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Abstract

Online fan subtitling (hereafter fansub) groups are a recent phenomenon that have quickly gained global popularity. They are groups of volunteers who produce and distribute subtitles of English televisions shows and films for free. However, to date not much academic attention has been paid to this phenomenon in a critical capacity, with the exception of anime fansubbing. This study closely examines one fansub group in China using a single-case design case study. The methods of data collection include: in-depth interviews with the translators; participant observation as a subtitle translator; and textual/discourse analysis of the subtitles. This study will use the British Cultural Study as its primary theoretical lens to explore the various ways in which the fansub group acts as resistance to the dominant discourse. By taking this approach, this paper hopes to expand the field of critical cultural studies by looking at the roles of the producers in mediating discourse, as well as fandom studies, by presenting a case of global fandom online.

The Art of Subtitling: A case study of a Chinese online fansub group

by

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Finally, I would like to thank my parents and dedicate this thesis to my mother, because without their support and her care during my illness, it would not be possible for me to complete this project.

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Chapter 1: **Introduction**

When I first came to North America in 1998, my English teacher was a 20-inch

television and a secondhand VCR in my living room. One night while channel flipping, I

discovered an international channel that showed Japanese animation with English subtitles at

the bottom of the screen. I was instantly hooked since I had always been a Japanese

animation fan. But I also was faced with a dilemma: I do not speak a word of Japanese, and

my entire English education consisted of three years of English classes in a Chinese

elementary school. Reading these subtitles was one of the ways I practiced English. As an

English learner, I understood the importance of subtitles in foreign TV programs; not only in

terms of understanding the dialogues, but also in the way they add another layer of meaning

to the original program. Sometimes I was frustrated with the inaccurate translations, and

wished that I could correct the mistakes myself. My wish came true when I joined a fansub

group in China.

In the digital age, making subtitles is no longer an expensive and exclusive practice of

the production companies. Regular viewers are able to create subtitles for any foreign

programs they like using readily available resources. This advancement in technology has

enabled amateur fansub groups to become a global phenomenon. This thesis will explore the

process and the products of such viewer-organized fansub groups and their relationship with

the dominant discourses, which are the original programs without subtitles and the officially

approved imports.

The Fansubbing Movement

In the 1970s, Japanese anime (animation) and manga (comic books) began to enter the

North American market as a subculture (Hatcher, 2005; Taneska, 2009). But for a long time, Japanese companies were not interested in making their products available for the global market, and ignored fans' requests to do so (Hatcher, 2006; Leonard, 2005). These fans, most of whom do not speak Japanese, therefore took the responsibility upon themselves to produce subtitles using VHS to circulate amongst each other (Hatcher, 2006; Leonard, 2005, Ito, 2017), and this how the fansub movement first came about. It is important to note that fansubbing grow out of conflicts between fans and the production companies, as well as the necessity to create a subculture because of corporate oppression; thus the fansubbing movement is a resistance movement from its conception.

Hatcher (2006) notes that fansubbing became much more popular after the spread of the internet, as digital videos and file sharing networks enabled these materials to circulate more freely and with very little cost, and it has also changed the way fansubbers organize and distribute their work (Hatcher, 2006; Cintaz & Sanchez, 2006; Rush, 2009; Ito, 2017). The situation is similar to other parts of the world, especially in China, where most foreign films and television series are introduced into the country by fansub groups. Rong (2015) has shown that technological advancements offer Chinese fansub groups much more ease to operate outside of the market. However, in the case of China, the fansubbing process is much more of a negotiation with various institutional powers including the state and the corporations rather than resistance. This thesis will examine the constant negotiations that take place within the life of a Chinese fansub group.

Anime fans and traditional television fans are differ in terms of their social identities.

According to Gunden (2003), anime fans embraces their outsider status, they use the word

otaku (geeks), which is a negatively connoted word in Japanese, to describe their culture.

Conversely, traditional television fans usually do not like to consider themselves to be

marginal. As Jenkins' seminal work on fandom (1992) argues, fans do "have a life" outside of

their fan activities and many of them do not appreciate the cultural stereotype of fans as geeks.

Therefore it is worthwhile to study this global fansubbing movement as a somewhat different

phenomenon from anime fansubbing, but keeping in mind that the nature of fansubbing is

always outside of the official discourse.

While there are a number of studies that focuses on fansub groups, most of them

examined fansubbing culture from an outsider's perspective through interviews (Rong, 2015).

This thesis will attempt to fill this gap in academic research and examine the fansubbing

movement from an insider's perspective. In order to achieve this goal, I chose one Chinese

fansub group as my primary subject of study. Using the lens of British Cultural Studies, this

thesis aims to understand the ways in which fansub groups act as the mediators and creators

of meanings. In this project, a fansub group will be defined as a group that produces and

distributes subtitles of western TV shows and films for free. Their practices include (but are

not limited to): translating, editing, encoding videos, and distribution.

As mentioned previously, fansub groups are often seen a resistance to the dominant

controllers of content. However, the actual ways in which fansub groups can act as a resistant

force are still unclear; therefore, the following research questions will guide data collection

and analysis:

RQ1: How do the practices of a fansub group as media producer differ from the traditional media producers?

RQ1a: How does fandom become an instrument of empowerment in a fansub group?

RQ1b: How do the rituals and dynamic of a fansub group resist the dominant ideology?

RQ2: How do the subtitles produced by a fansub group act as a mediator to the dominant discourse?

Fansubbing in China

Like Japanese anime fansubs, China's fansub groups also grew out of the lack of officially sanctioned materials and the need to fulfill audience demand. Globalization brought foreign entertainment into China, but government regulations keep most of them out (Berry, 2003; Winfield & Peng. 2005, Zhang & Mao, 2013), and this imbalance of supply and demand contributed to the rampant video-piracy market in China (Wang, 2003). The rapid development of the internet soon replaced the need for commercial piracy, and this is when fansubbing in China came into being.

According to an article written by one of China's fansub groups (YYeTs, retrieved June 10, 2010), the fansubbing movement in China also started with animation and slowly expanded into Western TV shows such as *Friends.* But it was not until 2005, with the premier of the American television drama *Prison Break*, that fansub groups became wildly popular in China. According to the article, at least ten million viewers in China watched the first season of *Prison Break* via fansub groups after its initial release. Popular press also began to notice fansub groups at this time. In 2006, *The New York Times* published a piece about China's

fansub groups (French, 2006), and Chinese mainstream media (Chen & Liu, 2006; Wang & Zhang, 2007) soon followed up and published two more pieces.

However, all the media attention did not give the fansub groups complete legitimacy. In December, 2009, there was a major crackdown on online video sharing in China (*People's Daily*, 2009), and this indirectly damaged the fansub groups' distribution channels (Teng, 2009). Since then, various fansub groups have undergone multiple crackdowns (Hu, 2017), and yet currently, there are still numerous groups operating in China today; some scholars have listed 75 active groups (Davis & Yeh, 2017). My own knowledge suggests that this number may be even bigger. This shows that while fansub groups do operate in a contentious area of legality, they have found a way to navigate through the tough world of Chinese cyberspace, and this study wishes to explore some of the ways in which a fansub group survives over time.

After a few more years of development and restructuring and as online streaming becomes more popular in China, the number of fansub groups is also growing at a very rapid pace. However, fansub groups that have existed for over ten years are still quite rare. The most famous fansub groups in the realm of U.S. TV series include: YDY, Fr, Ragbear, and YYeTs (Yuan, 2011). Previous studies on Chinese fansub groups of U.S. TV series almost exclusively focused on YYeTs (e.g.: Hu, 2014; Wang, 2017; Wang & Zhang, 2017), due to its large size and popularity; however, as this study will show, the method of operation for YYeTs may not be similar to other fansub groups, and this study will provide an alternative to the type of fansub operation that is most commonly discussed in the literature today.

A major difference between fansub groups of Japanese animation and Chinese fansub groups is that Chinese fansub groups are not necessarily or entirely a fan movement (Zhang & Mao, 2013). English education in China may also be a factor in motivating a translator to join the group. It is estimated that there were 100 million English learners in China even before its entry into the WTO (Zhang, 2003). Therefore, English learning may be a very important driving force behind audience demand for subtitled western programs, as well as translator's motivation (Liu & de Seta, 2015). However, as I will show in this thesis, fandom is one of the largest motivators and characteristics of fansub groups, although it may not be a requirement.

Why should we care?

While the fansub group in China has become a popular topic of study in recent years, the current study differs from previous studies in that a) it offers an insider's perspective of about the dynamics of a fansub group, and b) it focuses on a fansub group that has not been studied by other scholars. The fact that we can use this study to contrast with previous studies shows the variability within the fansub culture, and the need for a closer look.

The next chapter will be a review of literature that outlines the primary theoretical and conceptual frameworks for this study: British Cultural Studies, fandom, and translation studies. The method of analysis in Chapter 3 will be largely guided by the theories discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter will introduce some of the important conceptual and theoretical background for this study. The primary theoretical framework employed in this study will be the theories of British Cultural Studies, particularly those of Stuart Hall and John Fiske, which are also heavily influenced by previous scholarship in Marxism and scholars such as Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci. The first section will briefly introduce their main theories and how they relate to the current study. The two sections that follow will be on fandom literature and translation studies. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, both fandom and translation theories are closely related to the ideas of British Cultural Studies and are instrumental in understanding the fansub groups an alternative to the dominant ideology.

British Cultural Studies

To understand what the British Cultural Study does, we must first understand its influences and origins. British Cultural Studies is a contemporary school of criticism that is heavily influenced by Marxist philosophers such as Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci (Fiske, 1992).

Gramsci's great contribution to the field of critical cultural studies has been the idea of hegemony, or the ways in which the dominant group exerts control over the subordinate group. In his *Prison Notebook*, Gramsci (2006) wrote that: "Hegemony and dictatorship are indistinguishable" (10). In his view, the only difference between hegemony and political/military control is the degree of consent. Hegemony is an invisible system of control that aims to maintain the existing status quo. It exerts control through ideology, by making

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sure the oppressed groups remain subordinate and do not attempt to change or improve their

social position.

Following Gramsci's ideas, Althusser (1971) believes that ideology manifests itself in a

system of apparatus that maintains and sustains the dominant ideology, and this system is

what he calls "ideological state apparatus" (ISA). Individuals are *interpellated* into this

ideological system as a subject, which is a socially constructed concept. By acting in

accordance to social norms, e.g. returning someone's greeting on the street, an individual

automatically becomes a subject, and situates him/herself within a network of social relations.

Because these mundane practices of socially acceptable behaviors are so deeply ingrained

into everyday life, individuals are never aware of their status as an ideological subject.

British cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and John Fiske are deeply influenced by the

writings of Gramsci and Althusser, but they focus on the individual's relationship with

cultures produced by the dominant group. British Cultural Studies takes an optimistic view of

ideology, with some scholars maintaining that individuals are not helpless puppets that

succumb to the dominant ideology without any choice as hinted by Althusser's theory of ISA.

Instead, they believe that individuals do have the power to struggle against the dominant class,

and their site of struggle is culture (Fiske, 1992).

Stuart Hall and the theory of preferred reading

One of the most influential essays in British Cultural Studies is Stuart Hall's

"Encoding/Decoding" (2001). In this essay, Hall uses theories of semiotic and structuralism

to develop his own theory of "preferred reading." He suggests that production of a television

discourse and the reception of that same discourse by the audiences do not produce identical

messages. Of course, both production (encoding) and reception (decoding) are human

behaviors and therefore subjective; thus, what is meaningful to one person may not have the

same meaning for another person. In terms of translating a TV show, this process is implied

in the act. Because the source is in a different language, and the translator needs to first

understand the meaning in the original language (decode) and then transfer that meaning into

another language (encode), this is a reverse process of the original production, but it is still a

process that contains both encoding and decoding.

Hall (2001) goes on to describe the various levels of signs within a television discourse,

and because this discourse is a mixture of audio/visual/iconic codes, the meanings of a

television discourse and the ways one can decode these meanings becomes even more varied.

Because these codes are culturally produced, the ways to decode these meaning are also

dependent on the receiver's social and cultural background. Thus Hall (2001) proposed three

types of reading strategies or positions an individual could take vis-à-vis a given television

discourse, and they are: dominant, oppositional, and negotiated.

The dominant, or the preferred reading is the position that is completely in line with the

original intentions of the producers/dominant group, the audiences that employ the dominant

reading read a discourse in a way that is intended by its original conceivers. The oppositional

reading is when a viewer decodes the message in a fashion completely contrary to the

dominant position. The negotiated reading is situated between the dominant and the

oppositional, and the viewers in this position recognize the dominant messages and place

themselves within this system for the most part. But because of individual differences, they

can see the difference between their own situation and what is on television, thus they

partially problematize the dominant position as the natural position.

When this theory is applied to an international context, especially to a culture as distinct

from the West as China, most viewers will automatically position themselves away from the

dominant text because they are watching a discourse in a different language. As Hall (2001)

argues, television discourses are always mediated by and through language; thus, when a

language is different, the discourse inevitably needs to be understood differently. However,

Hall's theory is largely focusing on the receivers of the message and not on the producers, so

the current study will apply this theory of audience onto the producers of subtitles in hopes of

adding more nuances to this important theory.

Popular Culture as battleground

In addition to the theorization of reading positions, Hall also wrote about popular culture.

In his essay "Notes on deconstructing 'the popular'", he envisioned popular culture as a

battleground for struggles between different classes, or what he calls "the popular class vs.

the power bloc" (Hall, 2016, p. 238).

Similar to Hall, De Certeau (1984) used the metaphor of warfare and the idea of a small

military unit fighting an impossible war against a powerful army. The weak never use

physical force against the strong; instead, they use strategy and tactics, which he calls "the art

of the weak" (37). In other words, the weak or the subordinate group can never fully control

what or how goods and commodities are produced and distributed in a society. Rather, these

groups occupy a fluid position within the dominant discourse and uses small acts of resistance to build up momentum, and establish their existence as the opposing force.

John Fiske (1991) adds to De Certeau's point by noting that the powerful often try to contain resistance by attempting to normalize the repressed group(s) within the dominant discourse. He argues that the essence of popular culture is to make do with what is available to the consumers, and the only thing available to most people without their own means of production is a commodity. Fiske calls this process of making do with what we have "excorporation" (p.15). As Fiske points out, these attempts by the powerful fail because the producers do not recognize that the creativity behind these small resistant acts are stemming from social differences, and are not simply a matter of style, thus marking the users of the commodities and the actual creators fundamentally different. He uses the example of torn jeans as a way in which a subculture reworks a popular commodity into something that expresses their individual identity and to assert their ownership over this piece of commodity.

De Certeau and Fiske's ideas are also closely related to the practices of the fansub groups. As mentioned in the previous chapter, fansub groups are formed as a resistance to the dominant groups (television producers and the government) who refuse to meet their needs and demands. Thus the subtitles are a way to make do with what they have, which are the raw videos in a foreign language. The fansub groups are fighting a guerrilla war, not only against the original producers of the TV shows, but also against the government that restricts their access to these entertainment products. The popularity of these groups shows that they are slowly gaining more ground in this cultural warfare.

Obviously, fans align themselves closely with the discourse of popular culture, but it does not mean that fans simply accept what they have and are content with them. Thus British Cultural Studies act as a very important theoretical framework for fandom studies as well. The next section will introduce some of the more prevalent fan studies traditions.

Fandom

According to *Oxford English Dictionary* (2009), the word "fan" is derived from "fanatic," which has a negative connotation of being excessively enthusiastic in some events or activity. As Jenkins (1992) argued, traditional stereotypes of fans are often in accordance with this definition and if often what is described in William Shatner's "Get a life" sketch on *Saturday Night Live*, which is that fans are geeks who have no life outside of their obsession, and cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy. Works by scholar such as Jenkins (1992) and Fiske (1989, 1991) has changed this conception quite effectively when they argue that fans are a creative community that acts outside of mainstream media and are empowered through their creative endeavors.

