

Voltes V's Legacy in bilateral relations between Japan and the Philippines

Roehl Niño Bautista

Abstract

The Japanese animation Voltes V enjoys a huge following in the Philippines, so much so that the show has been used by the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines as a means to invite online engagement. Using Mahiwo's meta-nation state relations concept, this study looks at all posts published by the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines on Facebook, and by former ambassador of Japan to the Philippines Kazuhiko Koshikawa on X (formerly Twitter) throughout his term regarding the animation show and its live-action Philippine television adaptation, Voltes V: Legacy. In doing so, this study establishes the production itself as valid junction and important interaction point between both countries.

Keywords: Voltes V, pop culture diplomacy, meta-nation state relations, Philippines-Japan bilateral relations, social media, digital diplomacy, SDG16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals,

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Introduction

During a visit to Philippine television giant GMA Network on July 2024, Japanese Ambassador to the Philippines Kazuya Endo commended the media company for “acting as a bridge” between their two nations (Japan Ambassador pays courtesy call on GMA Network, 2024; GMA Integrated News, 2024; Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, 2024b).

In that courtesy call, he said that robot-themed *anime* (Japanese animated series) Voltes V “has become a symbol of hope, courage and unity, values that resonate deeply within our cultures” (GMA Integrated News, 2024a, 1:36). Meanwhile, network President and CEO Gilberto Duavit Jr brought up a memory of watching the said anime when he was young (0:36). “A great number of the hit anime from Japan have been released locally broadcast through our network” (0:47), noted Duavit, one of which was Voltes V which aired on the network first in 1978, and then again in 1999.

At the time of the meeting, Endo had just been in office for four months, but that was not the first time that an ambassador of Japan has mentioned the anime in their public communications. In a previous post on X (formerly Twitter), he reacted to the show’s announced afternoon rerun, saying that he “can’t wait to join the Pinoy fans in reliving this iconic series” (Endo, 2024b, para 1). On the other hand, his predecessor, former ambassador to the Philippines Kazuhiko Koshikawa, consistently used Voltes V as a point of interaction, especially when Voltes V: Legacy was yet to be released.

Koshikawa, who was assigned to the Philippines for a little over three years, said that he was a fan of the anime, earning him the moniker “Ambassador Voltes V” from Rappler journalist Miriam Grace Go (Go, 2024). However, for the first two years of his stay in the country, the former ambassador never spoke of his fandom publicly, until he posted a video showcasing a DX Soul of Chogokin Voltes V figure, described as “the most popular figure in the Japanese Ambassador’s residence,” (Koshikawa, 2022b, para 1).

Using Mahiwo’s (2007) meta-nation state concept in bilateral relations, this research studies the case of Koshikawa using popular cultural products, specifically Voltes V and Voltes V: Legacy, on digital communication posted by the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines as a valid junction and important point of interaction between Japan and the Philippines. This paper also looked at all Voltes V- and Voltes V: Legacy-related posts made on X and Facebook during his term to

further establish the anime and live action show as a valid junction for interaction between the embassy and Filipinos online. It also mentions instances when Koshikawa posted about other anime to support the idea that the ambassador's use of popular culture is not just limited to what he is a fan of.

Significance of Voltes V in Philippine television history

Voltes V's fame cuts across two major generations in the Philippines: the martial law babies (or those who were kids during under the dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos Sr.), and the so-called *batang 90's* or 90's kids (Fondevilla, 2007, p.444; Fondevilla & Cheng Chua, 2021, p.174; Limos, 2020; Tolentino, 2007, p.93; Zafra, 1998). It was aired nine times across different television networks, broadcasted most notably by GMA which ran the series a total of four times (Fondevilla & Cheng Chua, 2021).

