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Subjectivity of Chinese fansub: Autonomy placed under structural pressures

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Abstract: Since the digitisation of the early 21st century, the Chinese fansubs, who are spontaneously enthusiastic about translating the captions of foreign movies and TV dramas, have re-emerged as a topic of interest among researchers due to changing Chinese social contexts. This article aims at examining the relationship between politically driven technique and Chinese fansubs. Through a netnographic study, we explore the technical logic, the paradox of subjectivity, and the evolving nature of these virtual communities. Our argument suggests that the fansub phenomenon can contribute to our understanding of digital labour, whether in the form of organized teams or individual efforts.
Keywords: digitisation; translation; subjectivity; virtual community.

[es] Subjetividad del fansub chino: La autonomía sometida a presiones estructurales

Resumen: Desde la llegada de la era digital a principios del siglo XXI, los fansubs chinos, entusiastas de la traducción y adaptación de los diálogos de producciones audiovisuales a su propio idioma, han resurgido como un tema de interés para los investigadores debido a los acontecimientos recientes en la sociedad china. Este artículo tiene como objetivo examinar la relación entre la impronta política de la tecnología y las comunidades fansub chinas. A través de un estudio netnográfico, exploramos la lógica de su pericia técnica, la paradoja de la subjetividad y la naturaleza en constante evolución de estas comunidades virtuales. Planteamos que el fenómeno de los fansubs puede contribuir a nuestra comprensión del trabajo digital, ya sea en forma de equipos organizados o esfuerzos individuales.
Palabras clave: digitalización; comunidad virtual; subjetividad; traducción.

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1. Introduction

Marshall McLuhan (1962) considered the primitive world to be a 'tribe-sized' group in which people were closely connected due to the spatial limitations of oral communication. With the advent of the printing press, space restrictions were obliterated, and people became detribalized. Nowadays, electronic media will enable people to re-tribe on a larger scale, creating a global village. In response to the establishment of the global market, the multinational media groups represented by Hollywood are promoting world-sourcing, international division of labour, and cooperation between film and television drama producers under the nature of profit-seeking. As a result, this tendency is directly reflected in international script creation for film and television productions, in the selection of actors and locations, in marketing and promoting,

and so forth. Cultural exports have triggered cultural imperialism in developing countries, including China. This is commonly referred to as Western centrism, cultural invasion, or ideological control.

Popularity of American films and plays in Chinese mainland is an insignificant but typical microcosm. In the 1980s, a number of these works were televised in China. These dramas and their excellent production stuck out despite the immaturity of the Chinese cinema and television business, becoming certain types of spiritual fuel for many cultural pioneers. The proliferation of US television series in China, however, is a challenging task since the authorities require reviewing, delete and translate the content of those shows. US television series have lost their original fast-paced story elements, and their circulation in Chinese mass media has always lagged. The Internet initiated gaining popularity in

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the 21st century, and the emergence of P2P software, which includes resources like BitTorrent and eMule, contributing to the popularity of American TV shows in China.

Our research primarily highlighted 'fansubs', a group of autonomous admirers of American television dramas who eventually caught the interest of Chinese Internet users. A community of movie buffs known as fansub produces domestic subtitles for foreign language films. These interests' activities have a clear digital component because they developed throughout the Internet age. As Sai Chen and Yu Liu noticed (2006, para. 12, translated by author):

> The Chinese fansub develops a comparatively tight organization by communicating with one another spontaneously via Tencent QQ. Finding sources, translating, editing, exporting, and publishing are all responsibilities that each link oversees. They work efficiently, however remain penniless and low-key, acquiring netizen respect.

Those groups have the capacity to produce significant digital output additionally to receiving foreign films and TV shows on a selected basis. They are currently forming a certain social vitality and cultural influence, demonstrating the diversity and curiosity of the exhibition to strong culture among general Chinese netizen.

Due to our interest in these groups, we conducted a netnographic study of the Chinese fansub group named YYeTs. Its name YY stands for *Ren Ren*, which is how 'everybody' is spoken in Chinese, and *eTs* stands for 'enjoy the show'. In 2003, an undergraduate Chinese Canadian student created it. So far, YYeTs, which now involves the top spot, has recruited more than one thousand subscribers, 900,000 registered spectators, and 35,328 subtitles for films and TV series. It also includes a grant and relatively active working group, a high frequency of subtitle uploads, a developed collaborative translation tool, and a media ecosystem with websites, forums such as; Taobao (a Chinese online shopping platform), Weibo (a social media website launched by Sina), WeChat (an instant Chinese messaging, social media, and mobile payment app developed by Tencent), as well as TikTok (a short-form video hosting service owned by Chinese company Byte Dance).

