"A Community Unlike Any Other": Incorporating Fansubbers into Corporate Capitalism on Viki.com

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ABSTRACT

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Viki.com, founded in 2008, is a streaming site that offers Korean (and other East Asian) television programs with subtitles in a variety of languages. Unlike other K-drama distribution sites that serve audiences outside of South Korea, Viki utilizes fan-volunteers, called fansubbers, as laborers to produce its subtitles. Fan subtitling and distribution of foreign language media in the United States is a rich fan practice dating back to the 1980s, and Viki is the first corporate entity that has harnessed the productive power of fansubbers.

In this thesis, I investigate how Viki has been able to capture the enthusiasm and productive capacity of fansubbers. Particularly, I examine how Viki has been able to monetize fansubbing in while still staying competitive with sites who employee trained, professional translators. I argue that Viki has succeeded in courting fansubbers as laborers by co-opting the concept of the "fan community." I focus on how Viki strategically speaks about the community and builds its site to facilitate the functioning of its community so as to encourage fansubbers to view themselves as semi-professional laborers instead of amateur fans. In reframing the role of the fansubbing community, Viki creates a new image for what being a fansubber means and why fansubbing is valuable that emphasizes creating value for Viki over creating value for the fan community.

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Introduction: A Community Unlike Any Other?

Viki.com, founded in 2008, is a streaming site that offers Korean (and other East Asian) television programs with subtitles in a variety of languages. Comparing Viki to similar streaming sites reveals its unique strength: the company emphasizes its "community." Other comparable sites that have capitalized off the boom in popularity of Korean pop media in the English-speaking West since the mid-2000s, such as DramaFever.com and Kocowa.com, focus almost exclusively on fast delivery of professionally-subtitled video content. While quick delivery of subtitled content is also important on Viki, of equal or even greater importance is the facilitation of community building on the site. Unlike competitors, Viki does not use professional translators to subtitle its content; rather, it is a site "powered by fans"[1] who volunteer their time and labor to translate and subtitle videos licensed and uploaded by Viki. Because Viki relies on its volunteers to provide the subtitles users come to the site for, it focuses heavily on advertising and building a community of volunteers. The "Community" tab at the top of Viki's homepage offers users an easy way to learn about and become part of Viki's community, which it calls "a community unlike any other."[2]

When looking at Viki's community in the context of other streaming sites that offer subtitled Korean video content, it appears to be a community like no other. Viki's two biggest competitors, DramaFever and Kocowa, do not have site-based communities or features to facilitate interaction between users. Netflix and Hulu, which have limited offerings of Korean shows and movies (some of which are licensed from Viki),[3] similarly lack community features. Looking at the site from a wider context, however, makes clear that its community is not as

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[1] "About Us," *Viki*, accessed April 28, 2018, https://www.viki.com/about.
[2] "Community," *Viki*, accessed April 28, 2018, https://www.viki.com/community.
[3] "Partners," *Viki*, accessed April 28. 2018. https://www.viki.com/partners.

unique as it claims. For one, Viki is not the only site to have used volunteers in lieu of professional translators. As Julie McDonough Dolmaya has shown, both for-profit companies such as Facebook and Twitter and non-profit sites like Wikipedia have used crowdsourced, volunteer translation to translate their user interfaces and site contents. TED uses crowdsourced translation to subtitle its TED Talk videos in a way very similar to Viki's use of volunteers. Some of these sites even use the language of community to recruit and encourage volunteer labor much in the way Viki does.[4] When looking at Viki in the context of other crowdsourced translation initiatives, it becomes clear that Viki's community is actually similar to many others.

Viki's claim to be a unique community also hides the fact that its community of volunteers is not innovative, but is an updated and monetized version of the fan-run translation communities that have built and sustained fandoms of foreign-language media since before the widespread use of the Internet. The volunteer translation work done within these fan communities is called fansubbing (a portmanteau of "fan" and "subtitling"), and the term "fansubber" refers to the fans who participate in the process of fansubbing, whether through translating dialogue, editing videos, or managing a team of fansubbers. The Viki community has its roots in the K-drama (Korean television drama) fansubbing community, a community made of fans devoted to translating, subtitling, and distributing K-drama series for free through the Internet. K-drama fansubbers began their work around 2004 and distributed hundreds of subtitled K-drama series during the nearly nine years that fansubbing was most active. Through their work, these fan volunteers not only helped build the English-speaking K-drama fandom that Viki and other K-drama streaming sites have capitalized off, but also defined the expectations that K-drama fans have for the subtitled content they consume. Viki, despite its refusal to acknowledge

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[4] Julie McDonough Dolmaya, "The ethics of crowdsourcing," *Linguistica Antverpiensia* 10 (2011).

it, has capitalized off and carries on the legacy of K-drama fansubbing through its facilitation of fan-done subtitling.

In this thesis, I investigate how Viki has been able to capture the enthusiasm and productive capacity of fansubbers. Why have fansubbers, who for so long rejected commercialization of their work, accepted the monetization of their labor by Viki? Why have they embraced Viki despite having the community they built destroyed by the popularization of Viki and its competitors? The answer to these questions lies, I argue, in how Viki has co-opted the concept of the "fan community." Viki, through how it speaks about community and facilitates the functioning of its community on its site, reframes the role of the community for fansubbers, and in doing so, creates a new image for what being a fansubber means and why fansubbing is valuable.

<u>Meanings of "Community"</u>

Both Viki and the K-drama fansub teams who came before it deploy the language of community to justify the importance of fan translation and to recruit fans to volunteer their time and effort. As a result, it is necessary to know what community means to both Viki and to independent fansubbers. K-drama fansubbing, both on and off Viki, has always taken place within teams. Fans first came together to pool their labor and skills in order to streamline the process of translation, video editing, and episode distribution. These fans operated outside of corporate structures and took on the task of translating and distributing dramas completely on their own. Because of their independence from industry, I call these original K-drama fansubbers "independent fansubbers." The independent K-drama fansubbing community includes all fans who participated in fansubbing, including the translators and video editors who did the actual work of subtitling as well as the fans involved in running fansub teams. Fansub viewers could

also become peripheral members of the independent fansubbing community by providing moral support and feedback to fansubbers.

I refer to the fans who volunteer on Viki as "Viki fansubbers." Viki does not use the term "fansubbers" to refer to its volunteers, nor does it call its subtitling process "fansubbing." However, K-drama fans use both "fansubbers" and "fansubbing" when speaking about Viki and its volunteers, and I adopt their usage of these terms. As such, the Viki fansubbing community includes all fans who volunteer to create subtitles for Viki. The Viki community, on the other hand, includes Viki fansubbers as well as all other site users. Viki defines its community as encompassing its volunteers as well as those who "create real-time comments, fan collections, [and] ratings and reviews" on the site.[5] This definition of the Viki community, which is provided by the site, excludes users who watch dramas without participating in discussion or content production. However, my usage of "Viki community" refers to all users of the site.

Importantly, the independent fansubbing community, the Viki fansubbing community, and the Viki community are all sub-communities of the wider community of K-drama fans. I will refer to the wider fan community as the K-drama fandom or K-drama fan community in order to make this distinction between the sub-communities of fansubbers and the wider fan community clear. Additionally, although none of these terms specify the linguistic or national background of fans, they all refer to fans of Korean dramas who primarily consume dramas in English.

Fansubbers Role in K-drama Translation and Distribution

The role of fansubbers in the growth of the English-speaking K-drama fandom is a particularly interesting example of global media convergence because of how fansubbers have functioned, and continue to function, in permitting and promoting the spread of K-dramas into

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[5] "Community," *Viki.*

the West. Global media convergence, as defined by Henry Jenkins, is "the multidirectional flow of cultural goods around the world." Global media convergence results from the interplay of two different processes: corporate convergence, "the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a smaller and smaller number of multinational conglomerates," and grassroots convergence, "the increasingly central roles that digitally empowered forces play in shaping the production, distribution, and reception of media content."[6] As corporate forces and grassroots forces intersect, interact, and create new pathways for the spread of media around the world, global media convergence "alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences" and sparks "creative innovation in almost every sector of popular culture."[7] K-drama fansubbers, whether working in the independent fansubbing community or in the Viki fansubbing community, are grassroots actors whose actions have had powerful effects on the flow of Korean media around the world; both through their independent distribution activities and through their cooperative interactions with Viki, fansubbers have been able to influence what Korean media enters the English-speaking West and how that media is distributed.

More specifically, fansubbers have been able to effect change in the flow of K-dramas into the West through their role as what Hye-Kyung Lee calls "new cultural intermediaries." New cultural intermediaries are fans who "[undertake] tasks of cultural intermediation that are essential to bring a cultural product to an overseas audience" such as translation, subtitling, and media distribution. Lee observes that these "consumers are relocating the intermediary activities that used to rely on paid professionals to the realm of fandom" and in doing so, they "practice

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[6] Henry Jenkins, "Pop Cosmopolitanism: Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence," in *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 155.
[7] Jenkins, "Pop Cosmopolitanism," 155.

new logics of cultural intermediation." She focuses especially on how these fans promote "new trends of cultural consumption that is based on anytime (often real-time) access to an ever-increasing range of fan-translated cultural products from overseas."[8] Because fan intermediaries are isolated from the professionalizing forces of the market, they are able to innovate by, for example, translating media that companies will not license, developing new creative translation practices, or experimenting with online distribution technologies. Through their experimentation, Lee argues, fans are able to set new values and expectations for the translation of cultural products that professional intermediaries, bound by professional standards and limitations, often cannot compete with.[9]

As new cultural intermediaries, independent K-drama fansubbers were able to take a position of power within their fandom. Fansubbers were, for many years, fans' only source of English-subtitled K-dramas, and their role as the sole translators and distributors of dramas allowed them not only to control the flow of dramas into the K-drama fandom, but also allowed them to set norms for K-drama distribution. Their control over the flow of content granted them power over the fans who relied on them for dramas, allowing them to demand from their viewers certain kinds of behavior as repayment for their unpaid labor. More impactfully, fansubbers also had the agency to select which dramas they wanted to translate and to institute certain practices of translation, subtitling, and distribution as standard. These standard practices eventually came to inform fan expectations for how subtitled K-dramas should look, read, and be distributed, and later K-drama distribution companies would have to meet these fan expectations in order to succeed. Fansubbers' power over the conduct and expectations of their viewers stemmed mainly

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[8] Hye-Kyung Lee, "Cultural consumers as 'new cultural intermediaries': manga scanlators," *Arts Marketing: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (2012): 132-133.
[9] Lee, "Cultural consumers as 'new cultural intermediaries,'" 140.

from their control over distribution; because fans could not get dramas elsewhere, they had to conform to the rules fansubbers set and put up with the translation and distribution practices that fansubbers used.

On Viki, fansubbers still function as new cultural intermediaries, but have had their role as sole distributors of dramas stripped away and have had the bulk of their power within fandom stripped as a result. While Viki fansubbers still have control over how they translate, Viki has standardized the process of subtitling, thus restricting fansubbers' ability to creatively use subtitles as a tool of translation. Viki has also completely subsumed the process of content selection and distribution. Despite having set the standards for translation, subtitling, and distribution that Viki and other K-drama sites have attempted to conform to, fansubbers have lost the power to alter these standards or experiment with new practices. Additionally, because English-subtitled K-dramas can be found on multiple sites, fansubbers no longer have control over distribution and have lost the power that stemmed from that control. Viki has effectively monetized the labor of fansubbers while divesting them of much of the freedom and power they had gained through years of unpaid labor in the service of their fandom.

Viki's Embrace of the Fan Community

In the past, fans have reacted negatively against corporate attempts to capitalize off their labor. The example of FanLib is particularly informative. In 2007, FanLib, Inc. attempted to create a platform to host and make money off fan fiction, which was, like fansubbing, traditionally a non-commercial fan activity. FanLib's efforts were "largely excoriated by existing fan fiction communities," and it closed down only a year later.[10] Henry Jenkins argues that FanLib was rejected so strongly because it "didn't emerge bottom-up from the fan culture itself,"

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[10] Abigail De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 119.

but was "a business, pure and simple, run by a board of directors which was entirely composed of men" who wanted to capitalize off a largely female community without addressing the desires and concerns of those community members.[11] FanLib's status as an outsider, not simply its attempt to monetize fan fiction, seemed to be the salient factor in why it was not embraced by fans. Abigail De Kosnik observed that "there seemed to be a consensus…among fan fiction writers and readers that parties who do not currently operate in, and therefore do not thoroughly understand fan fiction communities should not be the parties who profit."[12] Fans met FanLib with suspicion and distrust because it attempted to overhaul the traditional non-commercial nature of the fan fiction community without first trying to understand and collaborate with that community.

Viki associates itself first and foremost with K-drama fandom and promotes itself a site not only made for fans, but "powered by fans."[13] This slogan emphasizes the importance of fansubbers on Viki. Fans not only consume Viki's products, but create the products that Viki sells; without fans, Viki would have no value to offer. By embracing and collaborating with fans, the site creates an image for itself as a company that cares about and is responsive to the desires and needs of the fans whose community it has entered. While FanLib was rejected by fan fiction writers and readers because of its perceived outsider status and lack of concern for what fans wanted and needed from a fan fiction hosting platform, Viki has been able to court fansubbers into volunteering their labor for the site because it claims be a community insider with a close relationship to fans. By strategically adopting some of the values of the independent K-drama fansubbing community, such as the importance of working in small units to subtitle, Viki has

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[11] Henry Jenkins, "Transforming Fan Culture into User-Generated Content: The Case of FanLib," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan* (blog), May 22, 2007, http://henryjenkins.org/2007/05/transforming_fan_culture_into.html.
[12] De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?" 119.
[13] "About Us," *Viki.*

made fansubbers comfortable laboring on and for the site. While Viki offers fansubbers advantages that traditional fansubbing lacked, such as legal legitimacy and easy-to-use software, I argue that Viki's insistence on the importance of community is the most important reason why fansubbers have accepted Viki.

Shifts in Community Bring Shifts in Power

While the compositions of the independent K-drama fansubbing community and the Viki community seem similar, the critical difference between them is who led or leads each community. The K-drama fansubbing community was built completely by fansubbers. The forums and instant messaging platforms used for communication and project management were set up and maintained by fansubbers who took on leadership roles. Though the large size of some teams necessitated the formation of a hierarchical power structure to ensure smooth project management, the organization of these teams was more communal than corporate; community members came together to discuss rules of conduct and standards for work, which were dictated by member desires and needs above anything else. As one team's recruitment page described it, fansubbers saw their community as a "loving family" where each member's contributions and opinions were valuable.

The Viki community, on the other hand, is more corporate than communal. Fansubbers are valued as a vital source of labor, and so their desires and needs are important, but Viki's management has ultimate control over how the community operates. While experienced fansubbers can be empowered as community leaders at the level of individual project teams, the power associated with leading a project team is fleeting, since it lasts only until the series is completely subtitled and the team disbands. Furthermore, if the site managers institute a change that fansubbers do not like, fansubbers are more often than not forced to decide between

accepting and adapting to the change or leaving K-drama fansubbing altogether. Thus, the shift from the K-drama fansubbing community to the Viki community saw fansubbers lose power on both the level of the community as a whole and as individuals. As a whole, fansubbers lost the ability to control how their community functioned, while as individuals, their voices held less power to affect change within the community. Understanding why fansubbers have accepted this disempowerment is the main goal of this thesis.

Chapter outline and methods

To investigate why fansubbers have embraced Viki, I begin with a survey of the history of fansubbing and an overview of the independent K-drama fansubbing community. Chapter one shows how K-drama fansubbing began, and how fansubbers grew the K-drama fandom to a size that made the founding of sites like Viki possible. With this historical foundation in place, chapters two and three examine the interventions Viki has made to incorporate fansubbers into its corporate structure. Chapter two is an analysis of Viki's subtitling software. I examine how the software's interface and communication features deemphasize communication between team members and promote adherence to high standards of quality. I argue that Viki's software promotes the ideal fansubber as one who views herself more as a pseudo-employee of Viki than as a fan working enjoyably alongside friends. This image of fansubber as employee rather than fan is reinforced by Viki's emphasis on the perks offered to prolific contributors; rather than working as a way to build relationships, fansubbers work to earn material benefits (that may or may not ever be delivered). In chapter three, I look at Viki's sitewide social features. Comparing the kinds of interactions between fansubbers and their viewers made possible on Viki to the interactions that took place on the forums and websites of K-drama fandom before Viki, I argue that Viki separates fansubbers from their viewers. In limiting socialization between fansubbers

and their viewers, Viki cuts fansubbers off from the wider K-drama fandom and suggests that their main identification should be with Viki and its community. Taken together, these analyses will show how Viki has been able to use the rhetoric of the fan community to position itself as a member of the fansubbing community while fundamentally changing the meaning of that community so that it can be incorporated within Viki's corporate framework.

The main methods of analysis to be used are discourse analysis and discursive interface analysis. Discourse analysis will be used to track and compare how fansubbers and Viki use the word "community" and how they speak about the benefits of labor. To examine how K-drama fansubbing websites, Viki's website, and Viki's subtitling software promote or discourage certain understandings of fansubbers and community, I will use discursive interface analysis. Mel Stanfill defines discursive interface analysis as a method that "examines norms produced by 'affordances' of websites" to "[interpret] websites' embedded assumptions about their own purpose and appropriate use." Affordances of a website are "what a site '*offers* the user'"; affordances can include features such as the ability to view a video, to comment on that video, and to share that video on a social media platform. Affordances can be analyzed not only to understand what a user can do on a site, but to examine what features of a site are "foregrounded, how [they] are explained, and how technically *possible* uses become more or less *normative*." This kind of analysis would include observing what features a site promotes by, for example, placing links or web apps at the top of a page and what features the site discourages by making them difficult to access or use. Working from "the premise that how sites are built reflect assumptions about what site visitors will do, which becomes a normative claim about what Users *should* do,"[14] I will analyze independent K-drama fansubbing sites and Viki webpages to

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[14] Mel Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," *New Media & Society* 17, no. 7 (2014): 1061-62

compare what possibilities they offer users and what kinds of ideal users they envision. These analytical methods will allow me to make claims about how fansubbers and Viki speak about and actively promote or discourage certain understandings of community and fan labor.

My thesis aims to show that Viki has created a fansubbing community that encourages its members to act as pseudo-employees rather than fans. By selectively adopting facets of the independent fansubbing community, Viki gives its fansubbing community an appearance similar to the close-knit community that proceeded it. However, the way that Viki has built its site prevents its fansubbing community from functioning so as to foster the close and familial atmospheres of independent fansub groups. Rather, Viki's community features encourage fansubbers to prioritize generating value for Viki through fast production of professional-quality subtitles. In doing this, Viki reframes what fansubbing is and what makes it valuable. I hope to show that, on Viki, fansubbing is not a practice aimed at serving and building up the K-drama fandom, but is a streamlined process that serves the site's corporate goals.

