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A Japanese Story: The Domestication of *Thermae Romae*

The 2012 Japanese movie Thermae Romae looks at the story of Lucius, an ancient Roman bath architect who through twists of fate time travelled to modern Japan on multiple occasions. Inspired by the bath technology of the modern Japanese people, Lucius would build many innovative bathhouses in ancient Rome, and his bath-building would eventually rope him into the political intrigue between Ceionius and Antoninus Pius, possible heirs of Hadrian. Thermae Romae is a peculiar case of Classical reception, as it was produced and found success in the Japanese society, where Classics is relatively unfamiliar to the general public. This paper discusses the incorporation of ancient Rome in the movie from the perspective of Domestication, and argues that the success of the movie can be attributed to its Japанизation of ancient Roman elements, which catered to the emotional and social needs of the Japanese society at the time of its release.

Keywords: *Thermae Romae* (manga), Reception, Mari Yamazaki, *Thermae Romae* (2012 movie), Japanese Cinema, Live Action Manga Adaptations

When the Japanese film *Thermae Romae* directed by Hideki Takeuchi came out in 2012, it achieved both domestic and international success. It came second place in the 2012 Japanese box office,¹ and premiered in North America at the Toronto International Film Festival. However, in comparison to other successful Japanese films of 2012, *Thermae Romae* stands somewhat as a peculiarity. Both *Brave Hearts: Umizaru* and *Bay-*

¹ MOTION PICTURE PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION OF JAPAN (2012).

side Shakedown The Final: A New Hope, the first and third most grossing Japanese film in 2012, are the last instalment in their respective series. Both of them have been in the public eye far longer than *Thermae Romae*, and their stories all focus exclusively on Japanese people.

By contrast, the story of *Thermae Romae*, which is based on the manga (2008–2013) of the same name by Mari Yamazaki,² focuses not only on a foreigner, but an ancient foreigner. The comedic story follows the ancient Roman bath architect Lucius, who is suffering from lack of inspiration at the beginning of the story, but then randomly time travels to modern Japan whenever he is submerged in water. Inspired by the wondrous bath technology he sees in Japan, Lucius reconstructs them in ancient Rome in his own bath houses. His designs attract the eye of Emperor Hadrian, as Lucius' bath building eventually influences the politics of the Roman Empire, and even history itself.

Yamazaki herself admits that she is surprised by the success of her work, which she originally expected to only have 500 fans in the whole of Japan (2008–2013, 17).³ An example from a Japanese world history textbook given by Kawana in her 2018 article on *Thermae Romae* (manga) corroborates this (p. 263):

The emperor Hadrian (76–138 AD; reign 117–38 AD), who ruled over the empire at a critical time in its history and who was the most illustrious client served by Lucius in *Thermae Romae*, receives just a one-line mention in a footnote.

² The Japanese names here are arranged as name first, surname second.

³ YAMAZAKI (2008–2013: 17). The manga collection of *Thermae Romae* has a section named "Rome & Bath, the Loves of My Life" following each manga episode where Yamazaki discusses her inspirations and opinions. These have their individual numbering system, so 17 here refers to the 17th "Rome & Bath, the Loves of My Life".

Therefore, it is fair to say that the success of *Thermae Romae* is an atypical case. This makes its use and construction of ancient Rome particularly interesting, as it offers insight on how a film produced in a society that is relatively unfamiliar with ancient Rome makes use of this ancient empire. The aspect of this subject matter, which this essay will look at, is the different ways which *Thermae Romae* Japanises Roman elements and give power to Japan as participant in ancient history. This will be done through the lens of ‘domestication’, which refers to the process of foreign culture/practices etc. being Japanised when they come into contact with each other. I will do so by first evaluating how *Thermae Romae* bears Western influence. Then, I will introduce the concept of “domestication”, and why *Thermae Romae* should be viewed within such a lens. With these as my basis, I will then examine the various ways *Thermae Romae* uses ‘domestication’ to present ancient Rome, which will explain why its success in 2012 is after all not so out of place.

