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## **Anime as Japanese Intercultural Communication: A Study of the *Weeaboo* Community of Indonesian Generation Z and Y**

### **Abstract**

Acculturation today does not only occur due to direct physical interaction between two different cultural groups, but rather, it is due more to online interaction. Cultural interaction also raises the imitation of the visual aspects of popular commodities, such as films being cultural products. This study aims to explore subcultures and identity communication built and maintained in the weeaboo fandom community outside of Japan. It also analyzes the daily experiences of individuals in interacting within the community and outside of it. This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach through detailed observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of community interactions on social media. Because weeaboo's scope is anime fans in various countries other than Japan, the sources and participants of this study were drawn mainly from Indonesia. The results showed that the weeaboo subculture arose between millennials and generation Z anime lovers. These cohorts began to recognize anime and form communities from childhood with those with the same habits, so similar characters and preferences emerge. Acculturation occurs in contiguity between two primary cultures where a new culture is born. In the context of anime, there is acculturation between Japanese culture (home culture) with the culture of a different country, as anime fans in the community do their routines and habits differently from the anime home country (Japan) in the host country (outside Japan). This study found that the weeaboo subculture of Indonesian Generation Z and Y is shaped by acculturation in intercultural communication such as in language, expressions, fashion, accessories, make-up, hairstyle, cuisine, group attitudes, values, and natural and cultural preferences of Japanese destinations. Based on the findings, further research can continue to analyze other aspects that are affected by the weeaboo community, such as international relations, economic aspects, and the Japanese tourism industry.

**Keywords:** Gen Z, millennials, weeaboo, Japanese anime, acculturation, identity of community, intercultural communication.

### **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, in the post-industrial era, the focus on communication, information technology, and creative work in the digital world is proliferating. Throughout the world, there are changes in the social, business, political, and cultural environments related to Information

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Communication Technology (ICT). For example, Japan as a nation that has stood for thousands of years, has a robust culture reflected in its productive society. Historically, in the Tokugawa period, Japanese minimized their contact with the outside world (Hall & Jansen, 2015). That era was used to build and foster national culture so that Japan had a strong identity and distinctiveness. Hein (2009) added the identity of Japanese people who appreciate culture, tradition, nature, and historical values. They are individuals in the community, free but disciplined, full of energy for future growth, blessed with leadership that is trusted, respected, and loved by the international community. Therefore, cultural commodity is one of the most promising business lines. The anime industry, by the Japanese Anime Association (AJA) consisting of 100 producers, announced that in 2016, it reached 2,009 Trillion Yen in revenue. Revenues came from nine areas, including films, television series, and others for the distribution of the domestic market and overseas distribution. AJA said that 767.6 billion yen was obtained through overseas distribution, both film screenings and other types of screenings. The second-largest producer worth 562.7 billion yen came from merchandising associated with various anime characters (Chapman, 2017). Anime is not just a business that grows from the Japanese cultural industry but acts as the nation's cultural ambassador to the world (Iwabuchi, 2015). Even the creative industry on a large scale, is a soft power to voice Japanese interests in global relations. Watanabe and McConnell (2008) described this Japanese-style modest public relations and diplomacy as contemporary "cool" pop culture.

Not every nation and country have unique character products, but Japan is known throughout the world for having unique, funny, peace-loving cultural products, and they are exhibited through print media, films, and online presentations. Japanese animation, known as anime (Napier, 2001) represents the desires and imaginations of everyday human needs, especially Japanese, that are easily understood and accepted by people from different nationalities. Moreover, in the development of Japanese anime, characters grow and develop by creating a culture of their own that is slightly different from the dominant culture in general. The producers created culture identity and attributes inherent in the anime characters. The source is extracted from imagination and mixed with the experience and factual conditions of the society. The creation of dominant culture in a society undergoes stages in the context of community change, which, according to Schein (2010) and Bhattacharyya (2010), generally follows stages such as birth, early growth, mid-life, and maturity. As a result, the change of culture in society is continuous.

Meanwhile, there are new developments in the media environment of production, distribution, and presentation of character products – such as films, comic books, and online comics – that are used for cultural diplomacy. The internet provides all the needs regarding information, entertainment, politics, socio-culture so that it is easy for users to get so much information and entertainment content. The internet, especially social media, provides access to production and distribution channels for millennials and Gen Z in the workplace. Young people in Japan and around the world, between producers and consumers, quickly meet and interact or even collaborate in the rise of the prosumers (Toffler, 1981; Pauwels & Hellriegel, 2009; Hassapopoulou, 2010). Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010) mentioned the recent explosion of user-generated content online, and that was increasingly a central consumption of the rise of prosumer capitalism. Online media provides anime products that can be obtained at lower costs with a broader reach. Anime community learns to make anime by imitating and producing anime and its attributes for their own consumption and exhibits them in online interactions. Anime communities also unite anime fans globally. The generation that forms Anime fan communities also organizes Japanese culture offline events and festivals in schools and uni-

versities. Community engagement has become an open facility and a gate to disseminate Japanese cultural products.

In addition to the role of establishing friendship and culture (soft power) in global diplomacy, anime fandom is at the same time a Japanese cultural products marketing device. Cultural commodity contains a substantial commercial aspect. This cultural explosion was demonstrated by the booming of Japanese Pop (J-Pop) since the 1980s, which dominated the cultural product market in Asia and even spread to Europe and America (Iwabuchi, 2002; Lamerichs, 2013). Neighboring South Korea followed the development of J-Pop with the development of Korean Pop (K-Pop) since the 2000s in Southeast Asia and other regions following the entry of Korean drama series on private televisions such as in Indonesia. In fan communities, young audiences were very familiar with Japanese cultural products, including anime.