Originally known as *Choudenji Mashiin Borutesu V* [Super Electromagnetic Machine Voltes Five], the robot anime features the Voltes Team, five young pilots of different "Volt Machines." In the Philippine broadcast, the characters are known as brothers Steve, Big Bert, and Little John Armstrong, joined by Mark Gordon and Jamie Robinson. Their aircrafts are individually equipped with unique weapons and can "volt in" or combine to form the stronger titular character. Voltes V is Earth's line of defense against the invading force of Boazanians (Clements & McCarthy, 2015), aliens that look human aside from the horns on their heads, that are not only equipped with numerous combat vehicles but are also capable of producing high-powered giant humanoid "beast fighters" that only the combined machine can defeat. It reached Philippine airwaves in 1978 and watching it became a popular Friday habit for the Filipino audience at the time (Mendoza, 2014; Obispo, 2022; Pante, 2021; p.23; Rodriguez, 2020; Sison, 2015; Tantiangco, 2018, Zafra, 1998). As Zafra (1998) recalled:

Every kid was singing the Voltes V theme in phonetic Japanese, every kid was nagging his mother to buy a brand of hotdogs so he could get the Voltes V action figures, T-shirts, rayguns, lunchboxes, records, comics, eyeliners, haemorrhoid medications...well, not quite eyeliners and medications, but you get my drift. Voltes V was big bucks. (p. 178)

However, in 1979, with only a handful of episodes left, then-president Marcos Sr. put a stop to its broadcast (Associated Press, 1979a; Associated Press, 1979b). While the state officially claimed that the show was taken off air due to violence it featured that allegedly affected young viewers (Chua, 2012; Lanzaderas, 2023), there is also speculation that the show's broadcast was halted because it suggested ideas about a rebellion, with the characters rising up against a fictional dictatorship while the Philippines was under a real one at the time (Dancel, 2014; Estacio, 2023, p.80; Ferreira, 2023; Garcia, 2022; Rodriguez, 2020; Zafra, 1998).

The public would not see the unaired episodes until 1999, when the series' conclusion was reedited for theatrical release as *Voltes V: The Liberation* (Sison, 2015). Showings were also done after the GMA Network comedy show *Bubble Gang* used the anime's opening song for its religious program spoof segment *Ang Dating Doon*, igniting nostalgia with the audience and prompting demand for another rerun (Bravo, 2012, Cheng Chua & Santos, 2016; Fondevilla & Cheng Chua, 2021; Garcia, 2022; Rodriguez, 2020). While *Voltes V* aired multiple times before 1999, that year saw a more successful comeback since it also coincided with what may be called the Golden Age of Anime in the Philippines. Dubbed by 90s kids though not yet established in academic literature, the Golden Age of Anime was a period between the late 90s to early 2000s which saw GMA Network and its top broadcast media rival ABS-CBN compete for ratings through their respective anime imports that took up significant airtime (adobo Magazine, 2023; Bautista, 2019; Bravo, 2012; Cheng Chua & Santos, 2016).

Beyond television, *Voltes V* remained in the national consciousness and has inspired numerous personalities and works. Some creations that gained public interest include a custom plastic model made from Gundam kits (Bautista, 2013) and flip-flops (Olivares, 2019). Custom-made models of the robot are also commonly seen at local toy conventions (Image 1). Its 40th anniversary was also celebrated by a local clothing brand in 2017, complete with a cosplay event and limited-edition clothing release (Afnidad-Bernardo, 2017). Meanwhile in 2014, artist Toym Leon Imao famously created a *Voltes V*-inspired installation art initially displayed at the University of the Philippines Diliman, which also had a rich history of activism during martial law:

Image 1.

Fan-made Voltes V figures.



Note: Photo by the author of multiple custom-made Voltes V figures on display at History Con 2018, August 12, 2018, World Trade Center, Pasay City

I have created a sculpture—a visual metaphor of the anger I felt as a 10-year-old when Voltes V and the other robots were summarily removed from television. We were left hanging, never knowing how the series ended.

My anger was trained on then President Ferdinand Marcos, who my young mind labeled as the Philippines version of the evil Boazanian Emperor.

At first it was only because he deprived me of a favorite TV character. And then a sort of political awakening happened. Suddenly, I was affected by what grownups were talking about: Martial law (Imao, 2014, para 9).

Voltes V also became associated with retired Police General Debold Sinas in 2020. As then-National Capital Region Police Office

(NCRPO) Chief, Sinas celebrated his birthday and visibly broke physical distancing guidelines at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic—though the PNP chief at the time insisted no violation was made. In the incident, Sinas was presented with a Voltes V-themed cake, with a poster of him with the robot in his background also displayed during the party (Talabong, 2020). A huge fan of Voltes V (Bajenting, 2018), Sinas launched a 4-minute exercise program on his last day as NCRPO chief using the anime’s opening theme song. He led the routine himself, and also had a video guide which featured him and the Voltes V music uploaded, leading to mixed reactions online (Malasig, 2020; Punzalan & Bagaioisan, 2020).

