

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Cultural Translation of U.S. Television Programs and Movies:
Subtitle Groups as Cultural Brokers in China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Applied Linguistics

by

Chi-hua Hsiao

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Chi-hua Hsiao

Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Elinor Ochs, Chair

This dissertation examines the phenomenon of cultural translation in the context of an underground network of Internet-based amateur translators in China. Informal volunteer subtitle groups emerged in the late-1990s and began catering to the younger generation's thirst for U.S. media popular culture. This study documents the translation of U.S. TV programs and movies by Chinese youth and young adults participating in subtitle groups, and examines how these translations are shaped by cultural and social conditions in contemporary China. Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Taipei, this dissertation examines how subtitlers' translating practices relate to the globalization of sociocultural ideologies, and how Chinese audiences respond to subtitlers' translations in online discussion forums. I explore how subtitlers and audiences co-construct the humor in U.S. television situation

comedies. Their language of evaluation used to judge controversial Chinese subtitles reveals the different cultural identities that audience members present for positioning themselves as moral Chinese who are familiar with the cultural, social, and political dimensions of what constitutes a laughable element. I also examine why subtitlers add annotations that are not linguistically encoded in the original English dialogues. By creating annotations, subtitlers provide background knowledge that they believe will help audiences better understand U.S. TV programs and movies, reveal their feelings about the subtitled programs to audiences, and create a sense of involvement by sharing their opinions of U.S. media programs with a community of like-minded individuals. Moreover, I analyze how subtitlers moralize their unauthorized use of U.S. TV programs and movies based on the conviction that Chinese youth and young adults want more instant access to foreign media programs. Subtitlers turn volunteer cultural translation into a moral site, where Chinese versions of intellectual property are tested, contested, and affirmed. This study has implications for how the intersection of the ideologies of culture, translation, and media technology and the ways in which their changing relations to one another shape translating practices. Subtitle groups provide Chinese youth and young adults with a medium for articulating, acting on, and practicing their own unofficial cultural translation that they may otherwise have difficulty carrying out.

The dissertation of Chi-hua Hsiao is approved.

Marjorie Harness Goodwin

Hongyin Tao

Yunxiang Yan

Elinor Ochs, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

This dissertation is dedicated to
the Chinese subtitlers, who have showed me a world of passion,
and to Tsung-ching, who has been the source of love.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am fortunate to have worked with a group of brilliant subtitlers for this dissertation project. They generously welcomed me into their lives and created an amazingly supportive environment in which I was able to navigate many unfamiliar situations. During my fieldwork, I usually spent Friday afternoons subtitling U.S. TV programs and engaging in intensive communication with my colleagues in Fengruan Group. I cherish this unforgettable experience. It has impressed me deeply that many subtitlers sit in front of their computers, striving to finish their subtitling tasks in time so that audiences can enjoy the latest Chinese-subtitled programs during the weekends.

Jin was my first consultant when I arrived in Beijing. She introduced me to Fengruan Group and to many subtitlers and advised me when I was still a novice in the group. I am grateful for her generosity, kindness, and helpfulness in giving all of my questions her full attention. Among all the subtitlers who participated in my project, I especially thank BaoDa, Fon, GreenFa, Jia, Lafen, NanFan, and Rong for offering considerable assistance. I am most grateful to all the consultants and interviewees who shared their time and experiences with me. Every chat with them has been an inspiration.

I have accumulated numerous intellectual debts over the years in the Department of Anthropology, Department of Applied Linguistics, and Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles. I am privileged to have Elinor Ochs as my advisor, committee chair, and mentor. She is a most exceptional person in every way. Her charming personality, great empathy, and unparalleled support have brought sunshine into my life as a PhD student. She led me into the fascinating

interdisciplinary field of linguistic anthropology and helped me gain a more comprehensive scholarly view of language. She is a remarkable interlocutor who has provided input on my dissertation and more. In my moments of self-doubt, she would look at me with determination in her eyes and tell me that I should persevere and things would turn out well. I am grateful for her trust in me. Working with her has helped me mature as a scholar and a person. With admiration and love, I thank Elinor for everything.

This dissertation has also benefited greatly from collective conversations with the other wonderful professors in my doctoral committee. Hongyin Tao contributed valuable and detailed comments on my dissertation and other works. He is a generous and passionate teacher who has guided my thinking and writing. His commitment to teaching and scholarship reminds me to always strive to do better. Candy Goodwin's optimism and warmth have supported me. Her insights, incisive feedback, and vast knowledge shaped my data analysis and pushed me to engage rigorously with my materials. Yunxiang Yan provided a sharp perspective on my writing and a sociocultural approach to my dissertation. I deeply appreciate the sound advice and wisdom I found in my conversations with him.

I also have had the pleasure of learning from Charles Goodwin, Linda Garro, Alessandro Duranti, Paul Kroskrity, and Suzanne Wertheim, among others. In addition, I benefited tremendously from many peer colleagues who have accompanied me on my PhD journey: Jennifer Guzmán, Gail Fox Adams, Heather Loyd, Hadi Nicholas Deeb, Sonya Pritzker, Rachel Flamenbaum, Guangyi Li, Jenny Walton-Wetzel, Lisa Newon, Haiping Wu, Yunshuang Zhang, Eun Young Bae, Keziah Conrad, Lin Lin, and Alethea Marti. They offered critical comments on my dissertation and provided other forms of

support at various stages of my study. I enjoyed all our discussions and conversations in classrooms, the Haines Hall office, the weekly Discourse Lab, the campus café shops, and the University Village. I thank them for sharing their stories and giving me strength to move forward.

Tracy Humbert, Jessika Herrera, and Kristina Magpayo kindly helped me through administrative processes at UCLA. Paul Connor, a computer genius, offered indispensable help with software-related issues and the equipment I used in my fieldwork.

My copy editor, Laura Iwasaki, carefully read my dissertation and expertly refined the earlier drafts. I appreciate her efficiency, professionalism, and willingness to accommodate my schedule.

Granting agencies made the research and then the writing possible, and I am happy to acknowledge their support. The earlier stage of my PhD study was supported by the U.S. Fulbright Scholar Program and the Ministry of Education of the government of Taiwan. The National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the University of California Pacific Rim Research Program supported my fieldwork, and the UCLA Center for Chinese Studies and Academia Sinica (Taiwan) funded me during the dissertation write-up period.

All these individuals and institutions helped in the production of this dissertation, from research to writing, and I am very grateful to them for reasons too numerous to list here.

For offering encouragement in many ways, I feel an immense gratitude to friends and family in my home country, Taiwan. Pailing Yen and Teresa Huang kept me grounded with their friendship and taught me the importance of work-life balance.

My parents, sister, Nien-chiu, and brother, Chih-wen, were always there for me. My parents supported my dream of pursuing graduate studies abroad and endured our long and frequent separations. I thank my siblings for taking care of my parents on my behalf while I was away from home.

My greatest debt is to my husband, Tsung-ching. While we were thousands of miles apart over the past years, there were countless nights that he stayed up late in Taipei, skyped with me, and listened to me so patiently. Just the sound of his voice made me feel like I was home. Every time I had to leave and return to Los Angeles, I would walk to the gate in tears, turning my head again and again, to see Tsung-chin standing outside the gate, watching me. That meant everything to me. He has helped me every step of the way. His clarity of judgment and greatness of vision guide me through life. I am blessed to have him as my life partner.

VITA

- 2004 B.A., English and Chinese Literature
National Chengchi University
Taipei, Taiwan
- 2006 Fu Si-Nian Memorial Scholarship
Academia Sinica
Taipei, Taiwan
- 2006-2008 Teaching Assistant
Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
National Taiwan University
Taipei, Taiwan
- 2007 M.A., Linguistics
National Taiwan University
Taipei, Taiwan
- 2008-2010 Merit Studying Abroad Scholarship
Ministry of Education, Taiwan
- 2008-2010 Fulbright Study Grant
U.S. Department of State
- 2009-2011 Instructor
UCLA Extension
Los Angeles, California
- 2010 Teaching Assistant
Department of Asian Languages and Cultures
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California
- 2010-2011 Research Fellowship
Center for Language, Interaction, and Culture
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California
- 2011-2012 Doctoral Fieldwork, China
- 2011-2012 Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant
National Science Foundation

- 2011-2012 Dissertation Fieldwork Grant
The Wenner-Gren Foundation
- 2011-2012 Advanced Graduate Research Fellowship
Pacific Rim Research Program
University of California
- 2012-2013 Research Fellowship
Department of Anthropology
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California
- 2012-2013 Research Fellowship
Center for Chinese Studies
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California
- 2013-2014 Fellowship for Doctoral Candidates
in the Humanities and Social Sciences
Academia Sinica
Taipei, Taiwan

PUBLICATIONS

- 2005 Hsiao, Chi-hua. Interaction of Phonology and Semantics in Taiwanese' Names—An Optimality Theory Approach. *Proceeding Southeast Asian Linguistics Society XV*: 133-147. Canberra: Australian National University.
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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Overview

Since the beginning of China's globalization campaigns during the post-economic reform period of the early 1990s, Chinese citizens have been allowed access to foreign media and entertainment programs, although with constraints and under strict policy guidelines (Chan 2003; Latham 2001; Lynch 1999; Rohn 2010; Zhao 2008; Zhao and Guo 2005). In spite of restrictions imposed by the state, means of accessing foreign television (hereafter referred to as "TV") programs have evolved. The Internet offers rapid access, which eliminates the long wait before a program is eventually approved by the government. The growth of the Internet has afforded residents opportunities to circumvent the state-party monopoly on information to some extent (Cheong and Poon 2009; Harwit and Clark 2001; Osnos 2007; Wines 2009; Yang 2009). Informal volunteer subtitle groups (*zimuzu* 字幕組)¹ emerged in the late 1990s and began catering to the younger generation's thirst for U.S. media popular culture. These subtitlers are dedicated to unofficially disseminating U.S. media programs to Mandarin Chinese speakers in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. They add Chinese subtitles to U.S. TV programs and movies, post the shows online for free download, and provide a network for online interactions (Farrar 2009; French 2006; Wang and Zhang 2007).

¹ Throughout this dissertation, I use simplified Chinese characters for the original wording in texts posted by subtitlers' and audiences' in online chat rooms, discussion forums, and the like. Otherwise, I use traditional characters, the system I use for writing, to explain a general idea, such as the term "subtitle groups" here.

This study is an ethnography of the new media and subtitling practices of Chinese youth and young adults in contemporary China. As a linguistic anthropological work, it examines how Chinese volunteer translators in underground subtitle groups translate U.S. popular TV programs and movies for Chinese audience of the younger generation, how their subtitling practices relate to the globalization of sociocultural ideologies, and how their audiences respond to their translation work in online discussion forums. Subtitlers want to create a world in which Chinese citizens can enjoy a popular media program within hours of its initial broadcast.² Chinese audiences have embraced this unofficial outlet as an alternative source for foreign popular cultures. Subtitlers, however, do not secure appropriate permission from TV and film production companies in the United States, and even though subtitle groups turn their potentially profitable products into a public resource that is available without charge, their activities violate the Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China (Ceng and Yang 2009; Yu 2001).³ This study documents the linguistic and cultural translation processes through which subtitlers translate U.S. TV programs and movies in ways that fit the sociocultural understanding of

² The principal subtitle groups compete with one another to produce the most instantaneous, best-quality translations. Moreover, subtitle groups hope to see audience comments on their translations spring up on their websites as soon as a new Chinese-subtitled program is uploaded for free download. In that way, they can refine their translations and offer a second, or even third, version of the same subtitled program. The sense of competition in the subtitle community impels the groups, especially the leading ones, to prove that their subtitlers are masters of U.S. popular culture and American English vernaculars by providing improved translations in a timely manner.

³ Article 2 states that works by foreigners and stateless persons are protected by this law. Works include "audiovisual works, meaning works fixed on a certain medium, composed of a series of images with accompanying sound or without accompanying sound, and screened with the help of technological equipment or disseminated in other ways." Moreover, Article 11 states that copyright includes the rights of reproduction and distribution and "the right of publication, being the right to decide whether or not to make the work known to the public."

the younger generation of Chinese audiences. This study also reveals how subtitlers moralize their unauthorized activities as a volunteer practice that aids the younger generation of Chinese citizens in its pursuit of more information and instant access to foreign media programs.

This dissertation centers on cultural translation that addresses increased diversity and plurality in the interaction of language and culture through translation practices (Benjamin 2004[1923]; Collins and Slembrouck 2006; Geertz 1973, 1983; Rubel and Rosman 2003; Said 1978). Translation is at the heart of the complex workings of identity formation and cross-cultural communication, and it has become a challenging theme for anthropologists, sociologists, linguists, and other social scientists (Appiah 2004[1993]; Handman 2010; Hanks 2010; Liu 1995; Pritzker 2012; Schieffelin 2007; Spivak 1993; Wadensjo 1998; Venuti 2004, 2005). While translation conventionally takes the form of transcriptions of texts from one language to another, Bhabha (1994:38) reminds us of another central dimension of translation, that is, translation also delineates multiple negotiations of meaning in the transcultural realities of the everyday. He comments, “We should remember that it is the ‘inter’—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.” He uses the term “in-between space” to describe a space where postcolonial or subordinate subjects gain agency. This term can also refer to the translation and meeting of cultures in a space between existing referential systems that generates “borderline affects and identifications” (Bhabha 1993:167). This dissertation follows this line of thought and tackles a translation modality—audiovisual—that is currently booming, not only for practitioners, but also for scholars as a more than productive site for academic research.

This study investigates the subtitlers' linguistic and cultural endeavors, which are akin to what Jezewski (1990) defines as the acts of culture brokers who bridge, link, or mediate between groups or persons of different cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change. Subtitlers translate and mediate U.S. popular culture presented in U.S. TV programs and movies in ways that facilitate comprehension among Chinese audiences. They add annotations explaining references (e.g., names, historical allusions, and idioms) that they assume are likely to be unfamiliar to audiences. They also encourage audiences to participate by commenting on and exchanging ideas about the translations with subtitlers. Audiences not only receive Chinese-subtitled programs but also contribute to refined translations by commenting on the subtitles and sharing their knowledge of U.S. popular culture and American English vernaculars with the community, whose members then learn from one another. Shirky (2008) describes a similar process at Wikipedia, which allows readers to edit any article in the database and thus possibly improve it. Adopting a linguistic anthropological approach, I provide an in-depth study of how the new media, especially the Internet, have influenced the cultural and social consciousness of Chinese youth and young adults participating in the underground subtitle community. I place translation and subtitling practices within China's socioeconomic complex and document the online activities of subtitlers and audiences in relation to various contexts, including their families, peer interactions, and institutional communities such as the school and workplace.

Subtitle groups are a collective effort of the generation born in the 1980s (*balinghou*, or, literally, "80s-post"), and they continue to spread into nonurban areas and to include younger and older generations. A common theme in discussion forums at the

subtitle groups' websites is audience appreciation for subtitlers, both for doing the work as volunteers and for making available a type of entertainment that is different from Chinese TV programs, which are subject to censorship and thus are limited in topic. Audiences are composed of people from all over the country, including non-first-tier and second-tier cities (*yixian chengshi*, *erxian chengshi* 一線城市，二線城市). Several of my consultants told me that their parents also watch Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs, even though they have only basic computer skills. Typically, the mothers start to watch the programs at their daughters' suggestion, and the fathers may or may not join them later. When my consultants returned home after going abroad for work or study, they usually brought back disks of downloaded programs for their parents. He Liang Liang, a renowned commentator in China, paid tribute to subtitlers on his political discussion TV show by calling them "the most unremitting and diligent translators and knowledge practitioners who make an excellent model for language learners in China," saying that "they have done much more than China's education has taught them" (*Shi Shi LiangLiang Dian*, "Lawrence Viewpoint," December 28, 2009). Journalist Cathy Jin praises subtitlers as the ones who are really breaking cultural barriers (2010). Chinese audiences often refer to subtitlers as living Lei Fengs (*huo Lei Feng* 活雷鋒); the state portrays Lei Feng as a selfless and modest person who sacrificed himself in service to others.⁴ The metaphor of Lei Feng in contemporary China denotes cherished values that

⁴ Lei Feng was a soldier in the People's Liberation Army from the 1950s to the 1960s. Chairman Mao Zedong initiated a nationwide propaganda campaign, "Learning from Lei Feng," that urged Chinese citizens to emulate this model of Party loyalty and carry out socialist core values.

Chinese society has failed to preserve (see Section 4.8, “Authenticity Issues in Chinese Society”).

An event that took place on World Intellectual Property Day (April 26, 2013) speaks to the controversial status of subtitle groups with the Chinese government as well as the recognition they have earned for their accomplishments from the younger generation in China. Although the Chinese government had a laissez-faire attitude toward subtitle groups, after joining the World Trade Organization (hereafter referred to as “WTO”) in 2001, it has occasionally shut down the leading subtitle groups’ websites without warning, making subtitling a private activity that is not shared with the public. The government did not give its reasons for the ban, but subtitlers speculate that the authorities punished the groups in response to the U.S. government’s constant complaints about unauthorized versions of American music, movies, TV programs, and computer software (American Chamber of Commerce 2011; Chan 2010; Pineda 2011). The cyberspace crackdowns were so intense that at times the survival of subtitle groups was in doubt. An anonymous netizen composed a widely circulated elegy acclaiming subtitle groups as “preachers of our time” (*women zhege shidai de budaozhe* 我们这个时代的布道者), who deserve to be remembered as honorable no matter how bleak their future may be. The elegy also criticized Chinese authorities for always dancing to the U.S. government’s tune whenever it criticizes China’s loose approach to intellectual property violations. On World Intellectual Property Day in 2013, the Chinese government shut down the subtitle groups’ websites again. Chinese citizens protested by posting a statement on Sina Weibo (a Chinese version of Twitter): “Pirates are fire-bringers” (*daobanzhe jiu shi daohuo zhe* 盗版者就是盗火者). As shown in Figure 1.1, Chinese

audiences chose the Prometheus metaphor for subtitlers, viewing them as benefactors and praising them for their courage and devotion to translating U.S. TV programs and movies.

Figure 1.1. Page from Sina Weibo, April 26, 2013.

The screenshot shows a Sina Weibo page with several tweets. The top tweet is from user 'Dricimitar' (Dricimitar喂自己袋盐) posted at 23:22 on April 26, 2013, from Sina Weibo. The text reads: '在一个有墙的社会，文化上的**盗版者就是盗火者**，是英雄' (In a society with walls, cultural **pirates are the ones who steal fire**, they are heroes). This tweet has 1 reply.

Below it is a retweet from user '弗朗西斯F' (Francis F) with a thumbs-up icon, posted at 19:43 on April 26, 2013, from Professional Weibo. The text reads: '//@21世纪经济报道:#观点# @五岳散人：正版不引进、盗版看不到、分级制等不来，你们到底想怎样？这是为了推广那些抗日神剧么？以一句话送给辛苦的字幕组以及其他人们：在一个有墙的社会，文化上的**盗版者就是盗火者**，是英雄。' (Retweeting @21st Century Economic Herald: #Viewpoint# @Wuyue Sanren: Legitimate versions aren't imported, piracy isn't visible, grading system isn't coming, what do you really want? Is it to promote those anti-Japanese god dramas? With one sentence sent to the hardworking subtitle groups and other people: In a society with walls, cultural **pirates are the ones who steal fire**, they are heroes.) This retweet has 1644 retweets and 219 comments.

The retweet includes a screenshot of a website showing a black screen with white text, likely a message about the closure of a subtitle website. The text in the screenshot includes: '人人影视和思路网宣布关闭 乐视网大涨超5%' (Renren Video and Silu Network announce closure, Le视网 rises over 5%), '字幕网站人人影视今天中午忽然关闭。另外，号称中国最大数字高清晰门户思路网日前遭北京市文化执法总队和警方联合取缔，警方以涉嫌侵犯知识产权将网站CEO周某等8人抓获，30名员工因发布下载资源超过5万次以上也将面临拘留。' (Subtitle website Renren Video closed today at noon. Additionally, the so-called largest digital high-definition portal in China, Silu Network, was shut down by Beijing Cultural Enforcement and Police. Police arrested CEO Zhou et al. for suspected IP infringement. 30 employees who released/downloaded resources over 50,000 times will also face detention.) The URL <http://t.cn/zToJlly> is provided.

Below the retweet is another tweet from user '菠萝皮sjtu' (Boluopi sjtu) posted at 23:37 on April 26, 2013, from 360 Safe Browser, with the same text: '在一个有墙的社会，文化上的**盗版者就是盗火者**，是英雄。' (1 reply).

Next is a tweet from user '瀚轩' (Hanxuan) posted at 23:37 on April 26, 2013, from Sina Weibo, with the same text: '在一个有墙的社会，文化上的**盗版者就是盗火者**，是英雄。' (No replies).

Finally, there is a retweet from user '疯子阿鸣' (Fanzhi Aming) with a thumbs-up icon, posted at 19:43 on April 26, 2013, from Professional Weibo. The text reads: '//@Poon俊晓: 支持！这是一个阴谋 #观点# @五岳散人：正版不引进、盗版看不到、分级制等不来，你们到底想怎样？这是为了推广那些抗日神剧么？以一句话送给辛苦的字幕组以及其他人们：在一个有墙的社会，文化上的**盗版者就是盗火者**，是英雄。' (Retweeting @Poon Junxiao: Support! This is a conspiracy #Viewpoint# @Wuyue Sanren: Legitimate versions aren't imported, piracy isn't visible, grading system isn't coming, what do you really want? Is it to promote those anti-Japanese god dramas? With one sentence sent to the hardworking subtitle groups and other people: In a society with walls, cultural **pirates are the ones who steal fire**, they are heroes.) This retweet has 1644 retweets and 219 comments.

The bottom of the screenshot shows a tweet from user '疯子阿鸣' (Fanzhi Aming) posted at 23:36 on April 26, 2013, from iPad Client, with the same text: '在一个有墙的社会，文化上的**盗版者就是盗火者**，是英雄。' (1 reply).

Figure 1.1 represents only a small portion of Chinese citizens' reactions to the shutdown, yet the five netizens in the figure express their condolences, shock, and disapproval of the government's policy. The first, third, and fourth netizens (starting at the top of the page) posted the same sentence: "In a society where information is blocked, pirates are fire-bringers" (*zai yige you qiang de shehui daobanzhe jiu shi daohuozhe* 在一个有牆的社会盗版者就是盗火者). The statement "pirates are fire-bringers," which is highlighted in red, also appears in the second and fifth netizens' posts. This statement is used recursively, revealing that audiences regard subtitlers as heroic people who bring them knowledge and extraordinary access to Chinese-subtitled American media programs.

In this dissertation, I address through analysis the following research questions: How does the translation process incorporate linguistic, corporeal, affective, and aesthetic information conveyed in U.S. TV programs? How do audience members and translators work to refine subtitles by interacting in dedicated forums? Why do subtitlers add annotations to Chinese subtitles, and how do audiences react to the subtitlers' "meta-thinking" on the contents, American dialogues, or their own translation texts in the subtitled programs? How do subtitle groups construct new moral discourses in relation to their unauthorized practices with U.S. TV programs and movies, and where do their moralities reside in the quest for more knowledge and authenticity?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted a multisited ethnographic study from August 2011 to September 2012 in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Taipei designed to capture the local and global forces that affect subtitling practices in the subtitlers' everyday lives. The fieldwork was carried out with support from the National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the

University of California's Pacific Rim Research Program. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the UCLA Institutional Review Board. During the post-field-data-analysis stage and the dissertation year, I was supported by the UCLA Center for Chinese Studies, the UCLA Department of Anthropology, and the Institute of Ethnology at Academia Sinica (Taiwan). My ethnography involved both online and offline work across various settings: online discussion forums, QQ (an instant messaging service in China), Sina Weibo, the subtitlers' workplaces, schools, and families, observation of participants, and interviews with subtitlers and audiences (see Section 2.5, "Research Methods").

1.2 Theoretical and Empirical Frameworks of Cultural Translation

Although I will introduce particulars of theory in the following chapters when appropriate, here I provide a brief overview of theories on cultural translation, a theme that runs throughout the entire dissertation. This study draws from theoretical approaches in anthropology, linguistic anthropology, postcolonial studies, and translation studies, which form a useful grid for exploring the practices of Chinese subtitlers and their collaboration with their audiences.

Translation as a part of anthropological practice is seen primarily as an issue related to a "manner of becoming" (Liu 1995), that is, the way in which texts are produced in the new sociocultural landscape. Scholars have focused on the function of translation as a potent form of cultural contact as well as on the politics of translation. Pritzker (2011) examines the translation of Chinese medicine books in various contexts—classroom interactions, embodied experiences and practices, political discourses, and

academic literature—and advances the notion of “living translation.” This idea proposes that the meaning-making process involved in a translation activity often reveals diverse thinking in the (re-)creation of meanings in Chinese medical philosophy. As she explains (2011:5), translation is “ongoing, emerging in multiple acts of re-translation that position actors within a social world where participants have varying access to source texts, and meanings are made and remade in narratives that both continue and transform linguistic, personal, and social meanings.” In other words, translation is fundamentally a socially situated and culturally constructed activity that incorporates particular moments of interaction. It is with this dynamic view of translation in mind, following the notion that translation is an “ongoing lived event” (Pritzker 2012:343), that I examine the linguistic, cultural, and social components of the translation work conducted by Chinese youth and young adults.

In a study of the Christian missionization of the Bosavi people of Papua New Guinea, Schieffelin (2007) illustrates how language, especially the process of translating, presents different ways of cultural thinking and different linguistic practices of mind and self. Bosavi speech has no repertoire for reporting the private thoughts or internal states of others in everyday language. This adds to the problem of translating the Bible in that local residents believe it is culturally problematic for anyone to know what was in the minds of the scribes. Schieffelin takes a diachronic perspective on the different Bible translations and examines Bible translations in pastors’ sermons, finding that their speech contains active sense-making efforts (e.g., self-repairs). The analysis shows that while new verbal resources were introduced in Bosavi—for example, “Christian” expressions of internal states and neologisms (e.g., “covert”)—people are still reluctant to accept the

idea that it is possible to know what others are thinking given the salience and importance of local cultural meanings of personhood and mind. Schieffelin (2007:158) notes: “There may be no such thing as simple translations and their impact on orientations is not always clear.”

Likening translation to intertextuality (Briggs and Bauman 1992; Silverstein and Urban 1996), Handman (2010) examines how Guhu-Samane-speaking Christian communities in Papua New Guinea paraphrase the original text of the New Testament and intertextually relate the text to their local-language translations. She observes that translation within a ritual performance can become a model of transformation for participants engaged in the performance, that is, a Guhu-Samane-speaking group speaks English or Tok Pisin, along with its own language, in order to experience the effects of worship. Handman argues (2010:584) that the group’s act of simultaneous translation into multiple languages during worship “enacts a constant transformation of Christianity into the local language context and a constant transformation of people into Christians.” The English word “sacrifice,” for example, is rendered as *ofa* in the Tok Pisin Bible and *kiridza* in the Guhu-Samane version of the New Testament. According to Handman, *ofa* generally refers to weekly tithes or animal sacrifice, whereas *kiridza* means material rewards given in workplace, school, or sports competitions. Moreover, the pastor uses these different translations by incorporating quotes from the Bible into his sermon. Such a sermon effectively contextualizes the different meanings of translated biblical texts in his sermon, and the English, Tok Pisin, and Guhu-Samane texts are also recontextualized with respect to one another.

In his famous essay “The Task of the Translator,” Benjamin (2004[1923]:76-78), proposes that translation is not merely about transmitting a message but is a “mode” that carries the potential to achieve what he calls a “pure language.” The translator’s task is not to “assemble” or express what is to be conveyed because the writer has already done that in writing the original text; rather, the task of the translator “consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original” (2004[1923]:79). Benjamin maintains that (2004[1923]:78) “a translation ... must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.” Translation needs to be transparent, as he argues, and the original and translated texts deserve equal attention. Benjamin endorses this view by quoting a German commentator, Rudolf Pannwitz (1917), who, in discussing the difficulty of translating another language into the translator’s own language, remarks:

Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. ... The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image, and tone converge. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign tongue. (2004[1923]:82)

As Pannwitz suggests, the translator’s own language is enriched by the target source and culture of the work to be translated. In a similar vein, Ramanujan (1978:viii) writes that “a translator hopes not only to translate a text, but hopes (against all odds) to translate a non-native reader into a native one.” Both scholars argue that a translator should not

merely transfer meaning from one linguistic-cultural complex to another; instead, he or she should interact with the source language and culture to make the translated work “alive” to readers so that they can experience the original text.

The Benjamin-Pannwitz mode is not easy to achieve. Schleiermacher (2004[1813]), for example, contends that only two strategies are available for translators: either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and brings the reader closer to the author, or, contrastively, the translator leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the author toward his or her readers. Schleiermacher promotes the first approach, that is, the translator reserves the “otherness” and foreign elements of the translated text by “striving to adhere so closely to the foreign text as his own language allows” (2004[1813]:54). Even though this method may make the translated texts more abstruse, it is more appropriate than the other way around. The second approach, as Schleiermacher points out, produces a transparent and fluent style by replacing the linguistic and cultural differences in the foreign text and thus smoothing out its strangeness. This notion is taken up and further developed by Venuti (1995), who distinguishes two types of translation strategy: domestication and foreignization. Domestication, as described by Niranjana (1992:20) and others, has dominated in Western translations of “the other” and involves “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to ... target language cultural values”; foreignization, in contrast, has little intention of remaking non-Western languages and cultures and thus leaves the linguistic, stylistic, and cultural otherness intact to some extent.

In postcolonial studies, scholars view translation as a political activity and focus on Westerners constructing postcolonial and marginalized cultures through multiple acts

of translation. Working in a variety of geopolitical areas such as South America, Africa, and India, researchers examine how a translation practice is contextualized in the cultural and political legacy of empire and how translation is always involved with relationships among power, languages, and culture. Bassnett and Trivedi (1999) observe that, as an antithesis to Benjamin and like-minded scholars, translation has always been a unidirectional process in which the imbalance of power between Western and non-Western countries reveals itself. They write (1999:5), “The close relationship between colonization and translation has come under scrutiny; we can now perceive the extent to which translation was for centuries a one-way process, with texts being translated into European languages for European consumption, rather than as part of a reciprocal process of exchange.” Likewise, Dingwaney (1995:4) notes, linguistic and cultural translation is a form of violence, “especially when the culture being translated is constituted as that of the ‘other.’” Colonial powers translate foreign texts into their own language on their own terms, thus eradicating cultural differences and creating a buffer zone of assimilated sameness. In Dingwaney’s words (1995:5), smooth translations that domesticate the text in the language into which it has been translated deprive it of its “‘foreignness,’ even, perhaps, of its radical inaccessibility.” Similarly, Rafael (2007:213) points out that “translation historically has served as an instrument of domination under colonial rule.” Niranjana’s (1992:1-2) study of Indian precolonial ancient texts translated into English, for example, illustrates that in a colonial setting, translation is one of the multiple sites where “the practices of subjection/subjectification implicit in the colonial enterprise operate not merely through the coercive machinery of the imperial state but also through the discourses of philosophy, history, anthropology. . . . The ‘colonial’ subject—

constructed through technologies or practices of power/knowledge—is brought into being within multiple discourses and on multiple sites.”

The imbalance of power between original and translated texts is of crucial concern in postcolonial literature. Spivak (1993) theorizes translation as a cultural-political practice that might be strategic in bringing about social change. She criticizes Western translation strategies that alienate third world literature from its host language and social grounding and argues that translators of third world literature require “a sense of the rhetoricity of language, a species of neocolonialist construction” (1993:181), in order to represent heterogeneity and signification of the literature as realistic representations of the originating society. Appiah (2004[1993]) proposes “thick translation” in opposition to the Western ideological agenda beyond translated texts. He cites an example of African oral literature and the asymmetries in global cultural and political economy between the original texts and the English translation, pointing out that the political significance of this translation is not the same in American society as in African society. A “thick translation,” he suggests, assists readers in understanding the cultural differences between two societies because it “seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context” (2004[1993]:399).