Individuals in the weeaboo community tend to separate themselves from the dominant culture of a society, but acculturation occurs in the interaction, communication, and transactions. The attraction between cultures of this community seems to form its subculture. Weeaboo grows into social and cultural “ethnic” groups by showing typical patterns of behavior that are enough to distinguish them from the other dominant groups that embrace them. From the cultural industry perspective, this anime customer engagement has created opportunities for a variety of additional products as accessories for the group’s identity that consumes them.

This research significance lies in an in-depth perspective of fans in the community who are loyal to a brand or character that grows and develops outside of Japan. This paper also contributes to the study of subculture as it discusses the weeaboo community, which grows as a separate subculture that might be a form of resistance to the socially dominant cultures. Another pertinence is that this study presents a phenomenological communication perspective in its approach, that focuses on the experiences of individuals in the weeaboo group as fans who form subcultures. Offline and online interviews were conducted, and weeaboo’s lives in Indonesia were observed in their activities.

Based on the findings, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the formation of weeaboo subculture and identity within Japanese anime fandom community, the experience of individuals consuming anime while interacting daily inside and between communities, and to analyze the weeaboo community in communicating their identity both inside and outside of the subculture.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Acculturation and Identity in Intercultural Communication**

This study uses several related theories, such as acculturation in intercultural communication theory and communication theory of identity (CTI). Some concepts, such as subculture, anime, and weeaboo, are clarified to build the discussion’s perspective. Intercultural communication theory is a broader scope for looking at the interaction between groups from different cultural backgrounds (Giri in Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The phenomenon of the formation of subcultures in the weeaboo fandom community is a process of acceptance of values, thoughts, attitudes, and habits among anime fans. This argument leads this study to select acculturation in intercultural communication, to understand the phenomena that occur when groups of individuals who have different cultures make direct contact continuously and then changes from the original cultural patterns of one or both groups (Redfield, Linton, Her-

skovits, 1936, p.149). Kim (2001) and Berry (in Bennet, 2015) also refer to it as an adaptation as the longer-term outcomes of the process of acculturation achieved through engagement of individuals and groups. Also, acculturation includes non-cultural such as ecological or demographic modification in autonomous cultures (Spielberger, 2004). Weeaboo existence is a process of acculturation and adaptation in intercultural communication so that this theory is suitable to be used as the point of view.

Concurrently, the weeaboo community expresses its existence through offline events and online into subcultural groups and externally to the dominant culture. This expression is a form of identity communication. Thus, the communication theory of identity by Hecht (1993, 2009), who found CTI states that there is a shift from considering identity from the central element of individual human beings to social identity. Identity appears more socially than individually because humans are inherently social beings whose lives revolve around communication, relationships, and community (Hecht et al., 2005; Hecht & Choi, 2012). As with subcultural phenomena, the interethnic communication process between the marginal group of weeaboo and primary culture fosters a weeaboo subculture identity. Corbu (2010) argued that “when people find themselves in new cultural contexts, their cultural identity, as a self-regulating system, reacts and determines an adaptation effort, which should re-establish the lost equilibrium.” Weeaboo, the non-Japanese living outside of Japan, accepts and carries representations of Japanese culture through the anime and goes through the above process.

## 2.2. Conceptual Clarification

Some of the concepts put forward in this paper include anime, anime community, weeaboo, and subculture. Anime is Japanese animation (Napier, 2001). It is an animation that is drawn or painted using hand and computer technology. Anime is an exemplary work that engulfed consumer communities throughout the world. In its development, it is not only produced in Japan but throughout the world, because the communities formed have the skills to copy the production, especially with computer technology, distribution, and online presentations. Anime products are increasingly being produced outside Japan and even by the fans.

Based on the perspective of marketing communication, undeniably, anime has created communities that are loyal to the brand and character of the anime. The anime community is a fandom or group of anime fans. One of the anime-loving communities that develop outside of Japan, such as in Southeast Asia, Australia, the United States, and Europe, is the weeaboo community. The weeaboo community, from a socio-economic perspective, is a group of people who are fans of a brand that is a cultural traded product. In its development, the community has its subculture by showing the identity and characteristics of the group. Anime communities in various cities in the world are connected and become a global network in the intercultural process. The community exists in various nations and countries but have similarities in daily life habits, views, different values that are formed while being in the dominant culture of each nation. The habits and views of the weeaboo community are different from the dominant society.

Japan’s popular culture has increased rapidly, but since 2001 anime and manga have mostly dominated the fans. Unfortunately, according to Winge (2018), the terms “weeaboo” and “otaku” have the connotation as an insult, that non-Japanese people do not fully understand Japan. Those who are dubbed this term tend to be harassed. Weeaboo (abbreviated, weeb) first appeared as a term in the Nicholas Gurewitch newspaper and webcomic, *Perry Bible Fellowship*.

*ship*. Weeb is a derivation of “wapanese (or wannabe Japanese)”. Weeaboo is a person who is not but wishes she or he was a Japanese, and usually a fan of CGDCT (cute girls do cute things) anime style (Winge, 2018). In Japan, *otaku*, as a slur, means having an obsession with media and products related to fantasy more than the family and community. Both phenomena were growing as subcultures.

The term “subculture” often used to refer to the normative system of groups smaller than the community to emphasize the differences in terms of language, values, religion, food, and lifestyle of the larger society in which they are socially bounded. This term refers to the norms that distinguish a group, not the norms – integrating a group with the whole society. Subcultural norms, as contrasted with role norms, are unknown, looked down upon, or are a dividing force by other members of the community (Yinger, 1960). According to Haenfler (2013), subculture studies yielded some conclusions: first, subcultures emerged among working-class youth, which collectively rejected structural barriers to their upward mobility. Second, the spectacular style has ideological meaning beyond mere fashion. Third, such forces are a form of symbolic resistance; fourth, authority and the media create moral panic; and fifth, such resistance is mostly ineffective, because the style of the subculture itself is ultimately co-opted and commodified. These five criteria match the weeaboo subculture characteristics, but on the other hand, Yamada (2017) also emphasizes that cultural performances are born from the point where different ideas, identities, aesthetics, and reality collide with each other.

