

## Yugen Aesthetic Element in Japanese Animation

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**Abstract.** Yugen is an artistic aesthetic as a combination of elements of seijaku (silent), yojo (lasting impression), muhyojo (expressionless), and aki (emptiness). In general, yugen means mysterious beauty, where a beauty can only be felt in an object, even though that beauty does not exist in the true sense of the word and cannot be seen directly. Yugen became one of the characteristics of Japanese literature. Hakkeden Touhou Hakken Ibun (2013) by Abe Miyuki is an anime that contains elements of yugen. This anime is an adaptation of a yomihon (novel) entitled Satomi Hakkenden, the masterpiece of Takizawa Bakin who was a great Japanese writer at the end of premodern Japan. This study aims to analyze the yugen element in the Hakkeden Touhou Hakken Ibun anime. This research is a library research with an objective approach. The research method used is descriptive analysis. Yugen aesthetics in anime are visualized in such a way as to invite the audience to imagine in such a way that they can find and feel the beauty that exists. The concept of beauty like this is one of the characteristics of Japanese literature, including anime. In this study, it can be concluded that in the Hakkeden Touhou Hakken Ibun anime, there is a yugen aesthetic by highlighting the dominance of dark colors. But that doesn't mean that the dominance of dark colors gives a strong or fearful impression, but that dark colors can also create a sense of calm, comfort, security. And, by combining elements with one another, this dark color can give meaning, loneliness, and solitude.

Keywords: Yugen, Artistic, Animation, Japan

### 1. Introduction

Yugen is one of the basic aesthetic elements in various works of art in Japan, one of which is literature. Yugen comes from the concept of Zen Buddhism that has been born in Japan since the 12th century. Yugen is often translated as “deep beauty” or mysterious beauty because that beauty cannot be experienced directly. Therefore imagination is very important to be able to enjoy yugen. In Sekartaji it is stated that yugen as a form of feeling deposition, deep contemplation, essence, and in that depth there is an element of darkness that can be associated negatively such as destruction, bringing gloom, fear. But darkness is also associated with positive and is often called quiet darkness [1]. Furthermore, Fujiwara Shunzei said that yugen is an aesthetic that combines elegance in simplicity and which has splendor and brilliance and is rich in symbolism [2].

Previously, research on yugen was carried out by Galuh Sekartaji, a graduate student at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta in 2016. He explained the aesthetics of Zen Buddhism theory, which contains elements of yugen, in the animated film The Tale of Princess Kaguya. In his journal, it is explained that yugen is a form of deposition of taste, deep contemplation, essence. In that depth there is an element of darkness that can be associated negatively such as destruction, bringing

gloom, fear. But darkness is also associated with positive and is often called quiet darkness. The result of this research is that the yugen element contained in the film *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* is a background depiction that features impressive and opaque watercolor strokes like Zen painting. The visualization of the city's background with minimal objects can be interpreted as a pseudo, empty thing, strengthening the movements of city people with colorful costumes, indicating that the city is a manifestation of the ego and human law that always demands perfection. The dominant color of the walls is gray gradations giving the impression of deep boundaries, the silence refers to Kaguya's confined psychic condition. The application of a thin color sweep technique presents elements of yugen (depth and subtlety) that frame the expressive scenes and characters depicted.

Research on yugen was also conducted by Vyas Chairul Fazri, Budi Rukhyana, and Helen Susanti in 2020 which discussed the yugen element in Shodou. The result of this research is that the characteristics of yugen in art are reflected in faded strokes to express an object symbolically. With brush strokes, it will produce the meaning you want to convey to be implied in the final result of a work. In elements that are not implied or not manifested in a work, Hisamatsu said that in that case lies the quality of yugen, which contains deep meaning. This can also be seen in the form of characters in the *sousho* style which is a simplified form of the standard shodou character.

Then in 2018, Adam Loughnane in his journal discussed the value of yugen contained in Sesshu's painting with the theme of *Splashed Ink Landscape*. The contents of the journal discuss the yugen aesthetic contained in Sesshu's painting *Splashed Ink Landscape* through techniques that range from spontaneous washing and splashing to actual ink tossing and dripping, creating a fully formed art image, but in negating itself by following the Taoist teaching that "great pictures have formlessness", producing the yugen element of the thickness of ink and the incompleteness of form.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the research above, the research we discussed on yugen aesthetics used the library method. This research is based on the theory that the yugen element contained in literary works is dominated by dark coloring, but even so it does not mean that it gives the impression of fear, gloom, but in the dominance of dark colors it brings calm, comfort, and security, in the *Hakkenden Touhou Hakken* anime.

