

# THE REPRESENTATION OF BUSHIDO IN KAI'S CHARACTER AND JAPAN SOFT POWER IN 47 RONIN MOVIE

**Lutfia Maharani**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

**Sylvia Octa Putri**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

**Pitri Haryanti**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

Bushido is a code of ethics for samurai that dictates their behavior and actions. This concept is reflected in Kai's character in the film 47 Ronin. This research employs Nitobe's theory of Bushido and the concept of soft power from an international relations perspective. The aim of this study is to analyze how the film 47 Ronin utilizes Bushido values represented by Kai to promote Japanese culture. The research uses descriptive analysis with observation and literature study methods. The results indicate that Kai represents the seven Bushido values in 47 Ronin, including Shinjitsu (honesty), Yuuki (courage), Jin (generosity), Reigi (politeness), Gi (justice/truth), Meiyo (honor), and Chuugi (loyalty). These values help construct Japan's image as a country rich in moral and cultural values.

**Keywords:** Ronin 47, Movie, Japan, Soft Power

## INTRODUCTION

Film is a form of literature that closely connects with society. According to Wibowo in Fitria (2022), film serves as a medium to convey messages to the public through storytelling and as an artistic expression for filmmakers to present their ideas. As stated by Rahim et al. (2024), films possess a unique capability as a medium that can reach diverse audiences worldwide. Through films, stories and traditions can be presented engagingly, making them an effective tool for transmitting cultural and linguistic messages globally.

Bushido (武士道) is a moral code that samurai must uphold. According to Agustian in Mahendra & Ali (2023), Bushido is a set of moral values in Japanese culture that developed during the samurai era. In modern contexts, these values have been well-integrated into Japanese society.

This concept is evident in the film *47 Ronin*, directed by Carl Rinsch and released in 2013. The film tells the story of Kai, a half-Japanese man found in the forest by Lord Naganori Asano and a samurai named Yoshio Oishi. Kai is adopted and raised with affection by Lord Asano's family, leading him to feel indebted and pledge to always protect his lord at any cost.

One day, Lord Asano is framed by Lord Kira and his cunning witch, Mizuki, forcing Asano to commit seppuku. His loyal samurai become ronin (masterless samurai). Initially ostracized, Kai eventually joins the ronin under Oishi's leadership. In their quest for vengeance, Kai proves himself a formidable warrior, using mystical powers he learned from supernatural beings. Alongside Oishi and the ronin, Kai faces various challenges, including supernatural creatures and Lord Kira's army. In the final battle, Kai defeats Mizuki while Oishi kills Kira, completing their revenge. However, as ronin who defied the shogun's orders, Kai and the others are sentenced to commit seppuku to uphold their honor.

This study aims to analyze how the film *47 Ronin* utilizes Bushido values embodied by Kai to promote Japanese culture internationally. The research specifically seeks to answer:

1. How does Kai represent Bushido values as the main character?
2. How do the Bushido values depicted in the film serve as a soft power tool to strengthen Japan's image?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have examined *47 Ronin*, Bushido values, and Soft Power, such as the research by Faisal Arif Mahendra and Mohammad Ali (2023) on "The Representation of Bushido Values in Anime," Rita Agustina Karnawati's study (2021) on the concept of *On Giri* and *Ninjou* in *47 Ronin*, and Tata Ardiansyah's research (2023) on "Japan's Soft Power in the Animated Film *Boruto*." This research differs from previous studies by integrating literary analysis with international relations perspectives.

According to Nitobe in Risdianto (2023), Bushido originates from a combination of words: (bu/武), which means weapon, (shi/士), which means person, and (do/道), which means path, ethics, or morality. Bushido (武士道) is a moral code that samurai must adhere to. Nitobe, as cited in Cahyono (2020), also stated that Bushido means the path that must be followed by the warrior class or samurai in carrying out their duties and daily lives. Agustian in Mahendra & Ali (2023), Bushido is a set of moral values in Japanese culture that developed during the samurai era.

The principles of Bushido are influenced by three major sources: Zen Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism (Wulandari, 2017). The Bushido concept is derived from these three schools of thought, which emphasize respect for life and death while encompassing values such as loyalty, role modeling, courage, justice, discipline, and self-respect (Febrianty, 2016). The Bushido concept remains deeply ingrained in Japanese society today. Initially, these values served as a code of ethics for samurai, but over time, Bushido has evolved into a broader moral guideline for society.

