University of Southampton

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Languages, Cultures and Linguistics

Re-subtitling the West: A Comparative Study of Simplified Chinese Subtitles of Anglophone Television Series and Their Retranslations (2000s-2020s)

By

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the evolving practice of English-to-Simplified Chinese re-subtitling in mainland China from the early 2000s to the early 2020s. It focuses on how subtitling strategies and norms shift across time, patronage, and audience orientations. Grounded in Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), the study adopts a product-oriented, norm-based approach that treats re-subtitling as both a textual practice and a cultural phenomenon. Cultural references (CRs), as key sites of translational challenge and strategic choice, are used as empirical indicators of shifting norms.

Three comparative case studies are conducted: (1) diachronic fan retranslations of *Doctor Who* (2005), (2) synchronic fan retranslations of four *Netflix Originals*, and (3) diachronic commercial retranslations of *Friends* (1994). Each case draws on self-compiled subtitle corpora, enabling systematic analysis of the strategies used to render CRs across initial and retranslated versions.

The findings complicate both the assumptions of *the Retranslation Hypothesis* and the view that fansubbing is inherently more interventional. Retranslations vary: some display stronger source orientation and intervention, while others move towards domestication. These differences cannot be explained by time alone, as they are also shaped by institutional conditions and audience dynamics, particularly where multiple subtitle versions circulate and viewers differ in cultural literacy and engagement.

By tracing how CRs are handled across fan and commercial re-subtitling, this study develops a context-sensitive account of Simplified Chinese subtitling practices. It challenges the divide between amateur and professional subtitling and shows how re-subtitling mirrors wider transformations in audience agency, patronage, and platform governance over time in the digital age.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Xuesi Yang

Title of thesis: Re-subtitling the West: A Comparative Study of Simplified Chinese Subtitles of Anglophone Television Series and Their Retranslations (2000s-2020s)

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: .... Date:

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Definitions and Abbreviations

A. Theoretical and Methodological Terms

AVT ..... Audiovisual Translation

CR(s) ..... Cultural Reference(s)

DTS ..... Descriptive Translation Studies

SA ..... Source Audience

SC ..... Source Culture

SL ..... Source Language

ST ..... Source Text

TA ..... Target Audience

TC ..... Target Culture

TL ..... Target Language

TS ..... Translation Studies

TT ..... Target Text

B. Fansub Groups

F6 ..... The first mainland Chinese fansub forum; produced initial fan *Friends* subtitles.

FRM ..... Early mainland Chinese fansub group, active before the 2010s; produced initial fan *Doctor Who* subtitles.

YIGUI ..... Well-known mainland Chinese fansub group specialising in fantasy and sci-fi genres; produced the retranslation of the Netflix series *The Witcher*

YYeTs ..... Major mainland Chinese fansub group, active from the 2010s onward; one of the largest and most influential communities; produced the retranslation of *Doctor Who* (S01, 04), *Stranger Things*

(S04), *Bridgerton* (S01), *The Queen's Gambit* (S01), and *The Witcher* (S01).

C. Commercial Platforms

Bilibili ..... Mainland Chinese commercial streaming platform, originally established as an ACG (anime, comics, games) community in 2009, which by the 2020s had become a major licensed distributor of international television. It produced the commercial retranslation of *Friends*.

Netflix ..... Global subscription-based streaming platform, which began commissioning and distributing subtitles for its original series worldwide from the mid-2010s onward (beginning with *House of Cards*, 2013). Simplified Chinese is routinely included among its subtitle languages, although the service itself is not officially available in mainland China. It produced the initial subtitles for its *Netflix Originals*, as well as the retranslated version of *Friends*. It produced the initial commercial subtitles for its Netflix Originals and also provided the official international subtitle version of *Friends* (c.2015).

Sohu ..... Chinese commercial streaming platform, one of the earliest to legally introduce Anglophone television series to mainland audiences, notably since the early 2010s.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Context: A General Introduction

On 11 February 2022, the iconic American sitcom *Friends* (1994) was officially introduced to mainland Chinese audiences via local streaming platforms, with Bilibili (Chinese: 哔哩哔哩) leading the release. However, this was not the first-time mainland viewers had encountered the show. Since the early 2000s, *Friends* had already gained a devoted following among Chinese youth through unofficial channels, circulating online with amateur "fansubs", i.e., fan-produced subtitles, in Simplified Chinese. Two decades after achieving grassroots popularity, the series returned via formal, top-down distribution channels. Yet rather than being welcomed, this 2022 commercial release sparked immediate backlash (see, e.g., Chen, 2022; Stevenson, 2022).

