

# Assessing The Impact of Japanese Animation on Philippine Pop Culture: A Look at Local Adaptations

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日本アニメがフィリピンポップカルチャーに及ぼす影響評価  
—ローカルアダプテーションを巡って—

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## Abstract

In the last decade, the avid consumption of Japanese animation or *anime* in the Philippines has led observers to contemplate on the issue of the cartoons' popularity and pervasiveness as generating the creation of a Japanese sphere of influence on local popular culture. This paper is a representative of such queries and it seeks to characterize the phenomenon through an assessment of its impact by looking at the Filipino media industries' practices of appropriation and their outcomes. The background of the study is initially presented and followed by a brief review of relevant concepts. Next is an overview of the history of anime's presence in the Philippines-- from its beginnings to its eventual rise to mainstream popularity. This is succeeded by a discussion of how local broadcasting networks and production outfits domesticate it to appeal to the Filipino audience with a stress on how anime's perceived Japaneseness factors in and is dealt with. With anime's potential as a resource for cultural power as given mention to in previous works (most notably McGray, 2002), this paper then highlights the many processes involved in its popularization that may point to or undermine Japanese cultural emanation and consequently, the formation of the said sphere of influence.

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## 1. Introduction

The term anime is now a part of international parlance and while originally a borrowed word from English (or French as some would claim) rendered in Japanese katakana sounds, it now came to mean and embody Japanese animation, mostly due to its surge to global, mainstream popularity in the last twenty years or so. This period is of course not to be mistaken with its debut on the world stage—anime titles were already being exported to the United States in the 50s and the United Kingdom in the 60s and in Japan's neighboring Asian countries, it has already been broadcasted on TV channels since the late 70s. The recent phenomenon which made anime into a household name has prompted, among other things, the research interest of the Western academic world in the 1990s (Craig, 2000: 5-6).

Scholars have discussed anime's rise in popularity in terms of its unique storytelling and aesthetics, and in many ways, taking note of its apparent reverberations in the economic, cultural and even psychological, sociological and political spheres (for example in Napier, 2000: 4-5). Its economic importance as it accounts for Japan's gradual emergence as a force in transnational entertainment business is highlighted and this is necessarily compounded by the added aspect of techno-piracy which grew into sophistication alongside high-speed technological advancement. Also dubbed as Japan's major cultural export, anime is being read as a text of distinctive visual and narrative properties, the offspring of Japanese art traditions and Western animation techniques. This supposed eclectic mix has been singled out invariably as one of the reasons why it has transcended national boundaries. At the same time, anime's obvious difference from American cartoons led some to propose that its popularization serves as a form of resistance in a world seen as US-dominated especially when it comes to pop culture products.

While rather intermittent and somehow belated, it is after all worth taking note that key Japanese government officials expressed their recognition of anime and other pop culture products and the potential tapping of these. These pronouncements gave birth to various committees as well as the creation of plans and proposals. In the past four years, popular anime characters were appointed as Japan's "ambassadors" in many areas: Astroboy or *Atomu* for overseas safety in November 2007, *Doraemon* for popular culture promotion in March 2008 and Hello Kitty for tourism in China and Hong Kong in May 2008. In June of last year, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry or METI established the Creative Industries Promotion Office which aims to promote cultural industries, including animation, under the long term concept of "Cool Japan".

In the Philippines, anime is ubiquitous and now a part of regular programming. While it played quite a limited supporting role to the generous servings of American cartoons two decades ago, it currently is a staple of local mainstream TV fare with

every free TV channel airing anime series. There is also *Hero TV*, a local, all-day anime cable channel which airs the titles dubbed in Tagalog. This presence is not limited to broadcasting but also with regards to merchandize products as attested to by thriving anime specialty shops in urban centers. Anime as a term also has become a by-word among the Filipino youth and could also serve as a description of a person's look and over-all get-up. Clearly, it has earned a niche in youth lifestyles and Filipino popular consciousness.

The Philippines presents a unique case study both empirically and theoretically for cultural research. Its historical background provides a distinctive milieu for expounding on the dynamics of the meeting of different cultural influences. While geographically located in Southeast Asia, its experience of having been colonized for more than three centuries by Spain and having been under American rule for half a century gave it a particular affinity for Western culture. This Western leaning is featured prominently in the choice of foreign television programs acquired and emulated by the local networks until recently, with the wide acceptance of Japan-made cartoons and its adaptation into local versions. For most observers, this represents a departure from the usual Western inclination towards a preference for more Asian or Japanese flavor.

In spite of this phenomenon, however, there are not a lot of studies devoted to the effects and influences of anime on the Filipino society and the Filipinos' engagement with it. This paper hopes to become a contribution in this field and at the same time, provide a Filipino perspective among the international inquiries regarding the impact of anime's traverse into different cultural realms. On the whole, the article's main endeavor is to make sense of the phenomenon by defining if it contributes to Japanese cultural emanation and the construction of a Japanese sphere of influence in Filipino popular culture or point to different processes altogether.

## 2. Brief Review of Relevant Literature: Conceptualizations on Cross-Border Cultural Flows

Anime's influx into the Philippines exemplifies a movement of media products across national and cultural boundaries and thus, the discussion of the phenomenon itself required practical guidance that can be found in conceptualizations on cross-border cultural flows. Mostly devised from researches done before on Japanese popular culture products which includes anime, these three concepts – namely *decentralization of globalization*, *bottom-up globalization* and a re-reading of the *soft power* concept – are instrumental in outlining several elements and factors of the phenomenon that would aid in creating an overall view. This paper is indebted to these notions in the formulation of some of its postulations in the characterization of anime's influence on local popular culture as well as the analysis of the processes that surround anime's

popularization in the Filipino society.

As what was mentioned in the introduction, the influx and popularity of Japanese cultural media products extends throughout the world and is most intense in Japan's neighboring countries in the East Asian region. Japan has emerged as one of the new centers of production in the recent decades and this scenario was elaborated upon by Koichi Iwabuchi's decentralization of globalization. This concept states that cultural globalization or media globalization cannot simply be stated as the one-way flow of Western, mostly American, products to developing countries as what the cultural imperialism theory<sup>2</sup> states. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century saw significant factors such as the advance of information technologies, the rise in affluence of several modernized Asian countries --thus the attractiveness of the Asian market, and the subsequent emergence of global media corporations. These gave rise to the integration, networking and cooperation among worldwide transnational media industries which essentially intensified intra-Asian cultural flows. As a result, new patterns of regional media consumption have surfaced and these stress cultural resonance and symmetry even under globalizing forces. Within this environment, local practices of appropriation and consumption of foreign cultural products and meanings are vitalized. This intricacy and disjunctiveness, according to Iwabuchi, is better expressed by the term *transnational* since actors are not limited to nation-state or to nationally-institutionalized organizations. (Iwabuchi, 2002a: 16-17)

It should be emphasized, however, that this transnationalism operates under the process of globalization and while it does pay attention to local contexts especially with regards to hybridization, it does not also necessarily cancel out nationalizing forces. As the cross-fertilization of cultural forms is smoothed, the same such tendency works to provide a reassertion of cultural power such as that of Japan in Asia. (pp. 16-17) While globalization is decentered, the advantage of transnational cultural power lies in its partnership with the local indigenizing processes. Iwabuchi echoes social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz and cultural anthropologist Richard Wilk in his statement that cultural diversity is thus systematized within globally-shared cultural formats. This underscores the fact that decentralization does not mean the disappearance of dominant centers as only a few powerful nations supply transnational products and "formats" and these include Japan.<sup>3</sup> (pp. 40-44)

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2 Cultural imperialism theory states that the global economic system is dominated by a core of advanced countries while Third World countries remain at the periphery of the system (Tomlinson, 1991: 37) and this is also manifested in the cultural arena. This cultural domination of powerful nations over weaker ones--with the end result most likely being the homogenization of culture-- is viewed as purposeful and intentional because it serves the former's political and economic interests.