The studies of fans and fandom have undergone quite a bit of development since Fiske and Jenkins' writings, and so far, there have been three distinct waves of fan studies that examine fandom from different perspectives (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2017). The first wave of fan studies can be exemplified by ethnographic works that focus on fan community activities and practices, and the goal is to legitimize fandom studies within academia, the primary example being Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* (1992). The second wave of fandom is influenced heavily by Pierre Bourdieu's work on social and cultural capitals, and focuses

on the hierarchies *within* fandom, for example, Jonathan Gray's work on the anti-fan and the non-fan (2003). Finally, the third wave of fandom moves away from studying fandom as a whole, but rather focuses on the individual's practices and identities, and sees fandom as a reflection of modern life, including Gray et al.'s (2017) book anthology. But these three waves need not be completely separate from one another, and this study aims to combine aspects of all three waves, and provide a more holistic view of a single fandom.

While the most influential first-wave studies were all conducted in the past century, it does not mean that this tradition is outdated. As Francesca Coppa (2014) argues, technological advances make fan activities increasingly convenient; the industry is also becoming aware of the value of fan participation. Therefore, the ethnographic studies of fan communities may carry even more weight, as they may provide a bridge for connecting the industry and fan communities. For example, Andrejevic (2008) focused on the website *Television without Pity*, and found that the website's interactivity is used by the television industry as form of free labor that allows them to garner fan responses and to keep audiences engaged with their series. This technique is even more prevalent today; for example, the official discussion show for AMC's *The Walking Dead* called *The Talking Dead* (Pasztor & Korn, 2015).

Therefore, while Jenkins' classic work on fandom (1992) may seem outdated, as he was writing in an era before the internet, his conclusion about fan communities is still applicable to the fansubbing community today. I will briefly outline these conclusions as they relate to fansub groups: a) fandom involves a particular mode of reception wherein fans maintain a

very intimate but critical distance; b) fans employ a specific reading strategy that is "playful, speculative, and subjective" (p. 278); c) fandom is a base for consumer activism, as fans are people who complain to the producers about certain plot development in hopes of changing the narrative; d) fandom has a particular mode of cultural production, including various fan artist, fan fictionists, video makers and in the current case, subtitlers, and their aim is to share their work within interest groups without any goals of profit-making; e) fandom operates as a kind of utopian social community, and fans finds fulfillment within this community. For the current study, the above criteria will be used to guide the analysis of the fansub group.

As noted in Chapter 1, fansubbing has always been an underground movement due to the potential legal consequences, and early studies of fansub focused on the tension between fansubbers and copyright holders (e.g.: Hatcher, 2005; Leonard, 2005). But more recently, scholars began paying more attention to the ways in which fansub groups act as cultural conduits in the age of globalization (Lee, 2011, 2012), and more importantly, as a shadow economy with its own internal hierarchy and rules (Hills, 2017; Ito, 2012; Lee, 2014; Schules, 2014). While most of these studies focused on fansubbing groups in Anglophone cultures, the conclusions are still applicable to Chinese fansubs.

Fandom and Fansubbing in China

Compared to fandom in the West, little scholarly attention has been paid China's huge fan base, not to mention the degree to which it is actually a global fandom. Just by looking at fansub groups alone, one can easily see that Chinese fandom goes beyond its local popular culture, or even Western popular culture. There is a stable fan base for Japanese and Korean

TV drama; there are even fansub groups for Thai and Russian dramas. One of the areas of Chinese fandom that has gained some notice is the extremely popular Korean Wave (e.g. Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Shim, 2006; Oh, 2016). Interestingly, many of the studies about Korean Wave in China focus on consumerism and purchasing behaviors (e.g.: Ahn, 2014; Chen, 2016; Shin et. al, 2016). This tendency is not present in studies of fansub groups, due to the community's non-commercialized nature.

Studies of Chinese fandom took off slowly as the internet began to flourish in China. Many studies focused on Chinese fans of popular culture such as celebrities (e.g. Fung, 2009a, 2009b; Wei, 2008; Yang, 2009; Zhao, 2018). Both Wei (2008) and Yang (2009) takes the classical fandom perspective and argues that fans of the popular television show *Super Girls* in China are empowered through their participation in the fan community. And Fung takes a sociological view when examining the effect of fandom on youth materialism (2009a), and how fans of a pop star construct their own social identity through fandom (2009b). Zhao (2018) focused on the female queer fandom of *Super Girls* to show how the ideology of the larger society can influence fan interpretations of homosexuality. As more and more and more studies of Chinese fandom start to focus on queer fandom, scholars have found that homoerotic contents created by female fans are able to generate space of public discussion about various social issues (Yang & Xu, 2016). These studies show that fandom studies is not only a study of subculture, they have the potential to uncover various cultural, sociological, psychological and ideological ramifications about the society in which they exist.

More recently, as fansubbing communities gain more public attention, so do studies of

such communities. For example, Kelly Hu (2009, 2017) who wrote several articles regarding this topic has called fansubbing a "neoliberal work ethic", which combines the efficient logic of capitalistic production and the element of voluntarism and free labor. But Wu (2017) argues that there is more than one models of work within the fansub community: the altruistic and the monetized. Zhang and Mao (2013) shows that fan activities such as translation have the potential of transforming into civic engagement through the translation of online open courses and articles. Tian (2011) believes that fansub groups can help speed up the process of globalization and break down cyber barriers imposed by the government. Wang and Zhang (2017) used gamification theory to examine the ways in which fansubbing can be used to circumvent government domination. Almost all scholars see the fansub movement as somewhat resistant to government hegemony. However, most current studies of fansub groups in China were coming from an outsider perspective, and almost all of the studies had focused on more publicly visible fansub groups such as YYeTs. This thesis will provide a missing perspective into the inner workings of a fansub group that has a very different dynamic and viewpoint from YYeTs.

Translation Studies

The last important area of scholarship this thesis will use as a guide for analysis is translation theories; although this study can only begin to touch upon this massive subject, it is important to introduce some basic principles of translation studies in order to begin analysis of fansub subtitles. There is a famous quotation about translation in *Don Quixote* (Cervantes, trans. 1899) where Don Quixote says to a translator:

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> …yet it seems to me that the translating of one language into another, unless it to be those queens of the languages, Greek and Latin, is like viewing Flemish tapestries on the wrong side, which although the designs are seen, are full of threads that obscure them so that the bloom and smooth of the fabric are absent. (p. 465)

Don Quixote's words are very telling in more ways than one, as they not only demonstrates the difficulties of translating beautifully, but more importantly, show how translation is a process of production that sometimes disrupts and reveals the smoother process of producing the original text. While this quality of translation is praised by some and reviled by others, the current study is concerned with how translation can serve as a breakdown of the dominant ideologies, thus it is more appropriate to take a position for the use of a more rough and abusive translation.

Abusive Translation

The idea of an "abusive" translation is a relatively recent concept within the vast scholarship of translation studies. It started with Jacques Derrida's "Le Retrait de la Métaphore" in which he argues that "all translation must always commit abuse"/ "all translation must always play tricks" (trans. Lewis, 2004). As Lewis explains in his seminal essay that established the concept of "abusive translation," the word "abuse" in French carries the dual meaning of committing a violent act against someone as well as the notion of being deceptive and misleading. Therefore, the term "abusive translation" carries these two meanings simultaneously and is in no way a negative term when used by translation scholars such as Lewis (2004), Nornes (1999) and Venuti (2002).

Lewis (2004) outlines the actual meaning of abusive translation, and explains "the strong, forceful translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the

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polyvalencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own."

(262) What Lewis means is that abusive translation is an experimental form of translation that

seeks to retain the multiple connotative meanings of the source language (SL) or the original

language by manipulating usages in the target language (TL) or the translated language.

However, Lewis (2004) also points out that this experimentation also needs to be based on

the principals of fidelity and intelligibility, so that the original meaning is still intact and the

translation can still be understood by the readers.

Nornes (1999) gives more concrete examples of good abusive translation. In Donald

Richie's translation of Akira Kurosawa's film *Ran* (1985), a samurai film set in ancient Japan.

Richie turned the Japanese phrase meaning literally "I want you to go" into "I would with

you go" (Richie, 1991, 16), but he later regretted his decision and believed it to be

inappropriate. However, Nornes (1999) praised Richie's experimentation and believes that

this type of translation should be endorsed more, because this translation retains the original

flavor of an archaic form of language. Nornes (1999) gives another example of translating

various Japanese slang into irregular English slangs, and replaces some of the curse words in

Japanese with "!@#$%", when such words would normally be automatically taken out during

translation.

Nornes (1999) believed that Richie's subsequent regret to stem from a tradition of what

he calls "corrupt translation," and what he means by "corrupt" is that many subtitle

translations attempt to smooth over the violence in the original text and tame it into

something that is deemed "acceptable" by common standards. Nornes (1999) believe this

practice is ideologically corrupt because it normalizes a foreign product and turns it into something bland and controlled; moreover, the audience will be less aware of the process of translation, and the fact that they are watching a foreign product. Nornes (1999) further argues that violent/abusive translation is ideologically resistant to the dominant ideology, because it does not follow the practices of corrupt translation and thus serves as a critique of such practices.

Venuti (2002) echoes Nornes's argument, and notes that the act of translation is to "reconstitute the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that preexist it in the translating language and culture, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality" (14). However, differences between two cultures will always exist, no matter how the translator tries to smooth over them. Therefore, Venuti argues that rather than making the differences invisible and make the foreign text more localized, the translator should recognize this difference and incorporate them into the translation.

Recalling what Gramsci and Althusser argue about ideology and how it exerts its control through a normalization of social conventions, it is not difficult to see how the traditional practices of corrupt translation works with the dominant ideology and normalizes those foreign discourses that may be out of place in another culture. On the other hand, abusive translation disrupts the ideological normalization and renders the process of translation visible to the audience, making them aware of the process of production and reminding them of the artificiality of these products, and in turn, their own artificial subject position. Abusive translation will serve as a good framework for the analysis of the subtitles, because this thesis

attempts to answer the question of whether or not the fansub groups really critique the dominant ideology through their practices, and their subtitles are the most important factor in determining this answer.

Audiovisual translation

In the age of the mass media, audiovisual translation is an increasingly important subject of both research and practice. Audiovisual translation generally has two broad categories: one is dubbing, and the other is subtitling (Chiaro, 2009). The main difference between traditional translation of books and audiovisual translation is in the way audiences perceive the translated message. In books or similar media, readers are able to read the translations according to their own speed, and even go back to reread the text if necessary or desired. In audiovisual translation, the synchronicity between the visuals and the translation is crucial; the audience must process the translated messages at the same time as the visuals on screen (Chiaro, 2009). This feature is even more important in subtitling than in dubbing, and this thesis will focus exclusively on subtitling.

Whereas professional translators have learned the rules and proper formats for subtitling, amateur subtitlers such as those in online fansub groups are not familiar with them and therefore do not necessarily conform to them. Bogucki (2009) is one of the only scholars who has studied online amateur subtitles in the field of translation. However, since Bogucki is a translation scholar, he is biased towards professional translations and concludes that amateur subtitling is largely inaccurate due to their lack of resources (e.g., a complete script of the program in the source language), and thus their quality is low. As far as I know, the fansub

groups now work with complete subtitles in English during translation, and thus the conclusion of this study will be different from Bogucki's.

There are also several studies that focus on the style of fansub translations in China. Cai (2015) studied the humor used by fansub groups and found that while fansubbers perform many of the same tasks as traditional translators, they enjoy much more freedom than traditional translators when it comes to translation, so much so that it can even be considered a type of recreation. Zhang (2013) also focused on the more humorous commentaries made by fansubbers called *tu cao* and found that fansub practices had even influenced the attitude of professional translators. But *tu cao* can also be controversial among viewers who may find such practice disrespecting of serious subjects. Similarly, Wang (2014) has shown that while audiences of fansub groups enjoy the benefit of cultural exchange language learning, they may also be misled by some imprecise translations. However, all these studies mainly focus on the idiosyncratic aspects of fansubbing, and this study aims to provide a more holistic view of all fansub groups' work.

This chapter has outlined some of the theoretical lenses that this paper will use for analysis, and they are mainly based on a critical approach towards culture. In the next chapter, I will outline the method of data collection and analysis in more detail.

Chapter 3: Method

This paper aims to explore the inner process of a single fansub group, Ragbear, and the types of practices that make the fansub group a form of resistance to the dominant ideology. This paper will use a single-case design case study as its method of investigation, and use the theories of British Cultural Study outlined in the previous chapter as its primary theoretical lens for analysis.

Case Study

I choose a single fansub group, Ragbear, as the subject of study. There are several reasons for choosing Ragbear instead of a larger fansub group. First of all, because it is a relatively new group, it synthesizes practices from all the older groups, and thus it serves as a good archetype for formulating a generalizable routine. Secondly, Ragbear is the least commercialized group out of all Chinese fansub groups. There is no advertising on its website and it is entirely supported by the site administrators, therefore it is a good case of non-commercialized movement given the current theoretical focus. Lastly, it is a matter of convenience and access: because fansub groups are usually quite secretive, it is difficult to obtain insider access to the groups, and has been the most welcoming group out of all four groups since I began the pilot study in March, 2010. I joined Ragbear as a translator in March of 2010, so it was the obvious choice when I decided to carry out this project. I will examine different aspects of the group, including: the translators, the group dynamics, the subtitles and the groups' website.

There are also few reasons why case study is the best approach for my purpose.

According to Yin (2009), case study is best suited to studying a contemporary real-life social phenomenon in depth, especially when the events cannot be controlled by the researcher. A case study is a holistic approach that examines a single (or very few) case(s) in order to gain insight into a larger phenomenon or a larger case (Gerring, 2007). A case can be an individual, a group, an event, or a process (Gerring, 2007; Schwandt, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin. 2009). In this study, a case is defined as a fansub group, which includes the work process of this group. The fansub group is a contemporary phenomenon that the researcher cannot control in a lab, thus case study is suitable in this situation.

Yin (2009) proposes that case study is more appropriate for answering research questions asking "how" or "why" something is the way it is, because these questions aim to explain underlying processes and are not simply descriptive. Given the current critical focus of this paper and the various aspects of the fansub group that related to this topic, a case study is the best method to use for this study.

Case studies usually cannot generalize to the larger population, because the subject of the study is only one or very few cases (Yin, 2009; Gerring, 2007), and this is usually the biggest threat to the study's external validity, especially as a single-case design. Yin (2009) suggests five rationales for doing a single-case design: a test of existing theory; a unique circumstance; a typical case; a revelatory case; or a longitudinal study. This study aims to present a unique case of alternative audience practice, in hopes of shedding light on this phenomenon in a way that has not been studied before, and also expanding on current theories of cultural studies. It fits three out of the five rationales proposed by Yin (2009). Furthermore, because this study

plans to explore various aspects of the fansub group, some of which are human subjects and interactions while others are texts and artifacts, it is not possible to utilize a single research design or data collection method to cover all these areas. The logic of this design calls for a case study that encompasses multiple sources of evidence and data-collection methods (Yin, 2009).

Since this is a single-case design, all the sampling will be purposive: only the data related to the group Ragbear will be collected. The data collection methods employed by this study include: in-depth interviews with the group's translators; participant observation data as a translator in the group; and a selection of subtitles produced by the group. Only a case study will allow for such a design that also enables the research to cover a broader range of issues relating to the fansub group.

In-depth interviews

As a part of the pilot study, in-depth interviews were conducted with translators who work for a fansub group in China. All the data collection is completed for this part of the case. Initial recruitment was through public website postings on the fansub group's forums after I gained the approval of the site administrators. Although the recruitment messages were public, the translators were able to contact me through the forum's private messaging system. After initial recruitment, I received five volunteer participants from two groups. After one month, I join the fansub group as a participant observer, and I was able to find two more participants after I joined the group. All but one participant were from the Ragbear, which is the current subject of study; therefore, data from that participant will be excluded from the analysis.