Chapter One: History of Fansubbing and K-drama Distribution in the West

Although Viki has dubbed itself home to "a community unlike any other," the site actually capitalizes off a fan practice and a fan community that both existed long before Viki's founding in 2008. Fan-run subtitling and distribution have been going on since the 1980s. The English-speaking K-drama fandom began to grow in the late 1990s, thanks largely to the work of independent fansubbers who distributed subtitled K-dramas at a time when there were no legal, commercial efforts to do so. Viki began distributing dramas at a time when independent K-drama fansubbing and the K-drama fandom were thriving, making it necessary for the site to use specific strategies in order to succeed. This chapter will provide the historical background needed to understand the unique context in which Viki entered the K-drama fandom. First, I will give a brief historical sketch of fansubbing and the growth of the English-speaking K-drama fandom. Second, I will explain how commercialization of K-drama distribution in the United States began and look at Viki's competitors. Finally, I will explain the value Viki claims to provide to fansubbers to see how it attempts to recruit fansubbers and redefine the purpose of fansubbing. With this context in place, chapters two and three will give an in-depth analysis of two of Viki's most important strategies for turning fansubbing into a reliable and successful business model.

History of Fansubbing

Fan subtitling and distribution of foreign television shows began in the late 1980s as a way for fans of anime (Japanese animated television shows) to counteract limited access to anime in the United States.[15] The practice developed within American anime clubs, which

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[15] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide an in-depth history of anime fansubbing. For the detailed, in-depth histories that my brief sketch draws from, see Sean Leonard, "Celebrating Two Decades of Unlawful Progress: Fan Distribution, Proselytization Commons, and the Explosive Growth of Japanese Animation," *UCLA Entertainment Law Review* 12, no. 2 (2005): 189-265; and Mizuko Ito, "Contributors versus Leechers: Fansubbing Ethics and a

received videotaped copies of anime episodes from Japanese anime fans and Japanese animation studios hoping to gain a foothold in the American market.[16] While some of these videotapes had English subtitles, many did not, and the language barrier provided a formidable obstacle to anime clubs' effort to spread awareness about anime in the U.S. Initially, bilingual club members translated episodes into English and wrote scripts that were printed and distributed within and among clubs.[17] However, by the late 1980s, widespread availability of computers and genlocks, specialized hardware which allowed users to overlay digitally-produced subtitles onto videotapes, made it possible for fans to put translations directly onto tapes.[18] In 1989, fans started to distribute the first fansubbed anime episodes on VHS tapes.[19]

Fansubbing using VHS tapes was both complicated and expensive. Would-be fansubbers needed to have access to both a computer and a genlock, and also needed to know how to use this equipment. To counteract the difficulty and expense of fansubbing, fans formed teams that allowed them to pool the technological resources and expertise of multiple people, educate each other about how to subtitle, and lessen the labor required of individuals so as to make the work more fun and feasible. The early development of fansubbing established two important, long-lasting characteristics of the practice: first, that fansubbing was somewhat exclusive, as fans needed to have both access to technology and knowledge of how to use that technology; and second, that the work of fansubbing tended to be done in teams in order to more conveniently and effectively gather the resources, labor, and knowledge needed to tackle each translation project.

Hybrid Public Culture," in *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, eds. Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Izumi Tsuji (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012): 179-204
[16] Leonard, "Celebrating Two Decades of Unlawful Progress," 199-201.
[17] Ito, "Contributors versus Leechers," 183.
[18] Leonard, "Celebrating Two Decades of Unlawful Progress," 196-197.
[19] Leonard, 214.

The exclusive nature of VHS fansubbing was exacerbated by the difficulty of distributing fansubbed videotapes. Sharing fansubs required videotapes to be copied and physically transferred, making the process of circulating subtitles slow. Videotape exchange happened either in person at club meetings or anime conventions, or through the mail.[20] As a result, "distribution was restricted to small networks of clubs and convention screenings"; only those who knew someone within one of the small fansubbing networks had access to subtitles.[21] This changed with the rise and spread of Internet accessibility in the late 1990s. As "fans started getting Internet access in increasing numbers and started becoming aware of additional titles, distribution demands 'exploded.'"[22] Anime fans could find fansubbing groups through the Internet and request fansubbed videotapes through email, greatly expanding access to fansubbing networks that had previously been relatively closed off.

Widespread adoption of the Internet also affected the process of fansubbing itself by giving rise to "digisubbing." Digisubbing placed subtitles onto digital video files, rather than VHS tapes, meaning fansubs could be distributed digitally rather than physically. The late 1990s also saw the growth of peer-to-peer filesharing networks, such as BitTorrent, that could facilitate the distribution of fansubbed video files. Sean Leonard estimates that "digisubbing eclipsed physical media-based fansubbing as the dominant distribution method by about 2002,"[23] a shift which had three important implications for fansubbing. First, fansubbing became more accessible as a practice. Digisubbing required only a computer and an Internet connection. Potential fansubbers could acquire torrenting software, video playback software, and subtitling software all for free, making fansubbing much less expensive to do. Fansubbing also became less

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[20] Leonard, 214.
[21] Ito, "Contributors versus Leechers," 183.
[22] Leonard, "Celebrating Two Decades of Unlawful Progress," 214.
[23] Leonard, 197.

technologically complicated, largely because digisubbing did not require the use of genlock

hardware to write subtitles onto VHS tapes. Additionally, experienced fansubbers began to create

and post fansubbing guides online that helped newcomers learn the skills necessary for subtitling

and distribution.[24]

The second important result of the migration of fansubbing online was that fansubbers

could more easily connect with fansub viewers and potential future fansubbers across geographic

gaps. Online chat software and instant messaging platforms like IRC channels allowed

fansubbers to connect with anime fans across the United States and around the world. Fansub

groups that grew out of anime clubs required members to be physically present in order to

participate in VHS fansubbing. Digisubbing, on the other hand, took place completely on

computers, allowing geographically distant people to work together and communicate with each

other through the Internet. Digisubbing fansub groups took advantage of new nation-wide and

global networks of communication in order to form teams of dedicated fans from disparate

locations. With a larger population of potential fansubbers came an increase in the number of

fansub groups and, as a result, the amount of anime that could be subtitled and distributed in the

U.S.

Finally, because digisubbed anime could be distributed completely through peer-to-peer

filesharing networks, the reach of fansubs greatly increased. Mizuko Ito marks the adoption of

peer-to-peer filesharing by fansubbers as the fundamental shift in fansubbing practice that caused

"the distribution of fansubbed anime [to explode]." She argues that, as audiences grew due to

increased accessibility of fansubbed anime through filesharing, fansubbing teams began to "see

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[24] For an example of such a guide, see Matthew R. Demicco, "The Beginner's Guide to Subtitling," *Anime Karinkuru*, last updated August 4, 2001, http://armitage.crinkle.net/karinkuru/howtosub/.

their mission as broad distribution" of anime.[25] Teams increasingly worked to reach as many

viewers as possible, and as they began to reach their goal of circulating anime more broadly,

"anime industries began to take note, and occasional cease-and-desist letters were sent to groups,

requesting that [fansub teams] stop subbing a series."[26] As fansub groups increased their reach

and influence through digisubbing and online distribution, it became more and more likely that

their activities would catch the attention of the anime industry. Such attention brought with it

legal risk.

Sean Leonard's legal analysis of fansubbing concluded that "fan distribution and fan

subtitling, in virtually all of their permutations, [are] illegal according to copyright law."

Initially, legal "risks were mitigated by apathy and dismissal…on the part of [the anime

industry],"[27] but as digisubbing became more common and fansub groups expanded their

audiences, anime producers became less apathetic toward fansubbing efforts. Thus, to protect

themselves and the practice of fansubbing from being attacked by the anime industry, fansubbers

adopted a vital community standard: non-commercialism. The tenet of non-commercialism

dictates both fansubbers' behavior and motivations. Fansubbers are not supposed to make profits

off their work, and they are expected to "stop fansubbing and distribution as soon as a series [is]

licensed for the U.S. market." They should see their work "as an effort to build and test an

audience for new series in the United States and to encourage commercial release [of anime]

outside of Japan," not as a way to gain recognition or status within anime fandom.[28] Rayna

Denison argues that the creation and codification of these guidelines by the Anime News

Network, a leading site in the anime fansubbing community, was an attempt by fansubbers to

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[25] Ito, "Contributors versus Leechers," 184.
[26] Ito, 185.
[27] Leonard, "Celebrating Two Decades of Unlawful Progress," 263.
[28] Ito, "Contributors versus Leechers, 184.

"legitimate the practice of fansubbing" and draw "clearer demarcations between acceptable fan practice and piracy" so as to appear less threatening or antagonistic to the anime industry.[29] While most fansubbers recognized the legal precarity of their activities, it was hoped that their portrayal of fansubbing as a strictly non-commercial practice aimed at growing and developing a market for anime in the U.S. would convince the industry to support, rather than fear, the fansubbing community.

Despite anime fansubbers' efforts to portray themselves as allies to the anime industry, the commercialization of anime translation and distribution in the U.S. put competitive and legal pressure on fansubbers to stop their work. Companies like FUNimation, a distribution company that initially focused on anime dubbing and DVD sales, and Crunchyroll, a formerly illegal streaming site that began licensing anime from Japanese rights owners, began "adopting the same [digital] technologies of distribution used by fansubbing groups," turning online anime distribution in a commercialized, legally legitimate process.[30] By 2008, anime fansub groups were receiving cease-and-desist letters from legal distributors with greater frequency. They also struggled to compete with the well-funded, professionally-built streaming sites of FUNimation and Crunchyroll. Although there are still anime fansubbing groups producing English subtitles, most fans tend to watch officially-produced subtitles, and the refrain that "fansubbing is dead" is a common one in discussions within anime fandom.[31]

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a more detailed history of the growth of fansubbing or to give an in-depth analysis of the factors contributing to the "death" of anime

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[29] Rayna Denison, "Anime fandom and the liminal spaces between fan creativity and piracy," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 14, no. 5 (2011): 459-60.
[30] Denison, "Anime fandom and the liminal spaces been fan creativity and piracy," 462.
[31] For examples of such fan discourse, see pentakiller19, "Best Sub Group?" *Reddit*, April 28, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/anime/comments/4gsrph/best_sub_group/; or Dark_Sage, "The State of Fansubbing (It's Dead)," *Crymore*, May 15, 2015, http://www.crymore.net/2015/05/15/the-state-of-fansubbing-its-dead/.

fansubbing. The point of this historical survey was to draw out the development of two important fansubbing conventions: group-centered work and non-commercialism. K-drama fansubbing grew out of the tradition of anime digisubbing and, as a result, adhered closely to these conventions. However, K-drama fansubbing grew up in a different context than anime fansubbing; unlike anime fansubbing, which co-existed with legally legitimate, commercial (albeit limited and offline) distribution of anime in the U.S., K-drama fansubbing took place in the absence of English-subtitled K-drama distribution. Because K-drama fansubbing came first, it provided a model for entrepreneurs looking to capitalize off K-drama distribution. The relationship between K-drama fansubbing and the K-drama industry has thus been different than the relationship between anime fansubbers and the anime industry. While anime fansubbers developed a somewhat antagonistic relationship with anime producers and distributors, K-drama fansubbers have collaborated closely with K-drama distributors and have been able to preserve fansubbing in a robust and long-lasting way (though this preservation came at the cost of commercializing the practice). To see how the unique context of K-drama fansubbing has affected the growth and trajectory of the K-drama fansubbing community, I now turn to give a historical sketch of K-drama distribution in the U.S.

History of K-drama Distribution in the United States

Korean dramas have been broadcasted on American television since the mid-1970s. After the U.S. was opened to non-European immigration in 1965, the Korean-American community grew at an astonishing rate. In 1975, two Korean-American broadcasters purchased time on Los Angeles television channel LA 18, a publicly accessible channel focused on providing airtime for

broadcasts targeted at the city's Asian immigrant communities.[32] Korean programs shown on LA 18 came straight from South Korea and were not subtitled. In 1983, South Korean broadcasting company KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) founded its own publicly accessible Korean-language television channel called KTE (Korean Television Enterprises) in Los Angeles. KTE only showed programs produced in Korea by KBS. In other cities with sizeable Korean-American communities, such as Chicago and New York City, Korean-Americans began to operate their own television stations that aired programs purchased from KTE or Korean broadcasters back in the homeland.[33] Programs shown included dramas, but also news and other kinds of content. Although anyone in these cities with a television set could access most of these channels, only those who spoke Korean could meaningfully watch them, since no channel provided English subtitles.

In addition to television channels in major cities, Korean video rental shops also helped circulate Korean television programs (and K-dramas in particular) in the U.S. In the 1980s, grocery stores owned by Korean-Americans began renting out VHS tapes of dramas purchased from Korea as a way to compete with other Korean grocers. As VHS rentals became more popular, entrepreneurs began to open video rental shops targeted specifically toward Korean-Americans. Like the programs on Korean television channels, the videotapes stocked at grocery stores and rental shops did not have English subtitles. Sangjoon Lee notes that the circulation of Korean television programs through video rental shops was unique in this respect; unlike Indian and Chinese rental shops that made videotapes "widely available to the diasporic audience, often with English subtitles to accommodate younger generations" who might not speak their parents'

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[32] Sangjoon Lee, "From Diaspora TV to Social Media: Korean TV Dramas in America," in *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media*, eds. Sangjoon Lee and Abé Mark Nornes (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015): 175.
[33] Lee, "From Diaspora TV to Social Media," 175-76.

native language, videos of K-dramas were available exclusively in Korean.[34] Lack of English

subtitles stood as a significant obstacle to the discovery and consumption of K-dramas by non-

Korean speakers. The fact that video rental shops were isolated within Korean immigrant

neighborhoods contributed to the inaccessibility of K-dramas for non-Koreans. As a result, Lee

argues, until the spread of Internet accessibility in the early 2000s, "Korean TV dramas were

circulated [in the U.S.] exclusively among Korean immigrants and [exchange students] who

easily accessed homeland popular culture" in their native language.[35]

Although K-drama distribution networks in the U.S. did not provide English subtitles,

non-Korean speakers were able to discover dramas through other diasporic networks. The roots

of K-drama fandom in the U.S. lie in the Hallyu wave, "a phenomenon where Korean popular

culture [began] enjoying fandom overseas," initially in other East Asian countries.[36] In 1991,

South Korea's National Assembly passed a new television broadcasting law that allowed for the

operation of the country's first commercial broadcasting station since dictator Chun Doo-Hwan

publicized TV broadcasting in 1980. The introduction of commercial television stations ushered

in "a multi-channel television era, marked by intense competition for audience attention."[37]

Looking to capitalize off the immense popularity television dramas had among South Korean

audiences, broadcasting stations began a "drama war" as a way to court audience attention,

leading to the production of many high-quality dramas.[38] By the late 1990s, broadcasters were

looking abroad for ways to earn extra money from their dramas, and in 1997, MBC (Munhwa

Broadcasting Corporation) decided to license its drama *What Is Love?* to China Central

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[34] Lee, 176-77.
[35] Lee, 177.
[36] Dooboo Shim, "The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries and the Korean Wave," in *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, eds. Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008): 25.
[37] Shim, "The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries and the Korean Wave," 23.
[38] Shim, 24.

Television.[39] Following MBC, other Korean broadcasters began licensing their dramas to broadcasters in East and Southeast Asia, spreading awareness about K-dramas outside of Korea. It was not until the mid-2000s, however, that K-dramas became extremely popular outside of Korea. Two dramas in particular, *Winter Sonata* (2002) and *Jewel in the Palace* (2003), were huge hits in Japan, China, and Hong Kong. Their popularity established K-dramas as a highly influential and successful genre across East Asia, thus starting off the Hallyu wave.[40]

The Hallyu wave traveled outside of East and Southeast Asia through the Asian diaspora. Non-Korean Asians in the U.S. were often introduced to K-dramas by friends and families in their home countries who had already been exposed to the huge popularity of dramas within Asia. These non-Korean members of the Asian diaspora became some of the first English-speaking K-drama fans. Other early K-drama fans were second-generation Korean immigrants who learned of dramas from family members who used them as a way to stay connected with their native culture.[41] Korean-Americans also introduced their non-Korean friends to dramas and helped them negotiate the language barrier presented by a lack of English subtitles. Together, this group, made up mainly of Korean-Americans and non-Korean members of the Asian diaspora, formed the early K-drama fandom.[42] The early K-drama fandom grew despite the general lack of English subtitles in the early 2000s. Dramas on VHS tapes were accessible to bilingual Korean-Americans. Non-Korean Asian-Americans accessed dramas that were subtitled or dubbed in their own native languages, often on VHS tapes, DVDs, or through online filesharing.

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[39] Shim, 25.
[40] Shim, 26.
[41] For example, see the biography of Javabeans, popular K-drama blogger: Javabeans, "About Us," *Dramabeans*, http://www.dramabeans.com/about/.
[42] Lee, "From Diaspora TV to Social Media," 178.

Early K-drama fans began to connect with each other online, and initially found each other through anime forums. Presence on anime forums introduced K-drama fans to anime fansubbing, setting the stage for the development of K-drama fansubbing. Groups of K-drama fans who met on anime forums eventually created their own forums to discuss K-dramas around 2004. K-drama forums such as D-Addicts, AsianFanatics, and Soompi were especially important because they brought together K-drama fans who knew about fansubbing and had the linguistic and technical skills to be fansubbers. Forums brought enough knowledgeable and interested fans together to form the first K-drama fansub groups starting in 2004. From the beginning, K-drama fansubbing adhered to both the processes and the traditions of anime fansubbing. K-drama digisubbing, like anime digisubbing, took place in teams that had members from around the world. Teams used instant messaging software and private forums to communicate across time differences and geographic gaps. K-drama fansubbers echoed the tenet of non-commercialism advanced by anime fansubbers; for example, fansub group WITHS2 explained that "there is no funding or profits in fansubbing, just the pure desire to share a common passion,"[43] and team Haru2subS told fans that its purpose was to make "English subtitles for everyone to use to fulfill their addiction with Korean Dramas."[44]

K-drama forums were not only important because they brought fans together to form fansub groups, but also because they allowed fansub groups to spread their work to others and help grow the K-drama fandom. K-drama forums and English fansubs expanded the word-of-mouth networks through which K-drama fandom initially grew, opening fandom up to Asian Americans and other English-speaking members of the Asian diaspora, as well as to non-Asians.

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[43] "Fansubbing," *WITHS2*, December 2, 2009,
https://web.archive.org/web/20091202011635/http://withs2.com:80/fansubbing.
[44] "About," *Haru2subS*, November 13, 2009,
https://web.archive.org/web/20091113041435/http://www.haru2subs.com:80/about.

The growth of K-drama fandom happened completely through the grassroots, amateur efforts of fansubbers and the fans who built and maintained forums. These fan producers played the most important and central roles in building K-drama fandom, and over time, they managed to build a large and passionate fan community that entrepreneurs began to view as a valuable untapped market.

