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**OFFICIAL MASTER'S DEGREE IN TRANSLATION, INTERPRETING
AND INTERCULTURAL STUDIES**



*Strategies and translation practices of anime fansub groups,
and the distribution of fansubs in China*

Master's Thesis

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Strategies and translation practices of anime fansub groups, and the distribution of fansubs in China

Resumen

Este trabajo estudia las características de los grupos de *fansubs* como organizaciones de aficionados en el contexto de la cultura *otaku*. Las dos primeras secciones presentarán el marco teórico, así como el concepto de *fansub*, la división interna de las tareas y la cadena de cooperación de los grupos de *fansub*. También se mencionará la situación actual de los grupos de *fansub* y los problemas de derechos de autor implicados.

Además, en el campo de la traducción, en la sección 3 analizaremos las diversas características de la traducción de grupos de *fansub* y lo compararemos con subtítulos de traductores profesionales. En la sección 4, se analizará y evaluará la calidad de la traducción *amateur* desde la perspectiva de la reacción del espectador. Al final de este trabajo, se resumirá brevemente el análisis mencionado anteriormente y se plantearán futuras líneas de investigación.

Palabras clave

Fansubs, subtítulo, cultura *otaku*, traducción audiovisual, traducción *amateur*.

Abstract

This paper aims to study the characteristics of the fansub groups as amateur organizations in the context of *otaku* culture. The first two sections will introduce the theoretical framework, as well as the concept of fansub, the internal division of works and the chain of cooperation of fansub groups. It will also mention the current situation of fansub groups and the copyright issues involved.

In addition, in the field of translation, in section 3 we will analyze the various features of a translation by fansub groups and compare it with professional subtitle translations. In section 4, the quality of amateur translation will be analyzed and evaluated from the perspective of viewer's reaction. At the end of the paper, the analysis mentioned above will be briefly summarized and further lines of research will be considered.

Keywords

Fansubs, subtitling, *otaku* culture, audiovisual translation, amateur translation.

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Introduction

Translation is a bridge that facilitates the communication between two different languages. Through translation, people can understand the aspects of another culture. Those who are using different languages can also communicate with each other through translation. As cross-cultural communication continues, works of other cultures are gradually being known and appreciated by people from other language cultures.

In the process of cross-cultural communication, as a group that is organized spontaneously by amateurs, the fansub group performs a role and acts as an agent that voluntarily translates and distributes. These are collectives of amateur translators that distribute content not available in their territories through electronic channels. However, in the existing research of these days, many scholars usually conflate the fansub group with television works and online communication. In fact, the fansub group has its own characteristics and research values (Yu, 2012: 138-141).

This thesis mainly discusses the activities of fansub groups within the *otaku*¹ culture. At present, the study of otaku culture is still in a shallow stage. First of all, as a subculture which is not widely understood, the otaku culture is rarely paid attention to, and there were very few researchers interested in its study up until two decades ago. Although in 1996 Okada Toshio introduced and analyzed at length the otaku culture in his book called *Introduction to Otakuology* (『オタク学入門』), up until now the circle of *otaku* is still being misunderstood and even discriminated. Because of this, although the activity of a fansub group is aimed at the widest promotion of their favorite anime² works, the spread of their translation works is mostly circumscribed to insiders of *otaku* culture.

In addition, many audiences are only interested in the translation result – the videos they watch. They are unaware of the work of fansub groups behind the video. Without the audience's reaction, it will be difficult to improve the quality of translation. And for fansub group, which is spontaneously organized and whose default audience is relatively narrow, the

¹ *Otaku* will not be written in italics hereafter.

² Since *anime* is also a recurring term, it will not be written in italics hereafter. The lexicalization of 'otaku' and 'anime' in English has extended the use of plural forms, even if those words do not have plural forms in Japanese, so the plural renderings 'animes' and 'otakus' will be used in this work.

difficulty of improvement is even higher. Although not all audiences are concerned about the quality of the subtitle translation, a good translation can undoubtedly enhance the viewing experience, and thereby enhance the popularity of the viewed works. From the perspective of communication, the analysis of the audience's feedback has a long-term significance.

The research presented in this master's thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of what is otaku culture and how the fans communicate and exchange information, thereby reducing the misunderstandings and prejudices in this field. At the same time, the goal of the analysis is to contribute to the study of the translation quality of fansubs, so that more translation suggestions can be brought to the members of fansub groups, thus further enhancing the accuracy and aesthetics of translation, and allowing the cross-cultural communication of subculture to go further.

This work is divided into four parts. In section 1, the background knowledge related to the issues discussed in this paper will be introduced. The mentioned background includes the definition of otaku and a brief introduction to the otaku culture. Changes in the role of reader/audience in the context of the information age will also be mentioned. Section 2 is a brief introduction to fansub, in which the concept of fansub will be explained in detail, as well as the internal division of works and the chain of cooperation of fansub groups. After the explanation, the actual situation of fansub groups and the involved copyright issues will also be mentioned.

In section 3, the characteristics of the translation by the subtitle groups will be analyzed. First, we will compare the fansub groups with the professional translation in several aspects, such as the work process and edition. Then, from the fansub group's language style, visual appearance and other aspects, various cases will be analyzed in order to summarize their characteristics. Section 4 will focus in the rapport between fansub groups and their audience, and the different practices of feedback on translation quality.

Finally, in the conclusion, we will evaluate the observations extracted from the analysis and summarize the main results of the study.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Background

This work discusses subtitle production with the background of amateurs' communications. In the research of fansub, there are a number of studies that have been conducted. Díaz Cintas has given a detailed introduction in his papers about subtitling. For example, in 'Fansubs: Audiovisual Translation in an Amateur Environment' (Díaz and Muñoz, 2006), a paper that specifically describes aspects of a fansub group's work from the perspective of a fansubber – such as the division work, work chain, and what software will be used in different situations. In addition, this paper lists some examples of translations to illustrate what problems may arise when translating through a pivot language.

In 'Los Fansubs: el caso de traducciones (no tan) amateur' (Martínez, 2010), the author not only meticulously summarized the differences between fansubs and professional subtitles, but also gave a number of examples to explain how fansub groups of Spanish speaking countries work.

In the papers mentioned above, the copyright issues of the United States and the Spanish speaking countries are addressed. We will not focus on such issues here since our main interest is the feedback rapport between viewers of fansubs and the fansub groups.

As for the aspect of otaku culture, since otaku culture itself is an area that eludes easy explanations and it is constantly evolving, relevant research in academia has been stagnant. This situation occurs because there is a certain separation between the otaku community and the research community. Those who have an informed understanding of the otaku culture and could tackle wide-scope analyses of the ACG³ community rarely engage in academic research. People who do not understand otaku culture tend to summarize it with a shallow, generalized perspective. In China, many researchers conduct otaku culture research with an attitude of seeking novelties and trends. They regard it as a social phenomenon among a minority of people. When outsiders try to learn about the otaku culture through these studies, they are misdirected. Therefore, it is necessary that the insiders speak for themselves and do

³ 'ACG' is the acronym for 'Anime, Comics and Games'. The term is used mainly in the sinosphere to refer to the subcultures focused on such media.

so from demanding scholarly standards.

1.2. Changes of audience's position in the information age

At first, the translation was a relatively unidirectional process. The translator translates the original text into the target language, and the readers read the translated text. There is very little direct communication between these two sides. This is because readers choose to read translations because they do not have the ability to read in the text's source language. It is precisely because of this that they are unable to identify if the translations are good or bad. They can at most tell whether the translation is easy to understand or not, and they can assess the stand-alone literary prowess of the text, but they cannot tell whether the translator has faithfully expressed the original author's intentions or its aesthetic features.

In this process, the translator's understanding of the original text occupies an important position. The reader can only guess the original author's intentions according to the translation. However, as the ability of ordinary readers to read and write in foreign languages has increased, more and more of them have the ability to read the original work and even to speak directly with the original author. They have their own views on the content, language style, and ideas of the original text. This means that when readers appreciate the translation, they have a key reference which the readers of the past do not have: the text in its original language. This reference has greatly improved the reader's ability to discriminate and criticize the quality of translation. When the expression of a translation differs from their comprehension, the readers can analyze the translation. They can also develop a translation criticism using the original text as a benchmark (Zhang, 2007).

The most basic function of translation criticism is supervision. What is more, it can be used for guiding the readers and translators. Translation criticism can provide readers with reference opinions on translation choices and provide cases for those who engaged in translation work (Yang, 2005:21). In every field of communication, the receivers' feedback is extremely important. However, the traditional translation criticism mainly focuses on literary translation criticism, the people involved in translation criticism are limited by the factors of the academic environment and their perspective is therefore narrow (Wang, 2015:73-76).

Nowadays, translation criticism through networked communication channels is timelier and more targeted.

Apart from the improvement of the language ability, with the coming of the information age, the identity of the reader as a mere receiver of information is also changing. The Internet has allowed translation criticism to no longer be restricted by the traditional standard. The way that readers express their own evaluation of translation is also much easier than in the past (Wang, 2015). For the network is a public domain which allows anonymous activities, social opinions and personal ideas can be expressed relatively freely in this area. In the field of online translation criticism, one can question the authorities. Thus, the readers get their right to speak. They can talk with the original author, discuss with the translator, and express their dissatisfaction to the official translations. This revolutionary change is gradually spreading. The leap of readers' methods of getting information and the improvement of reading ability has allowed them to change the relationship between author, translator and reader.

The translation process is a process that culminates in a translated text being produced, published, disseminated, and consumed. Generally speaking, readers are direct consumers of the translations, and their feedback is closely related to the optimization of translation. Reader's comment is the foundation of translation criticism research. Although not all translation criticism is useful, the multi-perspective and wide vision of the readers will open up a broader path for critical research in translation.

The change of the role of readers has an analogue in the changing role of viewers. In the beginning, the viewers were unable to obtain video sources nor had enough language skills to watch untranslated animes. The videos uploaded by fansub groups is one of the channels through which they contact the otaku culture. With the process of caption production being increasingly convenient, and video sources being also easier to obtain than in the past, viewers are freed from the passive stance of being unable to choose from a limited array of content and they can rely on the translations by diverse fansub groups to access otherwise undistributed content. As a result, viewers began to evaluate the translations and search for the better translated version according to their own needs.

1.3. Otaku culture

‘Otaku’ is a term that refers to a nerd, geek or fanboy. An otaku can be a hardcore or cult fan. The word ‘otaku’ (御宅, おたく) originates from a polite second-person pronoun meaning ‘your home’ in Japanese, allowing the speaker to refer to the listener indirectly (Azuma, 2009).

Okada Toshio's *Introduction to Otakuology* (オタク学入門) states that the contemporary usage of ‘otaku’ originated in the early 1980s. At that time, the senior figures of the Japanese anime industry, Haruhiko Mikimoto and Kawamori Shōji, used this word to call each other. After graduating from college, they chose to work in an animation company called STUDIO NUE, and reflected some of their habits into animations, such as characters using ‘otaku’ to call each other. In 1982, a landmark work in the history of Japanese sci-fi anime, *Macross* began to broadcast. Haruhiko Mikimoto and Kawamori Shoji were the main creators of this work. In one scene of the story, the heroine Lynn Minmay called the protagonist Ichijō Hikaru ‘otaku’. From then on, with the popularity of *Macross*, the way to call each other ‘otaku’ quickly spread between science fiction fans and anime fans. In a short time, at various *anime* shows, science fiction conventions, and *dōjinshi* exhibitions,⁴ anime fans began to greet each other with ‘otaku’ to advertise their status as senior anime and science fiction fans (Okada, 1996).

In 1983, Nakamori Akio, a famous social critic, mentioned the word ‘otaku’ in his article ‘Otaku Research’ (「おたく」の研究), which was published in the magazine *Manga Burikko* (漫画ブリッコ) (Azuma, 2012: 45). Thus, the word ‘otaku’ first appeared in serious publications and entered the research field of sociology. In the article, Nakamori defined the word ‘otaku’ as ‘anime and science fiction fan with no connotation’, revealing the inseparable relationship between this second person pronoun and its unproblematic use in the anime and science fiction community.

In the early 1990s, Okada Toshio, who calls himself ‘Otaking’ (king of otaku), began to speak for otaku culture. On the one hand, he continues to make anime works as a producer. On the other hand, he promotes his concept of otaku in various articles: ‘Those who have a high degree of concern for subcultures other than mainstream culture, and possess a high level

⁴ *Dōjinshi*, are amateur and self-published *manga*, see 2.4.

of information collection and analysis capabilities. They stand on the forefront of the cultural development' (Okada, 1996: 11-12). Above is his definition of otaku. From this we can see that this view tries to redress mainstream discriminatory views on otaku culture. He also holds that the otaku culture is the harbinger of a new social configuration and people should be proud of being an otaku. Regardless of whether the viewpoint is correct or not, it highlights a basic feature of otaku. That is, 'the degree that they focus on certain things is far from other people.'

In Japanese, *zoku* (族, そく) is often used to refer to a certain group or urban tribe. At first, the meaning of *otaku-zoku* (御宅族) referred to those anime and sci-fi fans who called each other 'otaku'. Nakamori's 'Otaku Research' also launched while this background was current. But his description of the otaku in the text, from how they dress to the *comiket*,⁵ is full of negative evaluation and even malicious assessments. Nakamori's evaluation of the otaku also largely represents the opinions of ordinary people in Japanese society. At the same time, in the animation industry, the old generation of senior anime fans had gradually stopped using 'otaku' to call each other, and turned to call those young junior anime fans 'otaku.' From this phenomenon, it can be seen that the early *otaku-zoku* was not a group that could be exalted (Wang, 2013).

Although people have been defining and discussing otaku within the area of anime, in fact, at the beginning, the meaning of 'otaku' was quite diversified. Not only anime fans could be called 'otaku'. Sci-fi fans, model fans and war fans, all these above can also be called 'otaku'. In a broad sense, we can call anyone who indulges in a certain hobby and reaches a certain degree of obsession an 'otaku'. However, narrowly speaking, the so-called otaku culture is based on its identification with *manga*⁶ and anime.

Until the end of the 1980s, 'otaku' still referred to the vast majority of normal anime fans, and this way of calling others still circulated in the Japanese ACG community. Until 1989, with the shocking 'Miyazaki Incident' in Japan, the otaku circle had caused widespread concern and criticism for the first time outside the animation circle.

Between August and December of 1988, three cases of disappearance of girls aged 4 to 7

⁵ An abbreviation of 'comic market'. The biggest *dōjinshi* (amateur *manga*) sales event in Japan.

⁶ *Manga* is another term that will be reproduced without italics hereafter, due to its number of occurrences.

occurred in Saitama, Japan, and the body of one of the victims was discovered later. This series of cases attracted the attention of the Japanese police authorities. In July of the following year, the police arrested a man named Miyazaki for the crime of defamation of a child. When the police searched and retrieved the evidence of his residence, they accidentally discovered the videos that were taken when Miyazaki kidnapped the victimized girls. This is the 'Miyazaki incident.'

However, what is even more shocking to the police and the public than the bizarre killings, is that in Miyazaki's family there is a large collection of anime and graphic materials, as well as cartoon animations, *dōjinshi*, and pornography depicting sexual metamorphosis and sexual abuse. The media seized the topic of a disturbed otaku in order to gain attention rates. Since then, the term otaku has been equated with the fat, perverted image of Miyazaki.

The incident accelerated the change in the definition of otaku, which would no longer be 'enthusiast of harmless hobbies'. Affected by the Miyazaki incident, the word has become synonymous with pedophilia and autism. Animes and mangas have also been regarded as a catalyst for crimes and 'sexual deviancy' and have affected the reputation of Japanese society. Although Miyazaki eventually received a sentence of death penalty in 2006, the 'Miyazaki incident' caused a freeze period of Japanese anime which lasted five years. When all of Japan was criticizing and attacking otakus, and in order to change this situation, with the moniker 'Otaking', Okada Toshio frequently appeared in various television programs. He defended for the otaku and expressed his support to this group of people. Up until 1995, when the famous anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* started broadcasting, the situation of criticizing otaku and otaku culture began to ease. The book *Introduction to Otakuology* was published during that period.

The development of otaku culture experienced a new push in the 2000s. The scholars' research and politicians' admiration are all important reasons for promoting the development and expansion of otakus and otaku culture in Japan. The most typical example of the penetrating of otaku culture in Japanese politics is Asō Tarō, the Otaku Prime Minister. This former Japanese Prime Minister not only called the otakus on the streets of Akihabara⁷ to vote for him during the election, but also admitted his interests to otaku culture on television.

⁷ Tokyo's famous electronic district and the center of the otaku world.

However, it is the strong consumption power of otakus that promotes their social status. In 2006, a survey report by the Nomura Research Institute, a prominent Japanese social survey company, estimated that the economic benefits of the Japanese otaku market amounted to 88 billion yens (about 792 million USD). In a market dominated by cultural consumption and digital electronic consumption, the Akiba-Kei⁸ is gradually becoming a powerful promoter of the Japanese economy. At the same time, the development of the Internet economy has enhanced an otaku's lifestyle of mostly staying indoors. The economic base determines the superstructure, and the change in the role of otakus in the socio-economic structure determines its position on the cultural and political level. The mainstream success of the *Train Man (Densha otoko)* franchise in the mid-2000s also speaks of an attempt to harness skilled otaku's wealth and to co-opt them into conventional lifestyles (Freedman, 2009).

