Classification and Common Topics of Anime

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Abstract

Anime has become more and more popular in during the recent years. And is being welcomed by both the children and the adults. With so many works form the past and present, people need tools to help them choose what they would like to enjoy. In such case, the classification and topics are the tools they that help them fulfill their wish.

The aim of this article is to study the classification and common topics of anime, conclude the ways that people used to classify anime works and the common topics that are most welcomed by the audience and have the most numbers of works.

This research will use the method of literature review to summarize the classification of anime, and will use the method of data analysis to conclude the common topics of anime after 1990s. The data to be analyzed are collected from the four biggest online anime data bases of AniDB, Anikore, Bangumi, My Anime List.

The research results were found as follows;

1.   There are basically five standards of classifying anime works that are often used;

2.   The most common topics of anime are: Adventure, Comedy, Daily life, Fantasy, Mecha, Romance, School, Science Fiction;

3.   Audiences from different areas enjoy anime works of different topics;

4.   People often confuse classification with topics and other elements when talking about anime works.

Keywords: anime, classification, topics.

1. Introduction

Anime is a word created by Japanese; a short form of the word *animation* translated into Japanese. For people in Japan, anime means all kinds of animation works no matter of its origin or style, while outside Japan, the word anime in most time refers to Japanese films made using characters and images that are drawn rather than real (Animation, 2023). But nowadays, the borderline between anime and non-anime (or traditional Cartoon) is getting ambiguous, for people are gradually using the word *anime* to refer to animation works of all kinds.

As an art form, it is welcomed by people all over the world and it's getting more and more popular these years. While hundreds of anime works are being produced each year, people have the demand to select the ones they want

enjoy from all these creations.

In this situation, people always turn to the classification and topics of anime for help. For example, a boy wants to see a roadshow anime *film* with *war*, *love* and *friendship* together as its contents. In the example, the boy classifies anime works using distribution method, and picked out three topics as his filtering rule. With this, he can pick up several certain works as his target works to enjoy.

Beside distribution method, there are also other standards to classify anime works. And there are many different topics of anime works. This research is trying to conclude different ways of classification anime works and obtain several common topics during different period of time with the help of internet database.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Classification of anime

As an art form, although still young, anime has developed many branches, and many expression techniques. So, it is still hard to clearly classify a work to certain particular category, for an anime work or an anime series in most times can be categorized into different types.

But to make a quick overview or search if a work is the one that someone wants to or is suitable to watch, people indeed developed some standards to classify anime works. Some are specially made for anime; some are borrowed from or shared with other standards.

The first standard of classification the anime works is from the technique used to film the work, which categories anime as follow (Wen li, 2018):

1. Traditional animation;
2. Stop-motion animation;
3. Computer animation;
4. Other animation.

Traditional animation is also called classical animation, celluloid animation or hand-drawn animation. It is to make animation by filming a series of continuum hand-drawn pictures. No matter it is drawn on celluloids or rice paper. This is the most traditional way to create an anime work.

Stop-motion animation is another traditional way to create anime works. Different from traditional animation, this technique is to film clay models or puppets or other objects that are physically manipulated in small increments between frames. The history of this kind of animation is as long as or even longer than traditional animation.

Computer animation is as the name described, to generate animation by using computer technology. It is in essentially a digital successor to traditional techniques and stop motion techniques. There are two kinds of computer animation, 2D and 3D. 2D computer animation is like traditional animation, but to draw the 2D frames on the computer, and can use the help of computer to generate in-betweens and some other effects to save time and money. While 3D computer animation is to create 3D models of characters and surroundings and film them, like stop motion animation.

And there are other kinds of animation, most of them is combination

between anime and other art forms, such as the combination of anime and live action movie.

The second is standard of classification is based on the distribution method (Anime, 2023). Which classify anime works as follow:

1. TV anime
2. Animation Film
3. OVA (Original Video Animation)
4. OAD (Original Anime DVD)

TV and film are easy to understand, which the works are shown on TV or in the theater.

Different from TV anime or animation film, which publish their DVDs or BDs after their shown on the screen, OVA and OAD are made specially for release in home video formats without prior showings. The difference between OVA and OAD is that OAD is always released in bundled with their source-material manga.

