



# Impact of Violence in Japanese Anime on the Psychological Development of Chinese Adolescents

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**Abstract.** Since the 21st century, Japanese anime has become widely popular globally, especially among adolescents, including those in China. This study focuses on the violence prevalent in anime and investigates its unique manifestations and attractions to adolescents. Through case studies in three cities in Province A, the research analyzes the complex impact of anime violence on social cognition, emotional characteristics, value formation, and behavioral patterns among adolescents. The study offers new insights into adolescents' psychological adaptation amid global cultural exchanges and pro-vides strategic recommendations to mitigate negative impacts.

**Keywords:** Japanese Anime, Violence, Adolescents, Psychological Development, Impact

## 1 Introduction

In an era of accelerated globalization, the surge in cross-cultural exchanges has spotlighted Japanese anime as a globally favored entertainment, particularly among adolescents. Recognized for its distinctive artistry, intricate storylines, profound themes, and diverse character portrayals, anime hails from Japan as a significant cultural export. However, its widespread portrayal of violence, encompassing physical confrontations, psychological aggression, and familial or societal tensions, has sparked debates about its influence on adolescent psychological development.

Adolescence is a critical phase for psychological and behavioral evolution, shaping individuals' personalities, value systems, and social interactions. Significant evidence underscores the influence of media, including anime, on this developmental stage. Anime's vivid visual appeal and compelling narratives hold substantial sway over youth, with media theories suggesting profound impacts on their psychological growth and behavior patterns<sup>1</sup>. Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that adolescents imitate behaviors observed in media, while Gerbner's Cultivation Theory argues that prolonged media exposure molds their values, particularly as their worldviews are still forming<sup>2</sup>.

Japanese anime attracts a large number of adolescent viewers with its unique storyline, complex characterization and deep cultural and artistic connotations. According to Allison (2006), themes such as heroism and struggle in anime have a positive impact on adolescents' value formation, helping them construct concepts of courage and justice<sup>3</sup>. However, there are also issues such as violence and sexism in Japanese anime, which may have a negative impact on adolescents' gender concepts and behavioral patterns. Therefore, Japanese anime has both positive and potentially negative impacts on adolescents' psychological development and value formation. In China, the widespread popularity of Japanese anime and its significant impact on adolescents' psychological development and value formation has led to a discussion of cultural identity and value assimilation. According to Iwabuchi's (2002) analysis, Japanese anime may have fostered identification with and appreciation of parts of Japanese culture among Chinese adolescents through cross-cultural exchange<sup>4</sup>. According to Fu Y (2019), the popularity of Japanese anime among Chinese adolescents reflects the reshaping of cultural identity in the context of globalization<sup>5</sup>. Li X and Yi J (2011), on the other hand, analyzed the impact of Japanese anime on Chinese adolescents' values from the perspective of cultural soft power<sup>6</sup>. However, most of these studies focus on abstract generalizations, ignoring the influence of specific content such as violent elements.

Existing studies have explored the influence of anime on adolescents' psychological development, but empirical studies addressing the violent and bloody elements are still limited, especially lacking analyses based on the actual situation of Chinese adolescents. This study provides new perspectives and empirical data for understanding the impact of violent elements in anime, as well as important references for parents, educators, and policy makers by examining in-depth the impact of violent elements in Japanese anime on the psychological development of adolescents who are anime fans through a case study of adolescents in three cities in Province A.

## 2 Violence in Japanese Anime

Violence in Japanese anime is prevalent and unique, playing key roles in plot development, conflict intensification, and theme highlighting. Some scholars have classified anime violence into substantive and symbolic types. Substantive violence involves direct physical aggression, while symbolic violence uses exaggerated settings and visuals to represent battles of opposing ideas, emotions, or moral conflicts. This paper analyzes the portrayal of violence in anime through four scenarios: social Darwinism, patricide, cannibalism, and confrontational scenarios.