The focus of this research is on recording the fansub of fieldwork in remarkable moments (the welcome ceremony when entering the community for instance), some unexpected events, the succeeding feelings and impressions, and (non)language interaction. This fansub community is now fairly closed off because of the blurred legal lines. Additionally, without authorization, none of its members were likely to take interviews on behalf of this organisation. The essay finally opted for covert observation (i.e., not actively revealing the researcher's identity), while gathering media reports, Internet articles, Internet comments, and other digital data, in obtain more field data.

2. Literature review

Technically speaking, the fansub is not a typical instance of digital labour. Despite being in a status of electronic media survival, they do not actively support the media industry. The ultimate step in the production process for a film or television drama is promotion, when this community member works out of interest. Media capital reaps market rewards from the fansubs' unpaid labour. Fansubs do exist and has shaped a working form. They do not, however, fall under the purview of a restricted sense of digital labour, and the best way to narrate them is via the lens of their unique labour motive.

The concept of pro-sumor (Quain, 2000, p. 27) was developed in response to audience commodity theory (Smythe, 1977, p. 24). This concept attaches great importance to the fact that the digital labour behaviour of regular Internet users includes both productive and consumptive aspects. The autonomous Marxist school classified this type of digital labour as intangible labour and combined it with precarity politics (Fuchs, 2014). They content that inter-generational exchange has clearly occurred across national boundaries because of intangible labour. In the context of 'unstable proletarians', Julian Kücklich (2005) performed research on 'play labour' in the form of modes in video games modes. Ursula Huws, Neil Spencer. & Dag Syrdal (2018) examined the role that platform labour plays in crowdsourcing in the gig economy. In an identical vein, Mark Graham et al. (2020) investigated how the platform economy affected digital production models and the employment status of digitised labour in less developed nations.

In comparison to the English academic circle, research on domestic fansub groups in China developed a little later, indicating a delay in systematic survey. Interestingly, the research methods are similar. The concern now focuses on the labour theory after studying the methods and outcomes of communication within fansubs, as well as their significance and development issues. The article 'Chinese Subtitle Groups and the Neo-liberal Work Ethic' by Chinese Taiwan scholar Ki-Zhen Hu (2012), was a significant turning point in the study of the Chinese fansubs. Hu stated that, «it is important to interpret the fansub culture in the Chinese context considering, China's position and value in the global production system» (Hu, 2012, p. 101, translated by author). The publishing of the paper opened fresh perspectives for the study of Chinese fansub groups and prompted scholars in the future to investigate the nature of their digital work concealed within the context of fan culture.

Ding-Ming Wu (2017) was the first to look at the labour structures, exploitation methods, and absorption tactics of the Internet business. Jin-Han Wang (2018) quickly started to concentrate on methodically expressing the conceptual significance and historical evolution of digital labour from a historical viewpoint. Jian-Hua Yao and Si-Su Xu (2021) consider that usual labour research overlooks or misses the conceptual significance and value of interpersonal cooperation and communication because of the issue. The importance of humanity collaboration and communication is also a concern.

Nevertheless, not all political economic communication scholars concur that Internet users are passive. Many of them claim that the audiences involved in the presentation in some way. The terms 'economic reductionism' and 'passive audience' are misinterpretations of Dallas Smythe's thesis, according to Cai (2018, p. 124). She argues that researchers in relevant fields should not ignore audience's subjective initiative, as audiences are the real meaning-makers.

Because of the Internet's development in the 21st century, netizens now have had access to media production tools without having to invest a sizable sum of money. Compared to previous audiences, they are more likely to become producers and secondary interpreters of media material. The fansub oversees stitching together and reorganizing images through linguistic translation during cross-cultural contact in order to sustain local culture and cross-cultural understanding.

3. Method

An in-depth netnography study was conducted over almost two years on the Chinese fansub group YYeTs. Ordinary netizens could participate in this fansub in three ways: as formal translators, freelance translators, or certified translators. Underneath these three identities, we carry out our network analysis. We wrote nearly 30,000 words of field logs and collected more than eighty related media reports and online articles by taking on three different identities.

Netnographic studies sociocultural patterns and meanings in communities, groups, and other social organizations. Computers are typically used as an intermediary while performing netnography to observe online communities. Fansub is a network community that fosters social connections while expressing personal feelings through regular contact and open-minded discourse. As such, it may be seen as an instance of a normal online community.

To get the fundamental data, our team joined the YYeTs fansub and conducted a fieldwork for a period. Three identities mentioned previously are used in the field practise mentioned in this essay:

1) Freelance translator. This is a reference to enthusiasts who participate in haphazard translation tasks within fansub groups. They interpret dramas that are not coped with official translators and serve as auxiliary members of the fansub team. They must pass few simple tests and assessments for participation. Freelance translators operate within an independent work group with loose management, relatively high professional skills, and enhanced flexibility and mobility in their work; 2) Certified translator. These are the translators who have acquired translation qualifications through resumes submission and completing tests in specific collaborative translation software. Primarily, they attempt to provide translation services on translation platforms. These traits include a wide range of varieties and types and large numbers, little requirements for professional ability, considerable labour flexibility, as well as unspoken traits of social groupings; 3) Core members. Members who successfully completed the multi-level assessment and were granted membership in the fansub work group are referred to here. It is their duty to interpret well-liked plays or motion pictures. Along with having good language competences, members also need to be productive workers. Meanwhile, the organisation has stringent membership standards and convoluted processes for becoming an official member.