A related one is the same as film classification, which is the motion picture content rating system, and this system is in most time, doesn't cover TV anime, but it can also function when an anime work contains restricted contents. Each area has its own organization responsible for this kind of rating, in Japan it is called 映倫 (Eirin, 2023), 映画倫理機構 (Film Classification and Rating Organization). This organization currently classifies works into four genres:

1. G: General Audiences
2. PG12 (PG-12): Parental Guidance Requested

3. R15+ (R-15): Restricted to teenagers 15 and over only
4. R18+ (R-18): Restricted to adults 18 and over only

In this rating system, G and PG12 works are unrestricted categories, R15+ and R18+ are restricted categories.

In which, G rated works are admitted to audiences of all ages. A work is rated PG12 means it may contain violent content, sexual content, use of drugs as well as underage drinking, smoking or driving, and children under 12 are advised to watch it with the accompany of their parents.

Children under 15 or under 18 are banned from viewing R15+ or R18+ works. R15+ works may contain bullying, more extreme violent content, more extreme sexual content, inappropriate language and criminal activity. R18+ works may contain glamorization of violence, explicit sexual activity and glamorization of the use of drugs.

Most TV anime works are unrestricted ones. Only few are R15+, and are broadcasted at around midnight, which is a time hard for children to view. Staff will check if the audience fits the rating age in the cinema and at the store while a work is road show or on sale.

The next standard of classification is based on target crowd, with certain topics (Anime, 2023). The classification standard is as follow:

1. Kodomo-muke
2. Shōnen
3. Shōjo
4. Seinen

5. Josei
6. Adult

This is a shared standard of classification with manga. It is a traditional classification in Japan started from 19th century to classify manga works. The categories are basically divided by the age of the target audiences, Kodomo-muke anime works are targeting children under 10 years old, the target age of Shōnen and Shōjo anime is 10 to 18, the target age of Seinen, Josei and Adult's anime is above 18. But age is not the only matter in this standard, there are also gender and gender related topics in this classification.

Komodo-muke means *children's* or *for children*, this kind of anime always with topics of education, family, friendship, simple justice and so on, and use simple stories to tell these topics, easy for children to understand.

Shōnen means *boy* or *teen male*, and in the meanwhile, Shōjo means *girl* or *teen female*. Shōnen anime tells story more from male perspective, all kinds of fighting or sports are often used as main elements, covering all kinds of topics, more focused on the movement and the description of fighting scene.

Shōjo anime tells story more from female perspective, more focused on the psychological description of the character, and in most cases, fantasy or idealized love story is one of its main topics.

Seinen means *youth* or *young adult*, in this situation, means *young male adult*. This kind of anime works tells story in a

more mature way and the topics are deeper than Shōnen anime, works in this genre in most situation carries thoughts of life or society form the author. Heavy topics such as history, politics, war and sci-fi are the common topics in Seinen anime. And description in some works inevitably contains extreme violence or sex.

Josei means *young female adult*. This kind of anime often portray more realistic love story in a more mature way than Shōjo anime. This kind of anime mostly targeting office ladies or housewives.

Adult anime only targeting adult group, mainly male, for explicit sexual contents as its main, and in most situation, only content.

The last standard of classification, which is a shared common idea, is as follow:

1. Original anime
2. Anime based on other works

This standard is easy to understand, whether an anime work is creating a new IP (intellectual property) or is based-on an already existed IP.

These standards of classification can be used alone or in combination. One can say that a piece of work is an Anime Film, or is an Original TV Shōnen anime, based on different standard of classification.

And on some standards, there are some arguments existed, such as Shōnen anime. Some argues that the audience rage of Shōnen anime is far more than young boys aged from 10 to 18, and love story is also a very important part in

Shōnen anime. Or on the definition of Original Anime, some say that although using the same IP, a work with its own world setting and characters that are completely irrelevant with other works under the same IP may also be called an Original work.

These arguments indeed have their reason, but applying these arguments will make the classification standard becoming chaotic. So, in this study, the simplest and clearest standard will be applied, which was also applied by most of the audience.

