

Japan's Soft Power through Doraemon: Story of Seasons in Enhancing Japan's National Image

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Abstract. This study examines the role of the game Doraemon: Story of Seasons as Japan's soft power in enhancing the country's national image. This game, which combines the iconic Doraemon character with the Story of Seasons gameplay concept, presents a rich narrative and cultural elements. Through the semiotics analysis approach proposed by Roland Gérard Barthes – including sign, signifier, signified – this research explores how Japanese cultural representation is conveyed and received by global players through theme, plot, characterization, setting, and point of view. The study's findings show that this game is not only a means of entertainment but also effectively introduces traditional values, aesthetics, and the Japanese lifestyle. Thus, Doraemon: Story of Seasons makes a positive contribution to strengthening Japan's national image on the international stage through narrative-based cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: Cultural, Diplomacy, Doraemon, Game, Soft Power.

1. Introduction

In the modern digital era, nations leverage various strategies to expand their influence globally, with culture serving as a crucial tool. Japan has successfully utilized its cultural assets to strengthen its international presence through a concept known as soft power. Soft power, as defined by Almakaty (2025), refers to a country's ability to shape global perceptions and influence other nations through cultural appeal rather than coercion [1]. Among Japan's most effective soft power tools are its popular media, particularly anime, manga, and video games [2]. A prime example of Japan's cultural diplomacy is the Cool Japan initiative, which promotes the nation's cultural products worldwide. One significant aspect of this initiative is Japan's gaming industry, which has gained international recognition for its engaging narratives and cultural representation. This study focuses on Doraemon: Story of Seasons, a collaborative effort between the iconic Doraemon franchise and the renowned Story of Seasons game series. By analyzing this game, we examine how Japan utilizes video games as a medium for soft power and cultural diplomacy.

Several studies have explored the role of media in Japan's soft power strategy. The globalization of Japanese popular culture and how its transnational appeal contributes to shaping Japan's image abroad [3]. Otmazgin (2012) examines the role of anime and manga in

Japan's cultural diplomacy, emphasizing their economic and political impact [4]. Japanese video games incorporate cultural narratives that appeal to global audiences [5]. Pellitteri (2021) highlights how Doraemon, as a transmedia franchise, promotes Japan's cultural heritage and values worldwide [6]. Open-world gaming as a medium for storytelling and cultural representation, reinforcing the connection between interactive entertainment and national branding [7]. While previous studies have focused on anime, manga, and general aspects of gaming in soft power, this research specifically examines the Doraemon: Story of Seasons game and its contribution to Japan's cultural diplomacy.

This study aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in Doraemon: Story of Seasons, examine the representation of Japanese culture in the game, and evaluate how Doraemon: Story of Seasons serves as a tool for Japan's soft power strategy in promoting its national image. To achieve this, the research employs a qualitative content analysis approach. The primary data source is Doraemon: Story of Seasons, which is analyzed through semiotic and narrative analysis to identify cultural representations and soft power elements. Secondary data includes academic literature, articles, and reports on Japanese cultural diplomacy and video game studies.

The study finds that Doraemon: Story of Seasons effectively incorporates Japanese cultural themes through traditional farming practices and rural life representation, symbolic elements such as seasonal festivals, food culture, and interpersonal relationships, and the integration of Japanese ethical and moral values, reflecting collectivist and harmonious social principles. Furthermore, the game fosters a positive perception of Japan by presenting an idyllic and immersive experience that resonates with international audiences.

This study highlights the role of Doraemon: Story of Seasons in reinforcing Japan's national image through digital entertainment. By blending nostalgic elements of Doraemon with the immersive storytelling of Story of Seasons, the game offers a unique platform for cultural exchange. The findings contribute to the broader discussion on how video games function as a medium for cultural diplomacy and national branding. Overall, this research underscores the growing significance of gaming in Japan's soft power strategy. As the global gaming industry continues to expand, Japan's use of video games as cultural ambassadors will likely become even more influential in shaping international perceptions of the country.

2. Literature Review

The role of video games in shaping cultural perceptions and fostering international soft power has been widely studied. Previous research suggests that games influence players' perspectives on culture, morality, and social interaction [8]. Video games frequently incorporate characters and settings inspired by diverse cultures, serving as vehicles for cultural representation [9]. This phenomenon aligns with Japan's longstanding tradition of using media as a cultural export, particularly through anime, manga, and games under the Cool Japan initiative.

