

Report of the GNCRT Metadata and Cataloging Committee on the Inclusion of Anime in the LCGFT Vocabulary

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Introduction

In an email exchange discussing their endorsement of the [Report of the GNCRT Metadata and Cataloging Committee on the Inclusion of Manga in the LCGFT Vocabulary](#), the PCC Standing Committee on Standards expressed a hope that “Anime” would also eventually be added to the LCGFT vocabulary. Following the establishment in November 2022 of “Manga” as a [subject](#) and [genre](#), and given the similarities between the justifications for prior rejections of “Anime” and “Manga,” the GNCRT Metadata and Cataloging Committee decided to research “Anime” and advocate for its inclusion in the LCGFT vocabulary.

Background

Like “Manga,” which was proposed multiple times for inclusion in both the LCGFT and LCSH, proposals related to “Anime” have been rejected on more than one occasion by the Library of Congress. In June 2012, the Library of Congress rejected the proposed genre/form heading “Anime (Motion pictures),” noting that “Anime is a style of animation, and not a genre or form.”¹ In January 2005, a proposal to remove “Anime (Cinematography)” from the subject heading “Animation (Cinematography)--Japan” was likewise rejected with the rationale that anime is “used for both the technique and media of Japanese animation.”²

However, many subject and genre headings exist in the LCSH and LCGFT vocabularies that are defined by their stylistic and artistic conventions. Examples include the subjects “[Kyōgen plays](#)” and “[Aleatory music](#),” and the genres “[Kabuki plays](#)” (“highly theatrical Japanese dance dramas that feature a non-realistic style and an episodic structure”), “[Documentary-style television programs](#)” (“fictional television programs made to resemble documentary television programs”), “[Chinese operas](#)” (Chinese musical dramas “written and performed in the style of a particular locality”), “[Aguinaldos](#)” and “[Manga](#).” There is even a genre for bands formed from a specific

¹ “Summary of Decisions, Editorial Meeting Number 6 (2012),” Library of Congress, SACO: Program for Cooperative Cataloging, June 18, 2012, <https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/cpsod/psd-120618.html>. The Library of Congress similarly rejected “Manga” from the original list of LCGFT literature terms developed by the ALA Subject Analysis Committee’s Subcommittee on Genre/Form Implementation Literature Working Group in 2012; in its 2014 rejection, the Library of Congress argued that manga “is a style of drawing in comic books, and in addition it means different things to different people.”

² “Summary of Decisions, Editorial Meeting Number 02 (2005),” Library of Congress, SACO: Program for Cooperative Cataloging, January 12, 2005, <https://listserv.loc.gov/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0501&L=SACOLIST&P=R106>.

fandom, "[Wizard rock \(Music\)](#)," which per the sources refers to a "music genre inspired by the Harry Potter book series."

If subjects and genres like these defined by their artistic styles can be included in the LCSH and LCGFT, anime should also be allowable following this pattern. Also, if "[Manga](#)" can exist within the realm of comics while having distinct stylistic conventions, and "[Noir fiction](#)" can still be considered literature despite being determined entirely by stylistic elements, then anime (like "[Cameraless animation films](#)") can exist within the continuum of animated films while having its own unique artistic style. Further, as will be seen below, anime is widely considered by librarians, publishers, film distributors, production agencies, and scholars (as well as several authority vocabularies) to be a distinct form of animated motion picture/television program with a unique history that influenced its development, and not merely an artistic style used in animation.

The *Introduction* to the LCGFT Manual states that "genres and forms may be broadly defined as categories of resources that share known conventions."³ Anime films display established and familiar conventions that are recognizable to American audiences, as will be detailed below. This shared American understanding of anime should qualify it for inclusion in the LCGFT vocabulary, per LCGFT Manual Instruction [J 120](#), which states: "Genre/form terms are usually established to reflect current **American usage** (emphasis added)."⁴

Considerations

LCGFT Manual Instruction *J 120* directs catalogers to establish new genres and forms "for definable and identifiable genres and forms for resources being cataloged;" these should share "known conventions" which describe "the purpose, structure, content, and/or themes" of the genres/forms.⁵ As noted above, it is the current American usage of a term that underpins the construction of genre/form headings.

Multiple authority vocabularies used in the United States include anime among their authorized headings. The Art and Architecture Thesaurus contains "[Anime \(genre\)](#)" as a distinct type of animated film. The American Folklore Society Ethnographic Thesaurus lists "[Anime](#)" as a narrower term under "Animation." The Sears List of Subject Headings includes "[Anime](#)" as a narrower term of both "Animated television programs" and "Animated films." Other authorities also distinguish between animation more broadly and anime specifically.⁶

³ "Introduction to Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms for Library and Archival Materials," in *Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms Manual* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2021), 3, <https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCGFT/2022-LCGFT-intro.pdf>.

