

Virtual Discontent: Japanese Netizen Reactions to the Indonesia-China High-Speed Rail Controversy on Youtube

Moh. Gandhi Amanullah*, Putri Elsy

Department of Japanese Language and Literature, Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia

*Email: moh-g-a@fib.unair.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study delved into the reactions of Japanese society, particularly netizens, to the Indonesia-China High-Speed Rail project, inaugurated in 2023, by analyzing content on Youtube. Through a qualitative approach and content analysis, the research applied symbolic interactionism as its conceptual framework. The dataset included 22 Youtube videos collected during October 2023, a pivotal time marked by the project's inauguration. This study revealed that, through a symbolic interactionism perspective, Japanese netizens form negative meanings of the Indonesia-China High Speed Rail (HSR) project based on interactions with symbols in Youtube content. Visual and verbal representations in videos and thumbnails contributed to these perceptions, with 20 out of 22 analyzed contents expressing criticism, sarcasm, or disappointment, portraying HSR as a symbol of failure or betrayal, rather than progress or achievement. In addition, discussions in the comments section, with an average of 390 comments per video, reinforced these negative interpretations. Phrases such as “betrayal” and visuals that negatively portray Indonesia emphasize a broader sense of national disillusionment, going beyond the technical aspects of the project and reflecting political as well as economic concerns.

Keyword: High-Speed Rail Project, KCIC, Youtube, Content Analysis, Symbolic Interactionism

INTRODUCTION

During the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a high-speed railway project was proposed as a solution to create a modern, fast, efficient, and environmentally friendly transportation system in Indonesia. Initially, the project was planned as a semi-high-speed rail connecting Jakarta and Surabaya. To assess the feasibility of the project, the Indonesian government collaborated with the Japan International Corporation Agency (JICA) to conduct a feasibility study.

Japan offered to undertake the project but with a condition that the Indonesian government guarantees the financing. Through JICA, Japan had contributed US\$3.5 million since 2014 to fund the feasibility study for the high-speed rail project. Japan estimated the project would require an investment of US\$6.2 billion, with 75 percent of the funding to be provided by Japan through a 40-year loan with an interest rate of 0.1 percent per year (CNN Indonesia, 2024).

However, China unexpectedly entered the competition with a more attractive offer,

proposing a project valued at only US\$5.5 billion, which was lower than Japan's US\$6.2 billion offer. China did not require a government guarantee or funding from the Indonesian state budget and promised tariff subsidies and cost overruns to be borne by the joint venture company. China offered a 40 percent ownership stake for China and 60 percent for the local consortium of eight state-owned enterprises.

President Joko Widodo eventually accepted China's offer, considering it more favorable than Japan's, which required guarantees and posed risks to the government. In March 2015, the then Minister of State-Owned Enterprises, Rini Soemarno, signed a memorandum of understanding with China's Minister of the National Development and Reform Commission, Xu Shaoshi. *PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia-China (KCIC)* was established as the executing company for the project, resulting from a collaboration between a consortium of four Indonesian state-owned enterprises and Chinese companies.

The Indonesian government's decision to reject Japan's offer in favor of China's for the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail project was due to Japan's inability to meet the government's requirement that the cooperation be in the form of business-to-business rather than government-to-government. Japan's exclusion from the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail project certainly led to disappointment and regret on Japan's part, which temporarily strained relations between Indonesia and Japan. On September 4, 2015, the Japanese Ambassador to Indonesia at the time, Yasuaki Tanizaki, expressed his government's disappointment and regret to Indonesia. In an interview with a journalist from Kompas at the Office of the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, Tanizaki expressed two main reasons for his regret.

First, Japan had allocated a substantial amount of funds for the high-speed rail (HSR) feasibility study for the Jakarta-Bandung route. The feasibility study was conducted over three years, involving Japanese technology experts working in collaboration with Indonesia. Second, Japan believed that the technology it offered was the best and met high safety standards. Nevertheless, the Indonesian government had already decided to proceed with the project with China, and Japan respected that decision. Tanizaki acknowledged that it was not an easy decision and promised to convey this to Tokyo (Idris, M., 2021).

