

SYNTHESIS OF TRADITIONAL ETHICS IN JAPANESE ANIME AND MODERN YOUTH MORAL STANDARDS

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Abstract: This article investigates the synthesis of traditional Japanese ethical values embedded in anime culture — the Bushido code, loyalty (chūgi), duty (giri), self-sacrifice (gisei), and honor (meiyo) — with the contemporary moral standards of youth. The study employs content analysis, cross-cultural comparative research, and ethical-philosophical analysis. Based on survey data (n=487) collected among youth in Uzbekistan, Japan, and South Korea, traditional values transmitted through anime significantly influence young people's moral decision-making. The creative transformation of Bushido principles in popular series such as Naruto, Attack on Titan, and Fullmetal Alchemist cultivates responsibility, perseverance (konton), and the capacity to prioritize collective over personal interests. The article theoretically substantiates the pedagogical potential of anime ethics and offers practical recommendations for its application in moral education.

Keywords: Bushido, anime ethics, youth morality, Japanese culture, moral education, ethical synthesis, loyalty, self-sacrifice, contemporary ethics.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqola yapon anime madaniyatida namoyon bo'lgan an'anaviy axloqiy qadriyatlar — Bushido kodeksi, sadoqat (chūgi), burch (giri), fidoyilik (gisei) va ornomus (meiyo) — va ularning zamonaviy yoshlar axloqiy mezonlari bilan sintezini tadqiq etadi. Tadqiqotda mazmunan tahlil (content analysis), qiyosiy madaniyatlararo tadqiqot (cross-cultural comparison) va axloqiy-falsafiy tahlil metodologiyasidan foydalanildi. O'zbekiston, Yaponiya va Janubiy Koreya yoshlari orasida o'tkazilgan so'rovnomma natijalari (n=487) asosida aniqlanishicha, anime orqali uzatilgan traditional qadriyatlar zamonaviy yoshlarning axloqiy qaror qabul qilish jarayoniga sezilarli darajada ta'sir qilmoqda. Naruto, Attack on Titan va Fullmetal Alchemist kabi mashhur animelarda Bushido tamoyillarining ijodiy transformatsiyasi yoshlarda mas'uliyat, davom etish irodasi (konton) va jamoa manfaatini shaxsiy manfaatdan ustun qo'yish qobiliyatini shakllantirmoqda. Maqola anime etikasining pedagogik salohiyatini nazariy asoslaydi va undan ma'naviy tarbiya sohasida foydalanish bo'yicha amaliy tavsiyalar beradi.

Kalit so'zlar: Bushido, anime etikasi, yoshlar axloqi, yapon madaniyati, ma'naviy tarbiya, axloqiy sintez, sadoqat, fidoyilik, zamonaviy etika.

Although the Bushido tradition emerged within samurai culture during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries of the Edo period, its systematic scholarly formulation was accomplished in Nitobe Inazō's book *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, published in 1900 (Nitobe, 1900). Nitobe identifies eight fundamental principles of Bushido: righteousness or justice (gi), courage (yū), benevolence (jin), respect (rei), sincerity (makoto), honor (meiyo), loyalty (chūgi), and self-control (jisei). Deeply rooted in Confucius' philosophy, this ethical code (Turnbull, 2003) continues to exert a strong influence on contemporary Japanese culture.

Studies by Robert N. Bellah (1985) and Ronald Dore (1987) demonstrate that Bushido principles remain evident in modern Japanese management practices, educational systems, and everyday social interactions.

Within the context of Uzbek philosophy, ethical systems parallel to Bushido can also be observed. The moral teachings of Alisher Navoi and the principles of justice and loyalty expressed in *Hibat ul-Haqoyiq* by Ahmad Yugnaki (Yo'ldoshev, 2018) contain ethical standards



that are structurally similar to those of Bushido. This parallelism provides an important theoretical foundation for explaining the influence of anime ethics on young people in Uzbekistan.

Anime studies scholars such as Susan J. Napier (2005), Thomas Lamarre (2009), and Christopher Bolton et al. (2007) have analyzed the multilayered spiritual and ethical structure of anime. Their studies demonstrate that, unlike Western cartoon traditions, Japanese animation places particular emphasis on moral dilemmas, tragic heroes, and themes of collective responsibility.

In his book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, Hiroki Azuma (2009) explains how contemporary anime creators synthesize traditional Bushido values with postmodern cultural reflections. As a result of this synthesis, a new ethical model that may be described as “neo-Bushido” is emerging.

In the field of empirical research, Cheung (2020), through a survey conducted among Southeast Asian youth ($n = 623$), found that identification with morally exemplary anime characters positively influences young people's ethical decision-making in real life. At the same time, Marc Steinberg (2012) argues that the decontextualized adoption of anime ethics may lead to certain moral ambiguities.

In the context of Uzbekistan, specialized research on anime and youth spirituality remains insufficiently developed. Although Madaminov (2022) and Toshmatov (2023) have examined the general relationship between media and youth morality, comprehensive analyses specifically focused on anime ethics are still lacking. The present study seeks to fill this gap.

This research is built upon three theoretical foundations. The first is Lawrence Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development, which posits that moral reasoning progresses through successive stages and that cultural context significantly influences this development. The second is Albert Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory, according to which individuals acquire moral models through observing the behavior of others. The third is Jonathan Haidt's (2012) Moral Foundations Theory, which classifies care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and sanctity as universal foundations of morality.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis, survey research, and comparative cross-cultural analysis. This methodology made it possible to examine anime ethics at both textual and socio-empirical levels.

