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Bringing Anime to Academic Libraries: A Recommended Core Collection

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Introduction

Today a person can find collections of Japanese anime and manga in almost any public library, but not in the general academic collection. Anime is simply the term used to describe all forms of animation from Japan; manga are Japanese comics. Public libraries are collecting them to fulfill their mission to gather materials that will entertain as well as educate and reflect the interests of their community.

Similarly, academic libraries have a commitment to support the research needs of their community. In recent years, more and more academic libraries have recognized the need to collect popular materials, such as novels and films. Such collections support the study of popular culture and give students access to materials that will engage them. However, these collections tend to focus on live-action films, including documentaries, silent films, independent films, and blockbusters. They fail to include anime.

Anime has a long history in Japan reaching back to 1917. The first anime produced were films and shorts. In the 1960's, anime expanded to include television serials. Many of these series are based upon popular manga and can continue for years. It is these series that are the most familiar to our students who have encountered them on television and at the public library. What they are unfamiliar with are the animated films from Japan. In a typical year, perhaps five animated films are released while literally dozens of new animated series are premiered. It is the films that demonstrate the high quality of Japanese animation and provide a basis for long-term study.

This article is intended to provide brief examples of what can be experienced in anime and provide an argument for its inclusion in an academic collection. Recommendations for an initial starting collection of films is also included.

Background

Both manga and anime provide insights into Japanese culture and allow individuals to experience it without visiting Japan. Within anime, viewers can learn about family life, religion, spirituality, and ethics. It is easy to dismiss anime as not reflective of Japanese culture because the characters do not necessarily appear Asian. Much of anime demonstrates a quality of *mukokuseki*, which can be translated as stateless or lacking nationality (Mckevitt, 2010). Anime has a unique style in which watchers are transported to another world; it may be represented as Earth, but it is meant to be one separate from the current reality. Therefore, this quality of statelessness means that most characters do not have features that can be linked to a particular nationality. That does not mean, however, that Japanese culture is not represented.

One major concept that viewers are introduced to is that of *giri*. *Giri* means duty, obligation or honor. To the Japanese honor comes before *ninjo* (desire). This is a very real concept for the Japanese and is deeply ingrained in their culture. Because of that, this creates a natural state of internal conflict for many of the characters portrayed in anime. To pursue one's desire over one's duty is considered an insult to the ancestors from which a person is descended. This comes up again and again in Japanese literature, anime, and films.

Spirituality is a much more subtle part of Japanese culture. It is found in anime where viewers may see *shimenawa*, a plaited rope placed around an item to acknowledge its *kami* or essence. Shimenawa can also be placed around items to purify them and repel evil. Female characters are often transformed into a *miko's* garb when they are fighting demons. A *miko* is a Shinto priestess who traditionally wears a white kimono top with a red split skirt. As well, families may have a shrine honoring their ancestors within their homes. These hints of spirituality are not overt within anime, so they are easy to regard as background filler. However, they are making cultural references that Japanese viewers will understand and that will add to their appreciation of the material. For others, those subtle cues gradually inspire the viewers to try and learn more about what they are seeing.

Much can be learned and experienced through anime that will engage students. The study of Japanese culture and language has increased tremendously over the past decade. In fact, there has been a 10.3% increase in Japanese language enrollments in U.S. colleges and universities between 2006 and 2009 according to the Modern Language Association (2010). Some attribute this growth as a result of the popularity of anime and manga. An anime film collection would not require the ongoing maintenance that a manga collection would, but it would still provide an introduction to Japanese popular culture. It would also serve as a mechanism to reach out to students to show them that academic libraries provide materials not just for their edification but also for their enjoyment. Since many college and university campuses have anime clubs, this type of collection could also function as a way to engage with those students.

It can be argued that since anime can be viewed online through sources such as *Crunchyroll* and *Netflix* or via direct download that libraries do not need to collect it. However, what students will find in those sources tend to be newer serialized anime. Many of the classic films of anime are not available for streaming. Anime supports both cross-cultural and interdisciplinary studies and can be used in classes on history, political science, ecology, mythology, and sociology. Where a professor might consider including a clip from a film or a chapter from a book in a class to steer discussion on a topic, he might consider using a clip from anime as well.