Thermae Romae and Western tradition of ancient Rome



Figure 1 *Thermae Romae* opening scene

Prima facie, the film seems to resemble the ancient Rome constructed by Western cinema greatly. It opens with a sonorous male voice briefly

Figure 2 *Thermae Romae* Title SceneFigure 3 *Ben-Hur* Title Scene

introducing the Roman Empire. The imagery accompanying this voice is a yellowed map showing the territory of the Roman Empire, together with the narration being written in Latin (Figure 1). All of these are backdropped by a grand and suspenseful music, which slowly elevates to operatic singing. This should immediately remind one of the many Hollywood epic films that are produced around the 60s. Films like *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *Spartacus* (1960) all open in such a manner, which Sobchack dubs as the ‘Voice of God’ narration.⁴ In fact, even the specific design of *Thermae Romae*’s title (Figure 2) calls back to *Ben-Hur*’s (Figure 3), going as far as to reduplicate the specific font used by *Ben-Hur*, together with its luscious golden colour.

Of course, the premise of *Ben-Hur* could not be further away from *Thermae Romae*, in that while Ben-Hur stands in opposition to Rome, Lucius is a staunch supporter of Hadrian and the Empire. The title never-

⁴ SOBCHACK (1990: 25).

theless indirectly acknowledges the influence of *Ben-Hur* on the original manga work. Although not included in the movie, in the manga, Lucius is given a chariot-race scene while in modern Japan by Yamazaki. She further reveals in her commentary that that she ‘dreamed of having a ridiculous *Ben-Hur* chariot scene...’.⁵ The resemblance to Hollywood epic is reinforced through the marketing of *Thermae Romae*, that makes use of typical Hollywood epic marketing strategies, which is to advertise the film itself as a sort of historical event that, to use Sobchack’s words: ‘formally repeats the surge, splendor, and extravagance, the human labor and capital cost entailed by its narrative’s historical content in both its production process and its modes of representation’.⁶ *Thermae Romae* has been variously described in its marketing as: 驚天動地 (literally Heaven shocking, Earth shaking), 大作 (great work, sometimes translated as ‘epic’),⁷ 今世紀最大の入浴スペクタクルコメディ (The Greatest Bathing Spectacle Comedy of the Century) (*Thermae Romae*, 2022).⁸ Notably, the ‘spectacle’ and ‘comedy’ here are rendered in katakana, which is a transliteration of the English words, rather than Japanese translation, which gives the film a stronger association with its western counterpart.

Following the line of surge, splendour, and extravagance, one of the film’s greatest selling points is the use of the Cinecittà studio, and the sets of HBO *Rome* (2005–2007). This ‘puts *Thermae Romae* squarely on the visual tradition trajectory for the screening of Roman antiquity’.⁹ Moreover, beyond simply having the HBO *Rome* landscape in the movie, the original manga itself is actually heavily inspired by *Rome*, which Yamazaki watched with great enthusiasm, as indicated by the multi-

⁵ YAMAZAKI (2008–2013: 17).

⁶ SOBCHACK (1990: 29).

⁷ This translation is provided by DENISON (2022: 595).

⁸ THERMAE ROMAE (2022).

⁹ CYRINO (2022: 89).

ple entries related to it on her personal blog.¹⁰ Yamazaki particularly favours the focus on everyday life and normal people in *Rome*.¹¹ Her sentiment echoes that of Lockett, who points out that *Rome* renders the Great Men in history secondary to peripheral and invisible actants and helpless to accidental progressions.¹² The same statement can also be applied to *Thermae Romae*: Lucius goes to the bathhouse that will eventually take him to Japan because he is fired. The various times when he is submerged in water and time travels to Japan are all happenstances. And instead of waging wars or making oratories to persuade the crowd, he builds bathhouses, which are part of Rome's everyday life and culture. Even at the end of the movie, when Lucius' achievements are recognised by the Emperor, the film still reminds us that written accounts of him rarely exists, again pushing him back into the periphery of history. Therefore, *Thermae Romae* is definitely an heir to the Roman world constructed by Western cinema, and in Kawana's words, a good example of 'an excellent visual representation giving rise to another excellent visual representation.'¹³

Domestication

So far, these details of the production and promotion of *Thermae Romae* indicate that it is a film that takes on many of Western cinema's practices and patterns in depicting Rome. However, it would be simplistic to view it just as a Japanese ensemble of these Western traditions. Denison points out that although *Thermae Romae* is 'an inherently transnational blockbuster text', its interaction with the international (e.g., use of the

¹⁰ KAWANA (2018: 280).

¹¹ YAMAZAKI (2008–2013: 22).

¹² LOCKETT (2010: 111).

¹³ KAWANA (2018: 281).

Cinecittà studio) is ultimately done for a domestic audience.¹⁴ It means that *Thermae Romae* is not a movie produced to fulfil the demands of the West, but rather to cater the Japanese market. Such a trend is not rare in Japanese cinema. The *Nodame Cantabile* films (2009–2010), which is also directed by Takeuchi, similarly makes use of European locations and actors, but these are imported back to Japan for a domestic market.¹⁵ Therefore, we must look deeper into the Rome of *Thermae Romae*, and treat it as a product of Japanese consumption.