Bushido encompasses seven values or principles that a samurai must apply in their life. According to Nitobe in Figun (2023), these seven values include (1) Shinjitsu (真実) or Honesty: One of the fundamental principles that a samurai must uphold. In the Bushido code, *shinjitsu*, which means honesty, emphasizes that a samurai must always adhere to the truth. They must never take back the words they have spoken. (2) Yuuki (勇氣) or Courage: A trait that every samurai must possess. A samurai must act without hesitation in carrying out their duties and demonstrate unwavering determination and strong mental readiness in every action they take. (3) Jin (仁) or Generosity: A combination of compassion and wisdom. This value includes kindness, empathy, love, generosity, and concern for others. (4) Reigi (礼儀) or Politeness: An unwritten guideline that



governs how an individual should behave and interact appropriately in social life. This attitude reflects respect and appreciation for others. (5) Gi (義) or Justice/Truth: A samurai must uphold the value of justice and be able to distinguish between right and wrong. A true samurai always adheres to the principle of truth in every aspect of their life. (6) Meiyo (名誉) or Honor: A samurai possesses a sense of honor that must be maintained. Therefore, they are responsible for preserving and protecting their honor as best as possible while avoiding anything that could tarnish their reputation. (7) Chuugi (忠義) or Loyalty: One of the core aspects that a samurai must uphold as a form of true devotion. It is not uncommon for a samurai to sacrifice their life to maintain their oath of loyalty. Loyalty also reflects strong determination and commitment to upholding principles that are believed to be true.

According to Joseph Nye, as cited in Wisanggeni (2019), soft power is the ability to influence other people's choices. He stated that soft power plays a crucial role in everyday democracy. This influence typically comes from aspects such as personality, culture, values, an appealing political system, and policies that are perceived as fair or morally legitimate. Soft power is a concept that refers to a country's ability to achieve its goals not through military or economic force, but by leveraging its appeal (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015).

Joseph Nye identified three sources of soft power, one of which is culture. Culture refers to a set of values and practices that create meaning for society. Culture also has various manifestations. It is common to distinguish between high culture, which includes literature, arts, and education that attract the elite, and popular culture, which focuses on mass entertainment. Culture is one of the main sources of soft power and is divided into two types. First, high culture, which includes art, literature, and education, tends to appeal to the elite. Second, pop culture, which revolves around the mass entertainment industry, has a broader audience reach (Matutina, 2020).

## METHODOLOGY

The data source used in this research is *47 Ronin*, a film directed by Carl Rinsch and released in 2013. The research method applied in this study is the descriptive analysis method. According to Bahtiar and Arwinarto in Putri (2019), descriptive analysis is a method that involves describing facts, followed by analysis.

This research also employs the simak catat (observation and note-taking) technique and literature study. According to Mashun in Dewi (2020), the simak (observation) method is named as such because data collection is conducted by observing language usage. This observation is not limited to spoken language but also includes written language. In its application, this method is complemented by the catat (note-taking) technique as a further step to record observed data. The note-taking technique serves as a continuation of the observation method. According to Rosyidhana in Agustin (2020), literature study is a data collection method carried out by searching for and reviewing various written sources, such as books or literature, that contain explanations regarding the theoretical framework.

## DISCUSSION

### Representation of Bushido Value in Kai's Character

#### Data 1



*Figure 1*



*Figure 2*

Figure 1 and 2 shows the scene where Kai directly approaches Oishi to inform him that a witch named Mizuki is disguising herself as Lord Kira's concubine. Kai warns Oishi about this danger, but he is not believed because he is considered an outsider. Kai could have remained silent and uninvolved, but due to his adherence to the value of honesty, he chooses to protect his master by conveying the truth he has witnessed. His decision to remain truthful, despite being rejected and underestimated, affirms that Kai embodies the Bushido value of *Shinjitsu* (真実) or honesty.

#### Data 2



*Figure 3*



*Figure 4*

Figure 3 and 4 shows the scene where Kai rescues Princess Ako from Mizuki's grasp. Kai demonstrates his courage when facing Mizuki, a witch who serves Lord Kira. Without hesitation, he confronts an enemy far more powerful and endowed with magical abilities, armed only with a sword. With unwavering determination, Kai pushes forward fearlessly, proving that true courage is not the absence of fear but the steadfast resolve to fight for honor. His decision affirms that Kai embodies the Bushido value of *Yuuki* (勇氣), which represents courage.