### 2.1 Social Darwinism Scenario

Social Darwinism in anime is depicted through survival struggles, class conflicts, and power competitions, reflecting the "survival of the fittest" principle. Series like "Attack on Titan," "Darwin's Game," and "Ajin" exemplify this theme, exploring survival rights, human nature, and social exclusion<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.2 Patricide Scenario

The patricide scenario reveals family conflicts and psychological struggles, showcasing physical and psychological violence within families. Works like “Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic” and “Fate/Zero” portray patricide, highlighting the impact of ambitions on familial bonds.

## 2.3 Cannibalism Scenario

Cannibalism in anime represents extreme violence, raising ethical questions about killing and exploring human nature, survival ethics, and moral boundaries. “Tokyo Ghoul” and “Attack on Titan” explore the necessity of cannibalism for survival and its impact on psychology and societal morals<sup>7</sup>

## 2.4 Confrontational Scenario

The confrontational scenario involves conflicts, competitions, and battles between characters to advance the plot and showcase character development. Iconic series like “Dragon Ball,” “Naruto,” and “One Piece” employ this scenario to highlight personal growth, friendship power, and justice triumph.

These scenarios have sparked discussions among anime enthusiasts, particularly in China. By rationalizing violence within survival context and attributing deeper motivations to it, these works encourage viewers to reconsider ethical issues regarding survival and development in modern society<sup>8</sup>.

# 3 Reasons Adolescents Watch Violent Anime

## 3.1 The Desire for Expression and Morbid Curiosity

Adolescents, in their quest for individuality, often use violent anime as a tool to express their uniqueness. The shocking visuals and extreme scenarios in these anime help them stand out from conventional interests.

ZMR: "Watching these anime, I feel I'm delving deeper into that 'taboo' world unknown and misunderstood by others. When I share with my friends, their surprise makes me feel special."

Morbid curiosity, another driving factor, stems from the fascination with the unknown and taboo. Violent anime, often encompassing shocking and taboo elements, satisfy this curiosity and provide a pathway to engage with complex ethical issues.

WX: "Every time I see bloody, violent scenes in anime, I feel a bit scared and resistant, thinking I shouldn't watch. But this feeling makes me even more curious to understand why such content exists and how it is created."

LH: "Sometimes, I watch these anime purely out of curiosity, to see things that wouldn't happen in real life or are hard to come by. Despite being somewhat extreme, they indeed offer me a different understanding of the world."

### 3.2 Environmental Violence and Vengeance Psychology

Adolescents often face pressures and challenges from family, school, and society. Environmental violence and experiences of injustice significantly influence their psychological state and behavioral choices. Violent anime provides a psychological compensatory mechanism for these adolescents. The success and revenge of characters in these anime symbolically fulfill adolescents' desires to fight injustice and gain respect.

MD: "When I see anime characters facing powerful enemies unyieldingly, retaliating with violence and ultimately winning, I feel an indescribable satisfaction and joy. It reminds me that no matter the difficulties and injustices in reality, I can overcome them with effort."

JY: "Watching these anime, like some school dramas, reminds me of the loneliness and pain I've experienced in life. Though I can't rebel as directly and satisfyingly as the characters, these stories make me believe that each of us can fight for our dignity and happiness."

XFQ: "I remember watching an isekai anime with a scene that deeply impressed me. The protagonist, previously treated inhumanely and tortured, gains and creates his power, then cruelly retaliates against his enemies in kind, bringing me immense pleasure. It might sound crazy, but seeing the enemies suffer more than the pain they inflicted brings me a strange satisfaction. At that moment, I could almost feel the protagonist's joy of revenge with a hot iron rod in hand, and the enemy's pained expression seemed to tell me that all injustices and sufferings were being avenged."

### 3.3 Identity Symbols and Self-Identification

Japanese anime has become a significant source of self-identity and a sense of belonging for some adolescents. Through watching anime and participating in related discussions and activities, adolescents gradually build interest groups centered around anime. For those who may feel lonely or misunderstood in real life, such communities become vital sources of psychological security and social belonging.