The concept of “cohort” was first put forward by Ryder (1965) based on a sociological-demographic perspective. Social change and population processes are affected by the demographic metabolism and life cycle of individuals considered in the aggregate. People born in the same period tend to have the same historical experiences, characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors. Furthermore, social change is driven by young adults and is related to revolution or war, immigration, urbanization, and especially technological change. According to Sheahan (2006) Gen Y characteristics are street-smart, aware, lifestyle centred, independent, informal, tech savvy, stimulus junkies, sceptical, and impatient. Meanwhile, Seemiller and Grace (2016, 2018), explained the core characteristics, qualities, and strengths of Gen Z, including honesty, kindness, humor, fairness, and judgment.

### 2.3. Rationale of the Study

Research on anime attracts many researchers from various contexts, but there is little known research that focused on exploring this phenomenon as an acculturation process within an intercultural communication perspective. Zeng (2018) examined living in virtual reality as a form of an anime and manga fandom. The result is limited to the explanation and presentation of the terms *weeaboo*, *otaku*, *waiifu*, *husbando*, *fujoshi*, and some criticisms of them.

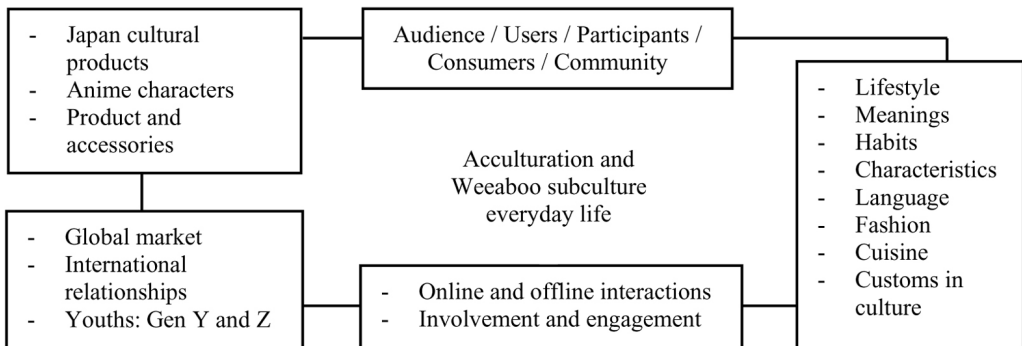
Another study that was carried out by Denison (2011), for example, examines transcultural creativity in anime with a focus on identities that experience hybridization at the stages of production and distribution of Japanese anime fandom texts. Denison found that anime transcultural viewers do not consume texts in a standard way – but further with the intersection and fusion of several cultures. Therefore, Denison’s attention is different from this study.

Earlier, Fukunaga (2006), in his research, focused on studying the development of foreign language literacy (in this case, Japanese) through Japanese popular culture. Literacy skills such as word recognition, listening, and pronunciation in the social context provided by anime make it possible for Japanese literacy students to be called “anime students.”

The attention of previous studies was not on the perspective of subcultures. On the other hand, this research studies the process of acculturation in intercultural communication. Weeaboo, as a form of customer engagement and loyalty, has a critical value to study. This research would complete the previous studies about anime, especially in the communication perspective of weeaboo community's cultural identity. Another contribution is also on Gen Y and Z cohorts who are identified as technology-savvy and have experiences in the virtual and the real-world.

Figure 1 explains the distinctive position of this paper in discussing anime, especially the weeaboo fan community. This depth can be seen in the phenomenology of their daily lives regarding lifestyle, meanings, values, habits, characteristics, Japanese language, fashion, accessories, cuisine, and customs.

Figure 1. Research Framework



### 3. Methodology

A qualitative approach is used to discuss the process of acculturation, the formation of subcultures, and the interaction of identity communication between members of the weeaboo group. Sixteen samples of the Indonesian weeaboo community were taken in various major cities in Indonesia such as Jakarta, Tangerang, Bekasi, Bogor, Bandung, Semarang, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Malang, Makassar, Banjarmasin, Medan, Palembang, Padang, Denpasar, and Manado. Each community is active online and offline in which all documentation is published on their respective social media. Researchers followed each of the weeaboo online activities and recorded all interactions that occurred during six months (August 2019 to January 2020).

This study collected both primary and secondary data, through in-depth interviews with various sources, especially members of the weeaboo community. Observations were made both in the field or offline at various events and on social media. Documents in the form of text, visual, and audio-visual are owned by each community and published online. Analysis of the documentation of the weeaboo community activities was carried out by collecting and processing data from the weeaboo social media. Participants had individual data sources that were collected to find answers to research questions raised (Keyton, 2006; Lavrakas, 2008). In this research, in-depth interviews were conducted to capture the essence of human experience on the phenomenon of acculturation in the process of intercultural communication between weeaboo members. From the selected communities, 40 participants were interviewed

on their experiences in the group and their daily lives to develop patterns and relationships of meaning.

Some dimensions discussed comprehensively, are about individual experiences in the weebie community as a subculture, besides having the community as part of a large group of fans of Japanese cultural products that are marketed in various countries. Consideration of various socio-cultural and phenomenological elements includes 1) Japanese cultural products, Japanese anime characters, and other accessories products; 2) Characteristics of anime fans, the role of community members as consumers, interactivity, and community; 3) Interaction in the weebie community on lifestyle, meanings, values, and characteristics.

The researchers seek to understand the world through phenomena that are experienced directly by compiling reflections on those experiences and having appreciations of the multiple meanings, contingencies, and diversity of the living world (Orbe in Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Then the weebie members and community were observed in their daily lives, both offline and online. Other dimensions used as indicators are how weebie consumes anime products and accessories in the global market and the profile of the weebie target market as the fandom of Japan's creative industry products. Daily experience in adopting Japanese language, fashion, accessories, cuisine, and customs is a concern in the in-depth interviews and observations.

