The goal is to increase interest in and recognition of Japanese culture, as well as boost tourism and the country's economy.

Before the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Cool Japan Strategy had made many positive offers in promoting Japanese culture throughout the world. However, when entering the Pandemic period, the Cool Japan strategy experienced several obstacles. One of them affected Japan's creative industry sector, such as the cessation of *anime* and video game production, as well as the postponement of festivals and cultural events. Thus, the number of tourists visiting Japan decreased by 87.1% (JNTO, 2019). To overcome the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Japanese government has made various efforts. One of them is by launching various initiatives to promote Japanese culture online. Some cultural events and festivals are held virtually, while some museums and art galleries hold virtual events to introduce Japanese art and culture to the global community. Although the COVID-19 had a significant impact on Cool Japan Strategy, the Japanese government continues to promote Japanese culture amidst this difficult situation. In the long run. The Cool Japan Strategy is still considered an important strategy to increase interest in and recognition of Japanese culture, as well as boost tourism and the country's economy.

Overall, the Cool Japan Strategy can be considered as the Japanese government's effort to introduce and expand Japanese culture to the rest of the world. Although the strategy has some shortcomings, it has made a positive contribution to increasing interest in and recognition of Japanese culture around the world.

3.1 Japan Boom on Anime and Anime Industry during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Japan boom is a term used to describe the period when Japanese popular culture became highly desirable overseas. Typically, the term refers to the period between the late 1970s and early 1990s, when Japanese *anime*, *manga*, J-pop music, and video games began to attract worldwide attention (Budianto, 2015). And until now, the Japan Boom is still being implemented by the Japanese government as an effort to disseminate and maintain the popularity of Japanese culture.

Currently, the *anime*-related Japan boom is becoming very popular outside of Japan, and the

Japanese *anime* industry is growing rapidly as demand from the international market continues to increase. Some of the factors that support the current boom of the Japanese *anime* industry include:

a. Online streaming: Online streaming platforms like Netflix, Crunchyroll, Hulu, and Amazon Prime Video make *anime* more accessible and reach viewers around the world. This allows people to watch *anime* legally and in good quality, even in countries that do not have television stations or movie theaters that show *anime*.
b. Fan communities: *Anime* fan communities around the world are growing, including on social media such as Twitter and Instagram, online forums, and *anime* events held in different countries. This cements the popularity of *anime* and introduces it to a wider audience.
c. Governmental Support: The Japanese government continues to support the *anime* industry and promote it through programs such as the Cool Japan Strategy. The government also supports *anime* industry associations in developing works and marketing them to international markets.

In recent years, several Japanese *anime* such as "Demon Slayer", "Jujutsu Kaisen", and "Attack on Titan" have broken box office records and gained immense popularity worldwide. This shows that the *anime* industry boom in Japan is still ongoing and will continue to grow inthe future (Forbes, 2021). Through such measures, the Japanese government hopes to improve the global competitiveness of Japan's *anime* industry and increase exports of Japanese cultural productsto international markets. In the long run, the Cool Japan Strategy is expected to boost the Japanese economy and help promote Japanese culture to the rest of the world.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been regulatory changes in the working methods and environment in Japan. On February 25, the government requested the suspension of all large-scale gatherings and the closure of all schools. Many Japanese companies also allowed their employees to work from home. This minimizes contact between people, reducing the risk of transmission. This is also no exception in the *Anime* industry, where several *anime* studios make it a rule for their employees to work from home, which has different impacts depending on the studio (Nikkei Asia, 2020).

Another impact that occurs in the *Anime* Industry, is in the dubbing process of voice actors. According to Tadashi Sudo, a veteran *anime* critic and founder of the Industry Trade site *Anime!Anime!*, the process of recording or dubbing voices for *anime* has several changes. Previously, the dubbing process involved many *anime* voice actors or *seiyuu* gathering as a complete cast in one room. Then they would speak loudly to each other, filling the air. However, since the new COVID-19 regulations were implemented, the voice recordingprocess has also changed. Whereas before the *voice actors* gathered in one room together and had adialog, now the seiyuu come into the room one by one to record their dialog. According to Sudo, this new recording process made the spontaneous interaction between the cast disappear, so sometimes the dialog between characters would feel less natural. But despite this drawback, the sound recording process has been going well until now without any significantproblems.