Anime explores all genres and many of the themes that are represented are universal. One theme that resonates throughout anime is man's use of, dependence upon, and conflict with technology. As well, anime delves into the exploration of identity. Does technology change who a person is, does it allow him to express himself more accurately, or can it be used to remake him? Good versus evil is another universal theme that is often found in anime. However, within anime, those concepts are not portrayed as definitively as they are in most superhero works. In anime, the hero may behave badly and the villain may reform; they are allowed to be more realistic. This realism is something that is still new to western audiences.

The cultural cues that are given in anime, like hearing cicadas in the summer, are also used thematically. If cicadas are heard at a different time of the year, it points to some global cataclysmic change that has taken place in the world. The Japanese often explore the consequences of war on both the environment and the populace in anime. This can be attributed to their exposure in being the only country in the world to have experienced an atomic bombing. That one act still reverberates in the Japanese consciousness and can be safely explored in anime. As well, what can be difficult to portray in film with even the most advanced special effects can be done much more easily within animation.

The study of film has been accepted for decades. Anime is simply another type of film. The recognition of this has meant that the study of anime has gained academic credibility with many

colleges and universities now offering courses on anime or manga. Academic writings on the topic have increased substantially since the late 1990's. This has been reflected in the growth of peer-reviewed journals that are focused specifically on anime, manga, and comics. However, anime is also discussed in other publications on film, sociology, anthropology, law, and economics.

By creating an anime collection, a library will provide their community with engaging materials that can be used for enjoyment or study.

Core List of Anime

This list was assembled based upon the author's twenty-plus years of viewing anime and is the culmination of a sabbatical in which the author studied the history of Japanese animation and read extensively from acknowledged experts in the field. The films included here have stood the test of time and inspire multiple viewings. The initial catalog of films which were reviewed for this project came from a variety of sources, including *500 Essential Anime Movies*, *The Anime Encyclopedia*, *The Complete Anime Guide*, *Watching Anime and Reading Manga*, and *The Rough Guide to Anime*. In some cases, the sources included best of lists. In others, topical essays highlighted films and series that demonstrated the best of a genre. Compiling these recommendations into one list, viewing all of the films again, and comparing them with information from these experts and other readings resulted in this core list.

The 25 titles listed here have been released in English, either dubbed or subtitled, and are focused on individual works. They can be purchased through vendors such as Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com/>), Right Stuf (<http://www.rightstuf.com/>), CDJapan (<http://www.cdjapan.co.jp>), HobbyLink Japan (<http://www.hlj.com/>), and Robert's Anime CornerStore (<http://www.animecornerstore.com/>). Focusing on individual titles, allows a library to create a collection quickly without worrying about multi-disc sets. It should be noted that the availability of anime is challenging. As anime is imported, it is licensed by distributors who create their own subtitled or dubbed version for release. Depending upon the length of the license and the popularity of the licensed version, it can quickly disappear. The titles listed below include seminal works that should be readily available. Titles from Studio Ghibli have been acquired by Walt Disney for distribution making them more obtainable. The cost will vary between \$10.00 and \$32.00 based upon format (DVD or BluRay) and availability. With that in mind, the cost of this collection should be around \$800.00.

Akira, 1988, Manga Entertainment

Director: Katsuhiro Otomo

Based upon the manga written by Otomo, *Akira* is representative of the cyberpunk genre and is most frequently compared to *Blade Runner* in tone and visual style. Set in post-apocalyptic neo-Tokyo, it features secret government experiments, teenage biker gangs, terrorists, and political corruption. Tetsuo, a young biker, is taken by government agents who wish to enhance his telekinetic abilities to recreate Akira, a human bioweapon. The elements of human experimentation, nuclear explosions, and corporate conspiracies make this a gritty, gripping drama. This was the first film to make a splash in European and American theatres and introduce a wider audience to anime.

Barefoot Gen, 1983, Geneon

Director: Mori Masaki

This film is based upon the autobiographical manga by Keiji Nakazawa a survivor of the Hiroshima bombing. It is a seminal anti-war film that focuses upon the aftermath of the blast. The film follows Gen, a six-year-old child, who is determined to live. The film opens hopefully showing Gen with his father and brother examining the growing wheat then going home to his sister and pregnant mother.