Moral education is another key theme in gaming, especially in titles that reflect Japanese societal values. Japan's elementary schools implement structured moral education programs [10], and Doraemon: Story of Seasons integrates these moral lessons. The game's characters, modeled as elementary school students, reflect core Japanese values such as cooperation, diligence, and respect [11]. This portrayal extends beyond entertainment, serving as an implicit educational tool that introduces players to Japan's moral philosophy [11].

Japan has previously leveraged games for cultural diplomacy, as seen in the success of Pokémon Go, which disseminated elements of Japanese culture worldwide [12]. Comparative studies of gaming soft power, work on Genshin Impact as China's soft power tool, further illustrate how video games can subtly promote national culture. Their research demonstrates that Genshin Impact fosters global interest in Chinese history and traditions, reinforcing the idea that gaming can function as a form of cultural outreach and diplomacy [13].

There was also a study in 2021 which showed personality traits (neuroticism and openness) are associated with an increasing environmental concern. It also suggested a bidirectional relationship between personality development and environmental factors.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Roland Barthes' semiotics theory, which divides meaning into connotative and denotative levels [14]. According to Barthes, connotation embodies ideological and cultural myths, transforming basic signs into deeper social meanings. These myths, in turn, shape players' perceptions and reinforce cultural narratives. Applying this framework to Doraemon: Story of Seasons allows for an analysis of how Japanese cultural symbols are embedded in the game and how they contribute to Japan's soft power.

Additionally, this study employs cultural diplomacy theory, which posits that nations leverage cultural products to advance national interests and foster international goodwill [15]. Soft power underscores the significance of cultural appeal in global influence, distinguishing it from coercive political power. Video games, as immersive cultural experiences, serve as contemporary extensions of soft power by engaging global audiences through storytelling and interactive participation [16].

Despite the extensive research on gaming and soft power, gaps remain in understanding how specific Japanese game franchises contribute to national branding. While studies have examined anime and general gaming trends, few have focused on Doraemon: Story of Seasons and its role in Japan's cultural diplomacy. The game's integration of Japanese traditions, moral education, and rural aesthetics presents a unique case study that warrants further exploration.

In summary, existing literature highlights the intersection of gaming, cultural diplomacy, and soft power. However, further research is needed to analyze how Doraemon: Story of Seasons specifically enhances Japan's global image. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the game's semiotic elements and their contribution to Japan's cultural outreach efforts.

3. Method





This research employs a qualitative method, as it is particularly relevant for exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups assign to a social phenomenon. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study as it allows an in-depth analysis of the narrative and dialogue within the game, capturing subtle details that quantitative methods might overlook.





Data collection was carried out using observation and note-taking techniques. The observation method, involves examining language use within the research object. This method ensures a comprehensive understanding of how language functions in its natural context [17]. Additionally, listening is a crucial aspect of observation, where the researcher carefully hears verbal symbols, interprets their meaning, and comprehends the messages conveyed through spoken language. In this study, the researcher closely observed the narrative and dialogue

within the game, carefully noting relevant aspects that contribute to the research objectives [18].

The note-taking technique, follows observation and involves documenting essential data manually and digitally. The researcher recorded key parts of the narrative and dialogue through detailed notes and screenshots, ensuring accuracy in data collection. This combination of methods enabled a thorough analysis of the linguistic elements present in the game. Table 1 below is the data collected from the game Doraemon: Story of Seasons, which included sign (in screenshot form), signifier, and signified.

Table 1. Sign, Signifier, Signified.

	Sign	Signifier	Signified
Data 001		Nobita walks on the farmland. There are several trees around Nobita.	The trees depicted have a variety of green and pink colors.
Data 002		Nobita participates in a watermelon-splitting contest with the townspeople.	Nobita participates in a watermelon-splitting contest with the townspeople. This contest is an annual event in Shizen Town every summer.
Data 003		Nobita fertilizes gobo/burdock plants.	Nobita fertilizes gobo/burdock plants. Gobo/burdock is a plant that can be grown in the fall season in this game.
Data 004		A list of food recipes that Nobita can make.	Nobita can prepare a variety of dishes using his agricultural products as well as ingredients sourced from the forest and sea. Most of the dishes made are traditional