The term “thick translation” is grafted onto Geertz’s characterization of the ethnographer’s work as “thick description.” Appiah’s use of “thick” conforms to that of Geertz in that they both refer to the inclusion of the participant observer’s experience within the scope of the ethnographic description. Geertz (1973:89) defines culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people

communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.” By this definition, culture is a context that encompasses the symbolic meanings of actions as well as a space in which actions take place (Geertz 1973, 1983, 1988). In Geertz’s sense, translation entails cross-cultural understanding, and cultural translation is an issue of determining implicit meanings—the meanings that speakers are potentially capable of sharing—in the context of the situation and culture in which they utter the true meaning of their discourse (Asad 1886; Malinowski 1961).

1.3 Writing Trajectory

The next chapter of this dissertation, Chapter Two, “The Ethnographic Setting,” situates the rise of subtitle groups in contemporary China since the economic reforms of 1978 and the subsequent, conditional opening to international, mostly Western, media programs. The chapter includes a discussion of how the economic reforms have reshaped a centrally planned economy into a market-oriented economy. This change has led to a gradual release from tight Party control; nevertheless, the state still imposes restrictions on the importation of Western media programs. Consequently, educated urban dwellers turn to the Internet as their source for more rapid access to various international media programs. The chapter also reviews the Chinese government policies that help to develop Internet infrastructure and exert significant control on Internet contents. The Internet, chat-room software, and online discussion forums provide subtitlers and their audiences with more convenient means of collecting, circulating, and discussing both original and Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs and movies. The final part of the chapter describes the ethnographic background contextualizing this study and outlines the methods of data

collection and analysis used. It offers background information about the focal participants and discusses my ethnographic positionalities during my fieldwork.

Chapter Three, “Translating U.S. Sitcom Humor: The Language of Evaluation and ‘Translation Sovereignty,’” examines how Chinese subtitlers and their audiences co-construct the humor in U.S. TV situation comedies (hereafter referred to as “sitcoms”) on the Internet. I draw on a particular example of humor in the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* and examine how a Chinese subtitle generates heated debate and dialogue between subtitlers and audiences. As humor is a social and cultural phenomenon, audiences express mixed opinions on what defines an appropriate translation of sitcom humor. Their language of evaluation used to judge the Chinese subtitle and other commenters’ assessments of the subtitle reveals the different cultural identities commenters present for positioning themselves as moral Chinese who are familiar with the cultural, social, and political dimensions of what constitutes a laughable element. I propose the notion of “translation sovereignty,” by which audiences claim that volunteer, underground subtitlers have the right to adapt and reinvent humor in the context of light entertainment such as sitcoms. Moreover, evaluations by commenters constitute a lively process that reflects what Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986) calls “voice” and “dialogicality.” The comments offered a timely response to a major social event taking place in China at the time they were posted. The translation of sitcom humor is interwoven with local knowledge of the sociopolitical economies of language and identity in a particular cultural context.

Chapter Four, “Annotations in Chinese-Subtitled U.S. Television Programs: ‘Meta-Thinking’ and Authenticity in Subtitlers’ Translating Practices,” explores the

linguistic element in the subtitlers' translation work, that is, annotations in Chinese subtitles. I examine why subtitlers create notes that are not linguistically encoded in the original English dialogues. The analysis draws on the narrative theory of Ochs and Capps (2001), which advances the idea that there are two conflicting forces in every narrative structure: first, coherence, the desire to create a single story line out of multiple episodes in order to present an organized account of an experience, and, second, authenticity, the tendency to recount all the events that happened and how they were experienced. In this vein, I show that annotations manifest two desires on the part of subtitlers. On the one hand, subtitlers want to provide background knowledge of contemporary English vernaculars and American popular culture that they believe will help Chinese audiences better understand U.S. TV programs. On the other hand, subtitlers reveal their inner thoughts and feelings about the subtitled programs to audiences and create a sense of involvement by sharing their opinions of the U.S. TV programs and movies with a community of like-minded individuals. The dialectic of objectivity and authenticity evokes various audience responses. I argue that creating an annotation reveals the "backstage" (Goffman 1959) aspect of the subtitlers' knowledge, expertise, and thinking process. Finally, I explore how the subtitlers' attempts to communicate their inner thoughts and feelings become an illocutionary social act in the atmosphere of inauthenticity and mistrust that exists in China.

Chapter Five, "Intellectual Property and Chinese-Subtitled U.S. Media Programs: Perspectives on Moralities from Subtitle Groups in China," analyzes the moralities of subtitlers and audiences, offering a detailed examination of how subtitlers moralize their unauthorized use of U.S. TV programs and movies. While *shanzhai* (山寨) culture,

“counterfeit culture,” is rampant in contemporary Chinese society, subtitlers distinguish themselves from businessmen engaged in selling counterfeit and pirated products through their disciplined subtitling practice, devotion to their practice, and the nonprofit spirit of their endeavors. Although the subtitlers’ activities violate the Copyright Law of the People’s Republic of China, their infringements of intellectual property receive warm support from Chinese audiences. The first part of the chapter reviews why the conventional notion of intellectual property did not develop in China and contextualizes subtitlers in the *shanzhai* culture. The second part analyzes two different attitudes of subtitlers toward their activities in relation to intellectual property. On the one hand, some subtitlers disregard the notion of intellectual property that has been nourished in the Western context. They challenge the applicability of this idea in China and formulate a new version of intellectual property that fits China’s socioeconomic complex. On the other hand, another part of the subtitle community recognizes the importance of intellectual property but chooses to adhere to its own codes. Either way, subtitlers moralize their activities based on the conviction that Chinese youth and young adults want more information and instant access to foreign media programs, in spite of the state’s media monopoly, and that fulfilling this need is a public good.

In Chapter Six, “Conclusion,” I tie together the dissertation’s main themes by offering a holistic picture of the different facets of subtitle groups’ activities discussed separately in the preceding chapters. The dissertation’s main concern—how Chinese subtitlers’ translation activities facilitate the movement of ideas across cultures and carry cultural and social meanings in contemporary China—is revisited. I reexamine the theme of cultural translation in light of research on stance, authenticity, and morality in the

developing cross-disciplinary dialogue between linguistic anthropology, linguistics, and translation studies.

Chapter Two

The Ethnographic Setting

2.1 China's Reforms in 1978

Following Mao's death in 1976, the new echelon of Chinese authorities, led by Deng Xiaoping, implemented a series of reforms that created a turning point for fundamental changes in China. The historic 1978 reforms replaced leadership political struggle with economic development as the state's new objective. China's transition, unlike those of the former Soviet republics, has been a gradual and experimental process. The first years were devoted to reform in rural areas (Perkins 1988), where the household responsibility system in agriculture was introduced. Unlike the commune system, in which agricultural production was collectively shared and income was allocated by local governments, farmers received extra rewards for additional labor after meeting certain obligations to the state and controlled their own agricultural production, including prices and growth (Qiao et al. 2003; Sicular 1986; Zweig 1983). The successful transformation of rural China served as the foundation of reform in other sectors, not only by solving China's grain problems, but also by changing the ideological thinking of the Communist Party from anti-market in Mao's era to support of a market economy (Huang et al. 2008; Lin 1992; Park et al. 2002). The revival of agriculture enabled the expansion of the market system, and the positive results encouraged the government to launch all-around economic reforms. Enterprises were gradually granted autonomy and responsibility so that they could make decisions based on people's needs rather than on those of local governments, share profits with the state, determine wages and bonuses, and implement

cross-region and cross-industry cooperation (Lee 1986; Li 1997; Naughton 1995). Increased incentives were crucial for industrial reform because the profit-driven attitude motivated management to restructure their resource stocks. In the state-owned sectors, companies eliminated redundant labor so that they could compete with newly privatized government-controlled enterprises that did not have to deal with this problem (Byrd 1991; Li and Rozelle 2004; McMillan and Naughton 1992). Workers' payment increased too, and they could receive the proportion of their income paid in the form of bonuses, or other benefits offered by the firm (Groves et al. 1994). Specialized banks, which later became commercial banks, were founded to facilitate the developments of different sectors, including agriculture, industry and commerce, and construction, and were given the right to authorize credit (Allen et al. 2008). The demand for skilled personnel grew along with the economy; therefore, the government improved the educational system and extended it to rural areas so that people in the cities and the countryside would have equal opportunities for education. Educational institutions ranging from research-oriented schools to providers of technical training at all levels were set up for students from different backgrounds (Hawkins 2000; Lewin et al. 1994). In addition, non-state sectors—collective, individual, and overseas-funded enterprises—were fostered to create a normal, competitive environment. As a result, the number of self-employed workers and laborers increased. Among these new sectors, the overseas-funded sector was established under the open-door policy, which reconnects China to foreign trade and investment and leads to the rise of different employment systems in enterprises with foreign capital, particularly in the special economic zones along the coasts.

The 1978 reforms produced a remarkable change, from aversion to foreign investment to an outward orientation (Kamm 1989). China's trade regime before 1978 was confined to import substitution; however, it took a few important steps to open itself up to the outside world. The so-called open-door policy (*gaige kaifang* 改革開放) decentralized decision making on exports and imports to local governments or regional foreign corporations and, in 1979, established special economic zones (*jingji tequ* 經濟特區) in the coastal areas, including Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Shantou in Guangdong Province and, later, Xiamen in Fujian Province (Stoltenberg 1984; Su 2001; Xu and Chen 2008). The main purpose of these special economic zones, with their many investment incentives, was to strengthen China's embattled economy with foreign capital and to modernize the country through foreign technology. According to Wong (1987), the term "special economic zone" was carefully selected by the authorities to denote a complex of related economic activities and services rather than a unifunctional entity. These zones undertook the pioneering task of experimenting with a market-oriented economic approach that is different from that of past decades. They were located in coastal areas far from the political center, Beijing, in order to minimize the costs and threats generated by their operation or failure. In economic special zones, tariffs, quotas, and licensing have replaced restrictions on exports and imports in order to attract foreign investment. Foreign firms that moved to these zones received preferential tax and administrative treatment; in Shenzhen, enterprises were given a ten-year exemption from the requirement of submitting tax revenues to the central and provincial governments (Kueh 1990; Zhu 1996). The government also lowered import tariffs throughout the entire period of the open door policy, and after China joined the WTO, the government

promised to lower tariffs even more so that it could meet requirements for membership (Fewsmith 2001; Liang 2002; Wang 2002; Yeung et al. 2009). Moreover, direct foreign investment was permitted and took three forms: jointly financed enterprises, cooperative ventures, and entirely foreign-owned enterprises. In dealing with foreign direct investment, the economic special zones showed a high degree of flexibility in that issues related to trade, payment, compensation, coproduction, and joint ventures were processed in a pragmatic manner (Ge 1999; Khan 1991). Foreign investors could set up factories in the zones and take advantage of the inexpensive labor, favorable fees for land or facility use, and friendly arrangements for project duration, location, and type of ownership. Administrative procedures for entry and exit were also simplified in order to attract international personnel. Coupled with improved infrastructure and the priority accorded foreign investment, these investor-friendly policies turned a flow of foreign capital into a flood. The economic special zones successfully serve the country as a “laboratory” in which to test a novel approach to economic development and connect China’s domestic economy to the outside world (Ip 1995; Sklair 1991; Wei 2000).

In the ten years since China embarked on trade liberalization, the economic growth rate remained at an average of 9.8 percent a year, with fewer and less painful ups and downs (Hu and Khan 1997). Studies report that in 2004, China became the third-largest exporting country in the world (Amiti and Freund 2010; Bown and Crowley 2010; Lardy 2005). In 2001, China joined WTO. Global economic integration has brought its own campaigns of globalization (Branstetter and Lardy 2008). The circulation of knowledge and products associated with materials from Western countries has gradually awakened a younger generation’s passion for an authentic taste of foreign popular

cultures, mostly from the United States. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I address the issue of China's embrace of globalization in relation to its openness on media. Next, I provide a macro-sociological account of the rise of subtitle groups in contemporary China. And, finally, I present a brief account of the ethnographic context of subtitlers and audiences in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Taipei, where I conducted my study during 2011–2012.

2.2 China's Openness on Media and the Popularity of U.S. Media Programs in the Chinese Market

After China joined WTO, the Chinese government was obligated to adhere to the General Agreements on Trade in Services, which stipulates that media sectors should be open for multilateral trade (Lin 2004). Before China's entry into the WTO, foreign firms were allowed to import only equipment and materials directly related to manufacturing projects that were approved by the state. Input under other categories—goods, service, information-based products—were strictly forbidden. Foreign media organizations and companies have attempted to enter the Chinese market since China acceded to WTO regulations. Instead, China opened its markets to the rest of the world and decentralized the media market at China's own pace and in line with the government's political agenda (Chan 2003; Rosen 2003; Zhao 1998, 2000). Initially, the government allowed merely three overseas TV channels— Central European Media Enterprises, Phoenix Satellite Television, and Star TV—to go into Guangdong province (Xu 2010). Although these companies were limited to the southeast area, China has made a pathbreaking commitment in its opening to foreign-owned channels in the media regime. In 2004, the

State Administration of Radio Film and Television enacted new regulation policies allowing foreign media into China in more diverse formats. Recently, China's policy has been to build a media and cultural industry capable of developing an entertainment sector that could create entertainment and news products to meet the rising demand from audiences (Barboza 2009). This encourages more foreign media companies to speed up their investments and secure a place in the lucrative market in China.

Foreign media companies face multiple challenges. First, the Chinese media market is highly restricted, and foreign media companies are prohibited from investing in any Chinese media industries. Foreign media companies cooperated with their Chinese joint venture partners and could not operate on their own (Lin 2004). The rules were loosened later, and foreign media companies gained greater freedom to finance and produce a wider range of programs for Chinese audiences (Barboza 2009; MacLeod 2009). Even so, international companies need to compete with emerging domestic media companies, which are likewise expanding their business along with the size of their audiences. Second, China has censorship of mass media, which has long been viewed as a ruling apparatus by Chinese authorities. As Hong notes (1998:138), the Chinese government's "opening up" was not equal to the Party's "giving up" its control and use of media. While the authorities welcome foreign investment in the media sector, they also exert control on foreign as well as Chinese media. In 2012, the government issued a new rule that China's television broadcasters will be permitted to show a limited number of imported series, as China continues to try to rein in foreign influence. According to the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (Jacobs 2012), under the new rules, no foreign TV series can be aired during prime time, 7 p.m. to 10 p.m., and overseas-

produced shows could take up no more than 25 percent of total programming time each day. Moreover, imported TV dramas should be no longer than fifty episodes, and TV stations should take care to broadcast a fair proportion of programs from different countries in order to avoid favoring productions from one country. There has been concern that an influx of foreign content is eroding public morality and that foreign media companies might steal market share from their Chinese counterparts. Journalist Jonathan Kaiman interviewed Yuan Fang, a professor at the Communication University of China, who commented, “If there’s no rule against taking shows from abroad, then TV stations will only broadcast foreign shows” (Kaiman 2012). This remark underscores the popularity of Western media programs among Chinese audiences, so that the government steps in to protect China-made dramas and, more important, to prevent audiences from learning “incorrect” values, that could lead to negative political or cultural consequence. In an article on Chinese officials’ attitudes toward globalization, Garrett (2001) points out that the ruling class holds a mixed view on the unavoidable move toward globalization. Some officials are optimistic and think that China will become even more prosperous and benefit economically, socially, and culturally from globalization. Others, mostly hardline nationalists and leftists, are uneasy about the “incursion” of foreign thinking and competition and worry that those may threaten China’s sovereignty and social values. Garrett cites former president Jiang Zemin’s speech, delivered at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Brunei on November 16, 2000. Jiang stated that China is aware of the potential negative effects of globalization and that he believed the downside is caused by some countries that intend to impose their ideologies on Chinese citizens.

Wan and Kraus (2002) provide a detailed account of the entry of Hollywood movies into China in the mid-1990s. The original intention of the Chinese government was to introduce foreign movies to the Chinese market in order to accelerate the sluggish film industry reforms. The authorities hoped that foreign movies would put pressure on domestic film companies to improve the poor quality of their products and their declining box office receipts. Hollywood movies turned out to be very popular and created substantial profits, but political upheavals interrupted their access to China. It was not until 2001 that the United States resumed negotiations with China on reopening the market to foreign competition in film. China sets a limit on imported movies every year. Jaffe (2011) interviewed a Chinese film producer who commented, “It (the quota limit) is about safeguarding local stories, not just local production companies,” and concluded that the quota aims not only to protect Chinese domestic films but to ensure “cultural ramifications, preserving a national film identity.” Moreover, Hollywood movies that hope to compete successfully for this slim opening must make sure that their contents do not run afoul of China’s censorship policies. The guidelines on content are strict—sex, religion, the occult, and anything that could possibly cause public disorder are forbidden. Any film that hopes to enter China must be approved by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television. For example, a scene in the James Bond film *Skyfall* was cut off by China’s censors because it depicts a French hitman shooting a Chinese security guard in the elevator of a skyscraper (FlorCruz 2013); in *Titanic*, the scene in which the protagonist poses naked was removed from the 3-D version out of fear that it might have a bad effect on the ethical social environment (Child 2012). In 2009, the WTO announced that overseas films should be allowed greater participation in China’s market. In response

to frequent complaints from U.S. and European film studios, the WTO ruled that China had violated the international agreement and requested that it lift its bans on imported films. The current president, Xi Jinping, while still vice president, promised during a state visit to Washington in 2012 that China would increase its import quota from twenty to thirty-four movies per year and, even more encouraging for foreign media corporations, that the amount of revenue shared with rights owners would almost double (Frater 2012).

Despite the restriction, the small number of foreign movies typically did well at the box office. In a competition with more than eight hundred domestic movies every year, the twenty foreign titles account for more than half of Chinese box-office revenues (Jaffe 2011). According to Burkitt (2012), while overall box-office revenue rose 42 percent from 2011 to 2012, earnings from China's domestically produced films went down 4.3 percent over the same period, and imported movies generated much more. Xinhua Agency (2013), China's state mouthpiece, reports that ticket sales for imported movies represented 51.54 percent of gross ticket revenue in 2012. China's restrictive quota policy obviously does not allow entrance of enough foreign movies, especially Hollywood movies, to meet the strong demand from audiences. Chinese citizens therefore find alternatives; pirated DVDs are sold at an affordable price, that is, ten to twenty Renminbi (around two to three U.S. dollars) (Figures 2.1 and 2.2). Even the latest Hollywood movies can be easily bought at corner streets at the slightly higher price of forty Renminbi (around six to seven U.S. dollars) (Bai and Waldfogel 2012; Lev 2003; Levin and Horn 2011; Timms 2013).

Figure 2.1. A street vendor cart selling pirated DVDs, Beijing.



Figure 2.2. A DVD store in a shopping mall stairway that sells both copyrighted and pirated DVDs, Beijing.



Subtitle groups emerged under these conditions in response to the younger generation's discontent with the state's restrictions on imported U.S. media programs. Section 2.4 further explores the rise of subtitle groups and their activities.

2.3 The Rapid Development of the Internet in China

Statistics show that China's Internet population has exploded in the past years. The China Internet Network Information Center announced that 590 million people (44 percent of the country's 1.3 billion population) in China have used the Internet as of June 2013. Microblogging has also increased at a fast pace, growing fourfold by the end of 2011, compared to the end of 2010; in 2013, microblogging reached a population of 309 million Chinese Internet users (Osborne 2013). The Chinese government has devoted much money and time to rapidly building the data network, making the Internet available to an expanding proportion of the country's population. According to *The Internet in China* (State Council of the People's Republic of China 2010), China invested a total of 4.3 trillion Renminbi in Internet infrastructure construction between 1997 and 2009. Xinhua Agency (2010) estimates that infrastructure expansion has ensured Internet access to 99.3 percent of towns and 91.5 percent of villages. Although the Chinese government has allowed a wider range of discussion on the Internet than in conventional media (Garrett 2001; McIntyre 1997), China is reported to have the most sophisticated Internet monitoring systems in the world (Cherry 2005; Gomez 2004; Sohmen 2001). Internet control in China focuses on both physical infrastructure and content. This ambivalent policy reflects the government's dilemma in allowing more access to commercial and educational resources while continuing to monitor access to information (Harwit and

Clark 2001). Zhao (2008:23) remarks, “The explosion of the Internet and mobile technologies and the imperative to control these highly dispersed and versatile new media have further extended the depth and scope of the Chinese state’s role in the communication field.” The regime adapts itself to a commercialized and market-oriented media sector but also reconfigures its control in order to mobilize more sophisticated operations and regulations related to different aspects of the Internet.

Despite endless attempts to control the Internet, a number of studies suggest that the Internet has challenged the party-state information monopoly. Researchers view the multifarious ways in which savvy Internet users dodge censors and manage to stake out spaces where they can share viewpoints that are not officially sanctioned as nascent democratization. In exploring efforts to stop dam building on the Nu River, Yang and Calhoun (2010) discuss the rise of a green public sphere and how the Internet offers an important channel for local citizens, protesters, and workers in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As the campaigns were mostly organized online, Yang and Calhoun show in detail that the Internet—especially e-mails, websites, and bulletin boards—has the capacity for speedy and wide distribution. Different channels of the Internet are subject to political control to various degrees; activists therefore took a flexible approach and combined the most effective methods of publicizing their campaigns and reaching their potential audiences. A civil society is always embedded in a particular political and social environment, and this is also true of China’s green sphere, which is embedded “in politics, in civil society, and in communication technologies” (2010:229). Cheong and Gong (2010) investigate a special type of cyber vigilantism, called “human flesh search” (*renrou shosuo* 人肉搜索), which involves a huge number

of Internet users whose aim is to expose corrupt local officials. In this grassroots, collective process, online participants find information about these officials and expose their real names, occupations, titles, locations, ages, and family members on the Internet, with the hope of achieving justice and restoring public morality. Cheong and Gong notes that emerging media, such as the Internet, “provide the interactive and instructive spaces to support criticism, debate, and expression of alternative public opinions from official accounts” (2010:481). In discussing the same phenomenon, Wines (2009) quotes Xiao Qiang, a journalism professor at the University of California, Berkeley: “It (human flesh search) is about raising the public awareness of democratic ideas—accountability, transparency, citizens’ rights to participate, that the government should serve the people.” Zhao (2008) documents a case in 2003, when the Chinese young adult Sun Zhigang was beaten to death in a detention center, a victim of police brutality. Sun’s classmates mobilized their network to reach media outlets, helping Sun’s family bring his death to public attention. The report of this tragedy first appeared in *Nanfang Daily*, one of the most liberal newspapers in China, and then spread to the Internet; it caused a national sensation. Sun was not the first victim of China’s detention and repatriation system, but his case gained wide media attention because he was an urban citizen. Authorities were pressured to enact new regulations, one of which prohibits local agencies from detaining people against their will or fining them. Yang (2003a, 2003b, 2009) advances the notion that burgeoning communications in Chinese virtual communities implicate the formation of a nascent civic sphere through a three-stage process: the Internet fosters public debate and articulation of problems; it then creates a new associational form for social organizations and their activities; this fore further introduces new dynamics into the real

world. He points out that online activism is a grassroots and volunteer activity through which Chinese citizens struggle against oppression rooted in grave material grievances and search for their identity as they are dislocated and encounter massive changes in their real lives.

2.4 The Emergence of Subtitle Groups and Their Activities

The first authorized U.S. TV drama to appear in China was *The Man from Atlantis*, which hit Chinese TV screens in 1980. This Chinese-dubbed U.S. program brought a novel experience to Chinese audiences, who had experienced no contact with foreign cultures in previous decades. The debut was successful; this drama was so popular that the Chinese TV station broadcast rerun the following years. Later, several other U.S. TV programs made their way to China, including *Garrison's Gorillas*, *Growing Pains*, *The X-Files*, and *Friends* (Figure 2.3). The Chinese government grants only limited importation of U.S. TV programs and movies; however, censorship practices and officially approved subtitles or dubbing for the few authorized programs typically deprive citizens of the original flavor of the English-language dialogue and U.S. popular culture. Fans of U.S. popular culture who later become subtitlers are not satisfied with the officially but badly translated or dubbed U.S. TV programs that are subject to censorship and may have scenes cut. With their computer and language skills, these Internet-savvy young people mobilize resources that the state is yet reluctant to provide.

Most subtitlers are well-educated members of the urban middle class and were born after the 1980s. They are motivated to form subtitle groups by the desire to increase the number of Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs and movies available to like-minded peers—that is, they are their own target audience. Successful subtitlers have fans who are

devoted to watching and discussing their translation work, and outstanding subtitlers are admired as heroic models of talent, determination, and dedication. The emotional satisfaction derived from the appreciation of audience members compensates subtitlers for their volunteer labor.

Figure 2.3. The Central Perk Café in downtown Beijing. The owner is an avid fan of the U.S. sitcom *Friends* and modeled his café after the café in the show. This theme café aims to attract Chinese youth and young adults who are fans of the U.S. TV program.



Researchers have noted that “fansubbing,” a process by which a video is translated and subtitled by fans, exists across linguistic and cultural communities (Díaz-Cintas and Munoz Sánchez 2006; Pérez González 2007; Rush 2009). In China, the practice has flourished as a well-organized collective enterprise supported by labor-intensive participation. There are approximately eighty subtitle groups in China working

on media programs, in a variety of genres, that originate in different countries. These groups vary in size from ten to more than a hundred people. Subtitle groups traditionally recruit subtitlers and staff members from schools. The majority of subtitle group members are undergraduate and graduate students who are avid fans of foreign media programs.⁵ Most subtitlers are not professionally trained translators and do not major in language-related fields. My ethnographic participants include, for example, graduate students, engineers, accountants, university teachers, housewives, lawyers, journalists, and physicians. People who apply to join one of the well-established subtitle groups, such as Fengruan (風軟) Group and YyEts (*renren* 人人) Group, are given seventy-two hours in which to subtitle a five-minute video program in order to demonstrate that they are capable of translating English-language U.S. media programs into Chinese and have familiarized themselves with a group's specific subtitling format.⁶ Subtitlers translate programs with high relevance to their areas of expertise, and experienced subtitlers assist them with language issues. For example, in Fengruan Group, one of the chief translators of the medical drama *House M.D.* is a full-time physician.

Subtitle groups stretch across the globe. Most members live in large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, and some live in other countries such as the United States. They

⁵ Some subtitlers continue to participate in the subtitle community after they leave school. They may be too busy to do any actual translating, but they contribute material support drawn from their new places of employment. For example, those working in computer companies donate secondhand equipment or free software, and those employed by advertising agencies might get some of their clients to support their group's website.

⁶ English lessons are compulsory for pupils in China's primary and junior high schools. Generally speaking, undergraduates have basic English proficiency. Aspiring subtitlers who pass the subtitle groups' "entrance examination" are supposed to have the capacity, to varying degrees, to translate English into Chinese.

communicate and coordinate tasks through the Internet. The circulation of a media program and its transmission across national borders depend on the cooperation of team members within a subtitle group. A subtitle group's standard operating procedure for translating a forty-minute episode is as follows: as soon as the program is released, staff members in the United States record a television program on a videocassette or DVD and send the media file to studios or bases of operation in China, where staff members divide it into segments and distribute the segments to translators. A forty-minute episode usually requires two or three translators, and they may collaborate with partners in other time zones if they fail to complete their overnight work on time. Experienced proofreaders follow up to ensure consistency among the translations. When the translation texts are ready, staff members establish a running time and place the Chinese texts on the screens.

Subtitlers translate and mediate U.S. popular culture presented in U.S. TV programs and movies in ways that facilitate comprehension among Chinese audiences. They create annotations to explain references (e.g., names, historical allusions, and idioms) that they assume are likely to be unfamiliar to audiences. They also encourage audiences to participate in the community by commenting on the translations and sharing their ideas with the subtitlers. Subtitle groups and their Chinese-subtitled programs have become a means by which Chinese youth and young adults can learn and advance their cross-linguistic communication skills and cross-cultural knowledge. Audiences not only receive Chinese-subtitled programs but also help generate refined translations by commenting on the subtitles and contributing their knowledge of U.S. popular culture and American English vernaculars to the community, whose members then learn from one another.

2.4.1 Becoming a Subtitler: Recruitment and Entrance Examination

The Chinese volunteer translators in subtitle groups impressed me during the early stage of my fieldwork with their preference for keeping a low profile. When I asked subtitlers how they collect and translate U.S. TV programs and upload the Chinese-subtitled versions to the Internet, they always responded with reservation and downplayed their involvement in the subtitle community. Their replies were filled with hedges (e.g., *huoxu* [maybe]), noncommittal agreement (e.g., *dagai shi ni shuo de nayang* [pretty much just like what you said]), and denials (*bu qingchu* [(I'm) not certain (about what you said)]). Their language, in addition to marking me as an outsider, reveals a consciousness of the sensitive issues surrounding the unauthorized use of media programs. Subtitler Ri told me about an incident that clarified the situation. Ding Chengtai, a team leader in Fengruan Group, was interviewed by the *New York Times*. The article, "Chinese Tech Buffs Slake Thirst for U.S. TV Shows" (French 2006), caused a controversy because Ding disclosed his true identity and enough details about Fengruan's operations to possibly draw unwelcome attention to the group and members of his team. Some of Ding's team members did not want to work with a colleague whose public exposure might lead to trouble for the group. Eventually, Ding left the group.

In an effort to build rapport with my potential ethnographic participants, I applied to join Fengruan Group. My friends who are also subtitlers in that group suggested that I go to Fengruan's official website and read the recruitment notice on the webpage. As shown in Figure 2.4, the notice highlights three main points. First, Fengruan Group is organized by volunteer netizens and is not profit-oriented; whoever joins is a volunteer and will not receive any income. Second, translators need to be responsible, patient, and

persistent; it takes a considerable amount of time to translate a TV program, and translators will have to continue working even on Chinese holidays. Third, translators are forbidden to participate in more than one subtitle group and cannot use subtitles from other groups. Plagiarism will be punished.

Figure 2.4. Recruitment notice from the Fengruan Group website.

[[公告]] | [[招聘]] FRM字幕组诚招翻译 (请仔细阅读须知及注意事项) 论坛已开放注册 收藏 订阅 推荐 打印

dingctai 发表于 2006-8-5 18:00 只看该作者 小中大 1#

泰的



FRM字幕组
动感熊猫 一飞冲天

帖子 2167
精华 13
威望 54 点
金钱 50657 FRB
阅读权限 80
注册时间 2005-3-17



 发短消息
当前离线

 加为好友

【招聘】FRM字幕组诚招翻译 (请仔细阅读须知及注意事项) 论坛已开放注册

FRM字幕组严正申明：

FRM字幕组所有听（翻）译字幕，只是为了所有爱好英语及其它语言的热心网友学习交流之用，没有任何以赢利为目的商业用途，凡是加入字幕组的成员必须始终做到这一要求，如有动机不纯者将FRM字幕组作品用于商业用途，一经发现，严惩不怠

字幕组报名须知：

1. 本组纯为网友自发组建的非盈利小组，自愿制作字幕并在网络分享的义务工作，无任何经济收入。
2. 字幕工作需要极大的责任心，耐心和毅力，也要花费一定的时间，所以在加入之前请仔细考虑自己身情况，字幕组原则上不收取只有假期才有时间的人，因为假期基本上不是美剧的播出档期，无法投入时间与精力的情况下，请勿报名。
3. 严禁加入多家翻译小组，严禁抄袭字幕，如有发现，严肃处理

In Fengruan Group, applicants may choose one from among three types of TV programs: medical dramas (e.g., *House, M.D.*) and detective dramas/crime dramas (e.g., *CSI, Criminal Minds*); sitcoms (e.g., *The Office*) and reality shows (e.g., *America's Next Top Model*); and science fiction (e.g., *True Blood, Supernatural*). For each drama type, there are two video clips from two different programs, and each clip is three to four minutes long. The six TV programs that are used to test and evaluate applicants' ability

are old, and it is highly unlikely that a translated version could be found in China.

Applicants thus must translate the program on their own. Consulting is allowed, since teamwork is encouraged among members of a subtitle group. Regardless of which TV program they decide to translate, however, all applicants must adhere to the subtitling guidelines, which stipulate how subtitlers should translate and write down their Chinese texts so that these facilitate audiences' comprehension and staff members' follow-up technical work. Getting the format right counts for a high percentage of an applicant's score, because if this part is not done properly, that will cause inconvenience for others.