3 He also says that awareness of cultural difference is increasingly being exploited by transnational corporations in the marketing of their products.

Following Iwabuchi's construction, the influx and popularization of anime in the Philippines could also then be characterized as an example of *glocalization*. (Robertson, 1991; 1995) Glocalization is the indigenization and appropriation of global formats and this implies that globalization works through localization-- thus the portmanteau combining both words. In this sense, globalizing processes are necessarily interpreted and absorbed differently according to the vantage point and history of particular groups. (Robertson, 1991; 1995) Glocalization captures the intersection between homogenization and heterogenization and some scholars use other terms such as *Sonyism* and *glocalism*. It still has its limitations, however, and as what was mentioned before, with the increased integration, networking and cooperation among transnational cultural industries which includes Western players<sup>4</sup>, transnational cultural power has been dispersed yet reinforced. (Iwabuchi, 2002a: 4) Iwabuchi, as well as scholars such as Straubhaar, Sinclair, Jacke and Cunningham and Lin, postulates that the relative decline of US cultural power has brought about the emergence of regional media cultural centers and in contemporary times, Japan has surfaced as one of these so-called centers in East and Southeast Asia. (p. 47) As what will be elaborated on later, anime's strong presence on Philippine television in contemporary times seems to have replaced what used to be the predominance of American cartoons.

In furthering the discussion of this abovementioned rise of Japan as a cultural center in East Asia, Harumi Befu's concept of bottom-up globalization-- what he terms as *Japanization* or Japan's globalization<sup>5</sup>—can bring additional insights into the spread of Japanese cultural products. His assertion was a reaction to what he calls theories spun out of armchair speculation that emphasizes the top-down approach and that heavily relies on Western-centeredness. Befu deems it necessary to build a globalization theory from the ground up and he comes up with the assumption that the type of globalization that emanates from Japan should be looked at separately from that of other centers such as the United States in order to be able to compare their points of similarity and contrast. Focusing on the global spread of Japanese cultural consumer products, he enumerates the characteristics as well as elements of Japanization which could help set it apart as another aspect of globalization comparable with Westernization and Americanization. (Befu, 2003: 20) These characteristics and ele-

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4 Japanese manufacturers of hardware electronic appliances such as Sony and Matsushita had bought into Hollywood entertainment companies such as Columbia Pictures and MCA Universal in the late 80s and early 90s and one of their purposes is to facilitate the distribution of products. The anime *Pokemon* or "Pocket Monsters" became a worldwide hit because it was distributed in partnership with Warner Brothers.

5 This term is used here according to Befu's definition as the spread of the consumption of Japanese cultural products and or globalization emanating from Japan. It will not be equated with assimilation into the Japanese sphere much as its original usage denotes. It will not also zero in on notions of desire of "turning Japanese" or even Japanophilia.

ments of Japanization represent varied processes and levels of authenticity and creolization<sup>6</sup>..

In his listing of the characteristics and elements of Japanization, Befu first discussed the identification of the cultural similarity between Japan and its neighboring countries as one such factor that enhanced the consumption of Japanese products. While it could be true in the case of Japan's East Asian neighbors such as China and Korea, such explanatory tool fails to elaborate why these products are also popular in Southeast Asia. Other explanations given were that Japan serves as the intermediary between the West and Asia and has been making Western culture palatable to the rest of Asia by indigenizing it<sup>7</sup> or that the similarity is more of recent historical experience rather than civilization-wide factors such as Confucianism. (p. 13) The former statement has a two-pronged implication—on one level, it shows concession to the Western hegemonic position but on another level, it could also demonstrate resistance to excessive Western influence by opting for another, “indigenized” version. (p. 11)

Another element worth taking note of is what Befu calls as indirect Japanization wherein newly established nodes of Japanization themselves serve as secondary centers through which the spread proceeds. He gives the example of the popularity of Japanese cuisine in Netherlands which was the result of influence not from Japan but from the United Kingdom and the United States. (p. 11) Other important factors that ensured success of Japanese products in recipient countries includes the development of manga literacy—the mastery of the visual language of Japanese comics— and image alliance<sup>8</sup> strategies—massive, multimedia campaign coordination between production houses, television networks, advertising agencies among others in launching programs. (pp. 11-12) Strategies such as concept trade<sup>9</sup> and concept transplant<sup>10</sup> work for areas where media technology is not yet well-developed while other elements such as niche marketing and piracy serve to fast track the Japanization process—even if the latter occurs at the loss of Japanese economy. (p. 14) In citing a concrete instance of this, Befu quotes scholar Saya Shirashi in her findings that pirated comics were the forerunner of the inroads of other products of Japanese popular culture in countries such as Indonesia. (p. 14) Befu's observations contribute to a more nuanced approach on how to analyze the spread and popularization of anime in the Philippine society and

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6 The term as used in writings on globalization and postmodernity refers to 'hybridity' and 'syncretism'.

7 For more discussion on this topic, please see works by Koichi Iwabuchi.

8 Ibid, page 12. This is quite similar with the strategies used to launch Pokemon as discussed in Joseph Tobin's *Pikachu's Global Adventure* (Durham and London, 2004) and strategies used by Sony as discussed in Du Gay's *Doing Cultural Studies* (London, 1997).

9 This is the practice of selling program concepts as defined by Befu. Please see also Iwabuchi's works especially *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham and London, 2002).

10 As defined by Befu, this is the process by which the whole comics and cartoons industry is reproduced abroad with inevitable variations.

how to make sense of the many mechanisms involved in it.

While the anime phenomenon is viewed as one manifestation of cultural globalization, another main concern of this study is defining the links between cross-cultural media products, cultural attraction and relationship between countries. In this regard, the concept of soft power can be drawn upon. The term and its definition was penned by Joseph Nye in 1990 and having made its splash in the academic world, is continuously being applied to researches and is also revised by recent studies. This paper utilizes the latest re-reading of the concept as applied to the dissemination of Japanese pop culture products and not the original notion. While this is so, however, it is necessary to look into the initial definition to show the development of the argument into a form applicable to the particularities of the anime phenomenon.