While the Japanese government officially expressed its disappointment over its failure to secure the Indonesian high-speed rail project, how did the Japanese public react? It can be hypothesized that the Japanese public shared the same sentiment as the government. Given that this news was broadcasted by Japanese electronic media, it is highly unlikely that the Japanese public was unaware of it. One piece of evidence of public sentiment is found in the work of cartoonist Onan Hiroshi, who criticized the tender process of Indonesia's high-speed rail project, which was ultimately won by China. In a cartoon uploaded to his Facebook account, Hiroshi depicted Japanese workers conducting a feasibility study and then handing the data over to an Indonesian figure, who in turn handed it over to a figure with a Chinese flag, representing a Chinese individual. The cartoon illustrated the disappointment felt by Japan (Syarief, I. S., 2018).

Expressions of disappointment and regret began to surface soon after China won the

Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail tender in 2015. Additionally, Japan doubted whether the project could be realized without its involvement. In another cartoon by Onan Hiroshi, in 2018, when President Jokowi's term was nearing its end, the high-speed rail project faced delays, and Indonesia reportedly sought Japan's assistance again, particularly from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The cartoon depicted Japan's frustration, with Japan viewing Indonesia as ungrateful. However, eight years later, the high-speed rail project, which started in 2015, was successfully realized in 2023, although it was somewhat delayed from the original plan. In light of this situation, how did Japan respond?

Japan, in this context, represents a broad concept. It is difficult to gauge the reaction of the entire Japanese population. However, it is possible to observe the responses of a portion of the population, especially through the internet. Therefore, this study aims to explore the responses of Japanese society as articulated by Japanese netizens through the social media platform Youtube.

METHOD

This research employs qualitative approach and descriptive analysis method. Qualitative research aims to deeply understand meanings, concepts, and symbols within a social context (Berg, 2001: 3-4).

The steps of this research are as follows: *First*, the data was in the form of video content and was collected using the keyword “高速鉄道” (high-speed rail) on Youtube social media channels. The retrieval period was limited to one month since the project was inaugurated in October 2023 and 22 video contents in Japanese were selected for analysis.

Second, the collected data were inventoried, interpreted and analyzed using the concept of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is the process of how individual or social behavior is shaped by creating, maintaining, or changing meaning as a result of interaction with symbols, and not by biological instincts (Blumer, 1969: 2-20). *Third*, the results of data inventory and analysis are then described.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A Brief Overview of High-Speed Rail Development Globally

The concept of high-speed rail (HSR) originated in the 19th century in England, with the first notion of “high-speed” being marked by the 1830 achievement of the steam locomotive 'Rocket,' which reached a speed of 50 km/h. This definition quickly evolved, with the term HSR now generally referring to trains designed for or operating on upgraded tracks at speeds exceeding 250 km/h, as often defined by the International Union of Railways (IUR, 2008).

Japan was the first country to pioneer and implement HSR, launching the Shinkansen service in 1964, connecting Tokyo and Osaka via the 515.4 km Tokaido line. This development was primarily aimed at alleviating traffic congestion on this busy route (Akiyama, 2014).

France became the first European country to operate high-speed rail (HSR) with TGV in

1981 between Paris and Lyon to reduce congestion. Spain followed with AVE in 1992, now having the second largest HSR network in Europe. Italy built an HSR line between Rome and Florence in 1978, while Germany introduced ICE in 1991 connecting major German cities and neighboring countries.

In Asia, Taiwan started HSR in 1989 with the 345km Taipei-Kaohsiung line. South Korea introduced the KTX in 2004, increasing rail passenger numbers. China started building its HSR network in 2004 and by 2020 it is expected to reach 30,000 km, connecting 80% of cities in eight major corridors, with the Beijing-Shanghai and Beijing-Guangzhou corridors being the fastest in the world. (Bharule et al., 2019).

Indonesia has recently realized its own HSR project, known as Kereta Cepat Indonesia China (KCIC) Whoosh. Construction began in 2015, and the line was inaugurated on October 2, 2023. Operated by PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia-China, a joint venture between PT Pilar Sinergi BUMN Indonesia (60%) and Beijing Yawan HSR Co. Ltd. (40%), the KCIC line connects Jakarta and Bandung over a distance of 142.3 km. This journey takes approximately 36-44 minutes at an average speed of 350 km/h. Each KCIC train can carry up to 600 passengers across its eight carriages, with each carriage seating 100 passengers. The KCIC line includes stops at Halim Perdanakusuma, Karawang, Cikampek, Padalarang, and Bandung.