⁴ "J120, When to Establish a New Genre/Form Term," in *Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms Manual* (2021), 1, <https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCGFT/J120.pdf>.

⁵ "J120," 1.

⁶ See, for example, the entries for [Anime](#) in the Gemeinsame Normdatei, the [Svenska ämnesord](#) and the [Australian Educational Vocabulary](#).

Likewise, a number of distributors, retailers, and streaming platforms used in the United States include anime as a distinct animation form. Netflix separates “[Anime](#)” from animated movies. Hulu has a discrete “[Anime hub](#).” Amazon Prime includes “[Anime](#)” as a separate genre for movies and television programs. HBO Max lists “[Anime](#)” separately from Adult animation, Classic cartoons, Kids animation, and Superhero shows. iTunes lists “[Anime](#)” as a distinct genre. TVTropes has a page dedicated to the [concept](#). AllMovie separates “[Anime](#)” from cartoons. And IMDb allows users to search for “[Anime](#)” and then narrow to “Based On Manga,” “Shounen,” etc.

Numerous reference sources also differentiate anime from animation and cartoons, and highlight the unique stylistic elements of the form. The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that anime is “characterized by a distinctive visual style involving stylized action sequences and usually featuring characters with distinctive large, staring eyes;”⁷ while the Merriam-Webster Dictionary considers anime to be “characterized by stark colorful graphics depicting vibrant characters in action-filled plots often with fantastic or futuristic themes.”⁸ Hu and Swale both point to the “unique recognizable characteristics”⁹ of anime, including “large super-reflective eyes” and “accentuated physical features.”¹⁰

Many of these now-distinctive characteristics of anime emerged from traditional Japanese cinema and art. Swale notes that “animation in Japan emerged from a broadly intersecting source of traditions and practices, from the ‘flip-book’ style animation techniques that stem from the Edo period, to the ‘trick photography’ that was an element within the emergent cinematographic technology.”¹¹ Hu traces the development from the Japanese traditional art of “emakimono,” which emphasizes the importance of each figure having distinguishable mannerisms and facial expressions; he notes that “although the drawn figures might look alike from afar, the emakimono artist was also mindful of the characteristics of each drawn figure, be it an ox or a deity messenger.”¹² Imamura Taihei, “a film critic and one of Japan’s pioneering animation theoreticians” also points to emakimono, noting the “various conceptual ways of viewing are active” in anime, mirroring the emakimono artist, “who changes position in order to paint and express an endless flow of perspectives.”¹³

Historical American cartoons and Japanese manga also had an influence on the development of anime. Brenner observes, for example, that “anime uses many if not all of the same symbols and storytelling tropes that manga does;”¹⁴ Hu also notes anime’s “close-knit links to the graphic

⁷ “Anime, n.3,” in *OED Online*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/248729>.

⁸ “Definition of Anime,” in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anime>.

⁹ Tze-Yue G. Hu, *Frames of Anime: Culture and Image-Building*. Vol. 1. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 3.

¹⁰ Alistair D. Swale, *Anime Aesthetics: Japanese Animation and the Post-Cinematic Imagination*. (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

¹¹ Swale, *Anime Aesthetics*, 8.

¹² Hu, *Frames of Anime*, 28.

¹³ Hu, *Frames of Anime*, 29.

¹⁴ Robin Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime* (Westport, Conn. : Libraries Unlimited, 2007), 75.

literary world of manga.”¹⁵ Brenner points out that early Japanese creators were also inspired by Western comic strips and cartoons, which generally had large eyes. Over time, large eyes became a hallmark of anime, and the distinct “eye shape and size came to mean something: for example, wide eyes indicate purity and innocence, and narrow, squinting eyes indicate villainy and cruelty.”¹⁶ Anime features many stylistic conventions also seen in manga, like aesthetic commonalities in face and body composition. According to *Anime Art Magazine*, a technique known as “toushin” uses the size of a character’s head to determine the proper proportions.¹⁷ As Horno-López explains, “the standard model in anime is governed by a canon whose facial and body elements appear slightly simplified or modified, but that always keeps the actual proportions in its layout and the harmony between its parts.”¹⁸

