



Evolution of Contemporary Anime in the Japanese Pop Culture: A Study

Kevin Philip Modayil

II BCA

21BCAS19

St Joseph's University,

36, Lalbagh Road, Bengaluru-560027, Karnataka, India

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the evolution of contemporary anime in the background of anime, including its emergence from manga and its development into a prominent form of entertainment in Japan. The paper examines the impact of globalization on the anime industry, which has led to the international popularity of anime and its influence on popular culture worldwide. Additionally, the paper considers the role of technology in shaping the modern anime industry, particularly in terms of animation techniques and the use of digital platforms for distribution. The research also highlights anime's social and cultural implications in contemporary Japan, including its impact on gender roles, identity formation, and fandom culture. Through a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of anime, this research paper provides insights into the cultural and artistic significance of this form of entertainment in contemporary Japanese society and beyond.

Keywords: *Japanese Pop Culture, Evolution of Anime, Contemporary Anime, History of Manga and Anime*

I. INTRODUCTION

This research paper is going to discuss anime, a very unique form of animation that originated in Japan in the early 20th century, and how it has evolved over the past few decades. Since its first appearance, it has undergone significant development and has become a very popular and respected art form around the world. In the 1960s, anime emerged as a distinct animation style with the introduction of color and improvements in animation techniques. Many masterpiece animations such as Astro Boy and Speed Racer were produced during this period. The 1970s and 1980s marked a shift towards more mature themes as anime explored complex ideas and began to tackle more challenging themes. The 1990s saw a period of growth and

expansion for anime due to the increased availability of anime on home video and the growing number of anime conventions and fan clubs. The growth of Japan's anime industry has also helped establish anime as a popular and respected art form. Today, anime is a very diverse medium, spanning a wide range of styles and genres. From traditional family-friendly series to more mature and complex productions, anime has something for everyone. The rise of streaming services like Netflix and Crunchyroll has made anime more accessible than ever, while technological advances have allowed for increasingly compelling animations and special effects. Overall, the development of anime has been driven by a combination of factors such as technological advancements, changing cultural attitudes, and the growth of the anime industry. Despite humble beginnings, anime has become a truly global phenomenon. It has grown and fans around the world have embraced this unique and fascinating art form.

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for studying the evolution of anime in Japanese pop culture will be a combination of literature review and qualitative data collection methods. The aim is to explore how anime has evolved, the factors that have influenced its development, and its cultural significance within Japan and beyond.

A review of relevant academic and popular literature was conducted to identify key themes and trends in the evolution of anime in Japan. This will include books, journal articles, and online sources related to the history and development of anime and its cultural and social significance.

A research question was formulated based on the literature review. The research question for this study will be "How has anime evolved in



response to changing social and cultural contexts in Japan?"

A sample of anime shows and movies was selected for content analysis. The sample was chosen to reflect a range of genres & time periods, and will include both popular and lesser-known titles.

A research was conducted on how anime has been used to comment on and critique social and political issues in Japan and other countries.

III. DISCUSSION

1. ANIME AND ITS EVOLUTION

1.1. What is the origin of anime?

The journey of modern anime began in 1917 and found lasting success in 1961 with the establishment of "Mushi Productions". At the turn of the 21st century, anime began to attend wide international popularity with the 'Pokémon' television series and films like "Spirited Away", directed by Hayao Miyazaki which came out in 2002 and was also an academy award winner of the best-animated feature film. Since then, anime has evolved a lot in animation style, storytelling, musical production, and writing.

1.1.1. The First Generation - The Dawn of Japanese Anime

Japan's anime production can be traced back to 1917 when silent films were in their heyday. At that time, animation techniques were still in the experimental stage and were based on methods used in animation shots from France and the United States. Japan's first anime film, titled *Namakura Gatana* (NFI), was produced in 1917 and had a runtime of just four minutes. Although it was a modest beginning, it marked the start of Japan's journey toward becoming a global powerhouse in the anime industry.