Group participants were divided into two, such as Gen Y and Gen Z. Gen Y or Millennial, or Echo Boomers participants, were born between 1977 and 1995. Then Gen Z is commonly perceived as those born during the latter half of the 1990s to the late 2000s, specifically after 1995 (Kardes, Cronley, & Cline, 2015). Based on those criteria, the 15-23 years old participants were Gen Z (32 participants), and 24-42 years old participants were Gen Y (8 participants). All names cited in the results are acronyms although the authors have obtained permission from the participants to state their real names.

After the data is collected and verified, then the coding process is carried out. It is taken from the interviews based on several dimensions of concept explanations connected with the objective of the research (Creswell, 2007, 2009). The first steps were coding as a process of organizing material into pieces or text segments to develop each section's general meaning. Second, determining whether the researcher had to develop codes based only on the information collected from participants or to use the specified codes and then adjust the data with them, or use some combination of the specified and emerging codes.

Open-ended questions were addressed to participants, including the character or traits inherent in anime fans and weebie, length of time in the community, and the inception of their fondness in anime. The questions explored their online interaction with other people, the extent to which they discuss anime with others, their sense of being together in an anime group, their principles and whether they feel as part of the community, or detached.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1. Findings**

The profile of participants in this study were 40 Indonesian people from a diverse age range of 15 to 42 years old. Most participants (82%) were students at the senior high school level, 10% of them were at university, and 8% had completed bachelor's education and had

worked. The study involved 61% male participants and 39% female participants, and they generally live in urban areas. In addition to involving individuals, this research also observed the weeaboo communities in sixteen cities, and most of them were done online except for few communities around Jakarta, Banten and West Java, which were conducted online and at off-line events.

Interviews were conducted in person and in writing with each respondent using semi-structured questions that considered the dimensions associated with the process of cultural acculturation and the formation of subcultures. The daily weeaboo experiences and habits were described and interpreted in the results and discussion. The four elements of cultural practices in intercultural communication were taken into account. This study analyzed language, fashion, cuisine, and new customs or values as results of interaction and acculturation built and maintained within the community.

#### *4.1.1. Acculturation as the Formation of Sub-culture*

Members of weeaboo in this research are individuals from Indonesia who have similarities in their devotion and attachment of anime. Acculturation in intercultural communication occurs between Japanese culture with other nations such as Indonesia. Tsu (25 years old), an Indonesian youth, who always use the Japanese name in interaction with his community, and an anime fan who routinely writes about his community activities on a blog entitled “Wibu Elite” said as follows,

The orientation of the weeaboo community is Japan. All the lifestyle, fashion, and way of life of most of the weeaboos are directed toward Japan. They want to look like they are Japanese or at least fantasize about living like their favorite anime characters. For example, haircut bangs, having lunch on the roof of the school building [even though the day in Indonesia is sweltering], eating *ramen*, *sushi*, and the like. The point is that the weeaboo community is Japanese in style.

Weeaboos feel pride when they could show that they and their group are Japanese (not just anime) lovers. Anime figures become a driving force in their community to transmit “anime waves” to their peers. One thing that distinguishes the extreme character of weeaboo is the existence of a subculture that is entirely different from other Japanese anime fan communities. They are often known as extreme communities because of their unusual values and the use of their attributes. However, in Indonesia, these “extreme” characteristics have not yet demonstrated their determination. Put (42 years old), a Japanese cultural researcher who had been a fan of popular culture in Indonesia since her teenage years said:

In my opinion, the identity standards of Indonesian weeaboo community have not yet existed, because in Japan, otaku does indeed have standards in fashion such as wearing particular pants and so on. Nevertheless, weeaboos are known for their extreme love of anime and all things related to Japan, and this often makes the Japanese despise them because weeaboo is not Japanese.

The otaku community that initially emerged and grew in Japan is indeed different from weeaboo, which is distinctive in non-Japanese countries. Otaku has a more influential organization, and the attribute model is distributed to various countries, while weeaboo grows as a subculture that could be more excessive, but is in a non-Japanese country. Weeaboos struggle with the power of the central cultural domination in the country and with the otaku. Their extremity sometimes makes them feel Japanese.

Japanese anime storytelling style was the main attraction for Indonesian audiences to consume anime, and customer engagement was always present in various local events. Accord-



ing to Dik (16 years old), the stories presented in Japanese anime are simple; they are about everyday life and within the scope of problems involving teenagers around the world. There were peculiarities in the Japanese cultural environment, but the audience could quickly adjust.

I think the anime story is exciting, and often the continuation of the story makes us curious. Sometimes it has a great moral message for us and is not monotonous and can be enjoyed. Until now, I am still interested, and now I plan to learn making manga in Japan.

At first, weeaboo members were beginners who had known anime since childhood. They did not understand the community groups. In their journey, each one started to follow various events that were held, and the moment became an informal introduction process and recruitment of new members. Dan (15 years old) explained his experience with anime:

Starting from the *Doki-Doki Literature Club*. So that was in middle school. Previously, *Naruto* started an era, on Sunday mornings, at the time of the *Indosiar* television. I like anime because, if it is *Doki-Doki*, the character is cute. Starting from the different character designs, and they all have their stand-out points. Like a visual novel. I spent my time, could be crazy, could take a long time, around four to six hours a day. That was not too long. Usually, it could be like 24 hours. I ate, then continue again... If available, I watched *Beauty Crown* number one to twenty-four, it took me like from 1 pm to 12 pm. That was long.

Yad (24 years old), an anime fan, always attends various community gatherings and exhibition events. He sometimes carries anime dolls and accessories when he is present in the community. Yad first got to know anime since he was an elementary school student, and he still remembered how he was initially attracted to the anime:

I have known anime since I was an elementary school kid. Got to know from borrowing a collection owned by a cousin. At that time, I paid no attention to Japanese culture. Since entering junior high/high school level, at that time, I was less sociable, and the entertainment at that time was limited by watching anime on TV, borrowing cousins' manga, and we often watched anime together in high school at that time.