2.2 Common topics

In this research, common topics means the topics that are most welcomed by the audience and have the greatest number of works. So, it is important to make clear what are the topics and how to classify them, but unfortunately it has not formed a standard, and because the topics are related with the contents of the work, and the contents are always mixed with many topics, makes it hard to pick out all of the topics in a work, and is almost impossible to limit one work in only one topic. Till now, there is still no common standard of classifying topics. Different people and different sources have different ways on tagging works with different topics, and it has to be said that these tags are quite random, and in some occasions mixed with other elements that are not topics or mixed with classifications.

Such as on different online anime sites from China, anime works are tagged differently. *Tencent anime channel* (2023)

tagged anime into 12 genres, in which 4 of them are not topics. Similar happens on other websites, *Bilibili* (2023) listed 37 "styles" while trying to tag the works that are available on the site, which are as follow:

Original, Manga-based, Novel-based, Game-based, Puppet, Hot-blood, Time-travel, Fantasy, Fight, Comedy, Daily Life, Sci-Fi, Moe, Cure, School life, Kodomo-muke, Instant-noodle, Romance, Shōjo, Magic, Adventure, History, Alternate world, Mecha, Demon, Voice-complex, Sports, Inspirational, Music, Detective, Club-activity, Battle of wits, Tear dripper, Food, Idol, Otome, Workplace.

We can see that among these "styles", there are classification of works, which are *Original*, *Manga-based*, *Novel-based* and *Game-based* on whether it is original or not; and *Kodomo-muke*, *Shōjo* and *Otome* (a branch of Shōjo anime) on what is its target audience. There are also features of anime works listed in: *Puppet*, *Instant-noodle* and *Voice-complex*. Puppet is seriously speaking not anime but filmed puppet play, Instant-noodle means that the time of each episode is too short only enough for making an instant-noodle, Voice-complex means that the work has very luxury voice cast that can be enjoyed by those who takes voice cast seriously. These are irrelevant with subject of the work, cannot be considered as topics.

This kind of situation happens on all kinds of anime related websites, different types of tags are put together, and the

selection of topics listed among these tags are random.

It is acceptable that the topics are hard to be completely listed out, for there are always new kind of contents and topics being created and each site have their own concern of choosing these tags. But it is possible to list out common topics, for the topics that most people would like to enjoy is limited.

3. Data collection

To conclude the common topics, data should be gathered and analyzed, only large amount of data can show what topics have the greatest number of works, and what are the topics that most welcomed works have.

Four anime websites are selected as the data source of this research, which are：

- AniDB
- Anikore
- Bangumi
- My Anime List

The reason to choose these four sites is that they are the largest online anime
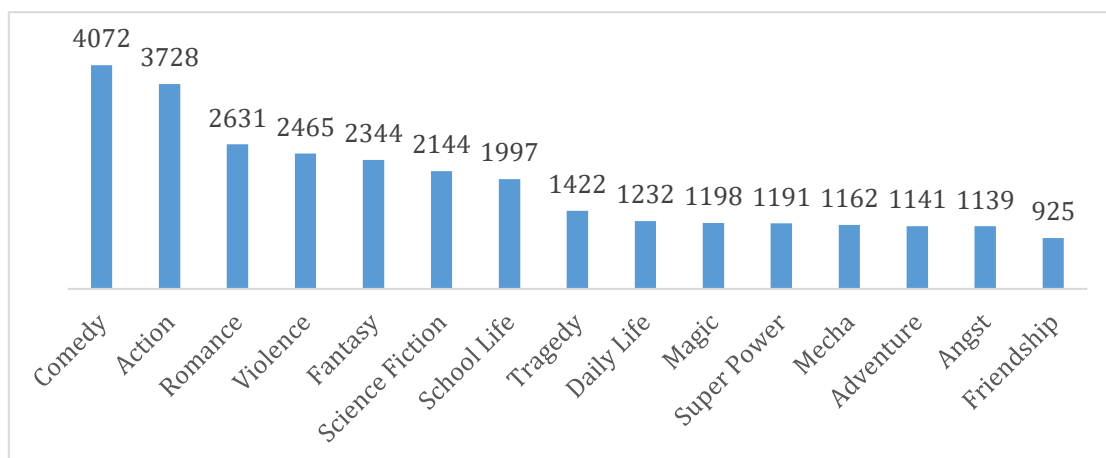
- AniDB

data base that people use in different areas. AniDB is the largest anime database site in USA; Anikore is the largest anime database site in Japan; Bangumi is the largest anime database site in China; and My Anime List is the largest anime database site among English-speaking area.