The fansub groups mentioned in this paper are those which have formed because of their love of anime. The aim of their activities is to introduce the otaku culture to a wider audience. The definition of otaku here takes the narrow one that we have mentioned first of all.

2. Brief introduction of fansub

2.1. The definition and characteristics of fansub

'Fansub group' refers to a group of fans who spontaneously create subtitles in order to spread film and television productions from another culture. With the continuous advancement of modern information technology, various types of popular cultural products from foreign countries have reached the audience through the Internet, which has prompted the birth of fansub. This type of translation made by fans has become a social phenomenon of Internet masses (Díaz and Muñoz, 2006).

In the era of the Internet, McLuhan's concept of 'global village' has been widely accepted. The commercialization and consumption of cultural products led to the globalization of cultural dumping. Among them, the first to be affected are cultural products such as a film and television works that are most easily accepted by the general public. However, when ordinary audiences want to enjoy more and better foreign cultural products,

⁸ The kind of otaku who hang out in Akihabara.

they have to face two major problems:

First, the number of cultural products cannot meet the needs of the audience. For example, China has strict restrictions on the introduction of foreign film and television works (Yu, 2012). According to the ‘Regulations of the SARFT⁹ on Further Strengthening and Improving the Management of the Introduction and Broadcasting of Overseas Film and Television serials’ which was published in February 2012, the length of the introduced foreign film and television serials in television should be confined within 50 episodes. What is more, foreign film and television serials must not exceed 25% of the total broadcasting time of the television programs of a day. As a result, the number of the films and television programs that have been introduced in China could not satisfy the growing demand of fans. Finding another way to get new video sources has become the top priority for the fansub group. This is actually very similar to the birth background of the first fansub groups in the United States (Ruh, 2012).

The appearance of fansubs of Japanese anime fully demonstrates that an audience’s requirements play an important role in cross-cultural communication. The contradiction between demand and supply is the basic driving force for this communication between fans. In the 1960s, the transmission of Japanese anime in the United States was restricted due to its violent and sexual content. Some fans formed Japanese anime clubs, such as the Cartoon/Fantasy Organization (C/FO), and shared Japanese animations for free with each other. Members of the club obtained video sources by going to Japan to buy or exchange tapes with Japanese audiences. However, these resources are not translated, in the video there is no English subtitle, and the viewers can only understand the story through images. In the late 1980s, the application of time-synchronized and S-VHS video systems enabled the output of precise text and images to be taped onto videotape. In this way, the first subtitled Japanese anime appeared in the United States, but the cost was very high. Afterwards, the development of technology has made the cost much lower. The Internet has become the main vehicle to transmit videos.

Fansub has a strong self-entertainment feature. They circumvent censorship measures in the traditional distribution chain, disseminate foreign cultural products through

⁹ State Administration of Radio and Television.

self-mobilization and coordination of member's capabilities, and use unauthorized communication behaviors to deconstruct the control of information by media agencies. Unlike the simple sharing of finished products, the production and distribution of media subtitled by fans requires a lot of time and effort (Yang, 2012: 48-55).

The activities of fansubs have the following characteristics. First, the work of fansub is a collaboration in a virtual community. Fansubbers do not aim for commercial interests. They spontaneously group together because they like the same work. In order to allow more people to see their favorite work, they create subtitles. In general, the members of fansub groups come from different regions and are engaged in different professions. They join in the group through the recruitment on the Internet and do not know each other's true identity. Everyone maintains contact with each other through instant messaging tools such as MSN, QQ, and Line. The trust between the members is the basic bond to maintain the fansub group's operation.

What is more, the quality and quantity of translation cannot satisfy the demands of the audience. Although the problem of film sources has been solved, when the cultural products of any country spread to other countries, the first thing that the audience faces is the barrier of language, which is the main problem in the cross-cultural communication. After all, not everyone has the ability to easily understand and accept the cultural products from another culture and language. For ordinary viewers, before the fansub group is created, the solution to the language barrier mainly comes through two channels: official translations and pirated CDs. However, although the translations sponsored by the Chinese government have guaranteed the quality, due to the long production cycle and low output, the officially translated videos are unable to meet the increasing demand of the audience. In the case of pirated CDs, although it has the characteristics of fast updating pace and a large degree of freedom of choice, the quality of translation is poor because the producers of these CDs only pursue speed and quantity. They even translate directly with translation software without polishing the translated text. These translations are incomprehensible and difficult to read. For those viewers whose education and aesthetic levels are gradually improving, this kind of translation cannot be tolerated. Therefore, with the development of the network, fans who have sufficient ability began to translate their favorite movies and TV programs and uploaded their Chinese

subtitles on a website to share with others.

The work of fansub requires some basic skills and knowledge, such as video editing, and the translators generally need to reach at least N2 level¹⁰ in Japanese. However, in fact, to join in a fansub group, one does not necessarily have to be a professional. Fansub is a group that is ‘constituted by fans’ and ‘serves the fans’, its recruitment requirements do not focus on professionalism, but on ‘love’. This is due to the fact that fansubber’s remuneration and investment are not proportional, and it is hard to stick to the work of producing subtitles without love of anime. When they enter the group, many members do not particularly understand the composition of fansub and what needs to be done. They usually learn while working. From this we can see that subtitle production is ‘amateur’ labor, not a ‘professional’ labor.

Secondly, this activity constitutes free labor under emotional involvement. As we said above, fansubbers’ activities are not aimed at commercial benefits. Their time and effort are not directly proportional to the rewards. In order to enable viewers of their shared language to get access to the updated video as soon as possible, fansubbers usually need to engage in a long and high-intensity work shift. Quite often, it can take all night long as they try to ensure the efficiency while providing the audience with high-quality translation. Sometimes, in the case of short TV animation episodes, fans are able to watch the videos with subtitles just only an hour after the broadcast in the original country. Therefore, in this hard and low rewarding process, the love for anime is indispensable.

The relatively larger fansub groups on the Internet generally rent servers and build their own websites or BBS (*bulletin board systems*). This is not a small cost. According to insiders (Sun, 2009), the hosting fee of a professional server of a fansub forum is 1,000 yuan (about 150 USD dollars) per month, and purchasing a server hardware would amount to 20,000 yuan (about 3,000 USD dollars). The server that the team members use to deposit the source video is 9,000 yuan (about 1,350 USD dollars), and the annual custodian fee is nearly 20,000 yuan. There are other costs involved such as the fee of some parts. The total is about 50,000 yuan

¹⁰ The results of international Japanese language grade examinations conducted by the Japan Foundation and Japan Educational Exchanges and Services are divided into five levels: N1, N2, N3, N4, and N5, of which N1 is the highest level. The N2 test taker needs to pass an intermediate Japanese language course, master higher level grammar, about 1000 *kanji*, and a vocabulary of about 6,000 words.

(about 7500 USD dollars) each year (Sun, 2009). These costs are subsidized by some fansub members themselves. The only benefit for the fansubber is to have a VIP account for the forum where one can download more extensive video resources.

From the perspective of audience psychology, people are unwilling to pay too much for the cost of enjoying entertainment products (Yu, 2012). The fansub group follows a non-profit and sharing operation method. Audiences can receive cross-cultural products for free. The activities of fansub group have allowed them to enjoy the cross-cultural communication at a nearly zero cost.

The Japanese animes translated by well-organized fansub groups are of high qualities. Some even have their own translation features. These fansub groups attract fans with their unique language style. There is online competition among the fansub groups and each of these groups have developed their own characteristics and styles. For example, the group POPG put forward the slogan of 'we would rather be slow than translate badly', emphasizing that translation should be as rigorous and accurate as possible; SOSG and Huameng emphasize the importance of knowledge of otaku culture. In their uploaded works, a large section of notes that explain background knowledge and *neta* can be seen.¹¹ The fansub group Zhushen is specialized in bilingual subtitle which is in Chinese and Japanese. In the selection of what kind of anime to translate, different fansub groups also have their own preferences. For example, the group Pipaxing prefers works of detective fiction; Feng Xue prefers the works of *Shueisha* (集英社, a Japanese book and video game publisher); the group WOLF specializes in the works which characters are mostly young girls.

2.2. Division of tasks and the chain of work

2.2.1. Division of tasks

In general, the work of members of fansub groups is divided into the following categories: raw acquisition, translation, timing, quality control, special effects, art and

¹¹ The explanation of *neta* added by fansub group will be mentioned in section 3.5. *Neta* has different meanings, but in its most simple definition, it can be understood as a background or context explanation for an implicit reference in a text. Since *neta* is a term that will be used profusely throughout the work, hereafter it will not be italicized. Also, the plural rendering 'netas' will be used.

uploading. To explain these categories, we will use a hypothetical example of a Chinese fansub collective (the information about the stages of the process has been summarized from Bi 2017).

The raw acquisition is responsible for providing untranslated original video files. Larger fansub communities often have multiple sources. Some files are provided through members who are in Japan. These members are usually international students studying in Japan. In Japan, in order to be able to watch television programs that they cannot watch during the scheduled broadcast, people often choose to use a television with a recording function to record the program just in case that they don't have the chance to watch it when it airs. The member responsible for obtaining the raw video records the anime when it is broadcasted in Japan, and then transfers the file back to China.

Alternatively, they can also download source files through different forums and software. In China, the most commonly used sharing methods are P2P (peer to peer) apps like BitTorrent, a program developed in 2001 that revolutionized the online distribution of anime (Ruh, 2012).

The translation team is responsible for translation and proofreading. The person who translates does not necessarily have to be a Japanese language major, as long as he or she has passed the Japanese Language Proficiency Test for level N1 or N2, or has a command of Japanese equal to those who pass JLPT N2 or N1. In addition to the ability to use a foreign language, the level of expression in their mother tongue is equally important.

Proofreading, or quality control, is responsible for checking whether the subtitle translation is accurate and whether it has expressed the meaning of the original text, and it must ensure the quality of the translation. Therefore, the proficiency of the proofreader's foreign language and mother tongue generally needs to be higher than that of the translator. Throughout the subtitling process, the members that translate and proofread must be at least two different people. But in some smaller fansub groups, if a member's skill is sufficient, there are also situations in which one person translates and proofreads at the same time.

If the raw video obtained includes the text of the dialogues (or Japanese subtitles), the translator can directly translate from the text. However, most of the raw videos do not have original Japanese subtitles. Thus, the translators need to listen to the dialogues and write down

the contents, or directly translate it while listening.

In addition, the translators need to have a good understanding of the ACG culture, because some anime vocabulary is rare and requires a certain amount of ACG knowledge. Moreover, when encountering an unknown term (such as very professional vocabulary), it also requires the ability to seek answers on foreign sites like 2CH (a Japanese anime BBS).

The proofread of timing is responsible for the strict control of the moment of each subtitle's appearance and the length of time it lingers on the screen, so that the time when the subtitles appear on the screen is synchronized with the dialogue. In order to prevent each sentence from exceeding the screen because it is too long, it needs to be properly segmented by the member responsible of the timing. This is a job that requires less ability in a fansub, but it is also relatively boring. It requires to have a certain foreign language proficiency (enough to distinguish between the content of the audio dialogues and that of the subtitles in the video) and be patient and meticulous. A skilled timing staff takes about 2-3 hours to complete the work for a 24-minutes anime series episode.

Special effects, or video editing, add special effects for subtitles that appear at specific times. For example, for the words of the opening and the ending songs, they can add some karaoke-like special effects. If the words or other subtitles and annotations in the original video already have special effects, they will try to restore these special effects on the produced subtitles. This step is not absolutely necessary, so some small caption groups usually do not spend extra time on special effects.

After all the work above is done, what the fansub group needs to do is to perform a final proofreading to ensure that the entire translated video is correct in all aspects. The next task is to convert the video file with subtitles (usually saved as .ASS Format) and the raw video to the compression. Usually, the videos that the fansub group works on are in AVI format. The task of compression is to compress the raw video and the subtitles together into RMVB format. After the video is compressed, it can be uploaded to the forum or other websites.

Nowadays, cloud storage has become a trend of sharing resources in China. The cloud storage propagation is based on the second transmission of the original resources, and its own network hard disk is for storing data. The publisher uploads and shares data to the network hard disk, and the recipients can find the required data through a specific link. They can

download it from the cloud disk to their PC or save it to their own cloud service. As long as the uploader keeps the resource undeleted, it can be downloaded forever. The shared data can be permanently saved on the personal cloud disk. The cloud disk solves the disadvantages of the limited storage space of PC hard disks, but animation resources in the cloud disk are often resources released by major animation forums, so the timeliness is weak (Fang, 2016). The advantage of cloud disk distribution is as follows:

1. It has a stable download speed. Unlike P2P and BT, the way that cloud disk downloads is similar to FPS (fast packet switching) downloads, that is, download directly from a guaranteed cloud disk server, and some high-speed networks can reach 10 MB/s.

2. The space of storage is very large. Taking the 360 cloud disk (a cloud disk that is widely used in China) as an example, everyone can easily obtain more than 36TB of personal storage space, either to store data or share resources to others. The audience getting Japanese animes through the cloud disk pays more attention to the quality of the video source, so there are a large number of high-definition resources in the cloud disk and the original disk contents directly captured from the Blu-ray discs. The size of these video resources is often more than 30GB, up to 100 minutes, and can only be stored through virtual disk rather than hard disk. The cloud disk greatly enriches the way of distribution of anime networks.

In addition, uploading videos to video websites is also a choice of many fansub groups. Some video websites in which one can watch animes are essentially an organized network company with strong capital, equipment and technical support. Under these favorable conditions, the website searches for online video through technical means, adds simple watermarking to the video, and then these videos can be disseminated to the audience. In addition, these sites may regularly push information and notifications about of their own production of translated animes. The advertising revenue (usually broadcasted before the video can be loaded) and membership services are the main sources of income for these websites.

Art control is also an indispensable task of a fansub. Instead of participating in the subtitling process, those in charge of art control directly participate in the promotion of the fansub itself. The group's promotional posters and the pages for recruiting new people are made by them. These members usually have artistic expertise and can skillfully use PS

(Photoshop), AI (Adobe Illustrator), AE (Adobe After Effects) and other editing software. In addition, they also design the logo that the fansub group needs to add to the video, and even design a character image that belongs exclusively to the group to increase its popularity.

2.2.2. The chain of work

Usually, to complete the subtitle of one episode of anime, the fansub group needs one person for timing, 2 to 4 translators, one person for proofreading, and one person for encoding. After an episode of anime is broadcasted in Japan, the members in Japan are responsible for obtaining high-definition raw sources as soon as possible. After the film source is sent to other members, the member responsible for encoding will perform the first edit to the original file, such as cutting off the advertisements and adding the fansub group's logo so that others cannot use the video for commercial benefit. At the same time, the translator started the translation work. In the case that the original video already has the subtitles in Japanese, they translate the text directly. Otherwise, they will transcribe the dialogues and write down the sentences before translating. Sometimes, if the translators are overworked, special dictation personnel will be arranged to write down the parts that require subtitles. Depending on the length of the video, sometimes one group may need several translators to work together.

The translated subtitles, if monolingual, are saved directly in txt. format, and the bilingual subtitles are saved in excel. Then, the file would be sent to the proofreader for the first proofreading. After the first proofreading, members who are responsible for the timing begin to work. Nowadays the fansub groups generally use software like Sub Station Alpha (SSA), Aegisub, Sabbu or JacoSub (Díaz and Muñoz, 2006). If the raw video contains or requires some subtitles that have special effects, it will require special effects personnel to make a further edit to the video after the work of timing is completed. Then it is usually necessary to conduct a second proofreading, to check if the video has any errors such as misplaced subtitles or if the special effects are in proper condition.

After the second proofreading of the completed file, then encoding may start. Together with the raw video, the translated subtitle is encoded. After this process of the production of subtitle itself is over, the members responsible for the release will upload the final video to the Internet or forum.

Above is a standard process of subtitling. Some large fansub groups may strictly follow this process. Each step has a corresponding time limit. However, in a smaller fansub group, in order to save manpower and improve the efficiency, it is common that when the draft of the translation comes out, the work of timing starts immediately. The proofreader directly checks against the timing line. Sometimes, some members may participate in several works. For example, the member who is responsible for special effects may also do the timing proofread.

2.3. The current situation of fansub

Because fansubbing is spontaneously organized by fans, often fansub collectives do not have enough staff. They usually have many translation plans but not enough people to translate or review. So, each time they publish the translated manga or videos, the fansub group always posts an attached recruitment notice, examples will be presented in this section.