Defined as the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments, soft power is always contrasted with hard power which is identified as military action and or economic sanctions as well as inducements. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideas and beliefs and can come from a lot of sources including policies that provide economic assistance, scholarships, educational and cultural exchanges, sports and other diplomatic strategies. A good image in the international arena as well as perceived attractiveness in terms of political, military and economic terms can also be classified as soft power. Popular culture and media are also regularly identified as other sources. (Nye, 2004: 1-4)

In most of his works dealing with soft power, Nye uses the example of the United States as possessing a lot of soft power resources—one of which is its culture or more specifically, its popular culture. He also points out, however, that the US does not exclusively possess the world's greatest soft power resources in all areas and he names Japan as one of the countries which also wield them. Japan leads in the creation of animation and popular video games around the world and Nye states that it has a greater cultural influence than it did in the 80s. (p. 40, p. 86). In the same vein, he lists Japan's soft power limitations such as its refusal to deal with its past foreign aggression, its neighbors' distrust of it because of historical experiences, the limitation of the Japanese language, the English skills of the Japanese people and its culture's inward-looking nature. (pp. 86-88)

The concept has been criticized for its inherent vagueness as well as for being state-centric, US-centric and unilateral. Criticisms regarding soft power that comes from popular culture stem from the purported oversimplification of the link between cultural attraction and political influence. David Leheny proposes that soft power has become a way for Japan to cope with national decline—or in Nye's terms, basically diminished hard power resources-- as what it had been with the US. (2006: 211-212) It's political weight is debatable and while improving soft power through cultural

promotion has gained importance among Japanese policymakers in recent times, it is more of seizing opportunities—chances of embracing social change, putting it to national use and supporting existing priorities (p.225-226). Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin argues that the impact of the Japanese popular culture lies in shaping the region's cultural markets and in disseminating new images of Japan but not in exerting local influence or in creating Japanese-dominated “spheres of influence”. (2007: 73) Along with export data and market surveys, he interviewed media industry personnel and consumers of five East Asian cities and found out that attraction to Japanese products and the appreciation of Japan that results from it are devoid of nationalistic character. (p.96) Moreover, many scholars point out that the enthusiastic diffusion and avid consumption of anime and manga owes more to market forces and consumer tastes than the acts of the Japanese government. (see for example, Peng Er Lam, 2007)

In a recent book, *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States* (2008), Nye updated soft power's definition and scope in his foreword and clarified some of his earlier postulations. He states that soft power is not restricted to states or international relations and can be applied to a much wider range of actors and contexts. He also emphasizes that while soft power has an agent-focused definition, subjects matter as much as agents because attraction is co-determined and that it is important not to confuse the resources that may produce behavior with the behavior itself. Researches presented in the book demonstrate a reworking of the concept which has widened its scope for application to empirical studies—one of which is Anne Allison's take on the power of the J-wave or Japanese Wave towards the American youth.

In trying to make sense of the so-called Japanese wave or J-wave in the United States and how to measure this in terms of soft power, Anne Allison says that this Japanese influence on the global imagination is nothing new and that Japanese imports have already made an impression on US pop culture throughout the postwar period. The 1990s, however, show an obvious shift to the greater mainstreaming of such products and the way in which Japan or “Japaneseness” gets encoded in the imagination of US kids. She mentions that starting in 2004, the reluctance to credit the Japanese roots of programs such as the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*<sup>11</sup> started to fade and in fact, the marks that identify these programs as Japanese did not have to be taken out because they are considered cool. (Allison, 2008: 100-101)

In the 60s until the 80s, only a handful of US youth studied Japanese and it was only to be able to work within Japan's bubble economy. At present, a lot of young

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11 The US version was based on the 16<sup>th</sup> installment of the Japanese super *sentai* program, *Kyouryuu Sentai Zyuranger*. Sentai series are Japanese live action programs which usually feature a task force of color-coded, armor-suited members defending the world against invading monsters and aliens.



Americans are enrolling in Japanese language classes in universities and high schools and they are driven by their enthusiasm for anime and manga. Their image of Japan is positive and they expressed desires to visit Japan, learn the language and culture. The popularity of Japanese goods is generating an attraction of some kind to Japan. (p. 101) Nevertheless, there seems to be no association between pop cultural trend and “real” geopolitical influence by Japan in the US and the rest of the world. Pop culture by itself does not equate with soft power because, referring to what Nye states, the latter rests primarily on three resources: a country’s culture, political values and foreign policy. The globalization of J-pop culture does not result in Japanese soft power because it fails to become anchored in something in the culture or country itself- such as social policies and practices that could fuel a yearning or attraction for the so-called real Japan. (p. 102-105)

Allison also observes that the form that power takes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—ideas, images, information and trend-making—is becoming decentered away from any single space including the US.<sup>12</sup> As an example, the American kids embracing the J-wave shows their willingness to go beyond the cultural orbit of “Americanness” and the hegemony of the global imagination it once held. The new models of global imagination that the J-wave offers are attractive but remains in that level. In this sense, the application of soft power needs to be expanded as the lines of power seen operating are as much post-national and transnational as national and the cartographies of place has become virtual, constructed and phantasmic.(p. 107-109)

The concepts expounded on above provide a good starting point in assessing the anime’s impact on Philippine popular culture and in elaborating on the dynamics of cultural globalization. In addition, these notions stress the need for going beyond superficial readings of the J-pop phenomenon and suggest a thorough redefining of the frames with which to examine it with. Along this line, the study would like to endeavor to enrich the field not only by exploring and taking cues from these precedents in its discussion of the Philippine case but also by sharing another perspective with its own unique circumstances.

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<sup>12</sup> This is quite similar to what Iwabuchi stated in his work.

### 3. Anime's Presence in the Philippines: From Its Beginnings to Becoming A Mainstream Fare



Fig. 1: Voltes V poster

Note: The above anime series is arguably the most influential anime TV series in Philippine history.

Source: [www.animenewsnetwork.com](http://www.animenewsnetwork.com)

The introduction of anime to the Philippines did start with a bang—a ban to be specific. Most Filipinos who have been around during that time still remember how former President Ferdinand Marcos prohibited showing of the first few anime series in the late 70s. One of the major local channels, GMA Channel 7, had begun showing several robot series-- “*Voltes V*” or *Chōdenji Mashin Voltes*<sup>13</sup>, “*Gigantor*” or *Tetsujin 28*, *Mazinger Z*, “*UFO Robot Grendizer*” and *Daimos* in the children’s late weekday afternoon slot. Christened “mecha”-- from the word mechanical in allusion to the giant robots piloted by young heroes in it, the series proved fresh and novel, creating quite a craze among kids. Supposedly, parents’ complaints about its extreme violence served as a basis for the prohibition in 1979.<sup>14</sup> This incident earned a measure of notoriety for both Marcos and anime itself whereas Voltes V, while not world-renowned as

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13 The anime titles are presented as follows: titles as released in the Philippines are with quotation marks and in italics and original Japanese titles are in italics.