For the content analysis, twelve anime series released between 2000 and 2024 and ranked among the most widely viewed worldwide were selected. The selection criteria included: (1) an IMDb rating above 8.0; (2) evaluation by more than 500,000 users on MyAnimeList; and (3) genre diversity, including shonen, seinen, and josei categories.

The selected anime series included *Naruto / Naruto: Shippuden*, *One Piece*, *Attack on Titan*, *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*, *Demon Slayer*, *My Hero Academia*, *Sword Art Online*, *Hunter × Hunter*, *Bleach*, *Vinland Saga*, *Rurouni Kenshin*, and *Samurai Champloo*.

The manifestation of Bushido principles in each anime was analyzed using a specially designed coding scheme. The coding categories included loyalty, duty, self-sacrifice, honor, justice, self-improvement, and commitment to the common good. The inter-rater reliability coefficient was found to be sufficiently high (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.78$), indicating a satisfactory level of coding consistency.

The survey was conducted between February and April 2024 in Tashkent ($n = 189$), Tokyo ($n = 163$), and Seoul ($n = 135$). The total sample size was $n = 487$. Participants ranged in age from 15 to 28 years. A stratified random sampling method was employed, with stratification based on gender, educational level, and anime-viewing experience.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: demographic information, anime-viewing habits, and the Moral Values Scale, adapted from Park and Peterson (2006), with a reliability coefficient of Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$. In classical Bushido, loyalty was primarily directed toward



one's feudal lord. In contemporary anime, however, this concept has undergone a significant transformation. In *Naruto*, the protagonist, Naruto Uzumaki, demonstrates loyalty first to his mentor and friends and ultimately to his entire village. This represents a model of "horizontal loyalty," which differs from the traditional concept of "vertical loyalty." Such a transformation corresponds to the tendency of postmodern youth to prioritize loyalty toward peers and communities rather than hierarchical authorities.

In *Attack on Titan*, loyalty raises a more complex moral issue. The initial loyalty of Eren Yeager gradually develops into a profound ethical tragedy in the later seasons of the series. This narrative encourages young viewers to reflect deeply on the limits of loyalty and its relationship with other moral values.

First, a positive correlation was identified between the frequency of anime consumption and moral values scores ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$). Participants who watched more than seven hours of anime per week demonstrated statistically significantly higher levels of self-sacrifice ($d = 0.62$) and commitment to the common good ($d = 0.58$) compared to those who watched anime less frequently.

Second, a comparative analysis among the three cities revealed that respondents from Tashkent tended to interpret the principles of loyalty and duty by enriching them with additional religious and national values to a greater extent than their peers in Tokyo and Seoul. This finding suggests that, for Uzbek youth, the ethical values presented in anime can be integrated relatively easily with traditional national and Islamic moral frameworks.

The findings of this study partially confirm and partially extend Jonathan Haidt's (2012) Moral Foundations Theory. The transformation of Bushido values in anime presents the foundations of loyalty and honor (loyalty/authority foundations) to young audiences within a new context that is more democratic and respectful of individual freedom. This phenomenon illustrates what may be described as the "moral vaccination" effect—the process through which ancient values are revitalized and reinterpreted through modern perspectives.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the potential negative aspects. According to the survey results, 18.3% of respondents reported that the moral justification of violence depicted in certain anime series occasionally caused confusion regarding ethical judgment and decision-making.

Bushido Principle	Anime Example	Type of Transformation	Impact on Youth (%)
Loyalty (Chūgi)	<i>Naruto</i> , <i>One Piece</i>	Vertical → Horizontal	78.3%
Duty (Giri)	<i>FMA: Brotherhood</i>	Obligation → Aspiration	71.2%
Self-sacrifice (Gisei)	<i>Demon Slayer</i> , <i>MHA</i>	Extraordinary → Everyday	72.4%
Honor (Meiyo)	<i>Attack on Titan</i>	Individual → Collective honor	65.7%
Justice (Gi)	<i>Vinland Saga</i>	Law → Inner conscience	69.8%



Bushido Principle	Anime Example	Type of Transformation	Impact on Youth (%)
Self-improvement (Jisei)	Hunter x Hunter	Physical → Spiritual	83.1%

Table 1. Transformation of Bushido Principles in Contemporary Anime and Their Impact on Youth

Traditional principles retain their essential meaning while adapting to new contexts: loyalty is transforming from feudal obedience into relationships based on free choice and affection; duty is shifting from external pressure to an internal moral imperative. This transformation, in essence, resembles a bottom-up diffusion of Immanuel Kant's ethics through anime.

In the context of Uzbek youth, this synthesis appears to be particularly effective, as several Bushido principles—loyalty, justice, and self-cultivation—are compatible with Islamic moral values and traditional Uzbek educational norms. This “moral resonance” turns anime into a medium capable of exerting long-term ethical and spiritual influence on Uzbek youth.

In the field of education: Anime content can be used as a methodological tool in ethics classes within schools and higher education institutions. For this purpose, the development of courses in critical media literacy is recommended.

For parents and educators: Instead of prohibiting anime viewing, it is more effective to turn it into a topic of family discussion—jointly analyzing the moral choices of characters. This approach yields more effective educational outcomes.

For policymakers: At the level of cultural policy, it is advisable to recognize the ethical potential of Japanese anime and to utilize this experience in the development of the national animation industry.

The study has several limitations: (1) a self-selection bias in the survey sample, where anime viewers may naturally hold more positive attitudes; (2) the inability to generalize the findings at a national level due to the limited sample drawn from only three cities; and (3) the difficulty of isolating media influence from other factors such as family, religion, and education. Taking these limitations into account, more sophisticated methodological approaches are required for future research.

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