Internet has become a resource that can give people reputation and help people become famous, and give them the sense of achievement that they cannot get in other venues. Because of this, many people are trying to become famous through the Internet. However, the staff from fansub groups are at the opposite side of the spectrum. They just regard the network as a means to channel their free dedication for the sake of love and sharing, and they have invested a lot of energy, material resources, and even financial resources in their endeavor. Therefore, the replacement rate of members in the fansub group is high and frequent. Due to the different workload distribution, many members of a fansub group may join different groups at the same time and participate in several works.

In this information age, the translated anime that the fansub groups can bring to the audience has always been in a short supply, because the production of anime titles outpaces their capacity. In Japan, new anime seasons start in January, April, July, and October. Seasonal anime series have usually 12 to 13 episodes, and anime of half a year usually have 25 episodes. When the fansub work of one season is finished, the new animes are ready to broadcast. Those fansub groups with a number of translation plans are often understaffed. They not only have to constantly translate new broadcast animes, but also tackle old anime to let more people learn about history of Japanese animation development. Therefore, the recruitment of some large fansub groups is open 24 hours (Zhang 2009).

There is competition between fansubs. This kind of competition is not from a business perspective, but from a capability perspective. The number of downloads is often the measure of the quality of a fansub's work, and the speed of translation often determines the download volume. After an anime is broadcast, the first fansub group that uploads the subtitled video will usually get more downloads. In this way, those fansub groups compete in speed and quality with each other. This kind of competition may inevitably result in a better quality of their translations in the least amount of time. However, as we mentioned above, there is a high frequency of entries and exits of members amongst fansub groups. This situation leads to the disbanding of some small fansub collectives due to insufficient manpower. If the funds are insufficient, the forum where the fansubbers upload videos can be maintained by the voluntary donations of the members and community backers.

The copyright problem is the major issue that fansub groups and film and television forums have to deal with. The fans of anime that often watch fansubbed videos may notice the following line of words, that often appears in the video: 'This subtitle is just for learning and for communication between fans, and is strictly prohibited for commercial use. Please delete this video within 24 hours after downloading. Please purchase and support the original works.' This is the most common method used by fansub groups to avoid copyright problems. In order to prevent the subtitled video from being misappropriated, the fansub groups may also add their own logo to the video so that others cannot copy it for commercial use.

The copyright issue has always been a problem that fansubs cannot escape. While fansub group's activities infringe on the copyright of the original author, its own translation may also be illegally used. In this era which takes the issue of intellectual property seriously, continuing with these activities can have serious consequences. During the long-term activity in the gray area of copyright, many forums of fansub groups have gradually been closed down due to copyright issues. Fansubbers are confronted with what to do in the future and how to keep their fansub groups going.

In plain terms, there are two choices for these fansub groups: continue the subtitling activity or choose to give up. Nowadays, as video websites like Youku and Bilibili pay more and more attention to copyright issues, large fansub groups can also get opportunities to cooperate with these sites. However, cooperation with copyrighted video sites conflicts the

original purpose of the fansubbers. This purpose is qualified as ‘disinterested’. They joined the fansub groups to meet more friends and distribute their beloved works, not for commercial benefits. When a fansub group becomes a professional subtitle group, when the volunteer's activity becomes paid, the purpose of subtitling has changed. Many fansub group members claim that they are unable to accept this.¹²

The fansub groups have been able to continue to develop steadily in the recent years. Their most important support is the audience's demand for watching foreign film and television programs. As the formal video sites can also provide those translated videos that only fansub groups could provide in the past, the era of fansub groups is about to end.

2.4. The case of *Dōjinshi*

In general, fansub focuses on videos that do not have official subtitles. However, some fansub groups also translate *dōjin* videos and works produced by fans.

Dōjinshi is a derivative product of otaku culture. In general, *dōjinshi* is ‘an amateur or professional magazine (the *shi* in *dōjinshi*), most often *manga*, published independently by a group of fans (circle).’ Sometimes it can be ‘equivalent to fanzines or fan fiction’ (Galbraith, 2009: 65-66).

At present, the works of *dōjinshi* in the world are divided into original fan works and fan works of secondary creation. Original fan works are created by an individual or a fan group (a fan club) that is not affected by business, does not seek profit, and is not published on a commercial platform. The main representative work can be found in *dōjinshi* inspired by three popular games from Japan: *Tsukihime*, *When They Cry* (『ひぐらしのなく頃に』), and *Touhou Project*. An original fan work has more freedom in creation than commercial works because its creation itself does not involve commercial purposes and does not have to agree with a magazine editor, nor does it have to consider factors such as sales volume and costs (Wang and Ye, 2017).

The fan work is a free re-creation based on original professional work distributed through conventional channels and it is a remix of the worldview and characters of the

¹² *Those who work behind the subtitles: working with video sites to find a way out.* 2014. https://cn.aliyun.com/zixun/content/2_6_288562.html (Last access 20th June, 2018)

original work. The authors of the works of secondary creation are interested in seeing the development of the story of the original works under different worldviews. Some of them continue to develop stories that are officially finished, and some of them just want to see stories of characters' couplings that would not appear in the original works. From a specific subplot to a whole worldview, all these above are the materials that the authors of *dōjinshi* would remix.

Dōjinshi is not limited to comics. Classified according to the type of creation, *dōjinshi* can be divided into *doujin* literature, *dōjin* videos (produced through software such as MikuMikuDance), and *dōjin* games (Wang and Yen, 2017).

Because of their localized activity and linguistic barriers, it is difficult for fan circles in different countries to communicate with each other. *Dōjinshi* created by fans from different countries generally only have audiences in the country where the authors come from. Because of the particularities and limitations of *dōjinshi* circles, the acquisition of *dōjinshi* is more difficult than that of *anime* and *manga* that have an official and wider distribution in their production country.

The translation of *dōjinshi* works like a fansub activity in a much smaller scale. Therefore, the group that translates *dōjinshi* is usually smaller. Sometimes a single individual is responsible for the whole translation process. The translators need to spend time reading samples of *dōjinshi*, select a good work, and decide what to translate. If necessary, they will also recruit peers to form teams to mutually check for the sake of efficiency. When the translator encounters difficulties, they even ask the original author for advice.

The readers of *dōjinshi* often do not have high requirements on the quality of translation because of the difficulty to get access to the raw source. A *dōjinshi*'s translation often shows a distinctive personal characteristic of the translator. Usually, the translator is also a producer of *dōjinshi*, and he or she may have some fans. Some fans may read the translation of *dōjinshi* because the translator is the author that they like. Therefore, a translation with the translator's style of writing is also one of the driving forces for the dissemination of the original works. However, the translators' own style does not help improve the accuracy of the translation. Some of these translators even translate the *dōjin* novels just to practice their language ability, so the quality of translation cannot be guaranteed.

Since *dōjinshi* is involved in the grey area of copyright itself as a cultural product, it is hardly protected by the same copyright protection as original works. Therefore, the internal stability of the environment of *dōjinshi* creation fandom is entirely maintained by fans themselves. Like the original authors, in addition to the premise of ‘based on the original work to make a second creation,’ the authors also need to ensure that their own works are originals; there is no copy or plagiarism. At the same time, in the same fan circle, the consent of the authors of *dōjinshi* also must be obtained when spreading their works. There are usually two ways in which the *dōjinshi* from another culture can be spread. If the original work was uploaded on the Internet, the translator would need to obtain the original creator's authorization and then translate it. When uploading the translated work, he or she must attach the original author's authorization statement as an appendix.

If the original work is obtained through a method involving the economic benefit of the original author, such as a purchase on Comiket,¹³ the translator will scan it before translation (the process is closer to *scanlation*)¹⁴ and then upload it to the Internet. Since readers who get access to the resources on the Internet have not paid for their consumption of the work, the translation group will set a password at the time of uploading to the forum, and they will indicate in the translated documents that ‘secondary transmission is prohibited’. Only when the fans download the file from the forum link can they get the hint to the password, and this hint is usually associated with the original work (e. g. the birthday of the protagonist, or the date when the file is uploaded). Those who have not read the original work cannot find out what is the password.

2.5. The issue of copyright of fansubs

In general, fans of Japanese anime have their specific websites for the distribution and exchange of resources. Most of the times, as long as this kind of distribution is non-commercial, there will be no legal problems. Whether fansub activities are legal or not depends on the country. In the United States, the fansub activities are not legally recognized.

¹³ ‘Pronounced as *comike*. An abbreviation of ‘comic market.’ The biggest amateur *manga* (*dōjinshi*) sales event in Japan’ (Galbraith, 2009:45).

¹⁴ ‘Unlicensed manga translations done by fans and disseminated illegally online. The originals are scanned in and the Japanese text is replaced digitally’ (Galbraith, 2009:196).

According to American copyright law, translations are derivative works.¹⁵ Derivative works are any work based upon one or more preexisting works.¹⁶ In addition, the fansubbers' act of copying and distributing the raw file is not legally approved either (Hatcher, 2005).

In China, translation in the absence of authorization is an irrational use of the original resource and is not legally permitted. Therefore, the activities of fansub groups should constitute an infringement of copyright of the original work. The reasons for considering their activity as infringement are as follows:

First, Article 15 of Article 10 of the Copyright Law of China stipulates that authors hold the rights to allow translation. The fansub groups apparently have not obtained authorization from the copyright owner and have not paid any compensation either. Therefore, their activity is 'unlicensed'. Objectively, the fansub group's translation act encroaches on the potential market of the copyright holders and has actually caused damage to the commercial profit (Li, 2016: 248). Second, uploading subtitle files to the Internet is an act of providing copies of works to the public. Third, the activity of fansub groups does not satisfy the statutory licensing requirement of the copyright law, that is, the use of the original work needs to meet the public benefit. That is to say, when a work is used in a legal situation such as in textbooks, newspapers, and sound recordings, it may not be approved by the copyright owner. However, the purpose of the fansub group is to distribute the subtitle file on the Internet and share with other users. This behavior does not meet the requirement above.

Although the fans organize fansub groups because the copyright owner of the original work did not have sufficient funds to publish or authorize overseas publishing, this does not mean that the fansubbers' activity is fully supported and recognized. In Japan, there have been occasional crackdowns by the Copyright Society on Chinese fansub groups and scanlation groups. Also, while some Chinese fans may oppose to fansubbing, according to Jiang Feng (2018) the biggest obstacle comes from the Japanese copyright owner. Because mainland China is not a target market for Japanese animation companies, legitimate works are not issued in China. Thus, unlicensed distributors hold that the activities of fansub groups and

¹⁵ *United States Code Annotated 2005* (CDPA) ss 106.

¹⁶ *United States Code Annotated 2005* (CDPA) s21 (3) (a)(i).

scanlation groups will not affect the interests of the original publisher. That is to say, the fansub group's activity is seen as free advertisement to the original work. Although China is gradually introducing mangas and animes that are officially authorized, there are still a large number of ACG works that cannot be introduced for some reason (for example, due to the stringent Chinese grading system, some works with sex or violent plots cannot be introduced). For those mangas and animes that are not published or authorized to be broadcast in China, China is an unexplored market for Japan's copyright owners. Many overseas fans learn about the original work through the fansub group, and then they may have the idea of buying the original book or DVD to support the author and the animation company. In Japan, the copyright organization and the copyright owner are not the same concept. The authors need to pay copyright fees for their own works, and the rights protection organization is the agent that helps them to protect the copyright of their work. When finding that the work is being illegally distributed, the copyright owner can sue against the unauthorized translation and distribution launched by fansub groups.

However, if the authors and the animation companies suppress the activities of a fansub group, first, they will lose a large amount of the readers and viewers, who may be buying other legal merchandise and products complying with copyright. And secondly, it will cause the dissatisfaction of the fans. It is not worthwhile for the original author who owns the copyright to stop the activity of fansub and scanlation groups.

The insiders of Japanese anime and television industry have also positively accepted the work of members of the fansub groups. The director of the TV series *Battle Programmer Shirase* expressed his apologies to the audience at the end of the play in 2004, 'Apologies to those who liked it and those who watched the subtitles overseas' (Lee 2011). At that time, the Japanese animation industry believed that the fansub groups' activities have a positive effect on the animation industry. They not only work for the audience that likes anime, but also create potential audiences. Inspired by their activities, some viewers may purchase and import original video discs so that the animation companies can also gain benefits in those non-targeted markets. Fansubs have contributed to the popularity of Japanese anime today. If there is no fan community network and especially no popularization of properties among these fans, the success of Japanese anime may never be a reality (Mihara, 2009).

With the widespread distribution of Japanese animes, the fansub group's dissemination activities appear to be no longer under control. The role of fansub groups in the process of communication has changed. The Japanese animation industry recognizes that there are more and more Japanese animation fans around the world, and the old business model has to adapt itself. Under such a pressure, the Japanese animation industry's attitude towards the fansub groups has changed in the recent years. They treated the subtitled videos as piracy, but they did not propose litigation as a good solution because it would offend the subscribing consumer groups. On the one hand, those viewers of fansub group are the core of potential consuming customers. On the other hand, the copyright law is restricted by the country, which also makes it infeasible to initiate lawsuits against fansub groups.

The network dissemination of authorized resources is a situation that recently emerged. The anime channel of video websites is becoming the main communication platform. Although the authorized resources still represent a small part of the whole anime following, the animes which are introduced in these platforms are all relatively famous. The video websites that have gotten authorized distribution rights include iQiyi, Bilibili, Tencent Anime, Sohu video, etc. The number is still increasing.

On January 17, 2013, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China's largest online game service provider, Tencent, announced that their anime distribution platform has reached a large-scale copyright cooperation agreement with Japan's Shueisha Publishing Co., Ltd., and had obtained the distribution rights for 11 classic mangas in electronic format. Since 2014, through cooperation between Tudou.com and TV Tokyo, 900 episodes of anime including Naruto and altogether more than 3,000 episodes of other programmes will be broadcast simultaneously at Tudou. The animes would be broadcast at the same time as they are in Japan. Starting from the same year, the operating companies of Bilibili also began purchasing broadcast authorizations. At this point, the situation of the network transmission of Japanese anime in China has quietly but significantly changed.

However, although the cooperation between the video websites and the copyright owners is expanding, there is still a considerable amount of works that cannot be introduced into China in this cultural context where translation is in short supply. Therefore, in the current situation, the fansub groups still have a large audience.

In the cases we mention in this paper, the screenshots of the animes are from the video website Bilibili. The issue about copyright of this website will be discussed in section 4.3.

3. Characteristics of translations by fans versus official translations

In the article ‘Los Fansubs: el casos de traducciones (no tan) amateur’, the author, Martínez, based on her experience of working in the fansub, created a form that compares the characteristics of fansubs with professional subtitles (2010:22) that we may use as a template to consider anime fansubs vis-à-vis commercial translations.

Characteristics	Translation of fansubs	Commercial translation
Working with a list of dialogues	No. The fansubs usually work on the audio or on the subtitle file in Advanced Sub Station Alpha format (ASS).	Working with the audio or a script of dialogues.
Always have the video	Yes.	No.
Character restriction	No.	Yes.
Liberty of typesetting	Yes. Different fonts and colors can be used for each character.	No. The standard of typography used by the studios is Arial or Times New Roman, 12 pt (Díaz, 2001: 114).
Limitation of numbers of lines	Up to four lines. In addition, explanatory notes may appear at the top of the screen.	Two lines maximum.
The translator is responsible for the adaptation	No.	There is the possibility to adapt (and in fact it is desirable).

The group has correctors or not	Not always.	It should, although according to Díaz (2001: 81), ‘this [revision] stage is usually ignored by most studios, since it incurs an increase in costs.’
Edition	Yes. It can include not only the typography, but also the Japanese content of posters, blackboards, screens, etc.	Yes, when there is relevant information. It is done in the form of a subtitle.
The subtitles are recorded in the video	Usually not. The subtitles are attached to the video in the form of a patch.	Yes, through printing, although the DVDs and DTT ¹⁷ usually use digital subtitles.
Exist a final control or not	Not always. This control is called Quality Check (QC).	Yes.
Opening and ending	The <i>anime</i> chapters always have an opening and an ending. The fansub chooses whether to translate them or not.	No.
Distribution	Through various Internet protocols (XDCC through Internet Relay Chat –IRC–, Bitorrent, storage servers	Through official distributors.

¹⁷ Digital Terrestrial Television.

	such as Mega Upload, Sendspace, MediaFire, etc.).	
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From this form, we can see that Martínez made a detailed comparison of the differences between fansub and commercial subtitles from aspects like the appearance of the subtitles, the original text of the translation, proofreading, etc.

Of course, this form is based on the activities of Spanish fansubs. Due to cultural and linguistic differences, fansubs in different countries have different ways of obtaining raw files, translating, and subtitling. Therefore, in the following sections, I will supplement some aspects that are not considered in the form.

3.1. Language style

Different from those of commercial subtitle groups, the translators of fansub groups are usually not professional (Martínez, 2010). Therefore, they are less restricted in the language style. Generally speaking, most fansub groups will choose to imitate the language style of the original video as much as possible. However, some translators may add their own emotions to the translation, such as adding the translator's own dialect or hometown dialect in the translated lines, or change the character's name and the way to call others into the form they like. In order to make their translation more humorous and interesting, some translators even do not hesitate to change the content of the original dialogues and replace them with online slangs.