Data 3



*Figure 5*



*Figure 6*

figures 5 and 6 shows the scene when - dies, he makes a confession that as a child, he often bothered Kai by throwing stones at him. Since childhood, Kai was always looked down upon by the Ako samurai because of his mixed blood and his status of not being a true samurai. Although he was often insulted, Kai never held a grudge against them. Kai is a man of generosity, always putting the interests of others before his own, possessing empathy and compassion. His actions show that the Jin (仁) principle is not just about strength, but also about generosity and true caring.

Data 4



*Figure 7*

Figure 7 shows the scene where Kai approaches Oishi to inform him that a witch named Mizuki is disguising herself as Lord Kira's concubine. Kai kneels while saying, "My Lord" as a sign of respect. Despite often being treated as an outsider by the Ako samurai, Kai continues to show courtesy toward the Ako clan. This reflects the Bushido principle of *Reigi* (礼儀), which represents politeness, emphasizing that a samurai must always be respectful toward others, especially their leader.

Data 5



*Figure 8*

figure 8 shows the scene where Oishi tells Kai that he regrets not taking action when Lord Asano was sentenced to commit seppuku. Kai does not simply accept this injustice either. Despite lacking the power to oppose the Shogun's decision at the time, he remains steadfast in

his resolve alongside the ronin to restore Lord Asano's honor. He does not act out of personal revenge but rather to uphold the justice that was taken from them. His stance affirms that Kai embodies the Bushido value of *Gi* (義), which represents justice or righteousness.

Data 6



*Figure 9*



*Figure 10*

figures 9 and 10 shows the scene where Kai accepts the punishment of seppuku as a form of responsibility for his actions alongside the ronin. Although they acted to uphold justice, the Shogun still sentenced them to seppuku for defying his orders. During the seppuku ceremony, Kai sits calmly and without fear, proving that honor is more important than life itself. His actions reflect the Bushido value of *Meiyo* (名誉), which represents honor.

Data 7



*Figure 11*

figure 11 shows the scene where Oishi reunites with Kai. At first, Kai appears hesitant, unsure whether he is truly accepted as part of the ronin group, as he has always been seen as an outsider. However, the moment Oishi invites him to join, Kai does not hesitate to accept the offer. His loyalty is evident not only in his words but also in his actions and sacrifices. With unwavering determination, he fights alongside the ronin, overcoming various obstacles to restore Lord Asano's honor. Kai's decision in this mission reflects the Bushido value of *Chuugi* (忠義), which represents loyalty.

### Bushido and Samurai become soft power tools to strengthen image

Bushido is closely associated with the samurai tradition. This film presents rich visual elements of samurai culture, such as traditional clothing, katana swords, and Japanese rituals. These elements reinforce Japan's image as a country with a strong cultural heritage. For example, scenes depicting samurai training, tea ceremonies, and the use of traditional weapons help highlight this cultural depth. Although Bushido is a traditional Japanese value, the film presents it in a way that can be understood and appreciated by a global audience. Values such as loyalty, honor, and courage are universal and easily accepted by international viewers. This is evident in Kai's character—despite not being of pure



Japanese descent, he internalizes Bushido values, demonstrating that these principles can be adopted by anyone.

The film combines historical elements (the true story of the *47 Ronin*) with Japanese mythology (mystical creatures like *kitsune* and *oni*). This creates a narrative that is both engaging and educational about Japanese culture. The film has the potential to spark global audiences' interest in learning more about samurai culture, Bushido, and Japanese history.

By showcasing Bushido values such as courage, benevolence, courtesy, justice, honor, and loyalty, the film helps build Japan's image as a dignified and honorable nation. International audiences may perceive Japan not only as a technologically advanced country but also as one rich in moral and cultural values.

The box office revenue for *47 Ronin* reached a total of \$151.8 million worldwide. The film has also been made available on online streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, and Hulu. While there is no official data on the number of viewers who watched the film in theaters, an estimate can be made based on its box office revenue and average ticket price. Assuming an average ticket price of \$8, the estimated number of viewers would be around 19 million. The film continues to attract international audiences, partly due to the presence of Keanu Reeves as a globally recognized actor. In this case, Hollywood also serves as a popular medium for promoting elements of Japanese culture.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Kai represents the seven Bushido values in this film, including *Shinjitsu* (真実) or honesty, *Yuuki* (勇氣) or courage, *Jin* (仁) or generosity, *Reigi* (礼儀) or politeness, *Gi* (義) or justice/truth, *Meiyo* (名誉) or honor, and *Chuugi* (忠義) or loyalty. These Bushido values serve as a soft power tool to strengthen Japan's image as a nation that upholds honor and loyalty.