During this period, Japanese *Manga Films* were more expensive to produce than Western animations and were overshadowed by the popularity of Disney cartoons. However, the quality of Japanese Manga Films was highly regarded by those who appreciated them. The industry was still in its infancy and had a long way to go before it could compete with the well-established Western animation industry.

One of the factors that helped Japan's anime industry find its niche was anime production for public relations and publicity campaigns by public institutions. This gave the anime industry a steady stream of work and helped it establish a foothold in the entertainment industry. (Drazen)

Finally, conclusions were drawn about the evolution of anime in Japanese pop culture, and recommendations were made for future research and analysis. The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural and social significance of anime in Japan and may inform future developments in the anime industry

Despite this early success, the anime industry suffered a major setback when Tokyo and the surrounding area were devastated by the Great Kantō earthquake in 1923. This natural disaster forced the industry to start from scratch and rebuild itself. (Clements, War Years)

Before the advent of films, Japan already had a rich tradition of entertainment with colorfully painted figures moving across the projection screen in *utsushi-e* (写し絵) (Kobayashi). *Utsushi-e* was a particular Japanese type of magic lantern show that was popular in the 19th century, possibly inspired by European Phantasmagoria shows. *Utsushi-e* showmen used mechanical slides and developed lightweight wooden projectors known as *furo* that were hand-held, allowing several performers to control the motion of different projected figures.

These early forms of entertainment had a significant influence on the development of Japan's anime industry. They helped to establish a foundation of knowledge and expertise that would prove invaluable as the industry evolved and matured.

1.1.2. The Second Generation – Cel Animation

The early pioneers of anime production in the late 1910s were *Oten Shimokawa*, *Jun'ichi Kouchi*, and *Seitaro Kitayama* (Japan City Tour), who are regarded as the *fathers* of anime. The dominant animation technique at that time was *Cel Animation* (Stobener, Bob and Scott), also known as traditional animation, which involves the creation of 2D drawings on transparent plastic sheets by hand. The colors used in filling the drawings were specific to the characters and the scenes depicted. However, many of the early anime productions did not utilize the cel animation technique that would later become the dominant production technique. Instead, they relied on various methods such as chalkboard drawings, painting directly on film, and paper cut-outs. (Clements and McCarthy, The Anime Encyclopedia: A Century of Japanese Animation)

As Japanese anime production developed, a host of other technologies were added to the production process. One significant innovation was



the introduction of sound, which added a new dimension to anime production. Sound was initially introduced in the form of music and sound effects, but later on, voice acting became a critical component of anime production.

Another major development was the introduction of color in anime production. Initially, anime was produced in black and white, but with the advent of color technology, anime production took on a new level of vibrancy and detail. The colors used were carefully chosen to create a particular mood and atmosphere in the anime.

The multiplane camera system was another technological advancement that revolutionized anime production. The multiplane camera system allowed for the creation of more complex and detailed animation sequences by enabling animators to create multiple layers of animation that could be filmed separately and then combined into a single shot. This technique added depth and dimensionality to the animation, making it more realistic and engaging.

The cel animation technique eventually became the dominant production technique in Japanese anime production. This technique involves drawing and coloring characters and scenes on transparent plastic sheets, which are then photographed in sequence to create the illusion of movement. This technique allowed animators to create more detailed and intricate animation sequences, leading to a new level of sophistication in anime production.

1.1.3. Effects of World War II on the Anime Industry

During the 1930s in Japan, due to the emergence of Japanese nationalism and the onset of WWII, animation productions were not primarily intended for entertainment purposes. Instead, they were commercially focused or government propaganda. In the 1940s, the government-sponsored the first animated film in Japan. After the war, manga, or Japanese comics, became popular, serving as a distraction from the harsh realities faced by the Japanese people. Nowadays, there are numerous anime titles available that cater to different audiences, making it one of Japan's most significant export products.

