# The Dynamics of the Globalization and Glocalization Process in Inter-Asian Popular Cultural Media Exchange: The Case Study of the Japanese 'Noblesse' Anime Adaptation

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# Table of Contents

# Introduction

East Asia has a long tradition of adopting each other's cultures, but in recent years, terms like globalization and digitalization have brought a new discourse to the study of inter-cultural exchange within East Asia. In this thesis paper I will focus on the effect of globalization and glocalization regarding inter-Asian pop culture and media. There have already been various studies about the development of cross-national inter-Asian media and its contribution to the de-Westernization of cultural production (Iwabuchi 2010, 198). Though Western/American media culture (Hollywood) is still predominant and positively received in many parts of the world, American media culture has been losing popularity in East Asia as globalization processes make it easier for non-Western actors to increase capacities of media production (Iwabuchi 2010, 199). While inevitably influenced by Western popular culture, the evident intercultural East Asian "globalization" process urges us to study globalization beyond the notion of Westernization or Americanization (Iwabuchi 2010, 200).

This research will focus on cross-media, transnational popular culture within the East Asian cultural sphere, specifically popular animation, as a product created for and by mass culture. As John Storey (2010) argues, the masses are able to debate, (re)establish, and contest social differences caused by capitalism within the platform of popular culture. Therefore, popular culture functions as an arena platform where different classes of society can interact and influence each other (Storey 2010, 3-4). This notion is closely connected to the cross-national exchange of (popular) cultural media as we are able to (re)interpret, debate and reflect on the exchanged culture through this transnational connection. The study of transnationally exchanged media within mass culture can reveal and help understand how the masses (re)interpret, (re)establish, debate, and reflect on (trans)national identity.

Though this intercultural exchange might lead to a better understanding and increased empathy of other cultures it does, at the same time, enforce a sense of nationalism, a reflection of the self in contrast to the other, and thus helps create an imagined community on a national level (Iwabuchi 2010, 206-207). Therefore, the inter-Asian platform of popular culture and hegemony is also closely connected to the term "glocalization"; the process of taking globalized products and shape them in such a way that it fits the local (Robertson 1995, 29). This definition shows that globalization can indeed lead to the enforcement of a sense of nationalism as global products are shaped in a way that it will appeal to the domestic local population through the process of glocalization. Though this localization of globalized products is often put within the framework of nations, I argue that glocalization is also applicable on global (international) community within the framework of trans-nationally exchanged popular cultural media of Webtoon based anime adaptations. Leading to this argument is the understanding that the global anime community is also a community and, therefore, can function as a locality which influences the production of a media product. In this case the Japanese anime adaptation of the Korean Webtoon *Noblesse* is being influenced by the locality known as the global anime community. In this sense popular webtoon-to-anime adaptation projects are globalized and then glocalized to fit and appeal to the anime community.

For this thesis I will use the Japanese animated version of the Korean webtoon *Noblesse* as a case study to illustrate the effects of hegemonic power on transnational media often resulting in an unequal cultural exchange due to the use of glocalization and indigenization. Though a Korean animation voiced by Korean voice actors of the *Noblesse* webtoon exists, this animation episode covers only a flashback appearing in the later chapters of the original *Noblesse* webtoon. Evident to the dominant position of the Japanese animation

4

industry, the 2016 *Noblesse: Awakening* anime adaptation co-produced by Naver Webtoon and Production I.G. and the 2020 Crunchyroll Originals anime adaptation of the famous dark fantasy Korean webtoon *Noblesse* was produced together with a Japanese animation studio directed by a Japanese staff. The Japanese anime adaptation was originally voiced by Japanese *seiyuu* (voice actors), indicating a need for anime to be created or spoken in Japanese. A Korean dub of the Japanese anime adaptation has also not been created. Apparent is the cultural hegemony Japan has on anime and its creation concerning the usage of the Japanese language as it could also have used the Korean voice actors who worked on the Korean *Noblesse* animation. Not only does the usage of language indicate the importance of Japaneseness within the anime genre, the most interesting part, considering the rocky relationship between the Japanese and Korean nation, was that certain characters in this adaptation were renamed to common Japanese names instead of using the original Korean names for these characters.

In addition, the creation of the *Noblesse* anime adaptations is a joint effort of companies from different countries such as Naver Webtoon (Korean), Crunchyroll SC Anime Fun (American) and Glovision (Japanese) together with the Japanese animation studio Production I.G., a veteran anime studio famous for creating titles like *Attack on Titan (Shingeki no Kyojin)*, *Psycho-Pass* and *Haikyuu*. Therefore, in the case of *Noblesse* glocalization doesn't necessarily mean that the reshaping of the Korean Webtoon targeted at Koreans was only for the Japanese domestic market. It also means that *Noblesse*'s target audience involves the whole of the global anime community as is evident from the co-operation of Glovision, a Japanese post-production company that provides subtitles and dubs (voice overs). The relatively globally famous webtoon *Noblesse* is glocalized in the animated version to appeal to the general (international) anime audience indicating the hegemonic dominance of the Japanese anime industry within the world of animation. Through

glocalization the country of origin of the source material is, if possible, rewritten to fit the common features of what is imagined to be the "anime" genre. In this case I argue that there is a certain expectation of Japaneseness included in what is imagined to be anime by the global anime community. Thus, this implies that the anime fan community expects their anime to be "Japanese" as an important function of anime. Therefore, the "anime" genre includes a certain extend of Japaneseness as an important aspect within its definition. I also argue that this is an assumption seemingly used by the anime industry to appeal to the global anime community and that in reality, the audience does not completely agree with this assumption. In addition, because of the difference of national origin and their association with said country of origin, transnational cross-media culture within inter-Asian cultural exchange also brings questions about unequalness and appropriation of the representation of the countries associated with source material as this is "cleaned up", when possible, in the favor of a more generally fitting localized consumer good.

In this paper, I focus my research on the effects of "glocalization" and inter-Asian cultural (cross-)media exchange within East Asia. Japanese animation has gained a lot of attention in the past two decades and holds a hegemonic position in the East Asian animation industry. I particularly focus on the Japanese animated "adaptation" of Webtoons, an innovative South-Korean (from hitherto Korean unless necessary for emphasis) comic format made possible by digitalization created in the 1990s (Jin 2020, 58-61). This topic is highly relevant as the adaptation of webtoons to anime is one of the new forms of cross-cultural exchange that has appeared in recent years. By studying the anime adaptation of the Korean webtoon *Noblesse* as a case study I aim to answer the question: How does the globalization, and in extension glocalization, process in popular cultural media of webtoon based anime adaptation affect inter-Asian transnational cultural media exchange?

This research will be constructed as follows: Firstly, this research will discuss theories and definitions surrounding globalization and glocalization within inter-Asian transnational cross-media culture. In this part I will discuss various globalization theories and define globalization as a hybridization process including the consideration of hegemonic struggle. I follow this discussion with explaining the intersection of globalization as a hybridization process and the concept and definition of glocalization taking into consideration relevant globalization theories of Asian origin. The explanation of the glocalization process is focused on how assumed "invented" localities influence the unequal trans-national cultural exchange in the glocalization process.

Secondly, I will explain why the "imagined" locality of the anime community includes Japaneseness within the anime genre and give a brief explanation of the cultural media of Webtoon and Anime.

Lastly, I will illustrate how the "imagined" locality of the anime community and, in extension, the anime genre influences inter-Asian trans-national cultural exchange with a case study discussing (unequal) cultural exchange influenced by cultural hegemonic power flows within transcultural exchange. This case study will focus on explaining how influences of cultural hegemonic struggles affect transcultural exchange. By using the discursive approach of genre studies this thesis will study *Noblesse* within a larger context through studying the involved production companies, the changes made to the original Webtoon in the animation adaptation, and the audience reception. This way, the study of globalization and trans-national/cultural exchange in conjunction with popular culture and genre theory can give us a better understanding of the role of the anime industry and the global anime community regarding the continuous creation of the anime genre and their impact on trans-national cultural exchange within a new and upcoming trans-cultural/national media format of anime Webtoon adaptations.

