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**CROSS- CULTURAL IMPACT OF SPORTS MANGA AND ANIME: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF “HAIKYUU” AND “HANEBADO”**

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The realm of manga and anime has transcended national borders captivating audiences worldwide with its diverse genres and captivating narratives. Among these genres, sports anime and manga have emerged as a significant cultural phenomenon, attracting a devoted following both in Japan and beyond. This research endeavours to explore the landscape of sports manga and anime, with a primary focus on the critically acclaimed series "Haikyuu" and a comparative analysis involving "Hanebado." By exploring the cultural nuances, reception, and influence of these manga/anime across Japanese and American demographics, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the globalization of Japanese popular culture.

The rise of manga and anime as global cultural exports has been remarkable, with enthusiasts spanning various age groups, genders, and geographical locations. The ascendancy of manga and

anime as global cultural exports is a testament to their universal appeal and enduring popularity. From the bustling streets of Tokyo to the vibrant subcultures of New York City, enthusiasts of all ages and backgrounds immerse themselves in the captivating worlds depicted in these mediums. The transcendence of linguistic and cultural barriers has facilitated the widespread dissemination of manga and anime, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and shared cultural experiences among fans worldwide. Within this expansive landscape, sports manga and anime occupy a unique position, offering narratives that resonate with audiences on a deeply emotional and visceral level. Whether it be the exhilarating triumphs of victory or the poignant struggles of defeat, these stories evoke a range of emotions that transcend cultural boundaries and resonate with individuals from diverse settings.

Studying the cross-cultural impact of sports manga and anime holds significant importance in the realm of cultural studies, media studies, and international relations. Sports manga and anime represent more than just entertainment; they are cultural artifacts that reflect the socio-political dynamics of contemporary Japan while simultaneously serving as vehicles for cultural dissemination on the global stage. These mediums have transcended traditional boundaries, reaching audiences worldwide and fostering intercultural dialogue and exchange in an increasingly interconnected world. At the heart of their cross-cultural appeal lies their ability to resonate with audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. Unlike traditional forms of media, sports manga and anime possess a visual and narrative language that transcends linguistic barriers, allowing them to convey universal themes and emotions that resonate with audiences on a deeper level. Whether it be the adrenaline of victory, the heart-wrenching struggles of defeat, or the bonds forged through teamwork and camaraderie, these narratives evoke a range of emotions that are universally understood and appreciated. Moreover, sports manga and anime serve as windows into Japanese society and culture, offering glimpses of its values, traditions, and societal norms. Through their narratives, audiences are exposed to facets of Japanese life, such as the importance of perseverance, discipline, and teamwork, which are integral to the cultural fabric of Japan. By immersing themselves in these narratives, audiences gain insights into the cultural nuances and intricacies of Japanese society, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of Japanese culture and identity. Furthermore, the global popularity of sports manga and anime has catalysed a thriving fan culture characterized by international fan communities, fan conventions, and fan-generated content. These fan communities serve as hubs for cultural exchange and interaction, where fans from different cultural backgrounds come together to share their love for these mediums, discuss their favourite series, and engage in

creative endeavours such as fan fiction, fan art, and cosplay. Through these interactions, fans not only forge connections with fellow enthusiasts but also exchange cultural perspectives and insights, enriching their understanding of different cultures and fostering cross-cultural friendships and collaborations. In addition to their role in fostering cultural exchange, the global popularity of sports manga and anime has not gone unnoticed by policymakers and cultural diplomats seeking to harness the soft power potential of Japanese popular culture. It contributes to the soft power arsenal of Japan, enhancing its global image and influence. As cultural ambassadors, these mediums promote positive perceptions of Japan and its society, showcasing its creativity, innovation, and cultural heritage to audiences worldwide. By disseminating Japanese popular culture on a global scale, sports manga and anime help to cultivate a sense of affinity and familiarity with Japan among international audiences, strengthening cultural ties and promoting mutual understanding and cooperation between Japan and the rest of the world.