These four websites cover most of the anime viewing audience in the world and have collected almost all the anime works through years, each has their own rating and tagging system.

As explained in the former chapter, the tags on these sites are quite random but still can be analyzed. In this research, 15 topics with most works will be chosen. And in the same time, 20 most welcomed works after 1990s will also be chosen to analyze their topics with the former chosen topics to see the total situation.

The following is the result of the data gathering of each database. The collected data will be shown in the form of figures and tables.

Figure 1. Top 15 Topics from AniDB

Figure 1 describes the 15 topics from AniDB which have the most numbers of works, together with the number of works which tagged with such topic.
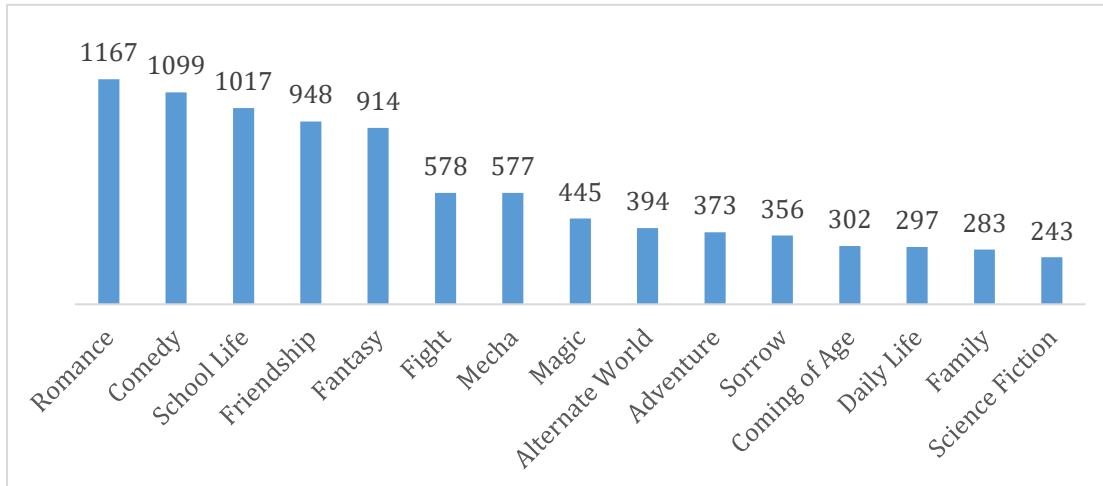
Table 1. 20 highest rated anime works since 1990 and their topics from AniDB

No.	Name of Anime	Tagged Topics
1	Hagane no Renkinjutsushi (2009)	Action; Adventure; Fantasy; Magic; Science Fiction; Violence
2	Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji Kenkaku Romantan - Tsuioku Hen	Action; Historical; Martial Arts; Romance; Tragedy
3	Steins; Gate	Comedy; Science Fiction; Thriller; Time Travel
4	Clannad: After Story	Angst; Coming of Age; Daily Life; Romance; Tragedy
5	Nodame Cantabile	Comedy; Coming of Age; Daily Life; Music; Romance; School Life
6	Code Geass: Hangyaku no Lelouch R2	Action; Mecha; Science Fiction; Tragedy
7	GTO	Comedy; Coming of Age; School Life
8	Gintama`	Action; Adventure; Alien; Comedy; Daily Life; Martial Arts
9	Gintama°	Alien; Comedy; Science Fiction
10	Hajime no Ippo: The Fighting!	Action; Comedy; Martial Arts; Sports
11	Mushishi	Detective; Fantasy; Tragedy
12	Suzumiya Haruhi no Shoushitsu	Alien; Angst; Alternate World; School Life; Time Travel
13	Cross Game	Daily Life; School Life; Sports
14	Mushishi Zoku Shou (2014)	Adventure; Daily Life; Fantasy
15	Cowboy Bebop	Action; Detective; Post-apocalyptic; Science Fiction; Space Travel; Tragedy
16	Death Note	Detective; Fantasy; Thriller
17	Hajime no Ippo: The Fighting! - New Challenger	Action; Comedy; Sports
18	Hunter x Hunter (2011)	Action; Adventure; Super Power; Tragedy; Violence
19	Koukaku Kidoutai S.A.C. 2nd GIG	Action; Android; Detective; Mecha; Science fiction
20	Code Geass: Hangyaku no Lelouch	Action; Mecha; Science Fiction; Super Power; Violence

Table 1 listed out the most high-rated anime works since 1990 from AniDB, together with the topics of these works tagged by the users.