This study creates following research framework based on the three participant identities and makes extensive observations (table 1).

Table 1: Research program. Source: Own production

Questions	Content	Subjects	Methods
Pictures of online work	Recruitment, Assessment, Training and Internship of members	Websites Applications Subtitle Creator Social Media	Netnography Web view Literature Research
	Participation in three identities		
	Community Maintenance		
Structure of relationship	Fansub groups		
	Copyright owner		
	Government department		
	Stream Media Platform		
	Netizen		
Alienation of labour	Transformation of labour, Development of software, Peripheral products, Voluntary donations, etc.		

Our team is assembling and reviewing documents, creating interview questions, and performing the field investigation at the same time (abandoned). In sum, we gathered more than forty academic papers and eighty media articles and news reports.

This essay presents the following ethical considerations. Initially, field observation conducted for this study is covert in nature, with the researcher's identity intentionally undisclosed. Regarding the ongoing discussions surrounding copyright issues within fansub groups and the preference for low-key and covert community activity (demonstrated by YYeTs' fansub production stagnating in the last six months), disclosing the researcher's identity would significantly hinder access to the field. Second, this study purposefully omits survey techniques. Often used techniques like group discussions, interviews, and hints were not included, aside from the communication that is required for community participation. Any form of interview expressly prohibited by the community notification. Thirdly, all non-original content has been anonymized and this publication incorporates a substantial amount of archival and comments, which includes the management regulations, translation tutorials, and statistical data. The investigators' personal field diaries are the most often mentioned sources in this essay, followed by archives and papers and anonymous online discussion.

4. Progress and research findings

4.1. Triple identity

Technology and culture are intricately intertwined and entangled, such as complex dance steps in the internet age (Kozinets, 2017). The technique of performing network ethnographic research as a lone researcher involves atomized people engaging in cultural practise activities online. Thus, researchers need to maintain a high degree of sensitivity to their interactions in the digital environment.

During the YYeTs, our team took part as subtitle translators and interacted through private social media platforms including QQ group chats, QQ mailboxes, WeChat group chats, etc. We seek relevant information and create our own web of meaning by using words, images, emoticons, videos, community announcements and papers, internet publications, and news reports. We turned interactive information experience into first-hand material on field practice. That is a procedure known as recounting (Sun, 2017).

Following three separate identities represent the practical requirements of fansub members while also presenting various social communication situations. The following carries a more detailed description of the three:

– Freelance translator. They engaged in the development of subtitles using their nicknames and gathered job information through temporary WeChat and QQ conversation. Most of the content contained niche English films, which includes films and television dramas that core members do not have the time to translate. We joined voluntary paraphrase processes for the creation of four movie subtitles prior to publishing this post. Based on our observations, taking part in fansub work with this identity carries a personalised system for freelancers. Open-ended discussion is prohibited, translation jobs are received and uploaded mechanically, and community attributes are unimportant. Moreover, it is explored that the works of free translators' voluntary labour, namely subtitle products, have been suspected of being misappropriated by the commercial parts of YYeTs to attract investment from MCN institutions, video platforms, educational institutions, technology companies, television stations as well as other subjects. Additionally, the unpaid work of personal translators can be exploited to earn money.

– Certified translator. A subtitle production software known 'RenRen YiShiJie' is essential to YYeTs, its name means 'everybody translates and sees the

world', and it is a collaborative translation tool (created by a Wuhan's firm). Several netizens were found to be capable of applying to become certified interpreters in this software, receiving and accomplishing translation tasks, as well as gaining the corresponding compensation. A wide range of tasks was covered by this platform, which translates the Chinese videos into foreign languages, accounting for more than 50% of all projects. It looks that YiShiJie offers technical assistance to those who like translating. It encourages two-way exchange of highly commercialized audio and video materials, and television series materials on a global scale. There is a significant difference between the work of a certified translator and that of a freelance translator or full member of the fansub group. They are no longer voluntary acts, which provides spiritual satisfaction, but rather a piece of labour such as traditional handicrafts.