Fansubbers' Influence on K-drama Distribution

Fansubbers not only succeeded in facilitating the growth of a vibrant and passionate fandom around K-dramas, but also succeeded in defining standards for how K-drama translation and subtitling should happen. From the beginning of K-drama fansubbing, distribution of dramas took place online. The peer-to-peer filesharing networks that fansubbers used to distribute dramas gave fans virtual on-demand access to a constantly increasing library of dramas that they could download and watch from their home computers. Furthermore, Brian Hu argues that K-drama fansubbers practiced a unique translation philosophy when writing subtitles. According to Hu, fansubbers preferred their translations to promote "an over-the-top emotional engagement with words and cultures" and place less importance on "precise word-for-word accuracy."[45] Abé Mark Nornes calls this kind of translation philosophy "abusive" because it rejects the rules of professional translation. He argues that professional translation standards encourage translators to write subtitles that "[conform] to the framework of the target language and its cultural codes." Professionally-produced subtitles thus hide instances of cultural difference between languages in favor of making everything understandable to subtitle readers, even if the subtitles carry "domestic meanings which are often irrelevant or inappropriate."[46]

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[45] Brian Hu, "Korean TV Serials in the English-Language Diaspora: Translating Difference Online and Making It Racial," *Velvet Light Trap* 66, no. 1 (2010): 45.
[46] Abé Mark Nornes, "For an Abusive Subtitling," *Film Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (1999): 29.

However, because fan translators lack formal training, they do not subscribe to the domesticating approach that professional translators use. Rather, fans "[seek] to intensify the interaction between the reader and the foreign" by "[striving] to translate from and within the place of the other [language] by an inventive approach to language use and the steady refusal of rules."[47] For example, K-drama fansubbers may leave a Korean word untranslated as a way to convey that the word holds cultural meaning that English cannot adequately express. Hu argues that K-drama fans prefer this "abusive" kind of translation philosophy because it makes facilitates "the kind of cultural consciousness [that] diasporic online communities joyfully [indulge] in."[48] In other words, K-drama fans came to appreciate fansubbers' unconventional and unprofessional translation style because it allowed them to experience and learn about unique facets of Korean culture and language while watching dramas.

K-drama fansubbers were able to make online distribution methods and "abusive" translation philosophies standard because they were the only parties translating and distributing dramas for English-speaking audiences. The extent to which these standards became necessary features of K-drama translation and distribution can be seen in the failure of YA Entertainment, one of the first commercial K-drama distribution companies. Founded in 2003, YA Entertainment sold English-subtitled dramas on DVDs. Although YA claimed its DVDs provided professional, "excellent" English subtitles,[49] most fans did not embrace the company's products. Fans' reluctance to support YA stems from two reasons. First, circulation of dramas through physical DVDs was slower and less convenient than online distribution. Fans preferred to wait a few hours for drama episodes to download instead of waiting days or weeks for DVDs

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[47] Nornes, "For an Abusive Subtitling," 29.

[48] Hu, "Korean TV Serials in the English-Language Diaspora," 45.

[49] Tom Larsen, "Questions and Answers!," *YAE Insider*, July 2006, http://web.archive.org/web/20061120062624/http://www.yaentertainment.com/insider/200607.htm.

from YA Entertainment to be delivered. Second, as Hu argues, YA's subtitles "[emphasized]

professionalism and grammatical clarity rather than impulsive community pleasure."[50] Instead of

highlighting and delighting in cultural difference, YA's translators chose to obscure and hide the

unique parts of Korean culture that fans wanted to see and learn about. Because YA failed to

meet the standards for distribution and translation established by fansubbers, K-drama fans

preferred to support fansubbers.

Additionally, YA Entertainment ignored the growing market of the K-drama fandom and

focused instead on marketing to mainstream American audiences. On its website, the company

repeated the refrain that "non-Korean, English-speaking Americans love Korean TV [dramas]"

as a way to emphasize that K-dramas were acceptable to non-Asians despite being culturally

foreign.[51] Early press releases from 2006 had titles like "Growing Viewership of Korean TV

Dramas Among Baby-Boomers" and "Survey Shows Over 90% of Korean Drama Fans are Non-

Koreans"[52]; despite the fact that English-subtitled dramas were rare in 2006, these press releases

asserted that K-dramas were already being consumed avidly by mainstream American audiences.

YA's marketing materials continuously downplayed the cultural uniqueness of dramas as a way

to court non-Asians into purchasing YA-produced DVDs. Although the creation of online

distribution networks by fansubbers was the main cause of the growth of K-drama viewership,

YA continually claimed that it was "[pioneering] the 'Korean Wave' in the U.S."[53] and ignored

the existence of a K-drama fandom that largely did not consume its products.

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[50] Hu, "Korean TV Serials in the English-Language Diaspora," 45.
[51] "Get Hooked," *YA Entertainment*, September 13, 2007,
https://web.archive.org/web/20070913104411/http://www.yaentertainment.com:80/getHooked.html.
[52] "Press Releases," *YA Entertainment*, September 13, 2007,
https://web.archive.org/web/20070730032654/http://www.yaentertainment.com/pressrelease/pr-060808.html.
[53] "Press Releases," *YA Entertainment*.

YA Entertainment's adherence to industry standards of translation and distribution weakened its ability to compete with K-drama fansubbers. Like the fan translators of Japanese comics examined by Hye-Kyung Lee, K-drama fansubbers had the freedom to experiment with new translation and distribution methods precisely because they were fans operating within fandom rather than professional translators and distributors bound to uphold industry standards. As a result, "their activities [showed] increasing efficiency and productivity [that] professional intermediaries [found] extremely difficult to compete with." Lee argues that professional intermediaries like YA Entertainment "[could not] easily transfer the values created by [fan translators] to the market economy" precisely because they lacked the freedom to adapt the experimental methods of fan translators to commercial distribution.[54] YA's inability to replicate the unique distribution and translation methods of fansubbers, as well as its failure to market itself toward the K-drama fandom, made it unable to compete with fansubbers. In 2012, at a time when K-drama fandom (and thus the market for commercial K-drama distribution) was growing, YA Entertainment closed down.

DramaFever: A Successful Attempt to Commercialize K-drama Distribution

The example of YA Entertainment shows the power that K-drama fansubbers had as competitors to commercial distribution companies. While examining similar competition between fansubbers and commercial distributors of anime, Reyna Denison observed that the companies who successfully competed with fansubbers "[adopted] the same technologies of distribution used by fansubbing groups."[55] Her observation holds for K-drama distribution as well. Unlike YA Entertainment, which tried to distance itself from fansubbers, successful K-

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[54] Hye-Kyung Lee, "Cultural consumers as 'new cultural intermediaries': manga scanlators," *Arts Marketing: An International Journal* 2, no.2 (2012): 140.
[55] Denison, "Anime fandom and the liminal spaces between fan creativity and piracy," 462.

drama distribution companies have modeled themselves after, and even collaborated with, independent fansub groups. These successful companies managed to not only uphold the standards of online distribution and abusive subtitling instituted by fansubbers, but also managed to provide added value that ultimately drew K-drama fans away from consuming fansubbed dramas.

The first successful attempt to commercialize K-drama distribution was DramaFever. DramaFever is a K-drama streaming site founded by Korean-American entrepreneurs Seung Bak and Suk Park. The site was founded at a time when several illegal K-drama streaming sites were becoming popular within the K-drama fandom. Starting in 2006, fan-run sites such as DramaCrazy.net and mysoju.com began posting English-subtitled dramas, usually stolen from fansub groups and posted without fansubbers' permission, for users to stream for free. The fans running these sites hosted advertisements as a way to recoup hosting costs, but generally did not make money from the sites. Around 2008, Bak and Park noticed that there was a large and consistently growing K-drama fan community in the U.S. They also noticed that the most popular K-drama distributors serving the U.S. K-drama fandom were operating illegally. Based on their market research, which showed that "almost six million unique users [were watching] Korean dramas on illegal video streaming sites in North America every month," Bak and Park believed there was a huge opportunity to profit off K-drama distribution in the U.S.[56] In 2008, the two began forming licensing agreements with two of South Korea's largest broadcasting networks, MBC and SBS. In 2009, they launched DramaFever.com, which offered MBC and SBS dramas with English subtitles for legal streaming. Advertisements and, later, paid

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[56] Lee, "From Diaspora TV to Social Media," 181.

subscriptions, earned the site revenue. Since its founding, DramaFever has become one of the most successful streaming sites for English-subtitled K-dramas.

DramaFever's success can be largely attributed to its effort to target and appeal to the English-speaking K-drama fandom. Unlike YA Entertainment, which ignored fansubbers, DramaFever began by collaborating with fansubbers. In the site's early days, many of the subtitles on its dramas were produced by independent fansubbers; in an interview with Sangjoon Lee, the site's founders estimated that around 40% of DramaFever's subtitles came from fansub groups.[57] By collaborating with fansubbers, DramaFever could present fans with the "abusive" subtitles they had come to enjoy and expect. Addressing what motivated its fansub collaborators, the founders said that fansubbers "are dedicated fans of Korean dramas and [are] happy to see their works appear on a legitimate web service."[58] Fansub groups were often motivated to collaborate with DramaFever due to legal pressure. If DramaFever licensed a drama that a fansub group had already worked on, the company would request that the group allow their subtitles to be put on the site in order to avoid a copyright takedown notice or cease-and-desist letter. While fansub groups willingly allowed DramaFever to use their subtitles, this relationship was not one that fansubbers themselves sought out, and most groups continued working separately from DramaFever as long as they could.

In 2014, DramaFever started a service to recruit freelance translators to produce subtitles for the site. The service, called WeSubtitle, is open to anyone, including fan translators. However, the process is more akin to conventional, professional translation than group-oriented fansubbing. DramaFever translators work alone, and the recruitment process, which requires

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[57] Lee, 183.
[58] Lee, 183.

translators to bid for positions on upcoming projects,[59] favors professional translators who are familiar with creating job proposals. Despite targeting professional translators, however, DramaFever's subtitles often still conform to the standards introduced early on by fansubbers. Fans often praise DramaFever's subtitles, as well as the speed at which they are released. The high quality and fast production of DramaFever subtitles are significant competitive advantages the site has over independent fansubbers.

DramaFever's success also stems from its early choice to market itself toward K-drama fans. Rather than trying to build a market among mainstream American audiences like YA Entertainment, DramaFever tried to attract users from the K-drama fandom. Early promotion efforts were often advertisements on sites run by important figures in the K-drama community; these efforts included not only advertising on popular K-drama blogs, but also collaborating with well-regarded independent fansub groups. Such advertising campaigns demonstrated to the fandom that DramaFever understood their needs and desires. While DramaFever's resources initially went into attracting viewers through community outreach, it eventually began to focus more on high-quality subtitle production.[60] The site's community outreach efforts, as well as its commitment to providing fast, high-quality English subtitles through streaming, demonstrated to K-drama fans that it understood what they wanted from a drama distributor. As a result, it has become a cornerstone of K-drama fandom.

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[59] Coco Kdrama, "Get paid to translate your favorite DramaFever shows with WeSubtitle," *DramaFever*, June 27, 2014, https://www.dramafever.com/news/get-paid-to-translate-your-favorite-dramafever-shows-with-wesubtitle/%7B%5B%7Bnotification.object.url%7D%5D%7D

[60] Young-Hwan Kim and Hoe-Kyung Jung, "한국 방송 콘텐츠의 뉴미디어 플랫폼 비즈니스 모델" [Business Models of New Media Platforms that Use Korean TV Content], *Journal of Digital Convergence* 14, no. 10 (2016): 434-35.

Viki's Roundabout Journey to K-drama Distribution

Unlike DramaFever, Viki did not start out as a K-drama streaming site, or even as a for-profit site at all. Viki was created in 2008 for a school project between three business graduate students at Harvard and Stanford. Initially called ViiKii.net, the site's tagline was "The Grand Cultural Silk Road." Co-founder JiWon Moon described the purpose of the site as an effort to realize "pre-Babellian universality, where everyone can communicate with anyone."[61] The references to the Silk Road and Babel draw out Viki's original purpose as a language learning and culture sharing site. Moon's blog post detailing the purpose of Viki describes how the site would function, like the Silk Road, to facilitate cultural flows around the world, specifically through sharing of media. Users would upload video files to the site and other users would subtitle those videos in their native languages, making that media accessible to anyone. The Silk Road comparison also highlights the global inclusivity of Viki; like the Silk Road, which tied together many cultures, Viki would serve as a channel for people across the globe to "[share] cultures and…truly appreciate [global] diversity" through the uploading and consumption of underrepresented national media.[62]

With these lofty goals, Viki entered its open beta phase in June 2008. Users could upload their own videos which could subtitled by others through YouTube's subtitling software. After only two months of operation, the site had over 1,400 user-uploaded videos and 150,000 lines of user-produced subtitles.[63] Although the videos and subtitles came from users from various countries, the most popular uploads were overwhelmingly Korean dramas, with American,

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[61] JiWon Moon, "Welcome to ViiKii," *The ViiKii Story*, June 25, 2008, http://viikii-en.blogspot.com/2008/06/welcome-to-viikii.html.

[62] Moon, "Welcome to ViiKii."

[63] Moon, "ViiKii Beta 0.9," *The ViiKii Story*, August 1, 2008, http://viikii-en.blogspot.com/2008/06/viikii-open-beta-launch.html.

Taiwanese, Chinese, and Japanese television programs also attracting viewers and subtitles. In

2010, Viki's founders realized that the popularity of K-dramas on the site presented an

opportunity to make money through legal streaming of volunteer-subtitled dramas. With nearly

$4.3 million in venture capital funding, the site came out of beta in 2010 and offered a new,

proprietary subtitling software that better facilitated the process of collaborative translation and

subtitling than YouTube's software.[64] Viki also began purchasing licenses from Korean

television broadcasters at this time and began slowly deleting user-uploaded videos (the ability

of users to upload videos was removed completely in 2017). Finally, in 2013, the site was

purchased by Japanese e-commerce company Rakuten for $200 million.[65] From 2013, Viki

began offering a subscription service called Viki Pass and has also started to branch out into

licensing Chinese, Japanese, and Indian dramas. Since its acquisition by Rakuten, Viki has

become a major competitor of DramaFever and is one of the major sites used by K-drama fans

for drama consumption.

Throughout these financial developments, Viki's focus on building a global community

has not changed. In 2015, for example, the site held a campaign called the "Billion Words

March" which encouraged its volunteers to contribute toward a subtitle count of one billion and

help create "global entertainment access for all."[66] The site also considers its community of

fansubbers its greatest resource,[67] and for good reason: not only does its fansubbing community

allow it to avoid paying professional translators, but its fansubbers allow Viki to position itself as

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[64] Willis Wee, "Razmig Hovaghimian: from failed pizza maker to founder of Viki," *Tech in Asia*, April 20, 2014, https://www.techinasia.com/story-of-viki-and-razmig-hovaghimian.

[65] Wee, Razmig Hovaghimian: from failed pizza maker to founder of Viki."

[66] Tessa Dwyer, "Multilingual Publics: Fansubbing Global TV," in *Contemporary Publics: Shifting Boundaries in New Media, Technology and Culture*, eds. P. David Marshall, Glenn D'Cruz, Sharyn McDonald, and Katja Lee (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016): 146-46.

[67] Kim and Jung, "한국 방송 콘텐츠의 뉴미디어 비즈니스 모델" [Business Models of New Media Platforms that Use Korean TV Content], 437.

an insider of the K-drama fan community. Because, as Abigail De Kosnik has argued, many fans feel "that parties who do not currently operate in, and therefore do not thoroughly understand [their fan communities] should not be the parties who profit" off their labor,[68] Viki's ability to claim insider status contributes greatly to its ability to monetize the labor of fansubbers.

However, the shift from school project to corporate entity has brought changes in how Viki speaks about and values its community, particularly its fansubbing community. In her first blog posts about Viki, Moon speaks about the site's community of volunteers as a group of people "[paving] the way towards the realization of a grand cultural 'Silk Road,' transmitting numerous local contents all over the world, beyond language barriers."[69] She does not use the term "fan" or "fandom" to refer to the site's volunteers. They are envisioned not as people coming together to facilitate enjoyment of television, but as people committed to forging deep cultural connections around the world. Since becoming a monetized streaming site, however, Viki has shifted how it speaks about its volunteer community and its mission. Its volunteers are now people dedicated to "bringing down language barriers that stand between great entertainment and its fans" so that people around the world can have "fun in any language."[70] Though its language remains lofty and utopian, it now positions its volunteers as people facilitating widespread consumption of media. Instead of creating opportunities for transnational friendship and understanding through the sharing of media, Viki volunteers now create opportunities for entertainment and consumption.

Viki's current slogan (as of 2018), "Global TV powered by fans," reflects this shift in the discourse around the purpose of the site and the role of its volunteers. Its volunteers are now

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[68] Abigail De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 119.
[69] Moon, "Welcome to ViiKii."
[70] "About Us," *Viki*, accessed April 28, 2018, https://www.viki.com/about.

called fans, invoking connotations of the traditions of independent fansubbing that were not present when its volunteers were not connected to fandom. In particular, by claiming to be a site for fansubbing, Viki associates itself with the community-focused ethos of the independent K-drama fansubbing community and creates a powerful connection between itself and K-drama fandom. However, Viki envisions the purpose of fansubbing, and of participating in fandom in general, as centered around consumption first and foremost. Fansubbers have traditionally worked in service of growing the K-drama fandom and helping bring people together to make friends with common interests. Viki does not emphasize its site's ability to grow a fan community, but focuses on its ability to provide "thousands of TV shows and movies" to "millions of engaged viewers."[71] Fansubbers are celebrated for "[removing] the language and cultural barriers that stand between great entertainment and fans everywhere,"[72] not for providing the content that helps form connections between fans across the world. Though the difference between these two ways of speaking about fansubbers is subtle, it is important. Viki's fansubbing community is framed as a tool to help facilitate global consumption of media, not as a group of people working for their fandom. Fansubbers are thus valued for their labor and what they produce, likening them more to employees than volunteers working just for fun.

As discussed above, independent K-drama fansubbers adhered closely to the fansubbing tradition of non-commercialism since the establishment of the first K-drama fansub group. Fansubbers have never attempted to profit from their labor, and so it may seem somewhat strange that so many fansubbers have consented to Viki making money off what they themselves have never monetized. When Viki began placing advertisements on its site after its acquisition by Rakuten, there were volunteers who felt uncomfortable with the monetization of their labor.

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[71] "About Us," *Viki*.
[72] Dwyer, "Multilingual Publics," 145.

One fansubber, for example, found it "shameful that Viki [had] made a HUGE profit…off the sweat and labor of [its volunteers]." She felt betrayed that the site had courted fansubbers "only to…profit from their free labor" without disclosing its intention to do so from the beginning.[73] Another fansubber, while upset and wary of Viki's acquisition, wrote that he would "endure the exploitation [of his labor], see what happens under Rakuten ownership, and if necessary, [gather fellow volunteers to] go on strike or jump ship."[74] Volunteers like these did protest the monetization of their labor and leave the site, but the vast majority of fansubbers chose to stay. While fansubbers had varied reasons for staying with Viki, one volunteer's reasoning succinctly sums up the sentiments of fansubbers who felt comfortable volunteering for Viki: she argued that while she "[does not] trust companies and [does not] trust money," she would "stay with Viki and watch it grow, as longs as its ethics remain intact."[75] Though she was not completely happy with Viki making money off her freely given labor, she felt that the site provided benefits that made her continued efforts worth it. To understand her why she, along with many other Viki fansubbers, accepted their new positions as semi-employees, I will now examine the benefits Viki promises its volunteers.