Apart from this, there are also other strategic changes implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Cool Japan program, *Anime* Industry. Here are some of those changes:

a. Increased Online Marketing: One of the biggest changes in the *anime* industry during the pandemic has been the rise of online marketing. With social distancing and travel restrictions imposed around the world, *anime* companies are using social media and other digital platforms to promote their works online. One of them, as explained above, is relying on streaming service platforms todistribute *anime*.
b. Movies and Series release delays: Many movies and *anime* series released during the pandemic have been delayed. Someproductions were even temporarily halted due to

production and supply constraints. Adaptation of release schedules for international target markets. To increase the sales and popularity of *anime* in international markets, some companies have changed their release schedules to times more suitable for audiences outside Japan.

c. Developing own Streaming platform: Some *anime* companies have developed their own streaming platforms to control content distribution and increase their profits. With their own streaming platforms, companies can set subscription prices and reduce distribution costs through third-party providers (Netflix, Crunchyroll, Amazon Prime).

d. Offers new Pandemic-related content: Some *anime* companies are creating new content related to the pandemic, such as stories about fighting the virus or stories about life experiences during the pandemic, so that viewers can relate more to the situation that they're currently feel.

Through these measures, the Japanese government hopes to attract more foreign tourists to Japan and boost the tourism industry. In the long run, the Cool Japan Strategy is expected to help promote Japanese culture to the rest of the world and boost the Japanese economy.

3.2 Anime Festival

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, Cool Japan Strategy and the *Anime* Industry have been affected. Many *anime* events and festivals have been cancelled or postponed due to social and travel restrictions imposed around the world. This has impacted the revenue and growth of the industry which has been forced to reduce production and scale down activities. However, with the restrictions on off-meeting based festivals, Cool Japan decided to still hold the *anime* Festival online. One of the online *anime* festivals held by Cool Japan during the pandemic was "*Anime* Japan 2021 ONLINE". The festival was held on March 2021 and was an online edition of the annual *anime* festival "*Anime* Japan" that is usually held at Tokyo Big Sight. The event was held in response to the social restrictions and travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the official site, *Anime* Japan 2021 ONLINE features various programs, such as discussion panels, Q&A sessions, interviews with *anime* creators, and presentations of the latest products from *anime* companies. In addition, the festival also features content that can be enjoyed online, such as music concerts, cosplay competitions, and virtual booths. Besides "*Anime* Japan 2021 ONLINE", there are also other online *anime* festivals held with the Cool Japan Strategy during the pandemic, such as "KADOKAWA Light Novel Expo 2021 Online" and "Crunchyroll Expo 2021". At these events, *anime* fans can enjoy *anime* and *manga*-related programs and content from around the world without having to travel far or face the risk of contracting COVID-19.

Through holding *anime* festivals online, Cool Japan Strategy can continue to promote the *anime* industry and introduce Japanese culture to a global audience without compromising the health and safety of the people involved in the event. In addition, this online *anime* festival can also be an attractive alternative for *anime* fans who cannot physically attend.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and analysis conducted, the situation and changes to Cool Japan strategy towards the *Anime* Industry are seen in accordance with Charles Hermann's theory of 4 levels in Foreign Policy, precisely at the second level, namely Program Change. At this level, what is done and the methods and procedures for doing it change to adapt to the changes that occur. It can be seen from the methods previously applied in the Cool Japan strategy, which had to be changed to adjust to the current conditions, namely COVID-19. In addition, the production and distribution process of the *Anime* industry has also undergone some changes but not so significant.

The changes were in the form of working method and location from the animation studio where animators gather and do their work, to work from home. In addition, other processes such as

dubbing also experienced changes to the recording process, which was originally recorded simultaneously in one place, to be recorded one by one in turn, or voice actors were asked to record at their respective homes. The method and process of distributing*anime* has also changed quite a bit, where previously many studios distributed their *anime* through physical copies (DVD, Blu-ray disc), to digital distribution through streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, hulu, and so on. However, despite these changes, the market demand for *anime* online is increasing. Due to the COVID-19 situation, most people can only stay at home, and to keep themselves entertained, watching *Anime* is one of the mainsolutions for them. Then, the main goal of this policy itself has not changed, which is to spreadinfluence and popularize Japanese culture to the international community through this Cool Japan strategy.

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