14 There are other persistent allegations concerning the circumstances surrounding the ban. One of these is that Marcos was threatened at how receptive people were of Voltes V-- a part of which tells the story of rebels fighting for their liberation against a dictator-- and that having had declared martial law, he did not want the Filipinos to get inspiration from it. Another version of the story tells that Marcos proclaimed the ban because GMA 7 was beating two other government-run TV networks in the ratings game.

Mazinger Z, unwittingly finds itself a place in Philippine history.

While the ban paved the way for family-oriented anime series such as *“Ron-ron the Flower Angel”* and *“Candy Candy”* in the early 80s, it resulted in the common view that most anime were about robots and were violent, effectively rendering the wholesome new batches of anime to come off as “un-anime”. The eventual lifting of the prohibition brought back the old giant robot series and channels like RPN Channel 9 filled their time slots with them. At that time, most of the TV networks got by with a roster of imported programs and only a smattering of locally-produced ones for cost-effectiveness. Programs that gained some popularity were *“Astroboy”* or *Tetsuwan Atomu*, aired every Saturday mornings, and the *“Robotech”* series.

Another type of Japanese TV program called *sentai* series also made it into local programming, providing children’s entertainment during late weekend afternoons. This superhero genre featured either lone protagonists who can magically transform into armored warriors or color-coded fighting squadrons who work together to steer a gigantic robot, both kinds waging war against monsters from outer space out to wreak havoc on Earth. While in live-action form and a product of the Japanese tradition of *tokusatsu* or special effects genre that gave the world Godzilla, it shared some similarities with the mecha series and thus renewing interest in the latter. Notable *sentai* series include *“Shaider”* or *“Uchuu Keiji Shaidaa”*, *“Maskman”* or *“Hikari Sentai Masukuman”* and *“Bioman”* or *“Choudenshi Bioman”*.

Most of the anime titles during this time were shown in English and not surprisingly, a number were acquired from the United States such as Astroboy.<sup>15</sup> This alternate route suggest that without the procurement of most American production companies of certain anime titles, their arrival in the Philippines would have been more limited and or more delayed.<sup>16</sup> As a consequence, most of the titles have already been reworked to suit the US market which basically places animation in the category of children’s entertainment. In addition to editing the programs to make them child-friendly, certain Japanese cultural references were also toned down or erased completely. Most of the Filipinos watching these were thus understandably unaware that some of the wholesome cartoons were in fact Japanese. On the other hand, however, these anime titles were only a handful compared to the predominant American cartoons.

Around the same period, the new trend of distribution was to release the anime directly to video and these direct-to-video releases were called Original Animated Video or OAV or Original Video Animation or OVA interchangeably. As it was

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15 This explains why most of the earlier anime shown in the Philippines adapted the American titles and some were already dubbed in English.

16 From my correspondence with Pablo Bairan, one of the pioneering leaders of Filipino anime interest groups.

cheaper to obtain these OAVs' license rights for broadcast compared to the regular, full-length TV series, the OAV anime provided one explanation as to why anime has flooded the US market in the first place. Some of these OAVs were re-edited into series and were shown in the Philippines on TV but the OAVs themselves—mostly coming in from the US—were not readily available locally in video form. Portable video entertainment was restricted to the middle and upper classes who could afford to buy the video playing appliances, buy and or rent the betamax tapes.

On another level that is not totally unrelated, Japanese animation companies decided to outsource cheap animation production labor to Asia. The beginnings of what is now Toei Animation Philippines Incorporated was established in November 1986 and Filipino animation studios also started filling in the roles of subcontractors for some Japanese productions. Some of the anime shown on Philippine television were actually done in part by Filipino animators. While the involvement of Filipino animators in the production did not necessarily and directly had an effect on the reception and consumption of the media itself, the voluminous results from the new set-up guaranteed the steady supply of cheap anime titles to Japan and of course, the rest of the cartoon-consuming world.

The dawn of the 90s saw the number of anime titles increase and concentrated around the children's weekday and weekend morning time slots. ABS CBN Channel 2 aired tearjerkers "*Cedie, Ang Munting Prinsipe*" or *Shōkōshi Cedie* and "*Sarah, ang Munting Prinsesa*" or "*Shokojo Purinsesu Se-ra*". These titles were so popular that they were made into Filipino movies during the mid-90s by ABS' film outfit, Star Cinema. Offerings also started to diversify—internationally famous series such as *Dragonball* and *Sailormoon*, anime versions of well-known story franchises such as *Peter Pan* and the "*Von Trapp Family Singers*" or "*Turappu Ikka Monogatari*" (more popularly known locally as the story of classic movie "*Sound of Music*"), and even anime based on the Bible—"*Super Book*" or *Oyako Gekijo* from the Old Testament and "*Flying House*" or *Tondera House no Daiboken* from the New Testament made it to Philippine TV. It is noteworthy that at this period, more and more titles were being dubbed in Tagalog. Anime programs were still comparatively scattered, however, when the whole TV scene was taken into view. It is also a bit doubtful at this stage if most of the Filipino audience had absolute awareness about the Japanese origins of most of these titles.

This diversification in stories and themes undoubtedly started attracting teenagers and even the adult viewers. Even if they were mainly clustered around children's time slots, some of the new series achieved certain cult status such as high school basketball drama *Slam Dunk*. Not only because of basketball being the most popular sport in the country, the plot involving an ordinary kid who wished to impress his crush by attempting to become his high school team's star player drew the young adults into

watching the episodes religiously. Another cult hit, magical comedy *Ranma 1/2*, caught attention with its blend of complicated love triangles and humor although it was heavily edited with scenes of nudity cut and sexual innuendos tamed. The mere variety of anime extended the viewer and fan base and by the end of the decade, a strong subculture revolving around anime already existed.

Towards the last couple of years of the 90s, TV networks got hold of more titles from a wider variety of genres while re-dubbing most of the earlier, popular ones in Tagalog and re-airing them. Two titles stand out from this new crop in terms of generating crazes in the area of toy merchandise: “*Let’s & Go*” or *Bakusō Kyōdai Let’s & Go* and *Pokemon*. The former created enthusiasm for small racing cars created by toy company Tamiya and spawned specialty shops, racing competitions and collectibles convention and the latter made waves locally just as it did previously in other places—sparking frenzies on trading cards, stuffed toys and video games. But even with the widening viewer base and the number of genres, anime programs were still primarily targeted towards children. TV channels were able to acquire well-known ones from Japan but tried their utmost to fit it into that mold. The bleak apocalyptic series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, already having its adequate share of controversy in its homeland, was broadcasted in a very watered-down, almost child-friendly version.<sup>17</sup>

Nostalgic clamor and a series that was marketed not unlike any other live action drama captured viewers in 1999. A hit comedy gag show used Voltes V’s opening theme song in one of its segments, stirring the adult audience’s childhood memories. Due to the consequent public demand, Voltes V was re-aired and garnered high ratings. The other series that made it big was “*Ghostfighter*”, originally titled *Yu Yu Hakusho*, which broke through the generation gap, gluing both kids and adults to the TV screen. Shown years before in English, it was re-dubbed in Tagalog albeit with English names retained and with promotions heavily emphasizing the dramatic elements of the action-adventure story—focusing on the character, Eugene’s (*Yusuke* in Japanese) relationship with Jenny (*Keiko* in Japanese) and using the popular Irish boy band Boyzone’s song “Baby Can I Hold You Tonight”<sup>18</sup> in promotional ads. It proved to be a smashing success in the ratings game and rival networks cashed in with similar offerings.

