

# MILITARIZATION AND MODERNIZATION OF JAPAN: A HISTORICAL STUDY IN THE FILM THE WIND RISES

**Yanti Carlina**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

**Sylvia Octa Putri**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

**Fenny Febrianty**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how the film *The Wind Rises* depicts the process of militarization and modernization of Japan during World War II and contributes to shaping Japan's national image. This study uses the theory of sociology of literature and soft power in international relations. Then, this study uses qualitative methods. The results of this study indicate that the film *The Wind Rises* represents the militarization and modernization of Japan through the role of Jiro Horikoshi as an aviation engineer. The modernization of the aviation industry shown in this film is inseparable from Japan's militarization policy, where the country encourages the development of fighter jets to strengthen the armed forces. This film also attracts the interest of global audiences to learn more about Japanese history, culture, and values as well as effective diplomatic tools as part of Japanese popular culture, this film can be used by the Japanese government or cultural institutions to promote a better understanding of Japan in the international world.

**Keywords:** *The Wind Rises*, Film, Soft Power, Japan.

## INTRODUCTION

Films can be considered as part of literary works because they have narrative elements, characters, and messages conveyed through the storyline. According to Faruk (1988) in Yusuf (2015) said that literary works are human objects, human facts, or cultural facts because they are the result of human creation. In the sociological approach to literature, literary works can be seen as a reflection of social life. Sociology of literature according to Ratna in Lestari (2017) is an approach in literary research that examines the relationship between literary works and the social aspects in them. And films not only function as entertainment, but also represent the reality of society, raising social,

cultural, political, and economic issues. Therefore, literary works can be used as a source to understand the social, cultural, and political conditions of an era.

Japan's modernization and efforts to become a global power began in the Meiji era, which took place after the fall of the Tokugawa government in 1868, after ruling for about 250 years. Japan's modernization before World War II was aimed at catching up with Western countries. Japan began to develop rapidly, especially in the industrial and military fields. In the field of industrial technology, Japan began to adopt Western technologies in automotive, aviation and manufacturing. At that time, Japanese engineers began to design fighter planes with more sophisticated models. Then the development of Japanese militarization also grew stronger in the early 20th century, at that time Japan began to develop an army and navy with European standards. They began to buy warships from England and Germany and develop their own war technology, such as aircraft carriers and fighter planes. Then Japan also increased the production of fighter planes such as the Mitsubishi A6M Zero, as told in the film *The Wind Rises*.

*The Wind Rises* is an anime film by Hayao Miyazaki that depicts the development of modernization, technology and militarization of Japan before World War II through the story of Jiro Horikoshi, an aviation engineer. Jiro Horikoshi as the main character in this film has dreamed of designing airplanes since childhood, Jiro dreams of making beautiful airplanes inspired by the Italian engineer, Caproni. After growing up, Jiro worked at Mitsubishi and designed the Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter plane, which was later used in World War II. Jiro Horikoshi is a young man from Japan who lives in a small town. He lives with his harmonious family who loves Jiro very much. Then when Jiro grew up, he decided to move to Tokyo, he began studying to become an engineer and during his education he also met a woman who would one day become his wife. After that, Jiro joined a Mitsubishi company to develop airplanes. After the second experimental plane failed, Jiro was sent by the Mitsubishi company to study in Germany, which at that time Germany already had more sophisticated technology than Japan. After returning from his assignment in Germany, Jiro returned to Japan and built the Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter plane.

This study aims to determine how the film *The Wind Rises* depicts the process of militarization and modernization of Japan during World War II and contributes to shaping Japan's national image. Specifically, the questions in this study are: 1). How is the historical background of Japan's militarization and modernization in the early 20th century represented in the film *The Wind Rises*? 2). How is Jiro Horikoshi's role in developing fighter planes in reflecting Japan's militarization policy? 3). How does the film *The Wind Rises* contribute to Japan's cultural diplomacy and soft power and the formation of international perceptions of Japan?

