

JAMS@AX 2024 Conference Report

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Introduction

The JAMS@AX Academic Symposium, a special academic programming track at Anime Expo 2024, brought together scholars, librarians, educators, and enthusiasts from around the world to explore the academic study of anime, manga, and Japanese culture. Since its inception in 2011, the AX Anime and Manga Studies Symposium has featured over 50 speakers from more than 30 universities and colleges. *The Journal of Anime and Manga Studies* partnered with Anime Expo to co-host this conference for the second time following last year's MechaJAMS symposium, continuing to offer this unique opportunity to delve deeper into the world of Japanese pop culture on a scholarly level. This year, the symposium embraced the "Edo Japan" theme and encouraged presenters to discuss how anime presents Japanese history and culture, especially during this period. The symposium offered a diverse array of panels and presentations that delved into various aspects of anime and manga studies, from historical reinterpretations and cultural critiques to the impact of music and the integration of traditional art forms. This report provides an overview of the key discussions and insights shared during the symposium, highlighting the scholarly contributions and the vibrant exchange of ideas that marked the event.

Day 1

The JAMS@AX Academic Symposium began with the keynote panel, “Researching Anime: An Introduction to Anime and Manga Studies.” The session started with



conference runner and JAMS editor-in-chief Billy Tringali’s presentation, “From Fan Blogs to *Fruits Basket*: Documenting the Recommended Resources of Anime Studies.” Tringali shared insights from his extensive—and still ongoing—research into the most highly recommended resources for the scholarly study of anime, manga, cosplay, and fandom. Fun fact: the most commonly recommended anime and manga in

these resources are *Fruits Basket*, *Cowboy Bebop*, *Fullmetal Alchemist*, and *My Neighbor Totoro*. Following this, editor of the blog *TheAnimeView* Peggy Sue Wood provided a comprehensive introductory guide to the interdisciplinary field of anime and manga studies in her presentation, “Entering Anime & Manga Studies,” offering valuable advice for newcomers on various approaches to the subject and how to get started in the field.



The second panel of the day, titled “*One Piece*, *Sekko Boys*, and Reimagined Histories in Anime,” featured the following

scholars: PhD candidate at UC Irvine Juan Carlos Fermin, mobile educator for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Sierra Schiano, and graduate student in Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Southern



California, Janine Sun (Left). This session delved into how anime can represent history and reinterpret historical narratives. Fermin’s presentation, “The Japan That Could Have Been: ‘Wano Country’ as *One Piece*’s Refusal of Japanese Imperialism,” explored *One Piece*’s critique of imperialist ideologies, mainly through the lens of the series’ Wano Country Arc. In “*Sekko Boys* and *Extra Olympia Kyklos*: Satirizing Sculpture in



Japanese Classical Reception,” Schiano examined the humorous recontextualization of classical art in anime. Sun discussed the integration of traditional and modern media in “Merging Media: Reconstituting Rakugo through Anime in Studio

Deen’s *Descending Stories*,” emphasizing the hybrid media approach when combining the traditional art of Japanese verbal comedy known as *rakugo* with modern animation.

The final panel of Day 1, “RADWIMPS and Music from the Films of Makoto Shinkai,” which filled every seat in the lecture hall, featured a deep dive into the music that has



moved and influenced audiences throughout Japanese filmmaker Makoto Shinkai’s filmography, with a primary focus on his partnership with the Japanese rock band RADWIMPS. Professors Elliott Jones and John Marr, both full-time faculty in the Music program at Santa Ana College, highlighted key musical moments that have touched souls, healed hearts, and moved audiences to tears.

The session even included a sing-along to “Grand Escape” from the movie *Weathering With You* (2019).

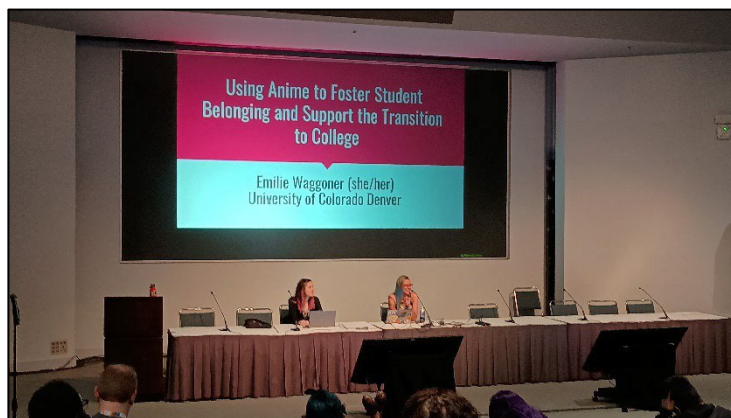


Day 2

Continuing into the second day of Anime Expo, the panels started with New York City manga librarian and author of *Manga in Libraries* Jillian Rudes and University of Colorado

Director of Student Transitions and contract

faculty member Emilie Waggoner's panel, "Manga in Libraries and Beyond: Centering Belonging and Connection through Anime." Both panelists stressed the importance of



using anime and manga in education to foster a sense of belonging, promote social and emotional learning, and create spaces where teens and college students can engage with new methods of literacy and learning.