As Gen Z grows, they enter a higher level of education, and subsequently, they find further experiences about anime from the daily lives of fellow peer groups. Some young people who were anime fans then grow in new habits. When talking about her weeaboo friends, Yoc (16 years old) said:

So, they are just an insult to Japanese culture. What I know is what they like to do, which, of course, watching anime, joining the community, and talking about it a lot as their topic of conversation. Yes, they always talk about anime, like their characters, character development, or shipping and stuff, and people like different genres of anime.

Yochana pays attention to her friends in the weeaboo community, besides hanging out with peers in the school and home environment. Weeaboo community is separated from the dominant culture that grows in society and shares experiences of daily activities in interacting and discussing anime products. Some of Yoc's friends do not want to get along like ordinary teenagers but prefer to separate themselves and only focus on anime products and their attributes. Dan illustrated his journey with anime:

Well, every new anime has its stand-out character. There are many characters. The one that I like is because she is a girl, of course. Like waifu. When I was in middle school, I understood waifu, of course. The one from the *Doki-Doki Literature Club* was Natsuki. First Yuri, then I changed to Natsuki. So, I liked it until I finally fell in love. I liked it because I think characters in the anime are better than

real-life people. Yes, I once fell in love with a character. Like terribly fell in love. I kept loving them, and I kept rejecting real people.

Young people in the weeaboo community are very obsessed with their favorite anime characters. An example of this manifestation is dakimakura or body pillows which often purchased to accompany their activities or on their sleeping time. Yoc said:

I do have a friend like that, but unlike those weebos out there, he does not have body pillows. He is just over-obsessed. He does have friends... his friends are not weebaos. Yeah and, he does not have a crush on anyone at school; he is just interested in one of my friends named Shana because she is short and small like a *loli*. He does not have a crush on her; he is just really interested in her, because she looks like a human version of a *loli*.

Weeaboo community could make *loli* to be one of the determinants of their daily lives. They seemed to be separated from the reality of life in their nation's larger cultural group. Members of weeaboo preferred to do activities and associate themselves with fellows in limited scope weeaboo groups. Daily activities were also limited to the context of this young person's interaction with the anime. According to Yoc, because her friend likes *lolis*, whenever he draws something, it is always a *loli*. "He also admitted to watching hentai without... without um... being shameful about it," Yoc said while closing her mouth with her fingers. Young people like Yoc are still limited to observing their peers and still have a sense of shame by remembering the dominant culture in the society while assessing the weeaboo subculture as a community that has not yet been accepted by the dominant group. Some weeaboo fans may prefer *loli*, a Japanese discourse or media focusing on the attraction to young or prepubescent girls, especially in anime, and they often term real-life female as 3-D women.

#### 4.1.2. Weeaboo Subculture

Weeaboo fandom is an anime fan community that grows exclusively amid a country's dominant culture. In Indonesia, the opportunity for the weeaboo fandom to grow is enormous because the country respects cultural diversity. There is no dominant culture in Indonesia because it is made up of thousands of ethnicities and communities with different cultures. This condition provides opportunities for weeaboo to grow among certain age groups (cohorts) of Gen Z and Gen Y. Gen Z digital and online technology environments accelerate the process of acculturation and intercultural communication.

In observation, researchers found many subcultures that grew up in digital society, but weeaboo was special because it was related to another nation and country that was friendly to Indonesia, which is Japan. As taught in Indonesia's national history, Japan is dubbed the "Old Brother" of the Indonesian people so that for the younger generation, specifically Gen Z, Japan is a horizon that provides a healthy perspective of Asian technological and cultural progress. From birth, childhood, and young adults, Gen Z is very familiar with Japanese anime, language, and visual culture. Everyday life in Japan is embedded in the minds of Indonesian children and youth. Yoc said:

In my opinion, through anime, someone has a positive impression of Japan. People always want to know and feel the culture further. However, weebaos devote their lives mostly to anime, manga, and games, and they become obsessed with Japan even though they are not Japanese. Moreover, even Japanese people are weirded out by them. So, if they think they are praising Japanese culture, the Japanese people do not like that.

Gen X is the first Indonesian generation who had the opportunity to study in Japan since the 1970s – which provided references on the one hand, and on the other hand promoted the growth of the cultural industry of Japan, East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia at the regional level. Gen Z got more stimuli of Japan, not only from their parents, but still did not smoothly experience acculturation with Japan through anime, being aware that their elementary, junior, and senior high school periods conditioned them to receive strict study discipline. Still, these young people could always take time to consume anime. Dan told his experience:

My mom and dad complain. They said it is a waste of time. However, I do not care. I have fun. While I still can protect myself, it is okay. So, in each period of life, such as elementary, middle, and high school, I like different anime characters.

Japan is the “Old Brother” in the East, such as of Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand in Southeast Asia. In the millennium, as developing countries grew modern, Indonesia grew closer to Japan. In line with that, school education curriculums have also been adjusted just like in North America, Japan, and West Europe. The learning burden of Gen Z children is also getting more substantial. However, on the sidelines of doing piles of homework, these students still took time to enjoy the anime. Pra (19 years old) still remembers that schoolwork could also reduce his desire to watch anime, “It is kind of limiting me, and by the time I got free, I am already tired and rather lazy, you know. Because we all know that the limitations, they are the voices of real people,” he explained.

Social media and the internet provide more significant opportunities for them to take the time to watch, read, and play wherever they are, even while being mobile. Their interactions with anime, now rely more on social media, as an Indonesian student, Lee (19 years old) said:

Since I have a network through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Line, finally, I have quite a lot of knowledge. Plus, sharing and exchanging information or anything that “smells” Japan with fellow Japanese culture enthusiasts.