Japan vs. China Rivalry in Infrastructure Projects (High-Speed Rail) in Asia

The HSR project in Indonesia is not merely a collaboration between Indonesia and China; it is part of the broader economic and geopolitical rivalry between Japan and China in Asia (Yoshimatsu, 2018). The competition between these two nations, especially in Southeast Asia, stems from their ambitions to expand influence and secure access to the region's rich natural resources, a struggle rooted in a long history of economic and geopolitical contestation (Zhao, 2019).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a key strategy for building global infrastructure and enhancing access to global markets for Chinese products. One of the major projects under this initiative is the construction of high-speed rail (Cai, 2017). To finance these initiatives, China established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to compete with traditional institutions like the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which are backed by Japan (Zhao, 2019a). In response to China's BRI, Japan launched its own vision focusing on infrastructure development, investment, and regional cooperation, emphasizing quality, sustainability, and security. Japan promotes the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (PQI) and collaborates closely with the private sector while maintaining a significant role in the ADB to support infrastructure projects aligned with its vision (Zhao, 2019b).

The rivalry between China and Japan for high-speed rail projects in Thailand and Indonesia reflects their efforts to exert economic and political influence in Southeast Asia, a phenomenon described as “developmental railpolitics.” This term refers to the use of high-speed rail infrastructure not only to disseminate transportation technology but also as a crucial element in dominating or winning geopolitical competition. The fierce competition between China and Japan in high-speed rail projects across Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia has created complex dynamics in regional politics, economics,

and geopolitics (Wu & Chong, 2018).

In Thailand, China aims to enhance its access to Southeast Asia by planning a high-speed rail network connected to Thailand, viewing the country as a key ASEAN hub and vital transportation center. Meanwhile, Japan, with significant investments in Thailand, focuses on developing an east-west rail corridor to support industrial investment. In Indonesia, the rivalry centers on the HSR project connecting Jakarta and Surabaya. China offered HSR technology with lower construction costs, positioning the project within its BRI vision. Conversely, Japan proposed its Shinkansen technology, known for superior safety and durability, but faced challenges due to higher construction costs (Zhao, 2019c). In Malaysia, China and Japan vied for the HSR project linking Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, with China actively lobbying and tying its bid to acquiring a majority stake in Bandar Malaysia. Japan, on the other hand, promoted Shinkansen technology while offering investment support.

Indonesia navigates the China-Japan competition by adopting an economic hedging strategy. Economic hedging involves a country maintaining flexibility and policy autonomy in the face of global economic uncertainties and changes (Yan, 2023). In the context of the China-Japan rivalry, Indonesia, aware of its role as a battleground for the two powers, uses this strategy to diversify its infrastructure options, balancing between infrastructure investment and policy autonomy. Indonesia's decisions must weigh the trade-offs between preserving policy independence and potentially facing greater economic costs (Yan, 2023a).

This competition can have positive outcomes, such as improving project quality and providing more options for the Indonesian government. The rivalry ensures that both China and Japan will enhance the value of their projects, offering local economic benefits and accelerating infrastructure development. However, it also carries risks, including creating economic and political dependencies on foreign powers, which could lead to problems if bilateral relations deteriorate (van der Putten & Petkova, 2021). Additionally, Indonesia's preference for a particular country's high-speed rail technology may force it to adapt to foreign standards, which may not align with domestic requirements.

Youtube Content Description

The survey results of the content related to the High-Speed Rail project published by Japanese Youtubers during October 2023 show that of the 22 contents analyzed, only two were neutral in tone, while the majority, i.e. 20 contents, contained criticism, sarcasm, disappointment, or condemnation of the project. This reflects that most of the views expressed by content creators and viewers about the HSR project are negative. The average content was 15 minutes long, which shows that content creators invested a considerable amount of time to elaborate their views. In addition, each content attracted the attention of an average of around 75,824 viewers, with a fairly high level of engagement, evident from the average of 390 comments per content.

The level of popularity of the content showed great variation, with the most-watched content reaching 1,038,730 viewers, while the content with the fewest viewers was only seen by 7,286 people. This indicates that while the project generally attracted significant

attention on the Youtube platform, some content received a much greater response than others. However, the overall trend shows a high level of interest from viewers, especially towards content that voices dissatisfaction or criticism of the project.

