

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Review of Literature

1. Manga Artist

Manga artists, known as mangaka, play a crucial role in Japanese popular culture as creative professionals responsible for producing manga narratives that shape contemporary media, cultural values, and social imagination. The role of a manga artist goes beyond artistic expression, as it involves tight production schedules, editorial oversight, market-driven expectations, and fierce competition within the manga industry. This condition positions manga artists as individuals who must negotiate creativity under professional pressure, making them compelling subjects in animated movie that explore artistic struggles, identity formation, and emotional conflict. Fontana et al., (2025) highlights how manga artists in Japan navigate identity formation through their creative calling amid precarious labor conditions, reinforcing the emotional and professional challenges depicted in animated representations of manga artist.

In animated movie, manga artists are often portrayed as individuals engaged in a continuous process of self-discipline, perseverance, and creative sacrifice. Through this portrayal, manga artists become symbolic figures that reflect the reality of creative work in Japan, including isolation, emotional exhaustion, and the pursuit of recognition.

The working life of manga artist is also closely related to psychological challenges. Robbins (2022) explains that the manga industry

demands high productivity, which often causes stress and fatigue among artists. Animated movie featuring manga artists tend to highlight these emotional struggles, depicting creativity as both a source of satisfaction and personal conflict. This duality allows animation to depict the internal tension between artistic passion and external expectations.

The portrayal of manga artists in animated movies often highlights the formation of their identities through creative practice. Robbin (2022) explains that manga production operates within a publishing system where editorial decisions, publication schedules, and market demands influence the creative process. Consequently, manga artists are expected not only to demonstrate artistic originality but also to adapt their work to professional standards established by the publishing industry. This situation contributes to the emergence of themes such as self-doubt, competition, and the continuous pursuit of artistic improvement in stories about manga artists.

In addition to the demands of their work, manga artists also face fierce competition in the creative industry. Banks and Connor (2017) argue that creative work is increasingly shaped by market oriented systems that demand continuous productivity while often offering insecure working conditions. As a result, creative professionals frequently experience long working hours, precarious employment, and pressure to maintain their careers in competitive industries. These pressures are discussed in greater depth in a study of the publishing ecosystem, in which even renowned publishers like Shueisha reveal the complex interplay between job safety

and the relentless demands placed on artists (Oyama, 2024) . In the manga industry, artists compete to produce compelling and successful works that meet readers' expectations. This situation creates pressure because creators must constantly prove their abilities and maintain the quality of their work. As a result, competition is one of the challenges manga artists frequently face.

Creative work is also closely connected to personal identity. According to Finkel et al., (2017) , many creative professionals view their work as an important part of their sense of self. Therefore, criticism, failure, or comparisons with others can affect their self-confidence and emotional well-being. Feelings such as anxiety, self-doubt, and insecurity often arise when creators feel that their work is not good enough. This shows that being a manga artist involves not only artistic skills but also emotional challenges that can affect both personal and professional life.

Overall, animated movie portray manga artists as complex characters, shaped by cultural norms, industry demands, and personal aspirations. By focusing on their professional environment and emotional experiences, animated movie provide insight into the realities of manga artists' lives in Japanese society. This focus positions manga artists as meaningful subjects for academic analysis, particularly in studies that explore creative identity and cultural production in Japanese media.

2. Japanese Social Work Culture and Cultural Pressure

Japanese social work culture is characterized by strong values of discipline, resilience, and collective responsibility. Scholars explain that this culture is influenced by concepts such as *ganbaru* (striving to the best of one's ability) and collective consciousness, which encourage individuals to prioritize group harmony and organizational success over personal needs (Haga et al., 2024). Within this framework, long working hours, emotional control, and dedication to work are socially accepted as indicators of professionalism and moral commitment.

The causes of cultural pressure in the Japanese work environment are closely linked to historical and structural factors. Japan's post-war economic development fostered systems such as lifetime employment, seniority-based hierarchies, and strong corporate loyalty. These systems reinforce expectations of perseverance, conformity, and self-sacrifice, while limiting personal autonomy. As a result, workers often experience pressure to meet collective standards, avoid failure, and suppress personal difficulties in order to remain socially accepted.

The impact of this work culture has been widely discussed in relation to mental health and well-being. Academic studies show that prolonged exposure to long working hours, limited breaks, and emotional pressure contributes to stress, fatigue, anxiety, and depression among Japanese workers (Haga et al., 2024). These effects are understood as structural consequences of cultural norms that prioritize productivity and resilience.