Anime comes to life with Voltes V: Legacy

Voltes V’s fame has stayed strong for such a long time that agreeing to produce a live-action adaptation was a no-brainer for GMA Network. A 1-minute teaser at the network’s new year countdown to 2020 revealed the show’s name, Voltes V: Legacy, and was met with huge audience reactions, both positive and cautious that the adaptation might fall flat of expectations (Alegre, 2020; Layug, 2020; Madarang, 2019).

The network, while not exactly a stranger to adapting Japanese series, is perceived to produce entertainment shows that often leave much to be desired. For example, in 2007, it aired the *sentai*-inspired show, *Zaido*, which lifted characters from three metal hero shows, namely *Space Sheriff Gavan*, *Space Sheriff Sharivan*, and *Space Sheriff Shaider* (Fondevilla, 2017). It also aired *Super Twins*, a supposedly original show that was visually similar to the anime, *Sailormoon*. Both earned mixed reviews, but the negative reaction is attributed to audiences comparing the shows to the source material, and by the production staff’s unfamiliarity with Japanese shows (Fondevilla, 2017). GMA also got flak for two other live-action shows that resembled Marvel’s *Thor* and the DC television series, *Arrow* (Manglinong, 2018).

That’s why it is not strange that it took Voltes V: Legacy director Mark Reyes around a decade to conceptualize the live action adaptation, just to make sure everything is right, according to an interview with Ferreira (2023, para 2). From being a vision in 2008, he waited until he felt that Philippine CGI capabilities matched his expected quality in 2013 (para 2) before moving to pre-production in 2018. After getting the green light from GMA Network and by Voltes V’s original creator, Toei Company, the show kicked off its production in 2019, only to be

hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic (para 2). It was finally slated for a 2023 release after a 5-minute “mega-trailer” was released again at GMA’s new year countdown (GMA Integrated News, 2023; Godinez, 2023). In an interview, Reyes said that the live action’s significance was not lost on him:

And all throughout the years, for decades, from the ‘80s all the way down to now, Voltes V has been very popular. The song has been used in political ads, in commercial ads in our karaoke bars, in the, you know, the song list the Voltes V theme song will be there. So, it was something that has touched the country for so long, for so many generations. So, it was a scary task to take, but I felt that, if not now, when; if not us, who? (Ferreira, 2023, para 12)

The show’s animation featured an all-Filipino collaboration between post-production firm Riot Inc. and GMA’s own video graphics team (Alegre, 2020; Ferreira, 2023; Layug, 2020), with all outputs requiring approval and comments by Toei Company, which according to Reyes, just required minimal changes (Ferreira, 2023). To bring the anime to live action, GMA boss Felipe Gozon said that “total production cost, including TV and digital rights for multiple years, would amount to more than half a billion pesos” (Cordero, 2023, para 4). To build further hype, GMA launched a movie version of the show called Voltes V Legacy: The Cinematic Experience which compressed key moments from the show’s first few weeks (Tunac, 2023).

Voltes V: Legacy generally enjoyed high ratings and positive feedback throughout its 4-month run on weeknights. It debuted with a 14.6% viewership rating (Ramos, 2023) which was the best inaugural performance for a television show that year (JE CC, 2024). It also had an afternoon rerun starting in May 2024 (Ruiz, 2024) while its television and cinema release in Japan were slated for the fourth quarter of the year (Medyo Media, 2024; Presillas, 2024). Japanese action figure maker Tamashii Nations also announced an articulated robot model patterned after the live action version of Voltes V, slated for a February 2025 release (GMA Integrated News, 2024b).

With these developments, Voltes V for Filipinos went from being a subject of nostalgia over Japanese animation to a renewed local phenomenon due to its live action adaptation. It is not just significant

as an anime aired in the 70s and 90s, but also as a source material for a production that proved that an all-Filipino team can accomplish world-class graphics. *Voltes V* also became a go-to talking point for both the Philippines and Japan whenever different players from both countries interact.