Thereafter, the tone switches from sentimental to mechanical as the audience enters the plane that drops the bomb. It is on his way to school that the blast occurs, and Gen is left in a devastated world with only his mother. The animation depicts the nightmare that occurred in ways that live action could never hope to match, showing people melting, eyes dangling from skulls, animals on fire, and buildings crumbling with a mushroom cloud growing from it all. It is an important film.

Castle of Cagliostro, 1979, Manga Entertainment

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

This film marked Miyazaki's debut as a film director. It is the story of a princess' forced marriage to reunite a family and reveal a fortune. It is also a story of counterfeiting, thievery, trickery, disguise, rescues, and friendship. Lupin the third, an international thief, opens the film with a successful heist from a casino only to find that the cash is counterfeit. Dumping the cash in favor of finding the plates, Lupin encounters the princess. Afterward he determines to steal not just the counterfeit plates, but also the princess to save her from the marriage. Lupin the third, created by Monkey Punch, is a beloved character in Japan along with his frequent partners, Jigen and Goemon. It is a humorous, adventurous tale which provides an excellent introduction to both Miyazaki's work as well as to the character of Lupin.

Ghost in the Shell, 1995, Production I.G.

Director: Mamoru Oshii

Adapted from a manga by Masamune Shirow, *Ghost in the Shell* is one of two films (the other being *Akira*) that escalated public awareness and appreciation of anime. It is an intriguing action film that centers around the idea of what it is to be human in a world where technology is an integral part of the body. The main character, Major Motoko Kusanagi, is a cyborg who's only remaining physical part is her brain. She must capture and destroy the Puppet Master; an artificial intelligence program that has gone rogue. So, if an artificial intelligence has self-awareness, the question is whether the soul, the "ghost," resides in the physical body, the "shell," or is it something else? The graphics are stunning and just as visually appealing today as they were when the film was created. This film has inspired many projects most notably *The Matrix* by the Wachowski brothers.

The Girl Who Leapt Through Time, 2006, Madhouse Studios

Director: Mamoru Hosada

Mamoru Hosada's films have won multiple awards. He is one of the best of the new generation of animators. This film is based upon a novel by Yasutka Tsutsui and is a blend of romance, science fiction, action, and drama. Set at a high school in modern day Japan, Makoto learns about love and friendship and that the ability to time travel does not mean that mistakes can be undone. This film is an excellent introduction to Hosada's work.

Grave of the Fireflies, 1988, Studio Ghibli

Director: Isao Takahata

Though this film is not about the atom bombings, it is shown on Japanese television every August as part of the memorials commemorating that event. It is based on the semi-autobiographical novel by Akiyuki Nosaka and looks at the tragic consequences of war on everyday life through the eyes of an orphaned brother and sister. The film begins with the ending and uses flashback to tell their tale. Fourteen-year old Seita and his sister Setsuko are orphaned when their mother dies during the firebombing of Kobe. Forced to live with an uncaring aunt, Seita decides to leave and raise his four year-old sister on his own. The film is a master study in *mono no aware*, which is roughly the appreciation of the transient or ephemeral nature of things. Something is special precisely because of its impermanence, like the lifespan of a firefly. The contrast between their fleeting happiness and the

desperateness of their situation as they gradually starve is heart breaking. .

Little Norse Prince, 1968, Toei Animation

Director: Isao Takahata

This film is notable for being the first film that Isao Takahata directed and on which Miyazaki was an animator before the founding of Studio Ghibli. It is a tale of enchantment, heroic destiny, and the battle between good and evil. It takes place in the far north showing both the beauty of the Norse lands in spring and summer and the desolation that comes with winter. The battle between good and evil takes place not only between the hero, Hols, and Grunwuld, the Sorcerer, but also within the heart of Hilda, an enigmatic young girl that Hols encounters. The animation is stunning and is an excellent example of cell animation.