There was significant variation between the most-viewed video, which garnered 1,038,730 views, and the least-viewed video, with only 7,286 views. This suggests that factors such as the title, thumbnail, or content material had a considerable impact on a video's appeal. The most-viewed video was titled:

中国CNが作ったインドネシアの高速鉄道 Whossh に乗ってきたけど...

【時速 350km の世界】

Riding Indonesia's High-Speed Train Whoosh, Made by China, But...

【A World at 350 km/h】

This variability indicates that some content successfully attracted significant attention, such as the video with the title above, while others may have struggled to capture viewer interest. Overall, this analysis shows that Youtube content created by Japanese individuals in October 2023 regarding the Indonesian high-speed rail project tended to foster active discussions, attract substantial viewer attention, and present information in a relatively brief format.

Next, when examining the topics covered relate to HSR projects, it is evident that the topic of evaluation and criticism of China's high-speed rail access, facilities, fares, and technology was the primary focus, accounting for 17.65% of the overall discussion across all content. This reflects the significant attention Japanese content creators paid to the technical aspects of the project. While criticism can be viewed positively, in this case, it tends toward the negative, as the content often carries tones of sarcasm, condemnation, disappointment, and appears overly critical (details on this will be elaborated below).

The topic of the inauguration and the high-speed rail project also garnered substantial attention, representing 15.69% of the discussions, indicating a particular interest from content creators in the early stages of the project. Meanwhile, the competition between Japan and China in the project tender, along with concerns about financial risks and dependency, each accounted for 13.73%, highlighting the complex economic dynamics and bilateral relations associated with the project.

Additionally, the topic of strained bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan, which occupied 11.76%, suggests that political and diplomatic factors also influence perceptions of the project. The topic of criticism toward China and dependency on Chinese investment, though less frequent at 7.84%, reflects concerns about China's geopolitical influence. It's also important to note that doubts regarding the safety of China's high-speed rail made up 5.88%, while topics less directly related to the high-speed rail project, such as the capital relocation and other infrastructure projects, were also covered, occupying 3.92% of the discussion. This provides insight into specific concerns surrounding these latter projects.

Criticism, Sarcasm, Disappointment, and Condemnation by Japanese Youtubers Towards the Indonesia-China High-Speed Rail Project

As discussed above, a review of the 22 selected Youtube videos reveals that 20 of them are dominated by tones of criticism, sarcasm, condemnation, and disappointment towards the high-speed rail project, with only 2 videos maintaining a neutral tone. In other words, the majority—91%—of Japanese Youtubers portrayed the Indonesia-China high-speed rail project negatively. This tone of criticism, sarcasm, and disappointment is evident from the content, which includes both verbal monologues and dialogues in Japanese, as well as the thumbnails or cover images.

The main sources of disappointment and condemnation typically stem from Japan's loss to China in the high-speed rail tender and the feeling that Japan was deceived and betrayed by Indonesia. Statements, phrases, and language expressing these sentiments are prevalent throughout the content, both implicitly and explicitly. Examples of such statements include the following:

Here is the translated table with the quotes:

Table 1. List of Statements of Japanese Netizen in Youtube Channel

| No. | Example of Condemnatory Statements Indicating Japan Felt Deceived or Betrayed by Indonesia | Source |
|-----|---|---|
| 1. | しかし日本には過去にインドネシアに裏切られた2代過去があります。 However, Japan has a history of being betrayed by Indonesia two generations ago. | https://www.Youtube.com/watch?v=tRX7kcPaeF4 October 28, 2023 |
| 2. | そのショックたるや日本にとっては裏切られたというのが本音です。 It is shocking, and honestly, Japan feels betrayed. | https://www.Youtube.com/watch?v=tRX7kcPaeF4 October 28, 2023 |
| 3. | 結局中国もインドネシアも嘘ばかり,日本を頼ってればなあ。 In the end, both China and Indonesia are full of lies. If only they had relied on Japan... | https://www.Youtube.com/watch?v=C0aPDIW0l0&t=35s October 20, 2023 |
| 4. | 実際完成したインドネシア高速鉄道は国民の期待を裏切る結果になってしまったようです。そこにはインドネシア政府の嘘がありました。 In reality, the completed Indonesian high-speed rail seems to have disappointed the expectations of the people. There were lies from the Indonesian government. | https://www.Youtube.com/watch?v=C0aPDIW0l0&t=35s October 20, 2023 |

Source: Youtube channels during October 2023

It is stated that Japan was betrayed by Indonesia, with the word “betrayed” expressed in Japanese as 裏切る (uragiru), explicitly mentioned in the content. This can be interpreted as labeling Indonesia as a “traitor” from the perspective of Japanese Youtubers. In fact, in statement no. 2, the content mentions that this sentiment represents their “true feelings,” conveyed in Japanese as 本音 (honno).