# Chapter 1: Globalization and glocalization in inter-Asian transnational popular culture

In the following chapter I will discuss the theories of globalization, glocalization and their connection with hegemonic power related to inter-Asian transnational culture. The theories discussed in this chapter follows the perspectives of academic work within culture and media studies concerning the effects of globalization in Asia. I will, mainly, base my discussion around the extensive academic cultural and media studies literature concerning globalization and East-Asian popular culture, supported by other relevant cultural and media research. This chapter will conceptualize the process of globalization and glocalization in transnational cultural exchange and its connection with hegemonic struggle.

## 1.1 Defining Globalization

In recent years the term "globalization" has come to be part of our everyday vocabulary as governments have to deal with it, new articles use it and academics, such as myself, are studying it. The relevance and popularity of this term still exists as its influences are still ongoing. Before explaining the theories surrounding globalization it is important to look at the actual definition of the word itself and what it entails. As this research is focused on the question of culture and globalization, I will particularly look at cultural globalization theories. I mainly discuss important concepts and theories based on the research done by Doobo Shim (2016) and Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1995). These theories concern globalization, glocalization and hybridity discussing the academic history, historic relevance and contemporary validity of these theories.

Firstly, globalization according to Doboo Shim (2016) is defined as "a concept that refers to the process and context of the world becoming closer" (Shim 2016. 34). Pieterse in his work defines globalization as "the intensification of worldwide social relations" (Pieterse 1995, 44). Concluding from the two provided definition above, the concept of globalization is defined as a process of increased international interconnection, a process in which worldwide social relations increase and the world, somehow, grow closer to each other. Various nuances within the definition of globalization exists. Common interpretation of the globalization process is often being connected with (Western) modernity and argued from the Western perspective (Pieterse 1995, 42). While the notion of cultural synchronization is relevant for defining and understanding globalization, academics critically point out that in the case of the cultural globalization process, cultural experiences have not simply been moving to the uniformity and standardization of Western culture (Pieterse 1995, 47-48). They argue that this Westernized interpretation of globalization overlooks the effects and influences of non-Western cultures on the West which downplays the role of the local and fails to recognize the influences of non-Western culture on each other (Pieterse 1995, 48). Therefore, when connected to Western modernity the interpretation of globalization defined as "the world becoming closer" incorrectly assumes that the world is becoming more Western because of globalization. In defining globalization, we must be careful not to assume a Western viewpoint when considering definitions of globalization. To shed off this Western perspective it is important to look at the globalization process in a more nuanced way taking into consideration the intricate dynamics of the globalized product and its glocalized version influenced by an "imagined' locality.

Thus, to better understand the influences and effects of globalization, it is important to study what is meant with "becoming similar" or study who or what is "growing closer. For

this purpose, I will look at three relevant theories concerning the discourses surrounding cultural globalization.

## 1.2 Cultural globalization theories and hybridity

First, there is the concept of globalization being the resulting extension of cultural imperialism (Shim 2016, 34). This theory argues that the world is being globalized through the "Western" enforcement of the distribution and adaptation of Western and (predominantly) American culture. This with as purpose to subjugate weak nations with weak cultural identities (Shim 2016, 34). As is apparent with this theory, it situates itself around the assumption that the West is predominantly enforcing globalization as a one-way flow from the "West" to other countries. Cultural imperialism is a term that can be used in studying certain flows of cultural exchange. Though the term "cultural imperialism" in its essence does not have to assume a pro-Western perspective, it does enforce a certain assumption of "national" culture, which could lead to fetishism and romanticism (Shim 2016, 34). In addition, it does not sufficiently explain the effects and flows of globalization as international media counterflow increases and the existence of growing regional players start to assert their own influences (Shim 2016, 34).

Furthermore, this definition does not include the importance of the audience reception (Shim 2016, 34). Locals are subjugated under cultural imperialism that is brought by the "West" without looking at the influences these locals might have on the exchanged culture. The subjugated are assumed to have close to no power or influence on cultural exchange, while, in reality, globalization and cultural exchange experience influences from various sources besides the "West". Because of the importance of audience within media studies, this aspect will also be discussed in the case study. As I have previously mentioned, to avoid overgeneralization, orientalization, and a "West vs Rest" narrative, it is paramount to avoid

Western centric reasoning which is apparent in the case of the cultural imperialist discourse of globalization theory.

Another relevant theory is that of globalization as a result of modernity. In this theory, the association of globalization and modernity serves the purpose of categorizing the current period in a way in which societies can be studied as a unit of analysis (Pieterse 1995, 43). This conceptualization is also connected with capitalism as earlier definitions of globalization were centered around the spread of a world market (Pieterse 1995, 43). Though this approach is appealing because of its clear structure it is also plagued with several problems. Whether centered around modernity or capitalism, this theory, again, assumes that the globalization process originates from Europe and the "West" (Pieterse 1995, 43). As this research is centered around inter-Asian cultural exchange of non-Western media formats it is clear that globalization does not exclusively enates from the "West". In addition, this theory also assumes a certain fixed route of history which takes away the agency and importance of other influences on or resulting from globalization (Shim 2016 ,43).

This leads us to the third definition of globalization, namely, the conceptualization of globalization as a process of hybridization. In the case of cultural globalization, hybridization is defined as the creation of new forms of culture through separating cultural forms from existing practices and recombining them (Pieterse 1995, 45). Contrary to the previously discussed theories this theory includes the history and existence of globalization far beyond that of the age of imperialism and modernity as it does not center itself around a Western centric world perspective. In this manner, globalization can be applied in different situation, discourses, and cultural flows, not limiting itself to the "West vs Rest" narrative. In addition, this theory also addresses the critique of viewing globalization in terms of homogenization or modernization/Westernization as it is more inclusive and broadly orientated (Pieterse 1995, 54). Using this theory, this research defines globalization as a process of hybridity where the

increased availability of different organization and actors influence the creation of new (media) culture. Though this definition distances itself from a Western centric narrative as much as possible, hybridization does not exclude the possibility of unequal cultural exchange by influences of hegemonic cultural power. For this purpose, it is important to look at the hegemonic power relations within the globalization process and discuss how the local plays a part within this arena of hegemonic struggle of globalization processes. To better explain this relationship between the global and local in the globalization process and to further demarcate the theoretic scope of this research, this paper will discuss the term "glocalization" together with the similar Asian terms of "*mugukjeok*" and "*mukokuseki*".

## 1.3 Glocalization, "mugukjeok" and "mukokuseki"

As I have explained above, instead of seeing the globalization process as a one-sided flow the surrounding factors of the locality in inter-Asian transnational cultural exchange regarding the glocalization process should also be considered to have influence. Therefore, it is important to establish what is meant by the "local". Additionally, within the discourse of globalization there is a tendency to assume that the globalization process overwrites locality (Robertson 1995, 27). Though this paper has made it clear that such a narrow approach is not sufficient for studying the various factors of the globalization process, it is important to understand that the "local" is often constructed and promoted from above or outside (Robertson 1995, 27). In other words, what is declared as "local" is actually the "local" expressed in generalized concepts of locality (Robertson 1995, 27-28). This leads to the conclusion that 1) the globalization process is not only a hegemonic process of global vs local but a mixing of the global and local, and 2) that within the "local" hegemonic struggle also exists.

The term glocalization is closely connected to the economic term "micro-marketing" which is the strategic tailoring and advertisement of global goods to that of local and particular markets (Robertson 1995, 29). From this definition we can conclude that global products are being retailored into product which appeal to the local (target) audiences. This clearly shows the forces of hybridization and mixing which I have previously discussed to be terms closely connected with globalization. Additionally, it also leads to the realization that even though determining locality as being homogenized by the globalization process is fundamentally flawed and narrow-visioned, contemporary conceptions of locality are often produced in global terms as they are created by the global tailored to the local (Robertson 1995, 31).