Many anime fans think that a fansub group's translation is more acceptable than the official translation because it is not restricted by the traditional translation standards. The translation of fansub is more colloquial, which makes it closer to the viewers. What is more, the use of online slangs makes the experience of watching more interesting. The translators of fansub groups are also anime fans, therefore, they know better what kind of language style the viewers like. However, there are also some fans consider that the excessive meddling and distortion of the text will affect their understanding of the story. They think that the existence of subtitles is to make viewers who do not understand Japanese know what the story is about, and they should not reflect the emotion and interest of translators.

承包诶妹
囧
大妈？突然想起了狐仙女友
登式婆婆啊啊啊
真过桥米线
表情包
狐仙女
登势婆

！？？？
建兜塞塞！
波丸

一波一波走起
我的世界飘！

哈...



就可以了。
是教导主任的亲威？

注意那对母子
过分

强大的字幕组



搞啥呢這是...

A screenshot from the anime 'Sailor Moon' showing the character Miku Aino. She has short blonde hair with a large red bow and is wearing a pink checkered dress over a white shirt. She is holding a long green bamboo pole diagonally across her body. In the bottom right corner, a small orange dog is visible. The background consists of a grey stone wall and some green foliage on the right. There are several lines of Chinese text overlaid on the image.

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However, there are also some adaptations that increase the interest of watching and do not change the original meaning. For example, in Japanese, アホ (*aho*) is used to refer to a person that is an idiot. This word appears frequently in Japanese animes, and some Chinese fansub groups may translate it as ‘二货’(èr huò). ‘二货’ is a Chinese word which is often used in informal situations. It is often used to refer to a kind of people that have a low intelligence quotient, think differently from others, and always do stupid things. In general, this kind of informal word only appears in daily conversations and is not suitable for subtitle translation. But the word 二货 not only shares a similar meaning as アホ, but also has a similar pronunciation (二货 is pronounced as èr huò, while アホ is pronounced as *a ho*). For audiences who know both Chinese culture and Japanese culture, this kind of cultural coincidence that appears in subtitle can elicit fun, and it would not otherwise affect the experience of watching the video nor the understanding of the plot.

Of course, an adaption that may affect the watching experience does not always occur. Some fansub groups may even polish their translation on the base of ensuring accuracy. For example, while translating the lyric of opening and ending songs, the fansub group may not only simply translate the meaning, but also guarantee the elegance and the poetic use of words. Some fansub groups are extremely skilled in translating songs, such as the group Dymy, whose translation of the lyric of the opening song of *Attack on Titan* is high appraised by the fans.

The following is a part of the translation:¹⁸

Song: 红莲の弓矢

(In the following lyric, the first line is the original version, and the second line is the translation.)

Sie sind das Essen und wir sind die Jäger!

他们是猎物 而我们才是猎手

Tamen shi liewu, er women cai shi lieshou.

踏まれた花の 名前も知らずに

¹⁸ The translation of 红莲の弓矢. <http://www.docin.com/p-704145130.html> (Last access June 10th, 2018)

Fu ma re ta ha na no na ma e mo shi ra zu ni

花谢凋零终遭人践 残瓣之名至今难辨

Hua xie diaoling zhong zao ren can, canban zhi ming zhijin nanbian.

地に坠ちた鳥は 風を待ち侘びる

Chi ni o chi ta to ri wa ka ze o ma chi wa bi ru

坠地之鸟顾影自怜 急盼风起以了夙愿

Zhuidi zhi niao guyingzilian, jipan fengqi yi liao suyuan.

祈ったところで 何も変わらない

I no tta to ko ro de na ni mo ka wa ra na i

一味祷告纵然心虔 世间又能有何改变

Yiwei daogao zongran xin qian, shijian you neng you he gaibian.

今を変えるのは 闘う覚悟だ

I ma o ka e ru no wa ta ta ka u ka ku go da

改变当下唯有信念 殊死一战不畏艰险

Gaibian dangxia wei you xinnian, shusiyizhan bu wei jianxian.

尸踏み越えて

Shi ka ba ne fu mi ko e te

尸横遍野 跨步再向前

Shi heng bian ye, kuabu zai xiangqian.

進む意志を嗤う豚よ

Su su mu i shi o wa ra u bu ta yo

独桀骜 耻不前 猪猡笑 刍狗喧

Du jie 'ao, chi bu qian, chu gou xuan.

In this part of lyric, the fansub group not only makes the translation rhyme (apart from

the first line of lyric which is translated from German, the rhythm of other lines is *ian*), and the first four sentences parallel with each other neatly.

The translation of ‘進む意志を嗤う豚よ’ is relatively special. The subtitle of the lyric appears on the screen when the MV (Music Video) of the song is played. When the song is played to this sentence, the text of the lyrics being sung appear in flashes on the screen. The lyric is divided into 4 segments, each with 3 syllables. Without changing the meaning, the translated subtitles maintain the division of 4 segments and 3 syllables, giving a feeling that the subtitle of the lyric completely corresponds to the MV of the song.

In addition, in general, the translation of lyrics only needs to correctly express its meaning. But apart from ensuring accuracy, some fansub groups adjust each line of the translation according to the number of syllables of the lyrics, so that the rhythm of the translation can perfectly correspond to the original song (just like what we have mentioned above, the translation of ‘進む意志を嗤う豚よ’). In this way, even the translated Chinese lyrics can be sung with the original background music. This kind of adjustment is not absolutely necessary, but it can add a sense of beauty to the translation so that the audience can experience the charm of language. Specific examples include the interlude song of *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, *God Knows...* and *Lost My Music* (translated by fansub group Hua Meng), and the ending song of the *A Place Further Than The Universe*.

As we can see in figure 3, as the song is being played, the Chinese subtitle and the Japanese lyric appear on the screen at the same time. The number of syllables of each version is exactly the same. In Japanese, the pronunciation of a kanji can have several syllables, such as 私, which is pronounced *wa ta shi*. And in Chinese, the pronunciation of every single Chinese character only has one syllable. The fansub group Hua Meng adjusts the number of characters in each line of the translation of the lyrics so that it can correspond to the scan of Japanese verses.



Figure 3. *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*.

In addition, the cases where fansub group add netas to the translation will be mentioned in section 3.5.

3.2. Visual appearance

Professional subtitles should ensure that the text is easy to read and understandable, and that it does not interfere with the viewing of the video. Therefore, professional subtitles need to follow certain rules. For example, the subtitles should be placed at the bottom of the screen, and the text should be aligned in the center. In the frame screen, two lines of subtitles can appear at most. Each line of subtitles has approximately 35 characters. The color of the character should be set to pure white, and it is better to use a font without serif (Karamitroglou, 2017: 83-85).

Unlike professional subtitles, the typesetting selected by fansub groups is relatively arbitrary. Each subtitle group may use a different font and subtitle color. Some fansub groups may even use different colors of subtitles for each character, so that the viewer may easily distinguish who is speaking.

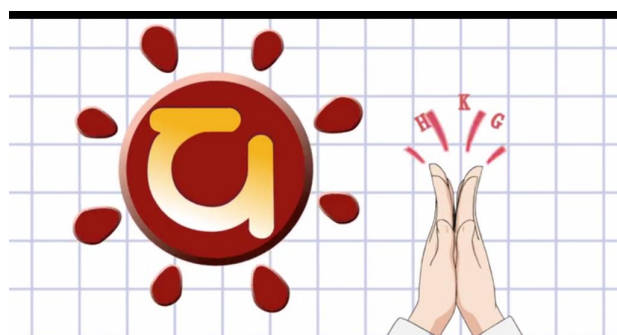


Figure 4. *Hidamari Sketch*.



Figure 5. *Hidamari Sketch*.

In addition, in order to prevent videos with captions from being stolen for commercial uses, fansub groups often need to make some editing of the video. For example, they may use the same font as the anime's title and put the logo of their own group on the title screen, making it impossible for others to modify the video. As shown in figure 4 and 5, in the opening song of *Hidamari Sketch*, the HKG subtitle group adds the three letters 'HKG' aside to the clapping hands. When the headline of the anime appears, a logo with letters HKG is also added in the lower left corner.

3.3. Translator's notes and explanations

When professional subtitle professionals come across with the following situations, such as when the original text demands background knowledge that is rarely known to the target audience, or when the dialogue contains wordplay that cannot be directly translated, the translator of the commercial subtitle team needs to make adjustments to the translation. When faced with the same situation, the translator of a fansub team can solve the problem by adding explanation notes.

During cross-cultural communication, inevitably we may encounter some rich points. A rich point is something in one culture that makes it difficult to be connected with another culture. It can be those surprises, those departures from an outsider's expectations that signal a difference between two language cultures and give direction to subsequent learning (Agar, 2006). An object that exists in one language culture may do not have a corresponding one in another. In the same way, some sayings such as slangs and jokes in one language may resist to be perfectly translated into another language, because the background knowledge does not

have a correspondence in the target language culture. For example, in Japan, there are a lot of jokes that use homophonic words and word components. This kind of joke often appears in *rakugo*.¹⁹ However, the punchlines in these jokes cannot be reproduced through translation. When faced with this problem, the fansub translator usually chooses to translate it directly, and then adds a note to explain the point of punchline at the top of the screen so that the viewers that have not learnt Japanese could understand the ridiculousness of the story.

For example, in the following screenshot of the anime by Kyoto Animation *Nichijō*, the protagonist Yuko is telling a homonymous joke. After directly translating the joke, the fansub explains the part of the homonym in the joke with captions above. In figure 6, Yuko says ‘The centipede comes towards me!’ This joke seems meaningless. Therefore, the fansub group explains that in Japanese, the word ‘centipede’(ムカデ, mukate) pronounces similarly with ‘come towards’(むかって, mukatteku).



Figure 6. *Nichijō*.

This kind of explanatory note strides over the cultural gap that is the most difficult to avoid in cross-cultural communication. It avoids bothering the viewers with strategies such as composing slogans, inventing strange names, references to extraneous place names, allusions to famous Western literary quotes that will not be identifiable by all of the audience. With these notes, the viewers can focus on the stories, characters, emotions, and cultural connotations of the original work, and do not need to worry about the misunderstandings caused by the lack of background knowledge.

¹⁹ *Rakugo* (落語) is a form of stage Japanese verbal entertainment executed by a single performer.

In addition, the annotations of fansubs also include other kinds of hints. Sometimes, after the ending song and the credit list of the movie, the producer will also add an after credits scene. However, the audience watching the video of a fansub may stop watching when the ending song starts. For example, in figure 7 which is cut out from the movie of *Eden of the East*, in order to prevent that the viewer misses the extra scene, the fansub adds the following subtitle: ‘Don't go away! There are bonus scenes behind!’



Figure 7. *Eden of the East*.

There is another kind of note which is added by the fansub group with a personal purpose. Some of these notes are comments of the fansub members, the function of which is similar to barrage (the definition of barrage will be explained in section 4.1). Without these

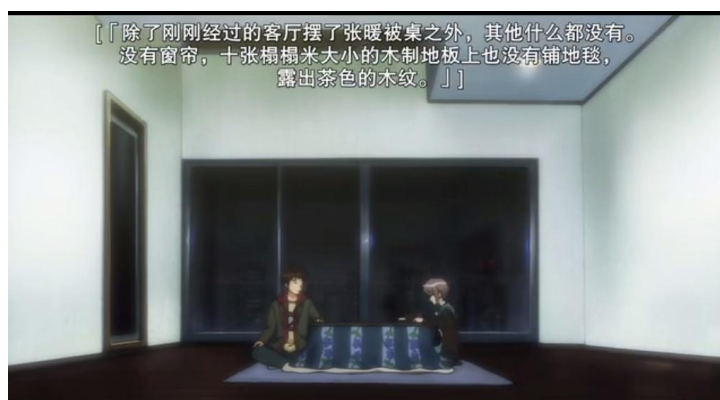


Figure 8. *The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi*



Figure 9. *The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi*

notes, the understanding of the storyline will not be affected. For some comedy animés like *Nichijō*, the comments as subtitles may make the watching experience more interesting, because they make the comprehension of the jokes easier. However, there are also some viewers consider that these notes are kind of annoying, because they have to spend a sizeable amount of time paying attention to notes which are not necessarily helpful and divert focus from other aspects of the work.

For example, the figure 8 and 9 is the screenshot of *The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi* translated by fansub group Hua Meng. This anime is adapted from the light novel written by Tanigawa Nagaru, so the fansub group put the text from the novel which corresponds to the animated scene.



Figure 10. *The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi*

And in figure 10, the content in the single parenthesis (最近的机器人都好会泡茶哦/the robot these days are really good at making tea) is a witty remark by the members of the fansub group.

3.4. The inconsistencies between different fansub groups

Different fansub groups usually work independently. They do not communicate with each other nor do they discuss problems encountered in translation. Therefore, usually, different translated fansub versions of the same anime work are issued in parallel. When the translation is accurate and does not affect the audience's understanding of the story, the translated versions of different groups usually do not differ much from one another. However, the lack of communication and negotiation between groups sometimes leads to deviations in translation that affect audience's comprehension when the public alternates episodes fansubbed by different groups.

Japanese and Chinese are relatively close to each other when it comes to the use of logograms (called *kanji* in Japanese; *hanzi*, in Chinese). Just looking at the *kanji* (漢字, 'Chinese characters'), the Chinese audiences who have not studied Japanese can roughly understand the meaning of the voice tracks. However, between these two similar written sign codes, there are also some aspects that can't be perfectly translated. One of these aspects is the translation of names of the characters.

When translating from Japanese to a language that uses the Roman alphabet (English, for example), the translator usually presents the names of characters transcribed directly in the form of target language sounds. This kind of translation can only show the pronunciation of the name, and if the translator wants to explain to the audience the meaning of the *kanji* of this name, they need to add a note. Due to similarities in language and culture, it is relatively easy to translate Japanese into Chinese. For example, as is customary with Chinese names, Japanese names also follow the order surname first and personal name afterwards. Most Japanese surnames are in *kanji*. Therefore, when converted into Chinese, they usually do not need to be translated. The translator can use the original *kanji*. However, many Japanese names do not appear in *kanji*, but in the form of *hiragana* (a Japanese syllabary, one component of the Japanese writing system). When translated into Chinese, deviations may occur.

In Japanese, different *kanji* may share the same pronunciation. That is to say, the way to write them in *hiragana* is the same. However, Chinese do not use *hiragana*, so when *hiragana* appears in the name of people, the Chinese translators must translate it into Chinese

characters. In this situation, different translators may have different inklings. Some may translate directly from the pronunciation, some may research the *kanji* that the *hiragana* corresponds to (there are names that have both *hiragana* and *kanji* renditions; sometimes the same name will have many *kanji* versions, but just one *hiragana* transcription). Therefore, the same name may have multiple translations. For example, the name Haruna (はるな) can be written as 春菜, 陽菜, 榛名, 晴奈, etc. We may have even more ways to combine these *kanji*. The way to understand and select the Chinese character is not consistent between all translators. Besides, the way to translate a name also depends on the personality of the character. If Haruna is a girl from a Western country, this name can be translated as 哈鲁娜, which shows directly the pronunciation of the name (the combination of these characters does not trigger any additional meanings or significant connotations).

The name is an important anchor in the audience's perception of a character. Therefore, when the name of a character in the same anime changes several times, the audience will feel confused. Some seasonal *anime* have a long interval between seasons, and each season might be translated by a different fansub team. In this case, there will be problems like having the translation of the name of the same character changing in each season. For example, the name Hiro (ヒロ) in *Hidamari Sketch* was translated as 绯露 in the first season, 弘 in the second season, and 寻 in the third.

The same thing happens in the translation of titles. The original title of *Hidamari Sketch* is 『ひだまりスケッチ』. In this title, ‘スケッチ’ refers to the English loanword ‘sketch’, which can be directly transcribed according to its pronunciation. But ひだまり can be written in several different ways in *kanji* or combinations of *kanji* and *hiragana*. For example, 陽だまり, 日だまり, 陽多まり, etc. The criteria employed when leaning towards a specific version depend on the translator. In the anime, the apartment where the protagonists live is named as ひだまり荘. Under different fansub translations, one comes across various versions like 向阳庄 (the manor that faces the sun), or 暖阳庄 (the manor that is full of sunshine). Although these different translations do not affect overall understanding, they are still difficult for some audiences to adapt to.

3.5. Analysis of cases of translation of neta

3.5.1. Definition of neta

In *The Otaku Encyclopedia*, Patrick W. Galbraith defines *neta* as:

Online slang for ‘topic’, although it’s now also used in spoken otaku language. It can mean the discussions that crop up around anything from pictures and video to blogs and text. It’s also used somewhat incorrectly to mean ‘online creator of fan fiction.’ *Neta-bare* means giving the story away (Galbraith, 2009:161).