In-depth interviews were conducted to determine the motivation and the routine practices of a volunteer subtitle translator, and it is the more appropriate method given my previous interest in the individual's perceptions and motivations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). The interviewees signed a consent form, and their information was kept confidential during data reporting. The interviews were conducted via the online chatting software QQ, which all the participants use on a regular basis, and they were strictly text-based interviews conducted in Chinese; I also took detailed field notes during the interviews. After the interview, I used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo for line-by-line coding of the Chinese transcript. This study has received IRB approval, and the results from it will be used in this thesis.

Participant observation

During the pilot study, several participants said that it would be best to join the group to get a hands-on experience. Therefore, I signed up to join Ragbear in late March of 2010, and I have been an active member of the group ever since. As my analysis in the following chapter will show, the group has different routines and rituals before and after a person joins. These routines are what prompted me be start observing the group in the first place. I started taking field notes about the group's interactions in their online chat room soon after I joined. I gained approval for collecting and analyzing the data from the administrator in late May. The observation is an ongoing process that continued through March of 2011, which makes the observation period exactly one year. Data collection is automatic when I turn on the software QQ, because it keeps a record of very conversation that happens in the group chat room. I also be too extensive field notes about these interactions, and I often participated in the

group's interactions as well.

After the approval of the group administrators, a group email was sent to inform the group members of my observation and their rights to privacy and confidentiality. After two weeks, a total of twenty-three consents were received from various members of the group. Although it is a small number of people compared to the overall number of translators in the group, these twenty-three people are the most active participants in the group, thus will not pose any problem for analysis.

The strength of using participant observation is that I can gain firsthand; insider access into the fansub group's working process (Schwandt, 2007). As I learned from my own experience, subtitle translators enjoy an exclusive status within the community of television fans, and they also have a number of routine and processes that outsiders are not privy to. Jorgensen (1989) identified four types of situations that are especially appropriate for participant observation: it is a little known phenomenon; there is a difference in perception between insiders and outsiders; a private phenomenon that outsiders cannot access, or an activity hidden from the general public such as illegal activity. The current study of fansub groups neatly fits the first three criteria. Of note, even though the group chat room is text based and there is a permanent transcript available for analysis, it is still real-time human interaction and the notes were taken at the time of the interactions, because I was also an active participant for many these conversations, thus it should still be considered participant observation and not purely textual analysis.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is another way of studying how people or cultures make sense of the world (McKee, 2003). Human interactions are largely based on language; the world we know is mediated by the language we use (Fairclough, 2003). Contemporary textual analysis is often takes a post-structuralist view of the world, which means that there is no single fixed reality (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005), and this view is the fundamental difference between content analysis, which assumes a scientific knowledge as reliable, and textual analysis, which takes on a critical and subject view towards a text.

Fairclough (2003) uses the term "text" in a very broad sense, which includes written documents, human speech, television images and sounds, as well as web pages. He uses "discourse" in place of text to describe a specific kind of text that is closely connected with social interaction. John Fiske (1996) notes that discourse analysis is more concerned with *how* things are communicated rather than *what* is communicated, and discourse analysis needs to take the broader social and cultural context into account. Given the current research focus on critical analysis, I would use discourse analysis as the primary method of analysis, and the primary texts that I will be analyzing are the subtitles produced by the group.

Subtitles

The most important artifacts produced by a fansub group are the subtitles. The subtitles provide much more information than just how the translators work, including how they (the translators) understand and reinterpret a foreign culture and assert their own agency. Not only do the subtitles show how the translators make sense of the foreign discourse, they are also an important mediator for the millions of audience members when they try to make sense of the

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television discourse through these subtitles. If one can understand how these subtitles are constructed as a discourse and how they are different from dominant reading of the same discourse, one can start to understand how a fansub group can provide alternatives to the dominant discourse. Therefore, the subtitles are the most crucial component for the current analysis.

Yet, due to the large number of subtitles produced by a fansub group in any given period, only a small sample of the subtitle can be included in the analysis. Initial criteria will be based on genre, because different genres may have different styles of translation; therefore, it is important to cover the most popular genres. I will include one comedy and one historical drama for analysis, because they demonstrate a relatively large discrepancy between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). I will also include reality shows because no script is available, so they are predominantly translated by ear, and the accuracy and style of these subtitles are often different from those of a dramatic series. Lastly, I will choose three dramatic series including crime, teen drama, and medical series for a good balance of genres. I will choose two of the most downloaded episodes from each program, and this will provide the basis for the textual analysis portion of this study.

However, as Hall (2001) discussed in his essay, television discourse is not only about language, the same can be said for subtitle translations, in order to analyze the subtitles, I will first go to the original source and watch the episode once without the subtitles, and then I will compare the differences between the subtitles and the original dialogue to get a fuller understanding of how the translations mediate the original text and not only in terms of

language but also any effect it may have in the visual and audio signs.

Role of the Researcher

Because this study is of a longitudinal design that spans over a number of months, my role shifted with the research process. When I conduct the first three interviews, I was an outsider and an audience of subtitled show. I joined another fansub group for a very short period, but I did not do much work to get a real sense of how the group works. I learned about the translation process through the interviews, but they have not prepared me for the types of experiences that I had after I joined the group. My growth from a newbie to an amateur translator to being a part of the community taught me much more than translation. I made friends in the group and became a true insider. I found myself paying close attention to the subtitle translations and begin to watch subtitled shows much more critically than before. But this process did not happen overnight, and this growth process is why I decided to continue working on this project even after I completed the pilot study. It is a unique opportunity to document the effects of being in a fansub group can have on one's perception and identity.

Of course, as someone who grew up in North America, my perception of the group is also somewhat different from the average Chinese viewer. I do not rely on subtitles to understand the programs; however, I do enjoy watching subtitled programs for their alternative meanings. Moreover, my language skill in both Chinese and English enables me to carry on this project and the understand subtitles and the observation transcripts with relative ease.

Chapter 4: Fansub group as producers

This chapter will be organized through locating various relationships in the fansub group, in order to understand its culture. First, we will start by examining the basic structure of the group, and the relationships that stems from the clear division of labor. Second, the decision making process in a fansubbing group not only reflects the fansub groups' relationship with its audience, but also with the fansubbers' personal lives and the larger fansubbing community. Third, the relationship between fansub groups and the government paints a complicated picture of the current trends in China's fansub culture. Finally, the prevailing trends in fan culture may prove to be another powerful relationship that influences the styles of fansubbing at any given moment.

A loose hierarchy

While fansubbing is categorized as a fan-organized interest group, its more disciplined than many fan organizations where individual members produce their own work and share them with other fans. Fansub groups work in small teams to produce a large number of subtitles each week, thus fansub productions are more systematic in terms of work scheduling and a careful division of labor than other types fan productions. Because of this division of labor, those who "control the means of production" in a fansub group necessarily become the people who hold the most power. By understanding the organizational structure of the fansub group, we can begin to understand the most basic form of power that dictates the day-to-day operations of a fansub group.

Overview of the structure

In order to understand the community of the fansub group as a whole, we must first understand its organizational structure. Most of the findings in this section are based on observational work, but it was partially informed by interviews conducted during the preliminary phase of the study.

There are six basic tasks in a fansub group that are essential for the smooth operation of the production. Some of the tasks can be carried out by the same person while other tasks are usually handled by multiple members. These tasks are:

- *Sourcing*: downloading the raw video sources and English subtitles of TV programs or films from foreign FTP or torrent sites and then upload it to a Chinese platform to distribute to the translators, editors, and time coders to ensure accuracy in translation and subtitle time codes.

- *Translation*: translating English subtitles into Chinese. A typical hour-long television series with about 800 lines of dialogue will usually be distributed to three people to be translated simultaneously in roughly three hours.

- *Time coding*: to ensure the subtitles are in sync with what the characters are saying on screen. The English subtitles are usually closed captions recorded directly from TV, and have commercial breaks in between, which the raw video sources do not have. There are lines that are out of sync, which need to be corrected by time coders. In rare occasions where there is no subtitle and the translator needs to translate by ear, the time coders need to add time codes to each dialogue using subtitle making software such as ansub or popsub.

- *Editing*: after the subtitles are all translated and the time codes are adjusted, the subtitles will be sent to a single editor to ensure coherence in style and to correct any mistakes or resolve any difficulties the translators may encounter during translation. They will combine the separate parts into a single file using specialized software. Usually, editors are higher-level translators.

- *Encoding*: combining subtitles with raw videos into one file and adding group logo and copyright warnings within the videos, the videos are usually in .mp4 format for the general audience to download. This has several purposes, which will be discussed later.

- *Distribution*: after the videos are encoded, they need to be distributed through several platforms for all audiences to see. They include: torrent, emule or other p2p software, and online cloud storage sites. The subtitles are also published as a separate file on a specialized Chinese subtitle distribution website for those audiences that want subtitles with a higher-quality video file.
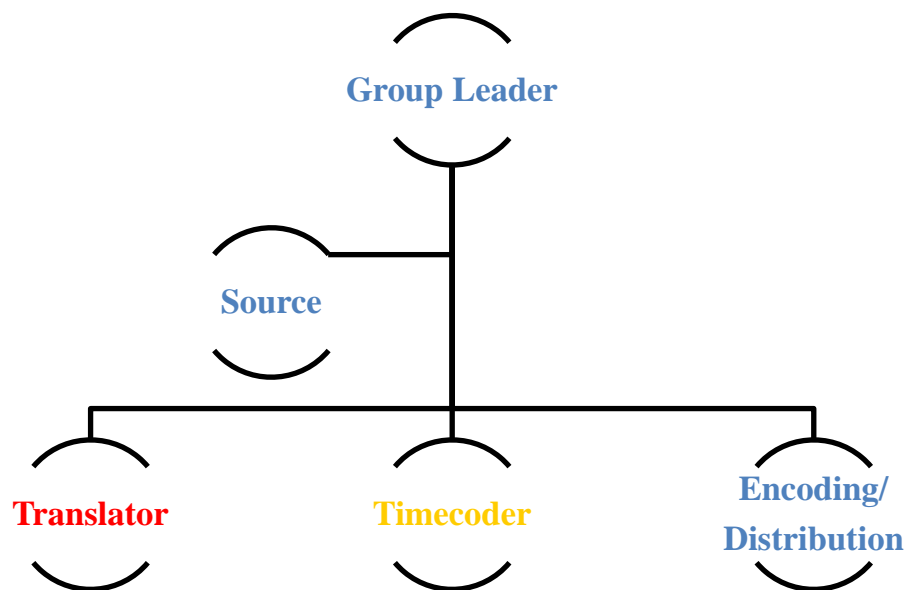

Figure 1: Division of labor, the same color represents the same person doing the task.

This division of labor is similar to what Hatcher (2005) and Cintas & Sanzhez (2006) found in their studies of western anime fansub groups, which suggests that this fansub group operational model is universal, and since China is a relative latecomer in the fansubbing community, they probably borrowed the model from the West.

Within the fansubbing community, the translators' job is probably the most straightforward. They will receive a message from an editor (group leader) on the day or the day before a certain show airs, to ask them if they have time to translate its dialogue. The translators can choose to accept or decline the job depending on their schedule and whether or not they like the show. They will then wait for the raw videos and the subtitles to arrive. The videos will usually arrive a few hours before the subtitles, so the translators can watch them first to familiarize themselves with the materials. After the subtitles arrive, the translators are given anywhere from a few hours to a few days (depending on the show) to finish translating and send the subtitles back to the editors for further processing. The translation process will be discussed in details in the section on translation.

Time coding is another crucial task in a fansub group, and the second largest category of labor. Time coding is a highly valued position in the fansubbing community because when subtitles are out of sync, it breaks the flow of the dialogue and influences the audiences' understanding of the show. Time coder not only needs to make sure the subtitles are in sync with the audio-visual cues, moreover, they need to adjust the time codes to ensure each subtitle stays on screen long enough for the audience to understand its meaning. This is especially the case for a fast-talking comedy show such as *The Big Bang Theory*, or a medical

show like *Gray's Anatomy*, which involves many complex medical terminologies. Their work is extremely time-consuming and requires a lot of patience, and unlike the translators, their works are rarely recognized but are just as crucial to the fansub process. One time coder once complained online that they are "like the janitors who always work behind the scenes to keep the bathroom clean, but [our] work is never acknowledged unless something is dirty."

While the translators and time coders are the two main labor forces within a fansub group, the most important position of the group is definitely the editors. The translators often refer to the editors as "group leaders" because they have several responsibilities above and beyond editing translations. In a relatively small group such as Ragbear (with around 150 translators), many of the above tasks are carried out by a single editor. The editors are not only in charge of editing subtitles, but also downloading raw video sources, finding available translators for a particular show, distributing subtitles to the translators and ensuring that they complete on time (especially for the 0-day works, which means there is 0 day between a show's airing and the publishing of translated subtitles), encoding, and usually a part of the final distribution. Because these tasks can be completed by one person during different time periods, it is possible for a single editor to be in charge of all these tasks to ensure efficiency and avoid miscommunication. Therefore, the editors are usually core members of a fansub group who devote much more time to the group than regular translators.

As mentioned earlier, encoding and distribution are the final steps to a complete subtitle, and also the more illegitimate parts of a fansub group's work. There are several reason for encoding a video and to insert internal subtitles and brands of a group: a) to establish a

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reputation among the audiences; b) to ensure no one can download a subtitle file (which is editable) and claim it as their own (to avoid plagiarism); and c) to add a disclaimer about copyright in hopes of avoiding potential legal ramifications.

The division of labor that exists in the fansubbing community clearly places a heavy burden on the editors/group leaders to be in charge of almost every aspect of the production process, from initial assignment of tasks to final distribution. At first glance, they are the only group of people with control over the means of production within the fansub group, and it is true that many newbie translators need to plead with group leaders to assign them work. However, the power of the group leader is not always something to be desired, because they often sacrifice their personal lives in order to produce a subtitle on time. One of the hardest-working group leaders I spoke to told me that he once edited subtitles for 12 hours, and produced four sets of subtitles within that time. He unabashedly says, "If anyone wants this job, they can take it, but can they handle it? That's the real problem. Buddha says, 'if I didn't go to hell, who would?' So someone has to do the work." Thus it is clear that the hierarchical structure within fansub group mainly comes from the amount of work and responsibility one is willing to take on voluntarily, and not from the control over means of production.

As this section has shown, while there is a hierarchy within the fansub group, it grows out of necessity for structure, not out of the need to control. Wang and Zhang (2017) call this a "generative hierarchy" because this hierarchy helps newer members assimilate into the group faster, and aids communication within the group. This type of hierarchy is not entirely

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sustainable, as translators become valuable resources.

A diffusion of power

So far, we have established that the most basic form of power within the fansub group is the group leader's power over the rest of the members. This power is mostly a result of the uneven distribution of labor and responsibility. Tian (2011) calls this meritocracy based hierarchy, but my observation shows that this hierarchy is not always very clear-cut. The group leaders' power is easily dismantled by other forces both within and outside the group. This is not to say that group leaders do not have any real powers; however, their power does not dictate the decision-making process of the fansub group. Besides the group leaders, experienced translators also have a great deal of power within a fansub group. Outside of the group, audience demand is a powerful force for any fansub group. Moreover, the brand image of each individual fansub group can also influence the decisions that group leaders make.

Factors influencing decisions

In many senses, fansubbing community operates just like any conventional market that bases its production of the supply and demand model. However, the difference between fansubbing and a conventional production business is the non-commercial nature of fansubbing, which means audience demand is not necessarily the biggest factor that dictates the production plans of a fansub group. Often, the choices are actually driven by the interests of those who produce subtitles; namely, the group leaders.

Though it seems quite undemocratic for a very small number of people to dictate what audience can watch from a certain fansub group, it is simply because group leader has access

to almost single every aspect of subtitle production, especially manpower and distribution channels. TV series subtitle production is labor intensive, and over the course of a season, there will inevitably be personnel changes, schedule conflicts, and other sudden situations that need coordination with group members. Therefore if a group leader is not willing to commit to producing a show, individual translators cannot sustain stable production by themselves, especial over a prolonged period.