A vital concept in understanding Japanese consumption of foreign culture/practices/goods, is what Tobin calls ‘domestication’:¹⁶ ‘to indicate a process that is active...morally neutral (unlike imitation or parasitism), and demystifying (there is nothing inherently strange, exotic, or uniquely Japanese going on here).’¹⁷ It also ‘suggests that Western goods, practices and ideas are changed (Japanised) in their encounter with Japan’. Creighton’s study on how Japanese department stores import foreign festivals makes a particularly good example for ‘domestication’: Valentine’s Day is imported into Japan as a commercial device from 1958, when an executive of a chocolate company mistakenly understood it as a day reserved for women to send chocolates to men. This mistake, though, actually works in favour of Valentine’s Day’s popularity in Japan, as it gives Japanese women a chance to be forthcoming and expressive about their romantic feelings.¹⁸ Thus, we see here a process that satisfies all three criteria set out by Tobin: Firstly, it is not pure imitation, and is done on Japanese people’s own terms and their own initiative. Secondly, it is not strange, because it is actually adapted to fulfil

¹⁴ DENISON (2022: 607).

¹⁵ DENISON (2016: 87).

¹⁶ TOBIN (1992: 4).

¹⁷ Tobin here means that there is nothing strange in Japanese’s domestication of foreign products.

¹⁸ CREIGHTON (1991: 687).

a societal need. Thirdly, the conception and practice of Valentine's Day is changed through its contact with Japanese society, so much so that Japan eventually made a White Day to correspond to Valentine's Day (where men gift women chocolates). The success of Valentine's Day also shows that in order for an import to be successful, it should be 'symbolically in accord with Japanese ideology', or 'serve a particular function in contemporary Japanese society.'¹⁹ With these in mind, I argue that *Thermae Romae's* success can also be explored in such a manner, in that it reflects the Japanese society at the time of its showing by fulfilling certain emotional needs of the people.

Historical Authority

To start with, although the Latin text in the opening scene has the obvious effect of giving the film historical validity and authenticity, its exoticism would have been significantly weakened by the Japanese narration that is a direct translation of the text. It legitimises the use of spoken Japanese throughout the film, even when characters should be speaking Latin, since the audience would already be under the impression that Latin can be materialised in Japanese. Another effect of this, is that for an audience who has limited contact with Latin,²⁰ the spoken language of ancient Rome is subtly linked with Japanese from the beginning of the film. This connection is further strengthened by the qualities of the 'Voice of God' narration, which not only verifies the content for the audience, but also establishes the Japanese voice as a valid spokesperson in relation to antiquity.

¹⁹ CREIGHTON (1991: 682–683).

²⁰ TAIDA (2018) shows in his article 'History and Reception of Greek and Latin Studies in Japan' that while the progression of Classical Studies in Japan is optimistic, it is still being developed.

In manga, this Japanese spokesperson of antiquity is manifested in the form of Satsuki Odate, an ancient Rome history researcher from modern Japan, who is also Lucius' love interest. She is qualified by her impressive academic achievements, and ultimately, she is able to uncover the archaeological remnants of the baths Lucius built in Baiae, thus giving voice to his achievement. In the movie, the heroine Mami Yamakoshi likewise becomes the spokesperson of ancient Rome, but in a wholly different manner. Bearing a name remarkably similar to Mari Yamazaki the manga artist,²¹ Mami enters the film as a manga artist struggling to find inspiration. In the end, she is able to turn her adventure with Lucius in ancient Rome into a manga named *Thermae Romae*. It is not atypical to find intertextual references here, as *Thermae Romae* is produced as a pre-planned transmedia franchise involving manga, anime, and film concurrently.²² Therefore, this specific plot, invented solely for the movie, can be seen from a financial point of view as advertising for the manga that was still ongoing at that time. The director Takeuchi himself has also had plenty of experience in such multimedia production, such as the *Nodame Cantabile* movies which are interconnected with its original manga and TV series, and are also box-office successes. However, that the movie chooses to advertise the manga by disrupting the causality speaks volume: Instead of the manga being a work that came about as reception of Western Classical culture, the film has redefined it as a historically authentic work due to it being based on Mami's lived experience in ancient Rome. Interestingly, when the film makes use of the 'Voice of God' narration scene again (38:58 & 55:34), Mami becomes the narrator, which further affirms her authority within the setting of the film. We thus see here the fascinating interaction with-

²¹ Another interesting detail: Mami's name is rendered as 真実 in Kanji, which means Truth.