Anime is a term to refer to Japanese animation. Ranang et.al explained that Anime comes from the word *animeshion*, usually characterized by colorful pictures featuring characters in various locations and stories, aimed at various types of audience. Anime is influenced by the drawing style of manga, which is a typical Japanese comic. [3]. Even though when film technology has developed in 3D, anime is still synonymous with the use of 2D technology. Apart from manga, the source of the story is also based on light novels. Anime is said to be a literary work because in it there are building elements like works of fiction. Anime also has elements of characters and characterizations, settings, themes, and mandates. Another characteristic of anime is the setting of places and stories that tend to be complex and creative. This makes the audience are invited to fantasize more broadly about the life of the world.

*Hakkeden Touhou Hakken Ibun* is an anime produced by Studio Deen in 2013. This anime is an adaptation of a *yomihon* (an Edo period novel) entitled *Satomi Hakkenden*, the masterpiece of Takizawa Bakin. Tells about the characters Shino and Sosuke who were saved by Satomi Rio's life. In return, Satomi gave Shino and Sosuke a task to collect the eight reincarnated dog warriors who turned out to be Shino's closest people while living in the capital. This anime is full of the values of Devotion, Morality, Brotherhood., Faith., Wisdom, Loyalty, Ethics, and Virtue. Based on this, the author intends to examine the aesthetic elements of Yugen in the anime entitled *Hakkeden Touhou Hakken Ibun*.

## 2. Method

This research is a type of library research, by seeking various related information through journals related to the material. The research method used is descriptive qualitative, namely describing the facts which are then followed by analysis [4]. The research approach used is an objective approach. The main research data is the animation *Hakkeden Touhou Hakken Ibun* by Abe Miyuki released in 2013 by Deen Studio (2 seasons/ 26 episodes). Data collection is limited to episodes depicted by yugen elements only.

Researchers as human instruments that carry out the process of data collection and analysis independently.

### 3. Results and Discussion



**Picture 1.** 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode; 3 minute 07.53

Picture 1 is the scene where Sosuke asks Shino about the reason why Shino accepted Satomi's offer to become Murasame's demon sword receptacle. Shino replied that if she didn't make that decision then neither of them would survive. The risk of becoming the receptacle of Murasame's demon sword was that Shino couldn't grow old, immortal.

The depiction in Picture 1 shows the dominance of black color with a slight gradation at the edges making the image reflect the dark side that is characteristic of yugen itself. The coloring of the white cloth that covers the characters gives the impression of contrast with the darkness around them, showing the main point when the reader sees the picture, it will immediately focus on the child who is covered in white cloth. As according to Feng Shui, the color white symbolizes purity and innocence, which is very suitable for the child who is wrapped in the cloth. The feathers that are presented around the image give the impression of softness that is hidden behind the darkness of the image's meaning. Then lastly, a sleeping child describes fragility. Overall, despite the dominance of dark colors that are highlighted, they still produce an impression of calm.



**Picture 2.** 8<sup>th</sup> Episode ; minute 18.22

Picture 2 is a scene where Dosetsu is on his way to find his long-lost sister. At that time Dousetsu was lost in a blizzard forest. Dousetsu who was suffering from hypothermia was lying in the thick snow while looking up at the night sky. The falling snow that looks as if it glows is a stark contrast in the dark bandage of the night as well as the tree branches that look white to strengthen the eerie impression.

In picture 2 presents yugen elements taken from nature. The dominance of dark colors is obtained from the dark night sky, because the angle taken from the image is taken from below which makes it interesting, so the sky is spread wide. Falling snow shapes are also drawn with realistic shapes as seen with the naked eye. In the picture, the effect of far near falling snow is applied. The connotations implied



in the picture are loneliness, cold, and loneliness which are symbolized by snow. Overall, the dominance of dark colors that are highlighted reflects feelings of loneliness and solitude.