The selection of "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" as focal points for this research is guided by their prominence within the sports manga and anime genre and their distinct thematic and stylistic elements. "Haikyuu," created by Haruichi Furudate, follows the journey of a high school volleyball team as they strive for greatness, blending elements of intense competition with themes of friendship, perseverance, and personal growth. On the other hand, "Hanebado," authored by Kousuke Hamada, explores the competitive world of badminton through the eyes of its determined protagonist, delving into themes of ambition, rivalry, and self-discovery. Despite their thematic differences, both series share a common thread in their ability to captivate audiences with compelling narratives, dynamic characters, and breathtaking sports action. This research is guided by three overarching questions that seek to unravel the complexities of cross-cultural reception and engagement within the realm of sports manga and anime: (a) How

do "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" differ in their reception across two cultural backgrounds? (b) What graphic elements within "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" contribute to their cross-cultural appeal? (c) In what ways do the art styles of these manga impact the overall reception and engagement of the series globally? (d) How are gender narratives redefined in the sports genre of manga/anime? In pursuit of answers to these questions, this study sets out the following objectives- firstly, to compare and contrast the reception of "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" within Japanese and American cultural contexts, exploring the factors that contribute to their popularity and appeal across these two demographics. Secondly, to analyse the graphic elements present in both series and their contribution to cross-cultural appeal, examining how visual storytelling techniques are utilized to evoke emotional responses and resonate with audiences on a global scale. Thirdly, to assess the influence of the art styles employed in "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" on the global sports anime and manga community, considering how stylistic choices shape audience perceptions and contribute to the overall reception and engagement of the series. And lastly, to critique the evolving structures of gender stereotypes in the expanding landscape of sports manga and anime culture.

II

The reception of manga and anime in different cultural contexts provides a rich field of study, particularly as these mediums have gained substantial global followings. "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" are two sports anime and manga series that, while both hailing from Japan, have experienced varying levels of popularity and different receptions in their home country compared to the United States. "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" highlight the genre's appeal through their

engaging storylines and dynamic character portrayals. Despite their shared genre, these series are received differently within Japanese and American cultural contexts. By comparing the reception of these series in Japan and the U.S., we can uncover the cultural factors that influence their appeal and understand the broader implications of cross-cultural media consumption.

In Japan, "Haikyuu" has been exceptionally well-received. Its portrayal of high school volleyball, coupled with its dynamic animation and detailed character development, has resonated deeply with Japanese audiences. The cultural significance of school sports in Japan, as highlighted by the popularity of national high school sports tournaments such as the Inter-High and Spring High Volleyball tournaments, provides a familiar and engaging backdrop for "Haikyuu" (Norris, 2018). The series' emphasis on teamwork, perseverance, and overcoming personal and collective obstacles aligns well with the values embedded in Japanese school sports culture.

"Hanebado", on the other hand, while popular, has not achieved the same level of acclaim as "Haikyuu". The series, which focuses on high school badminton, a sport with a smaller following in Japan compared to volleyball, presents a more niche appeal. However, it is appreciated for its detailed animation and complex character interactions. The intense personal dramas and the psychological aspects explored in "Hanebado" provide a different flavour, catering to a segment of the audience interested in more character-driven narratives.

In the United States, the reception of manga and anime is influenced by different cultural and media consumption habits. While these forms of entertainment have grown significantly in popularity, they still occupy a more niche space compared to mainstream American comics and animations. "Haikyuu" has successfully crossed cultural boundaries, finding a substantial fanbase in the United States. Its themes of teamwork and individual growth are universally appealing and

easily understood across different cultures. American audiences, particularly those involved in sports or team activities, find the high-energy matches and the camaraderie between characters

particularly engaging (Anime Manga Studies, 2024). The series' universal themes of striving for excellence and the underdog story are easily accessible to American viewers, who are familiar with such narratives through their own sports films and series. Furthermore, the increasing interest in volleyball as a sport in the U.S., particularly among youth, has helped "Haikyuu" gain traction (Norris, 2018).

"Hanebado," on the other hand, has a more specialized audience in the

U.S. Its exploration of personal and psychological themes resonates with viewers who enjoy character-driven stories. However, the sport of badminton does not hold the same level of cultural significance in the U.S. as it does in Japan, which affects its broader appeal. The series'

intense focus on the inner lives of its characters, while appreciated by some, can be less engaging to those who prefer the action-packed, straightforward sports narratives found in "Haikyuu."

The differences in reception between "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" in Japan and the U.S. can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the sports featured in each series play a significant role.