Since the group leaders also work voluntarily in this interest driven environment, their interest becomes a major factor in determining which shows a fansub group can and will produce. However, keep in mind that there are multiple group leaders in any given fansub group, and they have diverse interests, so popular shows will eventually be picked up by one group leader or another.

Another factor that drives subtitle-making choices for a group leader is the interests of individual members. Just like TV producers pitching ideas to networks, individual translators can also pitch a show to group leaders, but it is a very informal process. For example, the series *Justified* was pitched to a group leader specializing in police dramas by a translator who is a fan of the series' lead actor. After the group leader read the description, he immediately agreed to making the subtitles, even though the series still has very little audience demand. Finding the right fit between a group leader and a series is the key to whether a show is produced or not. More importantly, when the translator pitches a show, the group leader now knows that there is someone else besides him/her who is committed to translating the series, so at least there will not be a personnel shortage even for such a

low-demand series. One of the major issues to avoid in the fansubbing community is not being able to sustain the production of the subtitles during an ongoing season, because it will result in a negative reputation among the audiences and the group will lose credibility.

The third factor that can greatly influence fansubbing decisions is audience request. Audiences will use the fansub group's forum to make requests (for an episode or for a series), and sometimes when there is enough support from other audiences, the group leaders will start producing the series to meet audience demand. Audiences do not always get their wish, however, because group leaders also need to consider their own interests, the interests of translators, and the amount of time and energy they need to spend on a series. For example, during my observation, the practice of translating open courses from Yale became very popular within other fansub groups, and many audience requests started to appear in the group's forum, so I asked the main group leader whether or not we are planning to translate some of the courses. She replied, "Definitely not…those people are just following a trend. No one will really watch these things from beginning to end; it is not worth it." It turns out that her decision was correct; the open courses soon became less popular when there were too many available.

The last factor that will determine what a fansub group produces is the group's own brand image. Even though the fansub community is not-for-profit, each group still has a strong brand image, and it is this image that fansub groups rely on to attract audiences and members. Some groups establish their brand by producing a large amount of shows, others by producing more niche market shows. For example, Ragbear attracts a steady but small group

of followers by subtitling a fairly large number of British TV series and reality shows. It is an unspoken rule for each fansub group to produce shows that is within their own brand, even those without much demand. This way, audiences know where to go when they need to find a particular show. Fansub groups usually do not cross over to other niche genres unless a show becomes extremely popular and the demand rises. For example, the BBC series *Sherlock* did not gain much attention when it was first released, so Ragbear was the only group that produced the subtitles after the debut, but after the show became a major hit in China, every fansub group began producing their own subtitles for the series.
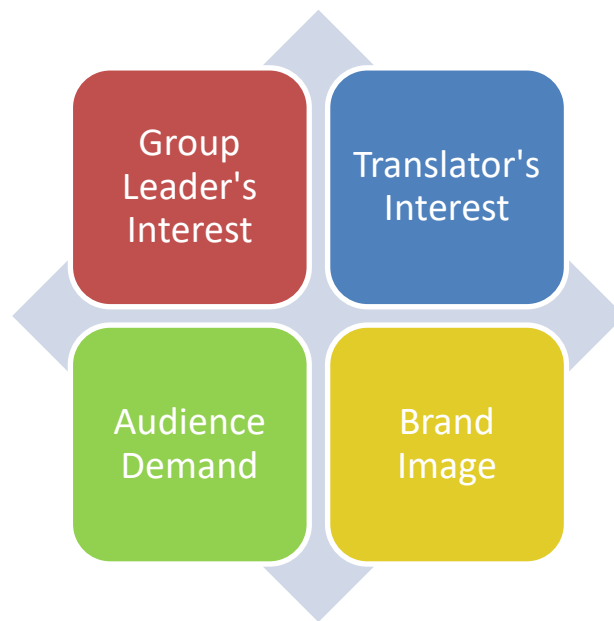
Figure 2: Four factors influencing decision, it is often a balancing act.

While the basis of sustainability for a fansub group is personal interest, the decision-making process is not always personal. Group leaders have to consider interest, manpower, audience requests and group's brand when making their decision. It is this delicate balance between the personal, the organization, and the larger market that places fansub groups outside and above of traditional realm of fandom.

Membership and Group Identity

While for outsiders, working for the fansub group can seem like hard, complicated work, for most fansubbers, it is a personal decision that is closely tied to their everyday life, not only the time commitments and scheduling after joining the group, but also their interests and their identity.

Member turnover and retention

While the common interest unites a fansub group, the loss of interest can also break up the group. The unavoidable reality in any fansub group is personnel turnover, because in such an interest-driven group, it is extremely easy to lose motivation, especially given the huge amount of time needed for translation. Although fansub groups do not have mandatory requirementa for their translators regarding how long or how much they should work each week, there will always be changes in members' lives, and inevitably, some members will quit. Several senior members quit the group (or as they put it, "retired") within my one-year observational period. One of them talked with me before she retired, and according to her: "it just stopped being fun for me. It is more like a burden now, so I need to get away." In the pilot study I conducted, two translators described themselves as retired or semi-retired, and loss of interest was always noted as one of the reasons to quit.

The downside to such a flexible group environment is the training and recruitment of new members. While the group recruits at least twenty new members each month, my observation shows that less than half of those recruited will actually stay in the group, and even less can survive the first month probation mostly because they did not actually complete

any translation work during this period. Even if they managed to stay for longer periods, there are other issues such as translation skills, personal motivations and schedules to consider. Thus recruitment in a fansub group is always ongoing and does not stop as long as the group is operating.

There are also upsides to flexibility: for instance, one never really feels pressured to translate subtitles during busy times because there are always other members to take over. An experienced translator can even negotiate how much to translate and when a subtitle is due. Group leaders know not to push translators too hard and to make them want to stay in the group. However, other studies did note that larger groups have a more rigid work requirement for their members, possible due to their larger workloads (Hu, 2012).

One of the interesting results of the issue of fast member turnover is the subversion of hierarchy within a fansub group. Because experienced translators are rare, they are often the ones who have the power over group leaders. One group leader once told me that he would rather use one experienced translator than three inexperienced ones, because reliability and trust are established over time. As such, experienced translators hold bargaining power that new members do not. Sometimes, the group leader needs to convince an experienced translator to accept work, while the newbies are eager to prove themselves to the group leaders. From my own experience, the process of becoming experienced can take as little as one month or as long as six months, depending on how hard one is willing to work.

Motivations

With all the time and energy that is required of fansubbers, it seems almost impossible

for anyone to sustain a prolonged engagement with this endeavor, yet many members I encountered in the fansub group had been active for over two years. So what is their motivation? This is a question I constantly ask myself during the course of this project, and even though I feel I still cannot provide an entirely satisfactory answer, there are some major themes that ran across many conversations.

The first and most obvious motivation is the opportunity to practice English; in fact, most interviewees suggested that this is the main reason they joined the group in the first place. But since the group has an entrance test that requires a good grasp of English upon joining, most members already have a good grasp of the language, and they simply want more practice. In fact, as one interviewee told me, "I think Chinese skill is more important for translation…you have to be concise and get the meaning across, it is not as easy as it seems." Therefore, while the language is a good motivator for *joining* the group, it is often not a reason for *staying* in the group.

Another reason comes from the prestige and pride of the job. Among the interviewees that I have spoken to, most have told their friends about their work in the fansub group and all of the responses are admiration for their English skills. On the other hand, fansub translators are also well respected in the online community, because of their volunteerism and their contributions to the online culture. Ito (2012) describes the relationship between fansubbers and regular audience as those of contributors vs. leechers, essentially the relationship between givers and takers. The terms alone reflect a certain distain for the common viewers who do not contribute, and most viewers will internalize this hierarchy, as

many people I encounter will show some form of admiration after they found out that I am a fansubber.

Within the fansub group, this relationship is sometimes hard to see, but traces of this hierarchical relationship still exist in conversations. For example, when the group's translation is repeatedly challenged by a regular audience on the group's public forum, one translator replied, "If you think you are so good, why don't you join the group and help us fix it?" Although this is a rather extreme remark, since most audience criticisms are tolerated and even welcomed, it does reflect what many translators secretly think about audiences.

Interestingly enough, this type of remark can also be a motivator to join a fansub group. One of my interviewee told me that the reason she joined the fansub group is because that she "do not want to see my favorite show being butchered by bad translation". Many translators cherish the opportunity to translate their favorite show, because it is not only an opportunity for them to be connected to it, but also for them to shape the way fellow Chinese viewers see it. This is especially true for comedy, where a lot of the humor is context-dependent and hard to communicate across cultures, so it is up to the translators' understanding and linguistic skills to accurately and concisely translate these jokes. When it is done well, the translation can become classics or even memes that are widely shared online. The sense of accomplishment that comes with such feat is also a very important motivator for more seasoned translators.

These motivational factors are confirmed in Zhang and Mao (2013), as they showed that online translators that are both for profit and ordinary fansub groups all work mainly as a

matter personal of interest. However, my observation also revealed a final motivator that not only drives the translators to join a fansub group, but also motivates them to stay it.

Most longtime members of fansub groups do not actually stay for the experience of translation, but rather, for the community. In a relatively small group like Ragbear, most members know each other and can carry on casual conversations. But friendships are most often forged with members who work on the same shows, not only because they have to constantly communicate with one another about their work, but also because they tend to share the same interests and preferences when it comes to the shows, so they will often discuss the shows' progressions and theories even when they are not working together, just like regular fans.

After joining the group, many members develop a sense of belonging that is directly tied to their personal identity. For instance, in casual conversations, many translators refer to themselves as "a member of the Ragbear family." The founder of Ragbear (who is still actively working today) also calls all the members "the Ragbear children." These terms imply that they view the fansub group as a family, and even after some members quit, they still see themselves as a part of this family. Kelly Hu (2012) also found this tendency to refer to one another as family in other fansub groups, suggesting the fostering of community is a key aspect of maintaining a fansub group. Such a strong sense of community is often accompanied by a strong sense of trust: one older member told me that she would implicitly trust anyone from Ragbear because she believes everyone in the group is a kind person. This level of trust is also carried over offline, where many group members arrange meet-ups and

parties, and there are even a few couples that met in the group.

In addition, the Ragbear community also likes to make its members feel engaged in the community by organizing annual celebrations that includes making an e-magazine, recording celebration audios, and writing celebratory essays. The group also celebrates members' birthdays and keeps each other updated on many old members' whereabouts. All these events keep the members feel actively engaged in the Ragbear community, and reaffirms their identity as a part of the Ragbear family, even if they have not been working for the group for a long time. This type of practice is common in online communities, as members form personal connections, and provide support for one another. It can forge a strong sense of community (O'Hagan, 2009, 2011).
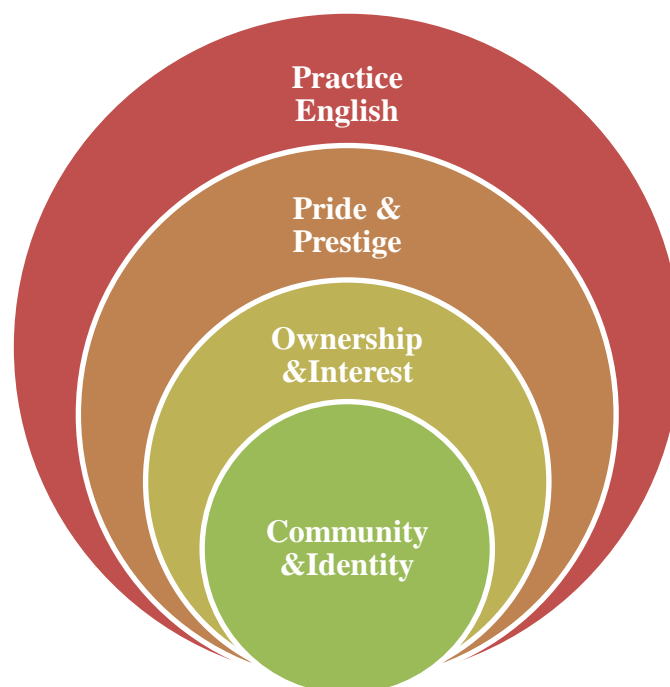
Figure 3: Motivators for fansubbers, from more superficial to deeper motivations.

As group members closely identify with the group, any attacks toward the group become personal. For example, when I first joined the group, I translated the reality show *Survivor* as

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a favor to one of my interviewees; a few weeks later; he gave me a link to a post that criticizes Ragbear's translation of *Survivor*. He was furious at the poster because he believes the criticism was completely unfounded and the poster clearly did not understand the original dialogue. Even though it was not my translation that was being criticized, I also became angry and felt the need to reply the poster and mock his comments. Afterwards, I realized that like my fellow translators, my group identity was already ingrained into the way I think, this is why I started to take any attacks on my fellow group members as an attack on myself. Such criticisms can easily grow into intergroup rivalries when the person criticizing is from another fansub group, thus group members are usually careful about public comment towards other groups in order to maintain a peaceful coexistence.

Intergroup Rivalry

Although there are no profit incentives, intergroup competition is still tremendously fierce. According to Ragbear's founder, this competition has been a part of the Chinese fansub culture since the very beginning. In fact, the group Ragbear was formed by the former members of another large fansub group FR after a major falling-out between the group's administrators and the top translators and editors. There are several ways in which groups compete with each other, and they mainly pertain to production speed and the quality of the translation.

Speed

From an outsider's point of view, intergroup rivalry is beneficial. Since groups mainly

compete over who gets to release a subtitle first, competition forces groups to increase their

production speed. According to one experienced group leader, the reason for this competition

is that because most viewers do not develop loyalty for a single fansub group, they generally

download whichever subtitled version they can find first, and first releases always get more

downloads than later releases. In the end, the only thing that matters to any fansub group is its

reputation, and for some translators, it is their personal reputation that is on the line.

In the fansubbing world, production speed usually depends on one thing: translation

(editing) speed; therefore, intergroup competition inevitably becomes personal to the

translators who must work hard to produce subtitles as fast as they can in order to make first

release. All fansub translators are motivated by the prospect that their work will be watched

by thousands of people, and first release is the key to achieving this goal.

At the same time, first releases or 0day can add a great deal of pressure for translators.

Almost all the translators I spoke to refers to 0day jobs as war, a battle they fight with

themselves in order to achieve the fastest speed. Usually, it takes about two hours to translate

200 lines of dialogue, but in extreme cases, translators can translate up to 200 lines per hour,

which is about a third of an hourlong episode. If all the translators work simultaneously, and

assuming that their work is of high quality, the time it takes from the beginning of the

translation process to the end of the encoding and distribution would only be about three

hours. This means that a single editor could potentially produce four episodes per day and

still achieve same-day release. Although this figure is astonishing, the group leaders that I

worked for did achieve this number during sweeps week of May 2010. Therefore, a faster

speed not only ensures enough audience for the group, it also greatly increases the amount of television series that can be produce in a day.

Quality

Generally, the emphasis on speed can undermine translation quality, but it does not mean fansub groups do not value quality. In this respect, the situation in the fansub world mirrors the television world. First releases are the most important factor for popular television shows with a large audience base. Usually subtitles for popular network series such as *CSI, Grey's Anatomy* or *NCIS* go for first releases. Cable series, especially those from HBO, Showtime, and British television series aim for a niche audience group who usually will develop brand loyalty to a single fansub group, and this is where quality becomes much more important than speed. *Ragbear* specializes in British TV series and reality shows; usually group leaders for these series do not rush their translators. A British TV movie, *The Song of Lunch*, took over three months to translate because the entire film is an adaptation of a poem.

Since translation speed is usually indisputable, translation quality becomes an important instigator of intergroup rivalries, and it is much more personal than fighting for first releases. The translators' pride is not related to how fast they can translate, because speed depends on teamwork, but quality is directly related to one's personal skill. Attacks on translation quality directed at one group usually becomes a personal attack against the translator, and this is when the most intense arguments arise.