In Fengruan Group, the format rules include the following:

1. Watch the clip of the program before doing the translation. "Naked translation" (*luofan* 裸翻) is absolutely forbidden.
2. Do not make any changes to the running time. For example, a sentence like "What are you taking about?" is segmented as a single frame at the time span from 00:00:01.500 to 00:00:03.580. Subtitlers simply translate this sentence and do not re-segment the sentence or revise the time frame.
3. The original English text is segmented into sentences with a running time frame arranged by number order. Do not change the number order and do not re-segment the English text.
4. Do not produce long Chinese sentences as each frame runs for only four to six seconds. There should be no more than eighteen Chinese characters in one frame.
5. Delete the English lines and keep only the Chinese subtitles in the file that is returned to staff members.

6. Names of people and locations are exceptions to the above rule. Do not translate these terms; keep the English original texts.
7. Type English punctuation symbols; do not type commas.
8. Do not add fancy subtitles (e.g., with emoticons) that may be distracting for audiences.

Applicants are also advised to review their translation text by reading it through while watching the program. Thinking of themselves as audience members, rather than as subtitlers, is the most effective way of reviewing their translation work.

2.4.2 Internship and Training Process

I chose to translate a sitcom and asked Jin, a friend of mine and also a senior subtitler in Fengruan Group, to review my translation text. She told me politely that I had understood every English word and conveyed the exact meaning of the English dialogue well in Chinese; however, she did not think that my translation text matched the style of the sitcom. She said that my translation text was good when read alone, but when she watched the sitcom program and my subtitles together, my translation was obviously “detached” from the program, and I had not caught the program’s humor. “Subtitles are supposed to make a TV program more intriguing. Subtitles are part of a TV show, but sometimes they matter more than the show to Chinese audiences who watch our work,” Jin said. She suggested that I re-translate the sitcom by rethinking its content and language in Chinese. As she remarked, subtitling is not so much about how much a translator knows about a program but about how he or she represents the program in an

appropriate manner so that those who do not understand it are able to comprehend and enjoy it.

With Jin's help, I passed the entrance examination and Fengruan Group accepted me as an intern. In the following three months, I was instructed in how to translate U.S. TV programs of all types—not just the category I had chosen (i.e., sitcoms)—and was required to finish the translation tasks in two days. Intern subtitlers do not translate the most recent episodes of popular TV programs; instead, they work on episodes of earlier series of less popular programs. In addition, intern subtitlers cannot refuse an assigned program. According to Fengruan's system, interns need to earn enough "points" (see details below) in three months in order to become official subtitlers. Otherwise, intern subtitlers will be evaluated as unqualified and will not be allowed to continue participating as subtitlers in the group.⁷ In addition, during the three months of internship, intern subtitlers must request personal leave if they cannot be on duty during a certain time. Absence without notice or failure to complete a task on time is unforgivable for interns as well as regular subtitlers because this may cause inconvenience for others and even delay the production of a Chinese-subtitled program. Paying full attention to these

⁷ There is no strict standard of points for interns and there is often a grace period for those who are evaluated as unqualified by their senior colleagues. These interns are given more time to demonstrate improvement. If they make progress, Fengruan will keep them in the group. Those who do not improve their language proficiency and translation skills will not be assigned any more tasks. Considering that an unsatisfying translation text will take senior subtitlers more time to proofread, Fengruan Group tends not to use the work of unqualified subtitlers. However, since these subtitlers have already volunteered for more than three months, they are treated nicely and are not obviously "banished." When they do not receive any assignments for a while, most will understand that they need to participate in other areas, such as technical tasks, if they want to stay in the group.

regulations and assigned tasks is therefore crucial for interns if they are to show their devotion and ability to Fengruan Group.

Fengruan Group has a specific point-earning policy. The points are allocated based on turn-around times for media programs and for various tasks (Table 2.1). There are three turn-around times: regular work on U.S. TV programs (a translation that is due two to three days after it has been assigned); zero-day work on U.S. TV programs (a translation that is due on the same day it is assigned); and U.S. movies (a translation that usually takes more than a week). The tasks include transcribing English dialogue into English texts, translating English sentences into Chinese, and proofreading Chinese subtitles.

Table 2.1 Fengruan Group’s Point-Earning Policy

Types of Tasks		Points Earned
Regular work on U.S. TV Programs	Transcribing 100 sentences	90 points
	Translating 100 sentences	50 points
	Proofreading 100 sentences	30 points
Zero-day work on U.S. TV Programs	Transcribing 100 sentences	150 points
	Translating 100 sentences	80 points
	Proofreading 100 sentences	50 points
U.S. movies (which usually take more than a week)	Transcribing 500 sentences	750 points
	Translating 500 sentences	400 points
	Proofreading 500 sentences	230 points

During my internship, I translated various types of U.S. TV programs, including action and military television series (e.g., *Strike Back*), sitcoms (e.g., *Molly*), adult animated sitcoms (e.g., *Family Guy*), and dramas (e.g., *Leverage*). I earned 3,131 points and became an official subtitler in Fengruan Group.

2.5 Research Methods

For this study, I worked with fifteen subtitlers from Fengruan Group, YyEts Group, and DouBan K.W. Team. Both Fengruan Group and YyEts Group are esteemed for their careful and accurate translations, and both offer well-established apprenticeships for new subtitlers. The two groups work on a wide range of movies and television programs, including sitcoms, crime dramas, legal dramas, medical dramas, reality shows, talk shows, talent shows, and animated programs. Both groups began with a small number of friends who shared interests in U.S. TV programs and movies and then gradually grew as they gained reputations for efficiency and high-quality subtitles. Founded in 2005, Fengruan Group has made its name with hospital shows such as *House M.D.* and *Grey's Anatomy*. There are about 100 staff members in Fengruan; they are grouped as small teams in charge of different TV programs, and each team has a team leader who coordinates the task assignments. The group puts strong emphasis on high-quality Chinese subtitles. They encourage subtitlers to take a little bit more time to produce well-done translation texts rather than simultaneous translations (e.g., translation texts released hours after the programs air in the States) that sacrifice quality for speed. Thus, a zero-day translation text is often assigned to senior subtitlers who can ensure that even the zero-day work is a zero-mistake refined work. YyEts Group was founded in

1998. There are about 120 staff members in this group, and, like Fengruan, they work in teams. The first two letters in the group's name, that is, "Yy" in "YyEts," come from the Chinese characters for "everyone" (*renren* 人人) turned upside down, and "Ets" stands for "English Television Shows." This name underscores the group's ambition, which is to help everyone in China, regardless of age, class, and area, watch U.S. TV programs via their translations. By contrast, DouBan K.W. Team is a small subtitle group with 20–30 staff members. This group focuses on the program *The Practice*. In the beginning, fans of Kelli Williams created a discussion forum at DouBan (a Chinese website that allows registered users to discuss and exchange information on films, books, songs, and artistic and cultural activities in China). The fans watch Kelli Williams' programs and share news about her, and sometime they translate her programs, mostly *The Practice*, in which Williams played the lawyer Lindsay Dole. Because there were only around ten members of the DouBan K.W. Team, they made slow progress. Later, a lawyer, Jia, who is fond of this program, also joined the team. He recruited a few lawyers, law school students, and fans of legal dramas to this group, and the subtitle group centering on *The Practice* thus came into being.

Data for this dissertation project were collected through the following ethnographic methods:

On-site participant observation

Data collection at traditional, real-world sites included documenting how subtitlers incorporate their participation in subtitling communities into their lives with respect to broad social forces such as ethical sensibilities, media uses, training, and discipline. This ethnography delineates how subtitlers draw resources from the Internet

and examines their capacity to make their own choices in their everyday lives. I joined Fengruan Group and participated in daily routines and social network interviews with selected subtitlers for the purpose of identifying culturally significant settings, relationships, and activities in their daily lives in Beijing. I engaged in participant observation (Bernard 2002) and joined subtitlers' activities, such as translating U.S. TV programs and discussing Chinese subtitles with team members. I immersed myself in the subtitle community and observed their activities, with emphasis on three activities: (1) the actual subtitling process, including how translators watch programs and are assigned segments, how they draft and refine subtitles, and how they draw materials from the environment (i.e., studio, private residence) to facilitate subtitling; (2) socialization of novice subtitlers, including how they adjust to the work style in their groups, how they learn computer software, and how they interact with more experienced subtitlers; and (3) translator-audience discussions on the subtitle groups' website forums (Figure 2.5), including how audience members in the online community reflect on affect-laden speech events such as jokes about racism represented in U.S. TV programs and movies, how translators refine subtitles through rich and lively discussions with audience members, and how humorous notions are contrasted and their interpretations ramified in different cultures. I did not do audio or video recording at this stage. I conducted only a few interviews that helped me determine appropriate or potential consultants for my research project.

As my consultants and I established trust and rapport, I began making ethnographic video and audio recordings (Duranti 1997) of naturalistic, spontaneous interactions in the subtitle groups' offices, personal studios, and homes. I continued to

engage in participant observation and join in team meetings as well as individual activities relevant to the subtitlers' work on U.S. TV programs. Consultants were asked for their permission before any video or audio recording began, and if they were uncomfortable with a recording, they had the right to erase it. Ethnographic field and diary entries were written daily as complements to the video and audio recordings.

Figure 2.5. Page from the discussion forum at the YyEts Group website.

The screenshot shows a forum page with a list of top-rated TV shows on the left and detailed entries for three shows on the right.

Top 7-12 List:

- Top7** 《福尔摩斯：演绎法》 地区：美国 类别：悬疑/罪案 年代：2012 第1季连载中
- Top8** 《破釜沉舟》 地区：美国 类别：战争/剧情 年代：2012 第1季连载中
- Top9** 《尼基塔》 地区：美国 类别：动作/剧情/谍战/罪案 年代：2010 第3季连载中
- Top10** 《屌丝女士》 地区：德国 类别：喜剧 年代：2011 第2季完结
- Top11** 《梅林》 地区：英国 类别：魔幻 年代：2008 第5季连载中
- Top12** 《新恶德世界》 地区：美国 类别：剧情/历史/爱情/罪案 年代：1998 已完结

Featured Show 1: 《好汉两个半》 (Two and a Half Men)

- 【美剧】《好汉两个半》 [第10季连载中]
- 【说明】 [人人影视原创翻译双语字幕][更新第11集]
- 【类型】 喜剧
- 【人气】 1372270次浏览 | 5334次收藏 | 8.7209分
- 【更新】 2012-12-15 14:10 | 2011-09-20 16:16 | HDTV/RMVB/MP4/HR-HDTV/DVDS/SCR/DVD/720P
- 【MP4】 [123.29MB] 好汉两个半.Two.And.A.Half.Men.S10E10.Chi_Eng.WEBRip.720X400-YYeT
- 【RMVB】 [92.86MB] 好汉两个半.Two.And.A.Half.Men.S10E10.Chi_Eng.WEBRip.720X400-YYeT

Featured Show 2: 《混乱之子》 (Sons of Anarchy)

- 【美剧】《混乱之子》 [第5季连载中]
- 【说明】 [Shiny深影字幕组原创翻译]更新至第五季第一季
- 【类型】 剧情/枪战
- 【人气】 43790次浏览 | 502次收藏 | 0.0000分
- 【更新】 2012-12-15 13:50 | 2012-04-17 08:34 | HDTV/MP4/HR-HDTV/DVD/720P/BD-720P
- 【HDTV】 [533.39MB] sons.of.anarchy.s05e12.hdtv.x264-2hd.mp4
- 【720P】 [2.32GB] Sons.of.Anarchy.S05E12.720p.HDTV.x264-EVOLVE.mkv

Featured Show 3: 《大西洋帝国》 (Boardwalk Empire)

- 【美剧】《大西洋帝国》 [第3季完结]
- 【说明】 [人人影视原创翻译中英双语字幕][第三季完结 13年10月见]
- 【类型】 历史/史诗
- 【人气】 1068182次浏览 | 5929次收藏 | 9.3112分
- 【更新】 2012-12-15 13:03 | 2011-09-28 11:27 | HDTV/RMVB/MP4/HR-HDTV/DVD/720P/1080P/1080P/STWEB-DL/BD-720P
- 【1080P】 [2.01GB] boardwalk.Empire.S03E03.1080p.WEB-DL.DD5.1.H.264-KINGS.mkv
- 【1080P】 [2.36GB] boardwalk.Empire.S03E12.1080p.WEB-DL.DD5.1.H.264-KINGS.mkv

I also established an archive of newspaper reports and articles from national and regional Chinese-language newspapers and magazines for the past five years (2007–2011) as a resource for exploring public debate on the social, cultural, and legal status of subtitle groups in China. Moreover, I documented the socialization process for novice translators in Fengruan Group and YyEts Group. I explored the process by which intern subtitlers acquired translation skills and the consequent socialization process by

recruiting four novice translators who underwent a three-month apprenticeship in both subtitle groups. I also participated in translators' interactions and task-oriented discussion of translation issues. During the last stage of my fieldwork, I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews (Bernard 2002; Levy and Hollan 1998) with participant translators designed to elicit life narratives on (1) their motivations for volunteering for subtitling work, (2) their philosophy of translation, and (3) their position on their use of U.S. TV programs and the influence their work may have on the Chinese younger generation's reception of U.S. popular culture. Consultants' points of view were documented in a longitudinal and an ethnographic manner. Furthermore, I conducted semi-structured interviews with long-term audience members seeking insight into their attitudes toward subtitle groups, their active contribution to the prosperity of subtitle communities, and their ways of evaluating and commenting on Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs and movies.

Online data collection

Cyberspace was a key site of data collection due to the fact that subtitlers' subtitling activity and communication with their colleagues and audiences take place on the Internet. There have been debates on how virtual sites of ethnographic research differ from traditional real-world settings and on how researchers and research participants manage representations of the self (Hine 2000; Lysloff 2003), and this study, in addition to sites in cyberspace, included social spaces of physical presence and the in-person interaction. In other words, I employed both online and face-to-face work and thus could take advantage of both methods and verify my consultants' online and offline statements.

I made adjustments in order to produce ethnographies of online phenomena. First, regarding the convention of “participant observation,” scholars suggest that, instead of being an “observer,” ethnographers on the Internet are more like “experiencers” because they experience the cultural practices of a certain online community but do not physically observe members of the community performing the practices (Garcia et al. 2009; Walstrom 2004). The term “participant-experiencer” thus better characterizes the ethnographer’s role in the online setting. As there is no direct observation, researchers observe by lurking and keeping a low profile in online discussion groups, and their presence may not be detected by or disturb other participants. I avoided the ethical problems related to lurking and the overuse of anonymity and unobstructive participation (Sveningsson 2004) by responding frankly in private when participants on the Internet asked my real identity and informing the online communities about my collection of their communications.

As Hine remarks (2000:51), oral interactions have been seen as the most critical data for ethnographers and texts as somehow auxiliary, the belief that speech is more authentic than writing should be modified, and “texts should be seen as ethnographic material which tells us about the understanding which authors have of the reality which they inhabit.” I focus not only on texts but also on the full range of modalities used by my consultants or all Internet users. When they convey their ideas, they use textual, visual, aural, and kinetic aspects for displaying information and affect that they hope will be seen. Hine’s analysis of a murder case that generated many campaigns and much activism on the Internet (2000), for example, included both the visual and textual components. Jones’s study (2005) of gay men searching for online friends or sexual partners by

exchanging photos over the Internet also indicates that photos convey more information along with the written texts, and participants in a certain group know how to read the “codes” used by their potential interactants.

I also conducted online interviews with subtitlers who lived in cities that I did not have an opportunity to visit. These were speech-based, not text-based, interviews conducted via QQ and Skype and were recorded by a separate recorder. The direct-voice communication tool provided the means for collecting audio materials from my consultants right after their Chinese-subtitled TV programs were released or audience comments were posted at discussion forums. Online interviews enabled me to collect crucial data without the time limits or spatial boundaries that may limit spontaneity. Although some may doubt the authenticity of online interviews (Kendall 2004), some interviewees in fact were more comfortable and less concerned about the impressions they were making in spoken interviews (Riva 2002). In this regard, online interview narratives may be more candid than those obtained from in-person interviews.

2.5.1 Sites of Data Collection

Online discussion forums, chat room, microblogs: I presented survey data and in-depth case studies collected through participant observation and immersion in China’s Internet culture. I participated extensively in online activities and interactions with fellow users in the subtitle groups’ website forums and regularly monitored and recorded the Internet contents. The online collection consisted of (1) English- and Chinese-language texts of Chinese subtitled U.S. TV programs and movies, (2) debate and dialogue between subtitlers and audience members on language and identity issues in translated texts as well as the process of

translating, and (3) the subtitlers' online conversations. The English- and Chinese-language texts of subtitle programs were collected from the official websites of Fengruan Group and YyEts Group, Plus Forum, and Shooter (*sheshouwang* 射手網).⁸ My data archive contained approximately 150 hours of Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs and 45 hours of Chinese-subtitled U.S. movies mostly from Fengruan Group, YyEts Groups, Douban K.W. Team, and other subtitle groups. Conversations between subtitlers and audiences were documented in two ways. First, I collected data from online discussion forums at the websites of Fengruan Group and YyEts Group. Staff for both groups are in charge of maintaining the discussion forum so that audience comments on any subject would receive feedback from subtitlers. Second, some subtitlers posted their translation work and discussed their ideas about translation in general on Sina Weibo. Audiences or fans who follow individual subtitlers' Weibo accounts had the opportunity to learn about their translation philosophies and strategies. Subtitlers' online communications are mostly about work within each subtitle groups and thus are not open to the public. As I participated in Fengruan Group, I collected data from subtitlers and staff members in this group. The discussion took place in a QQ chat room. One needs to create a QQ account and be invited to join the working group in order to participate in discussion of all issues surrounding a particular subtitle group. Another source is the Paste Bar zone (Tieba) on Baidu, the website of China's leading search engine. The Paste Bar zone welcomes users to address a variety of topics, and the discussion threads are thematically organized. As commenters and

⁸ Plus Forum is a public website where registered members can download all kinds of Chinese, American, Japanese, and Korean entertainment programs, including movies, albums, video games, TV programs, and computer software. Shooter is a public website for registered members where many subtitle groups post their Chinese-subtitled programs, in addition to their own official websites, to generate higher frequency of download.

articles on the same topics, such as “U.S. sitcoms,” accumulate, the zone becomes a rich site for sitcom fans who wish to connect and exchange information.

Schools: Some of my consultants were undergraduates and graduate students who spent a large part of their day attending courses, holding student seminars, and engaging in all kinds of school affairs. I participated in their school lives, dined at school restaurants with them, went to the libraries with them, did my own work in their dormitories, and attended their courses and meetings if the other class members agreed. This allowed me to obtain a comprehensive view of the ecology of their personal lives and participation in the subtitle community. My immersion in their lives minimized the gap between me and my consultants. They could think of me as their peer rather than as a distant researcher (see Section 2.5.4, “Ethnographic Roles and Positionalities”).

Household: I visited the households of most of my consultants several times while conducting my fieldwork. Some Chinese citizens invite only friends and those whom they trust into their homes. Some subtitlers were comfortable at their own places and more willing to chat. There were numerous objects and events that were of ethnographic interest: their computers, dictionaries, magazines, bookcases, work tables, subtitling activities, and pastimes. The physical layouts of their houses and everything related to their family life gave me a general picture of what they were like in their everyday ordinary lives.

2.5.2 Recruitment of Ethnographic Participants

As mentioned earlier, subtitle communities are geographically dispersed. Not every subtitler knew his or her colleagues personally; they may work as partners for years but never meet in person and have no intention of doing so. The first group of my

ethnographic participants lived in Beijing, so my data collection began there. However, they introduced me to their colleagues who lived elsewhere, so I traveled to Shanghai twice, Nanjing twice, and Taipei three times. This study thus took a multisited approach that extended my ethnographic study well beyond the city limits and encompassed a highly mobile and networked community.

Jin is the first subtitler I approached. While I was exploring my research project, I talked with Guang, a student from China who was attending UCLA at that time, about my interest in learning more about subtitle groups. I told him that I watched Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs, and I would like to further examine the social environment of subtitle groups in contemporary China and the cultural implications they bring forth. Guang told me about a friend who has participated in Fengruan Group for years. Through him, I came to know Jin. When we started the conversation, Jin was writing her dissertation in Beijing, and I was in Los Angeles; however, she gave me full information on Fengruan Group and a warm welcome when I arrived in Beijing. After I had settled there, I became involved in different subtitle groups. In the initial stage, ethnographic participants were recruited via word of mouth and through notices posted by my friends on their subtitle groups' websites. Later, after I passed the Fengruan Group entrance examination, I told some subtitlers about my research project and invited them to be my consultants. These subtitlers joined my research project at different stages, and I began my ethnographic observation at various points in their lives: some were busy writing dissertations, some had just begun attending university, some had new babies, some were unemployed and looking for work, and some were preparing to continue their education by studying abroad. Because of their youth, my consultants' lives were fluid. Some

relocated due to job changes, and a few withdrew from the project because the intense pressure from their studies or jobs made it impossible for them to participate in my research and in their subtitle groups. Though challenging, working with these people offered me considerable ethnographic information on how urban Chinese youth and young adults experience so-called youth and how modernity and the rapidly changing Chinese society bring them both opportunities and risks.

2.5.3 Focal Participants: Subtitlers and Audiences

I selected twelve subtitlers from the aforementioned three subtitle groups. Each of the subtitlers had at least one year of subtitling experience before I started my fieldwork. In addition, I chose three novice subtitlers who were new to Fengruan Group and YyEts Group and had served a three-month apprenticeship. I observed the process of socializing them into the subtitle community and the mixed-experience dynamics between subtitlers. These fifteen subtitlers have various backgrounds, including prior translation experience, school major, gender, and urban-rural background.

Table 2.2 Focal Subtitlers

Name	Sex	Age (at beginning of study)	Length of participation in the subtitle community	Occupation
Jin	F	31	5 years, 6 months	Graduate student
GreenFa	M	33	4 years, 9 months	University teacher
NanFan	F	22	2 years	Graduate student
Jia	M	40	4 years, 1 month	Lawyer
Rong	F	29	1 year, 2 months	University teacher
Guo	F	22	3 years	Undergraduate student
YuanYuan	F	24	1 year, 1 month	Housewife
Su	M	35	2 years, 3 months	Physician
AiYe	F	32	1 year	Journalist
Fon	M	25	3 years, 2 months	Assistant editor in a publisher
BaoDa	M	32	4 years, 5 months	Engineer
Tien	F	31	5 years, 10 months	Bank officer
Zhang	M	37	1 month, 2 weeks	Accountant
Lily	F	18	3 weeks	Undergraduate
Lafen	M	25	2 months	Elementary school teacher

Jin was a PhD student at a prestigious university in China. A native of Beijing, she was my contact person when I began my fieldwork there. She majored in Chinese literature and had an extensive interest in current social issues. She has participated in Fengruan Group for six years and made her name by subtitling the U.S. TV program *House M.D.* Jin helped write Fengruan's regulations and recruit new subtitlers and thus

had achieved a high level of prestige in the group. Because of her excellent translation work, a publisher invited her to join two other translators on translating an American novel. Jin's father was a retired government officer and her mother was a housewife. Jin and her parents lived in downtown Beijing.

GreenFa was a university teacher in a southern province. He taught aerodynamics and courses on the technical aspects of aircraft. He was married and had a one-year-old son. He could translate U.S. TV programs and proofread others' subtitles only during the evening. On weekends, his mother-in-law helped him and his wife to take care of the child; he thus had more time for Fengruan Group. His wife used to participate in the group but quit after having a child. Sometimes she helped translate program clips if no other subtitler could offer prompt help. GreenFa coordinated 5–8 TV programs, including assigning tasks and proofreading translation texts. His students did not know that he participated in the subtitle community.

NanFan was an undergraduate at a university in a southern province. She met GreenFa after joining Fengruan Group; she had not known that her teacher, GreenFa, was in the same group. NanFan majored in chemistry and had a strong interest in the English language and American cultures. She translated mostly comedies and adult animation comedies. She was preparing for studying abroad when I met her. This topic thus became our lingua franca. At that time, she was already gradually minimizing her workload with the group as she needed more time to prepare for her TOEFL and GRE exams and to complete the paperwork for her master's program applications.

Jia was a lawyer in a southwest city and specialized in civil litigation. He was married and had no children. His pastime was to watch foreign TV programs. He

contacted a Kelli Williams fan group at DouBan and established DouBan K.W. Team. In the beginning, Jia translated the programs and taught his colleagues in the group about the law and legal terms. Later, as he was engaged with his business and had only limited time available for the group, he became a coordinator and proofreader. He served more like an advisor in answering questions about legal issues if other subtitlers got stuck with the content.

Rong was recruited into Fengruan Group by her roommate Jin, while they were studying at the same university. During their two years as roommates, Jin never mentioned her participation in a subtitle group, until one day Rong raised the topic of the uneven quality of subtitled programs produced by different groups. Jin then invited Rong to join the group. Rong was surprised to learn that her roommate was the type of “mysterious” person who would be a subtitler, but she happily accepted the invitation. She translated mostly supernatural dramas such as *The Vampire Diaries* but was open to working with all types of TV programs.

Guo was an undergraduate student with a major in sociology. She was a native of Beijing but lived in the suburban area. She was a member of the Kelli Williams fan group and participated in the establishment of DouBan K.W. Team. Guo’s parents were working class, and she worked part-time to pay her way through university. When she became my consultant, she was applying for master’s programs in the States. Although her time was limited, Guo still tried to continue her subtitling activity. In addition to her group, she also helped some friends who wanted to organize a subtitle group for Disney animations by writing a recruitment notice and creating a home page for their website.

When I met YuanYuan, she was unemployed and preparing for the entrance exam for law school. She had a bachelor's degree with a major in electronic information. She joined YyEts Group to develop her English ability, which is essential for the graduate school entrance examination as well as for her future career. She was married to an engineer, who could support the family with his income. YuanYuna could therefore devote her time to the subtitle group and her preparations for law school.

Su was a surgeon. He worked with Jin on subtitles for *House M.D.*, which had made their name in Fengruan Group and in the entire subtitle community. Su was an expert on medical terms and the content related to medicine, and Jin was an excellent translator and language user. Su worked only on *House M.D.* and Jin was his only partner. Although Fengruan Group hoped that Su could translate other TV programs, he had a strong preference for medical programs, especially *House M.D.*, which was his representative work.

AiYe was a journalist who worked for a newspaper, and at the time she joined my research project, she was about to take a new job with a media company. With a major in journalism and years of working experience, she had many opportunities to work with native English speakers. AiYe earned a good salary, which allowed her to travel abroad once every year and buy high-quality imported products. She subtitled a variety of U.S. TV programs depending on her schedule: whenever a program needed timely translators, she took the task if she happened to be available.

Fon was a graduate student in the English languages and literature program. He joined Fengruan Group out of his passion for translation, and his thesis, inspired by his subtitling experience, explored subtitlers' translation strategies. He was on Jin's team and

received his translation training from her. Fon subtitled a variety of U.S. TV programs and was often given almost instant (e.g., zero-day) translation tasks. He worked for a publisher and was in charge of editing the English-language dictionary. He got a contract from another publisher and translated a novel.

BaoDa, a native of Hunan province, was a subtitler in Fengruan Group. When he became my ethnographic consultant, he stopped translating but took the role of coordinator in charge of administrative issues. He streamlined the entire process, from recording TV programs in the States to posting Chinese-subtitled programs online. This responsibility required him to be online all the time except for when it was time to sleep. He worked in an engineering company as a contact person who collected and forwarded information across departments, similar to his function in Fengruan Group. Accordingly, he could stay online even during his working hours, send timely messages to individual subtitlers, and manage the workloads for all subtitlers.

Tien is an experienced subtitler in Fengruan. She had a large number of fans, who wrote messages to her on her Sina Weibo page, expressing their admiration for her talent. The fans followed her updates and watched only her translation, even though other subtitle groups provide different versions of the TV programs she worked on. Tien also wrote extensively about music, literature, and movies on her Weibo page. Her page contained information on all kinds of artistic and cultural activities.

Zhang, a native of Shandong province, was an accountant in Beijing before joining YyEts Group through a friend's introduction. He did not have a high-paying job and sent money every month to his parents who were living in a rural area. While he was unemployed, he devoted himself to subtitling U.S. TV programs and movies. For Zhang,

they provided “food for thought,” motivated him to sharpen his English-language ability, and eased his anxiety about looking for a new job.

Lily was a college freshman majoring in education in Taipei. She spent the summer watching downloaded Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs and had a particular interest in reality shows. She applied to Fengruan Group with the hope of becoming a member and being assigned to subtitling more reality shows.

Lafen taught mathematics courses at an elementary school in Shanghai. She had watched Chinese-subtitled U.S. media programs provided by subtitle groups for a long time and decided to contribute to Fengruan Group. She also volunteered to help with creating running-time transcripts and to do other technical work as she had excellent computer software skills.

For participants from the audience, I selected six people who had been watching Chinese-subtitled U.S. media programs produced by YyEts Group or Fengruan Group for more than two years. The audience set is composed of Chinese young adults and youth from different walks of life. I established connections with these audience members through subtitlers in order to be sure that the viewers have been actively engaged with the subtitling communities; this gave me a better understanding of how subtitle groups are integrated into viewers’ lives. The selected audience members were balanced according to their backgrounds, including age, gender, educational level, and urban-rural distribution.

Table 2.3 Focal Audience Members

Name	Sex	Age (at beginning of study)	Length of participation in the subtitle community	Occupation
Nian	F	34	3 years	Designer
GaoYi	M	25	5 years, 3 months	Restaurant owner
LeeDu	F	38	1 year, 6 months	Physician
ZhenFei	M	21	4 years	Undergraduate
HeShi	M	28	3 years, 5 months	Insurance salesman
Luo	F	26	3 years, 8 months	Artist

Nian, a native of Taipei, was an interior designer working in Shanghai. She had lived in Shanghai for four years and after moving there she had become aware that subtitle groups were a common interest among her friends in China. She started to pick up the habit of watching the Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs and movies, and it gradually became an enduring pastime. GaoYi, a native of Changhua, Taiwan, run a breakfast restaurant in Taichung. He began watching Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs while he was in college. Watching the downloaded programs was a must for everyone in his male dormitory building. LeeDu was introduced to subtitle groups' work through his daughter, who often watched the Chinese-subtitled U.S. media programs and compiled hundreds of files on the home computer. LeeDu thus had access to these programs and began watching them. ZhenFei was an undergraduate who started watching subtitle groups' work when he was in high school old after being introduced to them by his older brother. HeShi was an insurance salesman, and one of his clients used to be a subtitler. The client encouraged him to watch subtitled TV programs as a way of learning

English. Luo was an artist who illustrated comic books. He participated in a subtitle group for a month but withdrew because of his heavy workload; nevertheless, he continued to watch all types of Chinese-subtitled U.S. media programs.

2.5.4 Ethnographic Roles and Positionalities

As a native Mandarin Chinese speaker who was born and grew up in Taiwan, I spoke Mandarin Chinese with a Taiwanese accent, and my use of words were interesting to my consultants and friends in China because they understood what I was saying but would not have said them in the same way. The language barrier, in my case, was minimal; sometimes it even became a topic of interest to subtitlers, the “Chinese spoken in Taiwan.” Some senior subtitlers suggested that I pick up the “language” used in China, especially by the youth and young adults, so as to produce Chinese subtitle texts that would be “native” to audiences in China. However, the other subtitlers held a different opinion, saying that each subtitler is entitled to have his or her own style, of which linguistic choices were certainly a feature.

My cultural background, a female native Taiwanese receiving a foreign education, caught the attention of some subtitlers.⁹ Citizens in China typically are curious about

⁹ Taiwan is an island off the southeastern coast of China that was originally inhabited mainly by Taiwanese aborigines. Since the seventeenth century, ethnic Chinese (Han Chinese) have been immigrating from China to this island. Even though ethnic Chinese immigrants in Taiwan had ancestors in China, Taiwan took a distinctive path toward modernization. In addition to traditional Chinese cultures localized in Taiwan, the cultures of Taiwan are a blend of various sources including aboriginal cultures, Japanese cultures, and Western values. In 1949, the China Civil Wars (1927-1949) ended; the Communist Party took power and defeated the government led by the Nationalists Party (Kuomintang), who left for Taiwan and proclaimed Taiwan the anti-communist base. After that, China and Taiwan have regarded each other as enemies, and communication between the two countries was suspended until China implemented the open-door

people in Taiwan. Some of my consultants and friends wanted to know what TV programs are available in Taiwan, what the university entrance examination is like in Taiwan, at what ages urban youth and young adults get married, and what university students do in their free time, to name just a few. My consultants and friends could get answers to some of these questions through their media channels, but they enjoy firsthand information from a native Taiwanese. Whenever we talked about social issues in China, my consultants and friends were equally interested to know how people would react if similar events happened in Taiwan. I was certainly glad to share my thoughts with them. This kind of communication facilitated my entrance into their world, where they treated me with hospitality, and I became their consultant on Taiwanese society.