Volleyball enjoys a higher profile in both Japan and the U.S., providing a ready-made audience for "Haikyuu". In contrast, badminton, while popular in certain regions and demographics, does not have the same widespread appeal, affecting "Hanebado's" reception. Secondly, the thematic elements and narrative styles of the two series cater to different audience preferences. "Haikyuu" emphasises on teamwork and collective achievement resonates well with cultural values in both Japan and the U.S. On the other hand, "Hanebado's" focus on individual psychological struggles and interpersonal drama appeals to a niche audience that appreciates more character-driven stories. Thirdly, the characters in "Haikyuu" are designed to be relatable and inspirational, encouraging viewers to empathize with their journeys. "Hanebado" features more complex and

often darker character arcs, which can be polarizing depending on the viewer's preferences. Lastly, Japanese audiences, being the primary consumers of manga and anime, have specific expectations and preferences shaped by their cultural context. American audiences, while increasingly open to diverse forms of media, still approach these series with different cultural lenses and media consumption habits.

The cross-cultural reception of "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" highlights the intricate dynamics of cultural globalization and the dissemination of Japanese popular culture. While both series offer high-quality storytelling and animation and are well received in their native Japan, their reception in the United States varies based on cultural significance, thematic appeal, and character development. Understanding these differences provides valuable insights into the complexities of cultural exchange and the factors that contribute to the global appeal of sports manga and anime.

III

Beyond captivating narratives and relatable themes, sports manga and anime like "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" leverage powerful graphic elements to transcend cultural barriers and resonate with audiences globally.

Manga and anime rely heavily on visuals to convey emotions, actions, and character development. Exaggerated expressions, dynamic action sequences, and well-composed panels can effectively communicate the intensity of competition, the agony of defeat, and the thrill of victory, even without spoken dialogue (Norris 2018). This visual language allows audiences from diverse cultures to grasp the narrative on an emotional level, fostering a sense of connection with the characters and the sport itself.

In chapter 0 of “Haikyuu”, the division of panels leads to a dramatic foreground of main characters aiming for the shot, intensifying the Vigor of the *nekkeitsu* shonen genre. (Ducarme 2018) The shortened dialogue and caption boxes coupled with bleeding images of characters with in-motion expressions create a dynamic visual effect which is mirrored in the respective animation of the series. The graphic elements for both the manga and anime highlight the ‘high-tension’ feel that urges an adrenaline rush among the audience. Effective use of shading in the manga series especially during confrontation moments heightens the ‘on-edge’ impact of the visual. The structure of the manga usually follows the three-division formula with top, middle and bottom panels. In the top panels, a large panel shows an overview of the volleyball court with players positioned for a serve coupled with smaller inset panels showing close-ups of the protagonists. Following it is a series of medium sized panels depicting the serve with motion lines arching the ball’s trajectory and a reaction shot of the opposing team. The bottom panels are close-up panels of players preparing to receive the ball with intense detail highlighting focused eyes, perspiration and in-motion shots.

On the other hand, in chapter 1 of “Hanebado”, the panels unfold a non-chronological storyline that zooms in and out of the main protagonists’ character arc. Although it is a sports genre manga, it aligns more to the *Jousei* aspect of sports. The art style is less dynamic and more ‘*shoujo-esque*’ and introduces comic effects that prevail throughout the first chapter. This comic element can also create a sense of illusion that renders the audience complacent as the plot thickens with darker themes overarching the seemingly ‘cute’ and ‘endearing’ story of Ayano Hanesaki.

Facial expressions and body language play a crucial role in conveying emotions and character interactions (Orsu, Comics Culture). A well-timed close-up on a determined athlete's eyes or a

celebratory fist pump can be universally understood, regardless of language. This proficiency in non-verbal communication makes sports manga and anime particularly accessible to international audiences.