Though local factors play a role within the globalization process, what is determined as "local" is often created by an outsider.

> In this respect globalization, defined in its most general sense as the compression of the world as a whole, involves the linking of localities. But it also involves the 'invention' of locality, in the same general sense as the idea of the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), as well as its 'imagination' (cf. Anderson, 1983). There is indeed currently something like an 'ideology of home' which has in fact come into being partly in response to the constant repetition and global diffusion of the claim that we now live in a condition of homelessness or rootlessness; as if in prior periods of history the vast majority of people lived in 'secure' and homogenized locales. (Robertson 1995, 33-34).

In this paper, using the notion of glocalization, I study how the creation of these "invented" localities affect inter-Asian cultural exchange and argue that the linking of these localities involves the complexity of hegemonic struggle. In the case of *Noblesse*, there seems to be an imagined locality of what is considered to be anime.

As I have stated before, based on the unequal trans-national cultural exchange of Webtoon based anime adaptations, the anime genre seems to assume a necessity of

including Japaneseness in its definition. Therefore, I will study the impact of the invented and imagined anime community, and, in extension, the invented and imagined inclusion of Japaneseness in the anime genre on inter-Asian cultural exchange by conducting a case study of *Noblesse*. In this case study, I will apply a discursive contextual case study of the webtoon *Noblesse* to study the intricate interaction between "imagined" localities and the hegemonic power of the anime industry. Cultural studies argue that popular culture is one of the important sites where societal differences can be established and contested as it is "an arena of struggle and negotiation between the interests of dominant groups and the interests of subordinate groups" (Storey 2010, 3-4). In addition, popular culture is neither a culture imposed by capitalist culture industries nor a culture emerging from below as an "authentic" folk or working-class subculture but a "compromise equilibrium" between the two (Storey 2010, 4). Though created as an approach to genre studies, the discursive approach provides a framework in which media text can be studied not only textually but also contextually including studying the creation of said media text, its audience, and production process (Mittel 2001, 9). Therefore, by discussing the involved production companies, textual changes from the original source compared to the anime adaptation, and the audience reception in the case study, I will study how hegemonic cultural influences of the imagined "anime" genre and anime industry concerning the trans-nationally exchanged Webtoon *Noblesse* affect the globalization process, and in extension, glocalization process result in unequal trans-national cultural exchange. Though it is important to note that one text does not define a genre on its own (Mittel 2001,9), this approach can help us understand the various (hegemonic) influences involved in inter-Asian trans-national cultural exchange.

To better situate this research within the discourse of East-Asian media culture and further distance this research from Western-centric concepts and terminology, it is important to look

at the Asian terms "*mukokuseki*" and "*mugukjeok*". These terms aid us in further nuancing the closely related concepts of globalization and glocalization involving Asian terminology and East-Asian experiences. Iwabuchi (2016) argues that studying and referencing Asian terminology serves to situate the discussion within the Asian context (Iwabuchi 2016, 27).

### 1.3.2 "Mugukjeok" and "Mukokuseki"

To illustrate the connection of the terms "*mugukjeok" and "mukokuseki"* with globalization and glocalization, it is important to, again, define what is exactly meant with these terms. Though this paper groups these terms together they both have their own nuances as they are not completely identical. As "*mugukjeok*" is a term that builds upon the concept of "*mukokuseki*", this subchapter starts with defining the latter.

The concept of "*mukokuseki*" (無国籍), literally translated as "something with no nationality", subsequently implies "the erasure of racial or ethnical characteristics or a context , which does not imprint a particular culture or country with these features" (Iwabuchi 2002, 28). In his discussion of Japanese consumer goods, in particular computer games, comics, and cartoons, regarding global popularity, Iwabuchi (2002) emphasizes "cultural odorlessness" as an important aspect of these Japanese consumer goods (Iwabuchi 2002, 27). In this case, the concept of culturally odorlessness is defined as consumer goods that do not include the contemporary lifestyle of the country of origin as the appeal of the product (Iwabuchi 2002, 27). Though it might be true that some anime (Japanese cartoons/animation) and other consumer goods do not invoke a certain way of life connected to the country of origin of the product, I argue that anime still includes a certain need to associate itself with Japan to appeal to the anime community. Some globalized national consumer goods may not include representation of Japanese contemporary lifestyle, but banal practices of national representation can still facilitate an association of these globalized

national products to its country of origin (Iwabuchi 2010, 207). In the case of both the anime adaptation of *Noblesse* and the original Webtoon, the feeling of anime and Webtoon being a Japanese or South-Korean cultural consumer good is enforced not by the inclusion of a contemporary Japanese or South-Korean lifestyle, but by banal practices of national representation. Furthermore, if Japaneseness is not an important aspect of the appeal of anime, then why is there a need to work with Japanese animation companies and Japanese voice actors? Though production companies might farm out a lot of their animation to Korean studios, why did they not consider making the original anime with Korean voice actors if it doesn't matter which country is emphasized within the anime format to appeal to the target audiences? The notion of "*mukokuseki"* and "*cultural odorlessness"* might have been appealing in the past, recent further global developments of increased worldwide connectivity, inter-Asian transnational exchange, the increased popularity of anime and the promotion of anime as a national Japanese product through the "Cool Japan" efforts, have changed the dynamics of anime reception, production, and reproduction.

This leads us to the term "*mugukjeok*" which is a Korean term equivalent to "*mukokuseki"* in that it translates to "something with no nationality". However, "*mugukjeok"* conceptualizes itself, in contrary to "*mukokuseki",* not only around "cultural odorlessness" but also includes the importance of particular cultural elements. In this sense "*mugukjeok"* is defined as the transcultural hybridity of popular culture influenced by global and local elements (Jung 2011, 3). As apparent from the notion of hybridity included in the concept of "*mugukjeok"* it is similar to the concept of glocalization in the sense that they both acknowledge the influence of both the global and local in the production of global consumer goods. While glocalization refers to the global being tailored to the local and thus influences each other, "*mugukjeok"*, however, refers to how transcultural popular culture enables the mixing of the particular cultural element with globally popular cultural elements leading to

those particular elements (the local) becoming less culturally specific (Jung 2011, 3). Though both glocalization and "*mugukjeok*" are similar in their definition, they emphasize different flows of the globalization process. While glocalization refers to influences of locality on global product as it is tailored to the local, "*mugukjeok*" refers to the local being globalized and therefore losing its cultural specificity.

> The development of inter-Asian cultural public spheres also raises a question of the politics of inclusion and exclusion. While we cannot neatly generalize the division between people in terms of place of residence, class, gender and ethnicity, inter-Asian media circulation has brought about not just cross-boundary connections but also cross-boundary disparity, divisions, antagonism and marginalization in various overlapping ways. (Iwabuchi 2010, 205)

In the case of *Noblesse,* both glocalization and "*mugukjeok*" are relevant to study the influences of the global and local on its production process. In the anime adaptation of *Noblesse,* the country of origin of the source material (South-Korea) is erased as much as possible and replaced with Japan. In other words, the country of origin of the culturally exchanged global product is erased while it is tailored to its own locality (the anime community) in this globalization process of transnational cultural exchange. Using the above discussed terms of glocalization and "*mugukjeok*" in conjunction with each other within the conceptualization of globalization as a process of hybridization, I will discuss the impact of the globalization process on transcultural adaptation production later in the case study.

# Chapter 2: Anime, Webtoon, and the International Anime Community

Before starting the case study this paper will first discuss both the concepts of anime and webtoon. Though anime and webtoon itself can be categorized in many different genres, to keep this thesis cohesive, I will limit myself to the conceptualization of the two mediums within the global perspective. In addition, this chapter will also discuss the recent connection between these two transnational global media products.