Neta is the *rōmaji*²⁰ rendering of ネタ, and is more used in Taiwan. Originally, ネタ (*neta*) sprung from the reversal of the syllables in タネ (*tane*). タネ (*tane*) means a seed of a plant, while ネタ (*neta*) has several different meanings. ネタ can be used to refer to the material of artworks, the magic props, the topics used in *manzai* (漫才),²¹ or the raw ingredients of dishes, etc. What these points have in common is that they all refer to the critical foundation of something. The earliest usage dates back to Japan's Edo period. So ‘ネタ’ is a word commonly used in Japan.²²

In the Japanese network community, ネタ has two main meanings. One is similar to the original meaning of ネタ, which refers to the core of an artwork like novel or manga. This meaning is often used when people talk about the jokes and laughingstocks used in *manzai* or plots that often appear in stories. And because the plot of stories can also be used as a joke or a laughingstock, in many cases, what *neta* means in a sentence is judged by context.

The other meaning is the abbreviation of ‘ネタバレ’ (*netabare*). ネタバレ is the combination of ネタ and バレ (*bare*). Like we mentioned above, ネタ means the core of content, while バレ means exposure and leakage. Therefore, ネタバレ means the early revelation of plot elements of a narrative which usually spoils the enjoyment of the experience.

In this paper, the *neta*²³ we talk about adopts the first meaning, that is to say, plot and laughingstock.

²⁰ *Rōmaji* designates the romanization of Japanese, that is, the use of the Latin alphabet to transcribe the Japanese language.

²¹ *Manzai* designates an established comedic stage genre delivered by two performers.

²² What are the similarities and differences between the concept of *neta* and 梗 (*geng*, the way to say *neta* in Chinese)? <https://www.zhihu.com/question/55427985/answer/144571584> (last access May 30th, 2018)

²³ Hereafter, the term will not be reproduced in italics.

In many film and television programs, it is normal to see that some characters and plots of some famous works are alluded to or appear in other programs. This is a kind of tribute to the original work. For example, in the film *Ready Player One* which is adapted from a novel, the director Steven Spielberg adds a huge number of Easter eggs to pay tribute to other movies. These Easter eggs are also a kind of neta.



Figure 11. *Ashita no Jō*.



Figure 12. *Bakuman*.

The phenomenon of neta is more widespread in Japanese animation. Some well-known comic plots are often used by other authors of comics in their own works. They pay tribute to the original work and also increase the interest of their own work. For example, the well-known plot of *Tomorrow's Joe* (*Ashita no Jō*, あしたのジョー), ‘燃え尽きたぜ...真っ白に、真っ白な灰に...’ (I have burned into pure white, white ash...) often appears in other manga and animes. This plot is used when the character has done all that he/she could and at last it is in vain.²⁴

In *Introduction to Otakuology*, Okada Toshio mentioned a classic case of neta. In the section named ‘The shadow of *Chibimaruko Chan* and the high-level otaku humor of *Mahōjin Guru Guru*’, he takes *Mahōjin Guru Guru* as an example to explain what is needed to understand a neta.

In one of the scenes of *Mahōjin Guru Guru*, there is a prop which appears with the subtitle ‘the object appearing on the screen is still under development.’ This is a neta that aims to add a fun atmosphere, but to understand why this neta is funny, one needs to know a lot of

²⁴ Burn the life to white as ash. <http://bangumi.tv/group/topic/23149> (last access May 26th, 2018)

related otaku knowledge. First of all, a person needs to know what is an RPG (Role Playing Game). What is more, it is necessary that the viewer had read magazines such as *Famicon*, so that he or she could understand in what situation would appear the sentence ‘the object appearing on the screen is still under development.’ Only with all this knowledge above can a viewer immediately understand this neta and laugh.

This is how a neta works. It mobilizes the reader's memory and knowledge so that they can feel the interesting points of the details in the process of recalling. However, people with background knowledge about the neta will find it very interesting, while those who do not have the knowledge may not understand it at all.

In addition, there are also some manga that push neta as their selling points, such as *Lucky Star*, *Sayonara! Zetsubō Sensei* and *Gintama*, among others. Apart from telling their own mainline stories, these works would add various netas of other works through details like dialogues, storyboard, the background scene, etc. Those viewers who haven't watched the original works where the neta come from may not get the laughingstocks, while those who know the original work would find these netas interesting. Therefore, if some mangas or animes do not seem interesting at the first glance, it may be because readers/viewers do not detect the netas that are involved. So, in order to ensure that the viewers could understand the interesting parts of an anime, and especially when translating works that have a lot of netas, the fansub groups may designate a member that is specifically responsible for translating and explaining netas. These members usually need to have an encyclopedic knowledge of Japanese manga and anime, as well as Japanese culture (from famous advertisement jingles to characters from classic works of literature), so that he/she can find out the neta that the author inserts, and explain it to the viewers with a note. As shown in the figure 13, on the copyright page of *Sayonara! Zetsubō Sensei*, the fansub staff of Shengse Langji features the neta ‘supervisor’ added to the member list.



Figure 13. *Sayonara! Zetsubō Sensei*.

The authors add neta to their works in order to make the work more humorous and interesting. When finding a familiar neta in the work that is being read, the reader would feel that a laugh of recognition or a tingling of excitement are inspired. The reason is simple. Compared to other readers who might not understand such neta, he senses a superiority in being part of an informed minority. Others who do not understand the inside story may not appreciate it, but s/he knows it. In this case, the pleasure of cultural acceptance brought by neta cannot be underestimated.²⁵

3.5.2. Analysis of cases



Figure 14. *Nichijō*.

Netas have many different forms. For different kinds of netas, the fansub would use different methods to explain.

One is neta on the dialogues. This kind of neta usually consists of a character saying

²⁵ Will people laugh when they find a neta? Why? <https://www.zhihu.com/question/23983379>

lines from another work. As shown in figure 14 which is cut out from *Nichijō*, after killing a mosquito, Aioi Yuko says ‘Killed some boring stuff again.’ This sentence comes from the most spoken line of Ishikawa Goemon (a character of *Rupan Sansei*). The original version is ‘また、つまらぬ物を斬ってしまった’ (*mata, tsumaranu monoro zantte mateta*). This dialogue usually appears after Goemon cuts something into two. This sentence is often used as a neta of ‘cut something’ in other comics.

The same neta also appears in *xxxHolic*. In the sixth episode of the first season of *xxxHolic*, when Ichihara Yuko tries to destroy a computer, she wrote ‘斬鉄剣’ (*Zantetsuken*, which is the name of the sword of Ishikawa Goemon in *Rupan Sansei*) on a red baseball bat so that the bat may have the function of the sword that can cut iron. After using the bat cutting the computer into two, the line of Yuko is also ‘killed some boring stuff again.’ (The two characters that use the same neta here are both called Yuko. This is just a coincidence, not a neta.)

When faced with this situation, the translator of a fansub group would explain where this sentence comes from. Some meticulous fansub groups may also explain the background of these lines so that the audience may fully understand what the jokes are.



Figure 15. *xxxHolic*.



Figure 16. xxxHolic.

Another kind of neta is based on factual information. Only when one is in the same culture system and social environment as the author, and knows the event that the neta refers to, can he/she understand the meaning that the author wants to express with the neta. In *Sayonara! Zetsubō Sensei*, an anime which is adapted from a manga based on criticizing reality, the author, Masayoshi Kumada, used a lot of real-life events as examples to carry out his criticism and complains about the society. Some of these comments on reality do not appear in the dialogues, but in the scene setting. Generally speaking, the fansub group might not translate all the texts appearing on the screen. However, for the works with neta as a central feature, it is very important that the translations facilitate the understanding of such neta. Therefore, some of the contents that are not included in the dialogues are also translated and explained by the fansub group. As shown in the screenshot in figure 17, the words written on the cards are all metaphors to reality (people, social trends, etc). When the fansub group translates the text content, they also note the events that these words refer to on the top of the

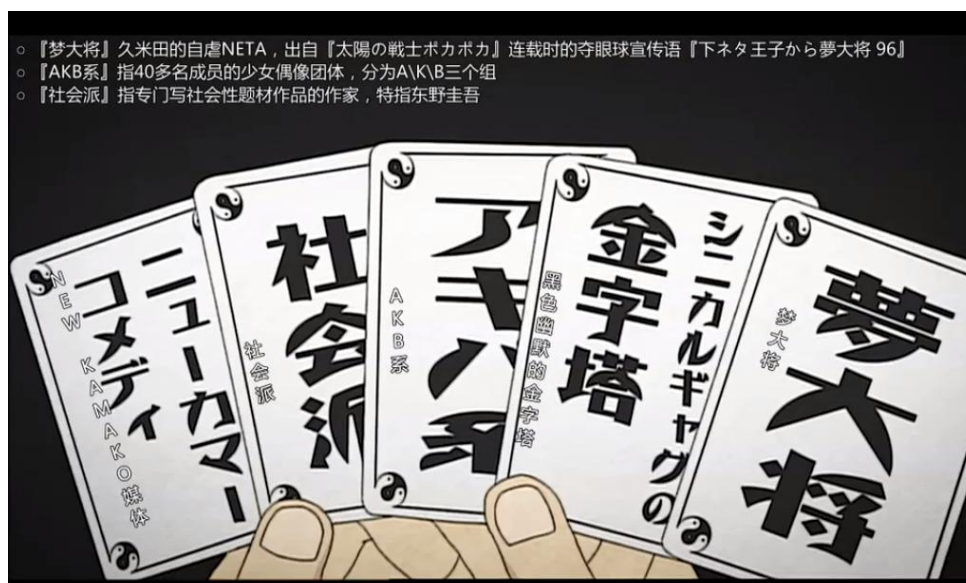


Figure 17. Sayonara! Zetsubō Sensei.

screen.

The members of fansub groups are just ordinary people who are interested in manga and anime. They do not get paid for the work in the group. Different from the authors of *dōjinshi* whose creations are also based in their interest (they sell self-published issues at conventions, although mostly to recoup the production costs), the way that fansub members express their love is limited. They do not create a ‘new’ work in the same sense as *dōjinshi*, because their aim is to remain faithful to the original work (Hatcher, 2005). Just like professional subtitling, the process of translating and creating subtitles for animation is mostly boring. Translation needs to be faithful to the original text, accurately express the meaning, and reflect its cultural background. However, as has been mentioned in section 3.1, some members of fansub groups may reflect their emotion and personal interest in the translation. Apart from the examples showed in section 3.1, another typical example is that the fansub members may add netas to the subtitles.

The netas that fansub groups may add to the subtitle also come in different types.

One is neta that is based on Internet catchphrases. By using the catchphrases commonly used by a certain group of people in the translation of subtitles, the dialogues may appear more interesting. For example, in episode three of *Hinamatsuri* (ヒナまつり), what Nitta says when he meets Anzu, who is collecting empty cans and explains that she is just killing time, is translated as ‘你这打发时间的方法，很硬核啊 (Your way to kill time is really hardcore).’



Figure 18. *Hinamatsuri*.

Hardcore is a word used mostly to describe rap music or games. Hardcore rap is a form of music which is powerful, passionate and strong. ‘Hardcore game’ refers to those games that have a certain level of difficulty and have its own dedicated players (such as *I wanna be the*

guy²⁶ and its derivative works). Moreover, in the network environment, the word hardcore can be used in many situations other than rap and games. For example, it is often used to describe something as very cool.²⁷

In the original dialogue, what Nitta says is ‘Your way to kill time is really cool (*takai*, 高い).’ Generally speaking, the decision of the fansub group to translate ‘高い’ as ‘hardcore’ has not changed the original meaning. However, in the Chinese network environment, the word hardcore is more widely used within groups of ACG fans. Only those viewers that know what does hardcore mean can understand the humor of this translation choice. But since the viewers of anime (especially users who watch animes through Bilibili) are mostly ACG fans, it is relatively easier for them to understand this neta.

Fansub groups not only explain and use netas, they also create netas. Some netas have been used in many situations, to the point that people are unaware of where and when did these netas originate. For example, the sentence ‘what a big smell of love comedy’, which derives from a translation of *Engaged to the Unidentified* (*Mikakunin De Sinkoukei*, 未確認で進行形). The original sentence was ‘ラブ コメの波動を感じる’ (‘I feel a fluctuation of romantic comedy’). This was originally an over-translation, but it was surprisingly well received and appreciated by the audience. Thus, this neta is often used to describe the very obvious show-off of love in animes. The phrase has crossed over to mainstream parlance, out of circles of ACG culture, and most people are unaware of the origin of the expression.

3.6. Special effects

Apart from translating and producing subtitles, the editing of video is also part of the work of a fansub group. The work of editing is also divided into several kinds.

① The special effects of Karaoke of the opening and ending songs. This kind of special effect is not limited to a single visual effect. The more common type is to turn the words or syllables of the subtitle to a different color as the words are being sung. Moreover, when the original video has a Japanese subtitle with a special effect, the members of the fansub group will create a Chinese subtitle with the same effect. However, there are also many

²⁶ *I wanna be the guy* is a PC adventure game which is known for its high difficulty.

²⁷ Meaning of the word *Hardcore* in Chinese.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%A1%AC%E6%B8/22543671?fr=aladdin> (last access May 30th, 2018)

fansub groups that do not produce special effects for the subtitles of lyrics, because this work may cost a lot of time.

② The editing of the image. Sometimes, a lot of text information may appear on the screen, such as words written on a piece of paper, the signboards of shops, a message on the mobile phone screen, etc. If these texts do not affect the understanding of the story, some fansub groups may not translate them, while some groups may put the translated words by the side of the text in the image. However, there are also some fansub groups that not only

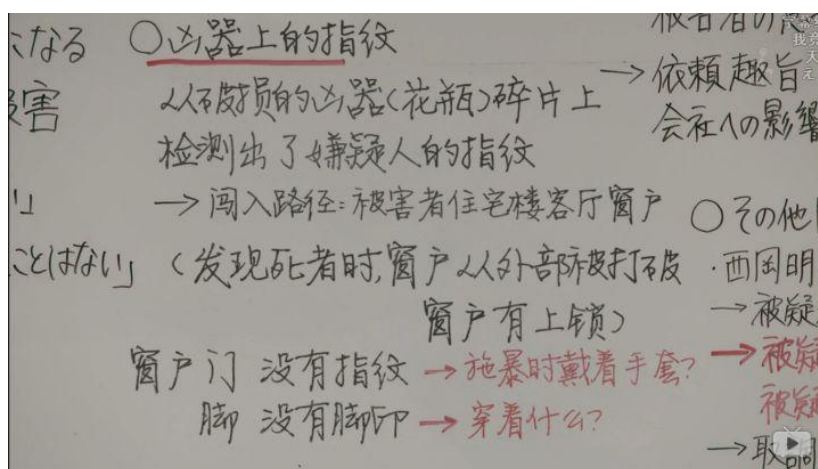


Figure 18. 99.9 Criminal Lawyer.

translate all the text on the screen, but also replace the original image with the translated words with a corresponding font. Like shown in Figure 18, the original version of the text on the whiteboard was written in Japanese, and now it is replaced by the Chinese translation in the form of handwriting.

③ Special effects whose goal is to make the viewing experience more interesting.

This kind of special effects has nothing to do with the translation or visual appearance. Generally speaking, the fansub group added these effects to the video 'just for fun'. Therefore, only in the comedy animes can we see these special effects. For example, in the ninth episode of *Monthly Girls' Nozaki-kun*, there is a scene where Nozaki and Sakura are running in the rain. The fansub group makes a subtitle that follows the characters moving on the screen.

As shown in figure 19 and 20, when the characters run from left to right across the screen, the subtitle also moves from left to right until it completely leaves the screen. And when the characters run from right to left, the subtitle moves backward in the same way.



Figure 19. *Monthly Girls' Nozaki-kun*.



Figure 20. *Monthly Girls' Nozaki-kun*

To add special effects or not depends on the time available for the fansub group or their self-imposed deadlines. If the time limit is relatively short (for example, if the anime is currently being broadcast, the fansub group would need to complete the work within a few hours after broadcasting), the fansub group will not consider making special effects.

3.7. Accuracy and other features

The fansub group is a team consisting of non-professionals and it produces non-profit works. Since there is no professional assessment for entering a fansub group, the quality of translation of different fansub groups is uneven. Although, when the translators join the group, most of the fansub groups require them to achieve a level of N1 or N2 in the Japanese ability test, actually, using a language involves all manner of background knowledge and local information in addition to grammar and vocabulary (Agar, 2006). Having achieved a linguistic level of certification does not mean that one already has sufficient ability of translation.

The barrier of entering the group is low, and many members of the fansub group are doing their subtitling work in their spare time. Therefore, the problems in translation are difficult to avoid. Since amateur subtitle production does not have a unified standard, many fansub group members do not have the so-called occupational awareness. Due to the time constraints or the lack of professional training and competence, fansubs are sometimes released with parts that are either not translated or mistranslated.

The case in figure 21 is a kind of mistranslation. Like what we have mentioned in section 2.2, sometimes the translators of fansub groups need to listen and write down the dialogues before translating. What the character in the picture says is ‘so let’s eat the second round (二周目).’ The translator of fansub group wrongly understood the dialogue, mistaking 目



Figure 21. *Hidamari Sketch*.