In the climactic and final chapters of “Haikyuu”, the aggravation of the sequence is exaggerated with the sharp stoic facial expressions of players on both sides of the court. The ‘ready set’ action that conveys a dynamic body language and co-relates to the actual game’s motion creates a simulation effect. The infamous ‘pause’ that sets in after the final point in the various arcs

(Shiratorizawa arc, Season 3; Aoba Johsai Arc, Season 2) is well expressed in the graphic manga through facial close-ups and all picture pages. The series utilizes dynamic action sequences to

capture the fast-paced nature of volleyball. The panels shift swiftly during rallies encompassing the in-game effect in a graphic medium. Clear panel layouts showcase the flow of the game, and the strategic devices employed by the characters. The panels in the “Haikyuu” manga vary significantly in size and shape, creating a dynamic reading experience. Larger panels are often used to emphasize important moments or dramatic scenes, while smaller panels can depict quick actions or conversations. Pages in the first volume of the series are composed with a mix of large, medium, and small panels, which helps to pace the story, although key moments may span a full page or even two-page spreads for maximum impact. Expressive character designs and exaggerated reactions during rallies effectively convey the emotions and determination of the players.

Similarly, in the final chapter of “Hanebado” (Ch-79, Vol 16), the graphic elements that outline the non-verbal communicative aspects are emphatic facial expressions and lively dramatic story sequences. The plotline is more interpersonal and explores the character in-depth and lightly zooms back into a time in real-life sport moment. This also creates a kind of disjunction between

the high point of the sport and the intertwined character arc. While the action might be less frenetic compared to "Haikyuu", "Hanebado" utilizes close-up panels to emphasize the characters' expressions and inner struggles during intense matches. The series also employs detailed illustrations of badminton techniques, potentially appealing to badminton enthusiasts who appreciate the technical accuracy of the sport's portrayal.

The strategic use of graphic elements in sports manga and anime plays a pivotal role in their global success. Visual storytelling techniques, non-verbal communication cues, and cinematic approaches all contribute to a universally understood language that transcends cultural barriers.

By effectively conveying emotions, actions, and the essence of the sport, these graphic elements allow audiences worldwide to connect with the narratives and cheer on their favourite characters, solidifying the cross-cultural appeal of sports manga and anime.

IV

The art styles of "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" while both depicting sports, utilize distinct visual approaches to enhance the storytelling, character emotions, and reception of the audience.

"Haikyuu" employs a dynamic and expressive art style. Characters' eyes widen in determination, sweat beads fly during rallies, and exaggerated movements capture the intensity and flow of volleyball. This energetic style fuels the excitement of the competition and allows viewers to feel the thrill of victory and sting of defeat alongside the characters. "Haikyuu" primarily adheres to the *shonen* sports manga aesthetic. Bold lines, dynamic perspectives, and exaggerated features like sharp eyes and defined muscles create a high-energy atmosphere. However, subtle *seinen*

(adult male) influences can be found. The character designs, while still maintaining a youthful look, avoid overly simplistic features (Norris 2018). This adds a layer of maturity, appealing to a broader audience that might appreciate a less cutesy style. The high-octane art style of “Haikyuu” is specifically designed to be visually engaging for a broad audience, particularly young male viewers who enjoy the action and competitive spirit of shonen sports narratives. The clear visuals and emphasis on action sequences make it easy to follow the game's flow and immerse oneself in the thrill of competition.

In contrast, “Hanebado” adopts a more subtle approach. The art style prioritizes detailed character expressions through close-up panels. Viewers can see the flicker of nerves in a player's eyes or the quiet determination etched on their face. This focus on non-verbal communication allows viewers to connect with the characters' internal struggles and mental fortitude during matches. “Hanebado” adopts a unique stylistic approach. The character designs lean towards a *Jousei* (women's) aesthetic, featuring more slender and elegant figures compared to the bulkier builds common in shonen. However, it also incorporates elements of *shoujo* (girls') manga with softer lines and occasional use of the *chibi* (super-deformed) style for comedic effect, particularly in character reactions. Despite these stylistic flourishes, “Hanebado” prioritizes technical accuracy in badminton techniques. The artwork showcases detailed illustrations of strokes, footwork, and court positioning, appealing to viewers who appreciate a more realistic portrayal of the sport. The use of short, high-detail sequences during crucial rallies adds a layer of realism, emphasizing the intensity and precision required for winning shots. This creates a captivating contrast with the more relaxed, expressive style used during character interactions. “Hanebado’s” art style caters to a slightly more sophisticated audience. While still visually engaging, the focus on detailed expressions and badminton techniques might require a higher

level of viewer engagement. However, this style rewards close attention by fostering deeper connections with the characters' emotions and the intricacies of the sport itself.