- Anikore

Same with AniDB, the top 15 topics with most numbers of works and the most high-rated works are shown in the following figure and table.

Figure 2. Top 15 Topics from Anikore

Table 2. 20 highest rated anime works since 1990 and their topics from Anikore
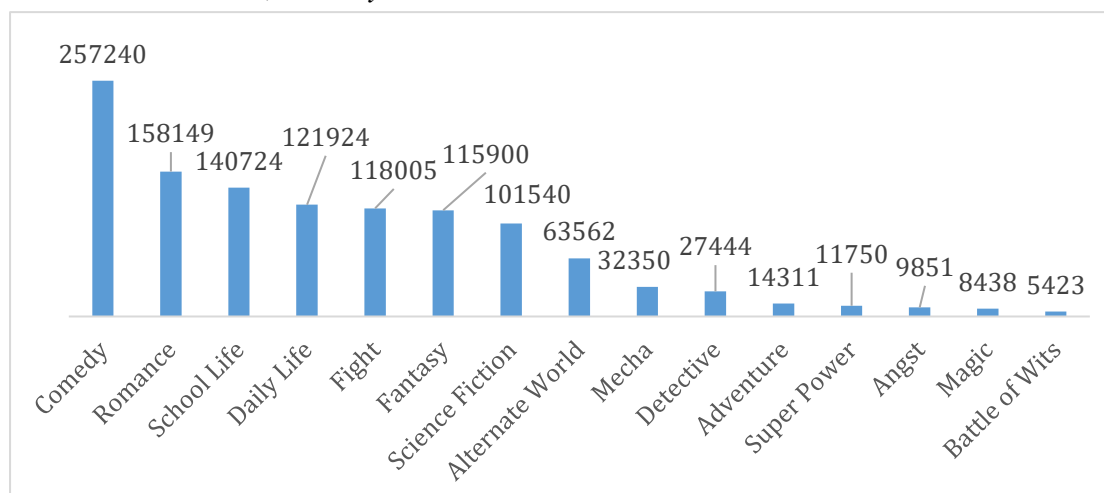
No.	Name of Anime	Tagged Topics
1	Kono Subarashii Sekai ni Shukufuku o! 2	Alternate World; Comedy; Fantasy; Friendship; Magic
2	Seishun Buta Yarou wa Bunny Girl Senpai no Yume o Minai	Fantasy; Romance; School Life; Teenage;
3	Kaguya-sama wa Kokurasetai: Tensai-tachi no Ren`ai Zunousen	Battle of Wits; Comedy; Romance; School life
4	Sora yori mo Tooi Basho	Adventure; Coming of Age; Friendship; Teenage
5	Tsuki ga Kirei	Romance; School Life; Teenage
6	Violet Evergarden	Sorrow; War
7	Kobayashi-san Chi no Maidragon	Alternate World; Comedy; Daily Life; Fantasy; Friendship; Magic
8	Kimetsu no Yaiba	Fight; Coming of Age; Family; Fantasy; Friendship; Thriller
9	Youjo Senki	Alternate world; Fantasy; Magic; War
10	Steins; Gate 0	Science Fiction; Time Travel
11	Eromanga-sensei	Comedy, Romance
12	Yuru Camp Δ	Daily Life

13	Made in Abyss	Adventure; Alternate World; Friendship
14	Code Geass: Hangyaku no Lelouch R2	Battle of Wits; Friendship; Mecha, School Life
15	Steins; Gate	Science Fiction; Time Travel
16	Code Geass: Hangyaku no Lelouch	Battle of Wits; friendship; Mecha; School Life; Super Power
17	Clannad: After Story	Family; Life; Romance
18	Suzumiya Haruhi no Shoushitsu	School Life; Science Fiction; Time Travel
19	Bakemonogatari	School Life; Romance; Monster
20	Saenai Heroine no Sodatekata Flat	Comedy; Romance; School Life