Metropolis, 2001, Madhouse Studios, Tezuka Production

Director: Rintaro

Rintaro is known as a director whose films feature intricate stories and stunning imagery. A protégé of Osamu Tezuka, his directing career began with episodes of *Astro Boy* and *Kimba, the White Lion*. *Metropolis* is a tribute to Tezuka and combines elements of Tezuka's manga with Fritz Lang's 1929 film. The main character, Tima, is an android and is meant to trigger a weapon that will allow world domination. The film revolves around the philosophical debate of the nature of man and machine. Tima is not recognized by others as a robot, does not initially know that she is a robot, and experiences emotions. Why then should she be treated as less than a human being? It is a surprisingly relevant film despite being based on a 1948 manga.

Millennium Actress, 2001, Madhouse Studios

Director: Satoshi Kon

This film is the first original anime that was written and directed by Satoshi Kon. An artist by training, Kon's film is visually complex and stunning. It tells the seemingly simple tale of an actress' life and the roles she has played from childhood through her retirement. As Chiyoko recounts her life to the documentary filmmaker, he and his assistant are drawn into it and are shown in key scenes as witnessing it as it happens. The director is so enraptured by his experience that he becomes part of her back story. In true Kon style, the imagery can be confusing as it overlaps present with past and truth with fiction. Satoshi Kon is considered by some to be the director most likely to inherit Miyazaki's title as "emperor of anime" (Richmond, 2009).

My Neighbor Totoro, 1988, Studio Ghibli

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

A remarkable film, whose main character, Totoro, became the studio's mascot. A story that portrays an idealized rural home life in a 1950's Japan; it is a timeless children's classic. It is the tale of two children who move to the countryside with their father to be closer to their mother who is recovering from illness in a hospital. It is told from the viewpoint of the children: Mei, four years old, and Satsuki, ten. Through their eyes the audience experiences encounters with soot sprites, forest spirits, experience the wonders of nature, as well as the fears that their mother's illness may be fatal. It is a poignant tale, beautifully told, that is artistically breathtaking. It is partially based upon experiences in Miyazaki's own life and truly shows his genius.

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, 1984, Tokuma Shoten

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

This film is based upon the only manga written by Miyazaki and whose success led to the creation of Studio Ghibli. It is science fiction, adventure, environmental awareness, and coming of age all wrapped

up in one. It is a blend of Japanese and Greek mythology combining the character of Nausicaä from the *Odyssey* with the Japanese princess who loved insects. It takes place 1000 years after a devastating war causes the collapse of a great industrial civilization and poisons most of the world. Nausicaä seeks to understand the environmental consequences so that she can heal the world and lead her people to a better future. A cautionary tale that will resonate with those concerned about the environment, but one in which anyone can be swept away by the adventure and the wonderful animation.

Night on the Galactic Railroad, 1985, Group TAC

Director: Gisaburo Sugii

This is a film that examines philosophy, religion, death, abandonment and how to carry on with living in the face of such loss. While this sounds like a particularly weighty film, its use of imagery captures the imagination and draws the viewer in. The main character, Giovanni, not only attends school but also works to support his bedridden mother. This often results in his being unjustly teased by his classmates. One night he encounters a steam train that moves among the stars and finds his one friend, Campanella, upon it. It is based upon the unfinished work of one of Japan's greatest writers, Kenji Miyazawa. It is a tragic tale, but demonstrates the importance of finding happiness in life.

Ninja Scroll, 1993, Madhouse Studios

Director: Yoshiaki Kawajiri

Set during the Takugawa Era (1600 - 1868), this samurai drama features ninjas, political intrigue, monsters, magic, and incredible fight scenes. A wandering ronin, Jubei, is drawn unwillingly into investigating a conspiracy that has resulted in the death of entire towns. He is helped by Kagerō, a woman who through being a food taster for years has become poisonous to the touch. The character of Jubei is based upon Yagyū Jūbei Mitsuyoshi, a samurai from the seventeenth century. This is one of Madhouse's best productions and features truly inventive characters. It is a beautifully executed example of cell animation.