Firstly, it is important to understand that next to the media originating from Japan, anime is a difficult term to define as it is constantly (re)produced and distributed across the world and put within different contexts. Because anime indicates more than only a single mode of media production, it is important to understand anime as a "cultural phenomenon whose meanings are dependent on context" (Denison 2015, 1-2). In this paper, I will discuss anime within the context of the inter-Asian transnational globalization process. Within this context, this paper aims to study the various influences that are involved with this specific globalization process. As anime is such a broad genre constantly shifting, growing, and spreading (Denison 2015, 15), past definitions, such as Iwabuchi's (2002) conceptualization of anime being "culturally odorless" as previously discussed, have become outdated. To further add to the discourse of anime, this paper will discuss anime within the specifically chosen context of Webtoon anime adaptations, globalization, and transnational cultural exchange.

To properly approach anime, it is useful to conceive the anime genre as a discursive practice and study the complex relations between texts, industries, audiences, and historical contexts (Mittell 2001, 7-8). In my case study I will use this contextual approach to investigate the industry and production process, text, and audience involved in the production and reception of animated Webtoon adaptations. Because adaptation of Webtoons into anime

is a relatively new practice, it is interesting to study what is believed to be "globally popular anime" in this specific case.

As giving a satisfactory definition of anime is difficult because of it changing meaning within different contexts, defining Webtoons should suffer the same problems. Nonetheless, academics argue that Webtoon is a uniquely Korean phenomenon as it is a product which originates from Korea's internet culture and native Korean platforms (Pyo, Jang, and Yoon 2020, 93). Of course, this contextual approach can also be applied on the study of Webtoons. The study of Webtoon is important as Korean internet platform companies and Webtoon providers are aiming to enter the global market incorporating glocalization strategies as to be able to profit from Webtoon export (Pyo, Jang, and Yoon 2020, 93-94). Therefore, studying these influences in the production of Webtoon serves to better understand the transition of Webtoons to anime and how globalization and glocalization influences this transition.

In recent years the increased popularity of both cultural media formats inevitably led to the hybridization of anime and Webtoon in the sense that Webtoon successfully exported its content to be appropriated in anime. This hybridization resulting from inter-Asian transnational cultural exchange led to a new cultural practice of adapting popular Webtoon stories into anime. Though globalization and hybridization led to the cross-border connection of Japanese and South-Korean originated cultural goods, it has also, at the same time, led to marginalization and unequal transcultural exchange. Studying the dynamics of this transnational cultural exchange using the conceptualization of globalization as a process of hybridization, together with the concepts of glocalization and "*mugukjeok*" can lead us to new understanding of what is imagined to be "anime". Using these concepts in the case study of the Webtoon adaptation of *Noblesse* I aim to answer how hegemonic influences of an "invented" locality affect the globalization, and in extension glocalization, process of

(unequal) trans-national cultural exchange through the workings of what is assumed and imagined to constitute the anime genre.

The locality discussed in this thesis is the locality known as the anime community. The anime adaptation of the Webtoon *Noblesse* is aimed to appeal to the global anime community as is indicated by the Webtoon being adapted into an anime due to its global popularity (Rick 2020). Additionally, together with the famous Japanese anime studio I.G. Production, *Noblesse* is being co-produced by and streamed internationally exclusively on Crunchyroll as part of the "Crunchyroll Originals" (Crunchyroll 2020a). This also indicates the importance to appeal the anime adaptation of the *Noblesse* Webtoon to the international anime community.

Because *Noblesse* is being animated by a Japanese animation studio it already includes a certain degree of Japaneseness. Nonetheless, a concrete example of the "imagined" Japaneseness of the anime genre is derived from the ongoing debate in the international anime community of subbed anime versus dubbed anime (Wilber 2018). This debate revolves around the community discussing if anime is better to be watched in Japanese with English subtitles (subbed) or in the form of a voice over in English, or another language (dubbed). Though not every international anime fan prefers to watch their anime in Japanese, the existence of anime fans preferring to watch anime in its "original" Japanese indicates a certain imagined importance of the Japanese language in the consumption of Japanese anime. Anime fans who prefer to watch anime in its "original" Japanese form with English subtitles are referred to as "purist" (Welber 2018). Anime "purist" are anime fans who wish to experience the anime the way it is meant to be seen by the creators arguing that a voice over in another language censors or change the content and relevant Japanese cultural references of what is originally intended while claiming that the original Japanese spoken voices are than the voice actors of other languages (Welber 2018). For example, in a discussion created

by the user Suicidalbutbaked on the reddit forum the question asking why a lot of people prefer subbed anime over dubbed anime is posed (Suicidalbutbaked 2018). In a reaction on this question user ToriRLR answered: "Because the Japanese voices are normally better. Also, you are watching something made by the Japanese and it often has references to Japanese culture. Things like that often get completely lost in the dub. Besides, neither English nor Japanese is my native language and since there are almost no dubs in my native language, so why would I not just watch it in Japanese?" (ToriRLR, October 26, 2018, 14:57 p.m., comment on Suicidalbutbaked 2018). This reddit forum discussion clearly proves the existence of a subbed versus dubbed debate within the international anime community. As can be concluded from the subbed anime versus dubbed anime debate a significant part of the international anime community prefers to consume anime in Japanese because it is created by Japanese. Therefore these "purist" anime fans find it important that anime stays as true to its original version and content as much as possible so as to understand references to Japanese culture and not suffer from censoring problems resulting from content changes and cuts to better relate to the foreign audiences (Welber 2018). Though it is questionable if Japanese cultural references are successfully communicated through the English subtitles this debate does illustrates the "imagined" importance of Japaneseness and Japan that is included in the conceptualization and consumption of the anime genre.

      In the next part of this thesis, the case study of *Noblesse* will be discussed. Here I will further elaborate on how the transnational cultural exchange concerning the Japanese anime adaptation of a Korean Webtoon confirms the hegemonic cultural dominance of Japan and Japaneseness in the anime genre. Because of the involvement of private companies in this cultural exchange, "anime" is conceptualized in terms of what is imagined to be appealing to the (targeted) anime community. Though the content and production Korean Webtoon *Noblesse* has almost no connection with Japan and Japanese culture, the decision to produce

the original anime version of the in Japanese with subtitles is part of its appeal to the international community considering that both subbed Japanese anime and dubbed anime is being consumed in the international anime community. Particularly peculiar is the fact that no Korean dub of the Crunchyroll *Noblesse* anime adaptation has been produced. Instead, the English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, and German dubs of *Noblesse* premiered within two months of the premiere of the original Japanese version (Mateo 2020). The seeming neglect of the Korean part of *Noblesse* indicates an unfair trans-national cultural exchange which will be further explained in the caste study.

## Chapter 3: The case study of Noblesse: a struggle of unequal trans-national cultural exchange through glocalization.

In this case study I will apply the contextual discursive approach and particularly focus on studying the production, comparing the text, and discuss the global reception of *Noblesse*. As it is important to, next to studying the content of *Noblesse,* also consider other aspects of the production process, the contextual discursive approach serves as a way to study and better understand the various influences involved in the cultural media production process. In particular, this case study aims to study the impact of Japan and Japanese leading to unequal transnational cultural exchange in the globalization and glocalization process of the 2020 *Noblesse* webtoon anime adaptation.

Firstly, this case study starts with explaining, in broad terms, what the story of *Noblesse* entails. Then it follows with discussing primary sources such as news articles, promotion videos and website information explaining which companies have worked at producing the anime adaptation of this Webtoon, how this anime adaptation has been

advertised. Then I will compare the original source material with the content of the anime

adaptation and discuss the changes in story content and content production. In the last part I

will discuss the audience's perception concerning the changes made concerning the

Japanification of the *Noblesse* story in the anime adaptation to illustrate that the inclusion of

Japaneseness in the anime community and genre is "invented". Studying these aspects, I will

address how glocalization appropriates the source material and how banal practices of

national representation indicate that a certain extend of Japaneseness is imagined to be

necessary to appeal to the global anime community. In this sense, Webtoon is being

transformed into anime and at the same time globalized and tailored to its locality in the

international anime community.