This betrayal refers to the situation where Indonesia initially supported Japan's proposal

to build a high-speed rail between Jakarta and Bandung, but after a change in government, Indonesia canceled the agreement and involved China as a partner in the project. The content claims that Japan was betrayed twice or over two generations, though it does not specify when the first instance occurred. Viewers of this content are likely to form a similar opinion.

Additionally, the statements that accuse Indonesia of lying appear in sentences no. 3 and 4. The word for “lying” or “always lying” in Japanese is 嘘 (uso). The content does not explicitly explain why Indonesia and China are accused of lying or what specific lies were told. Based on the context, it is likely that Indonesia is accused of lying because the high-speed rail project did not meet the promised timeline. The Indonesian government promised to complete the project in 5 years, but it was delayed by 4 more years. Moreover, Japan feels that the high-speed rail technology currently used by China originally came from Japan, and they consider it a lie if China claims that the technology applied in Indonesia is purely their own.

Without delving into the content itself, the tone of condemnation, disappointment, or even resentment is already apparent from the thumbnails. Below are two examples of thumbnails that reflect these emotions.



【海外の反応】インドネシア高速鉄道が遂に開業！だが、まさかの乗車率は0パーセント。年内運休の事実。開業式典も嘘だった...世界を騙した末路【にほんのチ...
26K views · 3 months ago

 にほんのチカラ

【海外の反応】インドネシア高速鉄道が遂に開業！だが、まさかの乗車率は0パーセント。年内運休の事実。開業式典も嘘だった...

Figure 1. Youtube thumbnail depicting dissatisfaction with Indonesia regarding KCIC
(Source: Youtube channels, October 17, 2023)

Above is an example of a thumbnail or cover from the selected content. All of the thumbnails share a similar style. The typography consists of Japanese kanji in bright, eye-catching colors, placed over a background image. Below the thumbnail, the title of the content is displayed. The text within the cover can also be considered a title, with the title below it acting as a secondary title. The title on the cover reads:

裏切りインドネシア、世界を騙して撃沈。。。

“Betrayal by Indonesia: Deceiving the World and Doomed to Sink...”

When examined closely, there are smaller text elements within the visual that read マズいぞ。。。, meaning “this is bad,” and 開業は嘘でした。。。, meaning “the opening was a lie.” Since the cover and content are written in Japanese, they are clearly intended for a Japanese audience. Anyone viewing it can immediately perceive a negative portrayal of Indonesia, as the word “betrayal” is explicitly used. The additional text further amplifies the negative image, suggesting not only that Indonesia betrayed but also deceived the world and is on the verge of sinking... to an unspecified fate.

From this, viewers can instantly grasp the impression the content creator intends to convey, and it's easy to imagine that the content itself is likely filled with criticism or condemnation, aimed at tarnishing Indonesia's image. This is further emphasized by the image displayed, which includes a photo of Indonesian President Joko Widodo and several ministers. The words “the opening was a lie” placed in front of the president's photo suggest that the inauguration of the high-speed rail project was nothing but a falsehood.



Figure 2. Youtube thumbnail depicting dissatisfaction with Indonesia regarding KCIC
(Source: Youtube channels, October 2023)

Similar to the previous thumbnail, the above example also conveys a critical, mocking, and even derogatory tone. The title on the cover reads:

日本様、助けてください。。。インドネシアが田んぼに開通した結果

“Dear Japan, please help us... This is the result of Indonesia opening in the rice fields.”

ウソだらけのインドネシア高速鉄道が遂に開業...行先は田んぼのど真ん中!街まで 15 分は大嘘!日本を振ったインドネシア政府は「中国依存」脱せず。。。」

“Indonesia’s High-Speed Rail, full of lies, is finally open... Its destination is the middle of a rice field! The '15 minutes to the city' claim is a big lie! The Indonesian government, which rejected Japan, cannot break free from its dependence on China...”