My educational background is also interesting to them in two ways. First, they initially did not understand the reason for my research project. “Is my life or what I do worthy of being observed by you?” they asked. Most of my consultants were well-educated members of the middle class who had received good educations in China and had rarely heard about anthropological works; to them, anthropology was something like sociology, and they were surprised to find themselves becoming the main figures in a research project. Their interest in my reasons for choosing them was equal to my fascination with their activities. Moreover, several of my consultants planned to pursue their studies in the United States, Canada, or Europe. By sharing my application materials with them and helping them edit theirs, I turned myself into a “senior sister,” with

policy in 1978. Relations began to thaw in the mid-1980s, and interactions between residents in China and Taiwan have been warming ever since (Chen 2001; Hwa 2005; Jean-Pierre 1995).

experience in applying to and studying in a PhD program overseas, rather than a researcher.

Chapter Three
Translating U.S. Sitcom Humor:
The Language of Evaluation and “Translation Sovereignty”

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines a particular genre of cultural translation: audiovisual translation of humor in U.S. sitcoms. Specifically, I explore how Chinese subtitlers and audiences use humor translation as a discourse of self-expression as well as of ideology, and how they construct subtitles as a contested site for expressing different worldviews and articulating ideal types of a Chinese version of humor that accords with China’s social-cultural conditions and political changes. The sitcom genre typically abounds with signifiers that are intrinsic to cultures (Chiaro 1992). Scholars in translation studies as well as linguists have discussed translation strategies related to humor, and the issue of how and to what extent humor can be translated has been debated for practice-oriented discussion as well as cultural and linguistic analysis (Baker 1992; Delabastita 1994; Diot 1989; Vandaele 2002). This chapter explores the role of language in mediating the movement of humor across cultural boundaries. I examine the ways that subtitlers translate the humor in U.S. TV sitcoms, discuss an example of translation that caused heated debate among Chinese audiences, and probe how subtitlers and audiences create their own ideologies of humor translation. I propose that some audience members display the stance of “linguistic sovereignty,” believing that subtitlers can responsibly decide how to translate sitcom humor when an effective Chinese subtitle requires creativity rather than fidelity to the original English dialogue.

I consider one linguistic phenomenon in particular—stancetaking—in audience comments regarding these translations of sitcom humor. I explore the multivoice metalanguage of humor translation on open, free online forums by examining the intersection of the stances expressed in the language of evaluation and the orientation of cultural identity. The construction of identity through linguistic stance—the act of “affectively evaluating some relevant current event” (Goodwin and Goodwin 2000:252)—in spontaneous interaction is observed across cultural communities (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Du Bois 2002; Goodwin 2006). Ochs (1996:420) advances the notion that the linguistic realization of stance may index social identity: “Linguistic structures that index epistemic and affective stances are the basic linguistic resources for constructing/realizing social acts and social identities. Epistemic and affective stance has, then, an especially privileged role in the constitution of social life.” In taking a stance, one accordingly establishes a positioning relationship with others. Because language is always a major identity resource (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982; Heller 2003), I discuss how audiences, in commenting on a translation of sitcom humor, position themselves as “moral” Chinese or distinguish themselves from others by engaging in shared or divergent stances through the Mandarin Chinese linguistic inventory.

Bauman (2000:1) defines identity as “the situated outcome of a rhetorical and interpretive process in which interactants make situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires of identificational and affiliational resources.” Individuals are social participants who are actively involved in constructing and negotiating boundaries between groups and categories (Bailey 2000; Eckert 1995). It is with this dynamic view of identity in mind, following the notion that identity is “the social

positioning of self and others” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005:586), that I examine the linguistic components of participants’ comments on a Chinese-subtitled U.S. sitcom.

This analysis also draws on Bakhtin’s theory of “voice” and “dialogicality” (1981, 1984, 1986) to shed light on the construction of identity that encompasses social aspects of how Chinese audiences perceive the translation of sitcom humor as part of larger ideological thinking on the politics between China and Japan. Bakhtin (1981) advances the idea that writing, rather than being solely a private reflection of experience or a public production of a fixed text, is more closely akin to the dynamic meeting of both. Writing involves complex and ongoing interplay between personal and public voices. The dialogic nature of written text has been thoroughly discussed in Bakhtin’s treatment of “dialogicality” and in case studies, such as those of academic writing (Hyland 2005) and newspaper articles (White 2003). Bakhtin’s notion of “dialogicality” offers a perspective for understanding how the voices of subtitlers and audiences commenting on the translation of sitcom humor are interwoven with their knowledge of the local sociopolitical economies of language and identity.

In what follows, I briefly review the frameworks of humor translation and define audiovisual humor as it applies to this study. I then discuss the strategies Chinese translators commonly use for subtitling U.S. TV sitcoms. Following this, I focus on a controversial translation of sitcom humor that has generated considerable discussion since its release in 2008 to the present. I propose the idea of “translation sovereignty,” by which Chinese audiences claim that volunteer subtitlers are entitled to adopt, reinvent, and reconstruct humor for the purpose of creating a new dynamic that differs from the that of the original program for audiences whose tastes and preferences are established in

the Chinese sociocultural and political context. This analysis contributes a linguistic anthropological perspective to understanding how language and new technology mediate the translation discourse and shape the ways in which subtitles are interpreted in relation to modern historical, socioeconomic, and cultural environments.

3.2 Translating Humor and the Social Properties of Humor

Research in diverse fields has corroborated that humor is a social and collaborative performative activity that creates some shared feelings among a group of people. Beeman suggests (2000:103) that humor is, among all forms of communicative acts, “one of the most heavily dependent on equal cooperative participation of actor and audience.” Viktoroff’s work (1953:14) on humor and its physical display, laughter, underpins the significance of sharing, because “one never laughs alone—laughter is always the laughter of a particular social group.” One’s capacity to laugh with people in the same group or elicit laughter from the group indexes one’s socialization and immersion in that group. Davies (1982, 1990) observes that while ethnic jokes may or may not involve racism and hatred, they carry the practical function of distinguishing alliances from non-alliances in that those who share the jokes are recognized as being within the same social and geographic boundaries. Once groups are identified as within the boundaries, they adhere to some conventions as a gesture of peace and goodwill; in his words, “Ethnic jokes police these boundaries” (Davies 1982:383). Humor can also be viewed as a defense mechanism that helps to express belief and attitudes that cannot be stated directly to a group of people. Holmes and Hay (1997) studies ethnic humor that serves two functions in New Zealand, either highlighting similarities or clarifying ethnic

group boundaries between Maori and Pakeha. They find that the minority status of Maori people made them more conscious of both types of humor, and thus they engaged in more interactive strategies to emphasize their marginalized position in relation to Pakeha. Likewise, documenting the use of ethnic jokes in the multiethnic and multicultural society of Hawaii, Oshima (2000) suggests that humor bridges cross-cultural interethnic communication. People who learn the skill of expressing and appreciating humor need to have a full understanding of their own culture as well as the cultures of others so that they can contextualize humor in a manner that establishes strong solidarity within local people yet maintains peaceful relations with people of other ethnicities.

Humor occurs when people perceive a fracture in the narrating discourse, when the contrastive cognitive frames are noticed, and when an expectation is set up but not confirmed. Translated humor has to obey the often group- or culture-specific spoken, written, or other semiotic “rules” before it produces an incongruence that drives audiences to find alternative ways of resolving it, thus “getting” the humor. The original knowledge associated with the humor, whether an accent, a stereotype, or a social norm, is the prerequisite for making or translating humor. Del Corral describes it as follows:

Communication breaks down when the levels of prior knowledge held by the speaker/writer and by the listener/reader are not similar. While this is true of any communication, the breakdown is particularly obvious in the case of translated humor, whose perception depends directly on the concurrence of facts and impressions available to both speaker/writer and listener/reader. (1988:25)

The importance of implicit knowledge cannot be stressed enough. Lendvai holds (1993:105) that “jokes should be characterised by a high degree of implicitness in order to preserve communicative tension before the punch line” and that it is also important not to frustrate audiences with introductory commentary or explanations. The pressure, then,

falls on both authors and audiences in that they need to possess cultural schemas on what or who can be targeted in social play. Without the prior background knowledge, jokes seem to “travel badly,” concluded Chiaro (1992:77), based on examination of many failed humor translations in several countries.

Along the same lines, Chiaro (1992) observes that sitcoms typically abound with attitudes, beliefs, expectations, presumptions, daily practices, and many other signifiers intrinsic to cultures. These representations of a culture are what Nash calls the “generic reference” of humor (1985:9-10). It is the broad reference to social and historical facts, customary patterns of behavior, conventional themes of literature and art that allows humor to act as a powerful vehicle for instilling a robust sense of self and others. Nash notes (1985:9), “We share our humor with those who have shared our history and who understand our way of interpreting experiences.” Such references, however, also make it challenging for humor to travel across linguistic and cultural borders. As a microcosm of culture, humor reflects the cultural particularities of the place where the humor producers originate, but these particularities can be barriers that make the humor less “visible” to audiences in the translated texts. This issue may become ethical and political: a translator may be confronted with what she or he finds or assumes is culturally “inadequate” humor; a regime or institution may censor or forbid certain types of humor.

Humor is not articulated in a conventionally coded linguistic unit, nor is it conceived as a set of semantics attached to certain lexical items or syntactic structures. Although some expressions are more easily labeled as “humorous,” “funny,” or “hilarious,” it is beyond dispute that humor does not naturally come with signifiers. Rather, humor often lies in the semantic and pragmatic effects of a particular discourse or

narrating characteristic of a language. To translate the effects, one must produce a counterpart, such as the existence of polysemic clusters, idioms, or grammatical rules. Humor translation thus requires a high degree of poetic creativity if the translation is to evoke amusement and laughter as the original intends.

This difficulty raises the issue of “untranslatability” (Baker 1992; Catford 1965; Chiaro 2005; Delabastita 1994, 2002; Diot 1989; Jakobson 2004[1959]; Newmark 1988; Pym 1998; Snell-Hornby 2006; Toury 1995; Vandaele 2002). Discussion oriented toward translation practice focuses on “How do I translate?”; in contrast, cultural and linguistic analysis wonders “Are the languages sufficiently similar to express the realities?” The issue of untranslatability is certainly not exclusive to humor but is a problem in translation in general. The specific trouble with humor translation, however, is that humor has disposition for sociolinguistic particularities and for metalinguistic communication. The main criticism of this notion is that untranslatability is a relative rather than an absolute category. Hatim and Munday observe (2004:15), (un)translatability “has to do with the extent to which, despite obvious differences in linguistic structure (grammar, vocabulary, etc), meaning can still be adequately expressed across languages.”

Translators may encounter the problem of faithfulness to the original. Von Stackelberg asks (1988:13-14), “Should the translator be allowed to make us laugh at his own ideas rather than at those of the author?” He answers himself, “We do not think so.” His writing, however, displays an ambivalent attitude toward this inquiry. On the one hand, he asserts that the aim of a translator must be “to find the ‘juste milieu’ between being too free and too slavish.” On the other hand, he emphasizes, “A comical text must

remain comical in translation ... otherwise what we produce is not translation, but falsification” (ibid). The complexity of humor casts doubt on the notion of a general theory of how humor can be translated. Von Stackelberg’s question invites translators to ponder the path one follows when delivering humor and how he or she balances being creative with remaining faithful to the original.

3.3 Defining Humor

Identifying examples of humor is a complex task, and different definitions tend to reflect the analyst’s interests. While humor has various manifestations in the specifics of different languages (Chiaro 2008; Lorenzo et al. 2003; Low 2011), this study defines humor from a social perspective. I regard humor as a joint construction involving interaction between two parties: producers and audience. I define sitcom humor as a joint construction involving interaction between two parties: producers and audiences. By “producers,” I refer to both the original writers of the U.S. TV sitcoms and the subtitlers who translate the programs. In this study, humor is defined in a broad sense and includes all sentences and utterances in TV sitcoms that are intended to evoke positive responses from audiences. Although determining the producers’ intentions regarding humorous content could be problematic, U.S. TV sitcoms usually have one salient contextual clue: canned laughter, a separate soundtrack with the sound of artificial audience laughter. However, canned laughter provides only a partial definition, as even with this cue, many jokes and quips may still pass unnoticed because audiences do not understand why they are supposed to be funny. Given this possibility, audience knowledge is equally crucial. Whether it is the English-language original or the Chinese subtitle text, as long as

audiences report that they are amused as intended, the text meets the criteria for humor as defined in this study.

3.4 How Humor is Translated by Subtitle Groups

There are a number of translation strategies subtitle groups commonly use to render humor into Chinese. The first strategy is to convey exactly the original words in English. An example from the sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* (season 7, episode 18) illustrates this point. In the episode, after his encounter with Quinn, Barney becomes infatuated with her. When he finds out that she works as a stripper, that doesn't end his infatuation. He tries to persuade her to go out with him, but Quinn has her own agenda. She plays Barney by extracting cash and valuable items from him. Just when he thinks they're through, he runs into her in a coffee shop and they start talking. As a gesture of goodwill, Quinn buys him coffee and asks if he has time to sit down and have a real chat. Barney's sarcastic reply, "I don't know. You're wearing my watch," produces a humorous effect:

How I Met Your Mother S7E18

Quinn: Do you have time to sit with me?

Barney: I don't know. You're wearing my watch (*canned laughter*).

Figure 3.1. Chinese-subtitled *How I Met Your Mother*, S7E18, “I don’t know. You’re wearing my watch,” from Fengruan Group.



As shown in Figure 3.1, the Chinese subtitle means precisely what the original utterance says: “I don’t know. You’re wearing my watch.” The humor lies in the story line that Quinn has coaxed Barney into giving his expensive watch to her just to buy more minutes to talk with her in the club. Barney sarcastically saying that he does not know whether he has time because she has taken the watch is understandable in this context.

When intended humor involves cultural references unfamiliar to Chinese audiences, translators often add annotations to subtitles. In *Two and a Half Men* (season 10, episode 1), Walden proposes to his girlfriend, Zoe, but she turns him down. Depressed, he is trying to figure out what he did wrong, but he cannot get in touch with Zoe, thus saying: “It’s like she’s Amish”:

Two and a Half Men S10E1

Walden: Now she won't return my calls or e-mails or texts.
It's like she's ignoring me across the entire digital spectrum.
It's like she's Amish (*canned laughter*).

Figure 3.2. Chinese-subtitled *Two and a Half Men*, S10E1, "It's like she's Amish," from Fengruan Group.



The Chinese subtitle for the utterance "It's like she's Amish" has two lines, as shown in Figure 3.2. Line 1 is a literal translation of the original; Line 2 is an explanation of the humor and reads, "The Amish people do not marry non-Amish people."¹⁰ The subtitler

¹⁰ Annotations may not always correctly explain the humorous effects intended in the original, but they provide clues to translators' perspectives on the original. Take the utterance here for example: "It's like she's Amish." To the subtitler, the humorous effect comes from the social protocol of Amish marriage. Accordingly, the subtitler's explanation of the humor is that Zoe acts like an Amish woman who refuses to marry an outsider. This is however not the only possible explanation. A stereotype about Amish people is that they rarely associate with the outside world

provided supplementary information in the hope of facilitating audiences' appreciation of the intended humor (see Chapter Four for a comprehensive analysis on annotations).

If no annotations are provided, translators may run the risk that audiences miss the intended humorous effect. In *The Big Bang Theory* (season 3, episode 4), Rajesh (an Indian speaking English with an accent) and Sheldon (a typical Caucasian American) are arguing about a physical theory in English. Rajesh feels disadvantaged because he is overwhelmed by Sheldon's fluency in English rather than the validity of his argument. He says, "...if we were having this argument in my native language, I'd be kicking your butt!" Sheldon retorts, "English *is* your native language":

The Big Bang Theory S3E4

Rajesh: Okay, let me just tell you, if we were having this argument in my native language, I'd be kicking your butt!

Sheldon: English *is* your native language (*canned laughter*).

and their life style is usually described as mysterious and exclusive. That Zoey cannot be reached by any form of modern technology seems to fit such a social aspect of Amish life.

Figure 3.3. Chinese-subtitled *The Big Bang Theory*, S3E4, “English is your native language,” from YyEts Group.



The Chinese subtitle has exactly the same meaning as the original utterance “English is your native language.” Some viewers, however, are confused by the canned laughter in the video program. To them, canned laughter is compelling evidence that the utterance is laughable; the Chinese subtitle, however, fails to successfully convey the intended humorous effect.¹¹ Audiences question the appropriateness of the translation. Some even criticize the translator for not offering annotations that could possibly help them to get the

¹¹ The humor in Sheldon’s reply, “English is your native language,” derives from his exposure of the inadequacy of Rajesh’s excuse for being at a disadvantage in the argument—that is, Rajesh comes from a rich family in India, where English is the native language for upper-class and wealthy people. This implicit background has been highlighted in *The Big Bang Theory*. Knowing this information and the relationship between class and language in India provides a crucial context for understanding their conversation and the intended humor.

humor.

Still another way of translating humor is “domestication” strategy (Venuti 1995); namely, to express the original conversation by using quasi-equivalent linguistic or cultural categories in Chinese language. In *The Office* (season 8, episode 18), the manager Andy tells the office workers the good news about Dwight in a weird manner.

Angela questions Andy about why “the way you said it made it sound like he was dead”:

The Office S8E18

Andy: Everyone stop what you’re doing. I have terrible news. Dwight is no longer with us.

The office: What?

Andy: He’s gone, damn it! He’s been promoted to VP of Sabre retail, and he is staying in Florida forever.

Angela: So...he’s alive.

Andy: Yeah, that’s him on the phone. He sounds wonderful.

Angela: Well, the way you said it made it sound like he was dead (*canned laughter*).

Figure 3.4. Chinese-subtitled *The Office*, S8E18, “Well, the way you said it made it sound like he was dead,” from Fengruan Group.



The Chinese subtitle for “Well, the way you said it made it sound like he was dead” translates as “Well, the way you said it sounds like he went to see Marx.” This expression, “to see (Karl) Marx,” meaning “to die; being dead,” has historical roots in the Chinese Communist revolutionary era of the 1950s.¹² Although the young people don’t necessarily say it, this expression, “to see (Karl) Marx,” is understandable by most contemporary Chinese of all ages. In the context of humor translation of sitcoms, it is an accepted “domesticated” translation that provokes little dispute.

Audiences’ acceptance of the “domestication” strategy is not unlimited. The next section analyzes a controversial translation of audiovisual humor that has been frequently revisited since its release in 2008. Audiences evaluate the Chinese subtitle by bringing linguistic, moral, political, and national perspectives to articulate their ideologies on what constitutes good humor translation.

3.5 The Media Contexts

Website online forums

The media contexts come from three sources. First and foremost are the online discussion forums managed by Fengruan Group and YyEts Group. The interactive nature of subtitle groups’ translations and website forums enables subtitlers and audiences to exchange ideas that enrich and shape their understanding of the Chinese subtitles. Open to everyone who registers on the official websites of Fengruan Group and YyEts Group, the forums constitute a

¹² In the revolutionary era, Karl Marx was regarded as a godlike figure by the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, which adopted his theory in order to construct China as a leftist country and apply it to everyone’s everyday life. It is said that Mao Zedong himself, in his late years, stated that he was ready to meet Marx. As Christians expect to see God after they die, followers of Marx in China expect to meet and be judged by Marx after they die.

participatory environment (Herring 2007) that welcomes a variety of topics related to the subtitled programs, including translation texts, the content of the programs, and English-language learning issues. The second source is Sina Weibo, where some subtitlers often share their opinions on translation and subtitles on their personal pages. Sina Weibo users are not necessarily involved in the subtitle community, but whoever is interested in the articles can respond and engage in discussions with the subtitlers. The third source is the Paste Bar zone.

At all three forums, users have the option of posting anonymously. As described in Rodriguez and Clair's study of washroom graffiti (1999:2), the anonymity can act to "level the playing field by getting past all of the factors—such as social status, hierarchical position, education, access, familiarity with rules, expertise, communication competence." Writing in the open online environment is essentially a social act. Such accessibility may "awaken an attitude of collaborative expectancy in us" (Burke 1969:58). Anyone who reads the posts is invited to participate in the conversation and become part of the discussion. As information is exchanged and experiences are shared, the web-hosted spaces become a new, culturally significant mode, providing an alternative to traditional place-based communities that enables users to display their mutual alignments across physical and cultural distances.

Subtitle texts

This analysis addresses one example of humor taken from the Chinese-subtitled U.S. sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* (*TBBT*), produced by CBS from 2007 to the present. The main characters are four physicists (Sheldon, Leonard, Howard, and Rajesh) who live in Pasadena, California, and *TBBT* is about how their eccentric behaviors,

intelligence, and social awkwardness lead to amusing interactions with “ordinary people,” like Penny, an attractive blonde waitress. *TBBT* is popular among Chinese youth and young adults. Many media channels have documented this phenomenon. The leading subtitle groups always attempt to provide the latest subtitled episode of this program in the shortest time possible in response to audience demand. Every time the latest episodes are uploaded, comments spring up in the online forums as audiences discuss the episode. In Baidu, the key words of this program’s English or Chinese title engender millions of pieces of information and content. Audiences also generously share interviews and photos of the cast from U.S. media. In addition, Chinese magazines that target youth and young people often have newspaper articles about this sitcom and the individual cast members.

In order to facilitate audience comprehension, some subtitle groups include the original English texts along with the Chinese subtitles. Audiences therefore have the luxury of savoring the English language and the American cultural elements conveyed through the linguistic input. With the original audio and visual inputs intact, even audiences who know little English are endowed with the critical power to debate the subtitle groups’ translations. Audiences take on their participatory roles and engage in a lively discussion with subtitlers, providing contributions and a sense of connection with the online discussion community. They navigate the cultural translation of audiovisual humor together, positioning it appropriately within the Chinese sociocultural complex, and cultivate a practical aesthetics of translation that addresses the symbolic relationship between the concept of humor and the context that inspires humor.

3.6 Weaving Language and Politics Together

The following example of humor translation is from *TBBT*, season 2, episode 7. In this episode, the character Sheldon, who is characterized as a nerd and always adheres strictly to routine and displays a total lack of social skills, has complained about Penny (and the other three characters) constantly ignoring his rules. He finally bans her from his apartment, but Penny, who works at a restaurant, pays him back by giving him a hard time when he and his friends dine at the restaurant:

The Big Bang Theory S2E7

Sheldon: Wait. Excuse me. You forgot my barbecue bacon cheeseburger, barbecue sauce, bacon and cheese on the side.

Penny: Oh, I didn't tell you? You're banished from the Cheesecake Factory (*Canned laughter*).

Sheldon: Why?

Penny: Well, you have three strikes (*canned laughter*).

One, coming in. Two, sitting down. And three, I don't like your attitude (*canned laughter*).

Sheldon: You can't do that. Not only is it a violation of California state law, it flies directly in the face of Cheesecake Factory policy.

Penny: Yeah, no, there's a new policy. No shoes, no shirt, no Sheldon (*canned laughter*).

Howard I bet we could sell that sign all over Pasadena (*canned laughter*).

This seems a straightforward, funny conversation. Sheldon and Penny bicker about on-record "strikes" (i.e. transgressions they have committed that make the other person uncomfortable). The line about the three strikes of "coming in," "sitting down," and the "attitude" evokes quite a bit of laughter. Penny then adds to the humor by adopting the parallel rhetorical syntactic structure "no X, no Y, no Z" to proclaim the new "policy" of the restaurant to exclude unwelcome guest, Sheldon. The line "No shoes, no shirt, no Sheldon" triggered a hot debate across different online forums in response to the

translation provided by YyEts Group. The group’s subtitle for this line is “No Japanese and Sheldon allowed” (*ribenren yu xieerdun buzhun jinru* 日本人与谢尔顿不准进入).

Figure 3.5. Chinese-subtitled *The Big Bang Theory*, S2E7, “No Japanese and Sheldon allowed,” from YyEts Group.



The subtitler assumed a “domesticated” strategy, attempting to replace American cultural elements with information suited to the Chinese context. For centuries, China regarded Japan as a politically and culturally inferior state. Although imperial China’s power rose and fell over its hundreds of years of history, Japan offered tribute to the Chinese emperors and imported a wide range of production techniques, institutional models, and material objects from China. But in the nineteenth century, Japan went through modernization and was transformed into one of the world’s top powers. Since

then, each nation has treated the other as its major competitor in Asia. Influenced by state propaganda as well as individual suffering, conflicts have caused a deep-seated antipathy toward Japan among Chinese people.¹³ Here the subtitler decided to expand the undesirable category of restaurant clientele from “Sheldon” to “No Japanese and Sheldon.” Moreover, the subtitler did not translate “No shoes, no shirt” as part of the restaurant policy.

Although a number of viewers appreciated the translation, others indicated that the Chinese subtitle created a dynamic that was substantially different from the original. Subtitle groups’ websites, the Paste Bar zone in Baidu, and Sina Weibo documented audiences’ comments on the line “No Japanese people and Sheldon allowed.” Representative comments are displayed below in chronological order, followed by analysis.

01. John Doe (11-12-2008):

It is fine that subtitlers make a spoof just for teasing. But here in this case, I did not get the point at all. It did not make sense to translate a funny conversation into something quite sensitive. I think it is a wrong translation.

02. He Wei (11-13-2008):

Put aside if the subtitle is funny or not, the bottom line is that it is a wrong translation. In what way does Penny have anything to do with Japanese people? In translation, a correct transfer of meaning should take priority over a subtitler’s personal creativity.

03. Beans (11-17-2008):

This subtitle is a translation with Chinese characteristics (*zhongguo tese* 中国特色). I like it. I feel it is especially hilarious (*gaoxiao* 搞笑).

¹³ China and Japan still have a variety of political and foreign policy disputes, such as over maritime resources, the sovereignty of offshore islands, and Japan’s controversial history textbook that whitewashes its wartime aggression. As the rivalry between the two countries continues, the majority of Chinese young people still feel animosity toward Japan, although some have started to embrace the Sino-Japanese friendship and appreciate Japanese popular culture.

04. Ashes (11-18-2008):
The cream of sitcom subtitles is in how the translators banter with the subjects. Like in *Gossip Girl*, the subtitles convey so much of the irony of social events in China. You just have got to get the point.
05. Rabbits (11-18-2008):
Thank you. The credit goes to the subtitlers in our group. They are so brilliant (*tai youcai le* 太有才了)!
06. Yangerrick (11-20-2008):
I am not following. Why the hell Japanese people?
07. Xio Lin (11-21-2008):
What is your problem [referring to Yangerrick]? Why do subtitles need to be exactly the same as the original? It is not a big deal to mock Japanese people. They deserve it.
08. Opiumish (11-22-2008):
This translation is done by a certain subtitle group. Sometimes their readings of the original and their subtitle texts are subjective. There is no need to be so serious.
09. Gu Hong (11-23-2008):
There is alliteration in the original. It is hard to translate for the same effect since the rhetoric is unique to English. If I were the translator, I would translate it as “Prevent Fire, prevent burglary, prevent Sheldon” (*fang huo fang dao fang xieerdun* 防火防盗防谢尔顿). This is better.
10. Discip (11-23-2008):
I also like “Prevent Fire, prevent burglary, prevent Sheldon.” It is alliterative, close enough to our daily lives, and does translate Penny’s upset with Sheldon. But, after all, a good translation like this is a result of collective brainstorming. “Japanese people and Sheldon are not allowed to enter” is also acceptable. Don’t you watch sitcoms simply for fun?
11. Red Pen (11-25-2008):
I felt confused when reading “No Japanese and Sheldon allowed,” but once I got it, I laughed not only for the punch line per se but also for the feeling of understanding it. The crisscrossing of time and space should be funny and casual in sitcoms. People should just enjoy the humor and not make a big fuss like the Japanese tampering with high-school history textbooks.
12. Hzybbs (11-27-2008):
I would translate the original as “Those with the same taste in clothing as Sheldon are declined,” but that seems less funny than the Japanese one.

13. Cardigan (11-28-2008):
It (the subtitle) is a dry joke, and not everyone can catch it. I can tolerate a subtitle that aims to tease, make fun of, or pay tribute to something, like a character or an episode in the same or a different TV program. Translation as such is widespread in animation. It is not such a big deal. But if translation makes things complicated and turns a funny thing into an attack, then it is a waste.
14. T_T (12-5-2008):
I would prefer a translation that is more faithful to the original. But considering that the subtitlers do the translation voluntarily and are not paid, I am not in a position to criticize.
15. Killer's Car (12-29-2008):
Even though this is volunteer work, I think that the translation should always have faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance (*xin ya da* 信雅达). The focus of the original, "No shoes, no shirt, no Sheldon" is Sheldon, and it is beautifully alliterative. In contrast, people must wonder about the relevance of Japanese people mentioned in the Chinese subtitle. Though people may get the punch line, it blurs the intended focus and loses the alliteration. Even though nothing remains the same, I think such a translation is a total failure.
16. Juxiaoaiong (1-4-2009):
Patriotism plays a big role in this translation, but I do not think this is the right place to apply it. I resist (*dizhi* 抵制) this type of translation.
17. Leo (3-16-2009):
I assume the rationale for the Chinese subtitle is that in some TV programs, the image of Japanese people is that they usually do not wear clothes and shoes. The translation is powerful (*tai geili le* 太给力了). I do not think any nationalist stuff is involved. It is simply a tease. Very impressive.
18. Super Angel (4-1-2009):
In foreign countries, formal restaurants have clothing requirements for customers. For example, if you do not wear a necktie or a suit, then you are not allowed to enter. The reason that Penny mentions clothing is so that she can ground her refusal to Sheldon on some social protocol. In the same vein, the subtitle "No Japanese and Sheldon allowed" has historical roots, coming from the humiliating slogan "No Chinese and dogs allowed."
19. Single Cell (8-30-2012):
I guarantee that this is one of the best translations that fits China's specific conditions!
20. Machine (9-1-2012):
The subtitle groups are getting more and more powerful (*geili* 给力). They provide the translation that suits China's actual conditions and also satisfies audiences' needs.

21. The End (9-1-2012):

The subtitle group loves the Diaoyu Islands.

22. ChuwChuw (9-2-2012):

The translation is very socialist tinted (*shehui zhuyi tese* 社会主义特色). I like it!

23. Deer (9-2-2012):

The subtitler has the talent of socialism (*shehui zhuyi* 社会主义).

These comments compose a complex set of evaluations of how sitcom humor should and could be translated and how the reading of humor translation is culturally framed and politically mediated from an array of perspectives, from the microlevel of linguistic choices to the macrolevel of the interpretation of political reality. My analysis addresses three main interrelated issues: the language of evaluation in assessing the translation texts, the stances that define a translation of sitcom humor as more or less moral in relation to the targeted audiences, and the ideologies of translation as a transmission and reproduction of social reality.

The language of evaluation, assessments, and authoritative stances

Stances often entail or articulate historically rooted ideological discourses. Jaffe writes (2009:8), “Speakers project, assign, propose, constrain, define, or otherwise shape the subject positions of their interlocutors.” Stance is deeply embedded in and organized by cultural-historical contexts. Goodwin and Goodwin (1992:166) note that “assessments reveal not just neutral objects in the world, but an alignment taken up toward phenomena by a particular actor.” Goodwin (2006:191) advances the idea that through evaluations of what others say or metalinguistic features in shared contexts, speakers “make visible their current alignment with regard to others who are present or talked about.” As the above

comments show, assessments of humor translation are saturated with evaluatively weighted lexical items:

01. I think it is a wrong translation.

wo renwei zhege fanyi shi cuo de

我认为这个翻译是错的

05. They are so brilliant!

tamen tai youcai le

他们太有才了!

15. ...it is beautifully alliterative

touyun ya de hen jingcai

头韵押得很精彩

20. The subtitle groups are getting more and more powerful.

zimuzu yue lai yue geili

字幕组愈来愈给力

22. *wo hen xihuan*

I like it!

我很喜欢

23. The subtitler has the talent of socialism.

zhege yizhe shi shehui zhuyi de tiancai

这个译者是社会主义的天才

In addition, first-person complementary-taking predicates of cognition and emotion are a recurrent construction (Goldberg 1995).

