

EYES ON JAPANESE ANIMATION

A&M students exploring the world of animation from abroad



By Jay Knium
THE BATTALION

In the United States, the word animation tends to conjure up images of two extremes: *The Lion King* and *Beavis and Butthead*.

Around these parts, animation seems geared for children, social satire or as modern art, as shown on MTV's *Liquid Television*.

Japan, however, does not share the United States' rather conservative attitudes about animation. Japanese animation, or "anime," is very much a part of that country's culture and everyday life.

Chuck Blend, a wildlife and fisheries sciences graduate student, is a longtime fan of anime, and said that animation is literally everywhere in Japan.

"Animation is their main form of media advertisement," Blend said.

Blend is the founder of Aggime (pronounced Aggie-may), an informal Japanese animation fan club on campus, which has free screenings of anime every Monday night in Evans Library's viewing rooms. Blend has made the animation into one of his life's passions, and has even written college papers about the subject.

Blend said the purpose of Aggime is to expose the public to Japanese animation in order to increase anime's popularity.

"We give people the opportunity to see different shows from another country," Blend said. "There's so many people that have never had a chance to see Japanese animation, and they watch a few episodes of something, no matter what it is, and they fall in love with it."

Perhaps the most widely recognized example of Japanese animation in the United States is *Speed Racer*, or *Star Blazers*, which used to air on Saturday mornings years ago. However, fans of the medium will tell you that these shows barely scratch the surface.

Anime has come a long way from the primitive animation in *Speed Racer*. The medium has as much variety in programming as the movie and television industries do in the United States.

"Lots of the anime series we show on Monday were shown on prime-time television in Japan or as feature films," Blend said.

Anime subject matter ranges from the truly serious to the blatantly silly, with all things in between. For example, *Grave of the Fireflies* is a sobering look at Japan after the atomic bomb, while *Ranma 1/2* is a ridiculous comedy series about a martial arts student who is cursed by a magical lake, and he turns into a girl whenever he is doused with cold water.

The staple show of Aggime is *Maison Ikkoku*, a romantic comedy series about a destitute, accident-prone college student named Godai who is in love with Kyoko, his attractive landlady.

Julie Fischer, a senior accounting major and Aggime attendee, said even though she loves the animation, racy scenes make it clearly a male-oriented medium.

Anime is a big part of Japanese culture, occupying the same niche there that immensely popular shows like *Star Trek* do here.

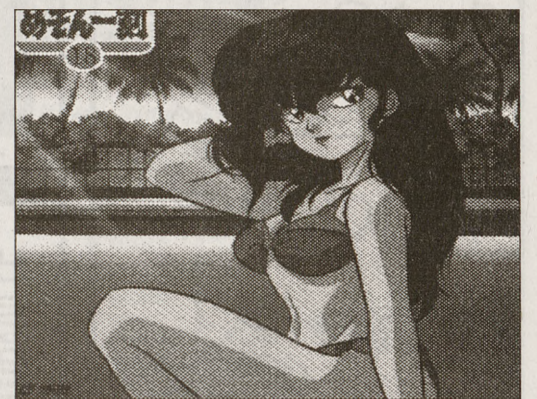
And then there are the "otakus." An otaku is a serious fan of Japanese animation — someone who has made it the purpose of their life to watch and collect anime.

Bill Lovell, a senior accounting major and regular attendee of Aggime, said an otaku is very much like a *Trekker*, or die-hard *Star Trek* fan.

"The word otaku has a dark side, a negative connotation in Japan," Lovell said. "It's sort of like the stigma against heavy metal fans. In Japan, the police broke into a serial killer's apartment and found anime pictures covering the walls."

Anime is very much in the mainstream in Japan, and has become an enormous business. This business has begun its assault on the United States.

Many companies such as



AnimEigo, AD Vision, Pioneer and Biz Video are in the business of buying the rights to anime, translating it with subtitles or dubbing, and selling it to fans in the United States.