## 3.1 The background and synopsis of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation

Before the announcement of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation in 2020, the *Noblesse*

webtoon series, created by Son Jeho and Lee Kwangsu, was first launched in Korea in 2007.

Then, in 2014, *Noblesse* launched globally, quickly gained success, and became one of the

big hits on the Line Webtoon platform, a globalized version of the Korean Naver Webtoon

platform (Rick 2020). In 2015, according to the *Noblesse* Fandom wiki page, the Korean

animation studio, Studio Animal animated an OVA (Original Video Animation) of *Noblesse*

which was revealed at the 17th Bucheon International Animation Festival (Fandom, n.d.). On

4 February 2016, the Japanese animation studio Production I.G. also released an OVA

adaptation of the Webtoon *Noblesse* in which most of the involved production staff where

Japanese (Rick 2020). In August 2020, Crunchyroll announced a Crunchyroll Originals

anime series adaptation of the Webtoon series *Noblesse* co-produced with the Production I.G.

Japanese animation studio. Before its première on the Crunchyroll platform and Japanese

television in October 2020 the *Noblesse* anime series was also licensed by Muse Asia in

Southeast Asia (Pineda 2020). Obvious from the various created anime adaptations, the

popularity surrounding the story and production of the *Noblesse* webtoon is apparent.

Concerning the contents of the story, the synopsis on Crunchyroll illustrates an overview of

the story contents and reads:

> Raizel awakens from his 820-year slumber. He holds the special title of Noblesse, a pure-blooded Noble and protector of all other Nobles. In an attempt to protect Raizel, his servant Frankenstein enrolls him at Ye Ran High School, where Raizel learns the simple and quotidian routines of the human world through his classmates. However, the Union, a secret society plotting to take over the world, dispatches modified humans and gradually encroaches on Raizel's life, causing him to wield his mighty power to protect those around him... After 820 years of intrigue, the secrets behind his slumber are finally revealed, and Raizel's absolute protection as the Noblesse begins! (Crunchyroll, n.d., b)

A more detailed synopsis can be found on the famous anime fan forum website called

MyAnimeList (also known as MAL) which summarizes the story content as follows:

> The "Noblesse" Cadis Etrama di Raizel, also known as "Rai," is enrolled in Ye Ran High School by his servant Frankenstein to stay hidden from the sights of the Union, a mysterious organization out for Rai's blood. Rai commences his life as a student, making himself familiar with his classmates and the daily activities of humans. However, his new life is far from peaceful, and Rai is soon forced to save his new friends from the hands of the Union that had abducted them.
> Meanwhile, M-21—a Union agent gone rogue during Rai's rescue operation—joins the Ye Ran High School security staff after a proposition by the school's director, who happens to be none other than Frankenstein himself. On the surface, M-21 is a prim and proper employee, but in truth he is shackled by his former ties to the Union and the inevitable consequences of betraying the organization.
> To further complicate matters, Nobles Regis K. Landegre and Seira J. Loyard enroll in the same school to investigate the Noblesse. While the Union conducts a manhunt for M-21 to extract clues regarding their missing agents, Rai is forced to keep his identity hidden while protecting all that he holds dear. (MyAnimeList, n.d., a)

As apparent from the synopses the story of *Noblesse* revolves around "Raizel". The

"Nobles" that are mentioned represent the depiction of vampires in popular culture. Though

the story includes battles, it mostly serves as a plot device to come to know more about the

background history of the main character, Raizel or develop other character arcs. In addition,

while the synopses mention the involvement of school life in this story, actual school life is not the focus of the story. Rather, it is the complex interaction of our main character, Raizel, with the modern world, his background history, and the development of characters surrounding connected to him which is the focus of the story. Because of its inclusion of supernatural being such as vampires, werewolves and modified humans with supernatural powers, the genre of this Korean Webtoon can be broadly categorized as fantasy. Most interesting is the mentioning of Ye Ran Highschool, which is one of the only remnants of Korean representation left in the anime adaptation. Later, I will discuss more about the changes made in the *Noblesse* anime adaptation in comparison to the original story, focusing on the omission of Korea in the story.

## 3.2 Production of Noblesse: Naver Webtoon, Crunchyroll and Production I.G.

The *Noblesse* webtoon itself first globalized on the international Naver Webtoon platform in 2014 after its debut on the Korean Naver Webtoon platform in 2007 by providing translated episodes in English (Hodgkins 2020). The international debut in 2014 indicates both the enjoyed popularity of *Noblesse* and the need of the *Noblesse* webtoon to reach a bigger audience than limiting themselves to the Korean market. The increasing popularity of the *Noblesse* webtoon led to the creation of animated versions of the popular webtoon from 2015 onwards.

As mentioned before, the 2020 Crunchyroll Originals anime adaptation was not the first animated adaptation of the *Noblesse* Webtoon. Before the involvement of Production I.G. in 2016 the *Noblesse* webtoon was animated by the Korean animation studio, Studio Animal in 2015. Though the first animated version of the *Noblesse* webtoon was made by a Korean animation studio and involved Korean voice actors the animated episode only covered a later part of the *Noblesse* webtoon story. Later, a Japanese anime adaptation which

covered a total of three volumes of the *Noblesse* webtoon was made, not continuing the Korean animation studio and voice actors that already worked on a *Noblesse* animation. In 2016 Naver Webtoon involved Japanese anime studio Production I.G. in the production, putting them in charge of the direction as well. The series later continued as an international co-production adding Crunchyroll to the list of involved production companies.

Japanese anime has become famous in recent years and everywhere in the world we can see an increased presence of Japanese animation. As Japanese anime, just as Korean Webtoon, is part of popular culture, it is made for the entertainment for the masses and thus, wants to appeal as much to the masses as possible. Because contemporary economics is based on capitalism, the goal of most capitalist companies, especially companies creating popular culture and mass media, is to earn profits with their goods. This way, the decision to discontinue working with the Korean animation studio, Studio Animal, could have been argued from a capitalist consideration of making profits. Though it is important to note the role of capitalist companies in the creation of popular culture, the notion that popular culture is made for entertainment of the masses also assumes that the creator's urge increased popularity and reach, and therefore it is also important to study the reaction of the original content creators. Nonetheless, the fact of the matter is that the Korean animation industry is not as famous and developed as the Japanese animation industry and therefore has less appeal and possible audience than its Japanese counterpart. For example, Netflix has said that over 100 million households globally at least watched one anime on the platform (Frater 2020). Crunchyroll, a video streaming platform specializing in streaming Japanese anime, as of 2020, has reached over 3 million paid subscribers globally and over 70 million registered users (License Global 2020). On the contrary, no international platform yet exists that specializes itself in streaming Korean animation globally. In addition, contrary to Studio

Animal who has animated on no more than 8 titles (Studio Animal, n.d.), Production I.G. has experience making animation for over 400 titles (MyAnimeList, n.d., b).

The gap between the popularity and experience of the Korean and Japanese animation industry clearly indicates the hegemonic position of the Japanese animation industry. The use of Japanese anime for the *Noblesse* webtoon animation to globalize and reach a bigger audience reflects the globalization, in extension, glocalization process. Furthermore, this decision also shows the need of using the Japanese animation industry over the Korean animation industry, leading to an unequalness of cultural representation in the transnationally exchanged culture.

In 2016 Production I.G. took over the animation process and together with Crunchyroll and Naver Webtoon continued the globalization process of the *Noblesse* webtoon. The anime adaptation of *Noblesse* animated by Production I.G. was called *Noblesse: Awakening* and debuted on Crunchyroll and Naver Webtoon's own website in February 2016 (Anime News Network 2016). Though the anime was licensed by Crunchyroll they were not yet involved in its production. In an online creator and staff panel of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation at the Crunchyroll expo in 2020, uploaded on Youtube on September 7, 2020, by the Youtube channel Complete Nerd Authority, the creator of the original *Noblesse* webtoon Son Jeho stated, in a short video interview, that the *Noblesse* anime project in 2016 was led by Naver Webtoon for marketing purposes, and acknowledged the limitation of the anime. Nonetheless, he also stated that he still excitingly anticipates the 13-episode 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation.