Only Yesterday, 1991, Studio Ghibli

Director: Isao Takahata

This is one of Takahata's finest films that takes the viewer inside the daily life of an ordinary person in the way that only he can. At its heart, it is a young woman's search to find herself and find out what will make her happy in the future whether that is a career or a family. The film depicts Taeko's life both as a child and as an adult showing how her childhood influenced who she is currently. This is done masterfully through the coloration of the scenes. Present day is represented vibrantly while her childhood self is shown through the use of watercolors and blurring of edges so that the audience recognizes memory at play.

Otaku No Video, 1991, Gainax

Director: Takeshi Mori

This film is a mockumentary which combines live-action film with animation. It tells the story of the transformation of a young man into a fan obsessed with anime, an otaku. It shows how fans helped to create the market for anime through sharing videos, costume play, garage kits, and more. It is also the story of Studio Gainax which was begun by three fans and evolved into one of the most well-known anime studios.

Panda and the Magic Serpent, 1958, Toei Animation

Director: Taiji Yabushita

This film is notable for being the first color feature-length Japanese animation. It was intended to compete with Disney and set the tone for all animation that followed. It was also the first feature-

length anime to be released to theatres in the United States in 1961. It is based on a Chinese legend and the characters are oriental in appearance remaining faithful to its origins. It is a tale of blossoming love between a snake goddess and a young man and the obstacles that they faced; obstacles that the young man's pets helped them overcome. It is an important historical film that belongs in every collection.

Paprika, 2006, Madhouse Studios

Director: Satoshi Kon

This film explores dreams and the subconscious mind using technology that allows psychologists to interact within subject's dreams. It is science fiction, technology misused, romance, and thriller all tied into one. *Paprika* is the doctor's dream persona who interacts with clients, but who also breaks out into the everyday world. Like many Kon projects it can be difficult to separate fantasy from reality within the story and may require more than one viewing. It is a complex tale based upon a novel by Yasutaka Tsutsui who also wrote *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*. The imagery blends 2D and 3D animation to fantastic effect drawing the viewer deeper into the film. At its heart, it explores how technology impacts lives and how people relate to each other.

Perfect Blue, 1997, Madhouse Studios

Director: Satoshi Kon

This film marked Kon's debut as a film director and initiated viewers into his intricate style of storytelling. It is a thriller and mystery, as well as an exploration of self knowledge. Mima is a pop star who wishes to leave that life behind to become a serious actress. As she does, one particularly creepy fan begins stalking her and she discovers an online site, Mima's Room, that details her life a little too accurately. As people are injured or die around her, she begins to question who she is. Reminiscent of Hitchcock this is an intriguing and gripping film. Kon is able to depict the grim reality of city streets and the urban landscape, while also using windows and mirrored surfaces to display the fracturing of Mima's reality.

Porco Rosso, 1992, Studio Ghibli

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

This work is one of Miyazaki's lesser known films but is one that portrays his love of aviation in the amazing detail used to portray acrobatic feats as well as the aircraft themselves. Miyazaki's life-long love affair with aircraft was established in his childhood through his family's aviation business and is why flying is seen in so many of his films in various guises. This film is set in the Mediterranean following World War I and is a tale of courage, bravery, isolation, love, and self knowledge. Porco Rosso is a man so grieved by the loss of friends in the war and his survival of it that he thinks himself unworthy. He sees himself, and thus unsympathetic others do as well, as a pig. However, instead of hiding himself away, he uses his skills to fight air pirates and keep the skies free. The film can be viewed as a modern-day fairytale and deserves further study.

Princess Mononoke, 1997, Studio Ghibli

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

Set in medieval Japan, *Princess Mononoke* is an epic film of heroic action, myth, devotion, and love wrapped in a beautifully designed and executed story of man versus nature. It features two of Miyazaki's strongest women characters: San and Lady Eboshi. San, a human child raised by an ancient wolf goddess, seeks to protect the forest from the devastation caused by Lady Eboshi's ironworks. Lady Eboshi, however, is not a one-dimensional character who only cares about industrialization, she also cares about people frequently thrown aside by society: prostitutes and lepers. "A parable about the perils of disrespecting nature, the destructiveness of anger and the healing power of forgiveness. *Princess Mononoke* is an artistic and philosophical high point of Miyazaki's illustrious career"

(Richmond, 2009).