(pronounced as me) with 面 (pronounced as men), and translated this sentence as ‘so let’s eat Jizhou noodles’, which has nothing to do with the original dialogue.

In addition, some translation errors are inevitable because the film source obtained by the fansub group is not the original Japanese version. Since the original raw video is difficult to obtain, some Spanish fansub groups’ work is based on the English subtitles which are already translated by other groups. However, when transferring from Japanese to English, most translators are not English native speakers. That is to say, in the case of English fansubs, the translators can be a Japanese native speaker which produces subtitles in English. This is a factor that directly impacts the quality of the final translation (Díaz and Muñoz, 2006). Thus, when an original text has been translated twice (i.e. first from Japanese to English, and then from English to Spanish), the meaning can be completely changed. In this way, the translation errors are difficult to avoid.

4. Evaluation of the quality of translation on basis of comments by the public

4.1. Definition and characteristics of barrage/ *dan mu*

Barrage is a special form of commentary. The word ‘barrage’ originates from military terminology and was intended to describe intensive gunfire attacks. This form of commentary is called コメント機能 (*komento kinō*) in Japanese network. This kind of comments first appeared in Japan's Niconico video site and is one of the site's biggest features. The users just need to press a button to send a comment while the video is being played. If successful, the comment will be displayed after 3 seconds. The result is that this kind of comment gives the users a feeling that differs from the general mode of commentary. It is a feeling that goes ‘beyond the flow of time in reality, and shares the modality of time of a virtual space.’ The management of the website calls this ‘non-synchronous live’ (Okada, 2007). This comment function introduced the concept of timing, so that the users of Niconico Animation can get the feeling of being ‘acompanied by other viewers’, a feature that other video websites did not have (Ma and Ge, 2014). The invention of barrage has obtained unprecedented success. Besides being used as a form of commentary, the barrage is also often used as subtitles, lyrics or explanations to the video.

While watching a video, the viewers’ comments about the video appear from the right side of the screen and move to the left. When there are many comments on the screen at the same time, the visual effect is like numerous bullets going across the screen. Inspired by the similarity of this special visual effect with a STG (shooting game), Chinese Internet users call this form of comment ‘barrage’ (弹幕, *dan mu*).

As a new type of commentary, barrage has the following characteristics. First, the barrage is targeted. When watching a video, viewers can comment on a certain content of the video, and their comments also appear on the screen at the same time as the video is played. Because of the accurate timing of the barrage comments, its contents can be more detailed. Usually, a movement of the eyes or one facial expression from the character or real person in the video can cause a lot of barrage comments. One person's perspective is limited, but several pairs of eyes can always find changes in details and call the attention of other members of the audience. Therefore, the barrage comment is not for the entire content of a video, but it focuses on certain moments or content.

Second, the barrage is an immediate interaction. When watching a video, the viewers not only can see the comments they have posted at a certain point of time, but also can see the comments posted by other viewers at the same time. Traditional video sites set a comments area below the video area in the page (YouTube comments follow this template), and the comments are sorted in a chronological order. Although many websites now can show the most popular comments on top of others, the majority of comments cannot be seen because they are covered by backlogs of information. The barrage commentary is relatively freer. It is not limited by linear modalities of reading that focus on a single voice or discourse at a time. When a viewer sends a barrage, his or her comment will become a part of the video and co-exist with the video. The next viewer will be able to see and respond to this comment when watching the video (Zhou, Lü and Wang, 2017: 9-10).

Third, the barrage reflects an audience's feedback. As we said in the first point, the barrage comments are not for the entire video, but targeted to a specific detail in the video. Therefore, we can get audience's feelings about video details more accurately through barrage. As we will mention in the following paragraphs, in the traditional P2P *modus operandi*, fansub groups only send out video resources so that the viewers can download them later. These are unidirectional flows of information, and there is no interaction between both ends. Through barrage, we can get an audience feedback to a translation just in time. When the subtitles are poorly translated or brilliantly translated, the audience will respond to this, so we can surmise what kind of translation is acceptable to them.

4.2. Introduction of websites of barrage /dan mu

The barrage comment function first appeared in Japan's Niconico Douga (ニコニコ動画) video site in 2006. In June 2007, the establishment of the Acfun video site introduced the barrage model to China. In 2009, Xu Yi, a user from the original Acfun created Bilibili (动画), which further developed the barrage and improved the comment model. The images of video shots with barrage analyzed in this paper are all from Bilibili.

The official website of Bilibili describes the barrage mode that they provide as the

follows:²⁸

Bilibili offers the following three commonly used barrage modes. The maximum number of each single barrage is 30 characters.

The rolling barrage: The barrage that moves from right to left, which is also the default mode. You can use this barrage to express some short comments on the video. The best word count is 7-25 Chinese characters.

The top barrage: The barrage which consists of a persistent top line comment (as shown in Figure 22). The users can use this mode to focus their comments to a specified part of the video. They can also use letters of smaller size to analyze the video or explain the knowledge behind the detail. If there is no subtitle, this mode can also serve as a free translation.



Figure 22. *Hidamari Sketch*.

The bottom barrage: The barrage that maintains at the center of the bottom of the screen. If the video is not translated, the language translation function is provided for the videos in a foreign language. If there is a subtitle, please do not use the bottom barrage to cover the original video subtitles.

From the moment of its official introduction by Bilibili, we can see that the website does not want the barrage to affect the viewing of the video. The barrage is a function designed to increase the interaction of the audience and enhance the fun of viewing the video, and it should not affect the content transmission of the video itself. In addition, the interaction

²⁸ Bilibili. <https://www.bilibili.com/blackboard/help.html#弹幕相关> (last access May 30th, 2018)

between barrages should also adhere to a harmonious and friendly environment. Therefore, when each user registers, he or she must complete a barrage etiquette test and obtain a full score to register successfully.

At the same time, Bilibili also provides different settings for the barrages that appear on the screen. However, after registering as a member, users can only input rolling barrage, which is a form of barrage that moves from right to left at the top of the screen. If the user wants to use other barrage display methods (such as bottom barrage, top barrage, barrage with colors or other sizes), he or she needs to upgrade to get a formal membership. There are two ways to upgrade to formal membership, either through an invitation code from other users or through an online testing. This online test is similar to the barrage etiquette test that we have mentioned above. The form of the test is multiple-choice questions, which mainly refer to otaku knowledge, as well as history, genetics, computers, chemistry, etc. The questions cover a very wide range of knowledge. Because of its high degree of difficulty, the Chinese netizens named it as ‘*Gaokao*²⁹ for otaku’. The users can choose their area of expertise to answer. To get a formal membership, they need to get at least 60 points.

In order to ensure that the latest comments can appear in the video, the Bilibili site puts a cap on the number of barrage interventions that can appear in each video. The barrage limit varies depending on the actual length of the video.³⁰

Video length	00:01—00:30	00:31—01:00	01:01—03:00	03:01—10:00	10:01—15:00	15:01—40:00	40:01—60:00	> 60:00
Barrage limit	100	300	500	1000	1500	3000	6000	8000

When the number of barrage in a video reaches that maximum limit, the newly sent barrages will replace the old ones to ensure that the audience can see the latest barrage.

²⁹ *Gaokao* (高考), college entrance exam, an exam that Chinese students must take in order to access higher education and enroll in an university.

³⁰ Bilibili. <https://www.bilibili.com/blackboard/help.html#弹幕相关> (Last access May 30th, 2018)

4.3. The issue of copyright of Bilibili

Since Bilibili is a cybercultural community for young people, its standard of censorship is relatively gentle. This has facilitated users' exchange and acquisition of resources, but also has caused a lot of copyright problems.

Starting from June 2017, China's SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television) and the Ministry of Culture have significantly tightened their supervision of online content and have imposed restrictions on foreign film and television resources. As a result, a large number of overseas sources of mainstream video sites were gradually withdrawn. Prior to this, on Bilibili, users could still upload overseas video resources. Therefore, Bilibili became one of the biggest platforms on which the fansub groups could distribute their videos. Consequently, Bilibili has assembled a large number of overseas unlicensed film and television resources, many of which involve content of a sexual and violent nature, and thus attracted the attention of departments like SARFT.

Between 2014 and 2016, due to copyright issues, the operating companies of Bilibili have been filed more than 20 lawsuits. Unlike other video websites, the videos on Bilibili are mostly uploaded spontaneously by the users. These video resources are not stored in Bilibili, but are stored in servers of other video hosting websites. In other words, when we watch a video on Bilibili, not only the video source is not on the site, but even the video stream (or video broadband) is originally generated in Bilibili either. Precisely because of this, Bilibili often puts forward the point of view that 'this website does not provide video storage media, the case of infringement on the right of works information network communication is due to the user's personal behavior rather than the website', using the 'safe harbor principle' as a reason to evade responsibility.

The 'safe harbor principle' means that when a copyright infringement case occurs, if an ISP (Internet Service Provider) only provides file storage services, when this ISP is notified of infringement, it has the obligation to delete it, otherwise it will be regarded as infringement. If the infringing content is not stored on the ISP's server and the ISP has not been explicitly told which content should be removed, the ISP shall not be liable for infringement.

The safe harbor statute became notorious after the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) was enacted by the United States in 1998. It proposes five exemptions: Transitory

Digital Network Communications, System Caching, Information Storage, Search Engine, Non-profit Educational Institutions (Wu, Hu, 2005). It is originally applied to the copyright field. Later, it was applied to the network intermediary service providers that are not capable of performing prior reviews of the content, and generally do not know about the existence of the infringing information in advance. Therefore, the adoption of the 'notice-takedown procedure' is a restriction on the indirect infringement liability of network intermediary service providers. The general idea is that 'the network service providers can use information positioning tools including catalogs, indexes, hypertext links, and online storage sites. If they are suspected of infringement due to the linked, stored content, they should prove that they are not malicious and promptly remove the infringing content. In that case, the network service providers are not liable for the compensation' (Yang, 2016).

The appearance of the safe harbor rules has provided a good cover for the infringing acts of some subtitle publishing platforms like Bilibili (ib.). According to this principle, when a film and television subtitling website closes the website or deletes the video in the face of inspection and the copyright owner's investigation, it can be exempted from liability. In litigations, video sharing websites generally use their property of information storage and search engine as justification.

Apart from the copyright issue, on the other hand, Bilibili's principle of free watching and not playing video ads also situates it in an awkward position in the market competition.

In Chinese mainstream video industry, the users are required to pay before watching videos which get authorized for broadcasting (such as movies and TV series). But at Bilibili, users can watch officially licensed videos for free, and on top of that they can upload their own video resources even though this is not legally permitted. Moreover, Bilibili's strategy of no video advertising is also a commercial advantage. As a result, major video sites (such as Youku, iQIYI) began to exert pressure on the copyright owners, saying that if Bilibili continues the strategy of no ads, they would reduce cooperation. Under pressure, copyright owners demand that Bilibili be consistent with other video sites or they will not cooperate with them. At last, Bilibili could only compromise and both sides reached an agreement. In the coming season of broadcasting, the users of Bilibili need to pay for watching the latest animes. That is to say, when a new episode is updated, only those viewers that have paid can

watch it timely. Those who have not paid only can watch the episode of the previous week. This new rule has ensured that all the viewers can watch all the anime, however, it also has received strong opposition from many users.

At the beginning of January 2018, TV Tokyo, which had been cooperating with Bilibili for almost two years, asked Bilibili to load a one-minute advertisement for non-paying users in order to obtain more commercial benefits. As the previous rule of paying has caused the users' dissatisfaction, in order to avoid further loss of users, Bilibili finished its cooperation with TV Tokyo. On January 12th, Bilibili removed the 37 animes which are broadcasted on TV Tokyo. When these animes return to the website on February 17th, only paying users will be able to watch them.

4.4. Analysis of barrage cases on fansub translation

In Jeremy Munday's theory of translation behavior, there are several roles that affect and influence the translation behavior. There are altogether six roles that are considered in a translation project: the initiator (who needs the translation); the commissioner (for example, a translation company, which plays an intermediary role); the source text producer (who produces the original text, but is not necessarily involved in the production of the translation); the TT (target text) producer (the translator); the TT user; the TT receiver (Munday, 2001: 77). Each translation behavior does not necessarily consider or involve all roles mentioned above. Sometimes, one involved party can play multiple roles.

In the translation behavior of the fansub group, there are relatively fewer involved roles because several of them may belong to the same group of people. In the translation process of the fansub group, the character of initiator is not clear because the aim the fansub group activity is not only to provide translation for those fans who need subtitles, but also to attract the potential audience. Similarly, the role of the commissioner in fan activities is not clear either, because the fansub group's translation activities are non-commercial. In short, in the entire process of the translation behavior of fansub group, the TT producer and receiver are both fans. These two roles fall on the same group of people. The receivers of translation may also have the ability to produce translated texts.

It can be seen that the translation behavior of the fansub group is an internal activity

within a limited group of people that gather the roles that will impact such behavior. People that have interests in ACG culture joined together and formed a ‘circle’. They have their own method of communication, which may seem incomprehensible to outsiders. The activity of fansub is one of these communications. The form of non-commercial activities of the fansub groups obscures the boundary between the producer and the consumer of translation, and sometimes a consumer of the fansub works will have a higher skill of translation than the fansub group members.

As we mentioned in the previous section, the barrage provides an immediate interaction with a translated video. Therefore, it is a practical tool for obtaining an immediate feedback from the audience. We know that the translation exists for the audience and the readership. The quality of translations is ultimately measured by the readers.

The best subtitles are those that pass unnoticed to the viewer (Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez, 2006). A well-translated subtitle would ensure that the viewers focus their attention on the video and be unaware to the existence of the subtitle. However, some fansub groups have changed this perception. From the barrage reactions to a video, it can be observed that in many cases the viewers not only realize the existence of the subtitle, but also show their evaluations and expectations about the fansub group. Even in some cases, the behavior of watching the subtitles itself becomes a pleasant goal in itself.

In the following cases, we will list screenshots of the barrage of some of the anime from Bilibili, and analyze the quality of fansub translations according to the reaction of barrage to the translation subtitles in different situations.

4.4.1. Viewer’s reaction to translation errors

From the previous introduction, we can learn that to get a formal membership, Bilibili's users need to pass an online test so that later they can use more barrage modalities. Some of the viewers watching anime at Bilibili do not understand any Japanese, while others may have the same or even higher level of Japanese language proficiency, of otaku knowledge, and of Japanese culture than members of the fansub group. When the subtitle is wrongly translated,



Figure 23. *Hidamari Sketch*.

viewers who do not understand Japanese may not pay attention and might be misdirected by the bad translation. In this case, the viewers who understand what the dialogue *does* say will point out the mistakes and then send their version of a correct translation through a barrage.

The figure 23 is the example mentioned in section 3.7. In this case, the fansub group wrongly translated ‘二周目’ (‘second round’) as ‘纪州面’ (‘Jizhou noodles’). In fact, if one does not understand Japanese, this mistranslation of dialogue will not affect the overall understanding of the story. However, this is intolerable for the viewers that understand Japanese. In the figure, we can see that a viewer used barrages to explain why the translation is wrong.

The following is the content of the barrage:

我估计这字幕组只懂完全的日语标准语 (相当于普通话) /I doubt that this fansub group understands the complete Japanese standard language (just like Mandarin).

一点点口音或个人的发音差异就不靠谱 / Even there is just a little accent or personal pronunciation habit, they cannot distinguish it at all

二周目, 即第二轮、第二回合, (周, 取: 一周, 一期的意思) /二周目, which means the second round. (周 means one period.)

这里是说【二周目】, 日语汉字的“目”表示排序顺序, 相当于“第”/what she says here is 【the second round】. In Japanese, the kanji 目 indicates the order, which is similar to ‘No.’

Through analysis of similar instances of barrage, it can be seen that in most cases, when the viewers find that the fansub group has a translation error, they usually choose to point it out. And when there is a large number of errors in the translation of a certain anime (as mentioned above, *Hidamari Sketch* translated by fansub group HKG), there will be audience members that use the barrage to request that other viewers who are also watching this video to correct the translation. For example, in figure 24, one viewer says that ‘毕竟是早期的番，当时的 HKG 翻译不到位也是难免，大家弹幕补充一下吧/ After all, this is an anime that has been broadcasted for several years, it was inevitable that the group HKG made some mistakes. Let's correct the translation together in the barrage.’ This viewer called on other audiences to use barrage to correct the translation errors, so that those who watch this video later can enjoy a correct translation.



Figure 24. *Hidamari Sketch*.

4.4.2. Viewer's reaction to the missing of translation

Sometimes the fansub groups may not translate texts other than dialogues (and neglect other texts such as stores' signs, messages on mobile phones, etc.). Although sometimes these untranslated words do not affect the understanding of the story, for those audiences who want to master all the details, the translation of any information is necessary. At this time, the viewers may self-reliantly translate the parts uncovered by the subtitle group and then publish it in barrage.