²² DENISON (2022: 606).

in Japanese franchises – besides using the film to advertise the manga, it also revamps the nature of the manga by placing historical authority within the hands of the Japanese people, thus domesticating the Western influences on the story.

After Japan's defeat in World War II, it has habitually looked to the West for confirmation of its identity. However, just as the country rebuilt its national pride around the 80s, the economic recession in the 90s quickly cast the shadow back onto Japanese people's self-conception.²³ Placing *Thermae Romae* in such a context, Kawana argues that the success of the manga is likely due to its affirmation of Japanese everyday culture through Lucius, who is the 'ultimate foreigner',²⁴ and a respected artisan with enough credentials to produce trustworthy affirmation.²⁵ To add onto Kawana's point, I argue that the film's conferring of historical authority upon Mami, and by extension, Yamazaki the manga artist, has achieved a similar effect. Although here it works in reverse to the manga: the Lucius in the film suffers from huge guilt for copying the Japanese, but it is Mami who tells him that he should not be ashamed for it. She is also the one who reveals the 'correct' Roman history to Lucius, which then inspires him to propose the battlefield bathhouse project that secures Antoninus as the successor of Hadrian. Thus, on top of confirming the value of Japanese culture, the film further empowers Japanese people by affirming the validity of their voice within world history. Therefore, the domestication of ancient Roman history in the film counters the cultural anxiety of the Japanese people.

²³ KAWANA (2018: 274).

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ KAWANA (2018: 275).

Power to the Japanese People



Figure 4 Mami's friends in Rome

I have already mentioned above, how, under the influence of HBO's *Rome*, *Thermae Romae* builds a plot that is pushed by many inconspicuous characters and chance. However, *Thermae Romae* takes this theme a step further, by introducing Mami's old men friends into ancient Rome. These people are not just inconspicuous, but are the bottom of the Roman social hierarchy. When Lucius first time travels to Japan, he instinctively assumes the Japanese people around him as subjects and slaves of the Roman Empire. Similarly, when Mami first reunites with her friends in ancient Rome, they are depicted as chained and being carted like slaves and criminals (Figure 4). As one of the few sombre moments in the movie, this scene features no soundtrack. Instead, the audience only hear the diegetic sound of the old men groaning and the wheels turning. The dreadful treatment of these old men is exacerbated as the camera cuts closer to them, showing their hapless expressions distorted by the heatwave. Later on, when they reunite with Mami, one of them even declares that they have come to hell. Before this point, the film's engagement with slavery in ancient Rome has been comedic, mainly used to highlight the technological discrepancy between Japan and ancient Rome, where the former's technology can only be achieved

through overworked slaves, or in Kawana's words: 'hilarious misunderstandings.'²⁶ The sudden change of tone here thus highlights slavery as one of ancient Rome's biggest taint in film.

However, the film does not stick with this depressive mood for long, nor do the old men express bitterness towards the Romans who mistreated them. After Mami conveys the idea of building a bath near the battlefield for the soldiers, they snap into action to help. What follows is the climax of the entire film, featuring Japanese and ancient Romans working side by side to create a bath hub for the Roman soldiers to rest and heal in. Lucius looks at these altruistic actions with bewilderment but still shows admiration for their team spirit. This sort of spirit is typically Japanese, as shown by Atkins, who cites an instance of a Japanese, in revisionist fashion, redefining American Old West's popularity as based on their teamwork instead of individualism.²⁷ Likewise, Nishimura lists 'Friendship' as one of the ideals commonly uphold in Japanese manga.²⁸ Lucius' attitude here is in stark contrast to the Lucius before, who wilfully defies the Emperor's order based on personal principle, and even demeans Mami when she tries to persuade him to think about everyone. After this, however, he actually acquires this teamwork mindset, as he accepts Hadrian's commendation on behalf of everyone, instead of himself. When the war is finally won, Japanese and Romans alike are shown celebrating together, presenting an ancient Rome where class boundaries have disappeared. In this instance of domestication, there are two effects at work here. Firstly, Japanese people imparts their dedication to teamwork to the ancient Romans. Lucius represents this change of ideology, when he acknowledges the good outcome as the effort of the collective. Secondly, *Thermae Romae*

²⁶ KAWANA (2018: 270).