Mahiwo's meta-nation state approach as framework for cultural diplomacy

Mahiwo (2007) posited in his meta-nation state approach that in terms of bilateral relations, two countries interact with one another through various kinds of representatives, directly or indirectly, through spaces called junctions (p. 249). Examples of junctions include physical venues such as workplaces, households, learning institutions, and event halls. However, we ask: can an inanimate, non-physical, and non-virtual plane such as a pop culture product like *Voltes V* be counted as a valid junction? If so, can the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines' *Voltes V*-related posts be counted as a creation and sustenance of the said junction? To help answer this question, we briefly review the approach proposed by Mahiwo in looking at bilateral relations between two countries.

There are different levels for these interactions and their corresponding representatives: the nation state level, the intra-nation state level, and extra-nation state level (Mahiwo, 2007) which is also called the supra-nation level (Mahiwo, 2011). Nation state refers to specific countries as a whole; intra-nation state refers to entities, individual or organizational, that “do not represent the whole national community (state or non-state) but as a subcomponent” (p. 259) of a nation state; and extra-nation state level refers to global groups or organizations that a nation-state or its representatives may belong to, such as the United Nations, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and even multinational corporations (p. 251).

Participants in these junctions are called players. Interactions with their counterparts can happen at any level, and are not limited strictly to those belonging in the same category. With the example of the Philippines and Japan as nation states, Japan can interact with the Philippines as a whole (nation state to nation state) or with Philippine students (nation-state to intra-nation state). Another example, this time of intra-nation to intra-nation interaction, would be a Philippine city

interacting with a Japanese city (Mahiwo, 2007). A Japanese company hiring Filipino employees also falls in this category.

In Mahiwo's (2007) approach, an economic deal between two countries is a junction. Cultural clashes between citizens of both nation-states are also considered as such, but interactions related to cultural products are not. Yet, the same approach is also open to creation of new types of junctions, especially in terms of Philippines-Japan relations:

The Metanation state type of interface reflects the occurrence of emergent crossroads wherein the Filipinos and the Japanese deal with each other not only in fixed state channels of relationships but also through innovative interactions which are occurring in unfamiliar venues and paths that are undergoing trail-blazing. In this connection, it is important to note that in Philippines-Japan relations, the openings of new interaction channels can be naturally occurring and or deliberately created and trail blazed by the interactors themselves. (Mahiwo, 2007, p. 250)

Expanding junctions in meta-nation approach

By identifying new junctions, Mahiwo's (2007) meta-nation approach can effectively be updated since its theoretical foundation's inception in the 1990s (Mahiwo, 1991) and almost a decade after the professor's death in 2015. The idea is not to change the existing framework proposed, but to expand what counts as interaction points between nation-state relations by broadly looking at it as a communication process. That means that implications brought by changes in communication technology also apply to it.

Since a junction functions as a point of interaction between representatives of two nation-states, the above approach can also be likened to basic communication models that span from the sender-message-channel-receiver model of Shannon and Weaver, to Kincaid's convergence model of communication (Narula, 2014, p.21) where two parties reach "mutual understanding" (p. 19). In these basic models, both nation-states function as message senders and receivers, communicating through different forms of channels as they reach a

mutual understanding (or multiple mutual understandings) as they continue their interactions.

A junction then can come in the form of a channel, or medium, through which players from both nation-states exchange messages. Communication has drastically changed since McLuhan spoke of the Global Village in the 1960s (McLuhan & Powers, 1992); the envisioned world connected by technology that allows interaction unbridled by space and time can now stay connected through multiple digital platforms. This means that a junction can also be virtual or digital in nature, or in other words, be a form of computer-mediated communication (Lee & Oh, 2015). It does not require face-to-face interaction, and provides experiences that can create and maintain different types of relationships, such as romantic ones for those in long-distance relationships (Aguila, 2009).