In barrage video sites like Bilibili, there is a profile of user who uses barrage to produce subtitle for other viewers. They use the function where the barrage can stay static on the screen to voluntarily produce subtitles for the parts which fansub groups have not translated yet. In Bilibili's barrage instructions, it has also been mentioned that the bottom barrage can be used to add captions to videos that are not translated. Such subtitles added by video site users using barrage are often referred to as 'wild captions'. In general, 'wild subtitles' usually appear when the opening and ending songs are being played, because in order to save time, many fansub groups do not translate the lyrics. However, only if the users use the high-level barrage that requires programming code, they can control the length of time that the barrage remains on the screen. Therefore, when the video is being played, the newly-appeared subtitles and previous subtitles tend to be stacked together, causing viewers to discern which subtitles corresponded to previous play times. As a result, 'wild subtitles' produced by barrage can only serve to help the other users understanding the story, and cannot be used as formal subtitles.

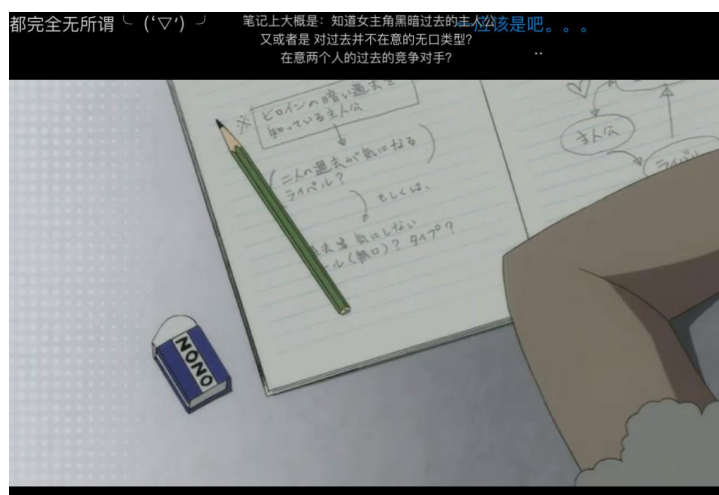


Figure 25. *Hidamari Sketch*.

As shown in figure 25, the fansub group has not translated the text content on the notebook. The text on the notebook is the draft of the novel that the character is writing. This draft has nothing to do with the main story of the anime. What audiences care about, however, is often these details that don't seem to have much to do with the main story. The reason for this will be explained with examples in section 4.5.

4.4.3. Viewer's reaction to netas

In this section, we will see examples of several instances of interactions with netas. First, we will look into the audience's barrage reaction to the netas that the fansub group plays in the subtitles; second, we will observe the audience's reaction to the explanations of netas added by a fansub group; finally, we will examine another reaction mode that implies that the viewers send additional exegesis of the neta which the fansub group has not annotated.

In most cases, when a neta appears in the subtitles as a content introduced by the fansubbers and extraneous to the source text, the audience may accept it with a relaxed attitude – after all, a neta's intention is to bring fun to people who also understand the background knowledge of this plot. If the neta added by fansub group is known to most viewers, their response will be positive. Those who understand the neta may think that ‘this is quite interesting’ and no longer care about it after laughing. However, when a neta appears too frequently or it ignores TPO (time, place, occasion), most viewers would respond that ‘It’s a bit annoying.’

As to the question ‘whether the fansub groups should add netas in translation’, there are many different points of views. Some viewers believe that too much neta in the subtitles shows that the fansub group has not taken the work of translation seriously. Some viewers think that subtitles can be humorous when it is in an anime of comedy. But if it is a serious anime, a witty language style would not be suitable. In addition, some viewers suggested that if there are netas in the subtitles, the video appears less boring. For some users, a subtitle without netas is not interesting enough.

The following are some of the comments posted in an online discussion between Bilibili users:³¹

Post Title: 关于那些玩梗很多的翻译组: 你怎么看? 反感? 喜爱? 如果你问我, 我虽然不反感, 但我还是支持正经翻译的。/About those fansub groups that are fond of adding netas: What do you think? Disgusted? Interesting? If I am the one who is being asked, I should say although I do not resent them, I still support more serious translations.

Post reply:

³¹ *About those fansub groups that are fond of adding netas.* <https://tieba.baidu.com/p/3219213230> (Last access May 30th, 2018).

7th floor:³² 偶尔的玩梗会增加笑点。过多就有点那个了...../Occasionally adding netas will increase laughter. Too much is a little bit of

14th floor: 正常番不喜欢，但猫和老鼠这些搞笑番我看着是挺乐的。/I hate to see netas appear in subtitles of normal animes, but if it is in *Tom and Jerry*, that will be fun.

18th floor: 喜欢正经翻译，有的漫不适合玩梗看了简直毁气氛。/I like serious translations. Some animes are not suitable for adding netas. That might destroy the atmosphere.

51st floor: 大部分番偶尔玩一下梗可以调节一下气氛，不过玩多了就有点不能接受了。/In most animes, adding neta to subtitle can ease up the atmosphere. But if there is too much, I can't stand it.

52nd floor: 不要在不合时宜的时候玩就好，比如本来挺悲伤的地方却被字幕逗乐了这样。/Don't add netas when it's not appropriate. For example, if the story is sad, but the subtitle is quite amusing...

53rd floor: 还行吧，我比较喜欢翻译组玩梗但是在旁边注明正常翻译的。/That's OK. I prefer that the fansub group would add netas but also put the normal translation aside.

132nd floor: 像这样的搞笑番，我觉得这样的翻译也挺不错的，增加了笑点，反正人物对话的大概意思知道就行了。/For those comedy animes, I think this kind of translation is also very good, it may add a little bit of laughter. Anyway, the meaning of the dialogue is clear.

154th floor: 我是一个英文翻译字幕组的，我们团队觉得适当玩梗是好的，多了就会让别人烦了。/I'm from an English fansub group. Our team thinks it's better to control the number of netas. If there is too much, the viewers might be annoyed.

166th floor: 不喜欢，想知道原版。之前看到有字幕组恶搞的时候在上方写正经翻译的，虽然有点怪但比较能接受。/I don't like it. I prefer to know the original dialogue. Once I saw a fansub group add netas to subtitles, but they also put the seriously translated version aside. It was a bit weird but acceptable.

It can be seen that the degree of acceptance of neta in subtitles varies from person to person. Everyone has their own different area of interest. Even if the neta added by the fansub group is very popular, for those who do not understand the background, this neta is only affecting the viewing experience. However, we can conclude that for most people, adding neta to the subtitle of comedy animes might be appropriate, but in a serious story, it is not

³² In this website, each reply is identified as a floor.

suitable. In other words, when adding netas, a fansub group needs to pay attention to the TPO. In this regard, a member from the fansub group Nixie Subs specifically uploaded a video called ‘*Netas? Serious? Conscientious? Where are the boundaries?*’ in which they express their own views.³³

In the video, the member pointed out that ‘There is no direct link between conscientious and effortlessness.’ Some viewers believe that if the language style of a subtitle is too relaxed, it might mean that the fansub group is not serious. In response, the member stated that whether it is to translate comedy animes or serious animes, whether the netas are added to the subtitles or not, it requires the same amount of time and effort. However, it is difficult to adjust the tone. Obviously, a fansub group cannot meet the needs of all viewers at the same time. Therefore, some viewers will choose different fansub groups’ videos for different viewing experiences.

The same problem also appears in the area of scanlation. When leaving the scanlation group to which he belonged, the translator of the manga of *Hinamatsuri* states in his work summary that to use netas or no is always a problem. The following are his original words:

The first is the problem of translation. In terms of translation, I mainly choose words which are close to the Chinese people's habit as much as possible. After all, it is translated for insiders, there is no need to follow the Western style.

Then the other thing I need to talk about is netas. I believe many of our readers may have chosen this manga because its translation includes a lot of netas. Although it wasn't me that first added neta to the dialogues, I tried to use them as much as I could during the translation. Of course, certain readers may find that I am gradually reducing the use of netas. Although using netas may make the process of translation much easier, there are also many readers who do not like it. I think this is the so-called *it is difficult to suit everyone's taste*.³⁴

From his words, we can see that using neta is a way to make the translation more interesting, and wanting to see interesting translations is the demand of some readers. This situation reflects the difficulties faced by many fansub and scanlation groups: to translate according to the requests of the audience and readers, or to translate following their own

³³ Nixie Subs. ‘Netas? Serious? Conscientious? Where are the boundaries?’ *Bilibili*. 04:09. 13rd June, 2017. <http://www.bilibili.com/video/av11290968> (Last access May 30th, 2018).

³⁴ The translator's words. <https://m.dmzj.com/view/7598/50870.html> (Last access May 30th, 2018).

hearts?

However, as for the translation efforts of the fansub group, the audience always regards them with a positive attitude. When the fansub group translates splendidly, the viewers' reactions all show their support and praise. Sometimes the fansub group may translate some texts which are seemingly untranslatable. As shown in the screenshot of *Sayonara! Zetsubō Sensei* in figure 26, in order to achieve a satire effect, the text on the screen is marked with mosaics. The fansub group translated the text in the mosaic based on the hints of the story and



Figure 26. *Sayonara! Zetsubō Sensei*.

the length of the text in the picture. When the video is played to this section, the audience's barrage comments are all like the following:

‘这字幕组神了/This fansub group is really marvelous!’

‘该不会字幕组是按字数猜的吧? / So they guessed the text by the number of characters?’

‘马赛克都阻止不了字幕组。/ Even the mosaic has been unable to stop the fansub group.’

When the fansub group has not explained the netas in the anime, in order to let other viewers know what has been left untouched in the picture by the animation group, some viewers may use a barrage to explain these netas. As shown in the figure 27, this is a scene of *Eden of the East* that does not have dialogues. The barrage above says:

‘注意，此处致敬麦田里的守望者。/Notice: here is a tribute to *The Catcher in the Rye*.

伊甸里似乎影射 Holden 是朗殿下，Phoebe 是小咲。/It seems that in *Eden of the East*, Akira-dono refers to Holden, and Saki-chan refers to Phoebe.

最后下起雨来，Holden 在雨中看着 Phoebe 快乐地坐木马。/And then it begins to rain, and Holden watched Phoebe happily sitting on the merry-go-round.'

(Dono and chan are both used to call others in Japanese.)



Figure 27. *Eden of the East*.

4.4.4. Viewer's reaction to excessive translations

The case of excessive translation is different from that of inserting netas. Ideally, a neta only makes the translation more interesting. It would not affect the dialogue's original meaning as long as it is not overused. However, an excessive translation carries the translator's own emotions. It will exaggerate the description, change the contents of the dialogue, and make it so the audience will not be able to tell the original content of the lines. Obviously, this type of translation might affect the audience's viewing experience. For those viewers who cannot distinguish the quality of translation, they might drastically misunderstand the anime which is being translated.

A typical example of excessive translation has been mentioned in section 3.1. At Bilibili, users can find different versions of *Nichijō*, which is translated by different fansub groups.

Among them, the versions translated by fansub group Wolf and the one translated by the group Yiyu caused controversy among the viewers. In the translated version of the two subtitles, the translators intentionally use the homonym of typos to achieve a funny effect, or they change the original meaning of the sentence according to the expression that the translator likes. As to the question of whether the excessive translation is suitable, the response of viewers appears completely different.

When the fansub group exaggerated the meaning of the sentence for the effect of comedy, many viewers pointed out in the barrage that the translation was wrong:

‘The translation is wrong.’

‘This subtitle has changed its original meaning.’

‘This fansub group translates well, but too much exaggeration is not good.’

‘Out of ten sentences, eight of them are not accurate. The translation affects my experience of watching.’³⁵

Nichijō itself is already a comedy anime. The fansub group does not add netas to the subtitles, so that is not what draws criticism, but rather the liberties taken with the dialogues. Many viewers are not optimistic about this kind of translation which makes funny changes to the original dialogues.

However, although many people have expressed dissatisfaction, the phenomenon of excessive translation still exists. Some people oppose it, while some people support it. There is a subgroup of the audience that does not evaluate the excessive translation, but turns to criticize those who have expressed dissatisfaction with the fansub group:

‘你这么厉害自己去翻译啊，对字幕组尊重点。/Since you are so gorgeous, why don’t you translate it yourself? Be respectful to the fansub group.’

‘爱怎么翻怎么翻，爱看不看。人家字幕组乐意。/They can translate it as they like. If you don’t like it, just leave. It’s a fansub group’s free choice.’

‘人家没有报酬的。/ The members do not get paid for their works.’

‘对字幕组有意见就去看生肉啊（笑。If you are dissatisfied with the translation, go see raw videos :-）’

Their reason for defending for the fansub groups is usually the spontaneous and

³⁵ Nichijō. Bilibili. <http://m.bilibili.com/bangumi/play/ss844> (Last access 20th June, 2018).

non-commercial nature of the fansub activities. They argue that since the viewers can freely enjoy the translation of the subtitle group, they should not make more demands on the translation.

To explain why this happens, we need to analyze the current composition of the audience of otaku culture in China. As a new industry, the ACG industry in China has taken the youth as its target. Bilibili has turned to ACG culture as its main platform, its target user group is also young people. According to the statistics,³⁶ in the fourth quarter of 2017, Bilibili's monthly active users were 71.8 million, and users spent a daily average of 76.3 minutes on the site. The retention rate of regular members for the twelfth month exceeded 79%. Among the users, 81.7% are young people born between 1990 and 2009. They are known as the 'Generation Z' of China. In other words, the age of Bilibili's users is mainly between 9-28 years old. Among them, the minors³⁷ group account for a sizeable proportion.

The lack of extensive otaku knowledge amongst the viewers may also be reflected in the barrage. Sometimes, even if the fansub group has correctly translated the dialogue, there will still be some viewers' complaints in the barrage that 'the fansub group has used neta again', or 'the subtitle group has translated wrong.' In these cases, such comments tend to be ignored by the rest of the users, although they occasionally spark further engagement.

³⁶ *Bilibili submits an IPO application to the US, plans to raise \$400 million.*
<https://view.inews.qq.com/a/TEC2018030300171906?from=groupmessage&isappinstalled=0> (Last access May 30th, 2018)

³⁷ In China, those who are under the age of 18 are minors.

4.4.5. Viewer's comparison between different translations

This kind of case is a bit special, but it is also often seen in barrages.

We know that when a new anime starts to broadcast, many fansub groups would compete to translate it in order to gain more playback. Therefore, after seeing multiple versions of translations, viewers will inevitably compare these different versions. We will use the second season of *Saiki Kusuo no sai-nan* (齊木楠雄のΨ難, *The Disastrous Life of Saiki K.*), which began to broadcast in January 2018, as an example. In section 4.3, we have mentioned that Bilibili once had to remove several animes due to a brief conflict with TV Tokyo. Among these animes, there is the second season of *Saiki Kusuo no sai-nan*. During this period, Bilibili's users could only temporarily choose to watch it on the website Youku, which is cooperating with TV Tokyo. However, the subtitle group that cooperates with Youku has been accused of translating it badly. That is to say, as we have mentioned above, this anime has been over translated. Because of this, the viewers were not used to the viewing atmosphere there. Therefore, when Bilibili resumed cooperation with TV Tokyo in February, viewers could once again watch the second season of *Saiki Kusuo no sai-nan* on Bilibili's site. During that time, many viewers expressed in the barrage, 'The translation here is much more comfortable.'

This shows that when it is impossible to choose, the audience can only tolerate the bad translations for a while. And when multiple translations are available to choose from, they would compare these translations and end up following the one that is more in line with their personal interests.

The audience will not only compare the subtitles of different fansub groups that are translated at the same time, but also compare subtitles which were translated several years ago with recent subtitle translations.

While watching new animes, which are being broadcast according to seasons, many anime fans might also review the works they have watched many years ago. Before the barrage comment function appeared on video sites, the audience watched animes without real-time comments. Therefore, we cannot get the audience's reaction to the subtitle translations that were released before. However, when old animes are re-broadcast with new translations, we can see that the viewers still remember the translations they had seen and

recalled these translations in the barrage. They mentioned that ‘there is no problem with the translation of this version,’ but they ‘didn’t like it’ because ‘this version of the translation is different from what they saw a few years ago.’

The series *Ouran High School Host Club* as an example began to broadcast originally in 2006, and up until this year (2018), it has been 12 years since then. Before this anime could be viewed through Bilibili, the translation that the viewers saw belonged to another fansub group. However, in the barrage, we can see that many people had watched that translation in the past. The translation of *Ouran High School Host Club* which can be seen on Bilibili today is accurate and there is almost no neta, but still the viewers who have seen this work in the past all agree that they prefer the previous translation.

From this case, we can infer that the viewers retain the memory of the translations that they have seen before. Instead of using subtitles as a fleeting tool to aid understanding, they will also remember subtitle translations. This memory is not limited to famous lines (such as *Detective Conan*’s ‘There is always only one truth / 真実はいつも一つ’), but it can cover all the dialogues. When one tries to recall something, the process is like seizing a piece of paper from a file. Some details, even if not deliberately remembered, can also be remembered by being stimulated by the outside world.