01. I think it is a wrong translation.

wo renwei zhege fanyi shi cuo de

我认为这个翻译是错的

03. I feel it is especially hilarious.

wo ganjue tebei gaoxiao

我感觉特别搞笑

17. I assume the rationale for the Chinese subtitle is that...

wo yiwei zhege zhongwen zimu de luoji shi

我以为这个中文字幕的逻辑是

17. I do not think any nationalist stuff is involved.

wo bu juede you sheji dao sheme minzuzhuyi de shiqing

我不觉得有涉及到什麼国家之间的事情

These assessments include cognition or emotion verbs in “first-person singular + verb” constructions expressing a certain commitment of the speaker toward a proposition. As languages typically provide inventories of expressions with which to encode a speaker’s commitment, in Chinese, such epistemic modality can be communicated via lexical verbs such as: *juede* ‘think,’ *baozheng* ‘guarantee,’ *renwei* ‘assume/think,’ *xihuan* ‘like,’ *xiangxin* ‘believe,’ and *dizhi* ‘resist.’ These verbs denote a high degree of epistemic certainty and frame an opinion as a truth claimed by the speaker—that is, the epistemic modalities underpinned by these verbs are assertive rather than speculative; the evaluations or judgments of the translation texts are articulated as having a factual status.

Commenters also directly evaluate other commenters’ assessments of the subtitle.

04. You just have got to get the point.

ni ziji dei kandong

你自己得看懂

07. What is your problem?

ni you sheme wenti

你有什么问题?

08. There is no need to be so serious.

meibiyao name renzhen

没必要那么认真

10. Don't you watch sitcoms simply for fun?

ni kan qingjingxiju bujiushi wei le haowan ma

你看情境喜剧难道不是为了好玩吗?

11. People should just enjoy the humor and (do) not make a big fuss like the Japanese tampering with high-school history textbooks.

dajia yinggai kanzhe haoxiao jiu xing fanbuzhao shangsheng dao riben jiaokeshu cuangai lishi de chengdu

大家應該看著好笑就行 犯不着上升到日本教科书篡改历史之类的程度

Moreover, the commenters adopt an authoritative stance through repetitive syntactic structures and certain rhetorical moves. First, deontic modalities (e.g., *should*, *have got to*) and epistemic modalities (e.g., *must*) are frequently used across the comments to encode the commenters' attitude, namely, that their understanding of the subtitles and proposed alternative subtitles are the right choices. The deontic modalities include:

02. ... a correct transfer of meaning should take priority over a subtitler's personal creativity.

zhengque de yisibiaoda yinggaiyao bi fanyizhe de geren chuangyi geng zhongyao

正确的意思表达应该要比翻译者的个人创意更重要

04. You just have got to get the point.

ni ziji dei kandong

你自己得看懂

11. The crisscrossing of time and space should be funny and casual in sitcoms.

qingjingxiju li de shikong jiaocuo yinggai shi gaoxiao erqie suiyi de

情境喜剧裡的时空交错应该是搞笑而且随意的

11. People should just enjoy the humor and not make a big fuss like the Japanese tampering with high-school history textbooks.

dajia yinggai kanzeh haoxiao jiu xing fanbuzhao shangsheng dao riben jiaokeshu cuangai lishi de chengdu

大家應該看著好笑就行 犯不着上升到日本教科书篡改历史之类的程度

15. I think that the translation should always have faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance.

wo xiangxin fanyi yinggaoyao zuo dao xin ya da

我相信翻译应该要做到信雅达

The epistemic modalities include:

12. I would translate the original as “Those with the same taste in clothing as Sheldon are declined,” but that seems less funny than the Japanese one.

wo hui ba yuanwen fancheng naxie he xieerdun yiyang chuanyi pinwei de ren jujue jinru dan zheyang sihu buru ribenren laide haoxiao

我会把原文翻成“那些和谢尔顿一样穿衣品味的人拒绝进入”但这样似乎不如日本人来的好笑

15. ... people must wonder about the relevance of Japanese people mentioned in the Chinese subtitle.

dajia yiding xiangbutong zhongwen zimu de ribenren you sheme guanglian

大家一定想不通中文字幕的日本人有什么关联

15. Though people may get the punch line, it blurs the intended focus and loses the alliteration.

suiran dajia keneng kandedong zhe ju fanyi de xiaodian dan he yuanwen you churu erqie mei ya touyun

虽然大家可能看得懂这句翻译的笑点 但和原文有出入而且没押头韵

19. I guarantee that this is one of the best translations that fits China's specific conditions!

wo baozheng zheshi fuhe zhongguo qingjing zuihao de fanyi zhiyi

我保证这是符合中国情境最合的翻译之一

Second, commenters judge other commenters' assessments of the subtitle as overreactive ("not make a big fuss" [11], "It is not such a big deal" [13], "It is simply a tease" [17]), while positioning themselves as composed and experienced arbiters of translations. This voicing suggests that others should, for example, downplay the Japanese issue, and poses this stance as objective. Moreover, rhetorical questions (e.g., "Don't you watch sitcoms simply to have fun?" [10]) position commenters as people with an omniscient point of view and a commonsense attitude. As Coupland and Coupland (2009) observe, the problem-solution format effectively persuades interlocutors that they are professionals who have the knowledge to handle the problem at hand. The omniscient perspective is also conveyed in general statements, such as "people must wonder about the relevance of Japanese people mentioned in the Chinese subtitle" (15). Here, the commenter displays

the ability to read other people's minds. The commenter later judges the original subtitle to be "a total failure."

Competing ideologies

Commenters' stances on the subtitle line "No Japanese and Sheldon allowed" and their evaluations of the comments of others are framed in two dimensions: first, the personal aesthetics of humor translation and, second, the collective emotional and moral experience of reading translations of humor. The stances taken in arguments over what elements constitute good translations of audiovisual humor introduce elements of a particularly ideological nature.

First and foremost, commenters who are open to creative or even "eccentric" translation texts reveal a sitcom-dependent ideology of humor translation. Commenter Ashes writes, "The cream of sitcom subtitles is in how the translators banter with the subjects. Like in *Gossip Girl*, the subtitles convey so much of the irony of social events in China" (04). The commenter cites examples from another U.S. TV program, *Gossip Girl*, to legitimize the free-style translation and establish a position that is somehow accurate or valid. Sitcoms constitute a separate category in which the most interesting part of the viewing experience may come from how subtitlers make fun of the original language and context rather than from a literal translation. The sitcom as a macro-context yields flexibility in translation, because "the crisscrossing of time and space should be funny and casual in sitcoms," says commenter Red Pen (11). The "playful frame" extends what one will accept in subtitles and endows them with the capacity to recruit almost any word, regardless of its relevance to the original, as long as they create enough amusement

to satisfy audiences. In addition, commenter Opiumish mentions another macro-context that shapes the appreciation of humor, that is, the “undergroundness” of subtitle groups, by implying that volunteer translation is allowed to be more subjective: “This translation was done by a certain subtitle group. Sometimes their readings of the original and their subtitle texts are subjective. There is no need to be so serious” (08). The underground practices of translating and circulating U.S. TV sitcoms (and other types of TV programs) give rise not only to nuances in the concept of audiovisual humor but also to more liberty in translating audiovisual humor from one semiotic system into another. As Fuentes Luque points out (2010:190), effect is more important than fidelity to the original because “the traditional obsession with loyalty often spoils the comic effect, dissipating the original function and intention of the text, especially of audiovisual humor texts, and paving the way to such fossilization processes.”

In contrast, other commenters advocate authenticity, that is, retaining the sense of the original dialogue, and refute the notion that funny effects define a good translation of audiovisual humor. Commenter He Wei, for example, writes, “Put aside if the subtitle is funny or not; the bottom line is that it is a wrong translation. In what way does Penny have anything to do with Japanese people?” (02). Commenter Killer’s Car emphasizes the importance of the original meaning: “...people must wonder about the relevance of Japanese people mentioned in the Chinese subtitle. Though people may get the punch line, it blurs the intended focus and loses the alliteration” (15). The underpinning ideology here is that the essence of translation is to understand the exact meaning of a text in one language and convey it accurately in another. Commenter Killer’s Car deploys professional translation jargon to develop a more academic-oriented ideology: “Even

though this is volunteer work, I think that the translation should always have faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance” (15). The commenter brings up the canonical rules of translation—faithfulness, expressiveness, elegance (*xin ya da*)—introduced by Yan Fu, a thinker, translator, and educator in China of the late nineteenth century. These rules have been widely cited in discussions of the Chinese philosophy of translation. Contrary to liberal thinking that embraces translation for the purpose of achieving humorous effects, this academic-oriented ideology appeals for adherence to academic translation guidelines and gives less weight to a “subtitled’s personal creativity” (02).

Some commenters consider linguistic factors in translations of humor. Recall, for example, commenter Gu Hong’s alternative translation, which addresses the phonetic, syntactic, and semantic dimensions of the original: “Prevent fire, prevent burglary, prevent Sheldon” (*fang huo fang dao fang xieerdun*) (09). The commenter remarks, “There is alliteration in the original. It is hard to translate for the same effect since the rhetoric is unique to English” (09). This claim, however, is not correct, since alliteration can be produced through the Chinese phonetic inventory. Commenter Discip favors the translation proposed by Gu Hong because “it is alliterative, close enough to our daily lives, and does translate Penny’s upset with Sheldon” (10). The analogical thinking is twofold. First, there is fire and burglary, just like shoes and a shirt, which are common daily things “close enough to our daily lives.” Second, Sheldon, like fire and burglary, is one of the things that people are always mindful of and want to avoid. The alternative translation unfolds a cultural perspective about what Chinese audiences conceptualize as undesirable in their daily lives, namely, fire and burglary.

Commenter Gu Hong suggests an important issue in translation, that is, semantic

and prosodic similarity in two languages. Translation scholars and experts indicate that cultural adoption, in which source elements are replaced by either formal or dynamic (quasi) equivalents from the target culture, is one basic strategy for transferring one semiotic culture to another (Nida 2004; Vinay and Darbelnet 2004). Gu Hong's alternative translation, "Prevent fire, prevent burglary, prevent Sheldon" (*fang huo fang dao fang xieerdun*), preserves the alliterative feature in that the initial words of the three phrases start with the same phonetic combination, *fang*, as those of the original "No shoes, no shirt, no Sheldon" begin with "no." The alternative also employs the same parallel rhetorical syntactic structure as the original: "*fang X, fang Y, fang Z*" and "no X, no Y, no Z."

One context-oriented commenter's analysis of the original "No shoes, no shirt, no Sheldon" speaks to the power of languages to denote a sociocultural milieu. Commenter Super Angel writes, "In foreign countries, formal restaurants have clothing requirements for customers. ... The reason that Penny mentions clothing is so that she can ground her refusal to Sheldon on some social protocol" (18). This comment hints at the context-sensitive basis of the humor: to audiences in the United States, the humor of the utterance "No shoes, no shirt, no Sheldon" comes from their knowledge of the sign "No Shirt, No Shoes, No Service," which is posted in some restaurants during a certain time. This sign was used to justify a restaurant's refusal to serve customers who were not wearing shoes or the appropriate clothing. Anderson associates the origin of this sign with the hippie culture in the 1960s (1995:283): "Citizens reacted to the hippie threat in many ways. ... Businessmen across the country put up door signs, 'No Shirt, No Shoes, No Service,' while Marc's Big Boy in Milwaukee hired a cop to make sure that no one with beads,

beards, flowers, sandals, long hair, or funny glasses was allowed inside to buy a double hamburger.” The message simply says that your sloppy attire or bare feet are bad for business. The commenter goes one step further by citing a well-known public notice that insulted the Chinese during the semicolonial era, saying, “In the same vein, the subtitle ‘No Japanese and Sheldon allowed’ has historical roots, coming from the humiliating slogan ‘No Chinese and dogs allowed.’” By making this connection, the commenter analogizes U.S. public opinion on hippie culture in the sixties and the racist treatment that Chinese received in their own country from Europeans during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Such a history-packed and affect-laden ideology of humor translation steeped in history aroused considerable sympathy, as it triggers many positive opinion markers (e.g., *the best, powerful, satisfy audiences’ needs, talent, like*). The “making fun of Japanese” theme works well for some Chinese audiences and is justified by the opinion that “it is not a big deal to mock Japanese people” (07). Approving of the “No Japanese and Sheldon allowed” translation is thus an act of identifying oneself as a “moral” Chinese who is well acquainted with the Sino-Japanese relationship complex and behaves in just the right way to get revenge through the translation of humor. Commenter Xio Lin’s assessment of the mockery of Japanese, “They deserve it” (07), suggests that it is moral to tease Japanese people because wrongdoers should be punished. Commenter Red Pen’s claim that “I laughed not only for the punch line per se but also for the feeling of understanding it” (11) identifies the in-group status of the commenter, who gets the point and, in doing so, is being like the others and taking the same stance toward translation and history.

One word appears several times in these comments: “socialism” (*shehui zhuyi*). This term refers to “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (*zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi* 中国特色的社会主义), a slogan used by Deng Xiaoping in his 1978 economic platform to describe the Chinese government’s new system, which replaced the onerous aspects of old-style Communism and with what officials determined to be the better aspects of capitalism. A great deal of literature has explored the political philosophy and administrative strategies related to this agenda (Chen 2002; Chow 2002, 2004; Gallagher 2002; Liu 1991; Restall 2008; Shirk 1993; White 1991). The system, called “Socialism with Chinese characteristics,” has become official rhetoric that enables the government to claim that, even with the political and economic reforms it has implemented, China still remains a socialist state.¹⁴ In fact, “socialism with Chinese characteristics” is actually state capitalism. The term “Chinese characteristics,” a phrase invented by the Party to smooth the transition from socialism to capitalism without admitting that the pre-1978 past is full of misdeeds, thus creates ambiguity, and the resulting flexibility allows the Party to develop policies that may deviate from old-style Communism but will achieve its goals. In today’s public discourse, the phrase “with Chinese characteristics” is applied to a variety of situations for which there are no historical examples or development models and means that people are entitled to create their own ways of guiding themselves

¹⁴ The Chinese government maintains that it revises the concepts of Marxist theory in developing a new economic system. Although socialism is not incompatible with these economic policies, the government has not abandoned Marxism; instead, a modified socialism allows the state-party to implement economic policies that attract the foreign capital necessary for China to develop into an industrialized nation.

through.¹⁵

With that said, “with Chinese characteristics” and “socialism” index a metaphor that describes people using innovative ways to do what they like to do. As shown in the aforementioned comments, some commenters refer to the subtitle “No Japanese and Sheldon allowed” as a work “with Chinese characteristics” (03) and “socialist tinted” (21). Another also describes the subtitler as someone having “the talent of socialism” (22). In the context of this discussion, “with Chinese characteristics” and “socialism” combine to form an affective stance that rejects the conventional thinking about translation that requires faithfulness to the original text. These descriptions, occurring with positive opinion markers (e.g., *like it, I feel it is especially hilarious, brilliant, impressive, talent*), convey an ideology that I call “translation sovereignty,” meaning that the subtitle groups are entitled to create their own agenda in adapting the original dialogue in order to create enjoyment for Chinese audiences. Relying on the metaphorical meaning of “socialism” and “with Chinese characteristics” encourages the underground subtitle community to free itself from conservative academic translation theories. These commenters support translations that reconfigure the perspectives of audiences through the formation of cultural constituencies. In so doing, the subtitler exercised a “socialism with Chinese characteristics” freedom to inspire their Chinese audiences.

¹⁵ In some contexts, this term is sarcastic in tone when it describes unprecedented social phenomena in China as the society undergoes rapid and significant changes in line with its social transformation and global economic aspirations. For example, Chinese media describe Chinese parents sending and picking up their children to and from school as “escorting with Chinese characteristics.” This is one of the many effects of the one-child policy. Worried about any potential danger their children may encounter when outside alone, parents escort even teenage children to and from school.

3.7 Multiple Voices in the Language of Evaluation

The commenters' assessments on the subtitle line "No Japanese and Sheldon allowed" co-construct a discourse in which multiple speakers tackle multiple voices on the following speech event: a white American female character named Penny uttered the sentence "No shoes, no shirt, no Sheldon" to a white American male character named Sheldon in the U.S. sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*. The commenters' assessments can be seen as dialogic arguments reflecting (1) commenters' personal aesthetics on humor translation; (2) commenters' examinations of the comments of others; and (3) commenters' public presentations of being a "moral" Chinese who knows the Sino-Japanese history well.

These assessments can be seen as dialogic arguments that constitute what Bakhtin calls "double-voiced discourse" (1984:156): "an author can ... make use of another person's word for his own purpose by inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has—and retains—its own orientation." These assessments reveal not only a commenter's single voice but the voices of many, including those who construe the translation of sitcom humor more as an ingredient of sitcoms than as a category of conservative translation; those who adapt humor translation as a practical medium by which to provide entertainment; those who think humor translations should be faithful to the originals; and those who conceive of the translation of sitcom humor as the strengthening of real-world historical scenarios.

Each of the comments is an "answering word" (Bakhtin 1981:280) to a particular point of view held by the commenters. A central notion in Bakhtin's philosophy on language is that "the dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course,

a property of *any* discourse” (1981:279). To Bakhtin, language is not a system of abstract grammatical categories; rather, language is an open-ended, cooperative system working toward reciprocal communication with the outside world. As he argues, whether oral or written, “every word is directed towards an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates” (1981:280). This “dialogic-ness” enables speakers and writers to perceive and preserve the difference between the self and the other, and they simultaneously anticipate the responses of actual, potential, or imagined audiences. Moreover, a cacophonous background makes an utterance or writing more compelling. Bakhtin proposes (1981:293-94), “The word in language is half someone else’s. ... It exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own.” In Bakhtin’s view (1981:279), everyone “is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way.”

As noted earlier, the audiences’ comments were posted over a span of almost four years, from November 2008 to September 2012. The comments are retained with little, if any, time limits, which makes online discussion forums an archive of texts of the past and present. These comments are, in Bakhtin’s words, a “polyphony” of interpretations and assessments of humor translations. Consider the following comments:

Consider the following comments:

19. Single Cell (8-30-2012):

I guarantee that this is one of the best translations that fits China’s specific conditions!

20. Machine (9-1-2012):

The subtitle groups are getting more and more powerful. They provide the translation that suits China's actual conditions and also satisfies audiences' needs.

21. The End (9-1-2012):

The subtitle group loves the Diaoyu Islands.

The major event taking place during the time these comments were posted (i.e., from August to September 2012) was the Diaoyu Islands dispute. Both China and Japan claim the Diaoyu Islands as their territory, and the sovereignty crisis—or the dispute over ownership of the immense natural gas reserves beneath the seafloor—has flared up repeatedly in the past decades; however, the confrontation between the two countries in 2012 was very intense. The islands have become iconic in China, a symbol of Chinese nationalism and Chinese pride. Accordingly, to some audiences, the translation offered by the subtitle group, “No Japanese and Sheldon allowed,” is a timely reflection of Chinese nationalist sentiments. Poking fun at the Japanese serves as an emotional outlet by allowing Chinese people to vent their growing hostility toward Japan. As Chiaro (1992:83) holds, it is particularly vital for translators of humor to be up to date in their knowledge of the “day-to-day affairs” of both source and target cultures. The translation “No Japanese and Sheldon allowed” and the associated comments constitute a multivoice discourse that gathers a variety of interpretations into a living dialogue woven by socio-ideological consciousness.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the role of language in mediating the evaluation of sitcom humor. Through a variety of linguistic practices—lexical items, syntactic

structures, epistemic and deontic modalities—audiences adopt shared or divergent stances in developing their ideologies on the translation of sitcom humor. Commenters in online discussion forums offer their interpretations of the original line “No shoes, no shirt, no Sheldon” and their evaluations of the Chinese subtitle “No Japanese and Sheldon allowed” from their own perspectives at a particular historical moment. They position themselves as the authorities who have authentic knowledge about the translation of sitcom humor. They “instruct” the other commenters on the right ways of translating and reading sitcom humor. The comments are also indexical. Commenters authenticate their cultural identities of being “moral” Chinese who behave appropriately in teasing the Japanese through the translation of sitcom humor. Online discussion forums provide a social space and invite audiences to develop their own theories of humor translation. This “zone of contact” (Pratt 1987) builds a community in which audiences accept, refuse, or debate an array of alignments with, orientations toward, and adaptations of humor translation. As Bakhtin (1984) observes, all discourse is in essence a dialogical exchange, and commenters on the translation of sitcom humor provide a rich record of what has been said, revealing that the different trajectories of thinking on humor develop from the process of relating translation to the experience of politics in the real world.

Audience comments reveal the ideology of “translation sovereignty”; that is, when a translation is framed in the medium of U.S. sitcoms, translators in the subtitle community are entitled to follow their own agendas in adapting the original humor to contemporary social and political conditions in China. In other words, the underground, volunteer subtitle groups have the right to translate sitcom humor in terms that relate to the Chinese sociocultural complex so that local audiences can appreciate it. Commenters

believe that this autonomy is justified because such “domesticated” humor is entertaining to Chinese audiences. This ideology of “translation sovereignty” is related to Chiaro’s observation (2010:13) that “humor has also been touched by both changes and the ascendancy of mass media.” Sovereignty of this type is a new form of cultural production of identity that reflects how Chinese youth and young adults define the translation of audiovisual humor and perform various moralities of reading audiovisual humor that emanate from historical and present-day political discourses.

Chapter Four

Annotations in Chinese-Subtitled U.S. Television Programs:

“Meta-thinking” and Authenticity in Subtitlers’ Translating Practices

4.1 Chinese Subtitles with Annotations

As noted in Chapter Two, people who apply to join one of the well-established subtitle groups are given seventy-two hours to subtitle a five-minute video clip of a U.S. TV program in order to demonstrate that they are capable of translating the U.S. English vernaculars in the program into Mandarin Chinese and are familiar with a group’s specific subtitle format. The group to which I applied, Fengruan Group, has a rule stating that there should be no more than eighteen Chinese characters in one frame; when there are more than eighteen characters, technical staff members redistribute the English texts so that the corresponding Chinese characters will not exceed eighteen. Character maximums vary slightly from group to group, but most subtitle groups observe this rule, because it accords with the opinion of translation scholars and experts that audiovisual translation should provide only the information most relevant to the original picture and conversation.

A number of detailed accounts explain subtitlers’ task and how it is different from that of translators in general; one of the major distinctions is the spatiotemporal limit on-screen (Díaz Cintas 2004; Fawcett 1996; Goris 1993; Gottlieb 1994; Li 2001; Nornes 2000; O’Shea 1996; Qian 2000; Rosa 2001; Titford 1982; Wang 2007). Subtitles on one screen generally occupy “a maximum of two lines” (Gottlieb 1998:245), and one line should have 35–40 characters (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998). This limit is based on the

number of words an average viewer can read when watching audiovisual programs, which, at seventy-four English letters in six seconds (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007), is slower than when reading printed texts. The challenge for subtitlers, Gottlieb (1992) remarks, is to present subtitles in a concise manner but not at the expense of correct translation, given that the temporal factor in video and the spatial factor on-screen that operate in the process of subtitling often result in the loss of much of the original meaning.

Word limits prescribed by subtitle groups have a cognitive basis, so it is reasonable to assume that words that do not convey the most relevant information are undesirable and digressive because audiences do not have time to read words that are not linguistically coded in the original. My actual subtitling experience, however, tells a different story. A subtitler colleague who proofread my translations constantly suggested that I add extra annotations to English sentences that carried potentially “foreign” concepts to Chinese audiences, including difficult punch lines, historical allusions, and references to the myths and legends of non-Chinese cultures. For example, she once requested that I explained “Sabbath” in the sentence “Would you or would you not pull an ass out of a pit on the Sabbath?” (*House M.D.*, season 4, episode 2). I argued that an annotation would have exceeded the character limit, and since the sentence did not carry an adverbial clause, it could not be segmented into two frames to fit the subtitling format. The proofreader assured me that a proper annotation would override the word limit rule, because audiences would like to learn more about “Sabbath,” and even those who already know about it would not mind reading a subtitler’s note as long as it offers pertinent knowledge and supplementary information that helps to bridge the cultural gap.

The phenomenon of creating annotations representing information not materially presented in the discourse is called “subtitles with annotations” (*zimu jiazhu* 字幕加註). The phrase *jiazhu*, “to add annotations,” can be collocated with different nouns to describe whatever item carries extra necessary information. For example, *huzhao jiazhu*, “passport with annotations,” refers to a passport with notes attached that contain important information that had to be officially recorded but not included when the passport was issued, such as extensions of visas. Regarding “subtitle with annotations”, subtitler Qie (2009) conducted research on annotations and found that they are frequently used in subtitle groups’ translation work. According to his survey, there are an average of thirty annotations in any ten randomly selected forty-minute episodes of Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs. In other words, there is one annotation every thirteen minutes, containing an average of 10.2 Chinese characters. This frequency not only highlights the salience of annotations in subtitle groups’ translation work but also implies that the subtitlers’ translation practice is different from the traditional audiovisual translation examined by the aforementioned scholars.

In this study, annotation is defined as a metalinguistic semiotic sign that elucidates, comments on, or provides additional information associated with a particular point in a media program. Annotations vary in length, typeface, size, placement, color, alignment, and use of additional symbols (such as parentheses). Annotations can be as short as an emoticon or as detailed as a full account of cultural references. Annotations can be placed at the bottom or top of screens; if at the bottom, they are put in parentheses underneath the Chinese subtitles so that they can be distinguished from the subtitle. Occasionally, annotations are in a different color, to make them stand out.

Chinese scholars in linguistics, translation studies, and communication studies have investigated subtitlers' strategies in creating annotations and the kinds of information that require annotations (Bao 2009; Duan 2010; Jin 2007; Sun 2007; Shi 2011; Wei 2012; Wu 2008; Yao 2010; Yuan 2004). While the functions of annotations have been recognized, the practice of constructing annotations and audiences' interpretations of annotations have yet to be discussed. This chapter addresses this lacuna by considering how subtitlers provide annotations based on their evaluation of audiences' linguistic and cultural competence with images, body language, English vernaculars, and other information represented in the media program. I argue that annotations reveal the "backstage" of subtitlers' knowledge and expertise (Goffman 1959). In annotating, the subtitler engages in a performative act that constitutes a public (Gal and Woolard 2001). Through this act, the subtitler illustrates his or her intimate knowledge to audiences. Subtitlers also create a sense of involvement for audiences, as they clue a community of like-minded individuals in on subtitlers' detailed knowledge of contemporary English vernaculars and American popular culture. This sharing of subjective stances blurs the boundaries between the public and the private.

4.2 Two Types of Annotations

Annotations can be categorized as either information-providing annotations or commentary annotations. Among the seventy-four annotations in my database, there are fifty information-providing annotations and twenty-four commentary annotations.

Information-providing annotations contain relevant knowledge of cultural discourses represented in U.S. TV programs and movies, including sociocultural

contextualization of characters, idiomatic phrases, puns, and wordplay. Figure 4.1 illustrates an information-providing annotation taken from the popular TV program *The Big Bang Theory* (season 5, episode 17). In this example, the character Sheldon is having an argument with a friend. Sheldon says, “I’d smack you with a glove,” meaning that he accepts the challenge and is determined to win the debate. The subtitler’s annotation expounds the idiomatic expression “to smack someone with a glove.”

Figure 4.1. Chinese-subtitled *The Big Bang Theory*, S5E17, “I’d smack you with a glove,” from YyEts Group.



Three lines of text appear in figure 1. Line 1 is the original text, “I’d smack you with a glove.” Line 2 is the Chinese subtitle, which is a literal translation of the original. Line 3, at the top of the screen, is the annotation, which reads, “In earlier times, hitting someone in the face with a glove was a social gesture for issuing a challenge.”

Commentary annotations serve a range of functions. They speculate on the inner thoughts of characters, project an imagined reaction from audiences, and express the translators' stance on the story lines. Subtitlers bring their full humanity—their likes and dislikes, enthusiasm and boredom—to the programs they are translating. Audiences not only read the Chinese subtitles but also feel the translators' inclinations and thus build interpersonal relationships with the translators. Figure 4.2 illustrates a commentary annotation from *Lie to Me* (season 1, episode 8). The character Dr. Lightman is a psychologist who is an expert in body language. He is asking a police officer for details of an accident. The police officer tells him that it was a suicide, yet Dr. Lightman detects a nervous expression on the officer's face and realizes that the officer is hiding the truth. Dr. Lightman says to the officer, "So not an accident, then," exposing his lie.

Figure 4.2. Chinese-subtitled *Lie to Me*, S1E8, "So not an accident, then," from YDY Group.



Line 1 is the English dialogue text, and line 2 is the Chinese subtitle, which is an accurate translation of the original. The translator added text on top, line 3, which reads, “It is a terrible lie.” This annotation is the subtitler’s comment on the police officer’s poor lying skills.

4.3 Annotations as Part of the Translation Narrative

Writing annotations can be seen as the subtitlers’ attempt to display their background knowledge and their “true selves.” Annotations not only reveal an individual subtitler’s stance but also display “meta-thinking”: they provide a mini-narrative that incorporates the subtitler’s perspective. These “capsule” annotations are intended to facilitate Chinese audiences’ understanding of both the media programs and the subtitlers’ interpretation. In this way, annotations offer insights into how subtitlers participate in translation, which is as important as the translation text itself. Annotations open the door to the meta-linguistic and meta-cultural consciousness of subtitlers as they strive to explicate meanings across sociolinguistic contexts.

In their groundbreaking work, Ochs and Capps (2001:1-58) propose a dimensional model of narratives to analyze the variability in the structure of stories. In this model, narratives can be situated along five dimensions of tellership (is the story told by a single narrator or by multiple narrators, that is, co-narrated?), tellability (to what extent are the incidents judged to be significant or surprising and worthy of being reported?), embeddedness (does the teller narrate the story in a surrounding discourse, include it in a cluster of narratives, or is it in a context detached from the conversational environment?), linearity (is the story told in chronological order?), and moral stance

(does the narrative convey a judgment on the people or events in the story?). Drawing on these notions of storytelling, I regard every U.S. media program as a narrative, and the Chinese subtitles in every program are the retelling of the narrative produced by subtitlers. In the subtitlers' versions of the narratives, annotations provide a "co-narrative" voice that is embedded in the subtitle discourse and also convey a moral stance on what translators assume audiences may or may not understand about certain cultural elements in the original English dialogue.

Subtitle groups annotate U.S. TV programs and movies with the goal of producing authentic representations of U.S. popular culture. Authentic representations include, first, truthful translation that accurately renders the meaning of the source text without distortion; and, second, annotations, based on possible discordance between the interpretations assigned by U.S. and Chinese audiences. Like-minded individuals in the subtitle community seek for authentic representations of U.S. popular culture, either through authenticity in Chinese subtitles or through translators' annotations of U.S. popular culture in relation to Chinese realities and vocabularies.

Ochs and Capps (2001) also observe that when people tell stories, they have two intentions in mind: to weave all happenings into a logically connected and coherently themed story and to figure out the uncertainties and incoherence brought forth by these happenings. Speakers intentionally craft the first type of narrative as a systematical one, while the latter type of narrative is produced in unscripted instances of interaction and takes on more chaotic qualities. Using the two mechanisms, people recount and give meaning to life experiences through narratives, which are a significant form of everyday communication. Building on Ochs and Capps's proposal, I explore how subtitlers employ

annotations to construct narratives of their translation activity. Through narrativizing, subtitlers connect their linguistic ability, cultural knowledge, and personal accounts into a meaning-making process for U.S. popular culture as represented in media programs. This chapter illuminates how subtitlers create annotations driven by two contradictory forces: to represent their sense-making process in an objective way, for explicating knowledge, and in an intimate way, for interacting with audiences. I investigate how audiences perceive annotations, how translators create annotations shaped by social and cultural conventions, how the pursuit of original representations of U.S. popular culture intermingles with interpretations generated by present-day China's social contexts, and how authenticity plays out in the meaning-endowing activity of annotating.

4.4 Authenticity and Translation

Authenticity has a rich philosophical lineage and wide connotations. In this chapter, however, I am concerned with, not a review of its history, but a much more modest task, that is, how scholars in translation studies and translators apply the notion of authenticity to their work.