Another kind of junction can be presented through a popular cultural product such as *Voltes V*, stressed by recent studies on Philippines-Japan relations and Southeast Asia-Japan relations as a significant artifact for Filipino audiences across different age groups; this significance is made more notable by the positive view held by Philippine citizens towards a country that once occupied it in World War II (Fondevilla, 2017; Fondevilla & Cheng Chua, 2021; Obispo, 2022; Otmazgin, 2008). In the context of bilateral relations, *Voltes V* is not a medium through which messages pass, but rather serves a junction because it provides a common talking point that encourages communication between multiple players, whether they are talking about the key plot point of the story, or sharing anecdotes of how they love the show. Moreover, instead of sharing these experiences in person, representatives of the Philippines and Japan can hold these kinds of conversations and reach mutual understandings online through social media.

Embassy of Japan in the Philippines' place in meta-nation state approach

With that statement in mind, the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines using a cultural product as a junction to interact with Filipino citizens and organizations can be considered as a nation state level to intra-nation state level interaction. While popular culture and traditional culture and art have been part of Japan's cultural diplomacy, they are officially considered as tools for this strategy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2022). By being a junction, cultural products,

like Voltes V in this case, function not just as packaged messages or content meant for consumption but also as channels themselves that encourage communication between two players. This approach adds to anime's already-dynamic role in terms of enhancing Japan's soft power through global appreciation of its "cool" culture (McGray, 2002), and underscores its ongoing function as "a tool for public diplomacy" (Hernández, 2021, p.59). By tapping social media platforms for its digital diplomacy (Hocking & Melissen, 2015; Manor, 2016; Manor, 2019), the embassy endears itself to its target audiences on online spaces that can easily share their messages.

Japan's occupation of the Philippines during World War II left almost a million Filipinos dead and quality of life severely deteriorated, with multiple atrocities committed against civilians (Jose, 2001; Yam, 2023). The strengthening of diplomatic ties between countries (Jose, 1999; Mahiwo, 2007; Tana & Takagi, 2018; Yu-Jose, 2008) across the decades has been significant especially since anti-Japanese sentiment was "inevitable" (Jose, 1999, p.24) and "too strong" (Yu-Jose, 2008, p. 47) following the conflict. Between 1956 and 2006, Japan "used several components of culture" (p. 39) on top of its economics-based bilateral efforts to "win the hearts of Filipinos and achieve its economic objectives" (p. 39).

With limited resources for a relationship-building campaign, Japan initially relied on hosting several sports invitationals (Yu-Jose 2008), pen pal clubs, boy scout jamborees, and student conferences (Jose, 1999) with the Philippines. Eventually, when Japan became a political and economic power in the region, its government sponsored scholarships for Filipino students (Yu-Jose 2008) and established the Japan Information and Culture Center under its embassy in 1965 (p. 52). However, Japanese culture was more effectively spread by "unorganized agents" (p. 39) such as Filipinos who have worked in Japan, rather than explicit efforts by the Japanese government (p. 39). In these cases, following Mahiwo's approach, interactions between Japan and the Philippines post-World War II were a mix of nation state to nation state and nation state to intra-nation state interactions.

As for nation-state to supra-nation state interaction, the framework of Japan's diplomatic approach towards ASEAN can be found in then-Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda's speech in Manila (ASEAN Council of Japan Alumni, n.d.), which also emphasized the importance of cultural

exchange in developing “mutual understanding” (para 5; Fukuda, 1977, para 20) with Southeast Asian nations and citizens:

It goes without saying that the promotion of this two-way cultural exchange between Japan and the ASEAN nations should be further intensified. It should also be noted that as the sense of solidarity rises among the countries in the region, the increasing importance is being felt of the need to promote exchange among the ASEAN nations in the fields of culture, sciences, and, in particular, regional studies. It is from this point of view that I have expressed Japan’s readiness to extend our full cooperation in this regard in response to the concrete formulation by ASEAN of a workable scheme for such enhanced intra-regional exchanges. This reflects the Japanese people’s appreciation of the desire of the peoples of the ASEAN nations to enhance mutual understanding among themselves. (Fukuda, 1977, para 22)

Ambassador Koshikawa and Voltes V

Fast forward to 2020, Koshikawa’s term as ambassador to the Philippines (Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, 2020) saw the continuation of this culture-focused diplomatic strategy, this time using accessible digital platforms to maintain a responsive image to help manage reputation (Hocking & Melissen, 2015), consistent with how digital diplomacy is currently practiced but with a distinctly “Japanese cool” (McGray, 2002, para 5) flavor. In 2023, when the diplomat made most of his Voltes V-related posts, internet users in the Philippines reached 85.16 million, a 13.4% increase from 2022 (Kemp, 2023). For context, COVID-related face mask mandates were lifted in October 2022 (Presidential Communications Office, 2022), and the country’s public health emergency status was lifted in June of the following year (Romero, 2023).