The Bushido values in *47 Ronin* are utilized as a soft power strategy to enhance Japan's reputation by showcasing universal principles such as honesty, courage, benevolence, courtesy, justice/truth, honor, and loyalty. Additionally, the film introduces elements of Japanese culture, such as samurai traditions and folklore/mythology, helping to build a positive image of Japan as a cultured and dignified nation while also increasing global interest in Japanese culture and history.

### REFERENCES

- Agustin, H. (2020). Design of Inside Outside Circle Learning Model to Increase Student Activeness in Civics Learning in Class III Elementary School [Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia]. <https://repository.upi.edu/51301/>
- Cahyono, A. D. (2020). The Value of Bushido Reflected in the Character Melos in the Short Story Hashire Meros by Dazai Osamu (Vol. 2507). Brawijaya University.
- Dewi, L. K. (2020). Diversity of Satire Meanings in Political Discourse on Student Demonstration Banners [Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia]. <https://repository.upi.edu/53436>
- Febrianty, F. (2016). Representation of Samurai as the Upper Class in the Social Stratification of Japanese Society in the Edo Period in the Novel Tokaido Innkarya Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler. UNIKOM Scientific Magazine, 14 (1), 29-40. <https://doi.org/10.34010/miu.v14i1.175>

- Fitria, N. A. (2022). Women's Self-Confidence in Imperfect Movie [Universitas KOMputer Indonesia]. <https://elibrary.unikom.ac.id/id/eprint/7294/>
- Figun, M. J. (2023). Representation of Bushido Values in Anime Series. 42-59. [http://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/30070/3/170906454\\_2.pdf](http://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/30070/3/170906454_2.pdf)
- Mahendra, F. A., & Ali, M. (2023). Representation of Bushido Value of Courage (Yu) in Anime (C.S. ierce Semiotics Analysis). *Mahadaya: Journal of Language, Literature, and Culture*, 3(1), 145-156. <https://doi.org/10.34010/mhd.v3i1.8287>
- Matutina, T. G. C. (2020). South Korea's Public Diplomacy After the Lifting of the Hallyu Ban in China (2017-2019). *Cerdika: Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia*, 3(08), 811-819. <https://cerdika.publikasiindonesia.id/index.php/cerdika/article/view/654>
- Putri, P. M. (2019). The Concept of Anxiety in the Character of Tadao in the Movie Inori no Maku ga Oritu Toki by Katsuo Fukuzawa. <http://repository.unsada.ac.id/1356/>
- Rahim, A. R., Firqatunnajiah, A., & Batari, T. (2024). Local Films As A Means Of Internationalization. 370-378. <https://e-journal.unmas.ac.id/index.php/senadiba/article/download/10635/7990/25673>
- Risdianto, M. F. R. (2023). Representation of Bushido Value from Kira and Athrun Characters in Mobile Suit Gundam Seed Animation Movie [National University]. <http://repository.unas.ac.id/6974/>
- Sergunin, A., & Karabeshkin, L. (2015). Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy. *Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12109>
- Wisanggeni, W. (2019). Japan's Soft Power in the Anime *Samurai Champloo* as a Form of Cultural Diplomacy. 3(2), 64-72.
- Wulandari, S. (2017). Bushido Morals in Mosaoka Shiki's Haiku. 61-64. [http://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/30070/3/170906454\\_2.pdf](http://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/30070/3/170906454_2.pdf)

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lutfia Maharani, email: [lutfia.63821040@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id](mailto:lutfia.63821040@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id)

**Lutfia Maharani** is a student at the Japanese Literature Program at Universitas Komputer Indonesia (UNIKOM). She is currently focusing on research related to characterization in movies.

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

**Sylvia Octa Putri**, is a Lecturer of International Relations of Universitas Komputer Indonesia. She is actively engaged in research focuses on international relations in the East Asian region.

Pitri Haryanti, email: [pitri.haryanti@email.unikom.ac.id](mailto:pitri.haryanti@email.unikom.ac.id)

**Pitri Haryanti** is the Head of the Japanese Literature Program at the Faculty of Literary, Universitas Komputer Indonesia (UNIKOM). She is actively engaged in research and community service in the fields of language, literature, and Japanese culture and has published various scholarly works on these topics.