The cohesiveness of the weebos members is getting stronger with social media interaction by exchanging experiences, and it has become a device to promote Japanese cultural events immensely, which is not limited to anime. Online communities strengthen the existence of offline communities and vice versa. Although several weebos members immediately reduce their extreme activities when they grow up and enter new lives, such as work and marriage, the community still provides a familiar sense of reunion with what once was an essential part of their lives. Edo (24 years old), for example, felt different when he was in the weebos community compared to when he was in the primary culture environment. “I feel different, unique, and free from the bonds and boundaries of the monotonous norms of everyday life. I enjoy wearing anime clothes with the community,” he explained.

As they grow, weebos members also feel that they must immediately choose to live in one of the worlds, whether in the weebos community as a subculture or in the world of the dominant culture. Even as he grew, a weebos like Nia (18 years old) can wisely and consciously recognize the two different cultures to finally choose. He said:

Yeah, if things do not go so well, I just see anime relatable, that is, you know... so it does not go crazy, but if you like it, it is okay. However, I mean, there is a fine line between the 2-D world and reality. The anime can make you less lonely, have more acceptance. Sometimes not all anime is talking bullshit. Some are touching your feeling. So, it can touch your feeling or give you acceptance. Yes, sometimes, it is better than a real situation.

The weeaboo members never escape from anime because of their environment, and some even carry over their anime collections to school for discussion with their peers. The urban environment in the shopping center and surrounding areas is filled with a variety of Japanese products, cultural products, and technology. Ong (17 years old) explained about his consistency in consuming anime products:

I like and love anime, so I buy things related to it. I bought an action figure. Yeah, of course, the one I love. I would not buy something that I do not love. Sagiri from *Eromanga Sensei*-still sticking in my mind until now.

Gen Z often does not distinguish between daily life (factual) and watching activities or online interactions with anime and other weeaboo members. They can fall in love with characters and their stories, whether they are in the form of a human being or another form such as robots. The story is tried to be implemented in real life or at least in interactions filled with anime conversations in a dominant community. Some also appreciate the value in the anime story. Ari (15 years old) said:

There is one of *Plastic Memories*... how humans love robots. Nevertheless, this robot has a certain amount of time for their lives until later they must be replaced again so that they can live again. However, when it is replaced, the memory is gone, you know. Moreover, this boy chose to stick with that robot, even though the time is already running out. He chose to be loyal even though he knew that he would not be happy in the end. But it worked.

The ability of the audience to understand the stories and characters in the anime built the weeaboo subculture. Even a kind of emotional bond developed between the audience and the idolized anime character. The community's audience then implements language, nonverbal, and the interaction behavior of these characters in real interactions within the community. As if weeaboo members move the world of the story (online) into the real world (offline). Ric (16 years old), understood that the actions and behavior of him and his friends in the weeaboo community indicated that they were in love with their respective anime characters. They treated anime characters as real human beings, to be loved and admired. Ric explained:

The thought is that it is like we treat a robot as our intimate friend. Just like a human. Android. The figure I bought was as large as a human being, even though she could not move. Like Sagiri. However, I guess it is made in China. One of them is *Bandai*.

#### 4.1.3. Language

Language is an important element in intercultural communication. Anime provides a kind of informal Japanese language training for children, teenagers, and young adults throughout the world. Anime consumers feel unique when watching animated films in different languages from their mother tongue because Japanese is not a widely known global language. Even in the countries of Southeast Asia where Japan had occupied in the early 21st century, the Japanese language was less preferred than English. However, anime has helped provide informal education to young people around the world. A weeaboo, Dei (24 years old) said,

I am used to imitating dialects or speech accents of various characters in the anime. I practice it when performing a monologue or while speaking alone, during a show-off, usually because it is a fad or when asked by a friend to talk or interact with native Japanese people they meet in person. So, the anime community helped me improve my Japanese language skills.

The anime film is the audience's first introduction to the Japanese culture industry, and it triggers children to be interested in registering Japanese language courses in their respective cities. The Department of Japanese Literature has become the interest of many young people to study Japanese culture extensively, starting with the language. Ayk (16 years old) explained that she understood Japanese better because of anime, "to be honest, because of this anime, we understand Japanese better. So, it can be easier to understand from listening or reading," said this grade 11 private high school student. More specifically, Adi (17 years old) mentioned one of his favorite anime that encouraged him to study Japanese. "Because I often watch anime, I understand a little more, especially since watching *Jo Jo No Kimyou Na Bouken*," Like Adi, a more senior anime fan, Yan (20 years old) said:

I studied Japanese, but eventually, I preferred to study on my own, especially listening and reciting words from songs. There used to be a website like animelyrics.com. I like searching for anime soundtracks on the internet, there were kanji and romaji, and the pronunciation was made in Latin and English translations. I spread the three lyrics side by side and finally memorized the shape of the kanji. I quickly memorized the kanji words that I saw. My peers liked it when I used Japanese writing. I liked to show off and did not feel ashamed because I thought everyone must have watched anime. I had more vocabulary or references than other friends. However, I hated it when people brought the habit to the broader community because most people would think of it as strange.

#### 4.1.4. Fashion

Fashion and accessories are the second elements after language that form part of nonverbal communication in intercultural communication. Fashion, in this case, can refer to both primary cultures, from Japan and the influence of the home country. However, the weeaboo community is innovating and creating new types of fashion and accessories aimed at sharpening its own identity that is different from other communities. Indeed, overlapping and similarity often occur in the elements of fashion design, but weeaboo members generally quickly recognize which ones are designed by their community and which ones are not, and members prefer to make purchases within the weeaboo community. Lee, a weeaboo who loves anime fashion and now lives in Kyoto, Japan, said:

In my opinion, the anime style of clothing seems flashy or bright but not tacky and has its uniqueness. For example, for female characters, most people like to wear clothes and accessories that are all brightly colored and seem cute, whereas, for male characters, female fans like muscular body or handsome faces and often prefer European style clothing.