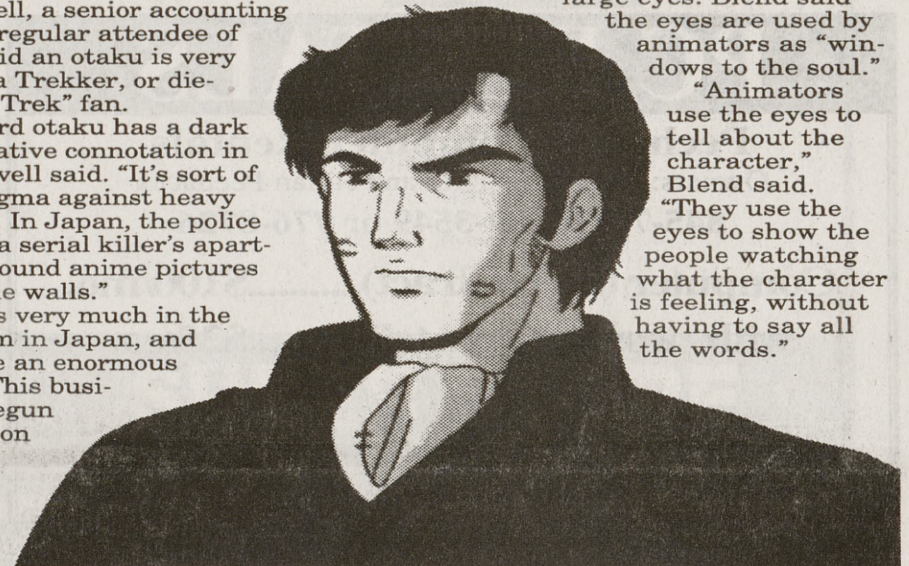
Broke anime fans have little to fear, however. It is a tradition among fans to do their own subtitling on computers and distributing their work free of charge to other fans at conventions. Selling a fan-subtitled work is frowned upon, but piracy rears its head quite often.

Blend said the distinct style of Japanese animation was inspired by Disney animation, especially the large eyes. Blend said

the eyes are used by animators as "windows to the soul."

"Animators use the eyes to tell about the character," Blend said.

"They use the eyes to show the people watching what the character is feeling, without having to say all the words."



Support organizations give valuable help to athletic department

By Keryl Cryer
THE BATTALION

Fans at Aggie baseball games often struggle over foul balls. As a Diamond Darling rushes to get the ball back in exchange for a Whataburger coupon or some movie passes, the audience purposely points her in the wrong direction so that the lucky fan can keep the prize.

When not trying to confuse the Diamond Darlings, fans often mistake them for the softball team, Captain Kylee Sandifer said.

"They always ask us what position we play," Sandifer, a senior marketing and management major, said.

The main function of the Diamond Darlings certainly isn't to straighten out Aggie athletic fans who don't understand what they do. The primary function of the group, along with the Aggie Hostesses and the Aggie Angels, is to assist the athletic department at games and in recruiting high school athletes.

During baseball season, the Diamond Darlings hand out programs, greet fans and retrieve foul balls at home games and at least two away games every season. However, their responsibilities begin long before the umpire yells "Play ball!"

Sandifer said the Darlings use the off-season to put together their uniforms, help create schedules and do community work.

"It's a lot of busy work in the fall," Sandifer said. "It's a lot of hard work that no one ever sees since it's usually behind-the-scenes."

When baseball season starts, the 16 members of the squad are usually the first people that fans see at baseball games.

Unlike the Darlings, most students never see the Aggie Hostesses. Members of this support group and recruiting force for the football team usually sit on the alumni side of Kyle Field during football games answering questions from potential football players and their parents.

Jill Boeding, administrative coordinator for the 38 hostesses, said the organization works closely with the football staff to find the best players for each season. Boeding said the group provides a service to the school, even though many people think they do it just to meet the players and the coaches.

"We brought in the No. 3 recruiting class in the nation and we hope next football season to bring in No. 1," Boeding said. "We simply do it to help out the University. It's another way of giving back to the school."