– Core members. Acquiring full membership in this fansub group is harder than obtaining the two identities mentioned above. It is important to remember that the YYeTs development and the transition process also invented free translators and certified translators. In actuality, the official members are responsible for the bulk of this group's work. They inherited the working principles and styles of the founding members of this community. The core members were in the vanguard of the copyright conflicts because they contributed to the subtitling of well-known episodes. Therefore, in contrast to the foregoing two, they required the highest level of translation capability. They also demanded the most difficult entry test, the strict community maintenance, and the trickiest daily work and communication. After two months of

assessment, our team has successfully become an official member of YYeTs. We have participated in the subtitle production of 7 seasons of television series and twelve films since joining the organisation in December 2020. We gathered many relevant documents and wrote nearly 30,000 words of fieldwork logs. This provides strong assistance for the research and analysis of this paper.

Our participation in the assessment process allowed us to discover interesting phenomena. Firstly, they habitually use insider argots. To avoid online censorship and establish a community context, inter-group communication would utilise various abbreviations or names for communicating within the community (table 2). Irrespective of the difficulty in understanding these expressions for newly recruited members, the communication efficiency of the community may be enhanced through this. Moreover, they could reinforce its sense of security and belonging by using peer pressure. The examiner motivates the participants to believe that "everything is possible" as part of the community assessment. However, he also emphasizes the difficulty of the assessment, sustains a high entry threshold, and fosters a sense of awe for the work rules and the organization itself. Individuals will release peer pressure under such a situation, which can be beneficial to stimulate their motivation and promoting subjective initiative. Third, they encourage sharing private images. Publishing personal photos in groups could be a way for expressing personal trust for this community and stimulate the interest of the collective to individuals. It is crucial for boosting community activation and fostering communication amongst participants.

Table 2: Argots in YYeTs. Source: Own production

Argots	Meanings
ZMZ	Acronym, Chinese pronunciation, means Fansub.
S1/S2	Acronym, Assessment of Step1/Step2.
cc	Acronym, Closed Caption.
0day task	Alternative name, task needs to be finished in 24 hours.
DL	Acronym, Deadline.
Bao P	Action, Chinese pronunciation, means post personal pictures.
Fan Fan	Nickname, Chinese pronunciation, refers to translator.
Da Da	Nickname, Chinese pronunciation, refers to supervisor.
Zhou	Action, Chinese pronunciation, means adjusting the timeline to achieve synchronization.
Raw meat	Acronym, means videos without subtitles.
Deli meat	Acronym, means videos with subtitles.

In February 2021, YYeTs fansub were investigated for pirating videos. This incident led to the closure of the official forum and application. However, the work of the subtitle translation group did not have a direct impact. Yet, YYeTs has repeatedly requested

their members to refrain from making public comments to maintain its existence in the current online environment. In contrast to the past lively scenes reported by mainstream media at home and abroad, the fansub group seems to be lacking a legal

explanation of the rationale behind copyright use of film and television works but has been greatly motivated to survive.

Due to its experience with triple identities and interest work, YYeTs has developed a field of Utopian cultural experiences for Chinese overseas drama enthusiasts. They have independently jumped into the worldwide pop culture manufacturing line, finding great delight in language interpretation and cognition. It is critical to note, nevertheless, that YYeTs is not a paradise for cultural participation. Throughout its development, rapid commercialisation, decline, and exit, it remains affected by special structural pressures.

4.2. Five-in-one structure

It is essential to clarify its structural relationship for a deeper understanding of the subjectivity of Chinese fansub under the theory of digital labour. There is a strong dependence on the Internet, file transmission, search engines, subtitle editing tools, and video playback technologies for the dissemination of the group's work. The fundamental and material nature of this emotional labour is revealed by this. Copyright issues, administrative management, platform capital, and the gift economy have been intertwined, developing a 'five-in-one' relationship pattern (figure 1) which includes the fansub group as the central node and the overseas copyright owners, government management departments, video portal websites, and ordinary netizen, developing a negative structure for fansub group subjectivity.

Figure 1: Five-in-one structure. Source: Own production
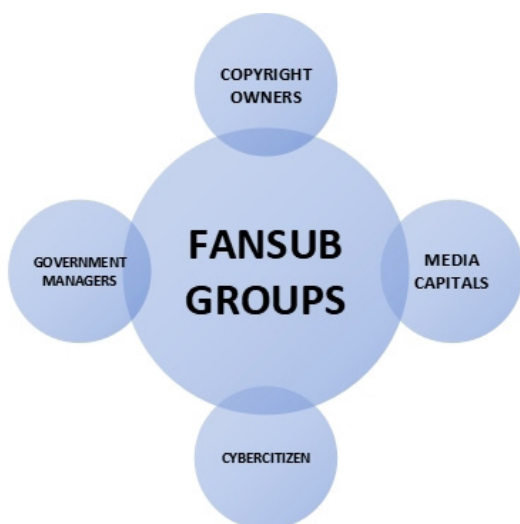
Fansub groups get film related materials by downloading them from foreign forums or directly recording them. Currently, the world's largest film source websites involve The Pirate Bay, 1337X, EZTV, YTS and RARBG. Most of the sources for movies and TV dramas have been uploaded by global netizen, and their titles normally include names, sources, definitions, and other details. To accommodate the viewing needs of those who are hard of hearing, many foreign films and television shows offer official subtitle files. Some forum websites have been built for collecting those subtitle files, such as OpenSubtitle, Subscene, Zimuzu, and SubHD.