Revolutionary Girl Utena, 1997, J.C. Staff and BE-PAPAS

Director: Kunihiko Ikuhara

The film *Revolutionary Girl Utena* is a condensed and somewhat altered version of a 39-episode anime series which was based upon a manga by Chiho Saitō. An important anime for exploring gender stereotypes; it follows in the footsteps of *Princess Knight* and *Rose of Versailles*. The main difference between those iconic manga and anime series is that in this case it is the girl herself who chooses to behave in a masculine way. Utena was once comforted by a princely young man who gave her a rose ring. After that, she decided to emulate him and thus dresses as a man. At Otori Academy, she is able to enter into a duel for the Rose Bride because of the ring. The film is an exploration of gender roles, love, and coming of age. It also explores some darker themes such as incest. The character designs, background, and settings are visually stunning. The colors are overwhelming ranging from psychedelic intensity to subtly romantic depending upon the context of the scene. An iconic story that perhaps was better served in the serialized anime but is well worth adding to a smaller collection in this abbreviated film version.

Royal Space Force: Wings of Honneamise, 1987, Gainax

Director: Hiroyuki Yamaga

Based on an original script this film is historic for being the first film created by Studio Gainax. *Honneamise* is science fiction and fantasy at its finest. The Gainax team created an incredibly detailed world with its own architecture, written language, utensils and more. It is man's race to space where the majority of the planet and the majority of the potential astronauts think it is all a joke. One man, Shitotsugh Lhadatt, changes all of that. Though he starts off as everyman, he evolves so that his passion and yearning stimulates true possibilities. The viewer is treated to a visual feast that demonstrates why Studio Gainax is one of the most respected today. A new 25th anniversary edition of the film has recently been released making it readily available.

Roujin Z, 1991, APPP

Director: Hiroyuki Kitakubo

This film is not well known but is a well-executed science fiction anime. It takes realistic characters and technology and blends them to create an highly entertaining, thoughtful film. Central to the film is the creation of a bed that can be neurally connected to an individual to meet all of his needs. The bed is an experimental prototype that is given to a geriatric patient. When this patient develops the desire to go to the sea, the bed, which has taken on the personality of his dead wife, endeavors to take him there revealing its hidden warlike potentials. A film that explores the potential for technology abuse, human relationships, and societal views of the elderly.

Spirited Away, 2001, Studio Ghibli

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

Miyazaki has said of this film that he created it for his granddaughter. He had noticed her losing touch with nature and her inability to entertain herself, so he created a fable to engage her and teach her about her heritage. This film is the most quintessential Japanese film that Miyazaki has ever made. It is the one that most Western audiences have trouble connecting to because of a lack of knowledge about Japanese spirits and folktales. Despite that, it is also the one film that most people have heard about because of its Oscar win. At its heart, it is a tale of a young girl who must learn self-control and selflessness in order to rescue her parents.

Tokyo Godfathers, 2003, Madhouse Studios

Director: Satoshi Kon

A Christmas story in which three homeless people, a transvestite, a drunk, and a teenage runaway, find a baby among the trash and decide to take care of her until her family can be found. *Tokyo Godfathers* is at its heart an exploration of what it means to be family. The search for the baby's birth family reveals the main characters' pasts and shows how they came to choose each other. The miraculous ending brings everyone's story full circle. The photo-realistic backgrounds are stunning in their detail and coloring depicting the underbelly of Tokyo. It is a different type of film for Kon in that the story is more straightforward and easily followed. It is a humorous and heartwarming tale.

Conclusion

The films listed here provide a foundation for an anime collection beginning with sources many are not familiar with because they are unique pieces that, for the most part, are not tied into televised series or manga. They serve as an introduction to some of the best Japanese studios and animators and can evolve into a larger collection that will incorporate televised series. Anime is a medium that can be used to explore a diversity of genres and themes. Within the academic field, anime can be used to supplement discussions on science fiction, ecology, man versus nature, war, self-awareness, man versus technology, and so much more. Anime can also be used to learn about Japanese culture and customs. Incorporating anime into an academic library collection will encourage students to use the library and engage them in new ways.

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