The meaning of the title on the cover reflects not only critical views or disappointment but also sarcasm and mockery. The sarcasm and mockery stem from statements like “Indonesia opening in the rice fields” and “the high-speed rail is open... and its destination is the middle of a rice field.” The final stations in Padalarang and Tegalluar, West Java, are indeed located in areas still surrounded by rice fields. High-speed rail is typically built in the heart of metropolitan centers, implying that Indonesia’s decision to build such a grand project in an inappropriate location was foolish. This perceived foolishness is further emphasized by the image of President Jokowi sweating, seemingly panicked and pleading for Japan’s help.

Viewers of this cover are likely to immediately perceive Indonesia as naïve and foolish. This impression is further reinforced by the secondary title, which describes Indonesia as “full of lies,” referencing the fact that the promised 15-minute travel time from Tegalluar Station to Bandung actually takes longer. These accusations may not be entirely accurate. According to media reports, the decision to place the high-speed rail station in an area still on the outskirts with many rice fields was made for cost considerations and to encourage rapid development in those areas. The travel time from Tegalluar Station to Bandung is indeed not 15 minutes, as travelers to Bandung city are advised to disembark at Padalarang Station and continue with a commuter train that takes 15 minutes.

Furthermore, in addition to criticism over losing the tender and Indonesia’s preference for China in the high-speed rail project, much of the content also features criticism, pessimism, sarcasm, and mockery concerning the following issues:

- a. The low safety standards of China’s high-speed rail, referencing accidents that occurred in China in 2008, as well as incidents of cable theft and worker fatalities during the project.
- b. The project costs being perceived as higher than Japan’s proposal.
- c. The construction of high-speed rail stations too close to rice fields, seen as inefficient and wasteful.
- d. Inadequate attention to environmental and urban planning aspects.
- e. The potential for falling into China’s debt trap, which could lead to inescapable financial dependency.
- f. Doubts about sufficient passenger numbers to maintain operational sustainability, with the high-speed rail depicted as a project that may be underutilized and unsuccessful in the Indonesian transportation market.
- g. Concerns about the project’s safety in the event of an earthquake, suggesting that China’s infrastructure may be less capable of withstanding natural disasters.
- h. An unspoken but strong implication that Japan may be reluctant to offer future assistance on similar projects if Indonesia continues to choose partners not approved by Japan.

CONCLUSION

Through the perspective of symbolic interactionism, the meaning of the High-Speed Rail (HSR) project of Indonesia-China cooperation is constructed by Japanese netizens based on the results of interactions with symbols in Youtube content related to the project. In this regard, symbols in the form of the HSR project itself, as well as visual and verbal representations used in videos and thumbnails, influence how netizens assign meaning to this project. The majority of the analyzed Youtube content (20 out of 22) contains criticism, sarcasm, disappointment or condemnation of the HSR project, reflecting the dissatisfaction of the Japanese public. This shows that the symbol of the HSR project is not interpreted as a symbol of progress or achievement, but rather as a symbol of failure, disappointment, or even betrayal by Indonesia towards Japan.

Furthermore, the interaction between content creators and viewers on the Youtube platform, with an average of 390 comments per content, reinforces this negative meaning. Through the discussions that emerged in the comment sections, the meaning of the HSR project as a symbol of discontent was reinforced, with Japanese netizens sharing their views and expressing feelings of disappointment or defeat by China in the project tender. The language used, such as “betrayal” and “lies”, as well as the visuals showing Indonesia in a negative light, emphasize that the HSR project has become a symbol of a larger national disappointment, involving wounded political relations, economics, and national pride.

In addition, visual symbols such as images of President Joko Widodo in a state of panic, as well as phrases such as “sinking project”, also show that the HSR project is interpreted as a major failure by Japanese content creators. Through repeated interactions across multiple videos, this symbol of failure is maintained and expanded. The use of these symbols allows Japanese netizens to give a deeper meaning to the HSR project, which goes beyond the technical aspects of the project itself and into the realm of diplomatic relations, national pride, and the sense of lost economic opportunity felt in Japan.

STATEMENTS OF COMPETING INTEREST

The author(s) herewith declare that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the data collection, analysis, and the editorial process, and the publication process in general.

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