	Sign	Signifier	Signified
			Japanese foods like tempura, chikuzen-ni, oden, and others.
Data 005		Doraemon and Nobita sympathize with Harmon.	Doraemon and Nobita show sympathy for the character, Harmon, who is described as an orphan.
Data 006		Depiction of the Harvest Goddess, Vera, in the future, before she is swept into the gigastorm.	Vera is a scientist who likely comes from the same century as Doraemon. Because of her advanced tools, Vera was considered the Harvest Goddess by the local residents.
Data 007		Nobita and his friends work together to retrieve the golden leaf from the Big Tree.	Despite frequent arguments, the five friends manage to obtain the golden leaf from the Big Tree thanks to their teamwork. They successfully save the town from the gigastorm.
Data 008		Giant, Suneo, Shizuka, and Nobita show their new skills to their mothers.	Giant, Suneo, Shizuka, and Nobita demonstrate the new abilities they gained from working in Shizen Town to their respective mothers. Giant, who works at the carpenter's shop, makes a chair for

Sign	Signifier	Signified
 <p>The 'Sign' column contains three panels of illustrations from the Doraemon series. The top panel shows Suneo offering a bowl of food to Nobita's mother, with a speech bubble saying 'Did someone order the Sneez special? I made this myself! Try a bite!'. The middle panel shows Shizuka and Nobita looking at a bird, with a speech bubble saying 'Where did you learn to care for her like that, Nobita?'. The bottom panel shows Nobita giving a radish to Doraemon, with a speech bubble saying 'Hey, Doraemon! I got a present for you!'.</p>		his mother; Suneo, who works at the restaurant, prepares a delicious meal for his mother; Shizuka, who works at the clinic, treats an injured bird with her mother; and Nobita gives his mother a radish he grew in Shizen Town.

4. Results and Discussion

The data we can find in the game Doraemon: Story of Seasons comes in the form of visual signs, dialogue, and the game's mechanics themselves. According to Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, the signs that appear reflect the assumptions of the audience of a literary work. Therefore, a system of meaning is needed to analyze the meaning of the signs that emerge in a literary work. The system of meaning proposed by Barthes consists of denotative meaning, which serves as the signifier for connotative meaning, and connotative meaning, which is used to express and justify values within a certain period [19]. Based on the obtained data, the following is an analysis of denotative meaning:

- (i) Data 001
Nobita walks around his farmland, surrounded by trees in different colors, namely green and pink.
- (ii) Data 002
Nobita is at the beach with other town residents, participating in a summer event called the watermelon-splitting contest. This game is commonly played during the summer in Japan.
- (iii) Data 003
Nobita fertilizes burdock plants, known as "gobo" in Japanese. The setting takes place in autumn, as seen from the yellowing grass.

- (iv) Data 004
A list of recipes that Nobita can cook. The game offers a wide variety of recipes, ranging from Western to Eastern dishes. Some Japanese dishes captured in the screenshots include tempura and oden.
- (v) Data 005
Doraemon and Nobita cry after learning that their new friend in Shizen Town, Harmon, has no parents. Both characters express their sympathy for Harmon through dialogue and facial expressions.
- (vi) Data 006
Vera is a scientist who likely comes from the same century as Doraemon. She explains that she is considered the Harvest Goddess because she brings advanced tools from the future, including the Big Tree, which can control the weather.
- (vii) Data 007
Nobita and his friends work together to obtain the golden leaf to stop the Big Tree from unleashing a gigastorm. Despite their frequent quarrels, the five friends manage to retrieve the golden leaf through teamwork. They successfully save the town from the gigastorm.
- (viii) Data 008
Giant, Suneo, Shizuka, and Nobita demonstrate the new skills they acquired while working in Shizen Town to their respective mothers. Giant, who works at the carpenter's shop, makes a chair for his mother; Suneo, who works at the restaurant, prepares a delicious meal for his mother; Shizuka, who works at the clinic, treats an injured bird alongside her mother; and Nobita gives his mother a radish he grew in Shizen Town.

Based on the denotative interpretation of the signs that appear, the following is an analysis of the connotative meaning of the obtained data:

- (i) Data 001
The game developers intend to depict spring as it is in Japan by adding pink trees, representing cherry blossoms (sakura). With these additions, players can identify the season through this iconic symbol of Japan.
- (ii) Data 002
The watermelon-splitting game, commonly played during summer in Japan, introduces Japanese culture in the game. By including this fun mini-game, international players can experience a traditional Japanese activity through their gaming devices.
- (iii) Data 003
Burdock or "gobo" in Japanese is a plant widely used in Japanese cuisine. Through the farming feature, players are introduced to various crops commonly grown in Japan, like burdock.
- (iv) Data 004
The developers added a variety of traditional Japanese dishes, allowing players to experience making Japanese food through the game. This in-game experience may spark players' interest in trying these dishes in real life. For example, Harmon's favorite dish, chikuzen-ni, can be made using burdock grown on Nobita's farm.
- (v) Data 005
Doraemon and Nobita cry after learning the truth about their new friend Harmon, who has no parents. Both characters are portrayed as empathetic and genuinely caring for Harmon.