Viki's Proposed Value

The clearest explanation of what Viki proposes to give to its fansubbers is on its "Community" page. The link to the Community page is featured prominently on the top of Viki's homepage, showing that Viki places a great deal of importance on this page and its function as a recruitment tool for new fansubbers. While the benefits Viki presents on this page are important,

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[73] Borri, "Done with viki," *Viki Discussions* (forum comment), October 26, 2013, https://discussions.viki.com/t/done-with-viki/467/16.

[74] James94131, "Sale of Viki to Rakuten," *Viki Discussions* (forum comment), September 5, 2013, https://discussions.viki.com/t/sale-of-viki-to-rakuten/150/11.

[75] OrionsRamblings, "Viki Changes and Viki Pass," *Viki Discussions* (forum comment), October 29, 2013, https://discussions.viki.com/t/viki-changes-and-viki-pass/501/3.

it is equally important to note what Viki does not mention on this page. For independent

fansubbers, Viki is valuable largely for the legal legitimacy it grants to fansubbing. Independent

fansubbers were capable of subtitling and distributing dramas on their own and had no real need

for Viki's infrastructure, but they had no way to respond to legal challenges. While legal action

against independent K-drama fansubbers was rare (and sometimes avoided by collaborating with

those who had the power to take legal action, as occurred with DramaFever), the fear of legal

repercussions for illegally downloading, altering, and distributing dramas drove fansubbers to

take careful steps, such as prohibiting re-uploading of their subtitles, to avoid attracting the

attention of copyright holders. Viki, by licensing dramas, enables fansubbers to work without

fear of legal action and thus makes fansubbing a more secure practice. That Viki fails to mention

legal legitimacy as a benefit is indicative of its desire to distance itself from independent K-

drama fansubbing. Listing legal legitimacy as a benefit would require the site to acknowledge

that a fansubbing community existed before its founding. Viki carefully avoids references to

fansubbing communities outside of its own; it does not use the term "fansubbing" or call its

volunteers "fansubbers," and it has never tried to appeal directly to independent fansubbers in its

recruitment efforts. By refusing to acknowledge fansubbing that takes place outside of the site,

Viki suggests that it has created a new, innovative method of subtitling and fails to acknowledge

that it interrupted the culture of independent K-drama fansubbing.

Despite distancing itself from independent K-drama fansubbers, Viki borrows from the

independent fansubbing community's recruitment tactics by playing up the social benefits of

volunteering for the site. Viki's offer to join "a community unlike any other"[76] is less emphatic

than the recruitment lines of some independent fansub groups who promised potential fansubbers

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[76] "Community," *Viki*, accessed April 28, 2018, https://www.viki.com/community.

that they would become "part of [a] loving family."[77] Even so, the site does promise to give its fansubbers the chance to "meet other fans from around the world" in a "fun and inclusive environment." Viki also emphasizes the inclusivity of its fansubbing community by telling potential volunteers, "beginner or expert, you're welcome here." "Even if you only speak one language," Viki says, there are ways to enjoy volunteering. [78] The site advertises the fan-created courses "Ninja Academy" and "Segmenting 101" meant to integrate unskilled volunteers into the fansubbing community, portraying its community as supportive, welcoming, and open to anyone.

　　　Independent fansub groups tended to rely on the social benefits of fansubbing as its main recruitment tool. Viki, while borrowing this recruitment tactic, devotes most of the space on its Community page to the material or professional benefits it offers. The material and professional benefits Viki offers come through its "Qualified Contributor" (QC) program. QCs are, in Viki's words, the "most passionate and active community members" who get "amazing perks, including special promotions like concert tickets, care packages, and more!"[79] To date, there have been no concert tickets or care packages distributed to volunteers; so far, the only "amazing perks" given to QCs have been coupons or gift certificates for online clothing or music retailers.[80] However, Viki does consistently give its QCs free subscriptions to its Viki Pass subscription service. These material benefits are prominently displayed on the Community page, suggesting that Viki believes its fansubbers are motivated largely (if not primarily) by material gain rather than social benefits. This is an important suggestion, as it represents a large shift from the traditional view among independent fansubbers that "the legitimacy of requiring rewards for their cultural work

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[77] "About," *Haru2subS*, February 7, 2010, http://web.archive.org/web/20100207204521/http://www.haru2subs.com:80/about.
[78] "Community," *Viki*.
[79] "Community," *Viki.*
[80] For examples of gifts that have been distributed, see leejunggi, "QC Gifts – Thank you Viki!", *Viki Discussions*, May 10, 2017, https://discussions.viki.com/t/qc-gifts-thank-you-viki/15706; or nik_os, "QC Gifts Winter 2017," *Viki Discussions*, December 20, 2017, https://discussions.viki.com/t/qc-gifts-winter-2017/18198.

[should be] denied."[81] In making this shift, Viki fansubbers come to resemble employees even further. Unlike volunteers, employees must be compensated for their labor in some way. By attaching material benefits, even small ones, to fansubbing, Viki recognizes (and encourages its fansubbers to recognize) that volunteering for Viki involves laboring and creating something of monetary value for the site.

As for professional benefits, Viki advertises that its QCs will be eligible to receive an "official certificate from Viki."[82] The Community page does not elaborate on what this certificate means or what it can be used for, but the designation "official certificate" suggests that Viki can confer some sort of semi-professional status on its volunteers that will be valuable to those who are outside of Viki, its fansubbing community, and even the K-drama fandom. A 2013 blog post explaining the process of becoming a QC explains that the certificate is meant especially for "students and professional translators" who are looking for a way to show proof of translation "experience on resumes and college entrance applications."[83] This explanation further suggests that Viki can provide a professional or semi-professional status that carries weight outside of the site. Despite the site's assertion that it can confer a professional status on its volunteers, however, the actual certificate fansubbers receive is careful not to make any claims about the recipient's skill or proficiency at translation or subtitling. According to one volunteer who ordered a certificate, Viki actually issues a "Certificate of Appreciation" that recognizes recipients for "helping to bring down language and culture barriers through their tireless volunteer" work on the site.[84] The certificate does not imply that the recipient has learned or

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[81] Denison, "Anime fandom and the liminal spaces between fan creativity and piracy," 460.

[82] "Community," *Viki.*

[83] Team Viki, "Viki U: Learn How to Subtitle!", *Viki Blog* (blog), May 15, 2013, https://blog.viki.com/viki-u-learn-how-to-subtitle-bcb9c88e7aba.

[84] Dudie, "ViKi Official Certification," *Viki Discussions* (forum comment), November 24, 2014, https://discussions.viki.com/t/viki-official-certification/4507/2.

practiced any kind of specific skill in translation that might be necessary or useful in a professional setting, nor does it even specify the nature or amount of work done by the recipient. While Viki claims that volunteering for the site might provide some sort of benefit when looking for translation positions outside of the site, the certificate's lack of specificity indicates that volunteering for Viki does not necessarily result in any transferable, professional skill. However, by even offering an official certificate, Viki suggests that its volunteers should view themselves at least as semi-professionals and encourages them to do the kind of work that might be valuable on college or job applications.

Viki's volunteer recruitment page entices would-be fansubbers by advertising a variety of possible benefits to volunteering for the site. While Viki borrows from independent fansub groups by promising fansubbers social benefits, it also offers material and professional benefits that suggest its fansubbers are not merely fans serving their community. The official certificate offered suggests that Viki fansubbers possess skills that are useful outside of amateur fansubbing. The material benefits provided, ranging from free site subscriptions to gift certificates, signal that fansubbers' work deserves compensation. Taken together, the unique material and professional benefits offered by Viki create an image of its volunteers as semi-professional employees whose skills and labor necessitate monetary compensation. Viki's image of fansubbers as pseudo-employees represents a large departure from the image of the ideal independent fansubber who was motivated purely by love of her fandom.

This transformation of fansubber from fan laborer to pseudo-employee is important because of how it helps reposition fansubbers in relation to corporate forces. Independent fansubbers worked outside of corporate structures, ignored industry standards in translation and distribution, and flouted copyright law. They were fans first and foremost, and their position

outside of industry enabled them to work in experimental, subversive ways that, as we saw, set influential standards for K-drama distribution. Viki, in order to compete with sites like DramaFever that employ mainly professional translators, had to find a way to turn independent fansubbers into workers whose labor could be channeled and controlled to fit its corporate needs. To do this, Viki reimagined fansubbers as fans who, while caring about their fandom, are more concerned about laboring to earn material benefits and learn transferable skills. As I have explained, Viki advances this image of fansubbers through the benefits it advertises on its recruitment page. However, Viki more forcefully encourages its volunteers to conform to its expectations through the way it has crafted its subtitling software and social features. Viki fansubbers, whether working on subtitles or chatting with friends in the Viki forum, are constantly encouraged to view themselves as pseudo-employees whose labor belongs to Viki. In the next chapter, I will begin to explore how the site pushes its fansubbers to view themselves less like fans and more like employees by looking at how fansubbing happens on Viki.

Chapter Two: Fansubbing on Viki

To begin my analysis of how Viki has succeeded in harnessing and controlling the productive power of fansubbers to serve its corporate goals, I will look at Viki's intervention into the process of fansubbing. Understanding how Viki captures the labor of its volunteers will shed light on how the site redefines fansubbers as laborers and turns them into valuable contributors to its goals as a company. This is especially important because fan laborers are not necessarily (and often plainly are not) useful to media owners and producers as laborers. As Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis argue, "it has long been recognized both within academia and in the various communities organized around fandom that the practice of being a fan does not merely consist of passive consumption. Rather, fans are also producers" who create a myriad of different kinds of works.[85] Fan works and fan labor have not traditionally been viewed by the media industry as valuable, and there have been multiple instances in which content owners have actively tried to shut down fan production due to fear that fan artists pose a threat to control over copyrighted works. However, perception of fan labor is shifting within the industry. Stanfill and Condis write that, as labor conditions in the media industry have entered a period of change, content owners and producers are seeing that "turning to fans rather than paid staff for [certain work] looks increasingly good for [their] bottom line."[86]

However, fan works and fan labor can often require changes when monetized to make them align with the monetizer's goals or needs. Fan works, for example, may have to be altered to remove material that might make them more difficult to sell profitably or legally, and these alterations may change the nature of the work altogether. Abigail De Kosnik has described how

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[85] Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, "Fandom and/as labor," *Transformative Works and Culture* 15 (2014): para. 1.1. http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0593.
[86] Stanfill and Condis, "Fandom and/as labor," para. 2.2.

the publication of *Fifty Shades of Gray*, a bestselling book that was originally a fan fiction for the *Twilight* series, changed the meaning of the text for both non-fan readers and readers from the *Twilight* fandom. Publication required that the original text be deleted from online fan fiction archives and necessitated removal of all traces of *Twilight*-related material to avoid copyright issues. De Kosnik argues that these changes "robbed [the] text of much of its potential impact on readers" by severing it from the fannish context from it which came.[87] In other words, transforming *Fifty Shades of Gray* from fan fiction into a piece of popular literature required that the original fan work be altered in a way that deleted all traces of the community that initially birthed it and made it meaningful.

Alienating fan labor from the community it is meant to serve is especially important for those hoping to profit off fans as workers. This is because, as Mel Stanfill has argued, when fans labor, "they not only create for a public but also create a public; that is, in producing for such a community, they call one into existence."[88] Fan labor is so tightly connected to the fan community because fan labor is the force that initially brings the community together. Members of the community, through consuming, celebrating, and showing gratitude for the fruits of fan labor, support those laboring in service of the fandom and encourage them to continue working. Additionally, Stanfill argues that, within fandoms, it is generally accepted that fan laborers "[do] not produce work alone but with help from the community."[89] Group-based production creates works that are not seen as private property, but are instead what Stanfill calls "limited common property." The concept of limited common property is especially troublesome for fandom

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[87] Abigail De Kosnik, "*Fifty Shades* and the Archive of Women's Culture," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 3 (2015): 121-123.

[88] Stanfill, "Fandom, public, commons," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 14 (2013): para. 5. http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0530.

[89] Stanfill, "Fandom, public, commons," para. 3.

outsiders who hope to monetize fan labor because "not everyone is eligible to exploit it." Only

"those who are on the inside can make use of it," and even then, it can only be used "as is

allowed within the norms of the community."[90] The case of FanLib, which I examined in the

introduction, demonstrates how fans' suspicion of outsiders can stymie corporate plans to

monetize fan labor. The majority of fan fiction writers and readers rejected FanLib precisely

because they were skeptical that the company would appropriate their fandoms' property in a

way that disrespected community norms (especially those norms meant to protect writers from

copyright-related legal trouble).

To prevent fans from resisting and ruining business ventures, then, it may be in a

company's best interest to seek a way to "manage [fan laborers] through disarticulating them

from the troublesome resistive capacity of fandom-the-community."[91] Viki has largely

accomplished this goal; though the site capitalizes off labor that has traditionally been seen as

belonging to the K-drama fandom, it has been able to find acceptance within the fandom. In this

chapter, I will examine how Viki's intervention into the process of fansubbing has managed to

alienate fansubbers and their labor from the K-drama fan community in order to successfully

monetize them. I will argue that Viki accomplishes this in two ways: first, it portrays fansubbers

as pseudo-professionals whose work is analogous to paid employees working for the site.

Second, it encourages fansubbers to identify themselves more closely with Viki (as a corporate

entity) than with the Viki fansubbing community or the larger K-drama fandom. By separating

fansubbers from their community and turning them into pseudo-employees, Viki transforms

fansubbers' labor from the limited common property of the K-drama fandom into its own private

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[90] Stanfill, para. 9.
[91] Stanfill, "Kindle Worlds II: The End of Fandom as we know it?," *Mel Stanfill* (blog), June 3, 2013, http://www.melstanfill.com/kindle-worlds-ii-the-end-of-fandom-as-we-know-it/.

property, leaving K-drama fans and fansubbers little space to complain about or reject the site's use of fan labor.

K-drama Fansubbing Before Viki

Tracing the changes that Viki has made in the fansubbing process requires an understanding of how fansubbing was done before monetization of the practice. Fansubbing, both before and after Viki, is a labor-intensive process. Multiple hours of work done by multiple people is necessary to completely translate, subtitle, and distribute one episode of a drama. Typically, two episodes of each drama are released per week. With episodes usually ranging from thirty minutes to one hour in length, this means that fansubbers are responsible for subtitling and distributing up to two hours of content per week. Additionally, before Viki, independent fansubbers needed not only linguistic knowledge, but also technical expertise related to video editing and online file distribution. Fansubbing requires a large amount of labor and knowledge, and thus it has always been done in groups. Forming fansub teams is beneficial not only because it allows fansubbers to decrease the time and skill burden placed upon each individual volunteer, but also because it facilitates the formation of inter-group bonds that help encourage team members to continue contributing their labor over time.

Within the independent K-drama fansubbing community, the size of teams varied greatly. The FansubWiki, a fan-built wiki that has tracked K-drama fansubbing efforts since 2006, lists many groups with around ten to twenty members.[92] There were also much larger groups, though these were fewer in number; for example, team WITHS2 boasted that it had over two hundred

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[92] "Kdrama Fansub Map," *FansubWiki*, last updated March 29, 2018, http://fansub.d-addicts.com/Kdrama_Fansub_Map.

members at its height, while Haru2subS listed over one hundred volunteers on its site.[93]

Comparing subtitle output and longevity among teams of various sizes reveals interesting trends. In her analysis of anime fansub groups, Mizuko Ito observed that "most groups are relatively short-lived. Five years is considered a very well-established group, and only a handful of groups have survived for longer."[94] This general trend holds for K-drama fansub teams as well. The groups with memberships of around ten to twenty people tended to list less than ten completed dramas on their FansubWiki profiles, and they tended to disappear from FansubWiki's project trackers after one or two years of activity. In contrast, Haru2SubS, which was active from 2009 to 2013, completed about thirty dramas during its four years as an active team.[95] WITHS2 was even more prolific; the team continually released subtitles from 2006 until 2014 and completely subtitled over two hundred dramas during that eight-year period.[96] Larger teams lasted longer and produced more work not only because they were able to take on more projects than smaller teams, but also because they were better able to mitigate the effects of burnout. As Ito explains, "fansubbers frequently suffer from burnout" and drop out after one or two years of active work.[97] Bigger fansub teams could more easily suffer the losses of burnt out members than those with fewer than twenty volunteers. Larger teams' prolific output also made them more well-known within the community, which made their recruitment efforts easier.

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[93] "About," *WITHS2*, December 30, 2009, http://web.archive.org/web/20091230111847/http://withs2.com:80/about.; "About," *Haru2subS*, February 7, 2010, http://web.archive.org/web/20100207204521/http://www.haru2subs.com:80/about.

[94] Mizuko Ito, "Contributors versus Leechers: Fansubbing Ethics and a Hybrid Public Culture," in *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, eds. Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Izumi Tsuji (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012):189.

[95] "Haru2subS," *FansubWiki*, last updated December 1, 2013, http://fansub.d-addicts.com/Haru2subS; "Projects," *Haru2SubS*, June 4, 2012, http://web.archive.org/web/20120604031026/http://www.haru2subs.com:80/drama-projects.

[96] "About," *WITHS2*; "English Subtitles for Korean Dramas," *WITHS2*, March 14, 2014, http://web.archive.org/web/20140314164229/http://withs2.com:80/.

[97] Ito, "Contributors versus Leechers," 189.

Regardless of size, however, fansub groups tended to have similar structures. Members typically served in one of four roles: administrator (admin), translator, editor, or timer. Admins spearheaded recruitment efforts, formed sub-teams for individual series projects, and handled other team-oriented responsibilities. Some also ran their group's website and did advertising in K-drama forums. Translators usually made up the biggest portion of each group, followed by editors and timers. Translators, like their name suggests, translated each drama episode into English and produced a script that would be used for subtitle creation. Editors checked over scripts to ensure translation accuracy and to correct grammar, revise translations to make them sound natural, and enforce team standards for variable aspects of translation such as the spelling of foreign names. While both translators and editors needed to have an understanding of Korean, translators were expected to have a better grasp of the language to facilitate efficient translation. Editors, on the other hand, were expected to focus on the readability of subtitles in English, and so were often required to be perfectly fluent in English. Finally, timers would receive completed scripts and use subtitling software to create subtitle files. Subtitle software, usually created for fansubbers by other fansubbers, required training and practice to use well, so knowledge of this software was one important skill for timers. Timers also needed to be able to coordinate subtitle placement with the appropriate spoken lines in Korean. As a result, while their technical skills were most important, they also needed to understand Korean well enough to be able to correctly synchronize subtitles and spoken dialogue.

