

The Impact of Asian Animation on the Western World of Animation

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Animation as an art has been used worldwide in many different ways. One of those techniques, more common in Asian countries, is the form of Japanese animation, commonly called anime. Japanese anime has been a major factor in shaping animation in the West. We see the impact of Asian artists on American projects in how Hollywood has transformed not only their animation projects but live-action shows as well.¹ The major confrontation when it comes to anime is the question “Isn’t that just a cartoon?” To that, there is a way we can define what is a cartoon and what is an anime. By technicality, yes, anime is a cartoon but its style and content is very different from what is considered a Western cartoon. A cartoon is non-realistic visual representation of real-world objects and characters. Anime is semi-realistic visual representation of real-world objects and characters.² Another way to look at this is the difference between the Fleischer Brothers style and Walt Disney’s style; both created cartoons but one focused more on

¹ Andrew C. McKeivitt, ““You are not alone!”: anime and the globalizing of America.” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 5 (2010): 893-921.

² Jonathan Clements, *Anime: A history* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023)

an adult audience while the other was targeted to children. The argument is that, despite their similar appearances, they are meant for different audiences, so it is absurd to claim that any animation is meant for children.

The target demographic is significantly different; for instance, while Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon focus on elementary and middle schoolers, Noggin and PBS Kids target young children in early development. Teenagers and above are the primary audience for anime, particularly Shonen anime, which captivates viewers with its action and dramatic adventures.

Cultural differences play a huge role in defining the two animation types, one being humour. American and Japanese have different humour and that directly influences their content; they have distinct senses of humour that correlate with culture and general norms. Another distinct feature is the pacing of their shows. Though anime can be very slow and explain a lot of information without showing much visually, both are simply different storytelling techniques and again, neither is in the wrong here. Younger audiences usually have a shorter attention span and require fast entertainment, which is something that cartoons provide with bright, overstimulating colours and lively stories.

Another distinction is that the majority of anime is plot-driven, whereas cartoons are more concerned with characters and diverse narratives. An example of this can be seen in Aang from the show *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, where the main focus is based on his decisions affecting the plot and watching personal growth within a character but narrating it in a way that children watching are still entertained. In *Dragon Ball*, however, the audience is more interested in watching Goku beat up the villains as extravagantly as possible than they are in learning more about his inner thoughts and emotions.³

Avatar the Last Airbender is an animated series that has been heavily debated whether or not it is an anime or a cartoon. It was created in America with an anime flair, which caused some consumer confusion, although it is a cartoon rather than an anime.⁴ The show was heavily influenced by a more anime style, says the creators but the show itself is not an anime, it's a cartoon.⁵ Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino shared the creative responsibility for its creation. Konietzko would serve as the art director and DiMartino as the story editor.⁶

Konietzko worked on other shows in the past like *Family Guy*, *Invader Zim*, and *King of the Hill*, but he noticed that

³ Crunchyroll: Inside Anime, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMteAFb0QSo>.

⁴ Dububoi, "'Avatar the Last Airbender' Is Not an Anime; Here's Why," *The Boba Culture*, October 2, 2020.

⁵ Sara Peterson, "Is Avatar the Last Airbender an Anime? Solved (2024 Updated)," *Toynk Toys*, August 29, 2022.

⁶ The Canipa Effect, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZB1lQRdTrI>.

within the shows he worked on, the American animation studios heavily relied on Korean animators but the artists didn't get much respect for their work. The American artists' didn't understand the creative minds behind the Korean artists' ideas and therefore couldn't execute them correctly. That is a predictable outcome with that kind of workflow and the team divided so Konietzko stayed in Korea for 4 months to properly study the work environment among them to get a feeling for the workflow. This experiment that he conducted proved to be successful when he got a full understanding of how they get things done.⁷

They brought Korean animators to the US to teach the animators there how to design and pick apart characters which helped impact the show a lot in the end.⁸ It was a big deal in the mid-2000s and it was a better deal for the foreign artist who came because they got better pay for their work and to impact the art style and story more efficiently. There had to be creative trust between the staff in America and Korea for this project to work. The creators wanted to challenge the Western industry and a major influence was using the Korean creative influence in

⁷ Hristina Ambareva, *Translating Japanese-Style Representations in Manga and Anime to the Language of the Western Culture* (TICS, 2017): 1449.

⁸ Amy Shirong Lu, "The many faces of internationalization in Japanese anime." *Animation* 3, no. 2. (2008): 169-187.

their show, which arguably worked successfully in the end with how successful the show ended up being.

Now it's one thing to say that Asian animation had an impact on the cartoon side of things, but what about other media? It certainly is influencing media including movies and films that go beyond cartoon shows for children as well as creative arts. Other films that were influenced by Japanese anime for example are *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* and *Creed III*.

In *Puss in Boots*, Joel Crawford talks about the influence too, "I've always loved anime. I remember watching *Akira*, and that just blew my mind as a kid. So being able to use some of those sensibilities to convey this larger-than-life action hero is just awesome." Crawford goes on to explain that the storybook illustration style was an ode to Katsuhiro Otomo, the creator of *Akira*. "The animation style goes from traditional CG to stepped animation, which you might compare to anime, which feels fantastical and pushed."⁹

Creed III is a live-action film that took creative pieces from Japanese anime into consideration while filming. Micheal B. Jordan who was a major director took that into account and during interviews, he mentioned his admiration towards

⁹ Bahr, Sarah. "What 'Puss in Boots: The Last Wish' Owes to Samurai and Sergio Leone." *The New York Times*, February 22, 2023.

Japanese animation and pointed out that he would use techniques that artists would use in anime and apply them to the movie. A person can see the influence throughout the film with the use of slow motion during specific scenes and the planning implemented in the fights, especially the final fight.¹⁰ It's about taking the mundane and making it a more visceral experience. Creating an artwork in your story to make it visually appealing. Hollywood has taken a lot of inspiration from that; ripping out the literal from reality.

Anime has impacted Western culture and not just in animation and media. Originally a nerdy hobby, anime has evolved into a respectable passion alongside something like Marvel comics or Star Wars. The relatively recent McDonald's marketing campaign, which featured manga-style bags and food containers along with new sauces for a limited time, is a comical example of anime becoming more popularized, particularly in America. The Campaign was named “WcDonalds” after a trend in manga to put a twist on real-world companies in their stories.

On November 11, 2022, Shibuya Crossing, Tokyo's busiest crosswalk, was blocked for the premiere of the Pokemon finale, in which Ash Ketchum ultimately emerged victorious in the Pokemon universe. The event itself was bizarre because they

¹⁰ Carolyn Hinds, “How ‘creed III’ Captured Michael B. Jordan’s Love of Anime in The Final Fight,” *Variety*, March 14, 2023.

took a fictional tournament and made it a real-time public event that a lot of people were interested in. Because it was so well-liked, news outlets all around the world covered it.¹¹

With the inspiration of anime, it has shown them a different way to make things more dynamic and alive in their media in different, experimental, and new ways. Japanese anime has been a major factor in shaping has been a major factor in shaping animation in the West. We see the impact of Asian artists on American projects in how Hollywood has transformed not only their animation projects but live-action shows as well. Taking creative practices from around the world helps advance the creative arts forward.

¹¹ Faultline, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AU0UJVNZMvA&t=228s>.

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