These findings are consistent with Hu's (2012 & 2017) assentation that fansub groups utilize cheap labor or produce high-quality subtitles in order to gain cultural and social

capitals. She calls this "neoliberal work ethic," as fansub groups motivate individuals to work

productively, efficiently, and competitively for the group's benefit. Although Ragbear's group

structure is a bit looser than the groups Hu (2012) observed, the overall principle is the same:

group pride is closely tied to personal pride, and group members takes intergroup

competitions quite personally, and that would motivate them to work harder. However, one of

the major differences between Ragbear and many of the other fansub groups is its very firm

stance against the commercialization of fansub, and this can also be a major source of pride

for group members.

Anti-Commercialization and government control

If the fight for first-releases and best subtitles can still be considered friendly

competitions, the ultimate taboo in the fansub world is the commercialization of the subtitles,

and this is the core issue behind the most intense intergroup rivalry that I observed during my

time working for the group.

There are two main reasons why commercialization is highly frowned upon in the fansub

world. First of all, it causes more legal issues than any one group can handle. All fansub

group members clearly acknowledge that their work is considered copyright infringement,

this is why all my interviewees would locate fansubbing "in the grey zone".   At the same

time, they also felt their work is necessary because there are not many legitimate ways to

watch these TV shows in China. While copyright holders rarely bring legal suits in China for

copyright infringement, the government often uses it as an excuse to crackdown on various

websites. That is why all fansub groups put a long disclaimer in all their subtitles in hopes of

avoiding legal prosecutions. The disclaimer from Ragbear reads: "This subtitle is for

educational purposes only; commercial uses are strictly prohibited". It is widely believed that

once a fansub group starts to make money from the subtitles, the entire basis of the fansub

group's legal argument instantly collapses and the groups will not survive government

crackdowns. While the government currently still turns a blind eye to most fansub groups, the

groups' means of distribution has undergone several crackdowns (though they always find

new distribution channels). Therefore remaining under the government's radar is the best way

to for the fansub groups to keep surviving.

Secondly, fansubbers all feel a sense of nobility when they work for free. One of the

interviewees, who had worked as a paid translator, told me that she would much rather work

as a fansubber for free because "it feels better as a volunteer." In a press interview, the

founder of the Ragbear also acknowledges "Whenever there are commercial elements in it,

there will be trouble. Everybody online calls the fansubbers heroes… If you only think about

profit, how can you face the netizens?" (Zhao, 2010). Commercialization would destroy

fansubbers' pride in volunteering, and the motivation for many fansubbers to work for free

would cease to exist. To this day, there are no ads, partnerships or sponsorships between

Ragbear and any other commercial sites. The founders of Ragbear still pay for the sites'

servers out of their own pockets. This is another strong point of pride that Ragbear members

take over some other groups, and that is why they sometimes consider themselves the moral

authority when it comes to the commercialization of subtitles.

In February 2011, news that the fansub group YYeTs was selling a hard drive full of

subtitled TV series within their group leaked, and three other competing fansub groups (including Ragbear) united against the group YYeTs in hopes of stopping the group's commercial activities. The three groups started a week-long campaign to boycott and ridicule YYeTs on social media. In the end, YYeTs deleted the post advertising the hard-drive deal, and the surprising outcome was that the three other groups formed a permanent union, which ended a very long secret rivalry between them.

While YYeTs has been the subject of study for several scholars (e.g.: Hu, 2012, 2017; Wang and Zhang, 2017), my observation has shown that their practice is actually not that common in Chinese fansubbing community, and sometimes even looked down upon. While many fansub groups want more viewers, they do not wish to draw unwanted attention, especially from the government, but collaborations with popular video websites and commercialization will do exactly that. It turns out they were right to be concerned, because during the past several years, YYeTs' servers have been shut down many times. However, none of the fansub groups that I am familiar with has shown any sympathy towards YYeTs; some are even rather gleeful, because they believe YYeTs brought the crackdown upon themselves. At the same time, none of the fansub groups that are against commercialization had ever suffered such fate.

This being said, the attitudes of fansubbers toward government crackdown is quite complicated: on the one hand, they will always have a degree of disdain for the government's tough restraints; on the other, they do not like the news of such crackdowns to be publicized, because they do not actually wish to be seen as anti-government martyrs. Not only because

these discussions draw unwanted attention to the fansub community, but also because they do

not see their activity as anti-government at all. In fact, many fansubbers are very nationalistic.

For example, after a *House* episode aired that criticized the government's one-child policy

and female infanticide, several group members expressed their unwillingness to translate the

episode. Fansubbers are fully aware of the dominant views in China towards such sensitive

topics, and they more or less share the same sentiments. Therefore, while many scholars see

fansubbers as a subversive group at the opposite side of government dominance, the

fansubbers do not see themselves this way.

Fansub group's fight against commercialization perfectly demonstrated the group's firm

grassroots position and their conscious rejection of any efforts to make them mainstream. But

to say that fansubbing is completely outside of mainstream is entirely faulty, because like any

other fan communities, fansub groups' products are based on commodities created by the

cultural industry. Just as Pierre Levy theorized, no knowledge culture can escape commodity

culture (Levy, 1999). But under the current format of distribution, fansubs actually replace

the original commodity that is the original TV programs with a new form of commodity,

which are the TV programs with subtitles, in this sense, knowledge culture is as what Mark

Dery (1993) calls "jammed" into a commodity culture and distributed.

The fact that fansub groups still put up legal disclaimers as they compete for viewership

demonstrates fansub groups' need to operate within the confines of the dominant ideology.

However, as an interviewee says, the commercialization move will not work, because once

the fansub groups start to charge for subtitles (or copyrights), almost no one will be willing to

pay for it. In other words, fansub groups cannot go completely mainstream. Like many fansub groups in North America, they will stop translating anything with an official license (Hatcher, 2005), and this practice marks a clear boundary between fansub groups and official (commercial) products. In the choice between survival and commercialization, most fansub groups adamantly choose to survive, but only to survive in the gray areas between the dominant mainstream and the completely deviant. The next chapter will present examples from fansub group's subtitles that show this struggle between the mainstream and the subversive is carried over to the fansub group's produced content as well.

Chapter 5: Three levels of subtitles

This chapter aims to answer research question 2: How do the subtitles produced by the fansub group act as a mediator to the dominant discourse? In order to answer this question, subtitles from two episodes from six shows are analyzed: *The Amazing Race, Gossip Girl, House M.D., Criminal Minds, the IT Crowd, and Downton Abbey.* The latter two shows are British series, in which the group specializes. These shows are selected based on their popularity with the fansub groups' viewer base (based on the number of download), as well as to demonstrate Ragbear's style of translation.

Translation scholar Gideon Toury (2001) believes that any descriptive studies of translation necessitates proper contextualization, and therefore there will be many instances where I explain original scene and cultural context of China in detail for the purpose of contextualizing my arguments. Data collected from observations and interviews will also be included in the analysis where appropriate, especially to aid in the analysis of translations that does not directly correspond with the original texts, because the translators usually make conscious decisions when they choose to translate not according to the source texts, observation and interview data often reflects their decisions and strategies.

Translation is an interpretive act by nature; all translators must interpret a sentence's meaning from the original source language's (SL) and translate this meaning into the target language (TL) using proper and understandable phrases, and SL and TL never match up perfectly because no two languages are exactly the same in linguistic structure. Thus, when studying a particular translation, there need to be biases towards one side or the other, either from the source or from the target. In his classic work on descriptive translation theory, Toury

believes that no translation hovers between two cultures; "it is necessarily part of an existing (target!) system," (Toury, 2001, 28). This leniency towards studying translation within the context of a target culture is called "target-oriented assumption." (Toury, 2001, 28)   Thus my analysis of fansub groups will be leaning towards an analysis of the translation from the context of the target culture, namely China. This is not to assume that the meaning of the source text is not important for understanding fansubbing practices, but the source text can simply act as a point of departure for understanding how and why translators make certain translation decisions.

Traditional Chinese translators usually follow a simple three-word guideline purposed by influential translator Yan Fu. In his translation of the book *Evolution and Ethics* by biologist Thomas Henry Huxley (1896), Yan Fu summarized his ideal translation guideline as faithfulness (*xin* 信), appropriateness (*da* 达), and gracefulness (*ya* 雅). Yan believed this is the three-tiered hierarchy of translation every translator should aspire to; the first and most basic task for all translators is always faithfulness, which is the extent to which a translator adheres to the meaning of the source text.

The same pattern of hierarchy is present in fansubbing translation, where the most important task is always to get across the meaning of the dialogue, and then consider the context of the dialogue and whether or not the translation is appropriate to that context. When they are able to achieve these first two steps, they can then start considering the nuances in translation, which are the style of the word and/or even the use of specific words and expressions. Thus this chapter will be organized according to these three levels: 1) basic

translation norms; 2) localization of a foreign culture; and 3) abusive practices. The first level of practice is also the most common practice for the fansub group, while the third level is the least commonly used method of translation.

According to Gideon Toury, norms are socio-cultural and even cognitive constraints that govern translation practice (Toury, 2001). Translation norms can be observed in two places: textual and extratextual (Toury, 2001). Textual norms exist within the translated product (the subtitles), and extratextual norms are those described by the translators themselves. Since fansubbers are not professional translators, oftentimes they are unconscious of the decisions they make as translators. Therefore, the primary aim of this chapter is to derive translation norms from the text themselves, but in the instances where translators do talk about their translated works, the interview and observational data becomes crucial to understanding the normative practices of fansubbing translations.

Level one: Basic translation norms

In fansubbing, as in all audiovisual translations, the meaning of the words is always mediated by the images on screen and the sounds audiences hear. The biggest difference between subtitle translation and print translation is that subtitles are meant to be watched and read simultaneously, while print translation only needs to be read (Chiaro, 2009). In other words, a subtitle is an integral part of a system of audiovisual codes –it needs to blend in with the rest of the images and sounds –and it needs to convey the meaning of the spoken lines within a short period of time without disrupting the flow of other audiovisual codes.

No matter what the original phrase is, there are always multiple ways of translating it.

Finding the best fit is the biggest challenge for the translators and the editors. There are several reasons why one way of translating is chosen over another. Personal preference aside, one of the most important factors is to convey the meaning of the dialogue as directly and briefly as possible because the next dialogue may come on screen very quickly. If the subtitle is too long, the audience will not be able to read through the words before moving on to the next sentence. Another important consideration is that the style of the translation needs to fit the tone of the TV series as a whole and the character who is speaking. As my first interviewee recalled, "It's a matter of understanding…sometimes the translation seems right on the surface, but it doesn't fit the habit of the character." Finally, the linguistic differences between the SL and the TL are also important to take into account. These are all examples of necessary changes to the original texts that a translator has to make with every translation.

Length

Upon analysis, it is surprising how much translation is dictated by the way time codes are organized. Usually a long sentence must be shortened because it can only appear on screen for half a second. A common way of shortening a sentence is to change the wording of a sentence, such as turning negatives into positives. In the ninth episode of the fifth season of *Criminal Minds* (5.09)[1], during the recap of the previous episode (where the dialogues always goes by very fast), the sentence –spoken by a serial killer to an FBI agent—is "If you stop hunting me, I will stop hunting them", and it was translated as "如果你放过我，我就放过他

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[1] Hereafter all episodes will referred to in three-digit numbers, the first digit being the season, and the latter two digits being the episode number within that season.

们". In Chinese, if the sentence were translated like the original dialogue, it would 如果你停止追捕我，我就停止追杀他们, which is four characters longer than the current version. But this translation not only makes the sentence shorter, but also easier to understand, because 放过 (letting go) is a single word in Chinese. But like in English 停止 (stop) and 追捕 (hunting) in Chinese are two separate words, and given the context, the word "hunt" requires two different translations, one for the agent (追捕 = to chase and catch) and the serial killer (追杀 = to chase and kill), and it the viewers would need to spend extra effort to decode this entire sentence if it were translated the longer way.

Another good way to shorten a sentence is to use common Chinese idioms. In *Gossip Girl* 2.04 (translated by the group's founder), the character Dan says, "It's not so bad once you get used to birds flying over your head and automatic doors never opening" when referring to being ignored by a group of popular girls in school. Instead of translating everything (e.g., birds and doors) literally, which would look something like "如果你能习惯小鸟飞过头顶及自动门永远都不为你而开 那其实也还行," the translator chose to use the Chinese idiom "视而不见" (look without seeing) to replace the birds flying and the doors closing analogy, which is just as vivid but much shorter. The self-mocking tone of the dialogue is instead moved to the translation of "it's not so bad" into "就会发现其实这样也挺惬意的" (You will find it's actually pretty relaxing). This way, the meaning and the tone of the sentence is preserved, but the translation is much shorter.

In other instances, when there is enough time, short sentences in English can also be expanded to provide clarification. In *Criminal Minds* 4.11, one of the agents is reporting back

the results of his investigation to his superiors, and she is surprised at his efficiency.

Anderson: Just got a call from the Postmaster General Inspector's office/邮政部长检查员刚打了个电话 (Postmaster General Inspector's office just called)
JJ: Already? /这么快? (So soon?)
Anderson: I am not just a pretty face/我可不是<u>光说不做</u>的*小白脸* (I am not just a *gigolo* who <u>only talks and never acts</u>.

The underlined part is expanded for clarification because the translator chose to use the term 小白脸 (literally, "little white face," used to describe a man with delicate features) as the translation for "pretty face." The advantage of using this term is that it is closer to the SL (both has "face"), but this term also connotes gigolo in Chinese culture, thus the term carries multiple negative connotations. In order to avoid misunderstanding, the idiom 光说不做 (all talk and no action) is added to clarify what type of "pretty face" Anderson is referring to here.

Context matters

As mentioned earlier, my first interviewee mentioned how important familiarity with the show is to a fansub translator, this theme is carried through all interviews and it is often brought up in group chats. This is why the practice called naked translation, or translating without watching the episode first, is something that is frowned upon in the fansubbing world. The challenge for translators is to be able to find a translation that fits the context. A common instance of context influencing translation is for the word "please," although it is most commonly used to express politeness and it is usually translated into Chinese as 请, but in a different situation, it can act as a plea, such as when someone is begging for his/her life, so translation has to become 求, which means "to beg."

A good example from the analysis that demonstrates translation according to context is in *Criminal Minds*. The series always uses a quotation at the beginning and the end of each

episode to highlight the theme of the episode, and the quotation is usually translated with much more lyricism than the rest of the episode. *Criminal Minds* 611 used the famous quote by Nelson Mandela "There is no such thing as partial freedom." The simple or literal way of translating this quote is 不存在部分自由之说 (partial freedom does not exist). The translator did not use this translation and instead went to a more poetic version: <u>有限自由</u> <u>根本子虚乌有</u> (restricted freedom is sheer fiction). There are two changes in this version that deserve mentioning. First, "partial freedom" is changed to "restricted freedom;" although it may not be a perfect literal match, this version matches the context of the original quote spoken by Mandela, who was imprisoned for twenty-seven years and thus his freedom was literally restricted. This change of wording gets to the heart of the quote instead of simply trying to match the SL. Secondly, the use of the idiom 子虚乌有 (sheer fiction) gave the quote the poeticism that beyond the original quote, because the last character 有 (pronounced "you"), rhymes with the last character in the previous phrase 由 (also pronounced "you"). This quote becomes more like a verse in this translated version, which is a quality that even the original version does not have. But if the rest of the episode were all translated this way, it would not only be time-consuming for the translator, but also does would fit the overall style of the series.

More commonly, context refers to the genre of a series, especially when translating historical dramas or comedies. Idioms and archaic grammar are much more commonly used in historical dramas than other genres, and comedies are often not translated literally but are highly localized in order to get the jokes across. These two genres will be discussed in much

further detail in the next two sections dealing with higher levels of alterations.