Admins were leaders of their fansub groups, and so they were often veteran fansubbers who understood how to manage teams and communicate with viewers so as to ensure their group functioned well and had a good reputation within the K-drama fandom. Smaller teams tended to take on only one or two projects at a time, so they had little need for the sophisticated group-

wide coordination that admins provided. As a result, they usually had only one admin. Larger teams, on the other hand, often had multiple projects going on at once. Thus, they had multiple admins to handle organization of project sub-teams, distribution of multiple series at once, and management of members flowing in and out of the group. WITHS2 and Haru2subS also had the additional managerial roles of moderator and coordinator. Moderators helped create a friendly, functional community dynamic and resolved the inevitable conflicts and confusion that arose within larger groups. Coordinators helped admins in recruiting translators, editors, and timers for project sub-teams and watched over sub-teams to ensure adequate progress was being made. Through the efforts of these administrative members, groups were able to tackle multiple projects at once while also recruiting, training, and keeping track of members.

To facilitate team communication and management, fansub groups used a variety of communication platforms, from instant messaging channels like IRC to dedicated team forums. Teams with multiple projects going on at once could easily keep work organized using a forum, with dedicated forum threads or sub-boards for each project. Smaller teams did not need the organizational infrastructure provided by a group forum, but could use multiple IRC channels, for example, to organize discussion and labor coordination. Regardless of what teams used for communication, these communication platforms also served as places for team building and friendship formation. Forums and instant message chats were the primary places where volunteers could form identities as members of their team community and enjoy the social benefits of fansubbing. Teams especially played up the social and community aspects of fansubbing in their recruitment appeals. WITHS2 invited fans to consider "joining [their] big family," promised that every team member was "friendly and understanding," and encouraged newcomers "[not to] be intimated" by worries that they might not have the skills or knowledge to

be accepted as a part of the team.[98] Haru2subS also made an emphatic appeal to the social

benefits of fansubbing in its main recruitment line: "Please do not hesitate to be part of this

loving family!".[99] Forums and instant-messaging software were important, then, as spaces in

which the geographically separated members of each fansub team could come together and form

one close-knit, family-like group.

Communication platforms were also vital tools for admins and their assistants to use in

wrangling in the various moving parts of their teams in order to create a streamlined workflow

for the process of subtitling. This streamlined process began by deciding upon a series to subtitle.

Teams considered various factors in selecting dramas to work on. While the requests of team

members or fansub viewers helped guide choices, group leaders also watched threads in K-drama

forums to gauge which upcoming dramas the fandom as a whole wanted to see. Some teams

were focused on filling specific gaps in the archive of English-subtitled dramas; the team Hanryu

Fansubs, for example, only subtitled dramas that aired before 2004.[100] Once a group selected a

series to subtitle, they announced that selection in K-drama forums, both to drum up anticipation

among viewers and to make sure other groups would not choose the same series. This helped to

ensure that fansub groups did not compete with one another and fostered friendly relationships

between teams.

Next, the team needed to acquire raw, Korean-language episodes of the drama. By 2004,

when K-drama fansubbing had begun in earnest, peer-to-peer filesharing had already become a

widely used technology, and teams were usually able to find episodes on torrenting websites that

Korean viewers had uploaded after the episode's original broadcast date. There were also teams

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[98] "With S2," *FansubWiki*, last updated July 12, 2013, http://fansub.d-addicts.com/With_S2; "Fansubbing," *WITHS2*, December 30, 2009, http://web.archive.org/web/20131208003231/http://withs2.com/fansubbing.
[99] "About," *Haru2subS*.
[100] "Hanryu Fansubs," *FansubWiki*, last updated July 12, 2013, http://fansub.d-addicts.com/Hanryu_Fansubs.

who used specialized hardware to record episodes onto DVDs or digital files as they were broadcasted in South Korea. However, because this method required the team to have members in Korea who could record each episode, and because the hardware necessary was somewhat expensive and difficult to use, torrenting was the most popular method of accessing untranslated dramas. Once in possession of the raw episodes, admins and their helpers coordinated a sub-team for the subtitling project and distributed episode files to the sub-team's members through torrenting or filesharing sites.

Translators were the first to get to work on each episode. They watched each episode and carefully wrote English scripts that translated all of an episode's dialogue, as well as any text that they felt needed to be translated. If a sub-team had multiple translators, they might split the episode into parts so that each individual had less work to do. However, translating often took quite a while. WITHS2, the only group to provide detailed information about its subtitling process, estimated that translation took anywhere from four to twelve hours per episode, making it the longest part of the process by far.[101] After translators finished their individual portions of the episode, they compiled a full episode script and send it to editors and timers through email or filesharing sites. Editors and timers collaborated to turn the script into readable, properly synchronized subtitles. Editors corrected for grammar or style issues in the script, and also made sure that sentences were short enough to fit into one or two lines on the screen. Timers used special software, usually opensource and created specifically for fan or amateur subtitling, to convert the corrected script into a subtitle file. They not only broke the script into individual subtitle lines, but also assigned each line a time to be displayed on the screen. This required them to both match subtitle lines with spoken dialogue and make sure the line stayed on screen long

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[101] "Fansubbing," *WITHS2*.

enough for viewers to read and process the text before the next line appeared. The subtitles and timestamps would be compiled into one file that got passed onto editors and coordinators for final quality control checks and, finally, got distributed to viewers. WITHS2 estimated that editing took around two to four hours per episode, while timing took around five to six hours per episode.[102] Although the total number of hours of labor that went into completely translating, editing, and timing subtitles was less than twenty-four hours, episodes usually were not completed until at least a few days after they had originally aired in Korea. Time spent waiting for episodes to be uploaded by Korean viewers, transferring files from person to person, and compiling end products often piled up such that episodes were not released for days or even weeks after their original broadcast date.

Once admins or coordinators had the final subtitle file, they would post a link to download the subtitle file to their team's website, a K-drama forum, or both. This method of subtitle distribution, which required viewers to download subtitle files and episode video files separately, was called "soft-subbing." Soft-subbed dramas had to be watched with a special video player that imported the subtitle file and displayed its subtitles on top of the video. The independent K-drama fansubbing community overwhelmingly used soft-subbing, in contrast to anime fansubbers who preferred "hard-subbing," in which subbers encoded subtitles onto video files so that viewers had to download only one file. Independent K-drama fansubbers felt that soft-subbing afforded them a bit of legal protection since they usually did not distribute pirated video files themselves. Rather, they relied on non-fansubbers to post download links for video files in K-drama forums. Because teams were not circulating episodes themselves, they reasoned that they were not directly violating copyrights.

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[102] "Fansubbing," *WITHS2*.

Careful selection of distribution platforms was another strategy teams used to protect themselves from legal threats. Teams differed on whether they would allow their subtitle files to be distributed through K-drama forums. While many groups posted subtitle download links on forums to take advantage of the high traffic forums received, others were afraid that the high traffic on forums might result in their work being stolen and uploaded elsewhere. As K-dramas became increasingly popular, it became common for unscrupulous fans to take a fansub group's subtitle files and use them to create hard-subbed versions of series that had been soft-subbed. These hard-subbed videos would then be uploaded to YouTube and fan-run, illegal streaming sites such as Crunchyroll, KissAsian, and MySoju. The increasing frequency of this unauthorized practiced worried fansubbers for two reasons. First, they were afraid Korean broadcasters might find their dramas uploaded onto illegal sites and attack fansubbers with cease-and-desist letters. Haru2SubS, for example, justified its ban on converting soft-subs into hard-subs by arguing that in doing so, people "[attracted] too much attention" to fansubbing and the practice's questionable legality.[103]

Second, stealing subtitles and uploading them to streaming sites was seen as disrespectful to and exploitative of fansubbers' labor. As Mel Stanfill argues, fan labor is given so that "those who are on the inside [of the fan community] can make use of it," but only so far "as is allowed within the norms of the community."[104] Fansubbers and K-drama fandom community leaders created and enforced rules for using fansubs that were to protect and celebrate fansubbers. These included, for example, respecting fansubbers' control over where their subtitles were circulated. This was a vital rule because, as explained above, fansubbers felt that control over circulation and distribution afforded them legal protection. Fansubbers also expected to be credited

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[103] "About," *Haru2SubS*.
[104] Stanfill, "Fandom, public, commons," para. 9.

whenever someone posted links to or screenshots of their subtitles so as to avoid others taking credit for their work. Uploads of hard-subbed dramas violated both of these rules; uploaders usually always took subtitles with asking permission from fansub groups, and they usually failed to credit fansub groups in order to cover up the unauthorized nature of their activity. The people stealing subtitles saw themselves as members of the K-drama fandom, and they had the noble intention of making dramas more easily accessible by eliminating the need to torrent episodes. However, their transgression of important fandom norms positioned them as hostile outsiders looking to take advantage of fansubbers' work.

While fansub groups usually contacted unauthorized uploaders to request that the stolen subtitles be taken down, most uploaders refused to do so. To solve the problem, then, fansub groups, allied with K-drama fandom leaders, appealed to the fan community to make wise consumption decisions. Notices not to steal subtitles or watch unauthorized uploads on streaming sites were posted not only on fansub group's websites, but also in K-drama forums and sites popular within the fandom. For example, the popular K-drama blogger Javabeans wrote a post explaining why fansubbers did not want their work on streaming sites. The blog post asked fans to help "keep [fansubbing] alive for the long run" by respecting fansubbers' wishes and using soft-subs, even if doing so was less convenient than using illegal streaming sites.[105] Fandom-wide appeals like this one demonstrated how connected fansubbers' labor was to the K-drama fan community. Fansubbers helped build and maintain the K-drama fandom through providing subtitled dramas for free, but they also relied on the fandom to protect them and ensure they could continue fansubbing. For the most part, non-fansubbers understood their reciprocal obligation toward fansubbers and tried to alter their behavior to help preserve fansubbing. Efforts

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[105] Javabeans, "WITH S2 fansubbing policy," *Dramabeans* (blog), December 23, 2007, http://www.dramabeans.com/2007/12/with-s2-fansubbing-policy/.

to inform and educate fansub viewers about the importance of only using soft-subs were largely successful, and though unauthorized uploads were never completely stopped, fansubbers were able to continue working without legal repercussions until 2014.

While independent fansubbers' close relationship with their fandom protected them and allowed them to evade legal issues throughout the height of independent fansubbing, the close connection between fansubbers and their viewers is also what ultimately led to independent fansubbing's demise. In 2014, eight years after K-drama fansubbing began, multiple fansub groups shut down. By this time, both DramaFever and Viki had become hugely popular within the K-drama fandom. These sites offered subtitles extremely quickly (in many cases, in less than two days after episodes aired in Korea) and in a streaming format that, for most fans, was much easier to use than soft-subs. As DramaFever and Viki licensed more and more K-dramas, fans began to turn to these sites rather than fansub groups, and fansubbers found themselves losing both viewers and motivation to continue working. Many groups simply abandoned their projects and closed down their websites without notice or explanation. WITHS2, however, updated their website with a farewell message explaining why they would be ceasing activity. "Fewer and fewer fans were willing to wait through [the team's] process…when [other subtitles] were so quickly and readily available," they wrote, and as a result, "fewer and fewer subbers were motivated to put in their valuable time" to continue producing subtitles.[106] Without the support of the community, independent fansubbers no longer had a reason to continue putting forth effort. The fandom they worked for no longer desired or needed their labor, and so independent fansubbers eventually stopped providing that labor.

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[106] "English subtitles for Korean Dramas," *WITHS2*.

K-drama Fansubbing on Viki

Independent K-drama fansubbers were extremely vulnerable to fluctuations in support from the K-drama fandom. Independent fansubbers depended on K-drama fans for both protection from legal issues and, more importantly, motivation to continue working. Although non-fansubbers succeeded in helping fansubbers escape the notice of copyright owners, they eventually failed to provide fansubbers with the motivation needed to keep independent fansubbing alive in the face of competition from legal streaming sites. To make fansubbing a viable business practice, then, Viki had to ensure that the productivity of its own fansubbing community was not dependent upon the shifting sentiments of the wider K-drama fandom. It needed to prevent, for example, fansubbers from ceasing work on a series if it should prove to be unpopular with fans, a labor-saving tactic that had been common practice in the independent fansubbing community. Viki also needed to ensure that its fansubbers would produce subtitles that could compete with those provided by DramaFever, which hired professionals to translate and subtitle its dramas. In other words, Viki needed to convert fansubbers from fans who labored for the needs of the community into dependable, productive, semi-professional laborers who could be counted on to provide subtitles that would keep the site competitive. The ways Viki has intervened in and changed the process of fansubbing, mainly through its proprietary subtitling software, has allowed them to accomplish this goal and successfully monetize the labor of fansubbers. In the rest of this chapter, I will examine Viki's subtitling software to see how it aids Viki in turning fansubbers into the pseudo-employees it needs to remain successful.

In many ways, fansubbing on Viki looks similar to fansubbing in independent fansub groups. Like independent fansubbers, Viki fansubbers work in teams led by admins, called "channel managers." Channel managers are selected by Viki through an application process.

Generally, only fansubbers who have reached "Qualified Contributor" (QC) status are accepted as channel managers. Becoming a QC requires a volunteer to write or synchronize three thousand subtitles and pass a quality control inspection administered by the site, meaning that those who attain QC status are judged by Viki to be the most valuable of its volunteers. As such, channel managers are similar to the admins of independent fansub groups in that they have the seniority and experience needed to efficiently run a team. Unlike admins, however, channel managers derive their authority from Viki rather than from their fellow fansubbers. Their status results from, and is completely dependent upon, their ability to continue providing value to Viki and has little to do with their social position or reputation within the Viki fansubbing community.

Channel managers are also different from admins in the scope of their authority. While admins ran whole fansub groups and might be overseeing progress on multiple projects at one time, channel managers are responsible for only individual project teams. Each time Viki announces a newly licensed drama, volunteers must apply to be that series' channel manager. Once that drama has been completely subtitled, the channel manager loses her authority. If she wishes to lead another team, she must wait for a new drama to be announced and go through the application process once more. Community leader positions on Viki are thus both transient and doled out by the company. Viki's fansubbing community lacks the power to appoint its own leaders, and those who Viki selects as leaders have that status only for a short time period.

Because channel managers are leaders of project teams, their authority is also limited in scope compared to the admins of independent fansub groups. Channel managers only have authority over those in their team; outside of the project team, the channel manager status means little. However, within their teams, channel managers do have a considerable amount of freedom and power. Channel managers are in control of recruiting all members of their team, including

the moderators who assist them. Because channel managers can select moderators themselves, they have a considerable amount of control over how the project team actually functions. Together, channel managers and moderators handle recruitment of team members as well as team branding. Branding responsibilities mainly include creating a team name and making the team graphics that are put at the bottom of the homepage for the series the team is working on. Team graphics are important as tools for communication between fansubbers and their viewers; graphics include information about the volunteers working on the series and also inform viewers of any rules the team wants them to follow. As these responsibilities demonstrate, channel managers do have a significant amount of power within the sphere of the project team. Although Viki selects the head leadership of each project team, it tends not to interfere with the inner workings of teams and prefers to give its chosen leadership great freedom within their teams.

While channel managers and moderators oversee the functioning of each project team, the majority of labor is done by the other two groups of team members, translators and segmenters. The role of translators on Viki is nearly identical to their role on independent fansubbing teams, but "segmenter" is a new role created by Viki that is analogous to the role of timer on independent teams. Segmenters are tasked with cutting episodes into approximately sentence-sized chunks that translators can easily watch, translate, and subtitle. Because segmenters turn episodes into tiny segments that translators use to write subtitles, they are the first members of the team to begin work on a newly uploaded episode. Segmenters need no knowledge of Korean and can use the verbal and physical cues actors give to decide when to begin and end a segment. The segmenter role thus makes it possible for anyone, regardless of linguistic ability, to volunteer for Viki. What Viki project teams lack when compared to independent fansub groups are dedicated editors. Translators are expected not only to work on

their own translations, but also to monitor the quality of the translations written by their team members. Moderators, who are chosen based on their language expertise, also help in the editing and quality control process.

Besides creating the segmenter role and removing the editor role from team structures, the most important change Viki has made in the fansubbing process has been requiring its fansubbers to use its proprietary subtitling software. The software automates many of the tasks that independent fansubbers had to take care of themselves. For example, Viki fansubbers do not need to search for raw drama episodes, spend time sending files to fellow team members, or worry about formatting and compiling subtitle files for distribution. The automation of these tasks greatly streamlines the subtitling process; everything is done seamlessly within the software. As soon as segmenters have finished cutting up an episode, translators can begin writing subtitles, and each team member's work can be viewed by others almost instantly. Viki's software also changes how, when, and where fansubbers communicate with each other. By changing how intra-team communication takes place, Viki changes the nature of that communication. Taken together, automation of previously necessary tasks and alteration of intra-team communication are the most important results of Viki's intervention into fansubbing. To understand the importance of automation and changing team communication, I will now look closely at Viki's subtitling software.

Viki calls its subtitling software the "Community Playground," and specifically refers to the subtitling and segmenting interface as the "Sandbox." These names hearken back to childhood playtime and instantly create the expectation that volunteering for Viki will be enjoyable and play-like, rather than difficult or laborious. By designating the subtitling interface as its community's playground, Viki also sets up an exclusive definition of community: only

those who are fansubbers get to be "real" members of the site's community. This exclusivity is reinforced by the fact that the Community Playground and Sandbox are not accessible to most users. In order to enter these areas of the site, users must register for an account and be added to a project team by the team's channel manager. Each drama series has its own Sandbox which is accessible only by those who are a member of that series' project team. Through these restrictive measures, Viki outlines a structure for its fansubbing community that separates it from the rest of K-drama fandom.

