

Human Mosaic

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Cover and back-cover: Hideki, a poor *ronin* (a student who has failed the college exam), and his girl-shaped robot Chi whom he found in a trash heap in Tokyo. From the manga Chobits (page 45 [cover] and page 46 [back-cover] from David Allen Rehfeldt 2003 Chobits: Better Living Through Technology. *Animerica* 11(4):45–48). See the article on Japanese animation by Jennifer Waddell and James Aimers in this issue.

Tulane University

Mecha and Mechanical Girls: Images of Technology in Japanese Animation

Jennifer Waddell
Anthropology, Southern Illinois University

James J. Aimers
Anthropology, Miami University of Ohio

Keywords: Anime, Japan, art, technology

Introduction

Anime is deeply imbedded in all aspects of Japanese society: folklore, legends, history, religion, moral assumptions, and aesthetic standards, to name a few. Fans around the world might be surprised to know that anime is created with only the Japanese in mind.
(Price 2001:155)

Japanese animation (anime) is both a Japanese art form with a culturally-specific symbolic code and a part of international popular culture. Anime offers a multitude of fantastic images from medieval time-travel and magic to giant robots and post-apocalyptic cities. While in the West animation has traditionally been considered entertainment for children, anime is also popular among adults. Accordingly, the images and themes of Japanese anime offer a somewhat darker and more complex view of human behavior and the future than its western counterpart. Here, we

examine a theme that is a perennial favorite in science fiction: the relationship between humans and technology. We discuss several differing treatments of technology in anime, which together reveal an ambivalent view of technology in Japanese culture.

Anime as Art

As Napier (2000:10) points out, “the generic, thematic, and philosophical elements of anime create a unique aesthetic world” worthy of consideration as a narrative art form. Buddhist monks of the 10th century created comic animal scrolls (Figure 1) that could be considered forerunners of today’s Japanese comic books (*manga*). Manga artists solved many of the problems of representation that became standard techniques in anime, especially the expression of emotion in two-dimensions, often in black, white, and shades of gray. In manga and their animated

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Human Mosaic website: <http://hmosaic.tulane.edu>

Managing Editor: Markus Eberl
Acting Editors: Jim Dugan
Vance Hutchinson
Tim Knowlton
Kerriann Marden
Sara Phillips

Book Review Editor:

All communication should be directed to: Human Mosaic
c/o Department of Anthropology
Tulane University
New Orleans LA 70118
HMosaic@tulane.edu

Information for authors

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Figure 1. Buddhist monks of the 10th century created comic animal scrolls that could be considered forerunners of today’s Japanese comic books (*manga*) (from Anime Powerhouse 2003).