In this section, this paper examines the social media posts under Koshikawa’s account on X, supported by posts of the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines on Facebook, to present as evidence of Voltes V functioning as a junction between Japan and the Philippines. It is important to differentiate between these platforms since there are two

distinct strategies at work: for X, based on the username @AmbJPNinPH and display name Ambassador of Japan in the Philippines, the approach is to frame the posts as personal to the ambassador. Facebook posts, on the other hand, were mostly formal in its language and published from the perspective of the institution. The two accounts did not make the exact same post, even if the topic they covered or if the accompanying photo or video used was the same. Voltes V was the main topic of 10 X posts by the Japanese ambassador and 3 Facebook posts by Japan's embassy in the Philippines. While this is arguably a small number, this paper does not aim to delve deeply into quantitative social media performance analytics, but instead considers the presence of such posts as significant. Mentioning the replies, shares, likes, bookmarks, and views gained by each post just helps present how well these were received by Filipinos online. Media articles about these posts are also mentioned, when available, to show that these were engaging enough to merit newsworthiness for media outlets.

Voltes V-related posts on X

Koshikawa was effective in engaging not just Filipino citizens but also local journalists as well. This was evident from his earlier-mentioned first Voltes V-related post on X in 2022, which showed the action figure displayed inside the ambassador's home while the anime's theme song played. Unlike the succeeding posts, the video didn't have the term Voltes V in the caption but only described the display (Koshikawa, 2022b). It got 14 replies, 85 shares, 599 likes, and 7 bookmarks. Following the post, GMA News Online published an almost 100-word lifestyle news story about it (Roque, 2022). Information on views gained by the clip is not available since, as of writing, only content posted in 2023 have this type of data, but the engagement it gained was above average since the ambassador's previous posts on X usually did not exceed single-digit shares and double-digit replies.

Some journalists also posted about this Voltes V figure on a separate occasion, such as GMA Integrated News reporter JP Soriano who posed with it and Koshikawa (Soriano, 2023). The ambassador reposted this, adding his excitement for Voltes V: Legacy's release (Koshikawa, 2022b). Rappler's Miriam Grace Go (2024) also took a photo of Koshikawa with the statue, which she reused in a tribute post when the Japanese ambassador ended his term.

In a separate interview with GMA News Online, the ambassador said that the “love for ‘Voltes V’ stood out for me. This anime is a reflection of our timeless friendship” (Del Callar, 2023, para 19) and hoped that the Philippines and Japan “can volt in together to achieve our shared goals and aspirations” (para 20). At the time, he mentioned that his “most important mission” was to “encourage” Filipino healthcare professionals to work in Japan (para 21).

The Voltes V figure appeared in more posts by the ambassador: on March 3, 2023, he photographed it together with other Japanese dolls in commemoration of *Hinamatsuri* (Doll Festival), getting 2 replies, 3 shares, 87 likes, and 5952 views (Koshikawa, 2023d). It appeared again on May 19, 2023 in a video that mainly featured the bread-inspired mascot, *Fuwa-chan* (Koshikawa, 2023g). The clip, which Koshikawa posted with the caption “introduced Fuwa-chan to Voltes V 🍞 and gave a tour around my garden” (para 1) got 5 replies, 29 shares, 164 likes, 5 bookmarks, and 13.2k views. Lastly, it was prominently displayed on stage during singer Julie San Jose’s performance at the Japan Self Defense Force’s (JSDF) 69th anniversary, hosted at the ambassador’s residence (Koshikawa, 2023j). San Jose sang Voltes V *no Uta*, the opening theme for Voltes V: Legacy which was a faithful rendition of the original anime’s. Koshikawa’s photo post from the event got 18 replies, 285 shares, 731 likes, 13 bookmarks, and 77.5k views (Koshikawa, 2023j); while a portion of San Jose’s performance got 3 replies, 164 shares, 351 likes, 7 bookmarks, and 11.6k views (Koshikawa, 2023j).