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

*The Wind Rises* film by Hayao Miyazaki has previously been studied as the same material object. One of the titles of the previous study was: "War Memory, War Responsibility, and Anti-War Pacifism in Director Miyazaki's *The Wind Rises* (*Kaze Tachinu*)". Written by Daisuke Akimoto in 2014, this study uses a Mimetic approach. This article examines the film *The Wind Rises* in relation to issues of war and peace, especially war memory, war responsibility, and director Miyazaki's anti-war pacifism. In addition, this article reviews how Japanese fighter planes were used in the Asia Pacific war because this perspective is missing in the film, although it is significant in explaining how the Japanese empire fought and to what extent Jiro's aircraft contributed to the war. From previous research on how Jiro's aircraft were used in war, in this study the author will examine how Militarization and Modernization: Historical Studies in the Film *The Wind Rises*.

Previous research with a sociology of literature approach has also been conducted, one of which is entitled "Nilai Pendidikan dalam Film NKCTHI (Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari ini) Kara Angga Dwimas: Kajian Sosiologi Sastra". Written by Kristinawati in 2021, this study uses a qualitative study that analyzes the values of life in the film through a sociology of literature approach. The study focuses on content analysis to identify various values conveyed through interactions between characters and the storyline.

This study uses the theory of sociology of literature and soft power in international relations. Sociology of literature is a study of how literature reflects, influences, or is influenced by social, cultural, economic, and political conditions. Therefore, literary works can be considered as social (cultural) documents that can describe the lives of society Febrianty (2016). Sociology of literature according to Faruk (2010) in Kristinawati (2021) is a science that is able to connect the reality of life with the results of human work, with different theories and methodologies, but in principle have many similarities. Wellek and Warren (2012) in Saddhono (2017) classify approaches in the sociology of literature into three main paradigms, namely; (1) sociology of the author, which views the author as part of the society that produces literary works; (2) sociology of literary works, which analyzes social aspects in literary works in order to understand and relate them to social conditions outside the text; and (3) sociology of readers, which examines how readers interpret literary works and the social impacts caused by the work.

The concept of soft power itself was first introduced by Joseph Nye, a political scientist from Harvard University, in his book entitled "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power" (1990) and then further developed in "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" (2004). Nye defines soft power as the ability to influence others through the appeal of culture, values, and policies, rather than through coercion or material rewards (hard power). Research on soft power was conducted by Dimas Gemires (2021) in the Film Rurouni Kenshin as a Means of Japanese Soft Power in Promoting Japanese Culture to the International World . This study discusses how Japan uses the film Rurouni Kenshin as a means of promoting Japanese culture to the international world through the Japan Foundation by including the film Rurouni Kenshin in various international film festivals as a step to promote Japanese culture to the international world.

#### METHODOLOGY

In this research, the researcher used a qualitative method. According to Creswell (2016) in Agustianti (2022 ) said that qualitative research is research to explore and understand meaning. Material objects according to Rohman in Syukri (2022) say everything in the form of materials, goods, situations, or phenomena that are the focus of the study. Therefore, the material object used in the study is the film The Wind Rises. Then to collect data that will be obtained from the material object, the researcher uses the technique of listening and taking notes and literature studies. Listening and taking notes is by watching and understanding the film The Wind Rises carefully and repeatedly, then recording the data found during the listening process. Then the data source, the main data source according to Hidayah (2023) the main data source is data collected directly from the research object as its main reference. so the main data source in this study was obtained from the film The Wind Rises which only focuses on images, scenes and dialogues, which are related to the research problem. Furthermore, the selection of images to be used as the main data was selected by means of screenshots in the appropriate scene to answer the research problem, and likewise with the selection of dialog related to the research problem.

#### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

##### **1. The historical background of Japan's militarization and modernization in the early 20th century is represented in the film The Wind Rises**

Through the development of aviation technology amidst turbulent socio-political conditions. The Wind Rises film depicts how Japan tries to catch up on its industrial backwardness by adopting modernization, especially in the fields of engineering and military. Historically, Japan in the early 20th century experienced a major transformation, especially after the victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905 which increased the nation's confidence in strengthening its military. This modernization policy continued until the era of World War II, where Japan tried to become an independent industrial and military power. The Wind Rises film reflects the spirit of the times through the character of Jiro Horikoshi as the main character in this film who aspires to create a high-tech airplane. The following data was obtained:



**Figure 1.** Data 1.

In the scene, Jiro's boss at his company said: "We were ordered to make a bomber designed by German Junkers". At that time, Jiro's plane had just failed in its second trial. Then the next data is:



**Figure 2.** Data 2.

Then in this scene when Jiro has arrived at the German company he says: "Type G-38. Are we buying old technology from them?"

These two data reflect how Japan in the early 20th century relied on foreign technology to accelerate the modernization of the aviation industry, which was then used in the context of militarization.

Based on the first data, it shows that Japan imports or imitates technological designs from other countries, in this case Germany. This reflects how Japan, in its efforts to modernize its military industry, learned a lot from western powers that were more advanced in aviation technology. Historically, Japan has indeed collaborated with Germany, especially in the fields of engineering and military. For example, Germany provides licenses and technological assistance to Japan in aircraft manufacturing and the development of other defense industries.

Based on the second data, it reflects the awareness that Japan may accept technology that is not always sophisticated compared to that used by western countries. Which shows the challenge in modernization, where Japan must compete with countries that have previously developed better military technology. In its history, Japan

has often experienced a similar dilemma, where they adopted foreign technology but still tried to improve and adjust it to be superior or according to their own needs.

From both data, it can directly represent the historical background of Japanese militarization and modernization in the early 20th century. Where Japan in its efforts to become an advanced industrial country, relied on foreign technology, especially from Germany, which at that time was one of the leaders in the military aviation industry.

## 2. The role of Jiro Horikoshi in developing fighter aircraft reflects Japan's militarization policy?

Jiro Horikoshi, as the main aeronautical engineer in the development of the Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter, represents Japan's militarization policy in the early 20th century. Jiro Horikoshi's role as the main character in this film reflects how Japan pushed for the modernization of the defense industry to strengthen its military capabilities in facing World War II. The following data was obtained:



Figure 3. Data 3.

In this scene, when Jiro was little Jiro said to his mother : “I want to design a beautiful airplane.”

The data above shows that since childhood, Jiro has had an interest in aviation with an aesthetic and engineering perspective, not for the sake of war, where Jiro aspires to create a beautiful and innovative aircraft. However, his dream will later clash with the reality that aircraft design in Japan at that time was dominated by military interests.



Figure 4. Data 4.

The next scene, when Jiro has joined and worked as an engineer at the Mitsubishi company, the director of his company orders Jiro to join the fighter aircraft competency: "That was the naval design competency in 1932, a carrier-based fighter aircraft."

Based on the second data, it reflects how Japan in the 1930s pushed for the modernization of military technology by holding an aircraft design competition for the needs of the navy. Then Jiro as an engineer was directed to participate in this military project, which shows how the government and industry worked together in the militarization effort.



Figure 5. Data 5.

Then, when he had succeeded in making an aircraft with the competency shown in the second data above, the aircraft that Jiro made turned out to fail during the trial period: "The army has decided to buy fighter aircraft from another company."

In the data, it reflects the reality of the Japanese aviation industry which is very competitive and oriented towards military needs. And if an aircraft design does not meet military standards or loses in the competition, then the project will be abandoned. This shows how the aviation industry at that time was very dependent on the decisions of the military.



Figure 6. Data 6.

The next scene is when Jiro and his friend are assigned to Germany to see and adopt German aircraft technology, and when Jiro falls asleep his friend says : "His face looks like he is carrying the burden of the entire Japanese aircraft industry."

In the latest data, it illustrates the great pressure faced by Jiro in his mission to develop an aircraft for Japan. Where Japan at that time was catching up with the technology of western countries, and engineers like Jiro had a crucial role in realizing Japan's military ambitions through aviation technology innovation.