● Bangumi

In Bangumi, each single tag of one work can be marked plural times, such as in *Kaguya-sama wa Kokurasetai: Tensai-tachi no Ren`ai Zunousen*, *Comedy* is marked 3782 times. So, the number of each tag can only reflect how many times the tag is mentioned, and among them, the most mentioned topics are as follow:


Figure 3. Top 15 Topics from Bangumi

Table 3. 20 highest rated anime works since 1990 and their topics from Bangumi

No.	Name of Anime	Tagged Topics
1	Cowboy Bebop	Romance; Science Fiction
2	Koukaku Kidoutai S.A.C. 2nd GIG	Fight; Science Fiction
3	Koukaku Kidoutai Stand Alone Complex	Fight; Science Fiction
4	Clannad: After Story	Family; Life; Romance; School life
5	Shinseiki Evangelion Gekijouban: Air	Fight; Mecha; Religion; Science

	/ Magokoro o	Fiction
6	Ghost in the Shell	Science Fiction
7	Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji Kenkaku Romantan - Tsuioku Hen	Fight; History; Romance; Tragedy
8	Shinseiki Evangelion	Fight; Mecha; Science Fiction
9	Sangatsu no Lion Second Season	Coming of Age; Daily Life; Life; Romance; School Life; Sports
10	Hagane no Renkinjutsushi (2009)	Fantasy; Fight
11	Kidou Keisatsu Patlabor 2 the Movie	Mecha; Science Fiction
12	Shirokabo	Daily life; Workplace
13	Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence	Science Fiction
14	Gintama`	Comedy
15	Perfect Blue	Thriller
16	Mushishi	Fantasy; Life
17	Slam Dunk	School Life; Sports
18	Steins; Gate	Romance; Science Fiction; Time Travel
19	Suzumiya Haruhi no Shoushitsu	Fantasy; School Life; Science Fiction
20	Gintama	Comedy

- My Anime List (MAL)
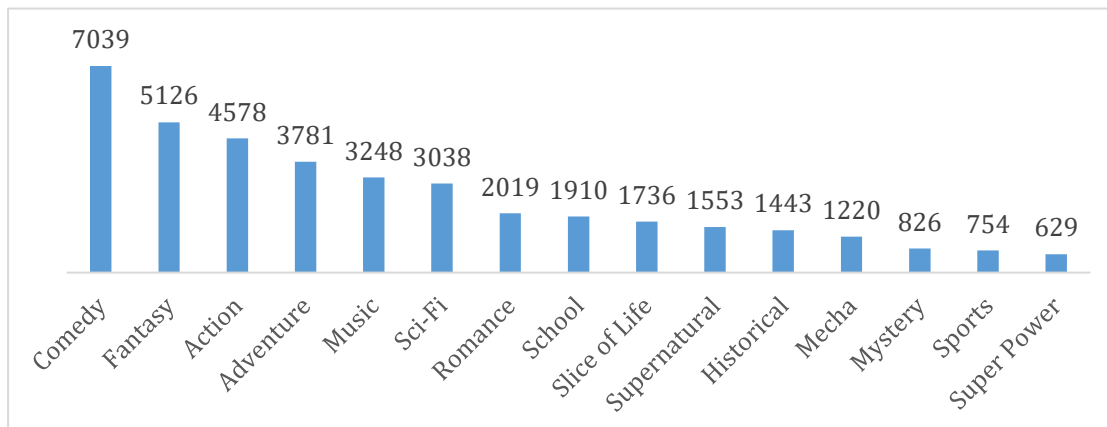
Figure 4. Top 15 Topics from MAL

Table 4. 20 highest rated anime works since 1990 and their topics from MAL

| No.	Name of Anime	Tagged Topics
1	Shingeki no Kyojin: The Final Season - Kanketsu-hen	Action; Suspense
2	Hagane no Renkinjutsushi (2009)	Action; Adventure; Fantasy
3	Bleach: Sennen Kessen-hen	Action; Adventure; Fantasy