²⁷ ATKINS (2017: 205).

²⁸ NISHIMURA (1997: 31), cited in KAWANA (2018: 262).

empowers Japanese people by depicting them as able to break through the abusive slavery system of ancient Rome. The Japanese ideology of teamwork triumphs over Roman slavery and their belief of superiority. Mirroring Mami's role within the movie, this part of the film renders Japanese people as vital participant in an important juncture of ancient Roman history. Both of these fit very well with the third aspect of domestication in Tobin's definition: Through their encounter with the Japanese, not only are the Romans changed by them, Roman history itself now needs to be viewed through a different lens, as it is made possible through the intervention of Japanese people.

Power, slavery, clash of cultures - these are all themes much grander than those featured in the manga or the 2012 anime adaptation. This is very likely influenced by the genre of the film itself, as Cyrino already notes that the shift from manga and anime to 'the conservative Hollywood epic cinematic style effects an essential shift in overall tone, in that the epic film genre inevitably compels a greater focus on the traditional narrative of power and empire.'²⁹ Similarly, Hiroshi Tamaki, who acted in the TV series of *Nodame Cantabile*, describes himself making use of greater physical gestures when filming the movie,³⁰ which hints at the subtle demand from the film genre to expand the narrative and the setting.

However, in my opinion, the bigger influence that made *Thermae Romae* focus on these themes, is the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, which happened merely a year before the film came out. At the time of the disaster, contrary to previous habits of blocking foreign rescue teams, the Japanese government accepted almost all offers of help.³¹ The April 2011 issue of *Highlighting Japan*, a monthly magazine published by

²⁹ CYRINO (2022: 90).

³⁰ DENISON (2016: 76).

³¹ KATAYAMA (2015: 71).

Public Relations Office of the Japanese government, testifies the strong impression left by international aids at that time. An article titled *World Rushes to Japan's Aid* details the various aids provided to Japan in the month since the disaster struck.³² We also find a letter issued by the then Prime Minister Naoto Kan, expressing appreciation for the global community on behalf of all Japanese people, and promising to repay these acts of kindness.³³ *Thermae Romae* corresponds to this atmosphere with its ideal, unified message, as discussed above, where different people let go of their boundaries and work for a common goal. It is indeed also the underpinning guideline of Yamazaki's manga, as she comments: 'The way that all of these people could mingle in the nude while bathing was doubtlessly a democratic sight...' and 'Perhaps shared nakedness in the presence of hot water is a basic principle for peace'.³⁴ Consequently, this democratic and boundary-less imagery ensures the film to be well received by the audience, who would likewise still be conscious of the abundant foreign help they have received.

Placing the film within the post-earthquake context, the success of *Thermae Romae* can also be viewed from the perspective of *iyashi* (healing). The *iyashi* products are wide ranging, but all of them promise to deliver calm for the consumer. According to Roquet, the *iyashi* trend began after two largest traumas of the late twentieth-century Japan: the Kobe earthquake and the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attacks.³⁵ The trauma left behind by these events made 'calmness' a marketable feeling, hence the rise of *iyashi* products. We can speculate that Japan was in similar circumstances in 2012, as the earthquake made people in need of such calmness again. Although *Thermae Romae* is not exactly *iyashi* due to its multiple moments of suspension and conflict, but it contains two ele-

³² PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN (2011: 4–7).

³³ PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN (2011: 11).

³⁴ YAMAZAKI (2008–2013: 1).

³⁵ ROQUET (2009: 89).

ments that can fulfil *iyashi*: Its focus on the everyday object of Japanese life, which is a salient feature of *iyashikei* films.³⁶ The idealistic scenes of different people finding relief in a bath – in fact, one of Lucius' central goal is to create a relaxing bathing space. Adding these to the constant affirmation of Japanese culture, *Thermae Romae* produces a mood-regulating effect that is at once calming but also encouraging, two emotions needed by the Japanese people in 2012.

Therefore, the story and the success of *Thermae Romae* are also clearly a reflection of the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake. The disaster's aftermath changed Japanese people's perception of their own position within a globalised world, and produced the adequate emotional context to work with *Thermae Romae*'s democratic message.

Roman or Japanese?