Most anime titles that came during this time found themselves on primetime and pitted against each other due to network rivalry. Programs with similar themes such

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17 In the wake of the 1995 Tokyo sarin gas attack, members of the cult Aum Shinri Kyo were portrayed by media as obsessive fans of Evangelion—an example of the moral panic described by Sharon Kinsella in her book *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (2000) and the version showed in the Philippines was heavily edited.

18 The song was a cover of a Tracy Chapman original and was a very popular ditty at that time.

as *Pokemon* and “*Digimon Adventures*” or *Dejitaru Monsutaa* were placed on the same time slots by their respective channels. GMA capitalized a lot on the trend and filled its weekday early primetime spots with anime. Replays of earlier favorites also took place and anime movies instead of live-action feature films sometimes were shown as late weekend night specials. GMA also took a step further by launching *WeAreAnime.com* in the early part of 2000 and the website went on to become one of the largest Filipino online communities as the year came to a close. The regular activities of the group became the springboard for the first major anime-related event. Not to be outdone, local groups composed of aficionados from the underground anime subculture and university clubs began to also organize themselves. These groups held gatherings, showings and events which are oftentimes open to non-members. To give the growing number of enthusiasts their merchandize fix, anime specialty stores sprung like mushrooms and pioneers such as *Comic Alley* came out of their nearly black market confines to lease conventional spaces in shopping malls.

With the triggers set firmly in place, it was just a matter of time before the so-called “anime explosion”<sup>19</sup>-- when anime reached the masses who comprise the largest market segment in the country-- in the year 2000. In addition to the contributing factors enumerated beforehand such as the network wars and bandwagoning among the channels, the dubbing of series in Tagalog, the sheer number of genres, the increase of anime interest groups and shops, several other key antecedents emerged. Cable networks such as AXN started showing anime thereby increasing the alternatives and the democratization of internet use guaranteed that information not only about anime but activities related to it are disseminated. The first major anime convention, aptly utilizing “Anime Explosion” for its name, was held for three days in November, drawing more than 10,000 people to its array of games, animation lecture demonstrations and cosplay. After the event, the boom was inevitable-- anime communities were founded one after the other, conventions became regular occurrences, anime-inspired Filipino comic book *Culture Crash* and anime magazine *Questor* were published, widely-circulated local comics such as *Funny Komiks* began adapting the manga-style of drawing, youths becoming interested in Japanese pop and rock music, and imitating Japanese hairstyles and donning Japanese street fashion.

Dubbing anime in Tagalog surely did some wonders with its popularity but the drama series-like qualities of *Voltes V*, *Dragonball*, *Ghostfighter* and *Slam Dunk* also did its part. In general, Filipino audience love melodramatic, prolonged plotlines and in the same vein, Latin American *telenovelas* and homemade drama series called

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<sup>19</sup> This was the term used by news reporters covering the story and it was chosen as the name for the first major anime convention in the Philippines.

*teleseryes* usually are well received. Anime proved to be yet another source of unending, human interest sagas for viewers. The four series mentioned also represent a sure-hit formula among Filipinos: an underdog protagonist faces life's struggles with strong determination and is assisted by friends along the way, managing to stay optimistic and cheerful most of the time. Not only can the audience relate to such tales but they also see values similar to their own such as cheerfulness, cooperation, friendship and camaraderie. On a rather separate level of explanation, the Philippines does not regularly make its own cartoon series and the few attempts at producing such have been mostly short-lived and disastrous.<sup>20</sup> Anime's sheer variety of genres assured that not only members of the target audience can find something to suit their tastes. The relatively cheaper cost also fit the bill for most of the networks.



Fig. 2: Filipino youth cosplay

Note: The picture shows Filipino youngsters engaged in anime cosplay which is a regular event in Metro Manila.

Source: author's own picture

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<sup>20</sup> From an interview with award-winning Filipino animator, Ms. Grace Dimaranan, as she expounded on the state of Filipino animation and discussed some of the first few Filipino animation projects.

The anime fever extended well up to the year 2002. Commonplace was how the programs were branded “the no. 1 from Japan” or tagged as “the most popular in Japan” as a promotional strategy by most networks. Elements of Japaneseness in the series were mostly left to their own-- original names and cultural references were retained and opening and ending credits, which employed Japanese songs and are of course peppered with Japanese characters, were left running in their entirety, a practice that was hardly ever done before. From 2003 to early 2004, however, there was a noticeable decline in anime interest. Competition from dramas originating from Taiwan and Korea, saturation of the market, the rise of low-cost, high-speed internet and the increase of technological piracy are often cited as the culprits. Some takes on this matter are more compatible to the author’s views that what transpired was not an actual decline but more the tail end of the mainstreaming process-- anime’s popularity has already reached its peak and is just maintaining its steady phase as a typical part of the TV culture.

The opening of two all-day anime channels, Animax and Hero TV, in the years 2004 and 2005 reignited the lukewarm anime scene. Animax broadcasts region-wide from Singapore while Hero TV is a subsidiary of ABS CBN. New titles are still being acquired and in recent years, “*Naruto*”, “*Bleach*” and “*One Piece*” have been winning Filipino audience over. Old and established anime such as *Voltes V* and *Ghostfighter* are still being re-run and anime continue to inspire local productions in terms of subject and treatment. Currently, anime still holds its grip as the foremost category of



Fig. 3 : Hero TV's Launch

Note: The above event dubbed as “*Hataw Hanep Hero*” ( “Groove Cool Hero” in English) was held at the Philippine Trade Training Center, Pasay City in November 2005 and was well-attended.

Source: author's own picture



cartoons being broadcasted on Philippine TV as it had been since 2000. It had come a long way from the weird-looking, robot-inhabited cartoon that once bore the brunt of a presidential ban and now, occupies the Filipino TV realm of the mundane.