The interface of the Sandbox is dominated by the video player, above which are tabs for various functions (fig. 1). Each tab represents one function of the Sandbox. The first two tabs are spaces in which the majority of subtitling labor takes place: in the subtitle editor, translators input subtitles in their selected language, and in the segment timer, segmenters cut episodes into small chunks for translators to use when subtitling. The last three tabs (team discussion, team notes, and activity) facilitate intra-team communication and labor coordination. Below the video player are additional communication features, including a list of currently active fansubbers and the "Chatter" box, an instant messaging system. The current contributors list and the chatter box are the main ways in which fansubbers can identify and communicate with fellow team members in real time. They are also the least visible of the Sandbox's communication features, suggesting that Viki wishes for its fansubbers to focus on the labor-oriented functions available through the video player tabs. However, while the current contributors list and the chatter box may be visually deemphasized, they do offer fansubbers a sense of team community and solidarity with those who are working alongside them.
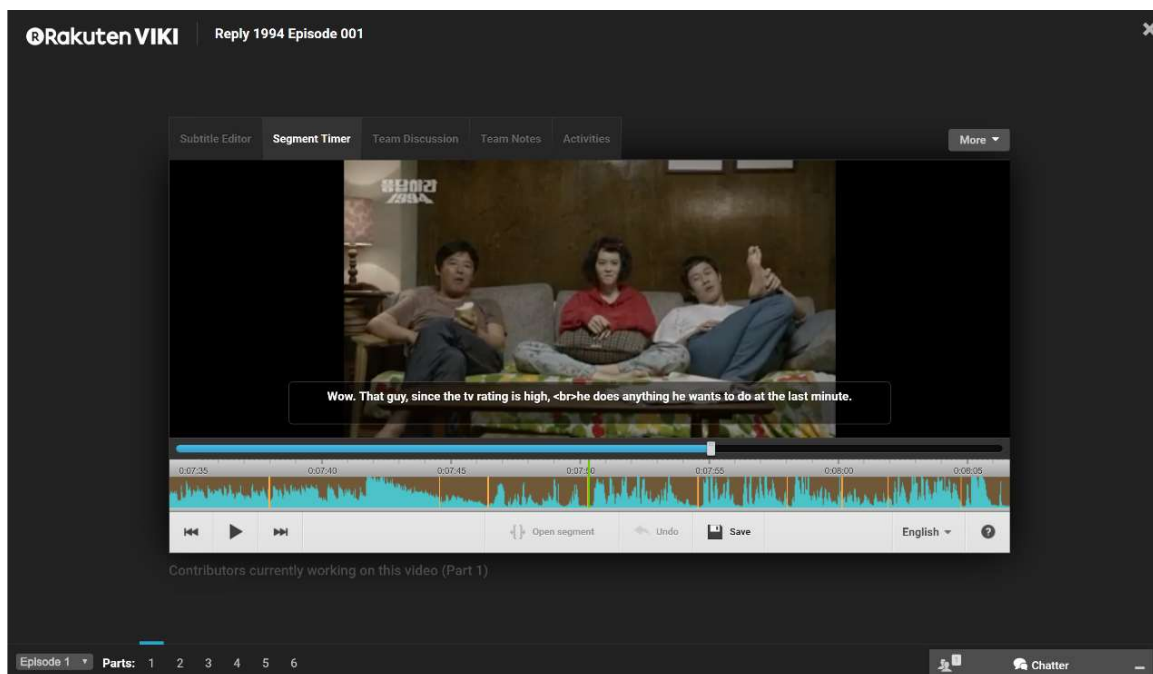
Figure 1: Viki Sandbox interface

By clicking on the subtitle editor or segment timer tabs, fansubbers can view the work their team members are doing in real time. As soon as the first few minutes of a show has been segmented, translators are able to see this and begin work. The Sandbox makes it seamless to move from step to step in the fansubbing process, thus getting rid of much of the downtime independent fansubbers had as they took care of intermediate steps in the fansubbing process, such as file transferring or downloading. Automation of intermediate steps of the fansubbing process makes fansubbing much faster, but also eliminates opportunities for the kinds of intra-team communication that helped make independent fansub groups feel close-knit and family-like. For example, while independent fansubbers had to communicate with each other when transferring files, Viki fansubbers can work without having to talk with any of their team members. While the small, short interactions that took place during the intermediate steps of independent fansubbing may seem insignificant, they provided opportunities for team members to become familiar with one another and interact directly. On Viki, fansubbers can access the

work of others automatically through the Sandbox, and so they can choose to work solitarily; instances in which a Viki fansubber will be forced to interact with her team members are few and far between.

Despite automation making intra-team communication less necessary, the Sandbox does have features to make such communication possible. The communication features most visible in the Sandbox are the team discussion and team notes tabs. The team discussion tab allows fansubbers to post comments for fellow team members to see using Disqus commenting software. Though the commenting software's reply function makes it possible to use the team discussion tab as a general place for team interaction, the tab is generally used only for posting progress updates. After translators and segmenters complete their work, they post a comment in the team discussion tab letting others know that their work is ready for review. Replies to comments are usually either further progress updates or criticism of the commenter's work. Often, a more experienced team member will offer suggestions, advice, and corrections to newer fansubbers. The team discussions tab thus functions mostly as a centralized place for quality control, education, and mentoring. The team notes tab is similarly focused on quality control. It is a document, maintained by channel managers and moderators, that provides guidance about which subtitling and segmenting methods the team will use. The document also includes tips on using the subtitling and segmenting software efficiently, and a list of translation conventions that all members should follow. Through the team discussion and team notes tabs, project teams are able to conduct the work-based communication that independent fansubbing teams conducted through instant messaging platforms and team forums.

However, team forums and instant messaging software also served as spaces for independent fansubbing teams to form friendships and cultivate a family-like team dynamic. The

only space offered in the Sandbox for fansubbers to have friendly, community-building conversations is the chatter box messaging system. The chatter box does allow for fansubbers to have discussions on topics other than subtitling while working, but it has an important weakness when compared to the instant messaging software and forums used by independent fansubbing groups: the conversations in the chatter box are not archived. Conversations that happen in the chatter box are stored locally in each user's web browser, meaning that once a fansubber exits the Sandbox, her conversation is erased. Records of her communication with her team members in the chatter box are gone as soon as she leaves the Sandbox interface. Additionally, fansubbers who enter the Sandbox in the middle of a team work session will only be able to see chatter box conversations that occur after they log on. If a volunteer logs on in the middle of a discussion between others, there is no way for her to see what her team members said before she arrived. As a result, the conversations in the chatter box are impermanent and inaccessible to anyone who was not there was to witness them. Without archived conversations, it is difficult for team members to have robust discussions and build connections with each other. The fleeting nature of chatter box conversations suggests that Viki values friendly, non-work centered conversation less than the educational, work-based discussions that are archived in the team discussion comment section.

Transforming Fansubbers into Pseudo-Employees

Viki's intervention in the fansubbing process made fansubbing more streamlined and seamless than it had been in independent fansub groups. One of the biggest advantages of the Sandbox interface is that it automates many of the time-consuming intermediate steps that slowed down independent fansubbing. Team members can work together simultaneously, making fansubbing a much faster and easier process. However, the Sandbox also altered how

fansubbers can communicate with their team members. Automation of intermediate steps made fansubbing a more solitary process; Viki fansubbers often have no reason to communicate with their team members. Much of the communication that Viki fansubbers feel is necessary, such as posting progress updates to the team discussion comment section, is focused on work. By archiving only fansubbing-related conversation, Viki privileges this kind of work-oriented conversation over the friendly, fun conversation that is vital in building intra-team relationships.

The devaluation of non-labor related discussion is a sign that Viki does not value strong relationships within the project team unit. Robust relationship building is facilitated more effectively on Viki's forum, where all fansubbers come together regardless of project team affiliation, than it is in the Sandbox. Directing friendly communication toward the forum helps to build a larger, more integrated fansubbing community while deemphasizing the importance of project teams. This is a significant departure from the nature of the independent fansubbing community, in which fansubbers tended to build stronger connections with their fansub groups than with the fansubbing community as a whole. As a result, team loyalty was strong among independent fansubbers. Within the Viki fansubbing community, team loyalty is virtually non-existent. Once a series is completely subtitled, the project team dissolves, as do most connections between team members. Viki fansubbers move from team to team, contributing their labor where necessary without building connections with a specific group of peers. The lack of team loyalty among Viki fansubbers is useful for Viki because it ensures that individual fansubbers will be likely to work on multiple projects and maximize their contributions to the site. Within the space of the Sandbox, volunteers are focused more on contributing labor than on forming social bonds, making them look more like employees than fans.

The privileging of labor-related conversation over friendly conversation also normalizes the enforcement of professional standards of translation and subtitling among Viki fansubbers. Tessa Dwyer has observed that Viki fansubbers, in contrast to independent fansubbers, "do not normally experiment with different font typefaces, sizes or colours. Rather, they stick to the pale white palette that prevails within commercial subtitling." Furthermore, "the textual mediation strategies favoured by [Viki fansubbers] tend to mirror the domesticating approach evident within much professional [audio-visual translation]."[107] In other words, rather than experiment with unique styles of translation or subtitling presentation, Viki fansubbers fall in line with professional standards. Besides restricting font style and color choices, Viki does not openly enforce professional styles of translation or textual mediation. Rather, fansubbers do this themselves, often through comments in the team discussions tab. Senior fansubbers write long comments giving criticism and pointers to team members about how to write subtitles that meet high standards of quality. These kinds of comments can put pressure on newer volunteers to produce high-quality work that will pass on first inspection. Though there is no formal method of penalizing those who make mistakes, the fear of being called out in the team discussion tab often encourages fansubbers to adhere to high, nearly professional standards of work.

Ease of quality control also contributes to the enforcement of professional standards among fansubbers. Within the Sandbox, each fansubber's work can be viewed instantly by others, making it simple for fellow team members to identify and correct issues. This editing process can take place even after an episode has gone live for viewers, allowing the project team to control and improve the quality of its subtitles in a way that was never possible for independent fansubbers who relied on file downloads to distribute their work. Often, correction

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[107] Tessa Dwyer, "Fansub Dreaming on ViKi: 'Don't Just Watch But Help When You Are Free,'" *The Translator* 18, no. 2 (2012): 231.

of an error is followed by the posting of a comment to address the mistake in the team discussions tab. In this way, quality control contributes directly to the enforcement of professional standards. The Sandbox provides channel managers, moderators, and experienced fansubbers the infrastructure to identify, correct, and educate their team members about quality control issues quickly and efficiently, contributing the professionalizing trend Dwyer noticed as unique to Viki fansubbers.

Viki benefits from its fansubbers' tendency to strive for the creation of professional quality subtitles. Not only do these fansubbers produce high-quality subtitles, but they help set the community-wide expectation that all fansubbers will write subtitles that align with professional standards. Knowing this, Viki has instituted a system to identify and reward those fansubbers whose contributions help improve the overall quality of subtitles on the site. Through the collection of statistics on how many subtitles and segments each fansubber has created, Viki monitors the output of each of its volunteers. These statistics are also displayed on each volunteer's user page, encouraging the fansubbing community to use these statistics as a way to value each member as a laborer. Once a volunteer has created three thousand subtitles or segments, she can apply to be a Qualified Contributor. If she passes Viki's quality inspection, she not only gains access to the perks discussed in chapter one but can apply to become a channel manager.[108] Thus, Viki ties community leadership to productive output and adherence to high standards of quality. Fansubbers must gain the approval and trust of Viki, not of their fansubbing community, in order to qualify to be a community leader. By positioning itself as the source of authority within the community, Viki encourages fansubbers to fall in line with its expectations and rules in order to attain status within the its fansubbing community.

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[108] Kristine, "What is Qualified Contributor (QC) status?," *Viki Community Support*, last updated April 24, 2018, https://support.viki.com/hc/en-us/articles/215075068-What-is-Qualified-Contributor-QC-status-/.

Viki's system of valuing and rewarding fansubbers' labor suggests that it, rather than the K-drama fandom, grants value to fansubbers and their labor. Fansubbers are meant to work in order to meet Viki's standards, achieve the rewards it provides, and ultimately become a leader who enforces Viki's standards within the both project team and wider fansubbing community. They are encouraged to focus on pleasing Viki, rather than the K-drama fandom, through their labor, positioning them more as employees of Viki than volunteers devoted to helping their fan community. The devaluing of the team unit and erosion of team loyalty within the Sandbox further contributes to the impression that Viki wants fansubbers to view themselves as its laborers and act accordingly. The ideal Viki fansubber, as envisioned by the Sandbox, is one who associates herself and her work with the site and produces subtitles that help Viki compete with other K-drama streaming sites. She does not see her labor as something that constitutes and belongs to the K-drama fandom, but instead sees it as belonging to Viki. By viewing her labor as separate from K-drama fandom, this fansubber separates herself from the fan community, making it easier for Viki to manage her and her labor.

In this chapter, I have shown how Viki's intervention into the fansubbing process encourages fansubbers to view themselves as pseudo-employees whose labor belongs first and foremost to Viki. This is the first important requirement for disarticulating fansubbers from their fan community and making their labor monetizable. In the next chapter, I will examine how Viki separates and insulates its fansubbers from non-fansubbers through its social features. In doing this, Viki fulfills the second requirement for making fansubbers a monetizable source of labor.

Chapter Three: Community Interaction on Viki

In the previous chapter, I examined how Viki's intervention into the process of fansubbing attempts to turn fansubbers into pseudo-employees who willingly serve the site's corporate goals. In this chapter, I will look at the infrastructure Viki provides to connect fansubbers with other site users and how its social features redefine the position of fansubbers within the larger K-drama fandom. Although Viki privileges fansubbers as the most important members of its community, the site has various points of entry for non-fansubbing users to participate in the community. The homepages for individual drama series offers all registered users the opportunity to contribute to the community by writing series reviews and comments. The site's forum, called Viki Discussions, gives registered users a place to discuss topics ranging from dramas and other kinds of pop culture to fansubbing and language learning. These social features make Viki unique among K-drama streaming sites; its competitors lack forums and commenting features, allowing Viki to claim that it focuses on and cares about its community.

In addition to providing an entry point for non-fansubbers into the site community, Viki's social features serve some of the same important functions as the K-drama forums that were most popular during the height of independent fansubbing. K-drama forums were set up and maintained completely by fans, meant to provide a space for drama fans to connect with one another and coordinate fansubbing efforts. These forums were also a place of intersection between the K-drama fansubbing community and the larger K-drama fandom it served. Fansubbers used these forums to spread information about their subtitling projects, distribute download links for subtitled episodes, answer technical questions about how to use subtitle files, and solicit opinions and suggestions from the users consuming their work. Non-fansubbers were invited to observe, appreciate, and even help to improve the fansubbing process, making them

important (though marginal) members of the K-drama fansubbing community. Their presence in the community provided fansubbers with encouragement and assurance that their efforts were not futile; as the fansub group WITHS2 put it, "all of [their viewers'] thanks and kinds words always [helped]" keep them motivated to continue laboring in service of their fandom.[109]

Both Viki's social features and K-drama forums function effectively as online spaces for relationship building and integration of new users into the K-drama fandom. However, while K-drama forums provided a common area for fansubbers and non-fansubbers to interact, Viki's social features are built in such a way to discourage non-fansubbers from interacting with fansubbers in the kinds of ways they did previously in K-drama forums. Although fansubbers are free to discuss fashion in the Discussions forum or write a drama review, fansubbing-specific discussion and interaction is isolated from the rest of the community in areas that are either difficult to access or labeled to suggest exclusion of non-fansubbers. Unlike on K-drama forums, in which fansub viewers were required to enter fansubber-specific spaces, fansub viewers on Viki have no need to enter the fansubbing area of the Discussion forum, nor do they have to look at the space reserved for fansubbers on series homepages. While nothing prevents non-fansubbers from going into fansubbing spaces, the way Viki structures its social features discourages them from doing so. As a result, Viki's fansubbing community is isolated from the wider Viki community and the larger K-drama fandom.

Viki has built social spaces that exclude, in soft but effective ways, non-fansubbers from the site's fansubbing community. As a result, Viki's fansubbing is disconnected from the wider K-drama fandom, thus providing fansubbers with another source of encouragement to identify themselves and their labor more closely with Viki. In this chapter, I will show how Viki has

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[109] "Fansubbing," WITHS2, December 8, 2013.
http://web.archive.org/web/20131208003231/http://withs2.com/fansubbing.

reoriented fansubbers away from their fandom and closer to itself and explain why this shift is significant. First, I will provide an overview of the features of traditional K-drama forums, and from there, I will go through a detailed analysis of how Viki's series homepages and Discussion forum function to create a separation between fansubbers and non-fansubbers.

Community on Independent K-Drama Forums

In chapter one, I discussed how K-drama fans were reluctant to embrace the earliest attempts at commercialization of K-drama translation and distribution. While, as Brian Hu argues, fans believed that fansubs were more authentic and accurate than the professional subtitles produced by early drama distribution companies,[110] the dedication fans showed for consuming fansubbed dramas also stemmed in large part from the organization of the early English-speaking K-drama fandom. Starting in the late 1990s, fans began to build websites and forums through which to spread awareness about Korean dramas and music and to contact other fans of Korean pop media. Fan sites, like Soompi.com and Dramabeans.com, often represented the work of one or a few fans dedicated to providing English-language updates on Korean entertainment news or summarizing dramas from an American perspective. While commenting functions on these sites allowed users to contribute to the discussion started by site authors, the most robust fan participation took place on fan-run forums such as D-Addicts, AsianFanatics, and the Soompi forum.

These fan-built forums, which are still used by K-drama fans, host discussion on East Asian pop culture and media, with boards organized according to the national origin and type of media being discussed. Within individual boards, discussion threads are also carefully organized around specific topics; within the Korean drama board, for example, threads specific to particular

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[110] Brian Hu, "Korean TV Serials in the English-Language Diaspora: Translating Difference Online and Making it Racial," *Velvet Light Trap* 66, no. 1 (2010): 45.

actors, actresses, or series are created in order to keep conversations about those topics in one centralized place and to archive the entire conversation so that future contributors and readers can easily see how the discussion has evolved over time.

During the height of independent K-drama fansubbing, D-Addicts, AsianFanatics, and the Soompi forum all saw the formation of what Brian Hu calls "affective translation communities." These affective translation communities grew out of series-specific K-drama threads, where fans created close connections with one another through "[contributing] their individual linguistic knowledge for the greater good of the collective."[111] Hu notes that the translation in these communities consisted not only of the obvious act of translating and subtitling drama episodes, but also included the translation of the drama's paratexts (news blurbs, statements from actors and producers, soundtrack information, etc.) and of the creation and compiling of images (including still and moving images from the drama, as well as officially and fan-taken photographs of the production process). For fans communicating in English on US-based forums, "images [became] a common language and [communicated] with a clarity and emotional salience within a community where not everyone's first language [was] English."[112] Images were especially important because the collection and uploading of images required no linguistic knowledge; by clipping images from drama episodes and uploading them into the drama thread, any fan could gain membership into these affective translation communities.

Affective translation communities were communities born out the intersection between the independent K-drama fansubbing community and the wider K-drama fandom. Series-specific forum threads were spaces in which fansubbers could discuss dramas with other fans, advertise their subtitle downloads, and gauge viewer reaction to their work. Series-specific threads were

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[111] Hu, "Korean TV Serials in the English Language Diaspora," 38.
[112] Hu, 38.

especially beneficial for fansub groups because they effectively directed traffic toward

fansubbers' work; many fans did not follow individual fansub groups or check fansub websites,

and instead preferred to use forums as their main hubs of information about what dramas were

subtitled and available for viewing.