Lastly, following the interpretation of *Thermae Romae* as conveying message of unity and empowerment, I would like to turn to the casting of the film, which echo points I have made so far in its execution. *Thermae Romae* makes use of a sizable foreign cast, ranging from the normal Roman inhabitants filling the background, to Lucius' wife Livia. These foreign actors, interestingly, also 'speak' Japanese throughout the film. Amongst them, there are those who are familiar with Japanese, such as Ananda Jacobs (Livia), who has been in the Japanese entertainment industry since at least 2009. But the film still employed a sizeable group of voice actors who dubbed over the foreign actors. This again reinforces the idea of Japanese people being the spokesperson of ancient Rome. Along the foreign westerners speaking Japanese, there is the main cast, which are made up of Japanese actors playing Romans. This in itself conveys an important message. As Frey points out, 'Characters' faces

³⁶ REN (2020: 27).

and bodies must correspond to viewers' imaginations, in order to manufacture a believable historical world.³⁷ By choosing Japanese actors to be the 'main players' of the history as it is presented in *Thermae Romae*, the film indicates its target audience, and further affirms Japanese people's validity in telling an ancient Roman story.

Another effect of this cast is to strengthen the message of unity. Both Hiroshi Abe and Kazuki Kitamura (Ceionius) are already famous for their 濃い顔, a type of facial structure considered to resemble Europeans because of its deep-set eyes and aquiline noses.³⁸ Thus, we see here a blurring of boundary between Japanese and Roman across language and appearance, which makes it difficult to measure just how Roman, or how Japanese a character is. Nevertheless, I do not believe that the Japanese actors are chosen merely for the sake of looking 'Roman'. After all, the



Figure 5 Yamazaki, 2008–2013, Episode 1



Figure 6 Lucius played by Hiroshi Abe

³⁷ FREY (2018: 9).

³⁸ See Eiga (2023) '実写版「テルマエ・ロマエ」キャスト、あらすじ、トリビア一紹介! 結局、誰が一番濃い顔. This news article, which focuses entirely on which member of the cast looks more *Roman*, illustrates how the casting of *Thermae Romae* is influenced as much by the Japanese conception of the foreign, as it is by the West.

Lucius in the manga has blonde hair, which is usually conveyed as white in most Japanese manga. Together with manga's tradition of leaving character's skin as white, he looks in multiple instances very much like a Greek Statue (Figure 5). In contrast, Abe does have striking facial features, but his dark hair and tanned skin are markedly different from Lucius (Figure 6). In this regard, I disagree with Lee, who claims that 'The Lucius of the manga is already drawn to resemble Abe.'³⁹ Additionally, when Mami first encounters Lucius, she instinctively compares him to Kenshiro, a famous Japanese manga character. Tetsuo Hara, the creator of Kenshiro, named Bruce Lee and Yusaku Matsuda as the main source of his inspiration.⁴⁰ On top of this, Abe himself was once the voice actor for Kenshiro in the movie franchise *Fist of the North Star: The Legends of the True Savior* (2006–2008), which adds another layer to this association. Thus, while the Lucius in manga calls back to antiquity, the Lucius in film is arguably more closely related to East Asian cultural memories.



Figure 7 Lucius enjoying a bath at the end of the credits scene

The multifaceted and paradoxical nature of Lucius, however, is resolved at the end of the movie. His duality allows him to become the

³⁹ LEE (2014: 147).

⁴⁰ HARA (2019).

embodiment of the amalgamation between Japan and ancient Rome. After showing various characters from the movie enjoying their respective baths, the credit of the movie ends with Lucius sitting in an ancient Roman bath contently (Figure 7). The camera work here is of particular interest. Though set within a Roman bath, the audience would of course notice how different this bath looks now in comparison to before - it is dotted with Japanese-bath inspired objects, such as the wooden buckets, the mirrors, and the painting of Vesuvius in the style of the Fuji mountain painting found in Japanese bathhouse. The set of *Rome*, and by extension, the vision of Rome as imagined by the West, have been domesticated by the Japanese, but the Romans themselves seem to thoroughly enjoy these Japanese imports. The mixing of these two cultures is embodied even more physically, as the camera closes up on Lucius. Here is supposedly a Roman sitting in a Roman bath. Yet beside him, stand a wooden bucket and fruit milk, while a towel sits on his head, all in true Japanese fashion. He seems to have been cast into the middle zone of Rome and Japan. Is this a Japanese taking a Roman bath? Or a Roman taking a Japanese bath? The answer is "Both". As the casting of Lucius, and the character's development within the movie have shown, *Thermae Romae* is a movie that utilises domestication to empower the Japanese people within and without the movie, which in turn fulfils the emotional and social needs of its Japanese audience. At the end of the movie, this domestication creates an ideal union between Japan and ancient Rome, which is actualised through the protagonist Lucius.

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