Therefore, Japanese social work culture and cultural pressures form an important theoretical basis for understanding work-related stress in Japanese society.

3. Hall's Theory of Representation

According to Hall, (1997) , representation is the process of producing and exchanging meaning through language, images, and other signs. Representation does not merely reflect reality as it is, but actively constructs meaning based on how people interpret and understand social experiences. Therefore, media such as movies can be viewed as cultural texts that shape viewers' perceptions of reality.

Hall explains that meaning is constructed through signs, symbols, visual images, and language that appear in media texts. Through this process, the media can represent certain ideas, values, and social realities. In animated movies, these representations can be identified through characters, dialogue, actions, facial expressions, and visual elements that convey specific meanings to the audience.

This theory is relevant to this study because the movie *Look Back* depicts the life of a manga artist through the character Fujino. Using Hall's theory of representation, this study analyzed how the character Fujino is portrayed and how the movie constructs meanings related to creative pressure, competition, social isolation, and the working realities of manga artists in Japan. Therefore, Hall's theory provides an appropriate framework for understanding the social and cultural meanings embedded in the movie.

B. Review of Relevant Research

Several studies have examined the representation of social and cultural issues in anime through various analytical frameworks. These works collectively demonstrate how animated texts function as critical media for constructing social meanings, particularly in relation to work culture, identity, and psychological pressures within Japanese society. The following review highlights three relevant studies that share thematic and methodological intersections with the present research, each addressing representation, cultural values, or social critique through the medium of anime.

A study on work culture representation in anime was conducted by Upik (2021), titled "Representation of Work Culture in the Anime *Shirobako* using Stuart Hall's Representation Theory." The aim of this study was to analyze how work culture and creative labor in the Japanese animation industry are represented thru characters and narrative structure in the anime *Shirobako*. The method used was a descriptive qualitative approach with representational analysis, focusing on scenes, dialog, and character interactions. The findings reveal that *Shirobako* portrays creative workers as passionate yet exhausted individuals who face long working hours, hierarchical power dynamics, and production pressures. This study concludes that anime can serve as a critical medium for exposing labor exploitation and dedication in Japan's creative industries.

The representation of social deviance and youth violence in anime has also been examined through a semiotic approach. Vanie & Javiera (2023) analyzed

the anime *Tokyo Revengers* with the aim of investigating how youth violence and delinquency are symbolically represented as forms of social deviance and resistance among young people. The method employed was qualitative semiotic analysis, focusing on characters' signs, symbols, costumes, and behaviors. The results show that violence in *Tokyo Revengers* is not just physical aggression, but represents the rebellion of young people against rigid social structures and marginalization. This study shows how anime encodes social criticism through symbolic representation.

Mental health representation in anime has been explored in a study by Valentina (2024), who examined how adult fatigue and psychological exhaustion are depicted in the anime *Life Lessons with Uramichi Oniisan*. The method used is qualitative descriptive analysis with a thematic and representational approach, analyzing dialog, facial expressions, and narrative situations. The findings suggest that Uramichi represents working adults experiencing emotional exhaustion due to unrealistic workplace expectations. This anime uses satire and dark humor to critique toxic positivity and emotional suppression in modern work culture.

Based on the three studies reviewed above, it is clear that anime can effectively represent various social issues, including work culture, youth violence, and mental health. Each study uses a qualitative approach and shows how characters and visual elements in anime reflect real social conditions. Despite focusing on different anime titles and themes, all three studies share a common finding: that anime characters often serve as symbols of the pressures

and struggles that people face in everyday life. The present study follows a similar approach by analyzing how the character Fujino in the movie *Look Back* represents the life of a manga artist in Japan. What makes this study different is its focus on a movie format and its attention to the specific creative and psychological pressures experienced by manga artists, an aspect that has not been widely explored in previous research.

C. Theoretical Framework

This study uses a representation-based analytical framework because animated movie serves not only as entertainment but also as cultural texts that actively construct meaning through narrative and visual elements. Representation allows researchers to analyze how stories, characters, and images shape viewers' understanding of social reality. In the context of animated movie, meaning is generated through the interaction between language, images, and cultural codes, making representation an appropriate framework for analyzing how creative identities and emotional experiences is depicted in specific cultural contexts.

Focusing on representation is particularly relevant when analyzing the identity of manga artists, whose work is often influenced by intense professional and social pressures. Animated movie often depicts creative individuals facing expectations related to productivity, competition, and success. These pressures are not only perceived as personal challenges, but are embedded in broader cultural values surrounding work and achievement. Through representation, emotional conflict, self-doubt, and ambition become symbolic expressions of