In an interview, Kapsaskis invites Michael Cronin, a scholar in translation studies, to elaborate on the relationship between translation and authenticity. Cronin comments:

We try to make sense of how we should act in our workplace, how we should act with other citizens, the community and so on. So we have to make sense of our lives. I think, to some extent, it is that sense-making process that I would describe as authenticity. It is the attempt to try and attribute meaning to something. And this is where translation comes into the picture. Because what translation shows us is that the process of meaning-making is negotiated, it is processual and it is endlessly changing. (Kapsaskis 2012b:173)

Cronin cites a comparison between translations of the *Aeneid* in Gaelic and in Latin during the late medieval period. The Irish Gaelic translation contains lengthy and detailed descriptions of the physical characteristics of Aeneas's dog that are completely absent from the original Latin version. The dog receives excessive attention from the translators in the Gaelic version because the target audience was the upper echelons of Irish society. At that time, a dog was considered an indicator of high social class. A majestic dog was thus a crucial element for Irish audiences in imagining a heroic figure such as Aeneas. Cronin remarks that "translation is so important to us in that it shows us how experiences of authenticity are most authentic when they are inauthentic. It is that moment when one is least faithful to the source that you realise just how authentic this act of translation is, because people are very keen on trying to make this correspond to their own search for meaning" (Kapsaskis 2012b:174). Cronin's thinking on authenticity is significant in that it recognizes and accommodates the heterogeneous within a cultural community, the distinctiveness of individuals, and dynamic local conditions. This chapter examines authenticity revealed by subtitle groups' work in relation to Cronin's notion. Authenticity in my formulation refers primarily to a genuine effort to provide an accurate translation as well as an adequate explanation of the English discourses and U.S. popular culture in U.S. TV programs and movies. The act of providing a "cultural gloss" (Scollon 1982) of intended meanings in U.S. media programs constitutes a "cultural gloss" itself, because annotating is a culturally embedded practice determined by social and historical conditions. Kapsaskis (2012a:2) comments that Schleiermacher "located authenticity in the positive act of representing, rather than suppressing, the asymmetry that exists between the foreign language and the translator's mother tongue." The annotating

practice resonates with Schleiermacher's notion of authenticity in that subtitlers reserve the "foreignness" of the original texts while attaching their recognition and explanation of the foreignness through annotations.

Authenticity is a double-edged sword for intellectual thought and political activism in postcolonial areas. Kapsaskis (2012a) analyzes an essay, which is also a manifesto, titled *Eloge de la Créolité (In Praise of Creoleness)*. The authors, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, redefine Caribbean culture through the language and folkways that are the common denominators of Caribbean population. On the one hand, according to Kapsaskis, postcolonial intellectuals express their own "authentic" voices on what they think their "authentic" cultures are against imposed colonial perspectives on their histories and traditions. On the other hand, such an appeal to the extreme confines the relationship between self and others, and the interpretation of authenticity may eventually advantage local citizens only. To avoid the pitfall of cultural essentialism, Kapsaskis (2012a:7) suggests that authenticity be defined as "a privilege accorded not only on the basis of local attachments but also on that of the ability to be critically conversant with foreign and global realities and vocabularies."

Murai (2012) examines the ideologies behind the editing and selection of stories from various cultural communities in two fairy tale collections, Andrew Lang's *Fairy Books* (1889–1910) and Angela Carter's *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (1990–1992). Murai explores her inquiry into what counts as authenticity, for whom, and for what purpose, by looking into how the editors of the two fairy tale collections chose and modified stories in order to represent the ideal cultural "authenticities." The two collections reveal two distinctive editorial methods of forging national identities. Andrew

Lang held the view that there was a universal authenticity; thus, he attempted to underscore the identical cultural and linguistic elements across stories and homogenized them by smoothing out the differences. He rewrote the stories, destroyed the original authors' writing styles, and tailored each story to the traditional oral tradition. Angela Carter, in contrast, applauded each folktale for its characteristics and incorporated the "unofficial" voices opposed to the oral conventions. Carter highlighted authors' distinctive styles and preserved the variations originating from different local cultures.

4.5 A Cry for Annotation

There have been debates over whether or not audiences need annotations in Chinese subtitles. Audiences are concerned about when subtitlers should add annotations and how to present them so as to minimize interference with Chinese subtitles by using different combinations of font sizes, separate lines, and spatial arrangements on-screen. In Paste Bar zone (Tieba), netizen Zijojo posted an article in 2008, appealing to subtitle groups to add annotations for jokes, humorous points, and punch lines in U.S. TV programs and expressing the hope that subtitlers would add background knowledge and write their own comments on the English dialogue. Although audiences can look up the intended meanings on Baidu, Zijojo writes, the subtitlers' annotations "help a lot" (*taishouyongle* 太受用了) because subtitlers themselves are audience members and think from audiences' perspectives. Zijojo concludes, "Subtitle groups' annotations are often funny; without them, the English jokes rarely trigger my laughter."

The article continues to receive enthusiastic responses. Commenter Wawa watched a Chinese-subtitled episode of a U.S. TV program without annotations and later

watched another version with annotations provided by the other subtitle group. Wawa's understanding of the original dialogue turned out to be very different from that of the translators. "I looked them up on Baidu. The translators are correct. Without annotations, I could only try to understand the TV program on my own. But how far I could go?" Commenter Cartonw writes, "Subtitlers are diligent and attentive to their translation texts. I make a pause bottom every time an annotation appears. I do not waste a chance for expanding my mind and broadening my view." Commenter YuJong writes, "I have a good understanding of U.S. TV programs, and I do not think subtitle groups' annotations are always right, but I like to know how others think about stories and names that are not familiar to our culture." Commenter SunWide expresses appreciation for translators' extra effort in creating annotations, writing, "I feel that they (subtitlers) are speaking to me at exactly the right moments when the Chinese subtitles do not make sense to me."

Some audiences hold a reserved attitude and different opinions on what needs to be annotated, for example, jokes, jargon, guest actors, or historical stories. To commenter Leon, annotations are good but should not appear extensively. Only difficult humorous points need explanations. Likewise, commenter Win1299 suggests that not every utterance accompanied by canned laughter deserves annotation. Sometimes characters talk rubbish, and not getting the nonsense is what makes it laughable. It is thus unnecessary to add annotation in such a situation. Only dialogue containing cultural references demands extra explanations. Commenter Newblack contends that although most annotations are helpful, they interrupt the viewing process. "It is difficult to read many characters in seconds. I just let annotations go if I do not feel like playing back the video program."

Annotations are contested because they impose a moral authority on the interpretation (or understanding) of U.S. TV programs and movies. Commenter Mybox feels uncomfortable with being instructed on how to think about jokes and insists that subtitles should not include whatever is not materially present in English conversations, even though the extra notes may carry relevant knowledge. Likewise, commenter Savi notes, annotations usually ruin jokes; even if they do not, they represent subtitlers' personal takes on jokes. "I know that subtitlers share their perspectives out of goodwill even though they do not need to do so. But I prefer to read the original and make my own interpretation."

Two values are central in audiences' discussion of annotations: objectivity and knowledge. Viewers are deeply concerned that subtitlers create an annotation that represents knowledge—either information relevant to the subtitled programs or translators' personal perspectives or opinions—in appropriate ways that contribute to their viewing process. Creating annotations is a process of double translation: first, translating text from English to Chinese and, second, communicating the meaning of the text in one sociocultural matrix into the equivalent in another sociocultural matrix while narrating the rendering process. By lending their voices to audiences through their annotations, subtitlers act as agents mediating among source-language and target-language cultures, global forces, and local realities. In subtitle groups, translators have unparalleled freedom in their translations because they are unofficial volunteers. The mediating role of translators, in conjunction with what Michael Cronin terms "the taboo about ... the mediated nature of our existence" (Kapsaskis 2012b:177), accounts for the use of annotation in the cultural translation of U.S. TV programs and movies. Audiences'

comments reveal different dimensions of subtitlers' agency as revealed in several types of annotations made during the process of translating linguistic and cultural complexity.

4.6 Responses to Different Types of Annotations

As noted earlier, information-providing annotations are intended to serve as neutral representations of knowledge, while commentary annotations are intended to convey subtitlers' stances. The two types of annotations evoke distinct reactions from audiences. Information-providing annotations arouse largely positive responses, while reactions to commentary annotations are mixed.

Information-providing annotations

I categorize information-providing annotations into three types: cultural information annotation, language information annotation, and cross-reference information annotation. Cultural information annotations offer background knowledge deemed essential to understanding story lines and English dialogues. These annotations elucidate a variety of references unfamiliar to Chinese audiences, including names, jargon, music performed by characters, political affairs, social events, historical allusions, mythological stories, and anything assumed to be unfamiliar to Chinese audiences. An annotation from the subtitled program *30 Rock* (season 7, episode 3) is a good example. In Figure 4.3, Jack, who is a womanizer, encounters one of his girlfriends, Zarina, while he is with someone else. He then tries to explain his duplicity to Zarina and justify his relationships with multiple women.

30 Rock S7E3

Jack: Look, I know this is awkward. But we never said we were exclusive.
And like a silver-backed gorilla or Mitt Romney's grandfather,
I require more than one woman to...

Zarina: Jack, I understand.

Figure 4.3. Chinese-subtitled *30 Rock*, S7E3, “And like a silver-backed gorilla or Mitt Romney's grandfather,” from Fengruan Group.



Line 2 is the Chinese subtitle, which literally translates the original utterance, “And like a silver-backed gorilla or Mitt Romney's grandfather.” Line 1, the annotation, reads, “Mitt Romney was a U.S. presidential candidate. He is a Mormon. Mormons practiced polygamy.” Here, the subtitler provides his or her perspective on this utterance by mentioning Mitt Romney's religious background and the association of polygamy with Mormons.

Language information annotations clarify idiomatic phrases, colloquial expressions, jargon, variations such as African American English, and puns or wordplay

based on linguistic structures of English. In *Two and a Half Men* (season 10, episode 8), Lyndsey wants a serious commitment from Alan. She asks if they have a future. Puzzled and unprepared for this, Alan tries to avoid the issue and dodges the question.

Two and a Half Men S10E8

Lyndsey: Do we have any kind of future?

Alan: Of course we do. Things are good. Things are great. Why rock the boat?

Figure 4.4. Chinese-subtitled *Two and a Half Men*, S10E8, “Why rock the boat?” from Fengruan Group.



The Chinese subtitle (line 2) reads, “We get along very well. Why are you asking this?”

Rather than translating “Why rock the boat?” word for word, the subtitler translated the hidden meaning of the idiom and found the closest equivalent in Chinese expressions.

The subtitler seemed to be aware that audiences might hear the expression “Why rock the boat?” from the original soundtrack and have questions about it. The subtitler thus added

the following annotation (line 1): “‘rock the boat’ is an idiom. It means ‘asking for trouble.’” This explanation is intended to help audiences understand why the Chinese translation is as it is. It also distills the dynamic between Lyndsey and Alan from the Chinese subtitles, namely, she brought up a topic that disturbs a situation that is satisfactory to Alan.

Cross-reference information annotations explicate characters, events, and plots mentioned in other media programs, including earlier episodes of the same TV program, other TV programs, or movies. The annotations are not so much about the linguistic composition or culture-bound elements; rather, they provide knowledge from other media programs that is essential to understanding how the references fit into the context of current conversation. In *Modern Family* (season 4, episode 1), on Jay’s birthday (middle, Figure 4.5), his friend Phil (on the left) surprises him by “kidnapping” him to go fishing with another friend. On their way to the fishing spot, Phil and the friend talk about growing beards. The friend tells Phil that he would look like Jon Hamm if he grew a beard.

Modern Family S4E1

Friend: Come on, you got a great nose, those deep-set eyes. I mean, you would look good.

Phil: Thanks, Shorty.

Friend: It’s, uh, sort of a Jon Hamm in between projects.

Figure 4.5. Chinese-subtitled *Modern Family*, S4E1, “It’s, uh, sort of a Jon Hamm in between projects,” from Fengruan Group.



Line 2 is a straight translation of the original, “It’s, uh, sort of a Jon Hamm in between projects.” The subtitler kept the English name *Jon Hamm* in the subtitle and added an annotation underneath the subtitle (line 1) remarking that *Jon Hamm* refers to “the actor who stars in *Mad Men*.”

Chinese audiences appreciate information-providing annotations from subtitle groups. As evidenced below, they admire subtitlers’ efficiency in providing detailed annotations along with translations shortly after the TV programs are released in the United States:

01. Lang 1010 (8-1-2011):

The annotations are products of strong teamwork. The translators work with the common belief that mutual assistance makes better quality. One translates, for example, and the others edit the translation work or provide relevant information for the subtitle. Through their efforts, they circulate the knowledge. I benefit greatly from subtitle groups' work. They teach me about many cultural references presented in popular U.S. TV programs.

02. Scott 92 (9-22-2011):

I am often amazed by subtitle groups' annotations. Are the translators living Wikis? How do they have so much knowledge? They explain the difficult words, even the random store names in the background. And they know which words need explanation. By reading subtitle groups' translations, I feel like there is no distance between me and American popular culture.

03. Muter (4-5-2012):

The annotations amaze me. The subtitle groups are think tanks of brilliant minds. Recently I saw the movie *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*. I went to a movie theater and checked out a DVD from Blockbuster. I also watched a different version on the Internet. Guess what? The official subtitles are wrong for several utterances. For example, "I keep thinking how much I'm going to miss the cricket in Moscow." The official translation for this line is that the speaker will miss Moscow's cricket, whereas the subtitle group's translation is that the speaker will miss England's cricket when he is back in Moscow. The subtitle group is correct. It also added an annotation, saying that cricket is England's popular summer sport.

04. Aboolou (5-8-2012):

The translators are getting more and more professional. Look at the annotations they add to the subtitles. You take a look and realize that the translators do much more than translate. I used to go to movie theaters, but now I prefer to watch the online versions provided by subtitle groups. It is not that much about saving money; rather, I learn more from subtitlers' translations. Sometimes I wonder why the movie companies don't hire subtitle groups and pay for their translation work.

Audiences think of subtitlers as a channel of knowledge transfer. The annotations convey a diverse range of knowledge that can be accumulated only by incredible intellectual effort, making subtitlers something like a web application (Wikis) or a "think tank." The practice of annotating embodies a can-do spirit in which subtitlers maximize their talent and capacity not only for translating U.S. media programs but also for putting knowledge into circulation. To audiences, annotations denote virtues: strong teamwork (01), mutual

assistance (01), being knowledgeable (02), providing the correct translation and knowledge (03), professional (04), and contributing more than is required (04). Appadurai (1983) writes that special codes and actors control the flows of goods and information between different cultural orders of value judgment. Translators in the subtitle groups play a similar role. They amplify the flows of knowledge across cultural boundaries and make cultural background knowledge comprehensible to Chinese audiences. As an audience member says, “I feel like there is no distance between me and American popular culture” (02). Annotations facilitate viewers’ understanding and construction of the intended meanings presented in U.S. media programs. Watching the underground versions of U.S. TV programs and movies is thus an issue of learning more rather than “saving money” (04).

The practice of annotating requires subtitlers to determine which English expressions may call for supplementary information, as an audience member mentions, “And they know which words need explanation” (02). The translators who choose to employ annotations make deliberate decisions on what is likely to be understandable to Chinese audiences and what is not. For instance, the subtitler of the film *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* assumed that cricket is unfamiliar to Chinese audiences and so produced a cultural information annotation for the original utterance, “I keep thinking how much I’m going to miss the cricket in Moscow.”

Audiences hold different opinions on what needs annotation. As the previous comments show, they disagree on what deserves their attention and subtitlers’ extra efforts. In other words, these decisions highlight the boundary between two languages and cultures by gauging Chinese audiences’ competence. It is noteworthy that my

colleagues in the subtitle group advised me that audiences like reading annotations even though they already understand the complexity of the sociolinguistic situation described in the media programs. This confirms the aforementioned comment “I have a good understanding of U.S. TV programs, and I do not think subtitle groups’ annotations are always right, but I like to know how others think about the stories and names that are not familiar to our culture.” Knowledge gained from one’s labor and the goodwill generated by sharing with others give a sense of authentic experience because audiences are invited into the translators’ “think aloud” process. They know how subtitlers think long and deeply on U.S. media programs before producing Chinese subtitles. Annotations offer an “experiencing” authenticity. To audiences, acquiring knowledge from annotations is paired with knowing how Chinese subtitles come into being. Annotations reflect not only new practical ways but also cultural insights into the nature and use of knowledge. Such a transformation provides impetus to the development of the value of authenticity.

Commentary annotations

Subtitlers document their affective stance (Ochs and Schieffelin 1989)—the emotions and emotional world attributed to the media programs—which is often closely related to the experience of translating the contents and the English discourses. Such notes constitute commentary annotations. They are usually not relevant to the subtitled programs; rather, they are like journal writing in which subtitlers share personal feelings and thoughts with audiences. The common topics of commentary annotations include big events in a subtitler’s life history (e.g., having a baby, passing a national examination),

holiday greetings to audiences, offering empathy during major events that draw nationwide attention (e.g., a devastating earthquake), and making a statement.

An example from *Criminal Minds* (season 3, episode 19) is a case in point.

Figure 4.6. Chinese-subtitled *Criminal Minds*, S3E19, from YyEts Group.



Figure 4.6 is taken from the beginning of an episode of the Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV program *Criminal Minds*. Line 1 reads “Criminal Minds, season 3, episode 19.” Each Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV program typically begins with nothing more than the name of the program, but in this case, the subtitler added information not relevant to the media program, as displayed in line 2: “Warm 08, China keeps going.” This subtitled program provided by YyEts group was released in May 2008, around the time a devastating earthquake struck Sichuan, a province in the southwest of China. The earthquake resulted

in more than 85,000 deaths and large-scale destruction, and Chinese citizens were engaged in the relief effort, which was unprecedented in the history of China since 1949.¹⁶ This subtitled program *Criminal Minds* (season 3, episode 19) was released at approximately the same time as the earthquake. The subtitler wrote the note “Warm 08, China keep going” in response to the deep concern felt by every Chinese citizen in the aftermath of the disaster. Such an annotation generates emotional solidarity between translators and audiences.

In a personal blog, audience member Blade comments on this annotation as “a unique way that is probably available only in subtitle groups’ work to recollect my feelings about the earthquake months later.” Blade expresses appreciation for the subtitler’s warm regard for the Chinese people, an emotion he or she shares. “This kind of time-sensitive warmth is made possible only through the weekly updated subtitle group’s work. The translator is part of us audiences. He (or she) speaks to the Chinese people’s mind.” Apparently, annotation is regarded as a form of timely communication. The subtitlers employ annotations to address a collective concern in the society, an appropriate social gesture that connects the translators and their audiences. Such an expression of personal feeling makes the subtitler an approachable, “real person” to audiences. Compared to mechanical translation or the official translation provided by the

¹⁶ The Chinese Communist Party reacted to the disaster with unprecedented transparency, swiftness, and compassion. This unusually open reaction gave Chinese citizens an opportunity to participate in the relief effort. Xu (2011:18-19) observes that the earthquake coverage contained an emotional element with explicit exposures of “casualties, tragedies, and devastation,” and such reporting evoked overwhelming “waves of emotional expressions in discursive publics.” Scholars (Bedford and Faust 2010; Lai 2008) speculate and imply that it was the approaching Olympic Games held in Beijing in August of the same year that convinced the authorities to allow the unprecedented flow of news so that Chinese citizens and foreigners could share in the tragedy and take action.

state, such an annotation emanates the aura of authenticity and makes audiences feel that the translation “has a heart.”¹⁷

Erving Goffman (1959) convincingly demonstrates that people consciously manage their behavior in response to various social situations in order to create the most favorable impression of themselves in public interactions. They do this because they adhere to social norms in the hope of guaranteeing that social activities proceed smoothly. People represent variations of their true or idealized selves by performing and communicating the social roles they perceive as appropriate for themselves and others around them. For subtitle groups’ audiences, the value of authenticity lies in subtitlers being true selves rather than professional translators. The role of a professional translator demands different types of authenticity, but there is virtue in being a real person who shares one’s feelings. In exploring authenticity in music, Lindholm (2008:27) writes, “What is most crucial according to expressive romantics is not the authenticity of the instrument, but the degree to which the performer is able to convey the emotional essence of the music.” Commentary annotations shape the subtitlers as authentic selves who communicate their inner feelings to audiences.

Commentary annotations receive negative responses if they involve sensitive topics and translators’ personal opinions. Figure 4.7, taken from a Chinese-subtitled Japanese anime program, is an example of a controversial annotation.

¹⁷ I borrow the expression “has a heart” from Ochs and Schieffelin’s famous analysis “Language Has a Heart” (1989), about how affective markers saturate languages.

Figure 4.7. Chinese-subtitled Japanese anime *A Spirit of the Sun*.



Line 1 is the Chinese subtitle, which reads “In Asia, Taiwan as a country.”¹⁸ The annotation, line 2, at the top of screen reads “‘Taiwan as a country’ is fictional and exists only in dramas. Audiences should have a clear mind and distinguish stories from reality.” The subtitler voiced his or her opinion on the Taiwan issue¹⁹ and appeals to audiences to discern the difference between fictional stories in media programs and reality.

¹⁸ Please note that this subtitle is an unfinished sentence due to the segmentation of the video program.

¹⁹ The “Taiwan issue” is the political consequence of the Chinese Civil War (1946-1949), which concluded with the Communist forces of Mao Zedong triumphant in Beijing and the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek retreating to Taiwan. Since then, Taiwan’s political status has been controversial, hinging on whether it is an independent country or a territory of the People’s Republic of China, which denies Taiwan’s legitimacy as a country. Most Chinese citizens in China think that Taiwan is part of China and will be become part of China in the future.

To some audiences, such an annotation is repellent, because it interferes with their viewing experience and spoils their enjoyment of the programs. The imperative mood in the annotation “Audiences should have a clear mind and distinguish stories from reality” makes audiences feel obligated to accept the translator’s opinion. Audience member AllyHu responds to this annotation by saying, “This annotation is too political. Why should I care about the translator’s political stance?” Audience member O”O writes, “This annotation ... wow, it totally overshadows the original utterance.” Audience member Wittt writes, “Even though I agree with the translator that Taiwan is part of China, I do not think it is appropriate to add his opinion to the program.” Audience member BlackLagoon notes, “I am irritated. This annotation is a statement about the translator’s political ideology. But on what basis did he think he was entitled to do this? Should I be grateful that the translator is being ‘nice’ by merely adding a note rather than removing the original utterance?”

Such commentary annotations give the impression that subtitlers want to direct the audiences’ thoughts and restrict their imaginations. Of course, it is not the case that annotations completely control the ways audiences understand what happens on screen. Audiences are certainly able to independently find out the meaning intended by the media program or derive their own interpretations. As shown in the aforementioned feedback, audiences are cognizant of the distributed authority in the annotations. For example, audience member BlackLagoon lashes out at the subtitler’s instructions to think about a political issue by saying in an ironic tone that the translator was being nice enough that he or she did not omit the original line altogether: “Should I be grateful that the translator is being ‘nice’ by merely adding a note rather than removing the original utterance?”

Annotations may not control audiences' interpretative agency, but they do shape a different reading of the media text. Although audiences are free to give alternative meanings to the program discourses, commentary annotations that carry a demanding tone of voice interfere with audiences' viewing, forcing them to accept the annotations as part of the media texts.

Despite the critical responses to commentary annotations that convey subtitlers' personal opinions on controversial topics, some audience members attach value to the authentic expression of such commentary annotations.

04. Aboo (4-15-2010):

This translator speaks his mind. That is it. He shared with us his true feelings through his translation. He has no responsibility to please everyone through his translation or annotation. He already offered volunteer translation. How could we deny his emotional connection with his work?

05. K-lau (6-8-2010):

Translators have their own feelings. We should not deny it. The subtitled programs are their products. It is kind of unreasonable to ask them to hide their feelings, isn't it?

Commentary annotations that express a subtitler's instinctive and spontaneous reflections are seen as reality free of artifice. The emotion generated by the translation process is the subtitler's immediate response to the subject. Even though the content of the annotation is contentious, the blunt expression of one's personal thoughts, no matter how ugly or flawed, gives off the aura of authenticity. Authenticity then becomes associated with an attitude of openness and frankness. Goffman (1959:121) observes that "defecation involves an individual in activity which is defined as inconsistent with the cleanliness and purity standards" that govern our public performance. The "secrets" of our public performance are often visible in settings that serve as backstage regions. Goffman writes (1959:121), "Such activity also causes the individual to disarrange his clothing and to 'go

out of play,' that is, to drop from his face the expressive mask that he employs in face-to-face interaction. As the same time it becomes difficult for him to reassemble his personal front should the need to enter into interaction suddenly occur." People choose to display either "onstage" or "backstage" behaviors by revealing or concealing the full and true information to or from our interlocutors. So do subtitlers. Audience member Aboo, for example, thinks of the subtitler not only as a person who translated the English conversations, "person front," but also beyond the "person front" to the "real person." When subtitle groups' audiences watch the subtitled programs, they expect to gain knowledge from the subtitles and also learn about the subtitlers. How subtitlers construct the Chinese translation texts and how they reflect on the subtitles are crucial for audiences if they are to get a real sense of knowing the subtitlers. Subtitlers' expressivity turns their emotions into public writings. Some audiences consider that to be a discourse of translators' authenticity in which they are being themselves.

4.7 The Dialectic of Objectivity and Authenticity

The previous sections have shown how audiences debate and celebrate annotations. The tension between objectivity and authenticity exists in both types of annotations. Audiences expect subtitlers to present relevant knowledge in an appropriate manner so that information-providing annotations convey the authentic flavors of U.S. popular culture and English dialogue represented in U.S. TV programs and movies. Audiences also want to see into the subtitlers' working process by finding out how subtitlers feel and think about the English discourses but depreciate translators' judgments and opinions. Ochs and Capps (2001) advance the notion that narratives

contain tension between coherence and authenticity. In telling stories, people are motivated by two conflicting forces: first, coherence, the desire to create a single story line out of multiple episodes in order to present an organized account of their experience, and, second, authenticity, the tendency to recount all the events that happened and how they were experienced. Ochs and Capps conclude that the pursuit of a coherent logic of events, that is, “the desire to sheathe life experience with a soothing linearity and moral certainty” (2001:56), is more likely to dominate in narratives composed by a single speaker. They observe that “imbuing an experience with a linear causal and temporal structure and conventional moral stance is the goal of many narrative interactions” (ibid.).

Subtitled Nanfan, who has translated the U.S. animated sitcom *Family Guy* for years, usually spends two days translating one forty-minute episode. She says:

Two full days for forty minutes ... I did a lot of research. I always added annotations where I thought necessary. I removed some afterward. And then I added them back but may delete them again. Deciding when and how to add annotation is tough. Sometimes you just have to explain the difficult points. The only thing I could do is not overdo it and keep the annotations short and clear.

Nanfan describes her annotating practice as a series of repetitive additions and deletions. The sense of inevitability reminds me of Bourdieu’s notion of habitus (1980, 1984). After many years of participating in Fengruan Group, Nanfan has been socialized into the norm that guides her emotions, thoughts, and actions as a translator. Nanfan and I are in the same subtitle group, and we received the same training, so just as I was advised to add annotations to English utterances that could be difficult for Chinese audiences, her translating practice is also shaped by the group’s translation protocol. Her only concern is finding the balance between an adequate amount of annotation and a concise translation discourse. In addition, her habitus is reinforced and reproduced under another condition:

audiences' self-initiated efforts to increase their knowledge of references related to U.S.

TV programs and movies. Nanfan mentions:

Some audiences work together to translate *Family Guy*. I sometimes visited Paste Zone in Baidu to read their translation work. They do a good job. Of course there are some mistakes. But I check their work especially when I do not get the jokes and when I do not know how to expound the difficult things. The audiences are pretty good at those things. Their analysis of punch lines and sarcasm helps. I also searched foreign websites. I don't know much about the U.S. politics, novels, or movies that are being played with in *Family Guy*, so it is a challenge. Not just to me but also to others. Many subtitlers translated an episode or two and then gave up. ... Google and Wiki are good resources. I am telling you that it takes a team to figure out all the implied meanings.

The boundary between translators and audiences becomes blurred because they switch roles. She refines her translations and annotations by learning from enthusiasts and collecting knowledge on the Internet. Audience members, rather than waiting for the subtitle groups' translation work, embark on their own interpretations. The pursuit of a detailed analysis of U.S. popular culture extends to audiences. The devoted, spontaneous, and individual acts of inquiry into the linguistic-cultural complex in U.S. popular media programs convey a collective desire for authenticity in translation and apprehension.

Lindholm's study (2008) indicates that governments' official narratives in constructing music or dance as an authentic group consciousness often homogenize the performance. Personal expressivity disappears "as the rumberors go through their highly skilled, but soulless and repetitive, motions in order to preserve the form that has been designated as authentic" (2008:94). The authenticity craved by the subtitle community is unique in that everyone is entitled to articulate what he or she thinks is the most accurate and precise interpretation of the materials in the media programs. The subtitlers may be wrong, but the audiences may be wrong, too. Authenticity is not given by the authorities; it emerges through positive competition, mutual learning, and constant debate.

There is a discrepancy between the types of cultural references translators and audiences think need annotations. Creating appropriate annotations is thus symbolic capital that represents one's understanding of, and empathy for, audiences composed of different social groups in China. Subtitler Tien says:

My judgments on what expressions need annotations are based on experience. It is a rule of thumb. I do not think I know anything better than other people. If I get stuck on a sentence and need to do research for a better understanding, I assume audiences need the same thing. It is indeed very subjective. I take myself as the norm since there is no other measurement. But it is also objective, for I regard myself as part of the audience. In a way, it is not me as a translator who decides to add or not add annotations, but it is me as an audience member who does so.

Bourdieu (1986) introduces the notion of capital and extends its meaning beyond material assets to capital that may be social, cultural, or symbolic. Creating a suitable annotation that meets most audiences' expectations requires the social capital of linguistic and cultural competence with U.S. and Chinese cultures and a precise evaluation of audiences' linguistic and cultural competence with both cultures. This process involves framing, forming, interpreting, and translating. The capacity to transform knowledge into an annotation comes with experience and time spent learning the disposition of Chinese youth and young adult audiences. Considering the lack of an objective guideline for annotations, subtitler Tien takes herself as the base line, that is, she attributes her comprehension of U.S. TV programs and movies to audiences. The assumed intersubjectivity between herself and audiences establishes the legitimacy of annotations, because decisions are based on the audiences' perspective rather than the subtitler's analysis. This standard is ambiguous, as Tien admits. If a subtitler is short on subtitling and annotating experience or does not have enough knowledge about the audiences' background, he or she may add inadequate annotations.

Subtitler GreenFa formulates a different principle. He adds annotations only when the English utterances are so difficult that no one would be able to understand them without an explanation:

You never know what audiences want. To be on the safe side, I avoid adding annotations. I always remind myself that subtitles are for the public. The less personal style, the better the subtitle. I am thinking for audiences. The best thing I think a subtitler can do is to give audiences some room to think. A subtitler does not have a right to interfere with audiences, not even for the purpose of helping them. Annotations have an impact on audiences' interpretations. It is not good.

GreenFa holds that annotations always interfere with audiences' viewing and reasoning processes. The authenticity of translation is to do nothing but faithfully render English utterances and cultural references into Chinese cultural contexts. Annotation is conceptualized as a product in the private domain as opposed to Chinese subtitles that are "for the public." To GreenFa, a translator's use of annotations denies objectivity, which can be sacrificed only for abstruse English texts. The morality of translators thus requires that their Chinese subtitles represent the unmediated voices of the U.S. media programs as authentically as possible.

4.8 Authenticity Issues in Chinese Society

In a casual conversation, a subtitler mentioned that she has been thinking about quitting the subtitle group for a while. However, every time she hears about the wholehearted support of audiences, she gives up the idea. "I do not want to let them down. Their expectations are high, and their acclaim is too much. I just try my best to translate. But they talk as if we subtitlers are living Lei Fengs (*huo Lei Feng*) (see Section 1.1, "Overview"). Journalist Mandy Zuo, in a newspaper article titled "Lei Feng's Spirit of Serving Others Has Lost Its Appeal" (2013), delineates how contemporary Chinese

people find it difficult to relate Lei Feng to their lives, as they are more concerned with the pursuit of material and practical rewards, such as salaries, than the virtue of helping those in need. Newly elected Chinese leaders also held up Lei Feng at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's most important political meeting where current leaders make policy announcements, in November 2012.