Subtitles for forums generally have two formats: RSS and SRT, which can be embedded into video files for synchronous playback. Use of a software that can import both the video file and the subtitle file is required. There are many open sources and free subtitle translation software packages available abroad, which includes Subtitle Edit, Aegisub, Open Subtitle Editor, etc., as well as the most prevalent domestic ones are Renren YiShiJie and Time Machine. These applications share a user interface with subtitles, audio, video, and a timeline. This would allow them to adjust the timeline, translate, and proofread the material. Along with being able to export the translated subtitle files after completion, they would also become capable of suppressing the completed film with subtitles after completion. Another term used for this is 'deli meat'. It is when a film is presented with subtitles. Moreover, the dissemination of deli meat is mainly dependent on streaming media platforms and peer-to-peer file sharing. In contrast to the latter, which is distributed through web discs and BT, the former primarily represents YYeTs Application (now removed), Renren Video Application (now renamed Duo Duo Video), Korean drama TV Application (a Korean drama video playback software on Chinese mainland) etc.

Group of fansubs located at the central node. In its role as a representative Chinese fansub, YYeTs combines voluntary labour and commercial profit. On the one hand, group members self-tame and self-manage in the subtitle production without remuneration and get emotional fulfilment from interpersonal and network interactions. The emergence and survival of fansubs rely on this type of labour with interest, and the basis for discussion within these groups. On the other hand, the fansub group platform's business mode is beginning to take shape. They recharge website members, download related apps, and purchase peripheral products. Due to the above method, many Chinese fansubs represented by YYeTs gradually evolve from pure communities of interest to profits-making institutions, leading them to be continuously and deeply involved in the following structure:

For the copyright owners: Unpaid Chinese translators

The squeeze of the west-style 'global interest' in local film and television works may result in implied consumption ideology in developing countries whose media infrastructures are far less developed.

Some countries and regions, such as Europe, South Korea, and Taiwan, have never stopped resisting the American culture industry. China has also instituted a quota scheme to regulate film imports, stipulated the screen time for domestic films and developed a month to protect domestic films from the effects of foreign culture.

The emergence of worldwide labour and production divisions has been driven by globalization and the establishment of the information superhighway. Film and television communication have expanded in the digital era, moving beyond the cinemas to streaming media and social media platforms. Video tapes, soundtracks, toys, books, picture albums, theme parks, and character IP are all illustrations of films and television-related products increasingly marketed digitally. Overseas production is often selected by producers to increase local sales and save money. Fansub groups influenced by this condition were also objectively incorporated into these structures.

Trends towards internationalisation can be observed in casting, filming, and other types of production. Fansub qualifies as an essential part of the distribution of overseas films in China. Apart from the distribution of the film, the digital flow generated by fansub group members' comments, discussions, and commentary on social media might be incorporated into the copyright owner's capital.

For government managers: Hidden outlaws

Although YYeTs has the support and affection of netizen through unofficial, mainly non-profit cultural resource sharing, its rationality cannot compensate for its lack of legal status. As per article 24 of the People's Republic of China's Copyright Law (2010, p. 6), «the use of others' published works for individual study, research, or appreciation might not be compensated in the absence of author's consent». Fansub groups, nevertheless, not only produce and publish subtitle documents during the heyday, since Chinese subtitles, as by-products added not much value: Rather, they distributed movies and TV series resources with Chinese subtitles directly. Under this situation, Article 12 stipulates that «The copyright of a revised work produced by adapting, translating, annotating, and arranging subsequent works shall be enjoyed by the person who adapts, translates, annotates, and organizes; however, the copyright of the original work must not be infringed upon the using of copyright» (People's Republic of China's Copyright Law, 2010. p. 3). As visible, fansub groups could be regarded reasonable users when making subtitles, but when the video is distributed with subtitles, it turns into an interpretation of original works, and public communication without permission constitutes an infringement.

When the government considers intellectual property protection with greater seriousness, Chinese fansubs frequently receive the brunt of the criticism.

The reasons are as follows: initially, owing to globalization's negative effects, media censorship are inevitable, as excessively diverse values might result into cultural and political effects. Moreover, since China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the US has repeatedly sought more films and TV series quotas on the grounds of rampant piracy in order to occupy a larger Chinese market (Hsiao, 2014). Furthermore, the use of administrative vigour for restraining the import of film and television works is not a long-term solution to the development of the local cultural industry. China's film and TV industry cannot undertake an industrialisation shift without a strong market environment and competitive market dynamics (Yin and Xiao, 2001). Recently, the fight against infringement has paid attention to the profit-making behaviour of commercial fansub groups, not all fansub activities, which happened to be the primary reason for their survival so far.