#### 4. Adapting Anime for the Filipino Audience

Illustrating anime's impact on Filipino popular culture necessitates a discussion of how it is adapted by local media industries in order to appeal to and be accepted by the audience at large. Philippine television has always had a polymorphous nature best epitomized by the iconic *jeepney*—a Filipino public transport vehicle fashioned to resemble the US military jeep but adjusted in order to have room for fourteen to twenty-two passengers and distinguishable by its decorations that flaunt a mix of art forms and cultural trends. Along with other forms of popular foreign programming, the introduction of anime to this jeepney-like milieu has contributed to the creativity of program development. Adaptations for Philippine TV are of two types: *minimal adaptation and format re-versioning*. The first one depicts the process by which the narratives of foreign programs are minimally altered such as when they are dubbed into the local language or are minimally transformed by the addition of a few local features such as a local host. The second and more important in the sense of the generation of new content is the format re-versioning where a local version is made out of the foreign program, whether licensed or cloned. (Santos, 2004: pp. 157-158)

Adaptation is where the main concern of anime as a form of foreign media originating from Japan is addressed. The two levels of adaptation mentioned earlier will be dealt with to arrive at a clearer view of how anime's Japanese origins and perceived Japaneseness figure in the end result. These methods are located at points where decisions of erasing, masking or retaining Japanese elements and or if such action mattered at all, lie. As with other examples of foreign programs, anime titles have been subjected to: at the first level, minimal adaptation for public airing which includes translation, dubbing, cutting and editing of both visual and audio tracks and the second, format re-versioning which involves the whole scale production of a local version. In both levels, promotional strategies play an important role as finishing touches and the author would insist that they are part of the adaptation process itself.

In order to be suitable for public viewing, the task of treating anime for minimal adjustments is handled either by the TV networks directly or by suppliers such as Telesuccess Productions<sup>21</sup> who act as middle men in the acquisition of the titles from Japanese production companies. The translation of anime is a necessity as most

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<sup>21</sup> Telesuccess Productions was one of the first Filipino suppliers involved in procuring anime titles for Philippine TV and in fact, was responsible for the acquisition of *Voltes V* and other mecha series that made it big in the Philippines.

Filipinos do not understand Japanese although the other steps such as dubbing, cutting and editing are comparatively open areas for creative and strategic decision-making. General practices of treating anime vary in four different periods as can be discerned in the brief summary of anime's presence in the Philippines above. The first period was from the late 70s to early 90s where anime was mostly dubbed in English and names were changed to familiar English names. Several factors could account for this—the networks not having enough resources and or capabilities to treat the material, the reliance on US backdoor for easier acquisition and camouflaging of the Japanese elements in the cartoons. This treatment which is almost tantamount to disguising could be a reaction to the ban and or a desire to render them similar with the more dominant, well-accepted US cartoons. On another level, ownership of television sets especially in the earlier part of this period mostly thrived in the upper and middle classes which relatively put a premium on the use of English. The patterns thus show material expediency, a preference for Western or American influences and language divide among the classes.

There were detectable changes in the mid-90s until the late 90s which comprise the second period. Dubbing in Tagalog began gaining currency although some were still being shown in English and English names were still in use. Especially in the earlier part of this period and with regards to the wholesome series, it was still uncertain whether they stand out as Japanese as most signs of Japaneseness were generally excluded or were not given importance to. The lyrics of the original theme songs were either translated and sang in English or Tagalog and or completely cut out. Opening and ending credits also suffered the same treatment. Some examples such as in the case of *Ghostfighter*, a song popular locally is used for promotion and minor parts of the whole story which are deemed appealing to the audience such as romantic relationships are emphasized. Overall, there is a trend of reaching out to a wider viewer base—the potential of which was made possible by a certain degree of democratization of technology and thus the spread of television ownership among the different classes— through language although the disguising of Japanese elements was still largely at work.

From 2000 until 2002, anime are mostly dubbed in Tagalog although Japanese names are retained except for obscene or ridiculous-sounding ones in the local languages. This dubbing of the cartoons in the lingua franca was a response of the TV networks especially ABS CBN to the market changes that occurred beginning in the 1990s. The change in the class composition of Philippine TV audience in favor of the lower-income social groups has resulted in a change in the preferences for cartoons according to language. (Santos, 2004: 164) Right after anime's explosion into the primetime, networks hurried to acquire the most popular titles from Japan and even

consulted with anime interest groups on which titles would most likely turn out to be hits.<sup>22</sup> There were lesser attempts to mask the Japanese original-- except of course for instances of sex and violence that are not permitted under local regulations -- and in fact, Japanese elements were oftentimes used as tools for promotion. Heavily butchered before, the opening and ending credits were now hardly ever touched, almost as a service to eager fans.

Following the relative decline of anime fever from 2003 up until the present, Tagalog dubbing became a standard component and Japanese names and elements are still left intact although they are not essentially emphasized and or singled out for promotional purposes. For sure, the audience are still aware of anime's Japanese origins but the significance of the difference of anime as Japanese cartoons and other cartoons has somewhat lost its intrinsic value except perhaps for hardcore aficionados. As what was mentioned earlier, it is not entirely because of a total waning of its popularity but rather, that its peak has subsided and its novelty has run out its course--thus becoming a regular part of the local mainstream. This also demonstrates a certain level of accustoming to anime for most of the Filipino audience.

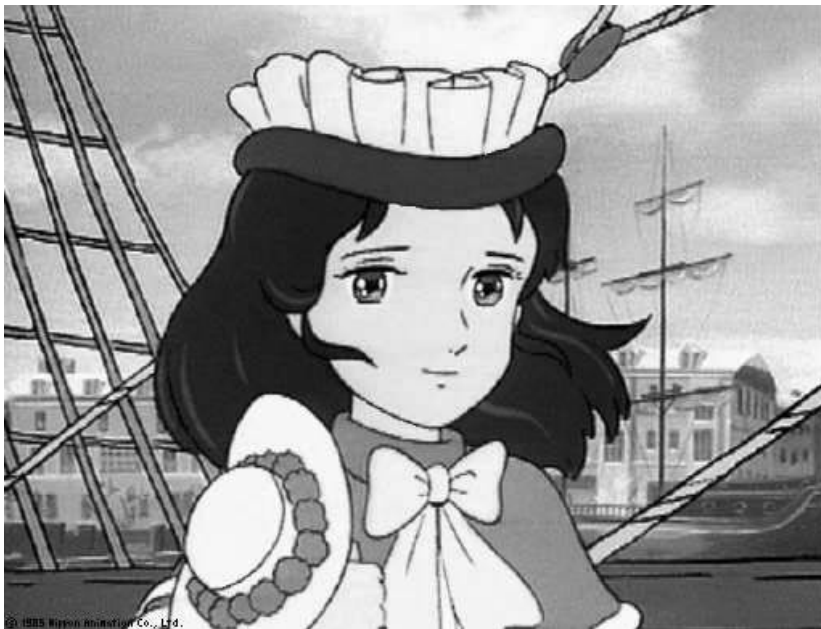


Fig. 4: The anime *Shokojo Purinsesu Se-ra* ( "Little Princess Sara" in English)

Note: A scene from the anime which was produced by Nippon Animation in 1985 and released as *Princess Sarah* in the Philippines.