Stylized visual conventions are also commonly used in anime to express a character’s emotional state. Cavallaro describes “visual tropes intended to externalize various affective states” of characters, including: “the use of a large drop of sweat on a character’s brow to symbolize either anxiety or relief;” “throbbing blood vessels or steaming ears to communicate intense ire;” nosebleeds to signify lust; and the placement of a dying candle above a character’s head who is “about to snuff it.”¹⁹ Stylized backgrounds can also provide context, such as the “appearance of flowers, sparkles, or abstract circles of pastel color around a character to indicate a love interest.”²⁰

These visual cues are furthered by unique production techniques. For example, in moments of action or high emotion, the backgrounds often vanish entirely, allowing the viewer to focus solely on the character.²¹ To help build the atmosphere and increase tension, there are often “many moments with no dialogue at all.”²² And animators, like mangaka, developed unique ways to convey the passing of time. “Time is often slowed down” in anime, to allow viewers to focus on a character’s emotions in the moment, and to indicate “the extreme concentration of the central character with regards to the situation being experienced.”²³ This emphasis on emotions is also conveyed through distinct character poses. Lamarre explains that due to financial constraints, and the resulting need to create fewer frames, “animators began to place emphasis on the most visually and emotionally important poses, which could last over many, many frames. Whence one of anime’s staples: the protagonist’s face racked with emotion, rather like a close-up but

¹⁵ Hu, *Frames of Anime*, 29.

¹⁶ Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime*, 308.

¹⁷ “Using Head-to-Body Ratio to Adjust a Character’s Height and Age (Part 1),” *Anime Art Magazine* (Jan. 26, 2023)

<https://animeartmagazine.com/using-head-to-body-ratio-to-adjust-a-characters-height-and-age-part-1/>.

¹⁸ Antonio Horno-López, “The Particular Visual Language of Anime: Design, Colour and Selection of Resources,” *Animation practice, process & production* vol. 5, no. 1 (2016), 41,

<https://doi.org/10.1386/ap3.5.1.39.1>.

¹⁹ Dani Cavallaro. *Anime Intersections: Tradition and Innovation in Theme and Technique* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2007), 175.

²⁰ Gilles Poitras. *Anime Essentials: Every Thing a Fan Needs to Know* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2001), 62.

²¹ Drazen, *Anime Explosion!*, 21.

²² Poitras, *Anime Essentials*, 59.

²³ Luca Raffaelli, “Disney, Warner Bros. and Japanese Animation: Three World Views,” in *A Reader In Animation Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 129.

with no movement or extremely restrained and repetitive movement (for example, brows or lips twitching in anger).”²⁴

These budgetary constraints, along with the emphasis on hand drawn figures, also led to some distinctive techniques for creating movement within anime. For example, Lamarre describes how “the cel can be pulled across the background in various directions, or the background pulled under the cel. Similar effects can be created on a more elaborate scale: cels can be placed in slots to create a scene with multiple layers or planes, in which case camera movements can produce a sense of relative motion between layers.”²⁵ This allows for less animation in some scenes, where, instead of drawing a figure walking across a background, the image or character can be pulled over the background, to simulate movement.²⁶ While many animators still draw movement, these so-called “moving drawings” are common in lower budget anime.²⁷ Osamu Tezuka pioneered this limited animation style, along with other techniques like “shooting three frames of film for every drawing instead of one or two to create the illusion of movement,” and animating only a character’s mouth or limbs.²⁸ It is also common, to save on production costs, to use stock images, which mostly follow anime archetypes such as a character pointing in an accusatory manner, or having angry throbbing veins to indicate annoyance.²⁹

These visual and production techniques help create deeply textured anime stories that differ from typical Western cartoons. Poitras writes that “in anime the feelings of characters play an important role in shaping their actions, much more so than in most American products, live or animated.”³⁰ Drazen also notes the prioritization of “the emotional life of the character, with less concern as to whether the cartoon is technically perfect.”³¹ The lives of anime characters also evolve over the course of a story, and influence the path a story takes. Won explains that the “main characters of Anime grow and develop their abilities as the story progresses. Unlike in most Western cartoons, wherein once the hero has established its character there’s little room for improvement, Anime characters grow as the story goes along.”³² As opposed to Western cartoon heroes who “often seem to just go around defeating evil,” anime characters “usually have other goals in life, which play large themes within their lives. Characters are not forced into plots, like a foot into a too-tight shoe; instead, stories grow out of the characters.”³³

²⁴ Thomas Lamarre, “From Animation to Anime: Drawing Movements and Moving Drawings,” *Japan forum* vol. 14, no. 2 (2002), 335, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09555800220136400>.

²⁵ Lamarre, “From Animation to Anime,” 330.

²⁶ Lamarre, “From Animation to Anime,” 336.

²⁷ Lamarre, “From Animation to Anime,” 329.

