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Term Paper

Anime the Film Industry of Japan

Anime is a term for Japanese animation. Manga is a term which is mean for comic books or graphic novels. Anime often covers more serious topics than the typical cartoon. In America, cartoons are considered a form of entertainment meant for children. In Japan, people of all ages watch anime. Most shows and movies are centered for kids or young adults, but there are also many anime that are made for the older generations of people. There are many genres in anime with basic categories like comedy, romance, action, drama, and pornography (hentai). There are also anime with content meant specifically for boys (shounen) or for girls (shoujo).

For girls it gets a little more complicated in the anime industry. What makes their anime for women called Shoujo anime and manga has many different forms and styles that make it unique. Shoujo anime and manga really emphasize people's emotions, relationships and feelings. This is different from shounen because they usually

rely on actions rather than emotions. A unique concept that is portrayed in shoujo is that everything is beautiful. No one is ugly and even certain types of concepts like homosexuality or incest are actually illustrated in a very tasteful manner though I am sure that for American audiences is very hard to visualize due to the graphic and very controversial topics that they are. In American society people are a lot more put behind closed doors on a subject such as this. These topics are brought to another level by the Japanese in their anime to educate the youth. Shoujo anime and manga artists are also considered the best because of the attention to detail that is shown in the work. Even the tiniest of details such as hair waving in the wind has much detail to it. Another big concept in Shoujo has to do with the eyes of a character; the eyes of a character can tell you if the character is good or evil. For example the main character that is the hero or heroin usually has very big eyes with a type of sparkle to them. Drama and romance are the two biggest types of genres that are in shoujo but they are not the only ones. It is actually true that the horror genre is the biggest seller of shoujo in Japan by revenue.

Shounen anime and manga (boys) produced to go straight toward the male consumer. Shounen is based in a more action based world for people less on the social interaction of people and more on what people do. It is usually violent and shows women in a very helpless and sexual fashion. This is the genre of anime and manga that has really made a big impact in the US and stays the biggest sellers for anime and manga.

There are many sub genres in shounen: Mecha is stories about big robots that have pilots which control them. They have a lot of action and they also at times can be very political. They speak about coups and the economic troubles of the world for example. This is shown in such mecha anime and manga as “Robotech” and “Gundam”.

They also show a certain type of character like the loner who is quiet but his actions do all his talking. American audiences can compare them to Gary Cooper (the strong silent type) 1. Samurai anime are all about the feudal systems in Japan from the Tokagawa Dynasty and Meiji restoration. Samurai anime and manga are not always historically accurate but do tell the story of the old Japan before the fall of their feudal system. This genre appeals to men more not because of history but more because of the violent content. This genre also depicts women in a more natural and realistic manner for size and shape (see anime like “Rurouni Kenshin” and “Blade of the immortal”). Sports anime shows anime like GTO which is a race car anime but also has anime based on soccer, baseball and basketball. This is a shounen anime because it mainly depicts the male student who excels at these sports. Comedy anime can be for all different types of people ages young and old. For boys the main characters always seem to have a problem for keeping their balance and trip and fall, or to land on a woman and end up with his hands on her chest (See “Golden boy” or “Here at Greenwood”). They are the all around clumsy person who means well but always gets into a mess. This is thought of as appealing to boys because it shows their shyness towards the opposite sex and usually shows how they would try and go about finding a love interest. Hentai is the very sexual adult anime which is uses hardcore sex to sell (they use things like rape, toys, and tentacles from monsters). Most of the time this genre is directed at males, but women are very interested in (yaoi) which is homosexual anime. (“Rei Rei” or “Guy”)

There is also a whole side to anime that has to deal with history and the culture of Japan. The genres in that are usually the way teenagers live and their struggles, history of Japan, Japan’s involvement in WW2, spirituality, and relationships such as marriage.

These stories are very rich and complex and show the hardships of many Japanese people.