Journalist Tania Branigan interviewed Tao Dongfeng, a professor in cultural studies at Beijing Normal University, who attributed the resurgence of Lei Feng to the state's growing concern about social and moral disorder. Branigan writes (2013), "'From the top to the bottom of society, we all feel morality has declined,' said Tao, citing the public despair last year when a video showed passersby ignoring a two-year-old who had been crushed by a truck. 'They hope to change the situation through Lei Feng.'"

What are the disappearing values that audiences expect subtitle groups to uphold? The comments from audience members quoted above indicate a wide variety of qualities: diligent, autonomous, competent, informed, skilled, efficient, sincere, and authentic. I want to center on authenticity, as it is especially pertinent to annotations. The previous analysis has shown that annotations reveal authenticity in two dimensions. First, authenticity refers to subtitlers' aspirations and efforts to provide a translation text with cultural annotations apprehensible to audiences with contemporary China's linguistic and social background. Second, authenticity denotes audiences' experience in both "front" and "back" regions: the front region represents the contrived experience, that is, well-done Chinese subtitles, while the back region represents the intimate experience, that is, annotations that show subtitlers' thinking process.

An audience member's feedback on annotations further relates authenticity to the current social environment in Chinese society by contrasting subtitle groups' practice with the member's experience with other issues.

0.6. HeGe (9-22-2012):

I grew up with subtitle groups. I am not exaggerating. When subtitle groups began to emerge, I was in the second year in high school. I witnessed how they have evolved. I am amazed by how they improve on the quality of translation. In earlier times, mistakes were common. But they make good subtitles nowadays. ... They even tell you the origin of the English words. I also admire the ways they manage themselves. They make themselves an open community so that even audiences can participate in the discussion. For example, we can vote on which TV program we want to see for next year. ... Subtitlers show how they think about the programs, they explain why they translate sentences this way or that way, and many others. They are frank and honest with audiences about their activity, their working process, their sources, probably everything except for their real names. Where else can you get such things in our society? Only with subtitle groups.

Audience HeGe does not specify the issues in Chinese society that offer a sharp contrast to subtitle groups' transparent management and translating practices. However, the mention of frankness, openness, and honesty strongly suggests the "trust issue" (*chengxin wenti* 誠信問題) in modern Chinese society. Widely reported in Chinese and foreign media, *chengxin wenti* has caused public concern about the damage, cost, and violence caused by untrue and fake events (Liu 2012; Moore 2011; Ng 2011), adulterated and unsafe food (Huang 2012; Knight et al. 2005; MacLeod 2012; Pierson 2011; Yan 2012), counterfeit and fake-brand products (Chow 2000; Clifford 2010; Trenwith 2011), trustworthy and dangerous strangers (Callick 2011; Fei 1981[1948]; Goodman 2011), and lack of confidence and trust in the government (Li 2012; Wong 2011).

In a newspaper article titled "Legacy of Distrust through the Ages," Lo (2012) mentions that China as a low-trust society has historical and cultural roots (Fukuyama 1995; Govier 1997; Lewis 1996; Lin and Si 2010; Wang and Yamagishi 2005). In

traditional Confucian culture, *guanxi* (關係), or relationships and social networks, is a very important aspect in every context of China. For example, family-run businesses rarely hire nonrelatives. Trust is replaced by distrust of people who are not kin. The situation of low trust, however, has been aggravated by the market reforms launched under Deng Xiaoping's leadership in 1978. Since then, China has undergone dramatic changes that have affected the lives of Chinese citizens in multiple ways. In the post-socialist transformation, China's economic development has experienced almost double-digit growth for more than thirty years (Chow 2004; Lau et al. 2000; Song et al. 2011; Zhu 2012). The social cost of China's rapid economic success is tremendous and has resulted in a number of problems: the gap between rich and poor, rising prices, distrust, pollution, and corruption. In *China Daily*, a widely discussed article commented that China is in an age defined by a decided lack of trust (He 2013). According to *Blue Book of Social Mentality* released by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in January 2013, trust among people in China dipped to a record low, with less than half the respondents to a recent survey feeling that most people can be trusted, while only about 30 percent trusted strangers. Distrust has increased among different classes and social groups.

In this atmosphere of mistrust, Chinese people are mindful of what is claimed to be real, original, and authentic. A web search of the Chinese words for authenticity, *shenshi* (真實) or *zhenshi-xing* (真實性), displays people questioning authenticity on all kinds of issues. Chinese citizens have doubts about government, law enforcement, and judicial agencies at the grass-roots level, and they doubt the level of authenticity in the advertising, housing, food, pharmaceutical, tourism, and catering industries. In an article on the Chinese government's huge campaign for the 2008 Olympic Games held in

Beijing, Ohannessian (2008) discusses rumors that the opening ceremony was faked with computerized special effects to present a different televised ceremony to the world. He concludes the article by saying that “China has a problem with authenticity.”

In present-day China, the subtitlers’ annotating practice stands for a spirit of authenticity. Chinese audiences admire the translator’s genuine endeavor, which produces an authentic experience, and they trust the process by which Chinese subtitles come into being. The “production” process is transparent because subtitlers communicate their meta-thinking, that is, knowledge and stance, to their audiences. With their annotations, subtitlers create an aura that transforms audiences’ viewing experience into a participatory experience of translation.

4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined what subtitlers and audiences think of annotations in Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs and movies. Whether associated with values that are disappearing in Chinese society or with the debate over the extent to which audiences should be able to make independent judgments about the programs and have their own tastes and interests, all of these ideologies indicate that annotations are not just a linguistic choice. Rather, annotating is a moral act that epitomizes subtitle groups’ pursuit and dissemination of authentic information through translation. With the aim of providing an accurate rendering of the knowledge contained in U.S. media programs, subtitlers create annotations to present their understanding of the English dialogue and clarify the Chinese translation texts. For many audiences, annotations become an “illocutionary act” by which subtitlers escape the role of translator and become average

audience members who may get caught by some difficult English expressions.

While Chinese society has concerns about what is claimed to be authentic, subtitlers pursue the goal of facilitating cross-cultural and linguistic communication by sharing the thinking behind their translations. They not only enact the transparent production of knowledge but also invite audiences to propose different interpretations of the translation texts, annotations, and English dialogue. An accurate translation produced through selfless commitment and an open process has come to mean authenticity in the subtitle community. Annotations express authenticity in a dialogical way that enables subtitlers and audiences to learn from each other and enrich their understanding of U.S. popular culture. They do so by sharing their analysis of the linguistic and cultural codes in U.S. TV programs and movies and contributing their individual creativity toward rendering the most authentic translation for Chinese audiences.

Chapter Five

Intellectual Property and Chinese-Subtitled U.S. Media Programs:

Perspectives on Moralities from Subtitle Groups in China

5.1 Introduction

On International Protecting Consumers' Rights Day, March 15, 2012, the Chinese Writers Association in Beijing filed charges against Apple, suing the company for publishing its members' works in electronic form without permission and making them available in Apple Stores without paying either the publishers or the writers. Claiming that Apple's laissez-faire attitude toward copyright violations has caused them great loss of income, the writers decided to take a prominent stand by seeking substantial compensation through legal means. A social group composed of writers and professionals in the Chinese-language creative industry, the association is a government-affiliated organization operating within the Chinese Communist Party and serves as a state apparatus. While other organizations in China have taken similar actions against corporate giants, including Google and Baidu, for unlicensed scanning and reprinting of individual works, the confrontation between the Chinese Writers Association and Apple Inc. gained widespread coverage in the local and international press (Biriwasha 2012; Durfee 2012; Liu 2012; Wang 2012; Zha 2012). This is not only because Apple always seizes worldwide attention but also because there is something more politically sophisticated behind this drama.

This news story came to my attention during an interview with a Chinese subtitler conducted on the same day that the association filed the lawsuit. In response to

my inquiry on how she viewed China's policy on intellectual property becoming an increasingly complex and multifaceted issue, YuanYuan cited this story as an illustration of the Chinese government's stance: "It is just all for effect. The government wants to look good in the trade battle between China and the United States. It is common sense that pirated electronic books are made available and circulated by people. Not just Apple users but, I would say, most Chinese people know how to share music, books, and movies anytime anywhere. It is part of what I do every day when communicating with friends. I bet it is the same for others."

Since China joined WTO in 2001, Chinese authorities have realized that it needs a strong intellectual property system if it is to participate in the global economy and have revamped intellectual property laws accordingly. Foreign thinking about intellectual property in China has focused on China's various "unfair" trade practices (Anderlini 2008; Castillo 2010). Protection of intellectual property is thus a hot-potato issue in China-U.S. relations, and China's enforcement has become a top business concern for foreign investors (American Chamber of Commerce 2011). Violation of intellectual property rights not only complicates China's international business development; it also hurts domestic companies and distorts competition by luring consumers with low prices and branding strategies. The Chinese government has been working to introduce the idea of intellectual property to the public in recent years, hoping to promote research and development by rewarding inventors and investors. However, academic studies and press reports have almost unanimously concluded that the campaigns so far have shown insignificant progress, if any (Chow 2000; Tribbey 2011; Wang 2004; Yu 2001) (see Section 5.4, "The Rampant *Shanzhai* Culture and the Can-Do Spirit").

The notion of intellectual property involves philosophical traditions of creativity and property, legal-economic policies, the social natures of knowledge, and the reality of personal autonomy and power. Coombe (1988:6) writes, “Intellectual property laws, which create private property rights in cultural forms, afford fertile fields of inquiry for considering social intersections of law, culture, and interpretive agency.” The expansion of digital technology has further stimulated a debate on the moral considerations related to intellectual property. With easy access to the Internet and software, fans are able to copy, circulate, and produce altered versions of copyrighted works. Scholars have examined how these activities may bring forth a new relationship between authors, publishers, and audiences (Downes 2006; Kelty 2008; Lipton 2002; Schwabach 2011; Tushnet 1997). While much has been written about legal doctrines, legislative reforms, and the operation of intellectual property protection, the place of intellectual-property-related moralities and ethics among fans receives less attention. What has been absent in much of the current scholarship is an inquiry into the morality of those who are in the shadow of the law.

In this chapter, I analyze the moralities of intellectual property developed by Chinese youth and young adults participating in subtitle groups. I examine the existence of the subtitle community as a moral enterprise, the reasoning that regulates the unauthorized use of U.S. media programs, and how subtitlers enact their moralities in everyday life. Anthropologists have investigated how people struggle to be moral subjects when, in Weber’s words (1946:147), “the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other.” The theme of making moral choices among competing values runs through the ethnographic literature. Laidlaw (2002)

observes that one's choice to act in certain ways within the frame in which one takes a stand is an essential criterion for determining one's reflective consciousness. Based on his research in Papua New Guinea, Robbins (2007) notes an incongruity between two contradictory values: a morality of freedom inspired by Western Christianity and a morality of reproduction grounded in local traditions and economic activities in which personal agency is closely tied to social hierarchies and relational networks. Actions taken in accordance with the beliefs of one system are regarded as immoral in the other; the difficult choice between "willfulness" and "lawfulness" makes life "a process of moral decision-making" (2007:310). Stafford (2010), through his reflections on his inappropriate venture to a funeral in rural Taiwan and his consequent treatment as "spiritually polluted" by local people, asks how to pursue a cultural account of people's moral judgments in the actual circumstances of life. The residents proposed ways of dealing with a foreigner, placing emphasis on Stafford's intention, his position as an outsider, and possible cures for his spiritual pollution. The light punishment he received provokes him into thinking about the ways in which punishments enforce the conventional moral order, especially when the reason for punishment is often, "in fact, ethical behavior from the point of view of those who are punished" (2010:205). In an article written in response to Stafford's analysis, Baker (2010) sharply points out that ordinary people are concerned with not only whether an action is right or wrong but also whether the reasons for supporting or opposing that action are moral or ethical. Baker calls moral deliberation on what to do or not to do "meta-ethical thought, whose object is the structure, or structural elements, of morality" (2010:226). Such thinking, as Lambek (2000:315) suggests, is itself morality, because morality, rather than a coherent, imposed

code, is “the forms and acts by which commitments are engaged and virtue accomplished—the practical judgments people make about how to live their lives wisely and well and, in the course of making them, do live their lives, albeit in the face of numerous constraints.”

In what follows, I briefly review the various frameworks of intellectual property, new media technology, and morality. This is followed by a section explaining why the idea of intellectual property did not develop in China throughout history. After that, I contextualize subtitlers’ moral reasoning in the well-sustained *shanzhai* culture in present-day China. The analysis shows that while some subtitlers perceive the Western concept of intellectual property as a foreign moral pressure imposed on China, others display both recognition of and resistance to it. I argue that regardless of their different opinions, subtitlers moralize their activities based on the conviction that Chinese youth and young adults want more information and instant access to foreign media programs, in spite of the state’s media monopoly, and that fulfilling this need is a public good. Such a morality honors an unofficial moral code that is parallel to official state policy.

5.2 Interdisciplinary Inquiry into Intellectual Property

In the Western context, intellectual property rights apply to “creations of the mind: inventions, literary and artistic works, and symbols, names, images, and designs used in commerce” (World Intellectual Property Organization 2002). Critical thinking questions the extent to which intellectual property rules can be implemented without leading to the creation of monopolies (Coombe 2004; Vaidhyathan 2001). Lemley (2005:1031) points out that in the United States, “if some intellectual property is

desirable because it encourages innovation, they reason, more is better. The thinking is that creators will not have sufficient incentive to invent unless they are legally entitled to capture the full social value of their inventions. On this view, absolute protection may not be available, but it is the goal of the system.” This belief reveals the view that the human mind, like other real property, generates wealth and justifies maximal protection by all means. Violation of intellectual property constitutes a moral failing that is no different from other criminal acts. Intellectual property protection, therefore, is considered a legal, statutory, and moral way of increasing innovation and boosting knowledge development.

In his study of Free Software communities, Kelty (2008:3) introduces the concept of a “recursive public,” that is, a public that is “vitaly concerned with the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal, practical, and conceptual means of its own existence as a public; it is a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives.” He suggests that it is this collective affinity that makes Free Software or other online communities proliferate, namely, the ability to modify and build work reorients the power and knowledge of authors and the public.

Richard Stallman, a software engineer and software freedom activist, launched a free software development project, the GNU operating system, in the 1980s. Based on the anti-copyright moral appeal that software should not be owned by anyone, Stallman proposed the philosophy of “copyleft.” According to this idea, an author is free to use copies of the program and his or her modified versions of that program. While a copyright restricts what people can do with their own copies of a product, a copyleft

restores their rights to modify and share it if they choose. Leonard (1998) writes, “Freedom, for Stallman, is a fundamental moral good.”

A number of law review articles examine the copyright implications of works by fans. Tushnet (1997) argues that fan fiction—stories written by fans about the characters or settings of the original work—should fall under the “fair use” protection clause of copyright law, because fan fiction entails productive labor that is not performed for profit. Schwabach (2011) asks whether or not fan fiction or fan arts constitute copyright infringement. He offers an insightful legal analysis, showing that while not all characters in a story are copyrightable, some fan work may be a derivative of the original story, and, furthermore, derivative fan work can be either an infringement or a fair use.

Lee (2010) explores the views of intellectual property held by Japanese anime fans who translate anime programs into English for audiences in the United States. The fansubbers acknowledge the right of the creators of the original anime and respect U.S. licensees’ ownership of exclusive rights to reproduce and translate the original anime. They operate in compliance with “A New Ethical Code for Digital Fansubbing” (Anime News Network 2003), which states that “only the first 4 or 5 episodes should be fansubbed in order to give a taste of the anime. . . . Distribution must stop the instant a license is announced.” As Lee remarks, anime fansubbers in the United States are aware of the ‘stop when licensed’ rule. However, as anime fansubbing becomes a matter of mutual interest across borders, the sociocultural conditions that vary from one place to another dilute the effect of the license rule.

5.3 Intellectual Property in China, Past and Present

Researchers have examined why China did not develop its own notion of intellectual property (Alford 1995; Han 2010; Li 2006; Li and Chang 2007; Zheng 2002; Zhou 2002). A thorough discussion is beyond the scope of this article; however, this section briefly outlines the major factors shaping the development of intellectual property system in China. Taking a historical survey, Alford (1995:2) argues that the unique “Chinese political culture” is the primary reason that the concept of intellectual property did not take hold in China. For thousands of years, Chinese governments prioritized information control at the cost of protection of property rights for individual authors and inventors. According to Alford, printing appeared in China in the Tang dynasty (618–907) and the imperial government’s stance, to allow minimal protection for printed materials, was similar to that of the Anglo-American legal system, that is, both originally used it to further their own ends. However, since the seventeenth century, patent and copyright laws in European countries have been transformed by state apparatuses in order to promote research and development by rewarding inventors. Such a paradigm shift did not occur in China; intellectual property continued to be held firmly in the hands of power and did not come up for legal reform. The Tang dynasty, for example, prohibited unauthorized printing of “state legal pronouncements and official histories, and the reproduction, distribution, or possession of ‘devilish books and talks (*yaoshu yaoyari*)’” (1995:13) in an effort to prevent people from having heretical thoughts that defamed or possibly subverted the government.

The idea of intellectual property was presented to the scholar-bureaucrats of the Qing dynasty in the mid-nineteenth century, when Western powers compelled China to

end its closed-door policy and open itself to foreign capital and cultures. As foreign economic investment expanded, charges of unauthorized use of foreign trade names and trademarks arose. Western missionaries appealed to Chinese officials to forbid unauthorized reprinting of their works. Nevertheless, copyright was considered a Western incursion on China, a privilege demanded by foreigners above and beyond their territorial and commercial aggression. Proponents also claimed that education in China relied on translating and introducing Western thought. A large number of intellectuals believed that intellectual property protection would limit young people's access to the latest developments in knowledge. There was also dissent within the scholar-bureaucrats' circle. Traditionally, Chinese intellectuals were recruited into the bureaucracy, where they served the emperors and the people, through a civil service examination system. The examinations placed importance on knowledge of the past, and exhibiting mastery of the subject in terms of both the issues and the solutions was considered evidence that candidates possessed the attributes needed to tackle the problems of the present. From the time students began their education, memorization and citation of a shared canon of classics were highly valued, and the moral cultivation of the intellectual was achieved through immersion in the classics (Elman 2000; Elman and Woodside 1994; Mun 2003; Yatsko 2000). This system of education lasted for centuries in China. Intellectuals who succeeded in the examination system went on to write about political affairs and took pride in seeing their writings adopted, circulated, and incorporated into policy making.

The succeeding Nationalist government enacted a new copyright law in 1928, but without adequate legal infrastructure and well-trained judicial personnel, its implementation was ineffective. The scholar-bureaucrat system collapsed along with the

demise of the imperial dynasty. Intellectuals had no choice but to write for a living. Without a sound legal system of copyright and a strong market, most writers merely scraped by. In 1949, the Communist Party came to power. The government recruited influential writers, musicians, playwrights, and artists into the Party, to serve as vehicles for propaganda. Most were employed at state agencies or state-controlled organizations. The government established a remuneration system as part of state economic planning. Writers received salaries based on standard word counts and the number of copies printed of their works. State patronage dominated cultural production and control, and authors did not retain the rights to their work. Under the socialist economic system, property belonged to the state and the people rather than to private owners. As Tiefenbrun (1998:37-38) notes, “The failure to reduce or eradicate piracy of intellectual property in China is also due to the serious misperceptions of the very notion of ownership by the Chinese people and by their government leaders. ... Owning property in a socialist society was tantamount to a sin.”

The remuneration system aimed to guarantee writers basic cost-of-living allowances and protection for their works, but it soon fell apart due to political turmoil. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), intellectuals were among the principal targets. They were to bear the brunt of these attacks, which included sessions of self-criticism and denunciation, parades through the streets, and exile to rural labor camps. Chinese citizens consequently developed contempt for authorship and payment for creative effort, as evidenced in a popular saying from that period: “Is it necessary for a steelworker to put his name on a steel ingot that he produces in the course of his duty? If not, why should a member of the intelligentsia enjoy the privilege of putting his name on

what he produces?” Even though Deng Xiaoping and other reformist leaders tried to rehabilitate the intelligentsia after the Cultural Revolution by enhancing their positions and facilitating their endeavors, these reforms have yet to cultivate sufficient respect for intellectual property rights.

Han (2010:344) observes that “the path of copyright in China displayed its proximity to power and its subordination to social hierarchies.” Throughout history, the state apparatus has overpowered authors’ autonomy, and its vision of civilization considers creativity to be a collective benefit to the public. Due to the collective psychology inherited from imperial China, there is little resistance to the demand that creative works be considered state property.

5.4 The Rampant *Shanzhai* Culture and the Can-Do Spirit

Beginning in 1978, the Party leader, Deng Xiaoping, carried out a series of reforms (see Section 2.1, “China’s Reforms in 1978”). The reform program provided economic incentives for private investment in China, created special economic zones along China’s southern coastline, and offered preferential treatment to joint ventures. Foreign companies found that it was most cost-effective to manufacture their products in China (and elsewhere in East Asia), because an abundant and cheap labor supply, low-cost land, quick turnaround times, and a huge consumer market attracted transnational investment and capital flows. Foreign companies provide the equipment, outsource production, and market the finished products under their brand names through their own distribution connections (Chen et al. 1995; Dees 1998; Huang 1995; Ma and Cheng 2005). Known as the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) model, it contributed to the

economic boom in special economic zones in China. The OEM model, as Hobday (1995:37) remarks, “evolved out of the joint operations of buyers and latecomer suppliers and became the most important channel for export marketing during the 1980s.” Hobday illustrates the reciprocal nature of the arrangement, as local factories supply goods to foreign companies upon request while acquiring experience with capital equipment and the training of laborers as well as advice on production, financing, and management, all of which help them overcome their disadvantages. Technological progress in newly industrialized countries is most likely to be achieved through interaction with foreign firms, and the learning process consists of borrowing and building on foreign designs rather than pioneering innovation (Amsden 1989; Goto and Odagiri 1997; Hobday 1995, 2001; Mathews 2002). Case studies have documented hundreds of firms in Asian countries that have undergone a similar learning process. As Hobday explains (1995:37), “By developing an institutional system of export-led technology development, the latecomer firms were able to assimilate, adapt and improve foreign technology.”

Chinese entrepreneurs, however, have taken it one step further. Following the logic of the OEM model, they learn from transnational companies but then go on to develop a new model that allows comprehensive and unlimited imitation of any type of product. Unauthorized reproduction of original products is incorporated into Chinese OEM culture and becomes the foundation for new enterprises across various industry domains. In 1992, China emerged as the largest recipient of foreign direct investment among the developing countries (Cheng and Kwan 2000). The OEM model has given rise to China’s vast array of branded, and even nonbranded, knockoffs, which are more conveniently available than the originals via all types of purchase channels. An emerging

term, *shanzhai wenhua*, which literally means “mountain fortress culture,” captures the essence of this phenomenon. The Chinese word *shanzhai*, which means “a small mountain village occupied by bandits,” has become synonymous with a culture of piracy, thievery, and infringement of rights. *Shanzhai* products are manufactured without approval from the authorities. Since the manufacturers of *shanzhai* products do not spend money on research and advertising, their counterfeits can match the quality of the real products and yet be sold at cheaper prices. One can easily buy all sorts of *shanzhai* goods, ranging from clothes, food, cell phones, and cars, to fake diplomas from *shanzhai* universities. While counterfeits have become a novel form of social violence, the majority of Chinese people choose to tolerate them, and some even take advantage of the situation. Counterfeits have also gone global, and the international press has dubbed China “the counterfeit capital of the world” (Trenwith 2011). Some countries in Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe claim that China is the main source of the fake products available in their domain markets (Chow 2000, 2010; Han 2008). The problem has sparked a public controversy over the impact of counterfeiting on individuals and on society as a whole. Opponents voice strong criticism of *shanzhai*, asking for legal and administrative bans. The government has addressed this issue by launching numerous campaigns cracking down on the production and distribution of counterfeits and other economic activities involving intellectual property violations. Chinese leaders also list the counterfeits issue as a critical item on their agendas in public speeches and position papers, emphasizing the importance of intellectual property protection as an economic

strategy. Notwithstanding these efforts, the problem remains widespread and entrenched.²⁰

The success of *shanzhai* items is fueled partly by prejudice against foreigners, mostly Westerners, who have been seen as political and economic imperialists. For many Chinese people, foreign power has meant unfair competition in which China was forced to participate and suffer humiliation. China's misfortunes since the nineteenth century have contributed to its fervent desire to overcome its inferior status and catch up with Westerners. Complex emotions, a mixture of craving foreign goods and feeling hostile toward foreigners for dominating China, find an outlet in the practice of counterfeiting foreign products. Most Chinese citizens admire *shanzhai* goods as embodiments of a can-do spirit that supplies them with goods of the same quality as the Western originals. Once a term associated with something cheap or inferior, *shanzhai* now indexes a certain

²⁰ The structure of the administrative apparatus for addressing legal values and political circumstances makes current attempts to establish intellectual property enforcement deeply flawed (Wang 2004; Zou 2002). Primarily, criminal penalties for counterfeiting are generally minor compared to the profits, if counterfeiters are convicted through court trials at all. Further, campaigns to combat counterfeits are a joint venture between the central government, local governments, and multinational corporations (MNCs). Local governments actually control enforcement operations, as they have the capacity to dispatch police and operate a system of court judges. On the other hand, ironically, however, most local governments collude with counterfeiters and those engaged in related crimes such as child labor and local smuggling. Some even have direct investments in counterfeit industries and retail stores that sell fake products. Counterfeiting can be the economic lifeline of an entire town because the traffic in counterfeits sustains legitimate businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and bus companies. Counterfeiting creates jobs and boosts the local economy; to some extent, it is a reliable, collective way of making a living for people in towns and villages. MNCs "are aware that the most serious hurdle to effective protection of their intellectual property is local protectionism, a form of government corruption, but they ignore or refuse to acknowledge the underlying problem" (Chow 2010:751). Most MNC managers are assigned to work in China for three to five years. They do not want to offend local governments or develop anti-counterfeiting strategies that will eventually require deep political reforms. Instead, MNC managers desire positive short-term statistics showing successful enforcement activities and confiscation of fake products that will facilitate their own promotions.

Chinese cleverness and ingenuity. Hu (2008:34) observes, this twist on the OEM culture reflects “an impulse to minimize the gap and time lag between China’s developing technology manufacturing and Western-style globalized consumerism in late modernity.” As one of the leading OEM-oriented economies, modern-day China is contending to prove that it is not just a subordinate manufacturer that accedes to the demands of the developed world. “Good quality, less money” deviates from the logic of the OEM model but provides psychological compensation for China’s victimization by foreign powers. This attitude has therefore engendered the culture of piracy that surrounds daily consumption, from ordinary commodities to luxury products.

It is under such conditions that Chinese citizens not only tolerate but support subtitle groups. It should be noted, however, that subtitle groups do not engage in *shanzhai* activities. The subtitlers are not counterfeiting; rather, they translate U.S. TV programs and break down the barriers of languages and cultures for Chinese audiences. Although subtitlers are in the shadow zone of appropriation, this distinction allows for moral rationalization, as between different values such as taking versus disseminating.

5.5 What Deserves Intellectual Property Protection

Although intellectual property issues have become a growing concern, some subtitlers do not think that it poses a risk on either a personal or a group level. Yi, a U.S.-based subtitler in charge of routine subtitling and recording of U.S. TV programs, expressed her indifference to protecting intellectual property. In a casual conversation on recently released Chinese-language movies, she mentioned that she disagreed with some directors who are calling on people to support copyrighted versions of movies. She

mentioned a director and commented that he is “good at making junk news just to be on the front page.” The junk news, according to her, is that, at the Beijing premiere of his film, the director held a press conference in which he called on audiences to go to theaters to see movies. The director was concerned that pirated DVDs and online circulation of clips recorded in theaters would have a negative impact on box office sales, explaining that if production costs cannot be met, no one will be willing to produce original work anymore, and when that happens, consumers would be the major victims. To Yi, talk of intellectual property is nothing but rhetoric aimed at protecting one’s own interests and an excuse for making profits. She does not believe that anyone should use the idea of intellectual property to obligate consumers to behave in a way that is considered “moral” or correct by writers or artists associated with the original productions. Yi’s viewpoint derives from her pessimism about the uncontrollable *shanzhai* culture:

Everything in China can be copied. If you buy a music CD, though I doubt if people still do it nowadays, it will be copied and circulated. I get free downloading access to music and movies every day. I do not know how I get them. The links are just sent to my mailbox. I do not even ask for it. It is very crazy, but they just come. You see, piracy in China is out of control and irrepressible. In a situation like this, people have got to get used to it. Think about ... hmm, just like air pollution in Beijing. The air is terrible, but you need air, right? So once you get used to the air pollution, you do not think the air is stinky. But the truth is, exactly because the air is very stinky, you have to train yourself not to feel or think about it. Why? To make your life easier.

Shanzhai culture not only provides consumers with alternatives but also configures an ideology that helps people reconcile themselves to their use of pirated products. The *shanzhai* culture is so ubiquitous, as indicated by the tone of surprise in Yi’s “I do not even ask for it. ... They just come,” that one may develop one’s own reason for living in compliance with *shanzhai*, but living without it has been off the agenda because it is “out

of control and irrepressible.” For Yi, a pragmatic way of reducing the conflict between violating intellectual property rights and seeing movies without paying for them is to accept the widely available free downloads but develop a moral justification for her behavior. The repetitive use of deontic modality (e.g., “have got to” and “have to”) indicates that the circumstances override the moral standards that adhere to intellectual property; instead, coping with the dominant *shanzhai* culture is the only feasible option. Refusing to accept “unfair” questions based on the conventional moral standard of intellectual property protection, Yi justifies the seemingly inappropriate practice of sharing media programs by conceiving of it as a moral entanglement in which one either participates or suffers rebuke from cynical critics. As Stafford (2010) discusses the questions of what constitutes moral thinking and to what extent deviant behaviors deserve punishment, the subtitler would probably respond that moral demands that pay little attention to prevailing social conditions are hypocritical, undesirable, and the least appropriate for determining (im)morality. Instead, a timely benign neglect of intellectual property rights signifies that the unauthorized circulation of media programs is tolerable in today’s political and economic climate in China. Interestingly, coping strategies in the Chinese society translate the logic of the legitimacy of authority as an importunate demand and that of the illegitimacy of piracy as a timely expediency.

Like Yi, a great number of Chinese young adults and youth embrace the view that intellectual property rights should be disassociated from the consumer’s obligation to pay for original entertainment products. During fieldwork, I constantly heard local friends comment that it is absurd that film producers want to “extort money from us” for bad movies that are not worth the unreasonably high price of theater tickets. Today’s

consumers in China have developed a carefully thought-out view of product values (Rein 2009; Springer 2011). They are flexible about finding various ways of filling their needs, and their purchasing behavior is governed more by practical and economic factors than by moral pressure based on the Western conception of intellectual property, which is deemed inapplicable to China's social conditions. Intellectual property protection, as many citizens perceive it, is a good idea that originated in the West and which the Chinese government has promoted vigorously in recent years in order to encourage indigenous innovation and elevate China to the level of civilized nations in the eyes of the West (Perkowski 2012). However, most people do not want, nor do they see a need, to be constrained by a moral commitment that eventually rewards capitalists who dominate the mass production of many goods. The Western notion of intellectual property protection is still a novelty that has yet to be incorporated into the Chinese moral regime. The question then arises, what functions should intellectual property perform in order to develop a culture of its own that could be integrated into China's socioeconomic structure? As our conversation moved from motive to intellectual property, Yi elaborated on her thoughts as follows:

Some signers still make money, and some movies still hit high box office receipts. If you think about the successful examples, is it reasonable to blame piracy for bad box office? Of course not. If a movie is good, people will be willing to support it. That will naturally bring profits to film directors. But, if a film is terrible and doomed to fail, why should I share the financial burden of it?

Yi does not think that the idea of intellectual property should be used to protect original works without regard for their quality. Instead, she believes that consumers have the right to determine which works deserve intellectual property protection. In other words, there should be an equal trade-off between protection and guaranteed quality. Yi reasons that

this may create incentives for artists and lead to an increase in high-quality works. This thought reflects the point of view that innovation should be protected in a more prudent manner; intellectual property would then figure appropriately in promoting consumers' willing respect for original works. Otherwise, while some Chinese citizens recognize the importance of intellectual property protection, most people have little sympathy for foreign companies or individual authors who complain about copyright infringements.