Based on the data above, it can be shown how Jiro, who initially had a dream to create a beautiful aircraft, was finally trapped in the reality that aircraft development in Japan was directed towards military interests. Jiro became part of Japan's militarization policy, where the country encouraged the development of fighter aircraft as a strategy to strengthen the armed forces.

### **3. The Wind Rises' contribution to Japan's cultural diplomacy and soft power and the formation of international perceptions of Japan**

The Wind Rises (2013) by Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli has made significant contributions to Japan's cultural diplomacy and soft power, and has influenced the formation of international perceptions of Japan, including the Promotion of Japanese Cultural Values through Aesthetics and Art. The film features beautiful visuals and rich details, reflecting the beauty of Japanese nature and architecture. This reinforces Japan's image as a country with a rich cultural heritage and high aesthetics. In addition, the film also highlights traditional cultural values such as perseverance, dedication, and harmony with nature, which are integral parts of Japanese cultural identity. The character of Jiro Horikoshi, for example, reflects the spirit of hard work and innovation that is often associated with Japanese culture.

In relation to militarization and modernization, the film emphasizes the humanist perspective that not only tells about Japan's technological progress in the aviation industry, but also highlights the moral and ethical impact of the development of military technology. This shows Japan's ability to reflect critically on its past, which can improve the country's image in the eyes of the international community. The film also illustrates the balance between progress and moral responsibility related to technological progress by depicting Jiro's internal conflict between his idealism as an engineer and the use of his aircraft for war, the film offers a deep perspective on moral responsibility in technological progress.

In terms of Soft Power, this film utilizes popular media, namely Studio Ghibli as a global brand, where Studio Ghibli has become a symbol of Japanese popular culture that is recognized internationally . Its films, including The Wind Rises, play a role in promoting Japan as a creative and innovative country. In addition, the Wind Rises film also utilizes the popularity of Hayao Miyazaki as a cultural ambassador. Miyazaki, as a legendary director, has become the face of Japanese cultural diplomacy. His works often combine elements of Japanese culture with universal themes, making them easily accepted by global audiences.

The film is also able to shape the international perception of Japan's image as an innovative country. The film emphasizes Japan's image as a technologically advanced country that is able to innovate, even in challenging situations such as the World War II era. The film is also a critical reflection of history, by showing the dark side of militarization and war, the film shows that Japan is able to introspect on its history. This can increase international respect for Japan as a mature and reflective country. Finally, the film also promotes peace, although the film is set in a war, its main message is more directed at peace and moral responsibility. This is in line with Japan's post-World War II image as a country that supports peace and anti-militarism. Then, according to Monika (2024), The Wind Rises presents a beautiful combination of imagination, technology, and history, which invites viewers to reflect on an individual's life journey and moral questions about the use of art in the context of war.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results of this study indicate that the film *The Wind Rises* represents the militarization and modernization of Japan through the role of Jiro Horikoshi as an aviation engineer. The modernization of the aviation industry shown in this film is inseparable from Japan's militarization policy, where the country encourages the development of fighter planes to strengthen the armed forces. Japan at that time tried to catch up on the industrial lag by adopting technology from Western countries, especially Germany. In addition, this film also attracts the interest of global audiences to learn more about Japanese history, culture, and values as well as an effective diplomatic tool as part of Japanese popular culture, this film can be used by the Japanese government or cultural institutions to promote a better understanding of Japan in the international world.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Yanti Carlina, email: [yanti.63821041@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id](mailto:yanti.63821041@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id)

**Yanti Carlina** , Japanese Literature Student at Indonesian Computer University

Sylvia Octa Putri, email: [sylvia.octa.putri@email.unikom.ac.id](mailto:sylvia.octa.putri@email.unikom.ac.id)

**Sylvia Octa Putri** , Lecturer in the International Relations Study Program at the Indonesian Computer University

Fenny Febrianty, email: [fenny.febrianty@email.unikom.ac.id](mailto:fenny.febrianty@email.unikom.ac.id)

**Fenny Febrianty**, Lecturer in the Japanese Literature Study Program at the Indonesian Computer University