Some titles such as “Vision of Escflowne” and “X” show the hardships of Japanese teenagers in school and in just every day life. The main characters of X have to deal with the death in their families and lost love interests. In “Escflowne” the main character whose name is Hitomi Kanzaki, feels that she is not good at sports or at education at all. She then contemplates suicide because of her situation. This is actually a common thought amongst Japanese teenagers in school. The school system in Japan is a very stressful situation on Japanese students because if you do not do very well you won’t get accepted to higher education. That is why in the whole world Japanese teenagers have the highest suicide rate in the world. 2

Such anime and manga like “Rurouni Kenshin” and “Princess Mononoke” depict different time periods in Japan. “Rurouni Kenshin” shows the time periods of Tokugawa Japan - 1603-1868 and Meiji Japan - 1868-1912. These two time periods chronicle the death of the feudal system of Japan as well as the death of the samurai. This series also shows the politics of the time period and the Americanization of Japan with the introduction of Commodore Perry in 1853. Princess Mononoke shows the Yamato Japan 400AD-700 AD with the different industrialization of the time period with iron mill community and the corrupt politics of the time period and the use of samurai. A Samurai was a protector of the land and hired by the Shogun (Leader of the Clan). They were usually armed with Katana sword. As the years got into the Meiji Era the Samurai became very corrupt and were not really needed anymore because of industrialization and a merging of cultures.

Much anime and manga deal with ideas related to the Pacific War, during WW2. The two that stick out the most are “Barefoot Gen” and “Grave of the Fireflies”. “Barefoot Gen” is an autobiography on a survivor of Hiroshima. It gets quite graphic on what the atomic bomb did to the Japanese people not just as it was dropped but the radiation poison which then followed. “Grave of the Fireflies” shows a family that struggles to survive after the bomb and shows the economic suffering as well as the way the Japanese people had to rebuild the communities. Both of these anime’s show the realities of surviving the war and what the people did to rebuild.

Religion is a very important part of anime and manga that is told. Such series as Evangelion and Card Captors use religion as a major factor. Evangelion uses such religious symbols as the tree of Sephiroth (the tree of life) which is a big religious symbol in both the Jewish and Christian religions. These symbols show up quite a bit in anime because the Japanese interest to western society. Card Captors uses certain poses called mantras and mudras. These are ritualistic hand poses that can summon spirits and the actually mediums of Japan use these poses to actually perform prays to their Shintos (Angels).

Relationships such as marriage are incorporated in many anime and manga. Such topics as arraigned marriages and people being afraid of growing old with out a mate are common themes in many types of anime such as “Cowboy Bebop”. In “Cowboy Bebop”, one on the main characters named Fay Valentine can’t seem to find a mate for herself. Though her standards were high she found the person she though was her soul mate and became anything but that. In Maison Ikkoku, a mother living in Maison Ikkoku, meets with the house manager in Kyoto and brings a portfolio of her son to try to arrange a

marriage. Eventually the old woman pulls out a portfolio of young unmarried men for whom she is matchmaking. Later to find out that they are right for each but he did not give an answer in time so she married someone else

All of these different factors make up very rich stories that are made up of many different factors of the lives of Japanese people. They show the many hardships of the Japanese people and how they live their lives. They also make different anime and manga for different people. It has been said by Mark Schulenberg who wrote The Japanese Encyclopedia of Pop Culture anime was the next golden age of Japanese cinema. That means that people do not find it childish and so of it has very adult themes. The Japanese treat anime industry the way that Americans would treat Hollywood.

More and more as the years go on Anime and Manga have come sneaking its way into America. Starting by television shows in the 60's such as 8 Man, Astro boy, and Gigantor and later with the release of Akira in 1985 by Streamline Entertainment. That is when anime had its big break. It taught Americans that it animation could have complex stories and appeal to people's imagination. Nowadays there are many different distribution companies that sell anime and manga, such as Manga, AD Vision, Anime Works, and many others. To walk into a movie store such as Suncoast Video or Saturday Matinee, it is very common to see the biggest racks to have anime on them.

Years ago if someone were to ask you what anime was you would probably not be able to answer but today it is some of the most common children's cartoons (See "Dragon Ball Z" and "Pokemon"). You also can see children and adults buying t-shirts and lunch boxes with their favorite anime characters on them. It is an industry that has many marketing techniques for selling paraphernalia. In Japan you can find things from

a notepad to suit that has an anime insignia on it. Even when you were a child you probably did not realize it but shows like “Thundercats” and “Robotech” were all anime. Though it seems to be a long way from being shown as blockbuster hits on the movie screen, titles like “Princess Mononoke” have been bought by Miramax”. Though it is up to the American Audience whether or not anime becomes a big seller for the film industry, I feel that it has its foot through the door and is just waiting to get in.

1. Tony Soprano says this in episode 1 of the HBO series **The Sopranos** season one.
2. Japan’s Suicide rate <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/1524782.stm>

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