This first level of practices shows that translation is never a straightforward task of changing SL to TL. The consideration of both the length of the TL, and the context of the SL is crucial to an accurate and smooth subtitle. Even though fansub translators are almost never formally trained in translation, they clearly know what sounds good in Chinese and what does not. The editors often jokingly instruct the translators to "speak like a human being," which means to make the sentence fit the speaking patterns of a Chinese person, rather than awkwardly translating a sentence literally. This is why different degree of moderations to the SL is always present in any translation. This section only detailed the most basic type of translation, which maintains most of the meanings and cultural contexts of the SL, without injecting too much local culture into the translation (aka localizing). It should be noted that this type of translation style is by far the most common way to translate. Most of the changes made to the SL are minimal and almost never receive any attention from the audiences and the translators, unlike the next two level of translations.

Level 2: Cultural Localization

Translation is a way of communicating between two distinct cultures and languages: first the translator must understand the culture from the SL and then find the appropriate fit in the TL. The interviews and the observations have shown that understanding the TL culture does not pose a big problem for most translators. Although I went into the interviews believing there would be cultural shocks, it seems the biggest cultural difference encountered by the translators is "using the dryer," because clothes dryers are very uncommon in China. It turns out that most cultural specific references can be easily understood with an online search. One

interviewee detailed her search process as, "When I don't know something I usually use the two websites Google and Baidu… http://www.acronymfinder.com/ is for acronyms… http://www.urbandictionary.com for American slang…I usually do the searches by myself." After understanding a phrase's meaning in the SL, the tougher challenge is to convert this understanding into TL. A translator often has to find a clear and concise e way to introduce a foreign cultural reference to a group of audience who may be completely unfamiliar with the background of that reference. There are two main strategies of dealing with this challenge, they are using additional notes and cultural "chunking".

Notes

From my observation, adding notes to translations is a fansub-specific phenomenon. In official audiovisual translations, notes are never used as explanations for cultural references and thus this practice was rarely mentioned in studies on subtitles. Fansubbing allows the freedom of using notes because it is not only unofficial, it is also computer-based and can allow the audiences to pause, rewind and re-watch a scene, whenever they want. Many believe that fansubbing is a very educational endeavor, especially given the popularity of English education in China. Many interviewees cited improving English proficiency as one of the benefits of joining fansub groups and watching subtitled dramas. Adding notes can be a good way for audiences to learn about a foreign language and its related culture. But since being succinct is one of the keys to making subtitles, notes are usually not the preferred method in most cases, unless it greatly affects the meaning of the sentence.

One of the cases where notes are needed is translating puns, which is one of the most difficult things to translate in any language. Some translation scholars even believe that puns are untranslatable and thus should be ignored (Reiss, 2000). When nonprofessional translators like most fansubbers are faced with puns, notes are a good way of dealing with the "untranslatability" of puns without completely ignoring the SL. In *House* 6.05, after a patient loses bowel control and defecates in his bed, House makes a joke about this situation (see figure 1 in appendix):

House: I wouldn't wanna be the duty nurse assigned to his floor./我不想去他那层做值班(duty)护士
Get it? /明白不?
Doody nurse/ "便便"(doody) 护士

The word play here is based on the phonetic characteristics of the English word "duty," which does not exist at all in its Chinese equivalent. In this example, the translator simply cannot ignore the pun because House points out his own joke in the next line. Thus the translator chose to add the original English words "duty" and "doody" after the Chinese translation to show the audience that these two words sound alike and hope that they understand what it means.

Another case where notes are needed is for jargons and proper nouns. Even common expressions such as "I plead the Fifth," often require notes because almost no one in China knows what "pleading the Fifth" means. Other common cases are famous quotations, such as in *Gossip Girl* 2.04, when Serena says she does not want to be the queen of her school, and Chuck replies "When trumpets call, you might feel differently". This is the quote by Theodore Roosevelt referring to the trumpet of retreat in war; the quote later became the title

of Roosevelt's biography detailing his life after his presidential term. But there is no way the average Chinese viewer would know all this complex cultural background for the quotation to make any sense, and thus the translator chose to translate "when trumpets call" literally, and added a quite long note: 指罗斯福下台到离世这段时间 (points to the period from Roosevelt's step-down to his death). Most Chinese know who Theodore Roosevelt is, so they can quickly make the connection between Roosevelt as president and Serena as queen, and understand what Chuck is talking about.

The advantage to adding notes is that it does not require much effort on the translators' part, and it also preserves the integrity of the SL. But the disadvantages are that it may become too long to read, and it is disruptive for the viewers because it not a part of the dialogue, and often breaks the emotional engagement audiences have with what is on screen. Thus while adding notes is allowed in fansubbing, it is not the definitive way of translating cultural specific references.

Cultural Specific References: Chunking

Because of the disadvantages of adding notes, translators usually will find alternative ways to translate cultural specific references (CSR) into Chinese, which usually means altering the SL. In translation studies, there are three ways to translating CSR, which are references that only exists in a given culture and requires in depth cultural knowledge to understand the meaning behind the reference. The three ways are: chunking up, chunking down, or chunking sideways (Chiaro, 2009). Chunking up a CSR means to replace a specific example in the SL with a more general example in the TL, and chunking down is the opposite

and it expands a reference in the SL in more details, and it often requires distortion to the SL, while chunking sideways is finding a cultural equivalent in the TL.

Sublevel one: Chunking up a culture

In fansubbing, as in most subtitle translations, chunking up is usually a simpler method of translating CSR. A good example of chunking up is to use the word 饼干 (cookies) to cover similar foods such as biscuits, cookies, crackers, meringues, etc. Just as some other practices discussed in the last section, chunking up is often done because of length considerations. The problem with this practice is that may it lose some of the richness of contextual information from the SL, but in certain instances, chunking up can also give more richness to a dialogue.

Downton Abbey is the only show analyzed here that is encoded with dual English and Chinese subtitles because it is a British historical drama and the English subtitles are used as a reference for fans who wants to keep it in their collection. Because there is limited screen space for two separate subtitles, chunking up is almost always a necessity. A good example of chunking up in *Downton Abbey* happens in episode two, when Lady Mary sarcastically asks her new cousin: "I suppose you are more interested in <u>books</u> than <u>country sports</u>."/看来你<u>重文不重武</u>/It seems that you <u>value culture over activities</u>." Books are translated into the Chinese as 文, which encompasses language, literature, civility and culture, and country sports are translated as 武, which is the opposite of 文, and can mean anything from military bravery to kung fu to sports and games. The use of chunking up here is entirely appropriate because the use of 文 and 武 has historical connotations in Chinese that fit the historical

period of the show. Moreover, the context of this dialogue is spoken with mockery and self-importance by an upper-class heiress; the "country sports" here refers to hunting, which is an upper-class pastime. When this dialogue is translated into Chinese, it adds a subtle hint of sarcasm alluding to her cousin's "uncultured" manners and lack of bravery, which the original text does not clearly provide with "country sports".

From this example, it is clear that when done properly, chunking up can actually add a variety of meanings to the original text even though it may be a generalization of CSR, because general terms carry a multitude of connotations that will add to the richness of the spoken dialogue.

It needs to be noted that as British series such as *Downton Abbey* have a smaller fan base in China than most U.S. series but are known for their high production values, fans of these series are pickier about the qualities of the translation than fans of U.S. television. Comments regarding the translations of specific sentences in a British show (both praise and criticism) were often the topic of discussion within the group's British series chatroom, but it rarely becomes an important issue in the U.S. show chatroom. Therefore, choice of translators for British series is much more selective, and in a sense more prestigious than translating U.S. television. *Downton Abbey* became an instant hit among Chinese fans of British television because of its large and talented cast, carefully written dialogue, and sumptuous production values, and since Ragbear was the only group translating the show at the time of its initial release, it quickly became one of the flagship shows for the group. My observation shows that many newcomers joined the group wishing to translate this series, but were turned down

because they were inexperienced. But not all subtitles from this group have such high standards for translation quality, which also shows that chunking in translation is not an easy practice.

Sublevel two: Chunking Sideways

Chunking sideways means to find a cultural equivalent for the CSR in the TL. An interviewee recalled an episode of the *IT Crowd* where he used the name of a Japanese porn star in place of a British porn star; since Japanese porn stars are much better-known in China. This is the simplest form of chunking sideways; there are much more sophisticated examples of this practice in the translations of *the IT Crowd*, a British sitcom.

In episode 3.02, a character named Michael is forced to perform magic tricks because he is dating the female protagonist Jen and she threatens to break up with him because he looks like a magician but is not a magician. A very nervous Michael attempts a card trick and before he pulls out the card, he says the magic words:

Michael: Bob's your uncle, abracadabra. Is this your card? / 形势大好 巴拉巴拉变 这是不是你的牌? (The situation is excellent, Balabala change! Is this your card?)

Two instances of chunking sideways occur in this sentence, the first is "Bob's your uncle," a British expression meaning meaning "everything is fine." It is translated as "形势大好 (The situation is excellent)." This is a perfect translation of the meaning, but it is only the first level of meaning. Given the context, it is clear that everything is not fine, so "Bob's your uncle" is used ironically here. In order to convey this irony even further, a second level of localization is found within the particular wording of the translation "形势大好." There are

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multiple ways of translating "everything's fine," but "形势大好" is commonly used by the

Chinese government in official broadcasts to describe the current state of the country. As the

politically conscious Chinese viewers would know, "形势大好" is often used to present a

false sense of prosperity especially when everything is *not* fine; therefore this expression is

filled with irony, but this level of meaning can only be understood by people very familiar

with contemporary Chinese political rhetoric. While this type of translation does not alter the

original meaning in any disruptive way, the subtle use of wording becomes almost an inside

joke between the translators and the audiences of the series.

The term "abracadabra" is also localized into "巴拉巴拉变 ("balabala change"). First of

all, this phrase sounds a little like "abracadabra," and if any of the viewers do not know that

"abracadabra" relates to magic, the last character 变 makes it clear. This expression came

from an 80's French cartoon *BaRagbearapapa*, which is about a magic family of blobs that

can change into anything they want. The cartoon was very famous in China during the 1980s.

"巴拉巴拉变" is the phrase the family says whenever they change shape, and thus its

purpose is similar to "abracadabra" in English. The translation of "abracadabra" also brings

up an interesting issue of how the translation of another foreign-media product becomes

localized over time into a part of the Chinese popular culture; more examples of this will be

discussed later.

But chunking sideways can also have bad results, because the translator is equating two

very different cultural references, and if the references do not match well enough,

experienced audiences may become disgruntled. A translator of the sitcom *The Big Bang*

Theory once translated the *X-Files* agents Mulder and Scully as 舒克与贝塔, who are main

characters from a Chinese cartoon about the adventures of two mice. One week after the

subtitle was released, an audience member started a post criticizing the use of this reference,

because there are very few similarities between Mulder and Scully and the two mice, both in

terms of characterization and plot lines. The translator later explained to me that it was the

only famous TV partnership that she could think of at the time, and she thought the cartoon

fit the "nerdy" vibe of the series, but she admitted that upon further consideration it was not

the best comparison. Although criticism from viewers are not uncommon, most of them point

to obvious mistakes such as misuse of words, or misunderstanding of meaning, and most

audience members are not astute when it comes to older U.S. TV references.

Sublevel three: Chunking down and localization

The practice of chunking downwards is moving closer to what I will discuss in the next

section –abusive translation. But sometimes chunking down is not as disruptive enough to be

considered truly "abusive," and abusive translations are not necessarily chunking downwards.

Chunking down does require substantial distortion of the SL, and it is a more localized way

of translating than chunking up. Chunking down is commonly used in comedies, comedic

dialogues or comedic situations.

One of the more memorable examples of chunking down from the analysis is also from

The IT Crowd episode 3.02; Roy is describing his poker night with "proper men" to his friend

Moss:

Roy: Wasn't brilliant at the start/一开始不太顺利
  'cause you know I was mostly vomiting/你知道 我开始一直在吐

Moss: Lovely/很好

Roy: But then I knuckle down and I brought my A game/然后我爆发小宇宙 使出全力
(Then I exploded my little cosmos and gave all I've got)

The expression 爆发小宇宙 (exploding little cosmos) is a good example of chunking down the idiom "knuckle down," because it made a common idiom into a very CSR. Just like the translation of "abracadabra," this expression comes from foreign animation –the Japanese manga/anime series *Saint Seiya*, one of the most popular anime series in China during the early 1990s. But unlike the translation of "abracadabra," this translation does not correspond to the original text literally, and requires more knowledge of the anime series. "Little cosmos" is something made up by the author of the manga/anime series; it is energy within the fighters that can elevate his/her abilities and make them transcend physical boundaries. Overtime, it became an exaggerated way of describing someone who suddenly starts working very hard, and it is a vivid way of translating this sentence because it fits Roy's emotional state as he is talking. But even though it is a very common expression, it is still a very culturally specific reference that only people who have watched the anime would understand.

Chunking down does present the same problems as chunking sideways. If the translator does not choose the reference well, there is the risk of altering the meaning of the dialogue completely and displeasing the audience. Moreover, if the reference is too specific or obscure, the audience will not even be able to understand what the translation means, defeating the purpose of translation completely. Once an audience member complained about the translation of "I am back" into a very famous line from a Cultural Revolution-era film. The translation is comparable in every sense, but because the viewer had no idea where the Chinese quotation came from, he/she had trouble understanding why it was used.

There are also instances when the original dialogue is very plain, but it is chunked down

and turned into a CSR in Chinese. In *The Amazing Race* episode 14.11, one challenge asks

the contestants to put on Chinese-opera makeup, and as a male contestant, Luke, is putting

the make up on his mother, Margie. She becomes increasingly agitated at his poor skills and

points to the model they were given to show him how the makeup is actually done (see

appendix figure 2):

> Margie: Do you see she has tiny little line, 看到没 人家的眼影化的多细 (Do you see?
> Her eye shadow is so thin)
> You had it thick! 你化的跟<u>麻花</u>似的 (You made it look like a <u>twisted fried dough</u>)

The translator expanded "thick" into the traditional Chinese dessert *mahua*, a thick

twisted fried pastry. Although the original dialogue does not contain cultural specific

references, the translation localized a very normal dialogue into a CSR. Since *mahua* has a

specific shape, the translator is not only describing the thickness of the eye shadow but also

its twisted shape. By chunking down the original text, the translator makes a comment on

what is happening in on screen, it is actually the translator who believes the eye shadow looks

like a *mahua*, not Margie.

Just as the example from *The Amazing Race* have shown, a translator's use of chunking

down often carries his/her commentaries, because he/she is making extra implications that

does not exist in the SL (although in audio-visual translation, the images may contain the

same implication). Nonetheless, it is a subtle form of commentary compared to a more direct

comments put into parentheses. Translator's commentary is another special characteristic of

fansubbing, because as fans themselves, the translators often will have some feelings about

the series they are translating (as discussed in the previous chapter). But commentaries are very disruptive to the overall flow of the show, thus it is a controversial issue among fansubbers and audiences. Even within the same group, editors disagree with each other about the use of commentaries. Some editors do not allow it at all; some would allow it but warns the translator about future use; others cherish commentaries as a means of interaction between translators and audiences. There is no clear rule within the fansub community about personal commentaries. This reflects the grassroots nature of the community as whole: common practice exists but is never strictly enforced.

Level three: Abusive Practices

As mentioned before, chunking down or even sideways possesses some of the qualities of abusive translation. To review, the idea of abusive translation is first theorized by Philip E. Lewis in his 1985 essay "The measure of translation effects." Lewis defines abusive translation as a type of forceful experimentation that tempers with both the source text and the target text (Lewis, 2004). Abe Mark Nornes (1999) uses this idea of abusive translation and theorized the potential for abusive subtitles, treating it as a critique of dominant ideologies and practices. The dominant practice, which he calls the second epoch of translation or corrupt translation, involves taming any disruptive instances in the SL (such as curse words) or eliminating them completely in order for the subtitle to be as invisible as possible (Nornes, 1999). Nornes was analyzing official translations of Japanese films and TV shows, which operate under various restrictions such as censorship, copyrights, and production or distribution issues. Fansub groups do not have any of these considerations, and

most fansubbers are not professional translators. Thus they are not bound by many of the standard practices in translation, and the freedom that comes from fansubbing often results in abusive practices. Translators sometimes use abusive translation for fun, and they also remember some abusive examples as their proud moments, an example of such translation will be discussed later. Some of these practices were already briefly discussed previously, such as notes and commentaries. Other examples include translation of obscenities and use of nonstandard languages or slang. All these types of translation are abusive because they would almost never appear in official translations, since they are not something that one would consider as an accurate translation by any means. The experimentation with the language that incorporates a great deal of the translator's personal feelings about the show or the plot, and it can be considered an alternative form of communication between the translators and the audience.