4	Steins;Gate	Sci-Fi; Suspense; Time Travel
5	Gintama°	Action; Comedy; Historical; Sci-Fi
6	Kaguya-sama wa Kokurasetai: Ultra Romantic	Comedy; Romance; School
7	Shingeki no Kyojin Season 3 Part 2	Action
8	Gintama: The Final	Action; Comedy; Historical; Sci-Fi
9	Gintama'	Action; Comedy; Historical; Sci-Fi
10	Hunter x Hunter (2011)	Action; Adventure; Fantasy
11	Gintama': Enchousen	Action; Comedy; Historical; Sci-Fi
12	Fruits Basket: The Final	Romance; Supernatural
13	Gintama.	Action; Comedy; Historical; Sci-Fi
14	Sangatsu no Lion Second Season	Slice of Life
15	Clannad: After Story	Romance; Supernatural
16	Gintama	Action; Comedy; Historical; Sci-Fi
17	Kaguya-sama wa Kokurasetai: First Kiss wa Owaranai	Comedy; Romance; School
18	Koe no Katachi	Romance
19	Gintama Movie 2: Kanketsu-hen - Yorozuya yo Eien Nare	Action; Comedy; Historical; Sci-Fi; Time Travel
20	Code Geass: Hangyaku no Lelouch R2	Action; Mecha; Sci-Fi; Super Power

It should be mentioned that some topics have different expression in MAL tagging system, but they have the same meaning with those in other sites, such as *Slice of Life* is the same with *Daily Life*; *School* is the same with *School Life*.

4. Discussion

4.1 General situation of common topics

From the top 15 topics of all the 4 sites, it can be easily found out the topics that are shared among the 4 sites:
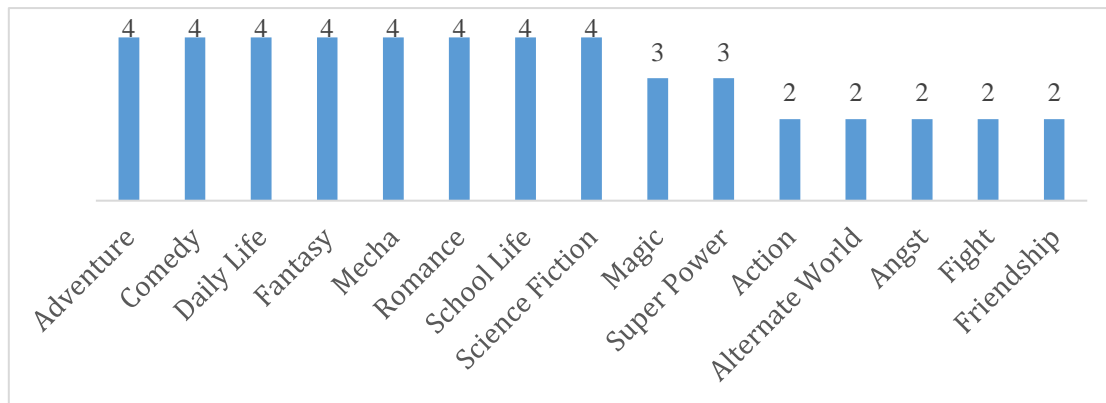
Figure 5. shared topics among 4 sites and their times of appearance

From Figure 5, it can be clearly seen that 8 topics that has the greatest number of works or most mentioned are shared in all 4 sites, which are:

Adventure, Comedy, Daily Life, Fantasy, Mecha, Romance, School Life, and Science Fiction.

This shows that anime works of these topics are most created and being enjoyed by the audience all over the world, they are without doubt the most common topics of anime works. And in which, the most welcomed topic is Comedy, it is in the top 2 of all these data sites.

And from the highest rated anime works of the 4 sites, it can be found out that almost all the listed works are tagged with at least one of the 8 common topics. Which also proves that these 8 topics are the most common topics.

But this does not mean that other topics are not common topics. All the topics that are listed have enough number of works and are welcomed by people all over the world. Such as Sports, although it only appears once, which is No.14 in MAL top topics, it has several works of this topic that are favorited by the audiences, like *Slam Dunk*.

Generally speaking, all the topics listed are the common topics, and 8 of them are the most enjoyed.