During the informal recruiting season, Hostesses are responsible for showing prospective students and their parents around campus, explaining traditions, and answering questions about academics.

Chantelle Freeman, coordinator in charge of recruiting, said high school prospects appreciate the efforts to make them feel important as students, and not just as athletes from other schools.

"We don't even talk about football sometimes because we don't recruit football players," Freeman said. "We recruit Aggies and that's something very special."

The Hostesses also participate in the formal recruiting every January when the players come up for second visits, talk to coaches and professors and receive scholarship offers.

Cari McLaughlin, coordinator of special events and promotions for the Hostesses, said the organization also sponsors activities not directly related to recruits. The girls are responsible for making posters, planning tailgate parties and attending functions sponsored by groups like the United Way.

The Aggie Angels is the recruiting organization for the men's basketball team.

Niki Bisor, co-captain for the Angels, said that in addition to supporting the team during the basketball season and recruiting during the off-season, they also serve the basketball program throughout the year.

"Each member is required to work in the (bas-



On the sidelines, the Aggie Hostesses celebrate the football team's win over Texas Tech last fall. Tim Moog / THE BATTALION

ketball) office a minimum of two hours a month," Bisor said.

The group's main focus is on supporting A&M basketball and its team members. The Angels plan alumni dinners, breakfasts with players and sponsor a basketball buddy exchange. This gives the Angels a chance to get to know the players and to exchange gifts with them in a fashion similar to those of Bonfire Buddies.

The Angels also exist to encourage student attendance at basketball games. The Angels try to show the importance, excitement and fun involved in less-popular Aggie sporting events. Although fan support has grown in recent years, Bisor said it still needs to improve.

"Our ultimate goal is to promote Aggie basketball and to make it as big as the other sports," Bisor said.

Stark Gallery hosts exhibit of drawings by 'American regionalist' Thomas Hart Benton

By Amy Collier
THE BATTALION

Students can experience American history, culture and politics through the drawings of Thomas Hart Benton.

The J. Wayne Stark University Center Galleries is presenting 66 of Benton's drawings in "Lasting Impressions: Drawings by Thomas Hart Benton" until May 7.

Catherine Hastedt, registrar and curator of the Stark gallery, said she has always admired Benton's work and jumped at the opportunity to

bring his work to Texas A&M.

"I think it's important that the students here get exposed to as wide of a variety of artists and art genres as possible," Hastedt said. "Thomas Hart Benton is a fairly well-known artist and I thought this was a period we haven't covered recently. I'm attracted to the quickness of his drawing."

Benton was born in Missouri in 1889 and created his artwork from the 1910s until his death in 1975.

Benton drew landscapes, common people and even political figures. Since Benton sometimes did not want to give up his drawings, 1,900 draw-

ings were found in his studio when he died.

Hastedt said Benton is probably most well-known for his murals and paintings and said the exhibition features a video of Benton painting a mural in The Country Music Hall of Fame.

"He's an American regionalist," Hastedt said. "He captured a lot of Americana."

Because Benton's drawings were often informal, Hastedt said many art critics dislike his work.

"Thomas Hart Benton is an artist who is difficult to characterize," she

said. "People either love him or they hate him."

Henry Adams, guest curator of the exhibition, said he initially did not appreciate Benton's drawings because many of them are so informal.

"After disliking Benton's drawings, I have changed to admiring them as my favorites," Adams said. "No other American artist of this century has left so rich and inexhaustible visual legacy of his experience."

Hastedt said Benton was also criticized because he turned his back on the modern art movement in the 1930s. Although he was the object of

negative comments, Benton still stood alone and drew what he wanted.

"He was very much an individualist," she said. "He didn't care if people didn't like his work."

Benton's individualism and determination helped him to become a famous artist.

"You'll find his works in all of the major museums in the United States," Hastedt said.

"This is a slice of American history," she said. "I hope that professors of history and sociology will take advantage of this exhibit because it ties into so much."