This kind of case also appears when a manga is being adapted to an anime. In Japan, a considerable number of animes are adapted from a manga. Before a manga was animated, its translation was performed by a scanlation group. After animating, although there is almost no difference between the animated lines and the manga’s dialogues, fansub groups usually do not refer to the scanlation group’s translation, but translate it themselves. For those viewers who first read the manga and then chose to watch the anime which is adapted from this work, the first version that they encountered was the translation of scanlations. For example, *Hinamatsuri*, which began broadcasting in April 2018. This is an anime adapted from the manga of the same name. As we mentioned in section 4.4.3, the translator of *Hinamatsuri*’s manga added a lot of neta to the translation, leaving a deep impression on the reader. Therefore, after animating, when the anime is played to the same segment as the manga, the barrage at that moment is all about the translation of the scanlation group.



Figure 28. *Hinamatsuri*.



Figure 29. *Hinamatsuri*.

For example, in episode nine of *Hinamatsuri*'s manga(see figure 28), Anzu has a line that says 'I really appreciate it that you have taken care of Hina for such a long time.' In the manga, this line was translated as '我是来顶楼主的。/ I just come to support you.' '我是来顶楼主的' is a sentence often used by netizens to express their support in the past. When the fourth episode of the anime was broadcasted to this plot, although the fansub group has translated attending to the source text contents, many people in the barrage sent the phrase '我是来顶楼主的。/ I just come to support you.' (see figure 29)

If both translations (scanlation's and fansub's) are straightforward, correct, and without neta, viewers often would not pay attention to the small differences. But when one version of a translation gives them a deep impression, the viewers might not forget the translation that they first accessed. Translations with neta can impress the audience. The viewers mention the scanlation group's translation in the barrage, this action is out of an attitude of sharing. In this way, more viewers who have never read the manga can also see this translation. At the same time, they can also see the reactions of other audiences to this translation, so that they can have fun in communicating with others.

4.5. Summary of case studies

From the behavior of the fansub group that provides free translations for fans, to the behavior of viewers who use barrage to help each other, both of these are internal communications among fans. People who do not know each other in 'real life' exchange information through the Internet and enrich their knowledge reserves in this process. This is a mutually beneficial activity. Through this process, the easter eggs and secrets buried in the original works can be excavated. Through the promotion of the Internet, more people can understand the meaning and background of those animes and mangas.

In *Introduction to Otakuology*, Okada Toshio introduced the 'three eyes' that otakus have – namely, the eye of the aesthetic, the eye of the craftsman and the eye of an overall perspective (Okada, 1996: 31-35).

The task of the eye of aesthetics is to discover the beauty of a work through one's independent point of view. The audience may pay attention to the author's growth, study the details of works of different periods, and gain pleasure from this process. The eye of the craftsman leans towards a more detailed appreciation. This perspective thinks that a work is not something that simply exists, but is produced through human skills which deserve to be observed and analyzed. It conducts a theoretical analysis of the work and explores its structure in essence. This perspective is more rigorous and similar to that of scientists. The eye of an overall perspective refers to the perspective that one can only gain by watching all the anime work and comparing it with the background knowledge of other works. Thus, the audience can guess and imagine the situation and details of the creation process. This perspective bypasses the final result and focuses on the hard work, the enthusiasm, and entanglement of the staff behind the scenes. When combining these three together, we can have an all-round perspective for appreciating works. From this multi-sited perspective, it is possible that each work can be interpreted comprehensively.

An experienced otaku needs many years of accumulation to hone such ability of appreciation. When networked communication technologies were not highly developed yet, otakus could only repeatedly watch the programs that they liked through recorded videos. Because of the limitations of time and storage space, it is particularly important to maintain the communication with fellow enthusiasts in order to obtain the latest information. With the

advent of the information age, the methods and channels that otakus could use to obtain information have increased. Therefore, in order to get more information through exchanging, otakus became not only the consumer of cultural works, but also producers.

In the sections above, we have mentioned the reactions of viewers to the fansub group's translation in different situations. Among these cases, there are corrections to translations and spontaneous explanations of the details (for example, neta). The purpose of these actions is to allow viewers who later watch the video to fully understand and enjoy these anime works. In some people's opinion, there is no need to pay attention to those paratexts that seem to have nothing to do with the main story. However, for otakus, there is no detail that is irrelevant. As we mentioned in the section 4.4.2, one fansub group did not translate a text on a notebook that appeared on the screen because it was not directly related to the main storyline. In fact, in the main story of *Hidamari Sketch*, the novel written by the character is based on her real life. The characters in the novel correspond to the characters in the reality. Therefore, even a fragmented detail like a draft on the notebook may allow the audience to have a deeper understanding of the characters' emotions. This is the so-called eye of the craftsman which the otakus cultivate. It uses a scientifically serious attitude to analyze the anime works. As we said before, the vision of one person is limited, but the vision of many people is much broader. The emergence of barrage has made it possible for communications between audiences that watch the same video to grow exponentially. As time goes by, the analysis of an anime work becomes more and more complete.

In terms of neta and over-translation, these two phenomena show the compatibility of a fansub group and the audience group. We have mentioned that the fansub group members themselves are also members of the anime fandom. We should not rule out the fact that most members join a fansub group in order to contribute to the development of the ACG culture, but there are also some people who participate in a fansub group's activities with the purpose of actualizing their self-worth. We know that humans are social animals. Even in a small group such as the ACG fandom, as long as one keeps creating and maintaining their contribution to the circle, he or she can get the attention and recognition of other fans. And those translators who often add personal emotions to translations belong to this kind of people.

The mentality of these translators of fansub groups is consistent with those of the *dōjinshi* authors. They do not consider that they are ‘translating works’. They think what they are doing is ‘creating’. They consider themselves as creators rather than servants. It is normal for fans to express their love to a work by creating *dōjin* works like mangas and novels, but when this happens to the translation of fansub, it might be inevitably polemic. Since translation has to attend to the semantics of the source text, if a translator simply changes the original meaning in order to show a sense of personal presence, that behavior is not regarded as a ‘translation’.

On the other hand, although the audience's translation criticism seems to be a manifestation of the transformation of the audience's role, in fact, there exists a lot of inequality between viewers and translators. The reason why viewers comment on translations is that they think they have fully understood the dialogues. The difference between audiovisual translation and translation of a text written is that, in the case of audiovisual translation, although the viewers do not see the original text directly, they can hear it. The human brain responds differently to reading and listening. Most of the time, when an audience thinks they ‘understand’ the lines, they may actually only understand the keywords. At the level of semantic understanding, one or several keywords would be sufficient. Just as when listening to a sentence, one only needs to know the verb so that he or she could be able to roughly guess the meaning of the original sentence. If one knows the subject and predicate, the meaning of the entire sentence would be very clear. But translation and understanding are completely two different processes. The translator needs to express his or her understanding in a way that others can understand after he understands the original meaning of the sentence. However, translation cannot provide only keywords. When viewers realize the existence of translation, they would not pay all the attention to the original text. But for the translator, whether a sentence is important to the understanding of the story or not, every line of dialogue must be translated correctly in the same way.

In the case of the fansub group, the translation is in the form of text. Each translation appears on the screen for a short period of time, so even a little inaccuracy or extraneous manifestation in the translation will cause the viewer to spend extra time on thinking and understanding. Therefore, translation criticism by audiences can only serve as a guide when in

comes to improving translations and translation training. The evaluations of viewers allow the members of fansub groups to know what the audience focuses on while watching, so that they can make high-quality subtitles more efficiently.

In addition, the fact that the viewers can remember the content of the subtitle that they watched several years ago is also worthy of further analysis. In general, we think that viewers' memories of subtitles are immediately perishable. Subtitles appear on the screen for a short period of time and are provided for the understanding of the content of the dialogue. However, with the combination of pictures, sounds and the story, it is easier to remember the fast flashing subtitles than still texts on a white page. We may tend to believe that, when the audiences expressed that they prefer a previous translation, this feeling is not based on an actual memory of the quality of the translation, but on the feeling and mood of watching the anime for the first time many years ago. In other words, memories play a role in idealizing in the process of recalling. The reason why the audience prefers the previous translation is that they have an intimate connection with the memories that the old translations have brought to them.

The fansub groups play an indispensable role in the cross-cultural communication of otaku culture. However, over time, fansub groups' operating conditions have also changed. Nowadays, the awareness of copyright of video websites is getting stronger, and as amateur organizations, the fansub groups have been less active than before. With the increase in the number of cooperation between video websites and the copyright owners, some fansub groups have begun to cooperate with these video sites. This makes them no longer a fansub group, but a subtitle group that works for the websites and get paid. However, regardless of how they are called, the group of people that participate in the subtitling activity is the same. They have a strong interest in the otaku and ACG culture, and are always sensitive to the news in this field (for them, it is never 'just another translation assignment'). The target viewers of their work are still their fellow ACG culture insiders. Amateur groups conducting activities in a sub-cultural environment still have a long way to go, be it in the form of fansubs or through other channels and activities.

Conclusion

The anime fansub groups are only one kind of the wide range of amateur subtitle groups. Just in China, there are numerous fansub groups that translate programs from several countries and languages, including English, Korean, Thai, Spanish, Russian, etc. And there are also other fansub groups all around the world. Some of the members of these fansub groups were just ordinary fans, while others have already developed the ability of a professional translator. These members gradually became communication agents with multiple roles, such as importer of cultural works, introducer of another language culture, translator, and distributor of foreign works in their own country. As communicators, fansub groups reciprocally share, compete, and learn in their subtitling activities. These collectives became a significant force in promoting cross-cultural communication during the last 25 years.

Under the restrictions of the background of otaku culture, it is difficult for anime fansub groups to widen the audience that they have. Although the purpose of their subtitling is to promote anime, the otaku culture (in its more devoted modalities), by definition appears to be the interest of a minority, which makes it difficult for outsiders to join in even if more and more commercial platforms feature anime as part of their viewing choices. Subtitling's work is tedious and meticulous. It requires teamwork and coordination among the different members (Díaz and Muñoz, 2006), and is often not understood by outsiders because of its non-commercial nature.

The fansub group members experience the enthusiasm of self-entertainment through subtitling, but the continuity of the fansub group is dependent on their output of subtitled foreign videos and television works. The copyright of the wealth of cultural products in the global market cannot be satisfactorily protected if such products are to be made promptly and readily available in every territory. This results in the unfavorable position of fansub groups. Piracy merchants use the subtitles produced by fansub groups to earn commercial benefit, but the fansub groups cannot use legal weapons to protect their own intellectual property rights. In addition, the principle of fansub groups that the members voluntarily participate and are free to leave at a moment's notice has also resulted in a relatively loose organizational

structure. The instability of the organizational structure has resulted in the often-overlooked problem of the long-term development of the groups.

Although the sharing spirit of fansub groups determines that they will not take commercial profit as their ultimate goal, the operating costs of the forums used by them is a source of pressure for the whole operation. With the combination of network economy, trying to cooperate with video websites is a strategy for survival. Even then, as the demands in other aspects of their social lives grow, most of these volunteer fansubbers will compromise and decrease their engagement or retire from the fansubbing team eventually.

In terms of translation, we can say that fansub groups can follow their own ideas undeterred by hegemonic discourses on rules for translating. Some large-scale fansub groups will strive for excellence in translation in order to attract a certain group of viewers. Also, some fansub groups may be good at explaining netas, while other groups may pay more attention to the literalness of the translation. However, as we mentioned before, many translators who are permitted to join in the group do not have professional qualifications, because their only accreditation is their language level. These translators regard translation as a form of self-expression. They regard and position themselves as ‘a fan who participates in subtitling’, not as “professional translator.” Therefore, the translation of this kind of person often reflects idiosyncratic traits (such as their personal emotional reaction to the source text).

This points to a contradiction of the fansub group: they are not professional teams, but they are required to be professional by a diverse audience with different criteria as to what constitutes a ‘good’ translation. The audience chooses to watch the videos translated by specific fansub groups. This is a reflection of their trust in the team’s work. They believe that the fansub group would bring them a good translation. They believe that the fansub group feels responsible and is bound to guarantee the quality of their work. For those who watch the video for the first time, the primary goal is to fully understand its content. To experience enjoyment through watching, one might need to watch the same video several times. However, most viewers only watch it once, so it is extremely important to ensure that the audience fully grasps the core of the story’s content on the first pass. This is why audiences think that the quality of translations is important. They do not have time nor are they willing to make time to watch the same video again and again as translated by different fansub groups, so that they

may determine which is the better translation. They expect that the one being watched is the best translation.

In this cultural consumption practices between the audience and the fansub group, it seems impossible to judge which of them is the dominant agent. In fact, we can say that the members of fansub group and the viewers belong to the same fandom. From the standpoint of identity, there is no difference between these two sides. The internal communication method of the fansub group is based on the platform of the Internet and is usually anonymous. The members from the same fansub group may have worked together for a long time and do not know each other's real name and identity in the reality. That is to say, the communication between ACG fans is based on common hobbies and it has nothing to do with the real-life profit. The fansub group's activity itself is in fact not a traditional translation activity but an activity of exchanging and socializing between anime fans. Although it also needs to be rigorous and accurate, it bears repeating that the translation in fansubs may not be constrained by social pressures and professional standards. Fansub groups' translation of animes have helped to increase the number of fans of ACG culture, and some of these new fans have also started participating in fansub activities in order to attract more partners. As time goes by, this has formed a virtuous circle. In this process of development, 'personal interest' and 'sharing' are all the motivators.

In the eyes of conventional media and academic research, otaku culture is a subculture entertained by a minority of people. However, in fact, the otaku culture is not simply an emerging culture which developed through fans' promotion and pursuit. It has a clear history and a rich development process. Culture is based on inheritance and innovation. It is because of the mutual reciprocity that cultures are able to stimulate each other. It can be said that it is precisely because of the inheritance of culture, that new creations could become possible (Okada, 1996: 27). To inquire into the different milestones of otaku's cultural development, as well as the innovators and pioneers that catalyzed the whole process, I am afraid that several dissertations could not be enough. Therefore, we only focused on the power of fans to introduce and spread anime in order to increase the number of fans who enjoy all the genres of Japanese animation. For the promotion of all the aspects of the source culture, the strength of the fansub group alone is not enough, as they translate media that focuses on expressions of

popular culture.

In China, the research on otaku culture is still at a shallow level. The reason for considering it 'shallow' is because for researchers in academia, otaku culture belongs to a subculture. What is more, their research focuses on the 'sub' value judgement aspect rather than on 'culture'. Although in China, the pursuit of ACG culture and its market have increased year by year, the country has just begun to pay attention to the development of this new industry. However, due to the average low age of the audience, even if the number of fans rises, few of them can be called an otaku. *Otaku* implies more than being a child with a hobby. It designates young adults or older individuals, with purchase power. Those who adhere to the prioritization of an interest above all other demands and who have the ability to contribute to the inheritance and development of otaku culture are even fewer. Among the older fans who could be able to participate in the promotion of otaku culture, the number of 'hardcore otakus' is actually low in China compared to the Japanese market.

Nowadays, the composition of the fansub groups has changed a lot from the usual configurations in the past. Apart from the fansub groups that began their activities in the era when otaku culture was first introduced to China, many members of the newly formed fansub group do not have much knowledge of otaku's history and canon. Some members join in a fansub group for personal needs. Some are looking for opportunities to meet people, while others are looking for a way to exercise their own language skills. This trend has been reflected in a decrease of quality of subtitle translations. In the past, the translations of fansub groups may have been wrong, but it rarely affected the viewing experience. The dwindling concern for translation quality also runs parallel with the higher demand for immediacy. Some commercial distribution channels in Europe and the USA have reached agreements with the Japanese broadcasters of series that have normalized the practice of 'simulcast', whereby costumers can see content as soon as it is broadcast in Japan. The Internet age has made rapid information acquisition possible. At the same time, people's attitude toward new things has become increasingly impetuous, and some users expect fansub groups to provide simulcasts, although amateur fansubbers do not have the resources nor the agreements with the animation producers that would allow them to begin the translation of episodes before they aired in Japan.

Under the current cultural background and social situation, although ACG culture platforms like Bilibili are continuously developing and expanding, the arrival of the copyright era will make it difficult for fansub groups to continue to survive, because their activities are based on free sharing. Reviewing the development process of a fansub group (its life cycle, metaphorically speaking), from the spontaneous team formation to the determination of its own style, one can observe that fansubs had garnered social attention in a historically situated media ecosystem. However, with the infiltration of business forces and the prejudice of mainstream culture, it seems that fansub groups that have performed activities in a sub-cultural background cannot escape being included and co-opted. However, we have said that whether or not there exists fansub groups, their members are the same people who are enjoying and promoting otaku cultural products. An aspect and activity of the fandom community may disappear, but quite probably that fandom will still find their own way to express, to distribute, and to create content pivoting on their favorite franchises.

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Glossary

Otaku: a nerd, geek or fanboy. An otaku can be a hardcore or cult fan.

Dōjinshi: a derivative of otaku culture. In general, Dōjinshi is an amateur or professional magazine, most often manga, published by a group of fans (circle). Sometimes it can be equivalent to fanzines or fan fiction.