(vi) Data 006

Vera is a scientist likely from the same era as Doraemon. Instead of using magic, she helps the town's residents prevent crop failure with her advanced tools. Vera's character reflects the vision and intelligence associated with Japanese people, showing their ability to create innovative tools that improve daily life.

(vii) Data 007

Nobita and his friends work together to obtain the golden leaf to stop the Big Tree from unleashing a gigastorm. Despite their frequent quarrels, their teamwork enables them to succeed. This collaboration ultimately saves the town from disaster.

(viii) Data 008

Giant, Suneo, Shizuka, and Nobita demonstrate the new skills they gained in Shizen Town to their mothers. By applying what they learned and experienced in Shizen Town, they show appreciation for their mothers through their work—whether by crafting, cooking, healing, or farming.

From the findings of denotative and connotative meanings above, players are encouraged to understand the portrayal of characters and stories that align with the moral education of elementary school children in Japan, as mentioned in other research [19]. This includes relationships with oneself (such as honesty and self-development), relationships with others (such as politeness, friendship, respect between genders, and willingness to learn from others), and relationships with nature and higher values (such as respect for forces beyond human control, including nature and divinity) [19].

The elements that make up Doraemon: Story of Seasons contain moral values that can influence player behavior, both through character portrayals and the game mechanics presented by the developers. Doraemon: Story of Seasons can serve as an enjoyable alternative for children's moral education, as it delivers its messages subtly—without being overly didactic—yet remains direct and clear [20].

Based on this conclusion, Doraemon: Story of Seasons subtly yet firmly conveys the idea that Japanese elementary school children uphold strong moral values through various signs. As part of popular media, this game significantly influences global perceptions of Japan and contributes to the country's soft power.

As part of popular media, the game has a significant impact on global perceptions of Japan and strengthens the country's soft power. Here is an analysis of how the game shapes global perceptions and enhances Japan's soft power includes; introducing Japanese Rural Culture, the game depicts life in the Japanese countryside, featuring beautiful natural landscapes, rice fields, and traditional activities such as farming, fishing, and interacting with local communities. International players gain an image of peaceful and harmonious rural Japanese life, which contrasts with the urban image of Japan often portrayed in media. The game includes seasonal festivals and local traditions, such as matsuri (Japanese festivals) and tea ceremonies, allowing players to learn the importance of tradition and togetherness in Japanese culture. Doraemon as a Cultural Ambassador, Doraemon is part of Japan's soft power as an iconic character globally recognized through anime, manga, and merchandise. His presence in the game strengthens Japanese cultural identity. Players already familiar with Doraemon feel more connected to the game, while new players are introduced to a character that symbolizes Japanese popular culture. Doraemon often conveys values such as friendship, cooperation, and creativity, which reflect Japanese cultural principles. These positive messages reinforce Japan's image as a nation that upholds moral and social values. Japanese Cuisine, another

element of Japan's soft power in the game is its cuisine. The game features various Japanese dishes, such as oden, tempura, and chikuzen-ni, which players can cook using the ingredients they grow. This exposure encourages players to become more interested in Japanese food and perhaps try these dishes in real life.

The game strengthens Japan's image as a country rich in culture, traditions, and positive values such as harmony, hard work, and friendship. As a result, international players may see Japan as an attractive destination to visit.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that Isabella experiences psychological inner conflict due to the external pressures and inner conflicts she faces. Using Freud's psychoanalytic theory that focuses on the id, ego, and superego, it is seen that Isabella experiences a shift from the id that is concerned with survival, to the ego that adapts to the system, until the end of the story Isabella is awakened to the superego which leads her to moral awareness to help the children escape. This proves that external conflicts in one's environment play a significant role in shaping their personality. The pressures and challenges a person faces can influence how they think, behave, and make decisions. External conflicts are not just sources of stress; they also push individuals to adapt, survive, or even change their beliefs and values. In this way, personality is not something fixed but rather something that continuously evolves based on experiences and the ever-changing dynamics of one's surroundings.

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