²⁸ Rayna Denison. *Anime: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 80.

²⁹ David Franco Alonso, “Differences between Japanese and Western Anatomical Animation Techniques Applied to Videogames” (BA thesis, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya BarcelonaTech, 2014), 43.

³⁰ Poitras, *Anime Essentials*, 55.

³¹ Drazen, *Anime Explosion!*, 23.

³² Kang-Sik Won, “A Study of Anime’s Success Factors in USA and Its Suggestions,” *International journal of contents* vol. 3, no. 1 (2007), 30, <https://doi.org/10.5392/IJoC.2007.3.1.029>.

³³ Won, “A Study of Anime’s Success Factors,” 30.

This focus on characters' lives and emotions bolsters the compelling stories that are fundamental to anime. Napier points to the depth and complexity of anime, contending that anime's "complex story lines challenge the viewer used to the predictability of Disney" and that "emotions and psychology ... usually run a far wider gamut and often show greater depth than do American animated texts."³⁴ Poitras also contrasts the stories in anime with those in American cartoons: "While the U.S. continues to pump out cartoons with gag stories, musicals with cute animals, animated sitcoms, and testosterone-laced TV fare, the Japanese have been using anime to cover every literary and cinematic genre imaginable in a highly competitive market that encourages new story ideas and the creative reworking of older ideas and themes."³⁵ Anime stories also feel more realistic. Poitras notes "violence in Japan is often shown as having consequences. People actually get hurt, unlike in U.S. cartoons, where the person simply peels himself up off the pavement and resumes his life."³⁶ Brenner elaborates on this point, noting that "the stories often leave endings open. Series end with characters continuing on their journeys, usually having defeated a villain or resolving a conflict in their life, but their lives may well be just as precarious as they were when the story started."³⁷

The open-ended, emotion-filled plots of anime, along with the stylized visual conventions and unique production techniques, point to a "definable and identifiable" form; the agreement seen above between reference sources on the "known conventions" of the "structure, content [and] themes" of anime point to literary warrant evincing "current American usage" that should qualify anime for acceptance in the LCGFT vocabulary, per *J 120*.³⁸ American anime fans also share a common understanding of the characteristics of anime, indicating user warrant for including anime in the LCGFT. Per the *AnimeNation Anime News Blog*, there is "a strong sentiment within the American fan community to define 'anime' by visual design rather than cultural origin."³⁹ The captivating stories in anime also keep many Western viewers "coming back for more."⁴⁰ It is both the distinctive visual elements, such as large eyes and drawings by hand, and the "far more complicated story lines than would be the case in equivalent American popular culture offerings,"⁴¹ that makes anime a unique form of animation for American audiences. As Won states, "to the West, not all animation is considered anime, and anime is considered a subset of animation."⁴² Thus, anime is not simply a style of animation, as posited in the rejection of anime as a genre in 2012. Instead, as evidenced above, it is a distinctive form of animation with known conventions, recognized by various distributors, producers, consumers, reference sources and even the Library of Congress, which began hosting an [Anime for All](#) event in 2018.

³⁴ Susan Jolliffe Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 9.

³⁵ Gilles Poitras, *The Anime Companion: What's Japanese in Japanese Animation?* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), vii.

³⁶ Poitras, *Anime Essentials*, 63.

³⁷ Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime*, 63.

³⁸ "J 120," 1.

³⁹ "Ask John: Do Americans Define Anime by Appearances?," *AnimeNation Anime News Blog* (January 14, 2008), <https://www.animenation.net/blog/ask-john-do-americans-define-anime-by-appearances/>.

⁴⁰ Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, 10.

⁴¹ Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, 10.

⁴² Won, "A Study of Anime's Success Factors," 29.

Concerns

Although anime is still primarily Japanese in origin, current American understanding of the form also includes non-Japanese animation that follows the same stylistic conventions. Several cartoons produced in America can be characterized as anime, including *The Legend of Korra*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *Powerpuff Girls*, *Teen Titans*, *Ben 10*, *The Boondocks*, *Samurai Jack*, and *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (the 2003 animated series).⁴³ Even anime considered to be Japanese may have been produced in other countries, as anime work may have been outsourced to other countries including China and South Korea.⁴⁴ In other words, it is the presence of particular conventions and animation styles that determine if a film is anime, and not merely the country of origin.

