

Digital Image Collection Evaluation of the Japanese Animated Film Classics Collection

URL: <https://animation.filmarchives.jp/en/works>

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Evaluations of Collection's Content

The Japanese Animated Film Classics collection was completed by December 31, 2017 and is affiliated with the National Film Center (NFC) in Tokyo, Japan. This collection seems to have come about after the NFC's exhibition celebrating a pioneer of Japanese Animation, Noburo Ofuji that was held in 2010 (Noburo Ofuji Memorial Museum, 2017). The collection is comprised of 64 animated films that range in date from 1917-1941. Most of the films are black and white & many of them are silent.

The entire collection, including films & documents, falls under Japanese copyright law according to the collections website, with no acceptance to be used out side of personal & educational use. The rights are held by the NFAJ (National Film Archive of Japan). The full site policy can be seen at <https://www.nfaj.go.jp/english/ge/sitepolicy/>.

The site policy states that this collection was created to preserve & promote classic Japanese animation to a larger audience for "discovery of history and enjoyment, and to encourage contributions to creative work." (Site Policy, 2017) It seems like the main audience is the general public & individuals who have a causal interest in Japanese culture or animation. I can see this group including individuals who are fans of current Japanese animation, history enthusiasts, and tourists. Furthermore, the site has a button at the top that will change all written content from Japanese to English which suggests the NFCs interest in having a larger global audience being able to see this collection. Different aspects of the site also refer to this collection being used for research, there for it's safe to assume that researchers interested in early animation, film, or Japanese art may also find this collection useful. Lastly, they have a section within their Q&A that references teachers & educational use, so another likely user is teachers, classes & students from Japan or abroad.

UX Audit

Japaese Animated Film Classics		Standard Met	Could be Improved	Absent	Not Applicable
Content Management Strategy					
<i>Organization Schemes</i> (<i>"Sort By" Options</i>)					
Alphabetical				x	
Chronological	x				
License					x
Topical/Subject		x			
Relevance (to search terms)		x			
Popularity				x	
Other Schemes	x				
<i>Search Refinement Options</i>					
Advanced Search				x	
Content-Based					x
Search Help/Tips		x			
Autocomplete				x	
Related Results				x	
Other Options				x	
<i>Metadata Elements</i>					
Title	x				
Creator	x				
Publisher	x				
Identifier				x	
Description	x				
Categories	x				
Medium	x				
File Format	x				
Keywords/Tags/Subject	x				
Headings/Vocabulary	x				
Image Size	x				
Date	x				
Usage/License	x				x
User Interface Design					
<i>Navigation Components</i>					
Search Field	x				
Breadcrumbs		x			
Pagination	x				
Results Per Page	x				
Categories	x				
Icons		x			
View Toggle				x	
<i>Visual Elements</i>					
Gestalt	x				
Hierarchy		x			
Dominance		x			
Space	x				
Consistency		x			
Services					
<i>Download</i>					
Image Folder				x	x
Download Formats					x
Download Sizes					x
Download Help					x
High Resolution					x
Print Options					x
Order/Buy					x
Copyright Information	x				
<i>Other</i>					
FAQ	x				
Featured	x				
Subscribe				x	
Responsiveness	x				
Feedback Form	x				
More Resources	x				

Reflection

While the website states a few different use cases for the collection, based on its inventory & layout, the main users fall into two categories. A more advanced user would be someone who has a keen interest in animation history, old films, or Japanese art. The collection seems to be set up well for a student or researcher in this category. This user would need access to watch the films, know who the animator was, the techniques used in the films' creation & background/historical context of the films' creation. Alternatively, the collection might be used by a more casual user, such as a teacher working

with elementary though high school students, those students, families, or tourists. This user might be interested in how these films explored new territory for drawing (ie movement through animation), they might want to learn basic facts about how animation works, or what characters or stories are being told in the films so they pick something out to watch that they might enjoy.

Taking on the perspective of a causal user, this collection would be fun to explore. The layout is open & organized well enough. The films are always shown with corresponding photos & titles in both English and Japanese no matter which language you view the site in. While the availability to sort videos based on different criteria is fairly limited (the only true filters are if the films are silent or have sound & via date) there are other finding aids that group the films (namely lists such as type of user: beginner, advanced, kid; playlist of films that are 5 mins long; genera; type of motion; techniques; characters; & expert's choice). On top of these initial groupings once you get into the film individual page, there are more categories that you can click on to find films that are related. For example, the film "Three Fearless Frogs" have labels relating this movie to others through: "War, Propaganda"; "Run & Walk"; "Sleep"; "Rotate & Round"; "Cel" (animation); "Frog"; and "Goblin, Plant, Others."

Searching this collection isn't super intuitive for me (an American) but potentially there could be cultural difference that could account for some of my confusion. The design works very well for browsing, as there are many ways to view the collection & explore from one page to the next. One of the frustrating parts of the UX layout is trying to find a page you were on previously if you aren't well acquainted with the site. There are multiple pages dedicated to exploring the collection in different ways, so if I were a causal user that really liked one of the layouts, it could be frustrating if I wasn't able to find it again.

One way to improve the experience could be to increase the sorting abilities within the collection to include all the "rankings" and "lists" that are currently different finding aid pages. The work has already been done to understand which films fit into which category, it would just be a matter of

streamlining pages into menu options. There is a tradeoff though, by making the collection more easily filterable, it may lose that browsable nature that was described earlier.

An interesting aspect of this collection that might be helpful for a user to understand before they get started is that not all animation is the same as children's cartoons. There are multiple films in this collection that deal with heavier themes or are a bit more experimental in nature.

Overall, the Japanese Animated Film Classics collection had a fairly easy to evaluate UX. There are some "missing" essentials according to Chang, Bliss & Altemus standards, but the collection is small enough that it's not a critical issue. Also, too an extent, it's unfair to hold this collection to the standards put out by Western visual medical specialists considering this is a specialized smaller eastern film collection. For example, the search options criteria alphabetical order is too western centric; these films were named in Japanese using traditional characters (ie Hiragana, Katakana, or Kanji). Furthermore, expecting advanced search options to work well in both Japanese & English seems a bit critical. The fact that the full site, documentation, metadata, extra information on animators and so forth can be fully accessed in two dramatically different languages is incredible. It's quite plausible that this collection UX is laid out in a more traditional Japanese way; with visual standards & clues that just aren't the same as we'd westerns expect.

References

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