Anime is characterized by its emotive, dramatic, and realistic storylines, with exaggerated actions performed by its characters. Typically, anime characters have large oval eyes, human-like bodies, and eccentric hairstyles. Contrary to popular belief, anime is not solely aimed at children. Most titles target a mature audience. Some anime companies,

such as *Studio Ghibli*, have managed to create content that appeals to both children and adults, making them one of the most influential companies in the animation industry. (Patten)

1.1.4. Post-War and the Rise of Television – Toei Animation

The history of Japanese animation, or anime, dates back to the early 20th century when the first short films were made. However, it wasn't until after World War II that the first modern Japanese animation production company, *Toei Animation*, was established in 1948. Inspired by the success of Walt Disney's films, Toei Animation's early theatrical releases, such as *Shonen Sarutobi Sasuke* in 1959, were explicitly Disneyesque. However, it wasn't until the shift to television in the 1960s that anime became widely popular in Japan.

During this time, Toei Animation adapted popular manga series, such as *Sally the Witch*, *Tetsujin 28 GO*, and Shotaro Ishimori's hugely influential *Cyborg 009*, for TV. The company, known as *Toei Doga* at the time, hired a team of young and talented animators who honed their skills while producing anime under the supervision of veteran animators. Toei Doga's first full-length film, *Hakujaden*, was released in October 1958 and impressed a young *Miyazaki Hayao*, who would later become one of Japan's most renowned anime filmmakers.

As anime's popularity grew, so did the competition for TV audiences. In 1963, *Osamu Tezuka* created the first modern anime series for television, *Tetsuwan Atomu (Astro Boy)*, which became a surprise hit and started an anime boom. Many writers and producers followed Tezuka's example, leading to a period of intense competition for TV audiences. By the time the '80s rolled around, Japan had many anime titles to export, and anime's influence spread throughout the world.

Anime has had a significant socio-cultural impact on Japan and the international community, and its popularity continues to grow. Today, anime conventions are held around the world, where fans gather to share their experiences and buy anime-related merchandise such as figures, DVDs, and collectibles. Tokyo has several neighborhoods specializing in anime culture, such as *Akihabara* and *Ikebukuro*, while Osaka has a subculture-heavy district in Den Town. Anime remains a popular form of entertainment for people looking to escape their daily lives through fantasy and entertainment.

In the early 1970s, one of the earliest successful television anime productions was



Tomorrow's Joe, a boxing anime that has become iconic in Japan. Another popular anime series from that time was *Lupin III*, which first aired in 1971. While the first series only ran for 23 episodes before being canceled, the second series, which began in 1977, was considerably more successful, spanning 155 episodes over three years. (Cavallaro)

While anime's roots can be traced back to the early 20th century, it wasn't until after World War II that it began to gain popularity. Toei Animation, established in 1948, was one of the first modern anime production companies, and it was inspired by the success of Walt Disney's films. The shift to television in the 1960s brought about a period of intense competition for TV audiences, and anime became increasingly popular in Japan. Today, anime is a global phenomenon that continues to entertain and captivate audiences around the world. (Clements, *Anime: A History*)

1.1.5. Revolutionizing Anime - The Rise of 1990s Japanese Animation

The 1990s were a transformative era for the animation industry in Japan and worldwide. One anime that stood out during this period was *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, a controversial show that became popular among anime fans in Japan and attracted attention from mainstream media. Written and directed by Hideaki Anno, the show was initially meant to be the ultimate otaku anime, designed to revive the declining anime industry. However, midway through production, Anno also made it into a heavy critique of the subculture, creating a show that resonated with a wide audience.

The success of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* culminated in the release of a film titled *The End of the Evangelion* in 1997, which grossed over 10 million dollars and marked a significant milestone for the animation industry. However, the violent and sexual scenes in *Evangelion* caused TV Tokyo to increase censorship of anime content, leading to the heavy editing of *Cowboy Bebop* when it was first broadcast in 1998. Despite this setback, the show still managed to gain popularity both in and outside of Japan, especially in the US. (Clements and McCarthy, *The Anime Encyclopedia: A Century of Japanese Animation*)