Koshikawa also joined the Voltes V: Legacy hype on X, and has expressed his affection for the show many times (Llemit, 2023; Llemit, 2024). On January 6, 2023, the account reposted the show’s mega trailer and added a photo featuring two Voltes V figures (see Image 2) (Koshikawa, 2023b). In this post, which got 2 replies, 65 shares, 326 likes, and 20k views, saw the ambassador claim that the video made him “shout ‘Let’s volt in!’” out of excitement. Then almost a month later, he posted a photostet with the television show’s cast at the sidelines of the Japan Fiesta 2023 (Koshikawa, 2023c). This got the lowest engagement rate among all of his Voltes V-related X posts with 1 reply, 8 shares, 89 likes, and 3.8k views.

The ambassador also posted photos about the cinematic release on April 19, 2023, noting the “enthusiastic reception” for the show and adding that he was “So ready to take a trip down memory lane with the super electromagnetic powers of Voltes V. Let’s volt in!” (Koshikawa,

Image 2.

Koshikawa's X account of Voltes V figures.



Note: A sample Voltes V-related X post on the Ambassador of Japan in the Philippines' account (Koshikawa, 2023b).

2023e, para1). His account also retweeted GMA Integrated News' post teasing a preview of San Jose's version of Voltes V *no Uta* (Koshikawa, 2023f, para1). The ambassador added that he got to watch the cinematic release with his wife, and that "It will definitely fascinate a new generation of VoltesV fans . The ✨bright and powerful✨ rendition of "Voltes V No Uta" by Ms. Julie Anne San Jose 🎬 perfectly match its impact ⚡️!" (para1). Both posts respectively got 9 replies, 158 shares, 605 likes, and 37k views; and 11 replies, 207 shares, 482 likes, and 41.3k views.

Then finally, after the show's last episode, Koshikawa reposted a farewell post from the official Voltes V Legacy account, commending the show's successful run and saying that it "not only captured our hearts but strengthened the enduring bonds of our people" (Koshikawa, 2023l, para 1). This X post got 1 reply, 13 shares, 68 likes, and 5.2k views.

Voltes V posts on Facebook

While Koshikawa's X posts were very casual in tone, the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines was formal on Facebook. They only highlighted the ambassador's love for Voltes V once, when it posted official photos of San Jose's performance at the JSDF's 69th anniversary (Embassy of Japan in the Philippines 在フィリピン日本国大使館, 2023b). The photoset got 766 reactions, 11 comments, and 31 shares, and was also the only one of two posts to feature original and official visual content from the embassy, with Voltes V as the main topic. The other one was an event report on GMA Network and Telesuccess President and CEO Larry Chan as awardees of the Ambassador Commendation on February 1, 2024 (Embassy of Japan in the Philippines 在フィリピン日本国大使館, 2024). GMA Network was cited for its work on Voltes V Legacy, while Chen was recognized for his company's work in bringing multiple anime and live action Japanese drama to Philippine television broadcast (para 2).

Unlike those two Facebook posts that featured official photos from the embassy, their first Voltes V-focused Facebook didn't have any original content. On January 6, 2023, they shared the Voltes V: Legacy mega trailer posted by the show's official Facebook account (Embassy of Japan in the Philippines 在フィリピン日本国大使館, 2023a). Also, unlike on X where the ambassador would add his insights about the show whenever it reposted content, the Facebook post just plainly and briefly invited people to check out the clip.

Ambassador Koshikawa and other anime in social media posts

Before he posted about Voltes V, Koshikawa featured other known anime characters on X. On January 9, 2021, he made two posts about Pikachu. The first, which was a solo photo with the mascot of the famous Pokemon character, got 1 reply, 20 shares, and 79 likes (Koshikawa, 2021a). It was followed by a set of 4 photos showing the ambassador serving Japanese omelet with ketchup sauce to the giant yellow rodent, which got 6 replies, 99 shares, 365 likes, and 3 bookmarks (Koshikawa, 2021b).