Source: [www.animenewsnetwork.com](http://www.animenewsnetwork.com).

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22 From interviews with network executives of GMA Channel 7 and Hero TV on their anime promotion strategies.



Fig. 5: The Filipino movie *Sarah, Ang Munting Prinsesa* ("Sarah, The Little Princess" in English)  
Note: A scene from the movie which was based on the anime series *Princess Sarah* (see Fig. 4) and produced by Star Cinema in 1995.  
Source: [www.abs-cbn.com](http://www.abs-cbn.com)



Fig. 6 : The anime series *Shokoshi Sedi* ("Little Prince Cedie" in English)  
Note: A scene from the anime which was as "Cedie" in the Philippines and was produced by Nippon Animation in 1988.  
Source: [www.animenewsnetwork.com](http://www.animenewsnetwork.com)



Fig. 7 : The Filipino movie *Cedie*

Note: This was a scene from the movie based on the anime of the same name (see Fig. 6) and also produced by Star Cinema.

Source: [www.starcinema.com.ph](http://www.starcinema.com.ph)

Direct Filipino adaptation of anime titles presents another level of local adaptation that demonstrates a re-versioning of the original format. Compared to the previous method, it obviously involves more production input—resources and efforts that could spell how the end result vary from the original. To begin with, the Filipino examples are in live-action form and could be a consequence of the Philippines not having regular mainstream animation as mentioned previously<sup>23</sup>. However, the mere fact that the anime titles were adapted for local production demonstrate a certain level of acceptance for the series themselves as the examples given here are based on anime that made it big on Philippine television. So far, there are four Filipino adaptations that directly credit their anime predecessor: “Sarah ang Munting Prinsesa” (“Sarah, The Little Princess” in English, 1995)<sup>24</sup> and “Cedie” (1996), both feature films, and “Princess Sarah” (2007) and “Lupin” (2007), both TV series. These adaptations were chosen for discussion precisely because they reference their source but this is not to say that they are the only examples of Filipino programs inspired by anime. Some examples of local TV shows evidently illustrate unreferenced borrowing or copying from anime and are classified by most media experts as “clones”.<sup>25</sup> However, the question of whether some

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<sup>23</sup> I believe that the question whether Filipinos would actually adapt anime in animation if there is a presence of regular mainstream local animation warrants a separate discussion.

<sup>24</sup> The title with quotation mark is the release title with the appropriate English translation within the parenthesis.

<sup>25</sup> The cloning of anime done by local production falls outside the scope of this paper but deserves another discussion in the future.

TV programs are cloned or just simply indigenized is considered a complicated one since there is lack of definite and clear-cut criteria for judging. (Santos, 2004: 166-167)

The Sarah and Cedie movies were produced during the mid-90s by Star Cinema, a film production company which is a subsidiary of ABS CBN Channel 2 where the two anime series were shown. The latter was based on *Shokojo Purinsesu Seira* (1985) and the former on *Shokoshi Sedi* (1988), both produced by Nippon Animation and in turn based from the stories *A Little Princess* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, respectively, by English children's writer Frances Hodgson Burnett. The movies were made directly as a result of the cartoons' being runaway hits and their plots were faithful to the anime with only minor changes in details. Sarah was shot partly in Scotland and Cedie retained the songs from the anime versions although with Tagalog lyrics. The elements that were preserved from the anime—the names, costumes, props and locations—were all notably Western.

During this period in relation to anime's history, the Filipino audience were not so aware that the wholesome, family-oriented cartoons were of Japanese origins and most of these cartoons derived their plots from Western stories (other examples would include, as mentioned before, Peter Pan, Von Trapp Family Singers and "*Heidi*" or "*Arupusu no Shojo Haiji*") --some of which were already well-known in the Philippines, some of which were not. It is not too far out to say that the Sarah and Cedie stories' Western features somewhat facilitated their acceptance as the audience was more familiar with this set of conventions. It can be said therefore that it was not the series' being anime, or of being from Japan, that made the adaptations attractive but rather the appeal of the story and the Western vestiges. It is also important to take note that these stories from Burnett were adapted numerous times—including a Hollywood movie version with child star Shirley Temple starring as Sara in 1939 -- and spanning across countries and generations. This brings to light two things: it underlines prevailing preferences for Western influences and it puts to question just how much Japanese influence there is.

The TV series Princess Sarah and Lupin were made on the same year by rival networks ABS CBN Channel 2 and GMA Channel 7. The former was based on the anime version but while it basically followed the storyline of the anime, it took a lot of liberties in its treatment of the genre and original characters. It was presented as a dramatic musical-fantasy—introducing new characters and a number of magical, talking animals. Subplots and twists reminiscent of Filipino *teleseryes* were also interwoven into the plot such as Sara's boarding school classmate and child antagonist, Lavinia, turning out to be the secret illegitimate daughter of the boarding school's headmistress and adult antagonist, Miss Minchin. In this adaptation too, Miss Minchin's character was made humorous and also did not come off as the main villain,



Fig. 8 : Child actress Sharlene San Pedro

Note: The actress played the title role of Sarah in the TV series *Princess Sarah*, the latest remake of the anime *Princess Sarah* (see Fig. 4) by ABS CBN Channel 2.

Source: [www.abs-cbn.com](http://www.abs-cbn.com)

a distinction that was given to a relatively minor character from the previous version, Mr. Burrows.

Lupin, on the other hand, was loosely based on the anime *Rupan Sansei* (“Lupin the Third” in English) which was in turned loosely based on the novel, *Arsene Lupin, gentleman-cambrioleur* (“The Extraordinary Adventures of Arsene Lupin, Gentleman-Burglar” in English) by French writer Maurice Leblanc. Except for the main character’s name, occupation and some elements that were borrowed from the anime such as some of the characters’ choice of weaponry, it was an action-adventure drama Filipino-style. Deviating completely from the anime, the story revolved around Lupin’s quest of avenging the killing of his bride, Angelie, whose love convinced him to abandon his life of thievery at the beginning of the series—thus making her a target of Lupin’s father, Duroy, who had trained him in the art of stealing from a young age and did not like the idea of losing his greatest pupil.



Fig. 9 : The anime series *Rupan Sansei* or *Lupin the Third*.

Note: A DVD cover of the said anime.

Source: [www.animenewsnetwork.com](http://www.animenewsnetwork.com)

During this period, anime is already mainstream and in fact, while still popular, the apex of its popularity has already passed. While both series were made building on the anime titles' reputations and in the case of *Princess Sarah*, also its Filipino movie predecessor, their style and substance strayed from the anime version in more ways than one. With its handling of the material, *Princess Sarah* appeared more evocative of Disney productions and the song-and-dance routines were familiar devices used in Filipino movies. For its part, *Lupin* slightly came off as a homage to James Bond with a bevy of beauties by the main character's side and a theme song that was arranged to sound like Tom Jones' "Thunderball", song to the Bond movie of the same name. On the whole, the finished products turned out more like Filipino teleseryes and the Japanese influence, if any, is just nominal or mere association with the anime.