For media capitals: Thieves of digital flow

As the Internet technology advanced, streaming media platforms and cinemas started complementing each other and started providing Overseas film and TV resources through copyright purchases. For authentic film and television materials, top Chinese media businesses like Tencent, iQIYI, Youku, and Bilibili must pay a substantial copyright royalty. Nevertheless, they also need to spend much time reviewing content. Films and international TV shows might not appear on the domestic streaming media platform for months or longer. This might diminish the audience's sense of freshness about TV series updated weekly.

Therefore, the battle of digital flow has commenced between the uncut resources of the fansub group and those of the top video platforms. When speaking at the 9th China Online Audio-visual Conference in June 2021, Sun Zhonghuai, the vice president of Tencent, said, «Why some foreign dramas can be lauded before they are formally shown in China? Where do people watch them? License companies must have applied for quotas from the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (China) before formally publishing». (Translated by author).

Moreover, fansub's commercial translation service has received various orders from media corporations, which might buy subtitles or even contribute directly. For example, there exists a close connection between Bilibili animation website and SUBPIG fansub group (a famous Japanese drama fansub group in Chinese Internet), and Korean drama TV and TSKS fansub group (an active Korean drama fansub group with a large scale in Chinese Internet). Fansub groups should not only comply with media content regulation but also be ready for the possibility of Internet content restriction because the commercialization of these organisations has turned against the original intent of 'not seeking anything in return'.

For ordinary cybercitizen: Unsung heroes

Cultural pirates in a society with walls are fire robbers (taken from Weibo comment by netizen X, 2014).

In the above assertion, the translator of unpaid labour has been contrasted to Prometheus in Greek mythology, a god who spreads fire and knowledge to the world. US television program captivate fans and translators alike, reflecting Chinese people's yearning to harmonies American culture with their own. It stands for translators' superior translation skills, their right to interpret American pop culture, and their ability to collaborate across geographical boundaries. Moreover, the audience could watch film and television works without restriction, and the interaction with the fansub group would contribute to a participatory culture. The fansub group and the audience have come to understand the importance of emotional labour in the community together. They have established a network community that exchanges popular culture and strengthens linguistic abilities after observing the gift culture phenomenon. An official member of the FRM fansub group (another well-known US TV series fansub group in China) stated, «The fansub team finds it highly difficult to defend its legitimacy, however, there is no other way to be more entertaining and educational than American television» (taken from Weibo comment by netizen J, 2011).

According to group members who support the Digital Shared Doctrine, which argues that sharing digital resources has developed as a social trend, pragmatism has greater sway than the core values of the law. The positive feedback from the audience gives fansub members emotional satisfaction as well as spiritual motivation.

Overall, above subject uses, adapts, and incorporates fansub groups in accordance with its own needs. The administration changes the pertinence and tightness based on economic development and ideological management; ordinary netizen supports the fansub group in order to acquire gifts and synchronize cultures, but if a better solution becomes available, they are likely to turn to other options, and there are many financial incentives for overseas copyright owners to pursue profit over legal protection.

4.3. Reconstructions of subjectivity

Fansub group activities have to some extent transcended geographical and cultural boundaries. The fansub group's subjectivity is constructed within the global cultural synchronization trend by this five-in-one structure, which also applies structural pressure to keep this subjectivity in check. In the face of such checks and balances, it is particularly critical for the fansub group to attain 'autonomy', which would allow them to enjoy the fruits of their labours. The following fansub members' efforts to find subjectivity had been observed during our field observations:

Remain silent. «Recently, the situation has become tenser, and news has gotten out. We do not blend into this environment, we do not express our worries, we do not respond, we do not disprove rumours. We are all invisible and low-key. We just do our jobs» (YYeTs Organizer X, from the author's field journal, p. 14). When confronted with external pressures, fansubs tend to choose silence as a first resort in order to preserve their existing resources as well as maintain the vitality of their communities. If the collective consensus of non-profits has been maintained, the cultural expectations of Chinese netizens might be capable of reserving space for fansub groups.

Put into emotion. «I like Game of Thrones», «I like the Australian actor Hugh Jackman», «I like the Amazing Spider-Man played by Andrew Garfield» (fansub group members, from the author's field journal, p. 29). Individual users are motivated by an unexplainable psychological tremor called emotion to bring back the 'lost lamb' - commercialized fansubs. It is important to note that emotional labour might generate altruistic gifts from the subject's self-satisfaction and self-enjoyment. The issue should go back to the more basic emotional experience to overcome the economic domination of digital labour.