Notes and commentaries

As the analysis above has shown, notes and commentaries are exclusive to fansubbing. They may be the most abusive form of translation because they are not a part of the original text or the subtitles, and they also take up extra screen space. The pros and cons of using notes have already been discussed, but it is important to understand that while both notes and commentaries are in parentheses, notes are not subjective like commentaries; thus within the levels of abusiveness, notes are less "violent" than direct commentaries.

As noted above, inclusion of direct commentaries is a very controversial subject even among the fansubbing community. There are people who love to see these personal touches

within subtitles, while others believe that adding commentary is extremely unprofessional because there are other platforms to express individual opinions. A translator should not impose his/her own views onto the thousands of viewers who may or may not share the same sentiments. In fact, the lead editor of Ragbear is one such believer, but she does not stop others from using commentaries.

This study is not concerned with the ethics of adding commentaries, but rather what kinds of commentaries are added and when or how they are presented. In the small sample of episodes selected, commentaries appeared in two shows: *House M.D.,* and *The Amazing Race* (most regularly in *The Amazing Race*), thus it is not a very common practice.

In *House*, the commentary doubles as a note. When Dr. House makes up a fake disease in order to convince his patient that he is not dying, he tells the patient that the treatment is called Nabasynth. (See appendix figure 3)

House: Tell him about the treatment/就告诉他应该怎么治
Chase: It's…well…it's complicated/呃…说起来很复杂
House: Doctors always wanna make everything sound so complicated/医生喜欢把病情说得很复杂
　　It's Nabasynth/ 就是服用 Nabasynth 啦 [大叔瞎掰的吧]
　　(Translation: Just take Nabasynth [Uncle probably made that up])

On the surface level, the parenthesis is a note, making the audiences aware that Nabasynth is not a real medicine. On a deeper level, this note doubles as a commentary that only fans would make. The term "uncle" here is a term of endearment that *House* fans in China use to call House, so it is obvious that whoever translated this is a fan of the show. Moreover, the overall tone of this sentence plus the use of the word 瞎掰 (*xiabai*, "bullshit") is a very casual speculation. This shows that the translator is very familiar with the personality of the

character House. The way this sentence is presented feels just like how friends would describe each other. But this is the only comment that was found in both episodes of *House*, which means that commentaries are not very common in regular drama subtitles.

On the other hand, episode 14.11 of *The Amazing Race* is peppered with commentaries; it is the episode where the constants go to China (it is also the most downloaded episode of all seasons of *The Amazing Race*). The frequency of the comments throughout the episode seems like the translators are having a conversation with the audience at times.

In the first comment, two contestants Jaime and Cara are looking for the Beijing Opera House, and they try to make their taxi driver understand their destination by pretending to sing opera. As they sing, the subtitle reads:

呜啊啊啊~~~ (woahahah~~)
(= =! 可怜的的哥) [Poor taxi driver] (see appendix figure 4)

This subtitle breaks several rules of translation and should be considered the most abusive way of translating. First of all, this dialogue does not even need to be translated because the contestants are not actually speaking any English; the only reason that it exists is for the translators to make this commentary. Secondly, use of emoji symbols is unusual in subtitling, because it disrupts the overall flow and can cause problems during encoding. This is why almost all commas and periods are replaced with blanks. But here, not only the symbol "~~~" was included, the emoticon "= =!" which looks like sweat dripping down the face and conveys a sense of speechless is also used. Third is the comment "poor taxi driver," while humorous, is clearly subjective. This entire sentence shows that the translator finds their singing voice extremely irritating, and that is why he thinks the taxi driver is unfortunate.

There are other instances where the commentaries are clearly emotional, especially when the contestants are criticizing China. In one instance, Jaime and Cara are looking for their next stop and cannot seem to find anyone that can show them the way. One of them says in frustration "This is why I don't wanna go to China, it sucks." Besides the translating the sentence, the translator added the comment: 那就滚回去呗! (So get the hell out). The translator used the character 滚, which is a moderate curse word, showing that he is angry at the contestant's comment about China (see appendix figure 5). In many of the comments, the translator not only expresses his emotions, he also uses obscene language to do so, and in Nornes' opinion, this is an extremely abusive practice (Nornes, 1999).

Obscenity

Depending on the show, sometimes fansub translators are faced with a variety of obscenities. But unlike officially translated subtitles where obscenities are almost always eliminated, all the obscene language will be completely translated in fansubbing. For instance, British series *Skins* (recently remade by MTV) is known for its risqué content and use of obscene language, and one of the translators of the show told me that obscenity is one of the major reasons she wanted to translate *Skins*. She viewed it as a way of release, since she can never actually say these words out loud in public. Other shows with excessive amounts of obscenities are the Starz drama *Spartacus*, and various HBO series. One of the new translators once asked the editors about the policies regarding translating obscenities, and the reply was, "There are no rules, just translate however you see fit."

In the six shows analyzed, only two shows had obscene languages within the subtitles. *House*, *Gossip Girl* and *Criminal Minds* are network drama series, so unnecessary obscenities do not happen. *Downton Abbey* contains no obscenity because it is a period drama with a largely upper-class setting. So what are left are *The IT Crowd* and *The Amazing Race*. The former contains some obscene words in the original text, and the latter is a reality show, and reality shows usually have a very casual translation style.

In *The IT Crowd* episode 4.03, the translation of a book title "Massages are Bollocks" is 按摩这操蛋玩意儿 (Massage is a shitty business). Although the word "bollocks" is an obscene word in the UK, it is not as severe as the Chinese 操蛋 when translated literally means "fucking balls," but the term is used for "bollocks" because "bollocks" can mean both "testicles" and "bullshit." In episode 3.02 of *The IT Crowd*, "fuck' is used several times throughout the episode, and the translator did not eliminate any of them.

Unlike *The IT Crowd*, all the obscenities in *The Amazing Race* are censored in the aired version because it is also a network show. In episode 15.07, teams are rummaging through haystacks to find a flag in order to win the race. The third team to arrive at the challenge was lucky enough to finish first, and the first team to arrive was extremely angry at this situation. Contestant Sam says: "I freaking hate…Big Easy [the winning team]," the translation for this dialogue is 我 TM 恨透…Big Easy 了 (I f*cking hate…Big Easy). Because "freaking" is a tamed version of "fuck," the translators decided to use the acronyms TM instead of the actual translation 他妈/*ta ma*, so that it is partially censored like the source text. Although in the next line, Sam says "This is ridiculous," and the translation become 这 TM 简直是国际笑话

("This is a freaking international joke"), "TM" here is used again to express the extreme

frustration in his tone. "International joke" is a Chinese slang for "ridiculous," and since that

the teams are traveling around the world to win the race, it also has a double meaning of

being ridiculous and being in a foreign place. This translation is also an example of abusive

translation, because it went above and beyond the SL and used a very localized and informal

way of translation instead of simply translating the text as is without considering what is

happening on screen (see appendix figure 6).

Slang and idioms

Use of slang and idioms is extremely common in fansubbing translations, and they are

more often not abusive. But every once in a while, the usage became so interestingly abrupt

and strange, it gives the sense of a simultaneous foreignness and familiarity for audiences that

understand the context and the reasoning behind the translation.

One of the best examples of abusive translation using an idiom/famous phrase comes

from *Downton Abbey* episode 1.02. As the maids in Downton are preparing for the arrival of

their potential future master. The head cook, Mrs. Patmore, yells at the maid Daisy because

Daisy did not answer her call (see appendix figure 7).

  Mrs. Patmore: Then might I remind you we are preparing dinner for your future employer?
               我可提醒你啊 今晚招待的可是你未来主子
             And if it goes wrong, I will be telling them why!
               要是有半点差错 <u>仔细你的皮</u> (If there is even a half bit wrong, <u>careful of
your skin</u>!)

The abusive part is in the last phrase "careful of your skin," the use of 仔细, which now is

normally used as an adverb, is also a verb in classical Chinese, but that usage is very

uncommon in modern Chinese. This expression is appropriate but at the same time, it is a

very strange and archaic way of saying "be careful". But since it is a period drama, archaic expressions such as this one are perfectly acceptable, perhaps even better, than a literal translation.

This usage of 仔细 as a verb was still quite popular up to the turn of the 20th century; it can even be seen in some modern literature. But the entire expression was most famously used in the classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*/红楼梦, considered by many as the pinnacle of classical Chinese literature. The novel tells the story of a powerful bureaucratic family living in an enormous manor not unlike the family in *Downton Abbey*. The term "careful of your skin" is used in chapter six of the novel, when the mistress in charge of household affairs warns her nephew not to break an expensive glass screen, so the context is actually quite similar to what is happening in *Downton Abbey*. People who have read the novel will know that the translator invoking the *Red Chamber* reference and making a comparison between *Downton Abbey* and *Red Chamber*, which many viewers have already done in various reviews and comments. Making this reference adds another dimension of textual richness, making the audience very aware of the work and attentiveness of the series' translators.

As fans of the show, the translators will also make subtle acknowledgement within their translation about character developments. In *Downton Abbey* episode 1.05, the first footman, Mr. Bates offers to help make a bed with head housemaid, Anna. Their relationship is ambiguously romantic from the beginning of the series, and all fans of the show picked up on this potential romance. The scene plays out as follows:

Mr. Bates: Shall I give you a hand?/要我帮忙吗？

Anna: Ah, would you? It takes half of the time with two/好啊 男女搭配 干活不累 (Great! When men and women work together, working is not as tiresome)

The original text is a straightforward fact that two people working together is more efficient, but the translation added the part about men and women working together to hint at the relationship. This expression also came from the 1960s, when many city youth were sent down to the countryside to be educated; it was originally a slogan to urge all youth of both genders to be sent down. The expression later gained more sexual connotation, and became a quite vulgar but humorous expression used in the countryside, which has now become the dominant connotation. The translator is clearly aware of the sexual innuendo behind the expression, and consciously decided to use this seemingly out of place translation to point out (quite bluntly) the romantic undercurrent within the relationship of Bates and Anna. It also contextualizes the conversation that will take place afterwards between Bates and Anna about secret love and the sadness of not being able to tell. Although it is not the most subtle or elegant translation, it clearly makes the translator's presence known to devoted fans of the show, making them aware that the translators also have the same expectations as the other fans and are following the relationship closely.

Abusive practices are also quite common in modern settings. In *The IT Crowd* episode 3.02, protagonists Moss and Roy (IT technicians) are trying to blend in with "proper men" by learning to talk football (soccer) with the help of a website. After conversing for a while, Moss wants to back out and warns Roy about the ramifications if the men discover that he does not actually know anything about football.

Moss: Look we are messing with stuff we don't understand/听着 我们在搅和的事情连自己都一窍不通
We are through the looking glass/跟<u>国产零零漆</u>没啥两样 (We are no different from the guy in *From Beijing with Love*.)

The expression "through the looking glass" means stepping into a world completely foreign to them. It is part of the title of Lewis Carroll's fantasy adventure *Through the Looking Glass, And What Alice Found There*, the sequel to his famous *Alice in Wonderland*. The term *国产零零漆* is the title of a Hong Kong comedy film by Stephan Chow, about a clueless mainland spy sent to Hong Kong to catch a coldblooded killer. The film was a tribute to classic spy films like the James Bond series. There are several reasons why this seemingly strange translation is appropriate, but only to people who have watched the film, who will know that it is about an oblivious person going into a strange world he has never been to before (which fits the original intended meaning). They will also know that it implies a number of misfortunes that will befall the heroes if they do not bow out as soon as possible (alluding to future events). Moreover, because the film's hero is an outmoded James Bond wannabe, not unlike Moss and Roy in this episode, by using this reference, the translator is mocking their lame attempt at becoming "proper men".

But one of the best examples in abusive translation I have ever come across is not from the analysis; rather, it is from one of the interviews with the editor/translator of *Survivor*. He recalled an instance where the he translated "Believe me, you will be fine" into 信春哥 得永生 ("Believe in Li Yuchun, and you will have eternal life"). This is a popular internet expression that is derived from the Bible's "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

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Li Yuchun is a Chinese celebrity from the singing competition *Super Girls*. This is expression is a mockery of her fans' devotion to her, and the derived meaning of this expression is to describe trusting someone who is actually extremely unreliable. Since *Survivor* is a show where the contestants use cunning and strategies to prevail over their opponents, the original context of this dialogue is meant to be ironic. Since no one can actually trust their opponents, they will not be fine, thus this translation actually fits the context perfectly. But like other examples of abusive translation, if the audience does not know the reference, he/she will not be able to get the full meaning of the dialogue.

It is obvious that abusive translation is often practiced in fansubbing, but only in select occasions. As the analyses above have shown, four shows out of six contain instances of true abusive translation, but there are almost no abusive examples in network dramas (with the exception of one comment). The analysis shows that although fansub groups allow experimentations in some occasions, they do not arbitrarily translate all shows abusively. The two examples of the viewers' complaints also demonstrate that they do not embrace experimentations blindly, and when they cannot understand a cultural reference, they are not hesitant to speak out. But if the original texts allow for (or sometimes even demand) a certain degree of free rein over the translation, the translators will not miss the opportunity.

A case of fandom influencing translation practices: slash

One of the biggest motivators for fansubber to use abusive translation is as fandom expression. Since fansubbers are first and foremost fans, they often try to combine their fan activities with their translation work, and that can lead to some unexpected consequences.

Traditional fan communities create byproducts based on the show/movie that do not directly influence the meaning of the show (especially for average viewers who are not fans). Fansubbing is perhaps the only opportunity to alter the original text and the way audiences receive the message simultaneously, instead of making comments about it after the fact. Although fandom theorists such as Henry Jenkins always theorize an interactive audience (Jenkins, 2002), I believe fansubbing is the truly interactive form of fandom because it is able to reach to the root of meaning – language –and mediate or sometimes even completely change it with a fan-made translation, not constrained by commercial forces.

As noted before, fansub is a minor category within the large area of pop-culture fandom, therefore larger trends within fan culture have major influences on fansubbing practices, and one of these influences is the trend of slash fandom.

Fangirls and Slash Fandom

Fansub groups in China are largely made up of women and girls; as one group leader once jokingly said, "The default gender in our group is female; if you are unsure, just assume it's a girl". The exact reason for this gender tendency in Chinese fansubbing is unknown, but it is safe to claim that fangirls are in charge of producing a large majority of Chinese fansubs, and because of this tendency, the personal preferences of fangirls sometimes seeps into their work.

Slash fandom is by no means a phenomenon created by Chinese fans or even the Asian fan community. In fact, scholars believe that the first instance of slash came from America with the rise of fan fictions for the original *Star Trek* series and romantic stories between the

series main protagonists Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock (Bury, 2005). In short, slash fandom is fans who create fiction, artworks and videos about a homosexual relationship between malecharacters in a work of fiction (including TV series, movies, comics, or novels). The term "slash" is used because of the use of the slash symbol to describe different parings, eg: Kirk/Spock or K/S stories. Slash fiction is a type of "shipping" practice, which is a term that is more encompassing of all types of fan created romantic relationships (Rambukkana, 2007).