Subsequently, without a single dedicated LCGFT term for patrons to search, locating all anime in a library's collection is extremely difficult. Catalogers can't simply denote anime by including "Animation \$z Japan" in their bibliographic records, for example. Such coding would miss the aforementioned American titles, as well as titles such as *The Haunted House* (also known as *Shinbi Apartment*), which is produced in South Korea, has a South Korean setting and references Korean mythology.⁴⁵

A search in OCLC for "Anime" in the genre field returns 11,652 results; anime in the subject field returns 22,584 results. Various libraries have developed local practices to distinguish anime from other animated films. [Brigham Young University](#) uses the term "Anime (motion pictures)," while the [Cooperative Computer Services](#), a group of public libraries in Chicago, uses the local heading "Anime" for films and TV shows. A closer look at the results in OCLC reveals:

- 655 _0 \$a Anime. [Which is incorrect, since there is no LCSH term to borrow]
- 655 _0 \$a Anime \$v Juvenile fiction [Again, there is no LCSH term to borrow and its formatting is incorrect]
- 655 _4 \$a Anime. [These often get stripped out of library metadata ingests, since they are uncontrolled]
- 655 _4 \$a Anime television programs. [A variation on the above, which shows the problems of inconsistency in uncontrolled terms]
- 655 _4 \$a Anime films. [Same issue as above]
- 655 _4 \$a Anime \$z Japan. [Same issue as above]
- 655 _4 \$a Feature : Anime. [A variation of the above, a commonly used term inconsistent with how genres are formed in most controlled vocabularies]
- 655 _7 \$a Anime. \$2 local [Also often stripped out because it's not an authorized vocabulary]

⁴³ Chris O'Brien, "Can Americans Make Anime?," *The Escapist* (July 30, 2012), <https://www.escapistmagazine.com/can-americans-make-anime>.

⁴⁴ Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime*, 17.

⁴⁵ John Witiw, "9 Netflix Original Anime That Aren't Actually Anime," *CBR* (November 10, 2021), <https://www.cbr.com/netflix-original-anime-not-from-japan/>.

- 655 _7 \$a Anime. \$2 lcgft [This is incorrect, as there is no LCGFT term for anime]
- 655 _7 \$a Anime (genre). \$2 aat [This is authorized, but may not display in all catalogs unless normalization rules or accepted vocabularies within a library system and discovery layer include AAT. This would need to be specifically checked for or configured, and cannot be done by all libraries.]
- 655 _7 \$a Anime. \$2 sears [Also authorized, but this vocabulary is often removed by libraries without large juvenile collections. Academic libraries, for instance, are unlikely to have browsable index searching for Sears headings.]

The multitude of headings, especially the variations of the uncontrolled terms, is particularly problematic for libraries that are unable to locally customize their metadata. This includes libraries whose public catalog is a state-run union catalog, or libraries in consortia which may have strict metadata requirements precluding workarounds (such as limitations on acceptable vocabularies). And there are some libraries that lack the technical expertise or institutional desire to configure their systems to accept non-LC vocabularies into their catalogs. For all of these libraries, the options are either to accept the patchwork of metadata, even when incorrect or varied, to provide some access to anime; or to strip out all of the above, and be left with no headings for patrons interested in anime to search to be able to retrieve their desired resources. This creates unequal access to anime within the continuum of animated television programs and motion pictures, and limits the ability of patrons to discover new anime. This is especially troubling since according to a 2012 study, “the majority of library patron respondents expressed ‘the desire for a greater quantity or variety of support’ for accessing anime” including “more robust genre cataloguing;” while a 2017 study showed that genre was one of the most important features for patrons looking for anime (ranked 3/19).⁴⁶

Recommendations

The GNCRT Metadata and Cataloging Committee recommends that the Library of Congress adopt “Anime” as a term into the LCGFT vocabulary (and preferably also into the LCSH vocabulary, for scholarly works about the form). Anime as a form meets the criteria for inclusion into the LCGFT delineated in LCGFT Manual Instruction *J 120*—it is definable and identifiable, with a common, shared American understanding, as seen above. An LCGFT heading for anime would bring the vocabulary into line with other authority vocabularies that already include the term. And it would alleviate the problems for patrons and libraries that the lack of LCGFT term, and patchwork of stopgap terms, creates when attempting to access anime in library catalogs. The Committee would be happy to further facilitate the process by creating SACO proposals for “Anime” as a genre and subject, should the Library of Congress agree that anime would now be eligible for inclusion into the LCGFT and LCSH.

⁴⁶ Hyerim Cho, Thomas Disher, Wan-Chen Lee, Stephen A. Keating, and Jin Ha Lee, “Facet Analysis of Anime Genres: The Challenges of Defining Genre Information for Popular Cultural Objects,” *Knowledge Organization* vol. 47, no. 1 (2020), 13-14, <https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2020-1-13>.

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