Deglamourize. The laws of time can be reformed to alter subjectivity and remove labour of interest from the machinery of capital operation. In the work of fansub groups, the principle of 0day, the battle for the 'name-giving right' as well as the work-time bonus have all been manifestations of time consciousness. This type of labour motivated by personal interests is likely to conform to the logic of global capital accumulation, leading to self-oppression and self-exploitation. In the cross-cultural translation of media text, fansub groups must be aware of the diversity of cultural production as well as the reality of cultural imperialism. To get rid of the cultural representations in the capitalist society, they must find cross-regional, cross-ethnic emotional resonance, switch self-control of time rules to the patient selection of worldwide excellent film and television works, watch and translate, for Chinese netizens in order to open perspective of the benign ecological window of the world by excluding cultural representations.

Dis-embed. Organizational splits result from YYeTs members' divergent perspectives on commercial influence when it comes long-term digital activity. Breaking away from relevant fields has turned into a strategy for members wishing to acquire de-commercialization while maintaining their subjectivity. Members of the community are trained in translating abilities. They learn how to use translation software, enhance their resource acquisition skills, participate in subtitle translation, as well as reconstruct community organizations.

Outside the community, these skills will feed back to the individual. They will sensibly arrange their time and energy, autonomously seek out and gather knowledges, freely analyse media texts, shirk time restraints and self-suppression, and priorities personal emotions over emotional interaction.

5. Discussion

Fan-subbing groups undertake the translation of subtitles for foreign language film and TV resources without payment, instead of presenting them as gifts to regular Internet users. The process allows them to amass intellectual capital while reshaping their social cognition. Computer and Internet technology have been rapidly evolving, resulting into a myth that they can transcend the limitations of time, space, and power and drive epoch-making progress. As a cultural 'fire robber', the Fansub group promotes digital sharing with these labour practices and collectively resists the cultural monopoly of media-rich nations and the labour exploitation stemming from international production division. We were likely to a deeper understanding of cultural naturalization, which reduces cultural estrangement and promotes cultural equivalence, as well as the reality of cultural imperialism via the topic of subjectivity. Therefore, we could gain a new perspective by observing the cognitive framework of different cultures.

As productive and consumptive digital practitioners, fansub spreads its intangible labour achievement throughout 'Philia' (a positive, emotional community psychological bond). In today's digital deluge, media users are intricately tied to market processes encompassing production and consumption, thereby undergoing a transformation of value (Arvidsson, 2009). Fansub group labour has been characterized as immaterial, meaning it is mainly used for producing information and cultural content. Labour within the digital realm – spanning data, traffic, memory, and other technical aspects – can be seen as generating informational content. In contrast, cultural and artistic standards, consumption trends, cultural taste, and even abstract changes in public opinion contribute to cultural content production (Lazzarato, 1996).

Amidst the rise of platform capitalism, people are gradually recognizing the material essence of intangible labour. While the emotional interaction and cultural implications born from the voluntary efforts of the fansub groups are captivating, disregarding its material basis could erode the vitality and selfhood of this community. Moreover, making a foreign film and TV subtitle needs computers and storage space, access to the Internet, as well as the use of virtual dedicated networks to collect overseas film sources and subtitles. This process also involves translation software, electronic dictionaries, search engines, and social media platforms, among others–each step

involves material consumption. The broader view of the global film and television production chain implies that the efforts of fansub group and interactive information could be objectively integrated into the localization strategy of multinational media groups to overcome barriers in China's audio-visual market.

Internet information flow is asymmetric, and capital has an advantage over users in generating content, as well as labour exploitation on behalf of the gift economy. Organizational hierarchy and information technology slavery is the two categories into which fansub groups outside of exploitation may be divided. Furthermore, neo-liberal work ethics, interest labour, and labour alienation are all included in the inside exploitation, and participants are continually urged to accomplish self-exploitation through self-management.

Along with incorporating digital voluntary labour based on personal interests into the physical gig economy as a 'piece of product', the accompanying information and cultural content might also be compiled into useful data. In contrast to traditional work, that seeks financial gain, digital work on the Internet focuses on emotional fulfilment and self-realization. Capital might not even have to pay to exploit its labour results. As atomized individuals, they have minimal bargaining power with big interest group. Upon finding a certain value, they would be exploited by capitalists.

Apart from capital binding and technical slavery, the fansub work itself faces insignificant instability. External factor, such as the tolerance of overseas producers and copyright owners towards fansub groups directly influences whether these groups can effectively access the necessary resources. Even worse, they could face legal repercussions. Tragically, due to the lack of moral protection for fansub groups, often driven by their motivation by interest, offshore film sources and subtitle aggregation sites are more susceptible to piracy. Their stability is frequently influenced by national copyright policies.