Eight days later, Koshikawa became perhaps the first ambassador to the Philippines to do cosplay (currently, there are no accounts about any of his successors doing so while on assignment) when he donned the iconic green and black checkered *haori* (jacket) of young swordsman

Tanjiro from the anime Demon Slayer for Japan Fiesta 2021 (Koshikawa, 2021c). This post got 4 replies, 36 shares, 116 likes, 3 bookmarks X, while a Facebook post (Embassy of Japan in the Philippines 在フィリピン日本国大使館, 2021) on the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines' page of the same photo a day after got 1.4k reactions, 65 comments, and 159 shares. While data on views gained by these posts are unfortunately unavailable, the numbers suggest that they all performed well in terms of engagement. Then on April 21, 2022, the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines showed a man cosplaying Tanjiro boarding the Metro Rail Transit Line 3, in reference to the character's animated movie set in a demon-infested train (Embassy of Japan in the Philippines 在フィリピン日本国大使館, 2022). The man in the photo was not named, and neither was his face shown but it got 4k reactions, 219 comments, and 1.5k shares.

Mecha anime Gundam also made it on Koshikawa's feed. He previously posed with statues at the Narita Airport (Koshikawa, 2023g) and took a photo with the life-size RX-78-2 Gundam at Yokohama (Koshikawa, 2022b). In the latter post, he said that "My Filipino friends once joked that they want this moving Gundam statue here in Yokohama to come to the Philippines. For now, I brought a delicious piece of the Philippines here instead" (para 1) while posing with a pack of dried mangoes, a famous Philippine delicacy (para 1). The ambassador also posted about Doraemon twice (Koshikawa, 2022a; Koshikawa, 2023a), and published a photo set standing next to characters from Detective Conan and Attack on Titan (Koshikawa, 2023f).

Conclusion

In one of his first X posts as ambassador of Japan to the Philippines, Endo recalled an insight from his predecessor, Koshikawa. The post included both of their photos, together with a screengrab of two Voltes V tweets: the photoset about the Voltes V: Legacy cinematic experience, and San Jose's performance at the ambassador's residence (Endo, 2024a). He said that:

I learned that Filipinos are surprisingly big fans of JP anime and pop culture! After Voltes V, I wonder what I can bring next... 😊 Looking forward to witnessing and sharing the Japan hype with you firsthand. (para 1)

While Endo has yet to mention other popular anime on X as of writing, the ambassador has already reacted to *Voltes V: Legacy's* theatrical release in Japan on October 2024 (Endo, 2024c). In doing so, the diplomat continues the legacy of his predecessor in using popular culture as a junction for engagement.

During his term, Koshikawa's manner of practicing cultural diplomacy through *Voltes V* was notably unique in a sense that it was presented as a genuine fan's perspective that connected with Filipinos through a shared affinity for the franchise. His choice of language on X also added a personal touch to this form of digital diplomacy, which encouraged readers to engage. In this instance, the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, through its ambassador, has created and maintained a nation state to intra-nation state junction that connects not just to the normal Filipino but also to the media. Such a soft power approach can help Japan reach its targets, especially since they have goals to encourage Filipino healthcare workers to go to Japan, among other interests to address on their end.

This researcher believes that, so far, this was the most concrete instance of a Japanese diplomat in the Philippines tapping a cultural product that had a significant place in local television history, and one that has made a mark on multiple generations of audiences.

It is also worth noting that this activity was done online, which provides an additional case for future studies on how digital diplomacy can be done and how platforms can be maximized to effectively implement a country's foreign affairs strategy to manage public perception virtually, such as Japan's pop culture diplomacy being present on social media.

In this sense, *Voltes V's* legacy has deepened the show into more than just an anime, or as a basis for a live-action adaptation. It has become a valid junction for representatives from both nation states at any level, where relationships can be potentially strengthened with a story of five machines volting in.

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About the Author

ROEHL NIÑO BAUTISTA (rabautista3@up.edu.ph) is an assistant professor from the Department of Broadcast Communication at the University of the Philippines Diliman College of Media and Communication. He holds an MA in Asian Studies - Northeast Asia (Japan) and a BA in Journalism from the same university. Among the subjects he teaches is a special topics course on Japanese TV in the Philippine Context.