LYY: "When I felt lonely and misunderstood, anime comforted me. Through online communities, I've met many friends who share my interests. We not only support our favorite anime couples but also attend anime conventions together. It gives me a sense of belonging to my own little world."

WLY: "After joining the anime society, I felt I found my place. Everyone shares the same interests, allowing us to share our feelings and enjoy 'second dimension' games and discuss characters and plots freely. Only with them do I feel understood, which is exactly what I wanted."

## **4 Objective Impacts on Adolescent Psychological Development**

### **4.1 Coexistence of Isolation and Identification**

The psychological impact of violent anime on adolescents reveals a complex dichotomy between isolation and identification within subcultures. Isolation, both internal and social, arises from adolescents' engagement with violent content, leading to feelings of alienation and marginalization due to misunderstandings or criticisms from peers, family, and educators. This can impair social interactions and psychological well-being. Conversely, anime subcultures offer a sense of identity and belonging, providing emotional support and social engagement that helps adolescents withstand mainstream cultural pressures. However, this identification can have drawbacks; excessive immersion in violent anime or emulation of such behavior may normalize violence, leading to a distorted acceptance among youths. Furthermore, deep involvement in these subcultures might cause neglect of real-life social obligations and academic pursuits, potentially deepening the isolation from broader society.

### **4.2 Ethical Reflection and Socialization**

Violent anime, rich in symbolic content, offers adolescents a unique lens to explore and reflect on ethical dilemmas and societal issues like social inequality and power misuse. This engagement fosters a deeper understanding of social norms and ethical values, contributing to the development of their social cognitive framework. However, without contextual interpretation, such violence might negatively impact their socialization, leading to distorted perceptions of conflict resolution and encouraging aggressive behaviors. Frequent exposure could also desensitize them to violence, diminishing empathy and contradicting societal values of non-violence and compassion, highlighting the dual impact of violent anime on adolescent social and ethical development.

### **4.3 Extremism and Impulsivity**

The exaggerated depiction of violence in Japanese anime can evoke strong emotional responses in adolescents, leading to excitement or fear. Over time, this exposure may promote extreme emotional states and impulsivity, impacting psychological health and social behavior. Adolescents might mimic the anime's direct approach to conflict resolution, lacking consideration for consequences. This can impair their decision-making and lead to risky behaviors. Anime often trivializes violence, reducing adolescents' fear of negative outcomes and affecting moral judgment. The search for similar intense emotional experiences in real life might result in dissatisfaction with daily routines and challenges in managing emotions and stress.

## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study on the impact of violence in Japanese anime on the psychological development of Chinese adolescents highlights a complex interplay between media consumption and adolescent growth. It reveals that while anime can serve as a vibrant platform for creative expression and moral reflection, its violent content has nuanced effects on young viewers' psychological health, social behaviors, and ethical development.

Although it has been proven, as in previous studies, that violence in Japanese anime does not cause social problems, it is important to mitigate the effects of violent anime on adolescents from a variety of sources, such as families, schools, social work professionals, regulatory agencies, and the anime industry<sup>9</sup>. (1) Media Literacy Education: Families and schools should work together to enhance media literacy, teaching adolescents to critically analyze and evaluate media content. This includes understanding media messages, recognizing biases, and using media responsibly, thereby reducing the negative effects of violent anime. (2) Professional Support for Anime Fans: Social work and psychological counseling sectors should focus on the anime fan community, particularly those at risk. Interventions should be implemented at community and school levels to offer targeted counseling and support, preventing the misunderstanding of adolescent behaviors as eccentricity. Family education workshops can also improve parental understanding and handling of adolescent psychological concerns. (3) Regulatory Oversight and Content Rating: Regulatory authorities are urged to strengthen oversight of imported anime, creating a detailed content rating system that aligns with China's cultural and legal standards<sup>10</sup>. This system should categorize anime based on content maturity and psychological impact, aiding viewers, especially parents and adolescents, in making informed choices. Such measures not only protect adolescents but also support the anime industry's healthy development by ensuring content suitability.

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