Fandom scholars generally regard slash fiction as a unique and subversive practice that works against the dominant ideology (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1991 & 1992). Penley (1991) refers to this genre as "guerrilla erotica" which calls upon the guerrilla warfare analogy of De Certeau. Fans who write slash are inventing homosexual stories that may not be intended by the original producers of the text, and the reading turns the dominant heterosexual ideology of the original texts on its head and renders the homosocial desires between the male characters that are suppressed by the dominant ideology apparent (Sedgwick, 1985). In China, this movement is commonly referred to as "danmei", and participants are able to mobilize and create a public sphere that works to address various feminist issues that they are unable to in offline life (Yang & Xu, 2016). Slash thus becomes an epitome of the ways in which fandom can operate as a subversive subculture.

Slashing Fansubs

Slash fandom does not exist for every series, only those that feature a strong male/male relationship, such as the traditional buddy-cop genre. Recent examples include: BBC's

Sherlock, CBS's *Hawaii Five-O*, USA's *White Collar*, and Fox's *House M.D.*[2] The

homosexual subtexts within these series attracted many female viewers' attention, and the

predominately female fansub group is also a part of this female viewership. Although the

analysis of the subtitles (discussed in more detail next chapter) did not reveal a clear slash

tendency because the shows were deliberately chosen to cover the most popular shows in a

wide range and genre, observation did show a trend towards slash fandom for some of the

shows mentioned above.

The shows that feature slash storylines are usually the types of shows that are extremely

popular within the fansubbing community; translators will fight for a chance to translate these

shows. Every Tuesday during the airing of *White Collar*, many translators will wait in the

group's chat room for the group leader in charge to recruit translators. The group leader will

usually choose a fixed group of people to translate these shows, because they are either better

translators or are more familiar with the particular ways of translations that was required. I

once received an instruction from the editor of *White Collar* to "make it more slashy," which

means to try and translate the lines between or about the two male leads in a way that makes

them more romantically ambiguous or even sexually suggestive when possible. The editor

believed that in order to attract the large slash fan base of this show, the subtitles needed to

enhance the homosexual subtexts that drew the slash fans.

Popular shows with a slash fan base not only initiate in-group competition but also

intergroup conflicts, because groups fight for first releases of these shows even though they

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[2] The producers of *House M.D.* often notes that the show is inspired by Sherlock Holmes, which is probably the originator of the buddy-cop genre; thus it can be included in the same genre.

may not be the most popular shows on TV. According to the editor of *Sherlock*, although *Ragbear* was initially the only group translating *Sherlock* after its first episode aired, by the third and final week of the show's airing, at least two other major fansub groups that were not previously interested in British series had joined the competition. But a first release is not the only thing the groups are competing for. The groups are also fighting to translate the show in as romantically ambiguous a way as possible, so that more slash fans can download and praise their subtitles. There was a discussion in the chat room about how other groups are trying to imitate the "slashy" translation style that *Ragbear* originated and whether or not it constituted plagiarism, although it soon diverged into a discussion of the show's own "slashiness." This discussion clearly demonstrates that turning subtitle into a slash-fan product is the deliberate intention of the fansub producers, and they also consciously recognize slash as an important "selling point" in their subtitles.

However, this type of practice is not universally cherished in the fansubbing world, because not all fansubbers are slash fans and not even all slash fans appreciate an overtly homosexual translation. A male group leader who specializes in police and crime drama was initially in charge of *White Collar* because the show fits his genre of preference. However, he soon became very irritated by all the suggestive translations he received; by midseason he had passed the editorial duties onto a female editor who is deeply into the slash fandom. He once commented, "I don't mind gay storylines as long as it is *in the story*, but I don't like it when you guys [the translators] make up nonexistent stuff". Yet the editor who took over the show also slowly changed her practice of making the show overtly "slashy". According to an

interview she did for the group's annual magazine, she received numerous comments suggesting that the translation should be faithful to the original text and the translators should stop being too self-indulgent with their translations. The comments invoked several discussions within the group about translators' roles and boundaries, and after careful consideration the editor decided to "tone it down". Since *Ragbear* does not specialize in slash, and it also caters to a general audience who are not even aware of the homosexual subtexts, their translations could make understanding the plot more difficult for these audiences.

This controversy initiated by slash fan practice shows that fansub groups not only consider themselves to be fan/interest groups, but also producers of subtitles beyond fandom possessing a certain degree of professionalism. While fandom practices such as slash bring a sense of subversiveness into fansubbing that make it more closely resemble an anti-mainstream movement, fansubbing group as a community will not and cannot operate in complete isolation from the mainstream. Once again, fansubbers find themselves walking in the delicate gray area between fans and producers, and between subculture and the mainstream.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

When I began this project, I fully shared the sentiments of most scholars studying fansub groups and saw fansub groups as the opposition to dominant ideology. However, when I finished my observation, I saw fansub groups operating in a much more complex cultural space than I first anticipated.

Several key events happened towards the end of my observation that allowed me to gain a deeper understanding into the world of fansubbing. One major event is the feud between Ragbear (and several other fansub groups) and YYeTs described in Chapter 4. The feud first started with a criticism of YYeTs' translations, but later became a more serious discussion of translators' and fansub group's ethics and responsibilities towards their audiences, including the commercialization of fan-made subtitles. This feud is a clear indication that even within the world of fansubbing, there are very different beliefs and approaches to the work that I am not entirely privy to. The fact that my findings differ from some of the other research that focused on YYeTs (ie: Hu, 2012; Wang, 2017) is further proof of this variability. Wu (2017) calls this contrast the altruistic model vs. the monetized model of fansubbing. Although I would categorize the attitude towards commercialization more as a continuum rather than two distinct models, and Ragbear and YYeTs sits on the opposite side of this continuum. Ragbear's attitude is more in-line with anti-commercialization, not just non-commercialization. It is important to note that anti-commercialization is not the same as non-commercialization, as many other researchers have theorized (eg: Hu, 2012; Tian, 2011; Wu, 2017), Because fansubbers from Ragbear not only choose to stay away from

commercialization, they actively condemn any efforts at commercialization by other groups.

Social media campaigns were launched and many articles were written to explain why

commercialization is detrimental to the development of fansub groups. However, the efforts

of this condemnation did not yield much result, and YYeTs remains the biggest fansub group

in China, perhaps due to their commercialization. This also highlights the market driven

nature of the fansub world.

The second event is about fansubbers' attitude towards official translators' work. After

Men in Black 3 (2012) was released in China, there was a backlash against the translator of

the film for mistranslating jokes, and the criticisms mainly came from fansubbers who

believed they could do better. Several posts were written to point out the mistakes, and to

offer their own version of the translation. While this event happened after the conclusion of

my observation period, it still shows the sense of pride fansubbers have for their work and

abilities. Fansubbers see themselves as professionals, or even better than professional

translators who make money for their work. They are not only authorities of translation but

also of foreign culture. In the internet culture of China, fansubbers are seen as elites (Jenkins,

2013); they consider themselves as the true insiders, the real ambassadors in the spread of

foreign cultures.

To me, the anti-commercialization attitude is what distinguishes fansub groups from any

other translation activities. The two incidents cited above provide the perfect examples of this

attitude. It not only speaks to an inherent sense of pride in doing volunteer work, it also

emphasizes the importance for fansub groups to remain on the fringe, especially at the

institutional level. Different institutions pose different types of threat to fansub groups: copyright holders can bring legal actions, and several fansubbers were arrested in Japan in January of 2018 (*Animenewnetwork.com,* 2018). Official video websites can potentially make the fansub group's work invisible (Wu, 2017). The government is the constant danger that can shut down the entire fansub community with their immense power over the cyberspace. It is the fringe status that ensures fansub group's continual survival.

During the interview process, the term that continues to pop up is "gray zone". It can be used in several different ways, but most often, it refers to the fansub group's position at the edge of legality. But it can also be referred to position that fansub groups occupy as both fans and media producers, and the difference between the two is not as big as I first anticipated.

As more and more fansub groups emerge in China, the fansubbing world is also becoming a free market dictated by supply/demand and competition. Audiences are free to choose which ever group's subtitles they like. The only way to win more viewers is through speed and quality. This ever-changing environment makes answering the research questions posed in the beginning of this study a far more complex endeavor than I first expected.

The core value of fansubbing is no doubt fandom, as Henry Jenkins (1992) theorized, being a fan also needs to follow certain rules and customs. This is another reason why beliefs such as voluntarism and free and open resource sharing are so central to fansub groups' practices. In simplest terms, fansub groups are fans of foreign films and TV that come together to help fellow fans who love the same things but cannot understand the foreign language. As fans become producers themselves, they also become the leaders of western TV

fandom in China. Thousands of Chinese audiences look to fansub groups for the latest releases of western TV shows and films. Fansub groups provide a gateway to continuing discussions and interactions between fans of western TV shows. It is safe to say that without fansub groups, western TV fandom would not be able to exist in China, let alone thrive as it does today.

Organization, hierarchical structure and careful division of labor set fansub groups apart from traditional fandom practices and more like a professional media organization. But the biggest difference between fansubbing and traditional media producers is profit and freedom. The volunteerism exhibited by fansub groups can even seems exploitative at times, because most fansubbers provide free labor to distribute commercial products. But fansubbers themselves see their work more as cultural ambassadors who fulfill a need that is currently not being met by the official market.

Though fansubbers receives great pride and respect from the online community, they eventually have to go back to their lives. While fansubbers are free to join and leave the group as they please, they have to operate under certain guidelines once they become members. Trust and responsibility are the backbones of a fansubbing operation, because without financial motivations, the only thing pushing the translators to complete their tasks on time is the sense of responsibility they have to their audiences. This neoliberal work ethic (Hu, 2012 & 2017) is at the heart of all fansub groups; though working solely for responsibility is not able to sustain long term commitments, it is the community and the love of popular culture that sustain fansubbers.

Ultimately, fansubbers are passionate fans of foreign dramas, and it is their love and need to constantly engage in fannish activities that kept their interests alive. As the case of slash fansubbing has shown, sometimes the fannish activities can even interfere with the work of fansubbing. It is up to the individual fansubbers to balance their fandom with their work, and this is another difference between fansubbers and media producers.

The freedom from various constrains such as censorship and professional standard of conduct can be another very appealing aspect of fansubbing. The subtitles produced by fansub groups can vary drastically in style and quality. There are some shows where the translations strictly conform to the source text and rarely deviate from translation in the traditional sense. These subtitles are dictated by the original text and the constraints of time codes. Filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha believes that subtitles that conform to the screen time and the idea of synchronization between spoken dialogue and subtitles is a very ideological practice: its purpose is to disguise the existence of the subtitle and making it as invisible to the viewers as possible (Trinh, 1992). In this sense, fansubbers usually do operate within the dominant ideology and aims to be an invisible mediator of cultures.

Every so often, fansub translators will use the power of their freedom and perform various experiments on the translations. This kind of experimentation is what Philip Lewis calls "abusive translation". As Chapter 5 has shown, fansubbers can use anything from notes, slang, and idioms to commentaries in their subtitles. Fansubbing is an integral part of popular culture; it interacts with various branches of Chinese culture and draws references from classic novels, foreign animations, to internet slang and pop-culture events; and it

simultaneously creates new references to sustain continual growth of the culture.

The shortcoming of this research is that it only focuses on a single group and its subtitles. In the future, researchers may choose to compare and contrast the styles and practices of several groups from different countries and theorizes their differences and similarities for a more holistic look at the world of fansubbing. Quantitative research such as content analysis can also be performed on fansub subtitles, to examine the degree of accuracy, distortions, and even abusiveness of the subtitles. The interactions between fansub group and the audience is another interesting avenue to pursue. Although this paper touched upon a few examples where audiences comments on fansubbers' work, it is only from the standpoint of the fansubber. All in all, there are many more issues that deserve academic attention within fansubbing, and this study only adds a small piece of understanding to this vast research topic.

In the end, I found the analogy of guerilla warfare used by de Certeau extremely appropriate to describe the status of fansub groups: they fight every day to evade being institutionalized, while simultaneously trying to reach a large audience. They operate in the shadows, but evidence of their work can be seen in every corner of the internet. The efforts of fansub groups are not overtly oppositional to the government; most members see it as a hobby, and some are even quite nationalistic. But fansub group's existence automatically constitutes a force of resistance by providing an alternative communication channel in the increasingly restrictive Chinese cyberspace. The tactic used in this warfare is simple: keep surviving.

Epilogue

Even as my observation ended with Ragbear, my relationship with the group did not end.

I continued to work and stay in contact with many members and consider them my friends.

One thing that continues to amaze me is the resilience of fansubbers even in the most dire of

circumstances; they have persisted when the government shut down a major distribution

channel: verycd.com, as well as a major subtitle website shooter.com. But the biggest

challenge to the survival of the fansub group is the proliferation of legal streaming platforms

in China.

Beginning in 2014, the major Chinese video streaming website Sohu began purchasing

copyright license for multiple American dramas (xiniu yule, 2019). Many popular U.S. TV

series including the politically sensitive *House of Cards* were legally streaming on Chinese

websites and some were even simulcasting. Scholars have also noticed this movement

towards watching a legalized form of foreign content, and documented instances where

fansub groups started to collaborate with official copyright holders to produce subtitles

(Meng & Wu, 2013; Hu, 2017, Wu, 2017). The issue of copyright became the forefront issue

with legalized streaming, and some even see this trend as a potential end to the fansub

movement (Gu, 2018).

However, the trend of legal streaming foreign content did not last very long; in April

2014, the government suddenly ordered the Chinese copyright holders of four U.S. series to

pull them offline. These series are: *The Big Bang Theory*, *The Good Wife*, *NCIS*, and *The

Practice* (Feng & Wang, 2014). In September, 2014, China's State Administration of Radio,

Film and Television (SARFT), issued the "Notice concerning Further Implementing

Regulations on the Management of Online Foreign Film and Television Dramas," which set a

limit to how many foreign TV shows can be purchased per year, with no more than 30% of its

domestic purchases, as well as directing the websites to examine their contents for any

violation of Chinese laws before publishing online (SARFT, 2014). This directive effectively

ends simulcasting practices and the legal status of many U.S. TV series. Most recently,

Tencent.com was forced to stop the streaming of the final episode of *Game of Thrones* due to

the increasing tension between the U.S. and China (Zhang, 2019). Though legal streaming is

still continuing, with Tencent dominating the market (xiniu yule, 2019), it is no longer on the

rising trend as it was in 2014.

Ironically, the government's increasing censorship practices are aiding the survival of

fansub groups; by cutting off legal means to watch their favorite TV shows, the audiences

will inevitably turn back to alternative means to watch these contents, and fansub groups are

one of the only places that provide these alternative means. Once again, the "gray area" that

fansub groups occupy becomes the refuge for many seeking foreign contents. So as long as

there is government censorship, there will always be a need for fansub groups.

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2 Notes are used to help understand the pun of "duty" vs. "doody"

Figure 2: the eyeshadow that looks like twisted fried dough

Figure 3: a fan's comment

Figure 4: Poor taxi driver

Figure 5: Emotional comment "get the hell out"

Figure 6: Obscene acronym

Figure 7: Careful of your skin!

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Demographic info

What is your education level?

Are you working right now?

Motivation related

When did you join the subtitle group?

What types of drama do you usually work on?

Can you estimate how many hours you usually work per week?

Besides the shows you work on, do you watch any other foreign TV shows?

How did you first learn about the subtitle group?

What makes you want to join the subtitle group?

What do you think is the best thing about joining the subtitle group?

What about the worst?

Translation related

Did your impressions of the subtitle group change after joining the group?

Do you pay attention to what audiences say about your translation?

Do you watch subtitles from other subtitle groups?

Will you compare other people's translation to your own?

Have you ever encountered anything very difficult to translate?

What types of tools do you use to help you translate?

Cultural differences

Have your ever paid attention to American shows' portrayal of China?

What are the main cultural differences you notice between the U.S. and China?

Have any of the portrayals in U.S. dramas changed your opinions about the U.S.?

Legal issues

Are you aware of copyright laws in China?

Do you think subtitle groups violate the law?

What are your thoughts on government crackdowns?

What are your thoughts on official translations?

Do you think there will be a future for subtitle groups if there are more officially imported

media?

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