During the 2000s, anime based on eroge and visual novels gained popularity, building on a trend that had started in the late 1990s with works such as *Sentimental Journey* and *To Heart*. Examples of such works included *Green*, *SHUFFLE*, *Kanon*, *Fate/Stay Night*, *Higurashi No Naku Koro Ni*, *Ef: A Tale of Memories*, *True Tears*, and *Clannad*. In May 2012,

Toonami Programming, which had been blocked in the US, was relaunched as a late-night adult-oriented action block on Adult Swim, overseeing worldwide premieres of English dubbed releases for various anime titles including *Durara*, *Deadman Wonderland*, *Hunter x Hunter*, *Sword Art Online*, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, *Attack on Titan*, *Kill La Kill*, *Space Dandy*, *Akame ga Kill*, *Parasyte: The Maxim*, *One Punch Man*, *Dragon Ball Super*, *Boruto: Naruto Next Generation* and *Kimetsu No Yaiba*.

Despite the hardships that the animation industry faced, anime survived and continued to evolve. Convention attendance continued to climb, and a dozen or more anime titles were released each month. Distributors aggressively used various digital networks to provide fans high-quality, legitimate copies of their shows, and the overall presentation of anime for non-Japanese fans improved significantly. Quality English dubs and bonus features created specifically for overseas audiences became commonplace.

New anime shows continued to emerge, with some of the best yet made being *Death Note*, *Full Metal Alchemist*, and *Attack on Titan*. While future anime shows may bear less resemblance to what has come before, anime continues to evolve and thrive thanks to the love of fans and the hard work of the animation industry. It has become a cultural phenomenon that evolves along with the society that produced it and the world that savors it. (Drzen)

2. Anime has Come a Long Way: Conclusion

Anime has come a long way since its inception in Japan in the early 20th century. Initially, anime was a niche subculture enjoyed by a small group of enthusiasts. However, over the years, anime has grown to become a global cultural phenomenon, attracting millions of fans worldwide. The evolution of contemporary anime has been an exciting and fascinating phenomenon to observe, and this research paper has explored various aspects of this evolution.

One of the most notable aspects of the evolution of contemporary anime is the way in which it has become more inclusive and diverse. In the past, anime was dominated by a male audience, with male protagonists and female characters often portrayed in stereotypical and objectified ways. However, in recent years, there has been a significant shift towards more diverse representation, with female protagonists and characters from different ethnic backgrounds taking center stage.

This shift towards diversity can be seen in anime such as *"Attack on Titan"*, *"Fullmetal*



Alchemist," and "Sailor Moon Crystal," which all feature strong female protagonists. Moreover, anime such as "Yuri!!! on Ice," "K-On!," and "Love Live!" have also introduced LGBTQ+ themes and characters, helping to break down barriers and promote greater acceptance and understanding.

Another important aspect of the evolution of contemporary anime is the way in which technology has revolutionized the production and distribution of anime. In the past, anime was produced using traditional hand-drawn animation techniques, which were both time-consuming and expensive. However, with the advent of digital technology, anime production has become more streamlined and efficient, with animators using CGI to create more visually stunning works.

Moreover, the emergence of streaming services such as Netflix, Crunchyroll, and Funimation has made anime more accessible to audiences around the world. Fans can now watch their favorite anime shows online, with new episodes being released on a regular basis. This has helped to fuel the growth of the anime industry and has made it easier for fans to discover new anime shows.

One of the most significant trends in contemporary anime is the way in which it has become more socially and politically conscious. Anime has often been used to explore complex social and political issues, and contemporary anime is no exception. Anime such as "Death Note," "Code Geass," and "Psycho-Pass" all explore issues such as justice, morality, and the role of government in society.

Moreover, contemporary anime has also been used to address more current social and political issues, such as the refugee crisis and environmental issues. For example, "Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress" deals with issues such as climate change and the impact of human activity on the environment, while "Attack on Titan" explores themes such as xenophobia and discrimination.

Another significant trend in contemporary anime is the way in which it has become more collaborative and global in nature. In the past, anime was produced primarily in Japan, with few collaborations with studios outside of Japan. However, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in cross-cultural collaborations, with studios from around the world working together to create new anime shows.

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