The first post of each series-specific thread provides a great visual representation of how

these threads were sites of intersection between the fansubbing community and wider K-drama

fandom. First posts were home to meticulously compiled information about each drama's plot,

cast, and original soundtrack, but also often included links to fansub groups' websites where fans

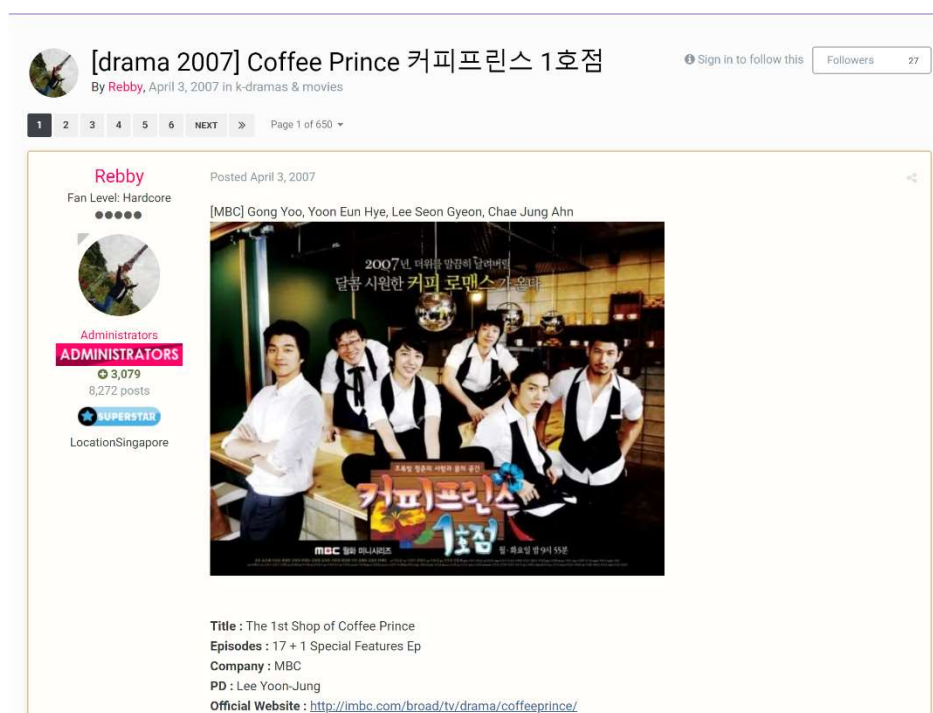could download subtitle files (figs. 1 and 2). While fansubbers provided the links to their works,

non-fansubbers were usually responsible for collecting and displaying the other information displayed in the first post. First posts, as well as the gifs, production photos, and carefully-created collages in the posts

Figure 2: First post for the drama *Coffee Prince* on the Soompi Forum.

that followed, were visual manifestations of each affective translation community's "collective

emotional investment" in both the series being discussed and the community fans had formed.[113]

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[113] Hu, 38.

Series-specific threads also demonstrated the prominent position of fansubbers in the K-drama fandom. First posts were reserved for what

Figure 3: Links to subtitles in the first post of the *Coffee Prince* thread. Notice the advertising banner for fansub group WITHS2.

the community viewed as essential information about each series, information that all users needed to know. The space thread authors gave to fansub groups in first post, placed fansubbers front and center for all fans visiting the thread; forum users could not browse a series-specific thread without seeing evidence of fansubbers' labor and community importance. Below the first post, fans might thank the fansubbers or comment (usually positively) upon the quality of the subtitles or the reputation of the fansub group. Besides these generally brief acknowledgments of fansubbers, series-specific threads were not home to in-depth or lengthy discussion of fansubbing. In many cases, however, lack of conversation about fansubbing was taken by fansubbers as a positive sign; lack of complaints about subtitles, and the thriving conversation that took place after each episode's release, indicated community acceptance and enjoyment of the fansubbers' work.

The D-Addicts forum is unique among the most popular K-drama forums because it is devoted mainly to fansubbing. D-Addicts has two boards specifically designated for fansubbing-

related discussion. The first is the Fansubbing board, meant for discussion of the process of fansubbing. The second is the Subtitles board, which is a centralized place for all fansub groups to put downloads links and usage instructions for their subtitles. These two boards, which sit at the top of the list on the site's board index, were instrumental in the growth and maintenance of the independent K-drama fansubbing community. The Fansubbing board was built mainly as a space in which fansubbers from all teams could come together as a larger fansubbing community. Having a designated community space provided multiple benefits to the fansubbing community. First, it provided a way to prevent competition among fansub teams. According to Mizuko Ito, competition among anime fansub groups working on the same series often manifested in "discussions in online forums and on fansub comparison sites [picking] apart the differences in the quality and approaches of different groups."[114] This kind of competition was rare within the K-drama fansubbing community, mainly because fansub teams did not work on the same series. This was possible thanks to communal spaces like the Fansubbing board, in which members of different teams could discuss their current projects and keep up to date with what others were doing.

The Fansubbing board was also a space, like drama series-specific threads, in which fansubbers and non-fansubbers could come together. Fansub viewers often went to the Fansubbing board to check on the status of a certain series, and sometimes left comments of appreciation on a group's update and progress threads. In this way, non-fansubbers could become marginal, supportive members of the fansubbing community. The board also offered non-fansubbers the opportunity to become full members of the community through its Fansub

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[114] Mizuko Ito, "Contributors versus Leechers: Fansubbing Ethics and Hybrid Public Culture," in *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, eds. Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Izumi Tsuji, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012): 183-84.

Recruitment sub-board. This sub-board connected fansub teams who needed new members with aspiring fansubbers looking for a group to join. Fansubbers looking to start new teams or start projects independent of a team also used the board to advertise to potential members. If the Fansub Recruitment sub-board represented the openness of the fansubbing community, the Fansub Mentoring sub-board represented its geniality. New fansubbers used this sub-board to ask questions about their new roles, while seasoned fansubbers provided copious assistance, regardless of what team the poster was in. Virtually no question went unanswered, demonstrating the supportive and inclusive nature of the fansubbing community; any person could use these sub-boards to connect with fansubbers and develop the skills necessary to be part of a group.

Another site for interaction between fansubbers and fansub viewers was the Subtitles board. The Subtitles board was home to D-Addict's series-specific threads. The series-specific threads, created and maintained solely by fansub groups, were often text-heavy. The first posts of these threads, unlike those of other sites, were dominated by download links, instructions for using subtitle files, and warnings against stealing subtitles or using them in unauthorized ways. Beneath the sparse first posts, however, were often robust conversations between fansubbers and their viewers. Viewers tended to respond to the thread with multiple posts expressing their gratitude and praising fansubbers after the release of each episode. Viewers also often used these threads to coordinate torrenting efforts for each episode, especially during the early days of K-drama fansub distribution when the numbers of people attempting to download each episode were low. In these series-specific threads and the conversations happening within them, the role of fansubbers as both intermediaries and distributors is clear, as is the fact that fansub viewers recognized and appreciated that fansubbers held these important roles.

The Subtitles board also reveals the nature of the power dynamics between fansubbers and fansub viewers. A pinned post near the top of the board, entitled "PLEASE DO NOT REQUEST SUBS!", lays out for non-fansubbers the most basic etiquette for consuming fansubs and interacting with fansubbers. The thread instructed users that it was bad manners to make posts requesting subtitles for certain series or to question fansub groups about their progress on upcoming episodes.[115] Forum administrators requested that fellow fans assist in the policing of this behavior, demonstrating non-fansubbers' efforts to create community standards for how fansubbers should be treated. These rules reflect not only the culture of respect and appreciation for fansubbers within K-drama fandom at this time, but also help reveal the power that fansubbers held within their fandom. The D-Addicts administrator who created the etiquette thread tells viewers to "sit back and wait patiently like the rest of us" as fansub groups made their own decisions about which dramas to subtitle and how quickly to complete each episode.[116] While there were fans who were unhappy with fansub groups' speed at subtitling or with their choices about which dramas to distribute, most fans, including those in leadership positions within the main K-drama forums, accepted their dependence on fansubbers for access to dramas and supported fansubbers' freedom to choose which dramas to subtitle and when to distribute them.

Complaints about fansubbers' choices or speed, as well as complaints about the difficulty of torrenting episodes or using subtitle files, indicate that fansubbers were unable to fully satisfy the desires of their viewers. However, these kinds of complaints were usually condemned quickly by other fans. Fansubbers were widely accepted and appreciated within K-drama fandom

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[115] Ruroshin, "PLEASE DO NOT REQUEST SUBS!", *D-Addicts*, August 22, 2004. http://www.d-addicts.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=6882.

[116] Ruroshin, "PLEASE DO NOT REQUEST SUBS!"

despite their inability to provide dramas in the numbers, or with the speed, that fans might have preferred. The high regard for fansubbers within K-drama fandom was a result not only of their sole ability to provide English-subtitled dramas for fans, but also resulted from the visibility of their labor and their close connection to K-drama fandom as a whole. Series-specific threads, and the affective translation communities that formed within them, brought fansubbers and their viewers together into a common community. Fansubbers were given a place in the first post of nearly every series thread, making them visible to all visitors and marking their importance in the eyes of their fandom. The independent fansubbing community was also very open to others through the Fansubbing and Subtitles boards on D-Addicts, which served as points of entry for those who wished to become fansubbers. These various sites of intersection between the independent fansubbing community and non-fansubbers linked the two groups closely together and allowed fansubbers the ability to exert their agency over their viewers. Because they had the trust and regard of their viewers, fansubbers had the freedom to choose what to subtitle, when to do so, and how to distribute their work to others.

Community on Viki Series Homepages

Independent fansubbers' presence in traditional K-drama forums was necessary, in large part, because fansub groups needed a place to advertise and distribute their subtitles. With Viki taking over both the task of advertising and distributing subtitled K-dramas, fansubbers no longer need to maintain a presence in K-drama forum threads. Because Viki has eliminated the need for fansubbers to attract viewers through robust community interaction, fansubbers have largely lost the prime position they once held in K-drama forums. For example, series-specific threads on today's most popular K-drama forums rarely mention fansubbers, while the Fansubbing and

Subtitles board on D-Addicts feature very little discussion about K-drama fansubbing. K-drama fansubbers' traditional points of interaction with the wider K-drama fandom have thus been lost.

However, Viki has created spaces that resemble the important sites of intersection between fansubbers and non-fansubbers found on K-drama forums. One of these spaces is the series homepage. Each series licensed by Viki has a standard homepage that includes links to each episode, a professionally-written summary, data about the drama's broadcast schedule, and photographs of the cast (fig. 3). As a repository of information about each series, the series homepages are analogues for the first posts of the series-specific threads that dominated K-drama forums. These series homepages also offer a space called the Contributor's Wall for the fansub team in charge of subtitling the series, as well as features, namely reviews and comments, that solicit participation from registered users. At least visually, then, Viki's series homepages seem to be worthy replacements for the first posts of series threads on traditional K-drama forums.

This impression of series homepages as functional replacements for first posts on series threads falls apart, however, when the features of homepages are examined in terms of how they facilitate the kinds of
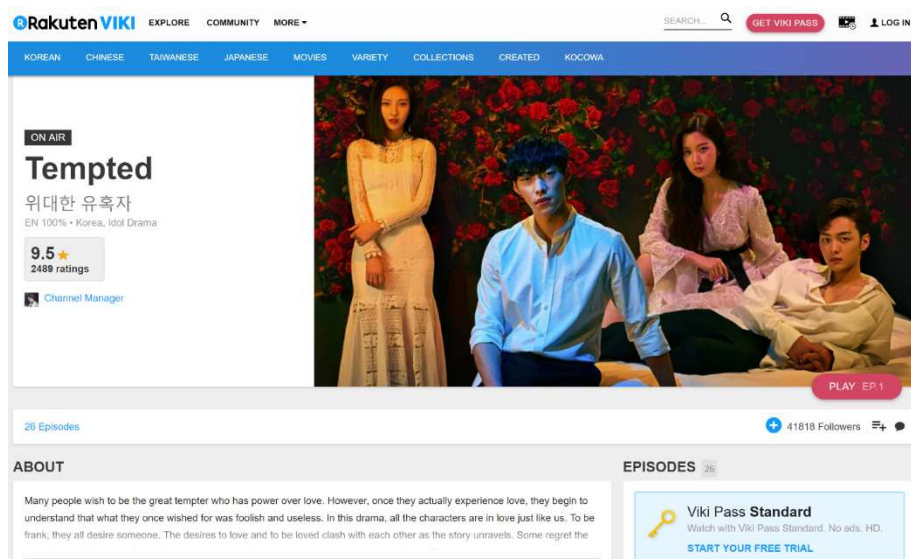

Figure 4: Homepage for drama series *Tempted.* Users are greeted with links to view episodes or purchase a Viki membership at the top of the page.

intersections between fansubbers and viewers that were so important for independent fansubbers

in traditional K-drama forums. First, the layout of the Viki series homepages fails to grant fansubbers the "prime real estate" that they occupied in first posts. The fansub team's space on a series homepage is located in the bottom half of the page, beneath summaries, broadcast information, cast details, and even fan-written reviews. Only the channel manager, who leads the fansub team, is mentioned at the top of the page, granting the person holding this role great importance while relegating other volunteers to a lowlier position on the page. Series homepages are often as long as the whole first page of a K-drama forum thread; while a forum user might scroll through a series-specific forum thread and see four or five posts (including the lengthy first post), a Viki user must scroll through nearly the whole series homepage to finally reach the Contributor's Wall. What this means is that the space that fansub teams is granted on series homepages is analogous to the third or fourth post on a series-specific forum thread. While it is entirely possible that users will scroll far down the page to view the Contributor's Wall, there is no need to do so; users can easily access everything they need to consume the drama at the very top of the page. Fansubbers' location near the bottom of the series homepage indicates that Viki does not view them as a centrally important part of their site. Unlike the authors of series-specific threads in K-drama forums who placed fansub groups in the first post that all users would have to see, Viki assigns fansubbers to a place on the series homepage where no one needs, or is even encouraged, to go.

If a user does choose to scroll to the bottom of the page, she will find the comment section. Located right below the fansub group's Contributor's Wall, the comment section is the place on the series homepage where the kinds of interactions between fansubbers and fansub viewers that characterized traditional K-drama forums are most likely to happen. However, the comment section is not built to facilitate the sorts of conversations that occurred in K-drama

forums. This is mainly because the comment section runs using Disqus commenting software. Disqus is a company, separate from Viki, that operates comment sections on many websites. The Disqus software requires that all commenters register and use a Disqus account (rather than their Viki account) when commenting. As a result, the interactions taking place in the comment section are not linked to the Viki community infrastructure in any meaningful way. A fan might use completely different usernames for her Disqus and Viki accounts, making it difficult to continue conversations from the comment sections in Viki's built-in forum or private messaging interface.

Additionally, the Disqus software organizes comments by popularity rather than displaying them in chronological order. This makes it difficult for new commenters to track (or even notice) if a line of conversation has developed in the comment section; comments appear disjointed and disconnected from one another, discouraging users from trying to start discussions at all. Additionally, there is no feature to filter comments by language, so users have no easy way to locate other commenters speaking the same language as them. While commenters are able to reply to comments from others, this feature is only rarely used in Viki comment sections. As a result, the comment section fails to serve the social function that K-drama forum threads used to serve. Commenters on Viki do not interact with each other, much less with fansubbers. In fact, virtually no commenters mention fansubbers at all. Most comments are celebratory, short observations about the quality of the drama or the looks of the actors and actresses. When fansubbers are mentioned, it is nearly always to request that subtitles be written in another language or to complain about slow progress on subtitling. Such comments would have been considered rude in K-drama forums, but on Viki, which has no rules for how to politely interact with or request things from fansubbers, these requests have become normal.

Another contributing factor to the decline in etiquette toward fansubbers on Viki is fansubbers' inability to make effective demands for behavior from their viewers. K-drama forums offered fansubbers the space to tell viewers how to treat them, and forum administrators often instituted rules about conduct toward fansubbers. Because Viki fansubbers are often not the only people providing subtitles for dramas (users can often find the same series on Viki's competitors' sites), and because fansubbers are easily replaceable with other volunteers on Viki, they lack the leverage to make demands of their viewers. Viewers can either go elsewhere for their subtitles or wait for new volunteers to replace fansubbers who refuse to work because of rude viewers. Furthermore, Viki does not offer fansubbers the kind of space necessary for rules about etiquette to be visible to viewers. The only space fansubbers have that directly connects them to viewers is the Contributor's Wall which, as discussed, is easy to miss or ignore due to its position near the bottom of the series homepage.

The Contributor's Wall is a representation of how Viki promises, through appearances that resemble traditional K-drama forums, to offer fansubbers a community similar to the independent fansubbing community but fails to deliver on that promise. Contributor's Walls are spaces given to fansub groups to do basically anything they desire. The layout of the top of the Contributor's Wall is designated by Viki: there is an array of the profile pictures of all the volunteers who worked on subtitling the series, offering users an easy way to click through to each fansubbers' profile and view their subtitling statistics. There is also an advertisement from Viki to become a volunteer. By linking to fansubbers' statistics and angling for new volunteers in this space, Viki reinforces the view of fansubbers as semi-professionals that was observed in chapter two.

Below this Viki-mandated part of the Wall, however, fansub teams are able to insert images and text freely. Nearly all teams fill the space with flashy, specially created graphics that both offer detailed information about the drama and celebrate the contributions made by the

Figure 5: Appreciation Corner visual for Team Robotic, which works on the drama *I Am Not a Robot.*

fansubbers on the team. While not every team chooses to add extra series synopses and character explanations, nearly every team will have an "Appreciation Corner." The thank-you collages and full

team member lists of the Appreciation Corners often include gifs, hand-drawn graphics, and personalized messages lauding the efforts of each volunteer on the team (fig. 4). These Contributor's Wall graphics, with their heavy visual emphasis, resemble the visually-oriented series-specific threads created by affective drama communities on K-drama forums more than anything else on the series homepage. However, the Contributor's Walls are created by fansubbers for fansubbers; there is no affective translation community, built through the interaction of fansubbers with non-fansubbers, behind these graphics. Like the comment section, the Contributor's Wall is only a facsimile of the series-specific threads that brought fansubbers and their viewers together in traditional K-drama forums. What appears to be possible sites of

intersection between fansubbers and viewers on series homepages are actually exclusive spaces, where either viewers or fansubbers dominate but never come together.

Community on the Viki Discussions Forum

If the series homepage is Viki's closest analogue to the first posts of series-specific threads, the Discussions forum is Viki's best recreation of the other features of traditional K-drama forums. Like K-drama forums, the Discussions forum is a space for K-drama fans to connect with one another and discuss a variety of topics beyond simply Korean dramas. However, the Discussions forum is not as central to the K-drama fandom as K-drama forums were. While traditional forums were central hubs of fandom activity, Viki places its forum in an auxiliary position in relation to the main Viki site. This is best demonstrated by the somewhat unintuitive process that users must take to reach the Discussions forum. Although the "Community" tab at the top of the Viki homepage would seem to be the obvious way to reach the forum, the Community link actually takes users to the volunteer recruitment page, which makes no reference to the Discussions forum. Instead, users must know to click on the "More" tab next to the Community tab, which offers "Discussions" as the fourth choice in a list of links. This somewhat hidden placement of the forum link indicates that Viki places a relatively low importance on community participation through forum discussions when compared to the other, more visible links on the main homepage. Thumbnails for various series and multiple links to the volunteer recruitment page dominate Viki's homepage, suggesting that Viki wants its users to prioritize consumption and community contribution (in the form of subtitling) over relationship building through forum participation. Social interaction is less valuable and less important than consumption on Viki, at least as indicated by the layout of its homepage.

The Discussions forum is also different from K-drama forums in its layout and the kinds of interactions that go on within it. Unlike the meticulously organized boards and sub-boards that greet users on the front page of traditional K-drama forums, the Discussions front page presents individuals threads of all kinds without any easily discernable organization scheme. At the top of the front page, however, users are given three thread organization schemes to choose from. The default scheme is "latest," which orders threads chronologically without any regard to the topic of discussion. The "top" scheme is the second choice, and orders threads by popularity, though how threads are ranked is not clear. Finally, users can select the "categories" scheme, which switches the site to a more typical forum layout in which boards (called categories) and sub-boards, rather than individual threads, are listed. There is also an option to filter all threads by category, offering users quick access to a particular category's threads regardless of which organization scheme they are using. Categories on the Discussions forum cover nearly all the topics common to traditional K-drama forums; users are offered spaces to discuss Korean celebrities, music, and fashion, as well as dramas and movies.