Fig. 10 : The Philippine adaptation of *Lupin*

Note: The cast of the TV series adaptation which was produced by GMA Channel 7 in 2007.

Source: [www.igma.tv](http://www.igma.tv)

On one hand, the examples demonstrate the development of Filipino adaptation of foreign materials even when taking into account the differences between animation, the film and the TV series format. While still opting for foreign inspirations, local adaptation capabilities are evidently maturing and the tendency to indigenize is more apparent. There is no denying that the productions were undoubtedly spurred by the respective anime series' popularity but there is almost no trace of Japanese elements in the productions. Plainly, what are clearly being imported here are the story templates and the basic elements of the story. The stories mentioned have universal appeal— the riches to rags, rags to riches storylines of both Sarah and Cedie and the action adventures of a Robin Hood-ish character like Lupin resonate with, and not only with, the Filipino audience. The adaptations mentioned are classified under the soap opera or drama and action-adventure genres which are arguably the most transferrable across cultures (Bielby and Harrington, 2008: 66-69) To reiterate, of course, the stories themselves did not even originate in Japan and were also adapted only as anime. If any, the Japanese productions introduced malleable storylines which lent themselves nicely to commercial interests and the popularity of anime becomes a mere selling point.

Grounded on the above assessment of these two levels of adaptation by the Philippine media, anime's Japanese origins and perceived Japaneseness seem to have

an uneven clout and have less to do with its attractiveness except for that brief period from 2000 to 2002 when it enjoyed an ostensibly relentless boom. There is no denying that Japanese elements are introduced and there is a measure of Japanese cultural emanation occurring but this is rather superficial. More than its national origins and the many cultural references that it brings with it, what is being underlined is anime as an art and media form that serves as a vehicle for fascinating stories, unforgettable characters, a whole new way of visual representation and dramatic storytelling which provides one explanation for its broad acceptance. The equation of the popularity and pervasiveness of anime in the Philippines to the amplification of Japanese cultural emanation and accordingly, a creation of a Japanese sphere of influence, is an oversimplification and seems to ignore the many processes that came into play.

## 5. Lost in [G]local Translation

Anime's attraction for most audiences outside of Japan seems to be situated in its uniqueness and difference to the usual. Visually-striking and with narratives that are strongly compelling, it presents itself as a medium that posits a new type of mythmaking (Levi, 2001:33) and a new kind of global imagination (Allison, 2008:107) with which the Filipino audience would willingly engage in. In the Philippine context and in some specific times more than others, it provided a fresh alternative to Western particularly US cartoons and even local entertainment programs—a fact that did not escape the notice of TV networks and production companies with reasonably commercial interests. The anime phenomenon in the Philippines evidently owes more to the practices of the local media industries rather than the distinctiveness that it showcases, the cultural vestiges that it possesses or a deliberate ploy by its Japanese creators and producers. Consequently, through these establishments' intercession, the possible cultural power that it supposedly projects is put into question.

The enthusiastic reception of anime and its pervasive presence in the local media and popular culture seems to signal a movement away from Western particularly American influences into Japanese ones. However, upon a closer look into Philippine media's practices of adaptation, it is more likely that both influences co-exist in varying degrees with the active reassertion of Filipino particularities and sensibilities. These practices of adaptation are the sites where localizing forces stake their possession of the text and ferret out cultural peculiarities— at the first level as seen with the minimal adaptation of anime for local airing, such elements are either erased or softened and at the second level as seen with the examples of local adaptations that embody format re-versioning, they are almost given up in lieu of a more local flavor (sometimes to the chagrin of the anime series' loyal fans). This active reassertion of the local culture is by no means only a propensity exclusive to the Filipinos but a

trait observed in many other countries (to mention a few: Martinez, 1998: 11; Tobin, 1992:3) and with regards to many kinds of goods including media products (Lee, 1991: 55-72; Straubhaar, 1991: 39-59). It is also profoundly intensified under the process of globalization as explained by Iwabuchi. In a much bigger picture, the anime phenomenon in the Philippines and other countries manifests itself as a facet of the worldwide globalization of cultural commodities.

The second level of adaptation that was discussed previously powerfully exemplifies how globalizing forces works hand in hand with the localizing ones. Anime titles adapted locally were also in turn adapted by Japan from other sources hence reaffirming the contention that the globalization of ideas—story templates and characters— is not just a simple, one way flow from one center of source to another and is more intricate, disjunctive and complex as Iwabuchi described in his conceptualization. Again, this convoluted asymmetry is due to globalization's transnational nature, the occurrence of which is largely smoothed by its partnership with localizing forces-- in this case represented by practices of adaptation and appropriation. Localization essentially transforms the material and the original ownership of such is increasingly obscured and to a point, almost irrelevant. The consequences of these transnational underpinnings can hardly be contained within a nationalist framework (Iwabuchi 2002a: 201).

At best, anime's characteristic as a vehicle for distinctive visual representation and potent stories remains and continues to be its main asset as it enters other territories. Its spread and permeation of Philippine popular culture and media-- and other countries' popular culture and media for that matter-- occur in conjunction with other processes which merits reference and contributes to the overall understanding of it. The acceleration of the worldwide circulation of images, text and materials are the results of the global integration of markets and capital, advancement of technology, the emergence of a middle class especially in non-Western countries and the increasing mobility of people. In such an environment, anime making its way pass national borders is not only plausible but quite unmanageable. Nevertheless, anime does not stand alone in claiming this advantage. In the same vein, the speed with which it might lose its uniqueness, freshness and novelty is expedited and the public and the media industries are progressively more exposed to alternative sources. In recent times, the Philippine media has moved on to other resources, most notably Korean dramas, and in the future, more materials will present themselves as such.



Fig. 11: Anime on the iconic jeepney

Note: Images of characters Naruto and Sasuke from the anime *Naruto* painted on the iconic Filipino mode of public transportation.

Source: the internet

It has to be conceded of course that a certain amount of cultural emanation is viable although it is not straightforward and seems almost rather benign when all the processes have been taken into consideration and even more so as it coincides with a local industry coming on its own. Nonetheless, this paper stops short of dismissing the cultural power that could come from the anime phenomenon lightly. So far, the discussion was just directed upon the two levels of adaptation practiced by local media establishments which is but a fraction of so many other aspects of the phenomenon. Then again, Japanese cultural influences are more palpable in current Filipino society and nowhere in history had Japan, Japanese things and concepts been known to most Filipinos than in the current period. Whether these had filtered down from relentless exposure to anime or the outcome of other contemporary realities remains to be a very tough research question to answer. A more comprehensive picture of anime's impact on Filipino society requires more research into other related areas such as its effects on education particularly Japanese language learning and Japanese culture appreciation, youth subcultures, Filipino art, technological piracy and so on. Indeed, much work has yet to be done.

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(Received 11th April, 2011)

(Accepted 13th January, 2012)