There is a more relaxed acceptance of anime fashion style to be worn as everyday clothing or specifically at community gatherings. For weeaboo individuals, there is a kind of pride if they wear anime fashion in front of many people who see it. With the fashion identity, they want to communicate the existence of the community amid the primary culture, and for many people, they usually become very distinct in public spaces. Throughout their teens, to young adults, weeaboo members like to travel and are accustomed to buying and collecting anime fashion according to the character of their choice. Lan (24 years old) for example, collected various fashion and accessories:

I collected a few clothes related to anime and cosplay. I wore it for particular moments, such as meetings and exhibitions. However, for everyday life, the fashion clothes of anime characters do not influence the choice of clothing that I wear.

A distinct identity is the fashion worn, accessories, make-up, and hairstyle of anime fans. They have the power to attract the attention of prospective members and strengthen the solidarity of the sub-culture and its viewers. Lia (20 years old, Tangerang, Banten) and Yoc have the same opinion that the costume dramatically influences the character itself in the eyes of its fans. “Something exciting is on her hairstyle,” Sicilia explained. “Because of the anime I became curious, then I bought and wore the character clothing to cosplay,” Yoc added. Like Yoc, Bie (27 years old, Indonesia) is also interested in anime fashion, and because of her affection in Japanese culture, Cyn (14 years old) is very content, specifically if the character wears *kimono* or *yukata*. For the accessories, Lee explained his collections:

At home, there are lots of manga comics, and there are also many collections of figurines or knick-knacks such as badges, hangers, dolls, folders, and others. Until now, in my free time, sometimes I still like to buy accessories in various stores.

#### 4.1.5. Cuisine

Playing games, watching, walking in shopping centers, and enjoying food and drinks are part of the everyday lifestyle of urban youth. Gen Z usually has close peer interaction in cafes, and the meeting points that provide free wifi facilities are restaurants or internet cafes in modern shopping centers. Japanese investment in shopping centers in Indonesia, for example, provides opportunities for many types of Japanese restaurants to offer young people’s favorite menus. Japanese food preferences derive from peer relationships, advertisements, Japanese television, anime, Japanese films, as well as YouTube and social media. Japanese cuisine has become a part of the Gen Z lifestyle in Indonesia and various parts of the world.

Yoc explained her fondness for Japanese food and drinks, which started from her references to Japan, and primarily because of the variety of Japanese restaurants around the Greater Jakarta (*Jabodetabek*). She even put her preference for eating Japanese food in the top position, followed by Western food, and tended to dislike traditional Indonesian food. She liked to eat Japanese food in various restaurants or canteens in shopping centers, not far from where she lived. Yoc said:

I love Japanese food and drinks since trying to eat at *Sushi Tei*. The taste is very suitable for me. Until now, I always visit Japanese restaurants. However, my taste for Japanese food is not related to my liking for anime. I know that there is anime with food content, such as *Food Wars*, but I do not even watch it. I like Japanese food because it is delicious.

Japanese cuisine for Indonesian Gen Z is part of everyday lifestyle while also complementing the experience of watching Japanese animated films on television or YouTube. Enjoying Japanese food is the same as traveling to the Land of Sakura, as revealed by Val (16 years old):

Japanese food makes me feel different from most friends. Moreover, my family and I have visited Japan, and when I went to a Japanese restaurant, I felt like it was in Japan. Visiting Japan for me was an extraordinary experience that I wish to repeat because Japan is very interesting, as exciting as anime.

#### 4.1.6. Customs in Culture

Individual members of the weeaboo community are usually led by one or several people who have more insight and concern than other members to build networks. Habits or traditions arise from the initiative of one or several individuals to be applied as communal values. A custom culture is the way group people or community does something and contains values

that are maintained and passed in the community. The habits in weeaboo include the preference of anime characters, collecting products related to the character, saying different words in Japanese, collecting clothes and accessories such as figures, dolls, and others, treating the doll like a living human, even “marrying” the doll as “Waifu” (wife).

The weeaboo community in Indonesia is easily found on social media, especially on accounts owned by weeaboo members who have an extensive network of followers. The leader of the weeaboo community labeled *Wibu Creative*, Naf (20 years old), has Facebook accounts with a network of 4,774 followers. Naf explained that the weeaboo community likes loli because the characters are cute and adorable. In addition to the weeaboo Facebook community, a particular Facebook account for the *Loli Addict Indonesia* group won followers of 10,366 accounts. This account is standing out in Indonesia (as a subculture, this community confronted the primary culture) when the primary culture accused the fandom community as the cause of violence against children or pedophilia. The cause of the criminal accusation was an account called “Official Loly Candy’s 18+”, which spread pedophile content. However, later the accusation was refuted by the appearance of the petition “Save Lolicon. They are not Pedophile!” (*Detik.com*, 18/11/18). Naf revealed his close relationship with anime in which he mentioned the values that were built together in the community:

One of the values put forward in the community is that weeaboo members or anime fans generally respect anime characters and must not harass those images. We even consider them living humans who need to be accompanied, loved, and protected from anyone who wants to disturb them. Anime is like a true lover; to us, it even exceeds the mediocre relationships that occur between humans. We appreciate loli or waifu or husbu. Waifu is a close friend when in a private room and in bed.

Def (21 years old), a loli fan, as quoted by *Detikcom* (18/11/18), confirmed Naf’s testimony above that many *weeaboo* members married *waifus* whom they loved as wives because, in their interactions with the beautiful characters, the fans could be aroused. An anime fan who had a *waifu*, but did not want his name to be mentioned, explained his opinion as published on social media (*Kaskus.co.id*, 29/6/18):

Having *waifu* might be considered a thing in the general culture [primary culture]. However, this is something ordinary. Anime fans feel sincere love for waifu. This waifu figure lifts the spirit of life every day and does not make you feel bored. *Waifu* fans find a cheerful, great, and innocent person. Because of this nature, many anime fans love her. Although abstract, waifu has emotional value. Every weeaboo member usually chooses a character that has similarities with the people he loves.