Some subtitlers believe that Chinese cultural thinking on knowledge and creativity is relevant to this Chinese version of intellectual property. Several major inventions are celebrated in Chinese culture for their historical significance and serve as examples of China's advanced science and technology in the imperial era. This glorious history bears comparison to the response of the current superpowers to the dissemination and utilization of knowledge. Subtitler Zhang says:

If Americans want to argue that Chinese people imitate their products, then I would like to talk about history with them. How about printing, the compass, and gunpowder? From where do they think they got those things? The ancient Chinese people invented them, and they were fine with the spread of these items. Maybe Americans think they are entitled to claim authorship of all original works in the world. That is unfair to other cultures. Everything that we use nowadays is based on older versions, which in turn are based on even older ones. The very sources are untraceable. How could Americans think they are so right about intellectual property?

This view challenges the Western cultural model of creativity in which intellectual property theory is grounded and that most members of Western cultures conceive of as true. In discussing the implicit beliefs behind the Western model of creativity—either proved correct or misleading by scientists, psychologists, and sociologists—Sawyer (2011) mentions one that is relevant to but the opposite of the traditional Chinese thinking on creativity illustrated in the above comment. In the West, creativity is seen as

the fruit or by-product of a process in which one departs completely from conventions and the past—that is, ignorance and rejection of prior art and knowledge allow creators to claim the maximum of inspiration and novelty. As Sawyer phrases this belief (2011: 2036), “Creative people blindly ignore convention; convention is the enemy of creativity, it blocks the pure inspiration welling up from the creative spirit.” This assumption remains part of the common thinking on the origins of creativity, even though it has been proved false by educational sociologists. Such a belief contrasts sharply with Chinese cultural logic, which maintains that innovation takes place within a network of previous experience, acquired knowledge, and cultural norms. In the old-fashioned system of Chinese education, children were required to memorize the classics and histories at a very young age. Word-for-word recitation, rote memorization, and a focus on absorbing the ancestors’ knowledge were standard. As the students grew up, they were mostly trained to be followers and conformists, as opposed to their Western-educated peers, who are oriented toward being leaders and innovators (Rudowicz 2004). Although modern Chinese education aims to avoid the many disadvantages of this Confucian-style teaching method, this system has consolidated its position as ideological orthodoxy over the thousands of years of civil service examinations. Throughout much of China, it is held that well-disciplined students should memorize as much knowledge as they possibly can, as one is incapable of intelligent thought without first obtaining enough basic knowledge. Of course, these two philosophical views on creativity are not absolute. Even so, subtitle Zhang’s comment on what qualifies as a really original invention underscores a way of thinking that is probably not found in Western culture, in which the intellectual property paradigm is defined.

5.6 Gaining Legitimacy through Their Subtitling Practice

A different part of the subtitle community recognizes intellectual property and the infringement implied in its unauthorized practices with U.S. TV programs and movies. These subtitlers articulate a moral discourse that aims to gain legitimacy through their passionate devotion to translating and disseminating Chinese-subtitled U.S. media programs. They master software operations, improve their English-language skills, develop subtitling proficiency, and sacrifice their time in order to construct authentic representations of U.S. media programs in a timely manner. By so doing, they give U.S. TV programs and movies a new face for Chinese audiences. The intention of these subtitlers—to spread American popular culture and provide a sustainable information resource—fulfills their commitment to the subtitle community. As one subtitler says, all she cares about is whether more people will be able to watch and enjoy the programs because of her subtitling; if that is happening, she can cheerfully ignore the vexing intellectual property issue, which casts a shadow on the subtitle community's reputation.

Many subtitle groups have found that companies that make pirated DVDs steal their translation texts. The merchants download the high-quality subtitled programs from the Internet, burn the video files to DVDs, add their company logos at the beginning and end of the programs, and then sell the DVDs through various channels such as online sales and street vendors. With its extremely low price, the commercialized pirated version sold underground is a popular counterpart to the work of the subtitle groups (see Section 2.2, “China's Openness on Media and the Popularity of U.S. Media Programs in the Chinese Market”). In other words, DVD merchants steal the subtitlers' intellectual property and profit from it. One consequence of the OEM experience in China is that

standard-quality computer-related products are inexpensive and readily available. With a computer and a cable, one can use the high-quality subtitled audiovisual files for any purpose, and there is no solution to the easy usurpation of online materials. Some subtitlers admit that they inadvertently and unfortunately encourage the pirated DVD industry in China, but they cannot do anything to stop the DVD merchants. Instead, they look on the bright side: even if people choose to get pirated DVDs rather than downloads from the subtitle groups' websites, as long as they benefit from the diverse cultural and linguistic knowledge provided by the translations, the subtitlers have achieved their objective of supplying more people with information. Paradoxically, although non-copyrighted DVDs carry out a "double piracy," they are understood by subtitle groups as a complementary approach to facilitating goodwill. Such tolerance expresses a desire for making U.S. media programs accessible to people in all walks of life and offers further evidence again that there is no clear-cut border in China between infringing on and appreciating someone else's work.

Subtitlers usually take responsibility for their translations by adding their identification codes and the name of their group at the beginning of the subtitled TV programs and movies in case audiences want to engage in discussion with them. Moreover, they add a statement explaining that their subtitles are for educational purposes only and that anyone who uses the subtitled program for commercial purposes is responsible for the consequences (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

Figure 5.1. First part of the statement from Fengruan Group in *Strike Back*, S2E7. The highlighted Chinese characters read “(This program) is for educational purposes only, so that (individuals) can exchange ideas about what they have learned.”



Figure 5.2. Continuation of the statement from Fengruan Group in *Strike Back*, S2E7. The highlighted Chinese characters read “No one can use this program in public places or for any commercial purpose. Any group or individual who does so will bear full responsibility for the consequences.”



While merchants usually remove this statement from their DVDs, they may or may not remove the subtitle groups' names and the subtitlers' identification codes. This may give the impression that subtitle groups are profiting from selling pirated DVDs, but Fon, a senior subtitler, is confident that the public knows that benefit-seeking behaviors are not accepted within the subtitle community. He says:

Most subtitlers are well disciplined. That is what we are famous for, apart from our translation work. If you look around the Internet, you will see some netizen delivering a blast at those who sell pirated U.S. movie or TV program DVDs, but subtitle groups rarely get involved. Why? We share but ask for no return. I am aware of the vulnerable position of subtitle groups. I know how bad it could get. So I am extra careful in order to maintain the good image of my group. It is sort of funny, but, you know, I do not always behave well in school, but when it comes to my role as a subtitler, I follow my group. This is the only way to distinguish us from other *shanzhai* stuff that aims to make money.

Referring to the morality of his dedication to subtitling and his observance of his group's social protocol, Fon asserts that there is a critical distinction between subtitlers and others involved in *shanzhai* business, and he believes society perceives it as well. Subtitle groups manage to work through the growing criticism of *shanzhai* by developing a particular ethos of unselfish devotion paired with diligent participation. While these two values have gradually disappeared among the younger generations in China, so that egoism has become extreme and everyone seeks personal benefit (Yan 2009, 2012), subtitlers embody these virtues through their actions of translating and disseminating knowledge as volunteers. The spirit of sharing with no thought of profit earns the public's admiration and immunizes subtitlers against harsh criticism for intellectual property infringement. Treating their role of subtitler as separate from their everyday lives, subtitlers perform "embodied dispositions" (Zigon 2009), that is, devotion, modesty, and self-command as implicated in their habitus behaviors. The morality they enact enables

them to demonstrate that their actions in this legal gray area are undertaken solely for the betterment of many.

One subtitler shared with me his story of becoming a subtitler and his efforts to work on the moral self. Jia, a lawyer in China, has been engaged in subtitling for more than three years. As his group focuses on TV dramas about criminal and civil litigation, Jia spends considerable time translating and communicating with other members about the legal concepts in the show as well as in Chinese society. He recounts:

In the very beginning, before I was in the group, I actually did not think too much. I simply thought it was a shame that Chinese people have no chance to see good U.S. television programs. It was really a pity that good legal dramas like *The Practice*, which my group works on, do not get a chance. I have been watching it intermittently for years by downloading non-subtitled versions from foreign websites. At some point, I wanted to do something so that people who are fans of legal dramas like me would not have to go through the trouble of getting the video files from the Internet and understanding English. The initial motivation for me to join the subtitle group comes from personal unpleasant experiences like this, I mean, spending hours to get access to the files and then hours to understand a forty-minute episode. I wanted to spare others the time-consuming process, if I could.

Jia describes himself as not thinking too much before joining the subtitle group because he took it for granted that he should help others by translating and making the videos conveniently available. Framing it as a shame or a pity (*kexi* 可惜), Jia was frustrated by the limited or even nonexistent access to good U.S. TV programs for the Chinese, as people need technical know-how or good luck to find video files. He conceives of this constraint not as something personal and private but as a social obstacle that prevents people from obtaining information that may benefit them as individuals or may benefit society in general. Grounded in his own experience of the great inconvenience involved in finding these TV shows, Jia's decision was motivated by the desire to save others time

and effort. For this reason, he did not even think of his subtitling activity as potentially illegal or a morally complex issue.

The real ethical dilemma comes from how he explains to himself, his family, and his friends the legitimacy of his subtitling activity, which is in direct conflict with his career as lawyer, and his involvement in a community that has taken a great deal of time away from his professional and family life. The legal issues implicated in the subtitling practices of Jia and his colleagues present a crucial problem for them. His friends who are also lawyers were surprised to learn that he participated in a subtitle group, Jia said. I asked why, and his response is interesting with regard to how he presented his image within his professional community: “My friends, they heard about it (subtitle groups), but probably they did not expect that their colleague would get involved, because lawyers have busy work schedules, and, you know, participating in a subtitle group is not something usual that you would hear about a lawyer.” It is not clear to me whether Jia did not know, or did know but for some reason attempted to avoid saying, why his fellow lawyers were startled to learn that he was a volunteer subtitler. He implied that subtitle groups are not a routine part of lawyers’ lives and that is “probably” why his involvement seemed such a curious phenomenon. As his professional knowledge began to play a role in the private sphere of his leisure time, his moral struggle intensified. After he described his friends’ attitude, he added that it did not take much time for them to see his subtitling activity in a different light and that they now often ask him for the latest subtitled episode of *The Practice*.

When we switched to discussing audiences and *The Practice*, Jia was more responsive. He said that every time he receives feedback from audiences saying that they

have learned something from the show thanks to the group's translations, he feels honored and thinks that participation in the collective effort of disseminating the concept of law and other sophisticated ideas through TV dramas is "all worth it" (*zhide* 值得).

When I brought up the issue of intellectual property, he remarks:

I do not think we are in the right position to defend ourselves. But I guess there is no better way—I mean, there is no alternative medium for spreading the Western concept of law in an educational and entertaining way. Many basic ideas are absent in China, like the jury, which appears in every episode, but I doubt that most Chinese people know of it. ... I have read many incomplete or incorrect explanations of Western legal concepts in Chinese books and newspapers. It is not just a problem of translation, but more like they sort of misuse those terms in the wrong contexts and miss the essence of the ideas. If I could do something to help people understand better—things like presumption of innocence, cross-examination, and so on—I would feel bad if I did not do it. And thinking of that, especially audiences saying that they learn something useful from watching our subtitled programs, and ... en ... about intellectual property rights, I think you simply have to make a choice. I am happy to help people by putting my expertise and professional knowledge to practical use. At least for now, this is what I want to do and enjoy doing.

Jia was frank about the position of subtitle groups in the dispute over intellectual property, but he described the moral dilemma as a result of current social circumstances, because there is "no better way" of sharing knowledge. By engaging audiences who are in need of accurate information, Jia convinces himself that he is helping to communicate with Chinese society through U.S. TV programs. He describes TV as an "educational and entertaining" medium. These words indicate a thoughtful logic behind his act. Compared to his evasiveness regarding his colleagues' bewilderment upon learning that he is a subtitler, he is specific in his reasoning on why he participates. He is more open to talking about their shift in attitude, which he understood as an expression of accepting, or affirming, the morally risky activity. And here, it is more obvious that audiences' positive

responses strengthen his determination to embody a morality that enables him to facilitate not only access to knowledge but also its adequate disclosure and dissemination.

As Jia cited examples of the mistranslation of Western legal concepts in Chinese publications, he suggested that the major reason for this failure is the difficulty of instilling such foreign and sophisticated ideas in Chinese minds without an appropriate context. In contrast, U.S. TV programs incorporate those ideas in intriguing story lines, which subtitlers in his group utilize to convey a correct understanding of the Western legal system to their Chinese audiences. In Jia's view, pragmatism wins out in resolving this ethical dilemma. His motivation is not only rational but also emotional; as he said, "I would feel bad if I did not do it." The moral breach of violating intellectual property rights is overshadowed by the real needs of his society. This moral paradigm permits subtitlers to overlook the illegality of their unauthorized use of media programs.

5.7 Conclusion

I have examined how subtitlers moralize their unauthorized use of U.S. media programs and perform an interpretive practice of their moralities that reflects China's legal system, economic development, and moral heritage. Subtitlers who refuse the conventional notion of intellectual property and do not consider their subtitling activity illegal believe they are producing a different version of intellectual property out of China's historical and cultural legacy. Their idea of intellectual property reflects Chinese citizens' concerns with evaluating whether the quality of a work justifies payment from customers and to what extent knowledge should be available to the public without charge rather than being privately owned. The pressure to enforce Western intellectual property

protections is perceived as coercion and arouses hostility among Chinese citizens, who treat these demands as attempts to surveil and exert control over China. They raise the question of cultural geography, asking why China, an ancient country with its own cultural heritage, is subordinate to doctrines rooted in Western civilization. Intellectual property, as relocated in Chinese society, is not simply read as the Western philosophy of encouraging and protecting innovation. Another line of moral reasoning among subtitlers is to acknowledge intellectual property but choose to adhere to their own codes—that is, to render Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs and movies and build the subtitle community as a platform where fans can discuss and share knowledge of U.S. popular culture. Subtitlers resort to the justification held by Chinese citizens, that whoever is capable of disseminating the knowledge desired by youth and young adults and does so has joined a moral endeavor and is exempt from the accusation of intellectual property infringement. Subtitlers have no thought of receiving material reward in return for what they do. Using their English proficiency and Internet skills, they channel their passion for U.S. TV programs into creating a public benefit while the official Chinese media are still subject to state censorship.

This chapter provides a cultural lens through which to consider intellectual property and the use of new media. As this analysis shows, although cyberspace gives subtitlers room to maneuver, their redefinition of intellectual property and moralization of illegal activities depend largely on real-world situations. The unauthorized copying and circulating of digital cultural contents are inseparable from the social production of collective knowledge and the morality of such a production. In the midst of the interdisciplinary attention directed toward the concept of intellectual property, I hope to

have shed light on how fans' moralities are crucial in influencing their behaviors and how their moral reasoning is entangled with China's socioeconomic structure and cultural heritage. Fans are guided by moral principles in creating various related forms of a copyrighted work. The legitimacy and efficacy of these efforts are likely to expand in a digital world.

Finally, an implication on the nature of morality emerges from the above discussion. Some researchers (Laidlaw 2002; Lambek 2010; Zigon 2007, 2009) appeal for a more specific framework through which to examine the moral aspects of social life, especially individual moral action, as a set of beliefs and practices distinct from social norms. A different voice, by contrast, emphasizes that the Durkheimian concept of morality as being social and cultural plays an invisible but important role in shaping moral life (Yan 2011; Robbins 2007). The subtitlers' theorization of their morality has revealed that both the agentive side of the individual (i.e., the pursuit of foreign popular cultures and accurate translation) and Chinese traditional thinking (i.e., the right to use any property that is the result of cumulative knowledge and will be of benefit to the public) project their own images into the tension between the two distinct cultural logics. This chapter provides empirical support for the argument that social norms remain a central force that persists alongside individual reasoning and conscious choice among a range of possibilities for moral and ethical behaviors.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This dissertation provides both ethnographic and linguistic analyses of cultural translation and examines the dynamic subtitling practices of underground, volunteer subtitle groups in China. It documents the translation of U.S. TV programs and movies by Chinese youth and young adults and how their translations are shaped by cultural and social conditions in contemporary China. At the macro level, I view the activities of subtitle groups as the younger generation's way of responding to a central consequence of Chinese modernity, that is, the gradual opening to Western media and the widespread availability of Internet infrastructure that have accompanied China's economic development. Subtitle groups are a grassroots movement grounded in dissatisfaction with the media monopoly and constraints imposed by the state. It is also a movement that reflects the craving to be connected with up-to-date ideas and information presented in U.S. popular media programs. The growing attention to translation in humanities studies and social sciences has opened up a host of intriguing questions about how constructions of meanings are related to a new language and various aspects of a new culture. In this dissertation, I offer a particularly rich area for exploration in this vein, that is, how the younger Chinese generation translates the U.S. popular culture represented in media programs. This is a particularly significant topic of investigation in China, where circulation of knowledge and information is of great importance to both citizens and officials and where the government is paying more attention to the legal framework that regulates intellectual property as it applies to China and the global economy.

Chapter One introduced various scholarly views on cultural translation, revealed how translation reflects poetics and a certain ideology, and contextualized the theme of this dissertation—the actual translating practices of Chinese subtitlers in China’s sociohistorical complex. Translation is one cultural domain that points out how certain frameworks—such as humor paradigms, identity, morality, desire for knowledge, ways of knowing and learning—can be culturally and socially revealed. While some may think of translating as simply finding equivalencies between two language codes, a detailed look at actual translation activity illuminates how participants, languages, texts, and sociocultural values encounter one another in a translation event. Translation can introduce new concepts and new genres while reformulating them through the reflexive capacity of language. In other words, the translation process illustrates ways of characterizing, reporting, and commenting on new meanings in one language code that are communicated in another.

The translation activities of subtitle groups in China involve a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991), in which participants share a particular set of ideologies and goals for translation. As discussed in Chapter Two, subtitlers develop social and cultural capital through education, which was rarely available to their parents’ generation (Li 2004; Wu 2000). As anthropological perspectives on adoption and innovation hold that creating new ways of engaging in new activities typically is not a property of individuals, the subtitlers’ translation work is a product of collective participation in context and in interaction with one another. Situated in present-day China and faced with globalization, which has cultural, political, and economic implications for everyday life, subtitle groups engage in activities that indicate major social changes in

China. First, the subtitlers' activities and their interactions with Chinese audiences on the Internet represent new forms of communication that are made possible by telecommunications developments in China. Second, the well-educated younger generation, aspiring to have more instant access to and less restrictions on U.S. TV programs and movies, employs these information technologies in its pursuit of more knowledge and information. Third, new moralities of intellectual property are deeply implicated in the subtitlers' performance of translating U.S. popular media programs. Their devotion to subtitling and their constant striving to produce accurate translation texts are regarded as moral acts by most of Chinese society. Ideologies of morality are shifting in China. Disseminating knowledge to the public without reward becomes a well-recognized code.

In Chapter Three, I showed how the translation of audiovisual humor in U.S. TV sitcoms becomes a contentious issue that generates lively discussion among audiences. I identified the common strategies by which subtitlers translate humor in U.S. sitcoms: translating, adding annotations to explain humor, and replacing "foreign" elements with quasi-equivalent Chinese expressions, which is, in Venuti's (1995) term, a "domestication" strategy. Scholars in translation studies have discussed the translation of humor in general and how it always receives a mixed response from audiences (Chiaro 1992, 2010; Del Corral 1988; Diot 1989; Fuentes Luque 2010; Tymoczko 1987; Von Stackelberg 1988). I demonstrated that in the case of subtitle groups, the audiences' assessment of controversial translations of audiovisual humor is a cultural activity. The expression of assessments in cyberspace depends on language, identity, rhetorical conventions, and the commenters' reflections on political events in the real world. The

practice of linking language expression and social identity is informed by culture, and this practice has been extended to cyberspace. I discussed how audiences comment on the audiovisual translation of humor and comments from other audience members. Their languages display an abundance of stance-taking markers—lexicals, syntactic structures, rhetorical questions, and words informed by China’s history, such as *shehui zhuyi* “socialism.” These linguistic elements occur in everyday Chinese expressions, yet in cyberspace, they constitute “dialogic arguments” that reveal the commenters’ aesthetics and allow them to present themselves as “moral” and educated Chinese citizens. Chinese audiences consider what counts as an appropriate translation of audiovisual humor. They discuss various facets of the translation of audiovisual humor, ranging from phonetic alliteration of English and Chinese words to the mapping of real politics, and adhere to an ideology that I call “translation sovereignty.” This notion describes the belief that volunteer subtitlers are entitled to adapt the humor in U.S. sitcoms in innovative ways in order to provide greater amusement to local audiences. Moreover, audiences relate humor to language, history, symbols, and politics; they talk about not only the translation of humor but the translation of culture. Their comments and discussions become a form of Bakhtinian “double-voiced discourse” (1984, 1986) by which audiences can make use of one commenter’s words to reaffirm or refute the comments of others. In cyberspace, the meanings of the translation of audiovisual humor have multiplied and practices for evaluating it have diversified.

Subtitlers also demonstrate cultural creativity and innovation in their work with U.S. TV programs and movies. By adding annotations, they expand the meanings and functions of the original media programs. In Chapter Four, I analyzed how subtitlers

decide whether they should add annotations to certain sentences in the original English dialogue, what types of annotations are created, and how audiences respond to those annotations. Like face-to-face communication, annotations bear the imprint of Gricean maxims (Grice 1975), one of which states that utterances often raise expectations of relevance that should be precise enough, and predictable enough, to guide the hearer toward the speaker's meaning. In addition, annotations require a different kind of creativity—the ability to make judgments when audiences need extra information in order to better understand the English sentences. For subtitlers, suitable annotations call for cultural capital because they need to know which English sentence in the dialogue is worth selecting for annotation. Different types of annotations cause mixed reactions. Audiences embrace information-providing annotations that facilitate comprehension of American popular culture and English vernaculars but disagree on commentary annotations that tell them about the subtitlers' personal feelings rather than the media programs. Either way, annotations make the subtitlers' thoughts transparent and thus offer a glimpse of the thinking behind the subtitles. I argue that annotations manifest the “backstage” of subtitlers' knowledge and expertise (Goffman 1959), and the act of creating annotations is symptomatic of the longing for authenticity in China. Contemporary Chinese modernity has created greater economic achievements, but these come with new forms of mistrust and inauthenticity. Although audience members hold different opinions on annotations, to most of them, annotations represent the sacred values of Chinese society: authenticity and originality. Annotations are thus products of and vehicles for sharing additional relevant knowledge and the subtitlers' emotions. These two types of information coexist in annotations and are indicative of the modern

Chinese quest for authenticity. Together they produce an immediate connection with audiences, who feel that they are involved in the subtitling activities. Precisely because annotations convey both helpful and controversial information, the knowledge-enhancing as well as the unnecessary thoughts of subtitlers, they allow audiences to see the subtitlers' real thinking process as they perform their translation work.

Developments in media technologies give people convenient ways of circulating digital media files. Many scholars have discussed the influence of this innovation on people's actions and ideas about the appropriate use of media programs (Downes 2006; Kelty 2008; Lipton 2002; Schwabach 2011; Tushnet 1997). Chapter Five contributes to this literature in two ways. First, it examined the sociocultural conditions of the subtitle groups' unauthorized subtitling practices with U.S. TV programs and movies. In the 1980s, economic reform policies in the special economic zones attracted Western companies to manufacture their products in China, where they could take advantage of Chinese labor and the many incentives offered by the Chinese government. This so-called original equipment manufacturer model gave Chinese manufacturers the opportunity to imitate original products and sell them at lower prices, and this in turn led to the flourishing *shanzhai* culture in China. Technological development coupled with rapid social and economic changes creates an environment in which illegal Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs and movies can become popular among the younger generation. Second, the Chinese government began paying close attention to intellectual property infringements after China entered the WTO in 2001. This chapter explored the subtitlers' response to the government's intention to promote intellectual property rights and the way they moralize their unauthorized practices with regard to U.S. media programs.

Some subtitlers disregard the Western notion of intellectual property because it does not fit China's social and economic circumstances. It is thus unrealistic to demand conformity with the conventional notion of intellectual property defined in the Western context. A different part of the subtitle community recognizes intellectual property but has decided to fulfill a more practical purpose, that is, to translate U.S. media programs and provide more knowledge to members of the public who would otherwise not be able to watch these programs. In the face of restrictions on imported foreign media programs in China, these subtitlers offer an alternative channel that enables citizens to circumvent sanctions. That subtitlers share their translation work without asking for compensation is viewed as a moral act by Chinese audiences, who admire the subtitlers' sincere devotion to the media programs and the production of correct subtitles.

The study of cultural translation should incorporate analysis of the sociocultural context in which the translating takes place. In subtitle groups, audiences are invited to discuss their opinions on the Chinese subtitles and become an indispensable part of the subtitle community. Studying the interactions between subtitlers and audiences and the audiences' responses to the translations opens up new avenues of research. Audience members' perceptions and reactions to a translation work may shape their understanding of other languages and cultures and the expression of identities. The interactive nature of translation is made possible by media technologies, especially Internet technologies. This study provides an empirical view of cultural translation as a collective activity, in that subtitlers and audiences exchange ideas about Chinese-subtitled U.S. TV programs and movies. In this way, Chinese audiences perform the very process of "translating" the subtitlers' activities. Chapter Three analyzed a special type of cultural translation—

audiovisual translation of humor—and illustrates a case of audiences expanding the conventional notion of humor translation. The creative adaptation of American humor in the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* has produced new ways of expressing cultural identity and ideal types of humor translation. The postcolonial approach views cultural translation as a form of hegemonic power in that a more dominant culture replaces the characteristics of another through translation. Subtitle groups have shown, however, that cultural translation is a way of contending that occurs not only across different cultures but also within the same sociocultural complex. The Chinese version of the humor in *The Big Bang Theory* episode targets Japanese people and the animosity between China and Japan. The subtitler's intervention in the source text, rewriting it and re-creating it in order to produce amusement for Chinese audiences, has become an issue for audiences. They ask to what extent translators are allowed to be “transcreators,” and whether it is appropriate for a subtitler to modify the original English dialogue and the humor it expresses. The debate showed that responses to subtitling and interpreting humor are a matter of identity, which influences how audiences position themselves in reading the Chinese subtitles and how they relate the Chinese version of humor to present-day politics.

Chapter Four revealed another dimension of cultural translation, that is, how annotations become a form of mediated communication that expresses the personal thoughts and feelings of subtitlers. By creating annotations, subtitlers transmit messages that they assume will be helpful to audiences or that they hope will articulate their opinions of the subtitled U.S. media programs. In this way, audiovisual translation becomes a form of communication that is more mediated and personal than traditional

printed translation. Through the use of digital technologies, these mediated forms do not serve solely translation-related purposes; they are elements of the broader Internet culture put to translational use. In other words, cultural translation is embedded in broader Internet cultures. Although annotations are an immediate way of communicating with audiences that depends on new technologies, their formation takes place in a historical process that involves participants figuring out how to use the technologies. The subtitlers' use of these technologies is shaped by the culture of Chinese society. Subtitlers' innovative methods of subtitling and annotating U.S. media programs have received various audience responses grounded on different considerations. In the culture of a changing and modernizing China, audience responses express the persistent desire among members of the younger generation for straightforward, authentic, and candid discussions of the issues that interest them.

Chapter Five revealed a morality-related debate on cultural translation in China. In this instance, translators in the subtitle community not only articulate new social values for their translation work but also put them into practice. Subtitlers turn volunteer cultural translation into a moral site, where Chinese versions of intellectual property are tested, contested, and affirmed. According to the present laws, subtitlers could be accused of violating intellectual property rights. However, they counter the conventional idea of intellectual property by proposing different versions of intellectual property, express strong critiques of it, and aspire to define an alternative that fits the sociocultural complex within which their subtitling practices take place. The ideological underpinning of their arguments is that even if they violate the law of intellectual property, the collective longing in Chinese society for free knowledge and information justifies their

unauthorized translating practices. Chinese citizens affirm the positive values of the subtitlers' activities and agree with their take on the Western idea of intellectual property. Subtitlers create an ideal model of knowledge sharing in Chinese society. They illuminate the concept of translation as a field of social justice and why knowledge should be free to circulate without limits and at no cost.

As an area of research, the intersection of the ideologies of culture, translation, and media technology and the ways in which their changing relations to one another shape translation practices hold great promise for the future. I hope this study has brought to light some significant aspects of this issue. From the point of view of Chinese ethnography in particular, subtitlers perform an innovative process of cultural creativity. Every chapter in this dissertation demonstrates that the subtitlers' activities are quintessentially activities of cultural production. Adapting U.S. humor, creating annotations, and proposing new theories of intellectual property are all creative activities. That the Internet and other new information technologies offer tools for these activities is significant, but the real significance lies in the subtitlers' use of these tools to involve generations born in the 1980s and afterward in their subtitling enterprise. Audiences have become co-translators of and co-commenters on U.S. TV programs and movies. In one way or another, subtitlers and audiences have become knowledge producers. Most participants cherish the widespread feeling that people in this open community collaborate for the purpose of knowing more about U.S. popular culture and English vernaculars. This feature attributes to the nature of the translation activity in the subtitle community—that is, every participant is entitled to his or her voice in a local articulation of cultural translation in response to the U.S. media programs. The dialogue between

subtitlers and audiences is a social activity by which Chinese citizens explore the many semantic possibilities and cultural interpretations of foreign media popular cultures (Jenkins 2006a, 2006b; Ricoeur 1991). Finally, I would like to document a comment from a subtitler, who once told me about her feelings over the years while participating in the subtitle community. During the initial phase of her involvement, she was worried about whether she could offer the correct and the best Chinese subtitles. Later, however, she was more concerned with whether her translations meant something to audiences, even something negative. “I do not mind at all if people think that my translation is wrong. I like them to challenge me. They help me come up with better translations. We help one another do better. Where else can you find something like that?” she said.

In summary, the significance of the cultural forms brought forth by subtitle groups is threefold. First, they are significant because of the size and scale of citizen participation. Chinese-subtitled U.S. media programs are circulated in different generations of Chinese audiences. The media technology enables subtitle groups to generate broad participation among Chinese youth and young adults. While there are numerous online communities (Hartford 2000; Lagerkvist 2005; MacKinnon 2008; Yang 2009), subtitle groups draw a high level of participation from individual citizens by providing instant translations of increasingly popular U.S. TV programs and movies. Second, the new cultural formations are significant for the values they represent. Subtitlers are dedicated to providing correct translations and do not ask for anything in return, and Chinese society affirms the moral values enacted by subtitlers. Third, the new forms represent new developments in Chinese society. The subtitle community emphasizes the fact that a veritable community of practice is developing in China.

Subtitle groups constitute an open and dynamic online community of participants who are strongly motivated to contribute their capacities toward advancing the goals of the groups.

This dissertation contributes to the study of translation as a globally informed and locally defined sociocultural and linguistic activity. I have focused on the interactions between participants and Chinese society, as well as the products of the translation activity, that is, the Chinese subtitles added to U.S. TV programs and movies. This perspective enables me to offer an interpretation of how Chinese subtitles, which are devoted to representation, are produced through dynamic, actual subtitling practices that are ontologically a model of social action.

By examining how individuals operate mentally in contemporary Chinese society, I have shown how subtitlers have become cultural brokers in interpreting new semiotic symbols and cultural implications beyond texts (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990, 1992; Berman 1992; Geertz 1988). As historically and culturally situated practices, the subtitle groups' activities facilitate the cross-cultural communication of the younger generations of Chinese citizens and are an innovative way of knowledge production. The emergence of subtitle groups marks, accompanies, and contributes to profound changes in many aspects of Chinese society. The cultural effects of flows of people and ideas mediated by communication technologies (Anderson 1991; Habermas 1989, 1992) turn the desire for direct access to foreign media programs into acts of communication. Just as the Internet and information technologies create new cultural forms such as chat rooms in which online interaction takes place, the subtitle groups' activities are manifest in the rise of new cultural formations. They allow translation activity to proliferate and diversify. The

subtle community provides citizens with a medium for articulating, acting on, and practicing their own unofficial cultural translation that they may otherwise have difficulty carrying out.

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