Following this, Assistant Professor in German at University of Colorado Boulder, Dr. Adrienne Merritt, and documentary filmmaker, writer, and journalist Dr. Dexter Thomas focused on identity within characters and fandom through their discussion in "Vampires and *Dragon Ball Z*: Memory Studies and Black Fandom in Anime." Dr.

Merritt discussed characters posed as “outsiders from within” and the “haunted memory” that compels Olrox of *Castlevania: Nocturne* to fight back against stereotypes and oppressive structures he finds himself within in their presentation “Olrox and Haunted Memory in *Castlevania Nocturne*.”



In his presentation “Piccolo is (not) Black,” Dr. Thomas thoughtfully analyzed Piccolo’s character from *Dragon Ball Z*. He posed the question, “Why are we able to find the black characters when they aren’t there?”



To wrap up the academic panels of Day 2, Editors-in-Chief of *Anime News Network*, Lynzee Loveridge, *Mechademia*, Frenchy Lunning, and the *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies*, Billy Tringali hosted a panel discussion around writing and publishing in anime and manga scholarship. All three panelists emphasized the need for writers to focus on analysis, critique, and theory when writing about and researching anime. They also highlight common pitfalls in academic publishing, such as addressing only surface-level discussions or failing to provide substantial evidence. The panel concluded with a discussion on the effects of artificial intelligence on writing and their hopes for the continued rise of publishing and research in anime and manga studies.

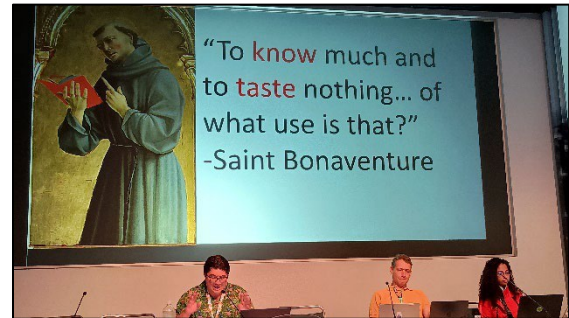


Day 3

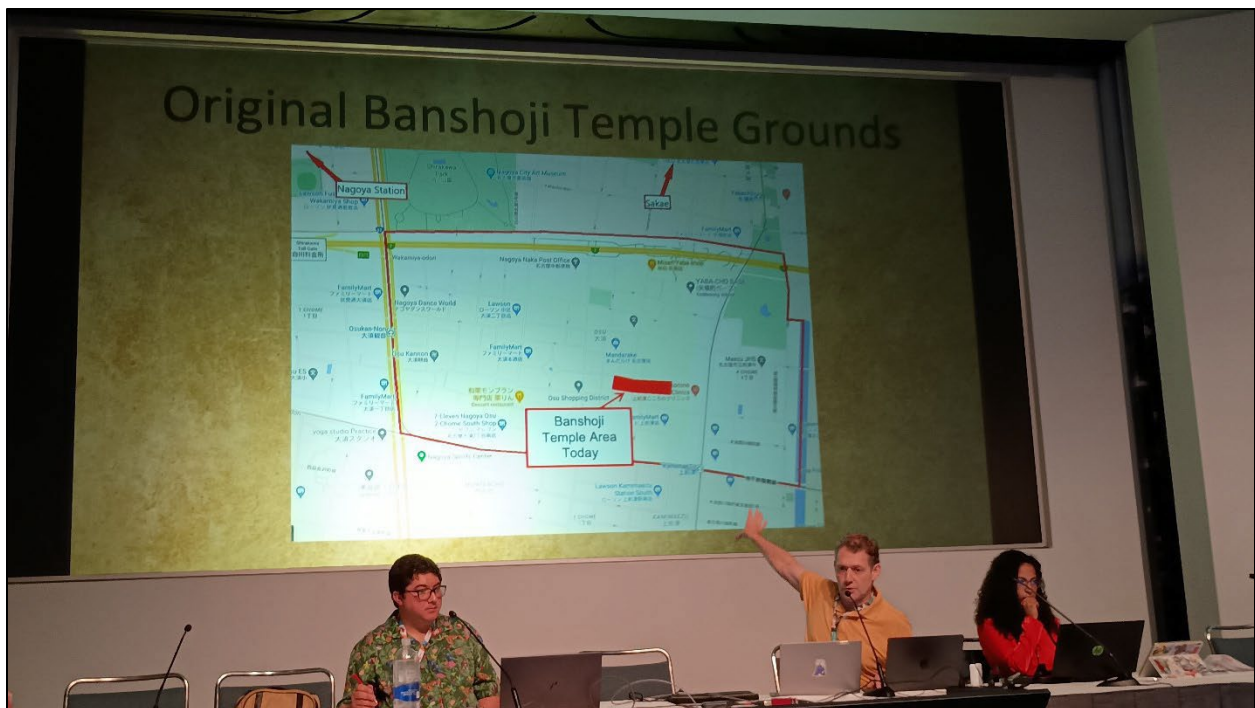
Moving into the third and final day of academic panels at Anime Expo, Kokushikan University lecturer Edmund Hoff, independent scholar Dr. Daniel W. Ambord, and University of New Mexico graduate student Dayana Calle discussed the stewardship of resources, rural cosplay tourism, and the global reach of *Dragon Ball Z* in the panel “Exploring Dungeons, Borders, the Countryside – *Delicious in Dungeon*, Rural Cosplay, and *Dragon Ball Z*.” Dr. Ambord engaged the audience by discussing the