Both “Haikyuu” and “Hanebado” showcase how sports manga art styles are evolving beyond just depicting action. They integrate elements from other genres, like the *seinen* influence in “Haikyuu” and the *shoujo/Jousei* blend in “Hanebado,” creating a richer visual experience. This focus on character development and strategic depth broadens the appeal of sports manga to a global audience, not just those seeking pure action. The success of both series demonstrates that these stylistic innovations resonate with international readers.

“Haikyuu” and “Hanebado” represent a sophisticated approach to art style in sports manga. They blend established genre aesthetics with innovative elements, creating visually engaging experiences that appeal to a global audience. This highlights the ongoing evolution of the sports manga art form on the international stage.

V

“Haikyuu” and “Hanebado,” despite both being sports anime, approach the portrayal of gender in contrasting ways.

“Haikyuu” operates within the shonen genre, known for its focus on male characters with stereotypically masculine traits like strength, determination, and unwavering fighting spirit. The narrative primarily revolves around the male characters' journeys and struggles. However,

“Haikyuu” subtly subverts these expectations. While the core cast is male, the series portrays a supportive network of female characters, including coaches, managers, and rivals. These

characters are not simply relegated to romantic interests or background decorations. They play crucial roles in motivating and supporting the male characters, demonstrating strength and competence in their respective domains. The characters themselves do not stick to a hyper-masculine trait often imposed in sports genres. The characters are in-touch with their feminine side and show mutual trust and respect towards their female counterparts (Tanaka, Sugawara, Hinata). When viewed through a feminist lens, “Haikyuu” can be seen as challenging the traditional portrayal of masculinity in shonen. It expands the definition of strength to encompass emotional intelligence, teamwork, and perseverance, qualities not solely confined to the male characters.

“Hanebado” dives into the realm of shoujo (girls') sports anime. While shoujo is often associated with femininity and romance, “Hanebado” presents a more nuanced portrayal. The female characters are driven by ambition and a passion for badminton, showcasing their athletic prowess and strategic minds. The art style itself incorporates elements of *Jousei* (women's) manga with *shoujo* aesthetics. The characters have a less overtly sexualized appearance compared to some traditional shoujo, promoting a more gender-fluid visual representation. “Hanebado’s” approach to gender has sparked discussions within fan communities. Some viewers appreciate the emphasis on female athleticism and the break from stereotypical shoujo tropes. Others might find the gender-fluid art style and focus on traditionally masculine traits in female characters to be unconventional or challenging traditional gender norms.

Regardless, both “Haikyuu” and “Hanebado” contribute to the evolving landscape of gender representation in sports anime. “Haikyuu” expands the definition of masculinity within shonen, while “Hanebado” challenges traditional shoujo expectations and explores gender fluidity

through its art style. While these portrayals might not be universally accepted, they spark critical discussions and pave the way for more inclusive narratives in sports anime and manga.

VI

This research has thoroughly examined the cross-cultural impact of sports manga and anime, with a particular focus on "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado." By examining their reception in both Japanese and American contexts, it has proven that "Haikyuu" appeals broadly across cultures due to its universal themes of teamwork, perseverance, and personal growth, while "Hanebado" finds a more specialized audience appreciative of its psychological depth and character-driven narratives. One of the significant findings is the role of graphic elements in enhancing cross-cultural appeal. Both series utilize visual storytelling techniques that evoke strong emotional responses, helping them transcend cultural barriers. The dynamic art styles and intense sports action sequences are crucial in shaping audience perceptions and engagement globally.

Additionally, the research delved into the evolving gender stereotypes within sports manga and anime, revealing that both "Haikyuu" and "Hanebado" challenge traditional gender roles through their nuanced characters and progressive storylines, thereby enhancing the genre's contemporary relevance and appeal.

By addressing the comparative reception and cultural impact of these series, this study fills a critical research gap and has provided valuable insights into the globalization of Japanese popular culture. The findings showcase the significance of sports manga and anime in fostering intercultural dialogue, promoting mutual understanding, and serving as cultural ambassadors that enhance Japan's soft power on the global stage. This research contributes to the fields of cultural

studies, media studies, and international relations, offering a comprehensive analysis of how

sports manga and anime function as cultural artifacts bridging cultural divides. The insights from this study are academically significant and have practical implications for policymakers and cultural diplomats seeking to leverage popular culture for cultural diplomacy and international cooperation.

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