In 2020 Crunchyroll announced that it would make a *Noblesse* anime series together with Naver Webtoon animated by Production I.G. In this case, because Crunchyroll focusses its streaming services on anime with as goal to "connect[s] anime and manga fans across 200+ countries and territories through the content they love", boasting to have the largest

collection of licensed anime (Crunchyroll, n.d., a), it is safe to assume that the anime adaptation of *Noblesse,* co-produced by Crunchyroll, targets this international anime community. Therefore, in addition to the capitalist profit-based explanation that there is a huge gap in popularity and experience between the Korean animation industry and Japanese animation industry, the reason for Crunchyroll working together with a Japanese animation studio can be explained due to its own explicit focus and interest in anime and the goal of connecting anime fans globally.

At the time of the creation of the 2020 anime adaptation of *Noblesse* Crunchyroll was owned by the American digital media company Otter Media, making the production of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation an international co-production between American, Japanese, and Korean companies. Nonetheless, the chief director, Shunsuke Tada, series director, Yasutaka Yamamoto, series composition by Sayaka Harada, and most staff involved in the creation of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation are Japanese (Noblesse Animation Partners, n.d.). Because both Naver Webtoon and Crunchyroll are co-producers of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation project it means that the decision to use Japanese anime working together with Production I.G. and hiring Japanese staff was agreed upon by both parties. Safe for hiring the creative staff, anime producers have a limited say in the actual creative aspect of anime production (Servakis 2019). Therefore, the script, composition, and contents of the anime adaptation of *Noblesse* are largely decided by Japanese staff hired by the producers.

In the grand scheme of things, the creation of the *Noblesse* anime series is a product of transnational cross-media popular culture of a Korean webtoon story adapted into a Japanese anime series. The reasons for this transnational cross-media cultural exchange can be explained by a variety of factors. A couple of factors discussed above are popularity, shared area of interest and economic motivation for expansion and globalization. Though a Korean animated version voiced and directed mainly by South-Koreans already existed in

2015, in 2016 Naver Webtoon decided to work together with Production I.G. to make another

anime adaptation of *Noblesse*. In 2020, Naver Webtoon together with Crunchyroll and

Production I.G., announced yet another adaptation of the *Noblesse* webtoon series. The

change in animation studio served as an attempt to further the globalization process of

*Noblesse* that started in 2014 when the English translations of the webtoon were published.

By including a Japanese animation studio and a streaming website focused mainly on

streaming anime internationally Naver Webtoon successfully propelled the *Noblesse* webtoon

further in the globalization process. However, using Japanese animation due to its popularity

and global reach in the globalization process of the *Noblesse* webtoon, at the same time,

inhibits the involvement, and in extension, development of the Korean animation industry. In

addition, it also decreases the overall involvement of Korean staff and, therefore, diminishes

the equalness of Korean representation and participation in the globalization process of the

transnationally exchanged cultural product of the originally Korean, *Noblesse* webtoon anime

adaptation.

By studying the production circumstances and history of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime

adaptation it becomes clear that the unequalness of inter-Asian cultural exchange in the

globalization process results from capitalist consideration concerning the appealing economic

benefits surrounding the popularity and experience of Japanese anime. The background and

circumstances surrounding the production of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation clearly

showcases the dominance of Japanese animation in the Asian popular culture arena. Using

internationally popular Japanese popular culture of anime, *Noblesse* is able to address a larger

global audience. However, the decision to use a Japanese animation studio over a Korean

animation studio, at the same time, indicates a certain degree of unequal representation and

involvement in the creation of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation from what was originally a

Korean webtoon. Therefore, the production aspect of the globalization process of the

*Noblesse* webtoon illustrates how globalization leads to an unequal transnational cultural exchange implying the dominant hegemonic position of the Japanese anime industry. To further address this unequal transnational cultural exchange, next to studying the production aspect of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation, it is also important to study the actual content and content production of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation, discussing what was changed and how those changes impact the unequalness of the inter-Asian transnational popular culture exchange process. In the next part of the case study, I will discuss how the transnationally exchanged popular culture product of the anime adaptation of *Noblesse* shows the inclusion of Japaneseness and Japan in the definition of the anime genre through studying the Japanification of content and content production. I will also discuss how the Japanification of the content and content production leads to unequal transnational cultural exchange.

### 3.3 Japanifying *Noblesse*

As discussed before, the original *Noblesse* story was created by the Korean duo Son Jeho and Lee Kwangsu and debuted on the Korean webtoon platform, Never Webtoon in 2007. In 2014 *Noblesse* was translated for international readers. Though the story of *Noblesse* revolves mainly around the supernatural aspect of the *Noblesse* world, the background in which part of the story takes place is Korea. However, this was changed in the anime adaptation together with the Korean character names. The 2020 Crunchyroll Originals anime adaptation series has 13 episodes and covers the second and third season of the *Noblesse* webtoon. The first season is covered by the 2016 Naver Webtoon and Production I.G. *Noblesse: Awakening* anime adaptation and serves as a prologue for the 2020 *Noblesse* anime series.

Though the content and story of the prologue episode *Noblesse: Awakening* covers the first season of the *Noblesse* webtoon, the actual anime adaptation saw a lot of material cut from the original story. By trying to fit 78 of *Noblesse* webtoon chapters into one 30-minute episode (Noblesse Wiki, n.d., b), many important characters were cut from the anime adaptation and plot lines were changed or sped up. However, the main line of the story still largely stays coherent with the story of original creation. The most interesting change is that all the high school related characters have their original Korean names changed to Japanese ones, save for the name of the high school, Ye Ran High School, which stayed the same. Other than being Korean or Japanese names, the changing of the Korean names to Japanese names serve no significant translative purposes as both the Korean and Japanese names do not include any important cultural or content related relevance. This naturally invokes the question if it these name changes were necessary.

In the 2020 Crunchyroll Originals anime adaptation, even more of the original story got cut. It was announced that the anime series continues the story right after were *Noblesse: Awakening* had left (Lyu 2020, 3:00) and did so by starting the first episode of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime series from the second season of original Korean webtoon series. However, this meant that chapter 79 – 90 was not covered in both the anime adaptation of 2016 and the Crunchyroll Originals anime adaptation in 2020. To compensate for the story gap due to the cut of these chapters, characters had to be scrapped which even resulted in the omission of the important side character Seo Yuna, in the anime adaptation known as Emi Iwata, in the 2020 anime adaptation. The character of Seo Yuna played a crucial role for story progression, especially at the beginning of the webtoon and was also included in the 2016 anime adaptation. This can confuse the anime only watchers as the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation starts at the beginning of season two, skipped a lot of content. Even if an anime only watcher knew that the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation series is a continuation of the 2016 *Noblesse*

anime adaptation, the sudden cut of the character Seo Yuna in the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation is also confusing.