**Picture 3.** Episode 14; minutes 10.29

Picture 3 is a scene where a restless Nachi is described as thinking about something while looking at the moon. Picture 3. on the right is what the person sitting in the picture on the right sees. Both display the value of yugen with the dominance of dark colors. In the left image, it depicts a night situation with a full moon, autumn trees and a faint puff of smoke visible. The affixing of the full moon symbolizes the determination of a soul. In the right picture, a man looks at the left picture on the terrace of a typical Japanese house. Soft light emanating from the moon lit up the man. The reflection of the man's shadow in the moonlight, and the angle taken from inside the house in the dark gives the impression of solitude. Overall, the dominance of the dark colors of the image simultaneously also gives the impression of loneliness.



**Picture 4.** Episode 14, minutes 16.19

Picture 4 is a scene that shows a cat walking away towards the time of his death. The cat belonged to Daikaku since childhood. The cat is always near Daikaku but in recent days Noro the cat has not been seen. Daikaku thinks Noro is dead because according to the story he knows that cats know when to die. When the cat is about to die, the cat will move away and look for a place to die so he can rest in peace without making the people who care for him feel sad.

From the angle taken in picture 4, it shows the difference in lighting, from the angle we look at the picture, the further away the brightness gets darker. On the other side of the cat, there are fireflies that illuminate the dark side of the other side, separated by a river that seems to glow from the bottom of the river. The image symbolizes the connotative meaning of someone/something towards the world after life. The existence of fireflies symbolizes the human soul that is already there. Overall, the dominance of dark colors in the image simultaneously gives the impression of warmth that comes from the fireflies as well as gives a sense of calm connotatively because even though we are going to the other side of the world, we are not alone, someone is already waiting for us there to welcome us.



**Picture 5.** Episode 14, minutes 17.50

Picture 5 is a scene that depicts Noro, Daikaku's cat who has become the guardian spirit of the area around Daikaku's house. Noro makes a barrier in the form of a forest of cherry blossoms that continues to bloom throughout the year, in order to protect his master from evil spirits. Sadly, he continues to protect the area even though Daikaku has forgotten himself even his name and traces of existence. Every night playing alone playing ball while singing, waiting for his master to remember his whereabouts. In picture 5 the depiction of a small child playing temari is placed in the middle of the picture so as to make the reader's focus go directly to the child. Around the child is depicted a Sakura tree which some of its petals have fallen. The dominance of color between Sakura and tree trunks looks contrasting. Coupled with the gradation of the image from all sides towards the center of the image getting darker, leaving only the center that has a light color. The concentration of light in the middle creates a sense of loneliness. Although the dominance of the color is dark, but it does not give fear.



**Picture 6.** Episode 22, minutes 23.39

Picture 6 is a scene that depicts Inue Shinobu, a half-tengu and half-human child. Her mother, who is ashamed of Shinobu's existence as a child who does not know who her father is, finally raises Shinobu in a cage so that the public does not know of her whereabouts. Then one time his mother tried to give Shinobu to someone, then on the way, he and Shinobu slipped and fell off a cliff which killed him instantly and seriously injured Shinobu. Shinobu is then saved by Kagetsu, a tengu who seems to be Shinobu's real father. For 10 years, Shinobu lived with Kagetsu and his younger brother Hazuki. Living for 10 years without aging with the tengu who raised him was enough for Shinobu to consider the two tengu as her parents. Shinobu is finally recaptured and brought to the countryside thanks to the help of the monks. But after 6 years have passed, Shinobu's memory returns along with Hazuki's attempt to reclaim Shinobu. In the scene above, Shinobu is looking at the night sky behind her simple bedroom window. He misses home and he considers his parents, namely the two tengu.

In picture 6 the focus is on the child who is looking at the night sky through the window of a typical Japanese house. At first glance, the image seems to represent a child who longs for freedom. The light that entered the room through the window seemed to gently hit the child and provide warmth in his solitude. The child's sitting position depicts resignation, no power. Overall, the dominance of dark

lighting in the image gives a sense of security. In this context, safe means safe if you are indoors and not necessarily the desired freedom from the outside world is safe.

#### 4. Conclusion

Yugen aesthetics in anime are visualized in such a way as to invite the audience to imagine in such a way that they can find and feel the beauty that exists. The concept of beauty like this is one of the characteristics of Japanese literature, including anime. In the Hakkeden Touhou Hakken Ibun anime, there is a yugen aesthetic by highlighting the dominance of dark colors. But that doesn't mean that the dominance of dark colors gives a strong or fearful impression, but that dark colors can also create a sense of calm, comfort, security. And, by combining elements with one another, this dark color can give the meaning of sadness, loneliness, and solitude.

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