ethical use of resources and transgressive thoughts on predator vs. prey perspectives in *Delicious in Dungeon* and Dr. Valerie

Plumwood's ecological philosophy in his presentation "Eye of the Dragon: Ecological Thinking in *Delicious in Dungeon*." Hoff followed with his panel, "Cosplay Studios as a



Source of Rural Revitalization in Japan," which highlighted the importance of cosplay for the success of small businesses in rural Japan and the impact it has on the tourism industry as a whole in rural areas outside of larger Japanese cities. Calle discussed *Dragon Ball Z*'s global impact and how the messaging around struggle, racism, and nationalism connected to traditionally marginalized audiences across the globe as a call to push back against oppressive forces in their presentation "Everybody of the



World...Give Me Your Energy!': How *Dragon Ball Z* Transcends National Borders and Unifies Generations."

Following this panel, University of Florida PhD candidate Lillian Martinez, 1st year MA Cinema Studies student at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, Chenghao Wen, and Peggy Sue Wood discussed death, tradition, and *yôkai* in various shows and throughout history in the panel "Death, Yôkai, and *Demon Slayer*." Martinez discussed funeral rites and the representation of modern Japan's clash against traditional Japanese beliefs and ways of life in their presentation "Growing Pains: *Demon Slayer*'s Memorial to the Past." Martinez asked the audience to think about how *Demon Slayer* "causes us to reflect on a past lost to modernity" through the



visualizations of death and metaphorical rebirth of the main character in the show. Wen discussed the evolution of yōkai in their presentation “The Liminality of Kappa in Japanese Animation: A Century of Myth, History, and Identity”. From history and myth to modern-day audiences in and out of Japan, Wen examined how yōkai, such as kappa, can depict both “good and bad” choices and representations for various audiences today. Peggy Sue Wood closed out the panel by discussing *Natsume’s Book of Friends* in their panel “Making A Place For Yōkai In The Modern World.” Wood discussed how folklore is represented by the various yōkai characters in the show to “honor the past and heal the current day,” pointing to a modern world that allows for a deeper connection to nature, fostered through folklore and early religious cultural beliefs, to continue for audiences today. This was the second JAMS@AX panel to fill the lecture hall to capacity.



In the final panel of the JAMS@AX Academic Symposium, senior research scientist Dr. Roman Gomez, NASA jet propulsion optical engineer Dr. Caleb Baker, and NASA jet propulsion system integration engineer Dr. Kristjan Stone analyzed and critiqued whether physics is represented correctly in various anime shows.

Drs. Gomez, Baker, and Stone utilized various theories and scientific studies, such as Einstein's theory of relativity and ongoing research on space dust's impact on space equipment, to explain how anime does (and doesn't) correctly depict real-world science. Dr. Gomez concluded the panel by imploring fans to continue using anime as a creative way to think through complex scientific questions in our world and allow themselves to engage in new ways of thinking about anime.



Conclusion

On the fourth and final day of Anime Expo, the Editor-in-Chief of JAMS and Coordinator of the JAMS@AX Academic Symposium presented two awards for “Best Academic Panel” and “Best Academic Presentation” at the Closing Ceremonies. These awards, given to Elliot Jones and John Marr for Best Academic Panel and to Roman Gomez, Caleb Baker, and Kristjan Stone for Best Academic Presentation, highlighted the symposium’s commitment to excellence and the high-quality contributions of the participants. Overall, the JAMS@AX Academic Symposium at Anime Expo 2024 successfully fostered a vibrant exchange of ideas, provided valuable insights, and promoted further research in the field of anime and manga studies, underscoring the symposium’s role in advancing the academic study of these mediums.