When asked about the difference between adapting an anime versus adapting a manhwa at the Crunchyroll expo in 2020 the *Noblesse* anime director Yamamoto Yasutaka said that this project gave him more freedom to stray from the original story in contrast to manga adaptation (Orcino 2020). Yamamoto stated that the manhwa side of the *Noblesse* anime series production was fine with changing the original story to make the story end more excitingly as, according to Yamamoto, the constraint of animating two seasons of the original manhwa story in 13 episodes would result in the series ending in the middle of the exiting parts (Crunchyroll 2020b, 20:17-20:49). He also said that he was especially worried about the script as he wanted to make the story more interesting than the original (Crunchyroll 2020b, 20:50). In line with Yamamoto's statement and obvious from all the cuts and changes in content explained above, director Yamamoto indeed strayed from the original content. Though the question if the anime is more interesting than the original webtoon is a matter of subjective preference, through this panel discussion it becomes clear that the director changed the story trying to make it more exciting. As Yamamoto stated this while attending the creator and staff panel of *Noblesse* at the 2020 Crunchyroll expo, making the story more "exciting", in this case, refers to making the story more exciting to the Crunchyroll international audience. This means that the "more exciting" is meant to be targeted at the international anime community. In addition, in a comment on the production of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation, director Yamamoto stated that "The contrast between the special power battles and the characters' daily lives is sure to offer entertainment to everyone from all generations and all orientations, so I hope you check it out!" (Luster 2020), further confirming the urge to reach a greater audience. Therefore, in line with the statements of director Yamamoto, most interesting are the changes concerning the Japanifycation of the

story content as it implies that changing the story background and perspective from South-Korea to Japan is "more exciting" or "offer entertainment to everyone from all generations and all orientations". In extension, this means that, for the purpose of reaching a greater (international) audience, the Korean Webtoon *Noblesse* is glocalized in both the 2016 anime 30-minutes episode and the 2020 Crunchyroll Originals anime adaptation.

The many story line changes and character cuts heavily impact the story line of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation compared to the original content. In line with the notion that these changes and cuts were made for the benefit of appealing to the international anime community with the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation, the changes made concerning the Koreaness of the original *Noblesse* webtoon are the most interesting. For example, chapter 21 of the *Noblesse* webtoon leads the story to a PC bang, or internet café but the content of this chapter was completely cut in the 2016 *Noblesse* adaptation and only briefly mentioned in the 2020 Crunchyroll Originals *Noblesse* anime adaptation (Son and Lee 2014). In the journal paper "The Games We Play Online and Offline: Making Wang-tta in Korea", Florence Chee wrote:

> Although Oldenburg (1997) wrote about third places for and within a U.S. context, similar parallels can be drawn for the importance of these third places in Korea. It is important to see the particular importance of PC bangs in Korean everyday life. It is significant that these places function neither as work nor home, and are places of psychological (and in this case even physical) comfort and support. It also is significant that wide use of the PC bang is due primarily to the availability and cheap price of access at $1.00 per hour. For these reasons, the PC bang has become the locus of so many varied community- nurturing activities among young Koreans. (Chee 2006, 234)

Though the content of chapter 21 and the omission of the PC bang is not of particular importance to the story progression, it does, however, represent a certain Korean lifestyle. Therefore, the omission of PC bangs further decreases the association of the *Noblesse* story with South-Korea in the anime adaptation.

Furthermore, in the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation, in addition to the previously mentioned changed character names from Korean to Japanese and the omission of the PC bang chapter, the background country of the original *Noblesse* story was also changed from South-Korea to Japan. This change becomes clear in the first 4 minutes of the first episode as one of the newly introduced characters says that they need to go to Japan for a mission (Noblesse 2020a).

Though from the 2016 *Noblesse: Awakening* anime adaptation it was not clear in which country the main character exactly resides (Tada 2016), in the 2020 *Noblesse* adaptation it soon becomes clear that the newly introduced character is going to the same place where the main character Raizel and his crew reside (Noblesse 2020a), confirming that the main (home) base of the protagonists is located in Japan instead of South-Korea, as was the case in the original webtoon.

Not only was Korean related content almost entirely removed, but also, content related to Japanese culture and lifestyle that did not appear in the original story was added. A good example can be found in episode 7 of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation were the relatively important side character Yuusuke Tashiro, originally known as Han Shinwoo, mentioned that he was reading *shoujo manga* (少女漫画), referring to the Japanese genre of comics (manga) target at girls (Noblesse 2020b). S*houjo manga* was not mentioned in the original story of season 2 and 3 of the *Noblesse* webtoon.

In line with the notion of "*mugukjeok"* the omission of the PC bang could indicate the locality of *Noblesse* being influenced by Korean culture becoming less culturally specific by adding globally popular cultural elements. However, in the case of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation, this would also imply that the omission Korean related content in favor of replacing it with content related to Japanese culture, indicate that Japaneseness of anime is a globally popular cultural element. Therefore, in contrary to the globalized product becoming

less culturally specific, in the case of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation, the story stays culturally specific but changes culture. In addition, against the notion of "cultural odorlessness" of Japanese consumer goods, I argue that the omission of PC bang and addition of referencing *shoujo manga* aims to include specifically Japanese culture and, therefore, does represent a certain way of (school)life connected to the country of origin. Furthermore, the notion of glocalization implies that within the globalization process, the globalized product is (partially) localized to appeal to the local (target) audience. In the case of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation, director Yamamoto and the involvement of Crunchyroll made clear that this target audience refers to the international anime community. Therefore, the many changes surrounding culture and nation in the 2016 and 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation indicates this glocalization process and, thus, implying that replacing Korean cultural content with Japanese culture is more appealing to the global anime community. Also, the original 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation was first streamed in Japanese with English subtitles before an English dub or any other dub was made available. This implies the confidence that making a subbed version of *Noblesse* appeals more to the global anime community confirming the importance of the dubbed versus subbed anime debate. Applying the notion of glocalization on the globalized good of the *Noblesse* webtoon anime adaptation director Yamamoto and the involvement of Crunchyroll confirmed, as previously discussed, that the locality in this glocalization process refers to the global anime community. In the case of the 2020 Korean webtoon anime adaptation of *Noblesse,* the decisions to make and stream a Japanese voiced anime first over other maybe more appropriate languages, change the background stage to Japan, cut Korean representation, names and cultural references replacing them with Japanese representation, names and cultural references, together with the subbed versus dubbed anime debate, implies the assumed "invented" locality of the international anime community's preference of including Japan and

Japaneseness in the content and production of an anime. Therefore, by aiming to better relate to the international anime community, references to Korea were replacement with Japan indicating an unequal transnational cultural exchange. In addition, through the banal practice of national representation concerning language, culture, and the mentioning of the nation-state, the anime adaptation of *Noblesse* changed almost everything Korean related to Japan, further enforcing the association of anime with Japan while implying the hegemonic position of Japanese culture within the creation of anime.

The glocalization of the globalized popular culture media product of the *Noblesse* webtoon to better fit the locality of the "invented" anime community, trying to appeal to the global anime community, resulted in all significant Korean related content and content production being changed to Japanese. Save for the originally Korean high school name, Ye Ran high school. The near complete erasure of Korea and Korean culture regarding the content of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation clearly indicates the hegemonic cultural dominance of Japan in anime, resulting in the unequalness of the transnationally exchanged popular culture of the *Noblesse* webtoon.

## Audience reception of the Japanified *Noblesse* anime adaptation: continuing the debate of Japaneseness in anime

In this part of the case study, I will address the "invented" assumption that anime has to be Japanese. Though, the many changes in the *Noblesse* anime adaptation, as discussed in the previous sub-chapters, indicate an assumption that anime has to be, to a certain extent, Japanese, to appeal to the international audience, there are many consumers who do not agree with this assumption. By studying reviews and comments related to the replacement Korea related content with refences Japan, I will illustrate that this assumed necessity of including Japaneseness in the anime adaptation of *Noblesse* by the production side trigger critical

reviews and comments concerning the replacement of Korean names and cultural/national references, at the same times, serving as a foundation for the further development of the Korean webtoon anime adaptation genre.