Love of anime products is seen as a growing value of love in the community. Male anime fans in the weeaboo community need waifu as a manifestation of their values of love, loyalty, and dependence on female anime characters. Members of this community seemed to devote themselves to waifu by becoming increasingly active in reading, watching, and playing video games that contained the personal character of his choice.

Gen Z Indonesia recognizes Japanese culture firmly, at least in one or several cultural elements. These young people have references that are dominated by their Japanese experience, including in choosing further studies. Campuses in Japan are the dream of Indonesian Gen Z, and they try to get scholarships or to be sent by their parents to reach this dream. Gie (17 years old), for example, had always wanted to continue her studies in Japan since she was studying in elementary school. By the time she finishes high school in Tangerang, Indonesia, Gie will receive a scholarship studying nursing in Japan:

Going to school in Japan was my obsession since I was in elementary school. I want to be able to be sent by my parents to Japan one day. However, because my family's economic conditions did not allow it, I tried to find a scholarship and adjust my goals to what type of education could send me to Japan. That is why I plan to have a profession as a nurse. I am getting a scholarship to study at a nursing school in Japan, with several years of service. That is not a problem for my family, and the most important thing is that I can go to Japan and study there, meeting Japanese people I have only known through anime all this time.

#### 4.2. Discussion

Although anime fans do not intend to form subcultures, weeaboo communities are subculture formations that are the result of acculturation in intercultural communication. Weeaboos realize that they fantasize about Japan because they have never been to Japan, but with that fantasy, everyone feels a close relationship with Japan. Weeaboos weave elements of Japanese culture into their primary culture outside of Japan. In this process, Samovar et al. (2017) explained that in the dominant culture, there are found many co-cultures and distinctive cultures as social communities. The characteristics, perceptions, values, beliefs, and communication practices are different enough to distinguish them from the dominant cultures.

Language is essential for weeaboo to pursue anime series. Language is the door opener into the world of anime. Understanding the meaning of messages in verbal communication is needed as a complement to visual communication appearance or vice versa. Indeed, there is always a translation into the local language where Japanese anime is played on YouTube or television but for the weeaboo community translation or dubbing is not enough and even tends to be disliked because it is considered to be unoriginal. Therefore, weeaboo learns Japanese both with self-taught and formally in various course centers or universities. Japanese language centers are increasing, such as *Gakushudo*, *Megumi Center*, *OBKG*, *Evergreen*, *Sakura JLC*, *Shinju* language center, and others. In contrast to the findings of Armour and Iida (2016), who questioned the Australian fans of anime and manga on the motivation to learn the Japanese language, they concluded that being anime consumers might not necessarily lead them to enter formal Japanese language education.

Fashion and accessories are very interesting for weeaboos and even become primary attractors because they are very eye-catching. Anime character fashion is very distinctive, including hair treatment and accessories. These things become the main identity of anime characters and a determining factor to get the attention of prospective consumers. Furthermore, the anime fashion business is exciting, an example is when it is worn by "Lolita" [*Rorita*] with models representing young women, who dress in cute, childlike, and modest fashions without the overly sexualized appearance, or so it would appear at first glance, although perhaps this is but another form of sexual display (Winge, 2006). Clothing is designed for anime by its creator, not by seeking the inclination of fans. The anime fans then follow the fashion of their anime role models or characters and make imitations of characters' visual appearances. They gather and hold conventions, exhibitions, and parades in public. Weeaboo expresses its identity, hopes for social recognition, and wants to show freedom in choosing cultural tastes. Various events were covered by media so that Gen Z and Y in various regions have the spirit to form a weeaboo community.

Japanese cuisine or food and beverages are very popular with Gen Z and Y in Indonesia. This food culture grows along with the increase in Japanese investment. More and more Japanese restaurants are available in various cities, both the original franchise from Japan



and local restaurants with Japanese style. Gen Z and Y freely choose restaurants, cafes or hangout places while getting free wifi to interact with weeaboos globally. The Japanese menu is very familiar and has become the appetite of young people in Indonesia. The growth of Japanese language centers and restaurants that back up the anime industry makes Japanese transnationalism, as Iwabuchi (2002) explained, that Japan does globalization re-centering through popular culture, especially anime. Customs in culture for some weeaboos are a goal to be studied formally and informally. Weeaboo communities were also formed at various campuses in Japanese literature and culture majors. Students intentionally learn Japanese culture and traditions because they have known anime since childhood. They often collaborate with the Japanese cultural center at the ambassador's office to organize various Japanese cultural and traditional events.

## 5. Conclusion

Weeaboo communities are subculture formations shaped by acculturation in intercultural communication. Acculturation occurs when there is contiguity between two primary cultures where a new culture is born. In the context of anime, there is acculturation between Japanese culture with the culture of a different country as anime fans in the community do their routines and habits differently from the anime home country (Japan) in the host country (another country).

Indonesian Generation Z and Y weeaboo subculture is formed and nurtured through acculturation of language, expressions, fashion, accessories, make-up, hairstyle, cuisine, group attitudes, values, and natural and cultural preferences of Japanese destinations. Gen Z's habit of watching anime and expressing it in peer groups in the weeaboo community encourages comprehension about Japan. Weeaboos make anime character imitations with dynamic visual appearances, and their community grows. They actively organize conventions, exhibitions, and parades in public to express their identity. They want to show freedom in choosing cultural tastes. Likewise, with the habit of visiting Japanese restaurants and enjoying their food and drinks, the weeaboo community chooses restaurants, cafes, or gatherings where there are Japanese nuances while interacting with weeaboo globally using the free wifi available. Through the love of anime, the weeaboo community of Indonesian Gen Z and Y has become a community that adopts elements of Japanese culture in everyday life.

Based on the findings, further research can continue to analyze other areas that are affected by the weeaboo community, such as international relations, economic aspects, and the Japanese tourism industry.

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