Unstable interest work leads to the erosion of Philia. Fansub members participate in collective interest labour mainly to produce text and interpreting meaning. To the goal is to foster an overseas film and television exchange community that is free, avant-garde, and respected by ordinary Internet users. The absence of stable community work and communication will result into the loss of vitality and creativity. Thus, the community would find it challenging to maintain its autonomy in the face of capital and administrative power.

If fansubs are viewed as digital work in the economic sense rather than as emotional labour, then the question of the temporal dimension is very important. Time and value are inextricably intertwined, and value expressed in terms of time is the abstract expression of social relational capital. The connection between 'socially necessary labour and time' and 'value' in Fansub's work does not consider

the temporal dimension. Temporality is more of a state of a 'time awareness'. Initially, the fansub group does not have fixed working hours, but replies in accordance with the availability of resources. Fansub supervisors would organize a translation team as per the official broadcast schedule. They will start translating as soon as the resources have been uploaded, working as swiftly as they can finish the subtitle development. Regarding the film resources having longer upload cycle, the fansub could only translate 'What its is'. Furthermore, the Fansub's high awareness of time is also rooted from the competition for authorship and naming. Translation opportunities for popular films and TV dramas have been restricted, and members must promptly sign up for these tasks. They should affix their signatures to the titles during the subtitle suppression procedure; moreover, the length of time spent translating the subtitles indicates the hard work of the individuals. It is the only standard through which the work result could be assessed. All members must record their workload on the starting of their production participation. Participation date, group, episode, supervisor, duration, and other information is included in the main content of the record.

Aside from time, the capitals also planned the space. Fansub's translation of film and television language might be considered as active spatial behaviour too in an abstract sense. Cross-regional production has turned into a means of accumulation by dispossession, while technological myths lead people to a neo-liberal utopia, which eventually leads to space materialization. There is little doubt that the fansub itself is conscious of the need to transcend regional boundaries, and this is inextricably linked to how transnational media capital is reorganising space. We can infer from the field observation that there exists a certain number of Chinese overseas students in the YYeTs. Through the Internet, they acquire cross-space aggregation, and combine first-hand information regarding pop culture with the lively cultural practice of domestic participation. Members of Fansub are experts in cross-cultural communication and have a network of cultural identities as well as various characteristics including cultural adaptability and multiple encoding and decoding. They can transmit meaning across space by employing indigenous media texts, which can be considered as an intercultural communication action (Sun, 2014).

6. Conclusions

Since the 1990s, a surcharge in individualization has been brought about by the market economy created by Reform and Opening up. With the passing of last era, the boom of the market economy diminished the salience of political capital, and social morality and living standards have evolved, allowing individuals to acquire the variety of knowledge and skills necessary for achieving self-actualization in a transforming society. China has adopted neo-liberalism because of this moral predisposition (Nikolas,1990). The associated neo-liberal work ethic has aided in the identity formation and purposeful mobilisation of fansub groupings. Chinese fansubs do not have the same business goals as the international corporations that the neo-liberalism represent; however, they continue to blend private and public concerns to produce a hybrid work style characterised by self-motivation and aggressive giving. The Chinese fansub includes elements of current neo-liberal society like competitive performance, computational rationality, self-interest, self-training, and self-growth and self-practice, as part of their conscious labour (Hu, 2012).

Fansub organisations, it turns out, heavily rely on related technologies, suggesting that they lack the freedom to move about freely in a capital-starved environment. The fansub group of volunteer labour is susceptible because of changes in labour forms brought on by changes in the broader environment.

In essence, this paper offers a multifaceted observational viewpoint on digital labour in China. The academic consensus in Chinese and Western digital labour research has long been the participation-exploitation binary paradigm. This paper addresses the shortcomings of earlier studies on digital labour. Instead of examining labour principles and cultural characteristics, it focuses on subjectivity and initiative of online volunteer work. Additionally, the paper also upholds the 'optimism of the intellect' regarding the future development of the Chinese fansub community. Although this type of the group is susceptible to structural digestion, its ingrained motives and communal attributes may still serve as an incentive for individuals to struggle, and these individuals are likely to conserve this precious digitized heritage.

In order to develop a more benign cross-cultural exchange field, platform capital and government management departments must fulfil the corresponding social responsibilities. Along with improving the translation quality and efficiency of imported overseas dramas, major video portals need to ensure the production of high-quality local films and TV dramas, changing 'profit first' to 'content is king', and making sure that the cultural participation is met. In addition to strengthening copyright legislation, government should also be responsible for encouraging original content, supporting film, and television communication, ensuring that the Internet subculture preserves a reasonable and legitimate activity space, building dynamic spaces for the folk film and television culture, regulating the content payments of platform capital and the gathering of users' information, and creating a clear, healthy audio-visual market environment over time.

7. Authors' contribution statements

Xu Minghua: Conceptualization, Supervision, Project administration, Writing - Review & Editing

Deng Boyi: Methodology, Investigation, Resources, Writing - Original Draft

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