One might expect that the K-dramas sub-category (within the larger TV & Movies category) would be home to the series-specific threads that characterized K-drama forum culture before Viki's creation. However, threads in the K-dramas sub-category tend to be about general topics surrounding dramas. Rather than discuss or compile information about particular dramas, fans ask for drama recommendations, discuss tropes in dramas, or coordinate efforts to request that Viki license new dramas. Because series homepages serve as repositories for information about each drama, the series-specific threads that are created on the Discussions forum focus on particular plot points instead of duplicating information that can be found elsewhere on the site. Series threads are also short-lived; while a typical series-specific thread on the Soompi forum,

for example, might have hundreds of pages and posts, series threads on the Discussion forum typically have fewer than twenty posts. The Discussion forum is also not image-friendly, and most users do not bother to post the pictures and gifs that often dominated on traditional K-drama forums. While the K-dramas sub-category is a space for community interaction and discussion of dramas, it is not conducive to the formation of the affective translation communities that grew out of forums during the height of independent fansubbing.

The Volunteering category is another category that seems that it might facilitate traditional K-drama forum practices. Placed near the top of the categories list, the Volunteering category is clearly important to Viki, both as a community space for its fansubbers as well as a space to disseminate information and enforce professional standards. Like the Subtitling and Fansubbing boards of D-Addicts, the Volunteering category provides a place for Viki fansubbers to recruit volunteers for new projects, ask for advice about the subtitling process, and coordinate the creation and spread of materials to educate new fansubbers. Fansubbers also use the space to discuss fansubbing on Viki and to make requests to the site to improve the fansubbing process. However, the Volunteering category is distinct from the fansubbing-centric boards of D-Addicts in its exclusion of non-fansubbers. Non-volunteer users can access the Volunteering category, but virtually none of them create the sorts of appreciative threads or posts that were common in the D-Addicts boards. This is likely because the Volunteering category has no threads that would be of interest to non-fansubbers; while the D-Addicts Subtitling board had threads that provided the links and technical instructions that fansub viewers needed for drama consumption, threads in the Volunteering category do not provide anything of use to users who do not wish to become fansubbers. Without the need to visit the Volunteering category, non-fansubbers simply do not visit, and so the space has become exclusive to fansubbers.

While the Volunteering category is not a true intersection point between Viki's fansubbers and its wider userbase, it is an important part of the infrastructure of Viki's fansubbing community. It is the main site of community activity for fansubbers. Fansubbers use this area of the forum in larger numbers than they utilize the communication features offered in the subtitling interface. As the main conversation space, the Volunteering category helps to encourage preeminence of the larger fansubbing community over individual fansub teams. The category is also a space in which the professional standards and expectations (outlined in chapter two) are reinforced. Fansubbers often create threads criticizing poor work or post guides for proper subtitle creation, demonstrating that these volunteers are viewing themselves more and more as pseudo-professionals who have a duty to create high-quality subtitles at a rapid pace. Finally, the Volunteering category is an advertisement space for Viki. For example, fansubbers post the "QC Newsletter," a newsletter from Viki written for Qualified Contributors, each month. The newsletter includes advertisements for currently popular dramas, notices about upcoming site updates, and information about special promotions and perks. Because not all volunteers are signed up to receive these newsletters, the Volunteer category is a useful place to spread this information and keep fansubbers connected to the community as it changes.

Both the K-drama sub-category and the Volunteer category are the spaces on the Discussions forum that seem most likely replicate the kinds of intersections between fansubbers and fansub viewers that were so important on traditional K-drama forums. One might expect to find affective translation communities forming in threads in the K-drama sub-category, or to see non-fansubbers creating appreciation posts in the Volunteer category. Despite the labels that suggest similarity to traditional forums, however, these spaces are not home to the traditional cross-community interactions that closely tied the independent fansubbing community to its

wider fandom. Part of this is due to Viki taking over the job of drama distribution and advertisement. Fansubbers maintained a strong presence in traditional forums because they needed to make their work visible to the rest of their fandom, and the threads in which they posted links and progress updates drew non-fansubbers in with the promise of new content. Additionally, series-specific threads were repositories for drama information that attracted a variety of fans to participate in information collection, translation, and interpretation within affective translation communities. With Viki distributing dramas and making space for drama information on series homepages, there is no need for the forum to facilitate fansubbers' ability to perform these functions. The threads that fansubbers created and used in the process of distributing and advertising dramas, the threads that acted as places for fansubbers and their viewers to come together and build relationships, are no longer created because they have been rendered unnecessary.

Another cause for the failure of the Discussions forum to facilitate robust interaction between fansubbers and non-fansubbers is Viki's undermining of the importance of forum participation. On the site's volunteer recruitment page, there is no mention of forum participation as a form of community participation; only fansubbers and those who "create real-time comments, fan collections, [and] ratings and reviews" are outlined as the true members of the Viki community.[117] Viki community membership is earned through subtitle contribution, content curation, or responding to dramas in mainly non-social ways, not through building relationships with others. The burial of the Discussions forum link on Viki's main homepage reinforces the devaluation of forum participation. While the forum is valuable as a way to disseminate

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[117] "Community," *Viki*, accessed April 19, 2018. https://www.viki.com/community.

information to fansubbers and reinforce professionalization of volunteers, its relationship-building function seems less important.

Isolating Fansubbers Through Social Features

In the current sphere of K-drama distribution, Viki offers users the unique opportunity to combine their drama consumption with their drama fandom. Unlike its competitors, Viki has social features woven into the fabric of its site, creating a streaming platform that better resembles the traditional K-drama forum experience than any other site. However, the resemblance is only visual; functionally, Viki's social features are not the sites of intersection between the fansubbing community and the wider K-drama fandom that were so prominent in traditional K-drama forums. Viki does not prevent intersection between its fansubbing community and its larger community, but it also does not encourage it. For non-fansubbers, starting conversations in the comment sections of series homepages is difficult, viewing the Contributor's Wall graphics made by fansub teams is optional and easy to miss, and crossing into the Volunteer category of the forum is basically pointless. Although fansubbers put effort into making their work visible through Contributor's Walls and vigorous forum participation, their effort seems to go unnoticed by non-fansubbers. With no encouragement to cross into fansubber-dominated spaces, non-fansubbers tend not to make the journey.

Without participation from non-fansubbers, the spaces that Viki has granted to fansubbers have become isolated enclaves. Viki's fansubbing community functions separately from the users who consume its work, rather than alongside and in cooperation with viewers as the independent fansubbing community functioned. Viki's isolation of its fansubbing community from the larger site community is an example of what Mel Stanfill has noted as "a broader shift [by content owners] to incite fans-the-individuals to ever-greater investment and involvement but

manage them through disarticulating them from the troublesome resistive capacity of fandom-the-community."[118] In other words, by separating fansubbers from their viewers, Viki weakens their ability to push back against changes in their practices and community that they may dislike. How this disarticulation of the fansubbing community from the larger Viki community (and the larger K-drama fandom) works to disempower fansubbers can be seen in two ways.

First, fansubbing has become an activity associated solely with Viki and with certain spaces on the site. As explained above, once Viki took over drama distribution, fansubbers lost their position within outside K-drama forums. As independent fansub teams closed down, fansubbing became something that occurred only on Viki. Viki's fansubbing community became the only fansubbing community, and Viki became the only place in which fansubbers were spoken about. Turning fansubbing into an activity that occurs on only Viki encourages fansubbers to identify themselves with Viki first and foremost. The isolation of Viki's fansubbing community from the wider K-drama fandom pushes fansubbers to view themselves more as members of the Viki community than as members of the wider K-drama fandom. This benefits Viki by making fansubbers easier to control; because fansubbers view themselves as tied to Viki, and because they have nowhere else to go, they are more likely to conform to the professional standards and roles that Viki has increasingly attempted to create for its volunteers.

Second, the isolation of the Viki fansubbing community from the larger Viki community severs the close ties between fansubbers and non-fansubbers that previously granted fansubbers autonomy, agency, and leadership within the K-drama fandom. The high regard fansub viewers used to have for fansubbers is difficult to cultivate on Viki because the two groups rarely interact on the site. Without the trust and regard of their viewers, fansubbers are subject to greater

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[118] Mel Stanfill, "Kindle Worlds II: The End of Fandom as we know it?," *Mel Stanfill* (blog), June 3, 2013, http://www.melstanfill.com/kindle-worlds-ii-the-end-of-fandom-as-we-know-it/.

criticism on Viki. Comments on series homepages often make requests that would have been considered rude on traditional K-drama forums, and complaints about the speed of Viki fansubbers can be seen both on Viki and on other sites, like Tumblr, where K-drama fans congregate. Viki fansubbers lack the power to make or enforce standards for viewer etiquette, and so complaints from viewers become yet another force encouraging Viki volunteers to professionalize. Viki has also taken away the power and agency of fansubbers to freely choose which series they want to subtitle or to decide their own release schedules for subtitles. Licensing choices are made by Viki, and while users often campaign for Viki to pick up certain series, these petitions seem to mean little. As for subtitling release schedules, Viki encourages fansubbers to complete episodes as quickly as possible so as to compete with the quick turnaround times found on competitor sites.

Despite the loss of much of their power and agency, fansubbers still happily volunteer for Viki. This is largely due to their enjoyment of fansubbing; they will volunteer for Viki as long as they are able to enjoy the activity that they love. However, the small freedoms that Viki does offer its volunteers also contribute to the comfort fansubbers feel in working for the site. Within the isolated spaces of the fansubbing community on Viki, fansubbers have considerable, if not mostly superficial, power. They can, for example, choose how to organize their team's labor within the subtitling interface, or creatively express their love for dramas and appreciation of each other on Contributor's Walls. These limited freedoms and powers preserve fansubbers' dignity and thus make it possible for Viki to incorporate fansubbers happily into its corporate structure.

Conclusion: Viki's View of Its Fansubbing Community

This thesis has examined how Viki has intervened in the K-drama fansubbing community and managed to successfully integrate fansubbers into its corporate structure through its use of the rhetoric of the fan community. Although Viki, in its claim to offer fansubbers "a community unlike another other," obscures its origins in the independent K-drama fansubbing community, it draws heavily from independent fansubbing culture as a way to appeal to fansubbers who might otherwise distrust them. Its site-wide social features create the appearance of a site that is unique among K-drama streaming platforms for its focus on the community. Its open embrace of fansubbing culture allows it to claim that it is a site "powered by fans" and centered on the needs and desires of fans. However, the extent to which Viki lives up to this image is limited by the need to assure Korean drama owners and advertisers that it is a professional, commercially viable venture. In order to assure copyright holders that their intellectual property is safe, and to ensure for advertisers that there will be viewers to see their advertisements, Viki has to incorporate fansubbers as a labor force that can be carefully controlled so as to produce subtitles comparable in quality with the professional subtitles found on competitor sites.

Successfully recruiting and controlling fansubbers as laborers necessitated that Viki find a way to convince fansubbers to give up the wide-ranging powers and agency they had gained within K-drama fandom. The site accomplished this partly through obvious means, such exerting legal pressure on fansub groups to take down download links and using its competitive advantages to court viewers toward its site and away from fansub groups. However, recruiting fansubbers as laborers (rather than simply eliminating them as a source of competition) required that Viki provide benefits to fansubbers that would make laboring for Viki valuable. In order to this, Viki used the language of community to set up its site as an analogue to the independent K-

drama fansubbing communities that it was attempting to dismantle. By emphasizing that volunteers were part of a vibrant community of fans, run by a site who was sympathetic toward and appreciative of its volunteers, Viki positioned itself as a member of the K-drama fandom and an ally to fansubbers.

Chapters two and three examined the spaces on Viki in which its fansubbing community reside and work to see how the site delivers on its promises of being a company centered on the needs and desires of its volunteers. The Sandbox subtitling software provides a unified place where fansubbers can work and communicate as teams. As an alternative to the traditional system of fansubbing, the Sandbox was fast, efficient, and easy-to-use, providing a clear benefit to fansubbers in terms of speed and ease of learning. However, the Sandbox's communication features discourage the intra-team relationship building that, for many fansubbers, was a large part of the value found in donating their labor. Intra-team communication features are used almost exclusively for discussion of subtitling, while friendly, community-building conversation is relegated to the Chatter box, which facilitates only fleeting, hard-to-follow conversations. While it is possible for Viki volunteers to communicate with each other privately, the Sandbox's communication features deemphasize the importance of building close social connections with others. The Sandbox encourages fansubbers to value the Viki fansubbing community over the project team; rather than facilitate the formation of close-knit team units, Viki pushes its volunteers to identify themselves more strongly with the wider Viki community.

The importance of professionalization was also noted in the analysis of the Sandbox. While independent K-drama fansubbers always attempted to produce the best quality subtitles possible, there was considerable freedom for individual fansubbers and project teams to experiment with font choices, colors, and subtitle placement, as well as to develop their own

methods of translation and video editing. The Sandbox standardizes the process of subtitling between all teams, making it easier for one fansubber to provide labor on multiple projects and create more value for Viki over time. The Sandbox also standardizes the look of subtitles so that Viki's subtitles look similar to those produced by professional translators. Professional standards in translation quality and subtitle timing are also made easy to enforce through the Sandbox editing tools and through team-wide communication features which allow team members to point out, correct, and offer advice on avoiding mistakes. Viki never calls its volunteers professionals, but by standardizing the process of subtitle creation, limiting the freedom to experiment with the look of subtitles, and making it easy for team leaders to demand and maintain high levels of quality, Viki suggests that its fansubbers should aim to be as professional as possible. Additionally, by advertising and offering special perks, including premium site membership, coupons for online retailers, and certificates of appreciation, Viki provides material benefits to its fansubbers that resemble monetary compensation for professional-quality work.

Viki's site-wide social features give the site the appearance of a place on which a virtual community can easily be built. Viki offers fansubbers space in nearly all of its social areas; fansubbers have their own sub-forums on the Discussions forum and have large real estate on homepages for each drama series. These spaces resemble the traditional K-drama forum spaces in which fansubbers could meet and talk with their viewers in order to build friendships and learn how to better serve their audience. However, the structure of Viki's social spaces discourages interaction between fansubbers and non-fansubbers. Neither the comment sections of series homepages nor the Discussion forums are sites for interaction between fansubbers and their viewers. Instead, fansubbing activity is isolated to certain places on Viki, creating the impression that fansubbing is something associated only with the Viki fansubbing community. Viki's social

features cut fansubbers off from the wider Viki community and from the K-drama fandom and thus encourage fansubbers to associate their labor and rewards with Viki exclusively. Viki offers fansubbers a community to be a part of but restricts that community to exist as a small, isolated segment of the wider fandom that fansubbers are said to be laboring for.

Taken together, Viki's Sandbox and site-wide social features reframe what fansubbing is and what makes it valuable. Fansubbing on Viki is not the experimental, empowering activity it was during the height of the independent K-drama fansubbing community. Rather, fansubbing is a streamlined process that conforms to what Viki views as valuable. The rewards for fansubbing are no longer primarily social, but also include material benefits that, along with the streamlined and standardized process of subtitling on Viki, push fansubbers toward professionalization. Finally, by downplaying intra-team communication and limiting the ability to communicate privately with fellow fansubbers, Viki devalues the importance of building close relationships. This devaluation of the social benefits of fansubbing and isolation of fansubbing to a small portion of the Viki community and the larger K-drama fandom deemphasizes the social role of fansubbers in favor of their productive role as laborers. Membership in Viki's fansubbing community comes to consist more in subtitle production than in building relationships and connections within the community, and fansubbers are thus transformed from powerful and influential members of the K-drama fandom into sources of value to be used for Viki's benefit.

Despite this shift in the role of fansubbers within the drama fandom away from community leadership and toward association with Viki as laborers, fansubbing has remained a popular activity. Unlike fan fiction writers and readers who rejected the commercialization of fan fiction by FanLib, fansubbers and fansub viewers have largely embraced Viki as a welcome presence in K-drama fandom. Because of fansubbers' willingness to give their labor to a for-

profit website, it can be tempting to see Viki's use of the language of community as a sneaky way to mask its mercantile intentions. It may appear that fansubbers are "participants [who] might not even know they're being exploited, because they're unable to see through the 'marketing mechanisms'" Viki has crafted to recruit them.[119] However, it is important to remember that "free labor…is not necessarily exploited labor."[120] Fansubbers derive pleasure from fansubbing, and Viki is the only place they can engage in that activity. Additionally, Viki is not forcing fansubbers to volunteer; even if its claims to be a unique, welcoming, close-knit community are not true, the benefits of fansubbing on Viki, whether material or immaterial, are valuable enough to fansubbers to continue donating their time and effort to the site.

The purpose of this thesis is not to make ethical value judgments about whether Viki's use of the language of community to extract labor from fansubbers is right or wrong. Rather, I have attempted to analyze how Viki deploys the word "community" as it attempts to recruit and maintain its volunteer base, and to understand whether and how Viki's website structure actually facilitates the kind of community it claims to be. By rejecting Viki's claim that it is "a community unlike any other" and comparing the site to the K-drama forums and fansubbing community that existed before it, I have shown how Viki has crafted the appearance of a community-friendly site while actually implementing features that allow it to efficiently extract value from fansubbers. I have also examined how Viki's monetization of fansubbing has affected the position of fansubbers in their wider fandom, arguing that fansubbers have been transformed from community leaders into laborers for Viki. Further exploration into Viki might include interviews with fansubbers, including those who worked both before and after Viki's entrance into K-drama fandom, as well as fansub viewers, to understand how fan perception of fansubbers

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[119] Julie McDonough Dolmaya, "The ethics of crowdsourcing," *Linguistica Anteverpiensia* 10 (2011): 102.
[120] Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (2000):

aligns or deviates from the role Viki has created for them. Future investigation might also include analysis of Viki's mobile application to see how (or how not) community features are integrated into the site's mobile experience. While these analyses were not possible within the scope of this thesis, I have attempted to provide an adequate starting analysis of Viki's strategies for labor extraction and community development. Understanding how Viki courts and extracts labor will be important as global media distribution becomes increasingly commercialized and conglomerated and other corporate actors seek to incorporate fan laborers into their intermediation and distribution processes.

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Biography

Taylore Nicole Woodhouse was born in Galveston in 1995 and spent much of her childhood in Kentucky but has called Texas home for the past 11 years. While at UT, she majored in Plan II and Asian Cultures and Languages with a focus on Korean. She was also a Jefferson Scholar and devoted much time to studying classical moral and political philosophy. In her last two years on campus, Taylore served as a Peer Coordinator for the Peer-Led Undergraduate Studying Program, through which she has conducted tutoring sessions for mathematics and physics and trained new student leaders. After graduating as a Dean's Distinguished Scholar in 2018, she plans to begin graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Media and Cultural Studies on the Advanced Opportunity Fellowship.