Firstly, I am going to discuss the reviews written on the "review" section on the MyAnimeList 2020 Crunchyroll Originals *Noblesse* anime adaptation web page. MyAnimeList is an anime fan website with over half a million users a day and bases its activities around gathering and sharing anime and manga information, news, and trends, discussing anime and manga content either on forums or as reviews, and keeping track of the anime you watched, are watching and want to watch on a personal list (MyAnimeList, n.d., c). The MAL top 20 reviews on the review section of the 2020 Crunchyroll Originals *Noblesse* anime adaptation shows, in contrary of the overall score of 6.83/10 scored by 70,245 users, an average score of 5.05/10 (MyAnimeList, n.d., d)., indicating that the reception of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation is not exceptionally positive. Most of the critique concerns the cut of story content and the fast pacing resulting from try to fit two seasons of *Noblesse* webtoon content into a 13-episode anime series (MyAnimeList, n.d., d). However, in one of the top 5 reviews written by the user FateXBlood, found helpful by 41 other users, the changed location from South-Korea to Japan and changed Korean character names to Japanese names are mentioned as one of the major faults of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation (FateXBlood 2020). Concerning these changes FateXBlood in his review says: "Personally, this felt like they're either trying to claim that Noblesse is a Japanese story or have a superior mentality that anything animated in Japan will have the details of Japan only. Which in my opinion, is a very bad move." (FateXBlood 2020). Another example implying the disagreement with changing the original Korean location and names to Japanese ones, is the comment by the user IMJ9 appearing in the comment section of the first 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation. In this comment IMJ9 writes: "WHY THE HECK DID THEY CHANGE

THE SETTING FROM KOREA TO JAPAN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" (IMJ9 2020). This comment has

been upvoted 93 times and has been replied to by several other users, mostly confirming their

agreement with IMJ9's statement (IMJ9 2020).

Both FateXBlood's MAL review, supported by 41 users of this review, and IMJ9's

comment in the comment section of the first episode of the 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptation

on the Crunchyroll website, supported by 93 users, clearly showcases the disagreement of

some global anime fans with the assumption that anime has to be Japanese. At the same time,

however, it also indicates that the assumption of anime needing to be Japanese exists. As

evident from the audience's reaction discussed above, even though this assumption has been

enforced by part of the global anime community itself in the previously mentioned subbed

versus dubbed debate, in the case of the anime adaptation of the *Noblesse* webtoon, it was the

production side that used this assumption and further enforced it.

Because the debate and assumption surrounding the necessary Japaneseness of anime

exists, in the case of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation, this assumption ultimately led to the

unequal transnational cultural exchange of the *Noblesse* webtoon by erasing Korea and

replacing it with Japan in its anime adaptation. Nonetheless, critical reaction concerning the

erasure of Korea in the anime adaptation indicate the continuation of hegemonic struggle

between not only, production and consumers within anime, but also indicates the existing

hegemonic cultural dominance of Japan in anime creation.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have discussed how the hegemonic cultural influences of Japan in

Japanese anime affect globalization process of transnationally exchanged popular cultural

media of the Korean webtoon based anime adaptation *Noblesse.* By using the notion of

globalization as a process of hybridization, together with the concept of glocalization and the Korean concept of "*mugukjeok*", this thesis illustrates the "imagined" inclusion of Japaneseness in the anime genre. While the association of anime with Japan illustrates the dominant position of Japan within anime production the hegemonic position of Japan and Japanese culture can lead to unequal transnational cultural exchange. Using the concept of glocalization in conjunction with "*mugukjeok*" together with the ongoing debate of the use of Japanese language within the global anime community in a case study, this thesis proves the existence of an "imagined" inclusion of Japaneseness in the production and content of anime. The case study applies a contextual discursive approach studying the production, changes in content, and audience reception to better understand the impact of the globalization, and in extension, glocalization process on (unequal) transnational cultural exchange of Korean webtoon based anime adaptation.

In the first chapter, this thesis discussed and analyzed the theories of globalization and glocalization. This chapter also discusses East-Asian globalization concepts of "*mugukjeok*" (Korean) *and "mukokuseki"* (Japanese), ultimately including the notion "*mugukjeok*" in conceptualizing glocalization. In addition, this chapter also explains the discursive approach that will be applied in the case study. The notion of globalization as a process of hybridization together with this thesis' conceptualization of glocalization explain that both local and global influences affect the creation and production of globalized goods. Therefore, to study and create a better understanding of the impact of the globalization and glocalization process on the production of inter-Asian transnationally exchanged culture, it is important to discuss the relevant local and global influences in play within the production and creation of globalized consumer goods. In the case of the globalization process of Korean webtoon anime adaptations, I argue that the locality of the international anime community influences the glocalization process of adapting Korean webtoons into anime.

In the second chapter, this thesis discusses both the popular cultural media of anime and webtoon. In addition, this chapter also discusses that the "imagined" locality of the international anime community includes Japaneseness in the conceptualization of the anime genre. This inclusion of Japaneseness in the conceptualization of anime is based on the ongoing discussion within the anime community concerning the debate if it is better to watch anime in Japanese with subtitles or in your own native language. Though this debate mostly concerns subjective preference, the fact that this debate exists indicates that a part of the anime community includes the Japaneseness of anime is an important aspect of anime enjoyment. Through discussing comments on the international anime community surrounding this debate it becomes clear that fans watch anime in Japanese with English subtitles because it is created by Japanese (ToriRLR, October 26, 2018, 14:57 p.m., comment on Suicidalbutbaked 2018).

In the case study the production, content, and audience reception of the Japanese anime adaptation of *Noblesse* was discussed. Firstly, I gave a brief explanation of the *Noblesse* story and introduced the relevant involved production companies. Then, the case study continued by discussing the production side of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation. Concerning the production process of the 2016 and 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptations, it becomes clear that, because of its huge popularity, Japanese animation was to continue the animation and globalization process of the *Noblesse* webtoon, which already had made an animation adaptation of *Noblesse*. In line with economic (capitalist) consideration, the popularity of the anime genre led to the decision to involve the Japanese anime studio, Production I.G. over the Korean animation studio, Studio Animal, indicating the cultural dominance of the Japanese animation industry within the East-Asia. Also, adding to the explanation why Japanese anime was chosen for the adaptation of the *Noblesse* webtoon is the aligned interest, existence, and involvement of the international streaming platform

Crunchyroll, who co-produced and licensed both 2016 and 2020 *Noblesse* anime adaptations. The reason for Crunchyroll working together with the Japanese animation studio Production I.G. can be explained due to Crunchyroll's own focus and interest in anime and focusses its content on streaming (Japanese) anime and connecting anime fans globally. In addition, while hiring Korean creative staff and voice actors was an option, the decision to leave almost all creative production to Japanese staff and anime studio in favor of reaching a greater audience indicates a certain extend of unequal transnational cultural exchange.

Furthermore, the content of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation was changed to better fit its target audience. In this case, the target audience is the global anime community as is apparent due to the involvement of the international streaming site Crunchyroll and confirmed by statements of director Yamamoto Yasutaka. Additionally, the global anime community also serves as the "imagined" locality in the glocalization process of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation as much of the original *Noblesse* webtoon content is changed to appeal to the global anime community. Following this notion, the usage of Japanese voice actors over Korean voice actors, the replacement of Korean cultural reference with Japanese cultural references, the change in background country from South-Korea to Japan, and the subbed versus dubbed anime debate all imply a certain assumed Japaneseness of anime content and production. In line with the glocalization process, the globalized product of the *Noblesse* webtoon is influenced by the "imagined" locality of the international anime community. Therefore, the replacement of references to Korea with Japan, aimed to better appeal to the international anime community, indicate an unequal transnational cultural exchange in the globalization and glocalization process of the anime adaptation of the *Noblesse* webtoon.

In the last part of the case study, I discuss that, in the case of the *Noblesse* anime adaptation, the assumption that the global anime community prefer their anime to be Japanese, is only that, an assumption. Many anime fans are not agreeing with the many

changes in the *Noblesse* anime adaptation. A couple of anime fan especially address the erasure of Korean culture as something disrespectful and unnecessary. This indicates that the assumption of anime needing to be Japanese, at least concerning the content, does not account for every anime fan. However, the reactions concerning the omission of Korean cultural references does indicate the existing debate surrounding the Japaneseness of the anime genre. Nonetheless, as the creation of genre is a fluent process, this assumption will change bit by bit and thus the study of the anime genre needs to be constantly updated.

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