4.2 Differences among areas

It is clear that audience from different areas enjoy different topics. The ranking of the topics is different in every area. Comedy is the most common topic in all the areas, even in Japan, the gap between Comedy and Romance, which is the first, is very small. But other than Comedy, other topics are welcomed in different levels in different areas.

This can be basically analyzed through the highest rated anime works in different areas.

In America, 10 of the 20 highest rated anime works are tagged with Action, which is the most mentioned topic among all the 20 works, even more than Comedy, which is only mentioned in 7 works. This means that Action is very popular in American area.

In Japan, 3 topics of School Life, Romance and Friendship have the most appearance among the 20 works. In which, 8 works are tagged with School Life, 7 are tagged with Romance and 7 are tagged with Friendship.

In China, the most mentioned topic is Science Fiction, 10 of the highest rated anime works are with such tag. Much more than any other topics in the list.

The situation in English-speaking area is very unique. In other areas, most of the works are from different series. But in MAL, which is the English-speaking area's situation, 7 of the 20 listed works are from Ginatama Series, and all of them are tagged with the topic of Action, Comedy, Historical, and Science Fiction. But other than these 7 works, Action is still the most mentioned topic.

5. Findings

There are some other findings during the research of classification and common topics of anime.

The first finding is that when talking about anime, people always confuse the classification with topics. This happens all the time in all 4 data sites, people prefer to call it "Genre", and put all the stuff under it. And people always tag one work with similar topics, such as in Anikore, many works are tagged with "Comedy" and "Love Comedy"; "School life", "High school" and "School Club".

The second finding is that although there is a mess while talking about the topics or classifications, people are trying to put them into order. Such as in AniDB, every tag, no matter classification or topic or others, have a "family tree", putting tags of same kind together, for example, "kodomo" is under the branch of "target audience", together with "18 restricted", "josei", "mina", "seinen", "shoujo" and "shounen", which is quite similar to the classification standard based on target crowd.

The third finding is that when classifying anime works based on target crowd, it is closely related to the topics, for certain crowd always enjoy works with certain topics, makes these topics common topics, such as Sci-Fi is a common topic among Seinen anime.

Also, there are some expressions that people often use but are hard to say they are classifications or topics, such as "moe" or "voice complex". For any work carrying certain features can be categorized into these. Even a very serious Sci-Fi work, if there is a cute women character in it, people can still tag the work with "moe"; and any work filled with famous voice cast, can be called "voice complex". These elements are definitely being considered while conducting the work, but it can only be considered as features of the work but not classifications or topics.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research discusses about the classification and common topics of anime. This research concludes that there are basically 5 standards of classification anime works that people often use. Also find out 8 most common topics of anime are: Adventure, Comedy, Daily life, Fantasy, Mecha, Romance, School, and Science Fiction. And audiences from different areas enjoy anime works of different topics. During the research, also find out that people often confuse classification with topics and other elements when talking about anime works.

It should say that common topic is very

easily affected by the social background, it alters with time and space. Different people from different areas and eras may be interested in different topics, and such difference is caused by the social background of the audience. Using Semiotic theory, the social background affects both the process of modeling and representation while producing anime signs and the process of semiosis while receiving anime signs, for all these processes are based on the knowledge given by the social background. And the social background is always changing, thus the common topics of anime will sure be constantly changing together with it. Also, the anime works that have been released are in the same time become part of the social background and starting giving influence on the creation of other anime works.

It should be mentioned that there are some deficiencies in this research.

One main deficiency is the score of anime works. the score is being updated all the time, and the scoring standard of audience and the crowd itself is changing all the time, so it is not able to exactly reflect if the work is welcomed when they are being aired. This is reflected that recent year works are more easily to get higher scores.

Another deficiency is that the rate is more to reflect the total quality of the work, some high rated works may not be popular at the time, and this kind of situation happens all the time. Some works became popular later, while some just went undiscovered. So, it cannot completely equal the work with "high rated" to "popular", although high rated works are in most time popular works, but the error can't be ignored.

There are also similar researches being done. Such as Hyerim Cho, et al. (2018) have done research on the relation between genres using faceted approach, found out that anime genre includes more aspects than the traditionally narrow labels for genres and sub-genres. Shows that this is an interesting field and there are still more to be researched.

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