Long-time fans quickly noticed that several key scenes had been altered or entirely omitted. Most notably, references to a lesbian relationship, which is central to one character's storyline, were cut entirely. Sexual innuendo and politically sensitive content were either euphemised, paraphrased, or excluded completely. For viewers already familiar with earlier fansubbed versions, the differences were even more glaring. A recurring sentiment quickly emerged on social media and Bilibili the streaming platform, that viewers would rather revisit older subtitle versions than engage with the censored new release.

This preference for alternative subtitle versions, and the broader fact that many media texts circulate in multiple translated versions, is not an isolated case. Over the past two decades, mainland Chinese audiences have increasingly encountered audiovisual content presented with multiple coexisting subtitle versions: some fan-made, others corporate; some officially licensed, others distributed through informal networks. These versions may appear years apart or within days of each other. This phenomenon, which is termed "re-subtitling" henceforth, has become widespread yet remains underexplored in academic discourse. Unlike traditional literary retranslation, which typically occurs after long intervals and for scholarly or editorial reasons, re-subtitling in the mainland Chinese digital context could sometime be rapid, contested, and audience-oriented.

Whether driven by concerns over translation quality, ideological disagreement, cultural adaptation, or regulatory shifts, these subtitle versions provide a rich and revealing entry point into the dynamics of audiovisual translation (AVT) in the target culture (TC) context. The practice of re-subtitling, both diachronic and synchronic, challenges the assumption that one "definitive"

version of a subtitle is enough, and highlights how translation, or more specifically, subtitling norms, audience expectations, and socio-political influences evolve over time in ways that are especially visible in the mainland Chinese landscape.

Despite the rising prominence of AVT globally, academic research in the field remains relatively modest and predominantly Eurocentric. The *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, the first international journal dedicated entirely to AVT, was only established in 2018. In its inaugural issue, Chaume (2018, p. 40) identified four key methodological "turns" in AVT: descriptive, cultural, sociological, and cognitive. While increasingly influential, these paradigms echo long-established trajectories within Translation Studies (TS), reflecting how AVT continues to be shaped by TS frameworks, particularly Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), within which this research is situated.

As Chaume (2018) further observes, while the 1990s in AVT research were largely devoted to explaining the translation process, its distinctive characteristics, constraints, and the roles of agents, the 21st century has witnessed a shift toward a more descriptive approach. This methodological evolution has enabled a more systematic and scientific engagement with AVT, allowing the field to grow beyond its early functionalist roots. Building on this shift, the cultural and sociological turns of the 2010s have "dramatically changed the perspective of audiovisual translation" (Chaume, 2018, p. 56). Cultural studies have brought ideological dimensions to the fore, while sociological and cognitive approaches have highlighted a move away from a traditional "distributor-consumer" model toward the rise of the "prosumer", a consumer-turned-producer . This shift, along with what Pérez-González (2014, p. 58) terms a more "interventionist" paradigm, reflects the exponential growth in both active and passive audiovisual engagement by contemporary audiences. These emerging foci have considerably expanded the scope of AVT research, allowing it to better capture the complexities of the current media landscape and contributing to its growth as an autonomous discipline.

By contrast, the development of AVT scholarship in mainland China has followed a more practice-oriented trajectory. Since the introduction of cinema in 1896 (Zhao, 2011), mainland Chinese AVT research has largely centred on prescriptive strategies and practical challenges. The first published scholarly work on AVT in mainland China addressed both technical and textual difficulties in dubbing scientific documentaries (e.g., Qiao, 1986), setting the tone for decades of subsequent inquiry. Much of the literature has focused on charting the historical development of AVT (e.g., Kang, 2007; Hu, 2012; Wang, Zhou and Zhang, 2019), offering guidelines for dubbing (e.g., Ma, 2005; Gu, 2006), critiquing amateur subtitling practices (e.g.,

Wang and Wang, 2013; Y. Li, 2016; L. Li, 2016), and tackling specific translation challenges such as rendering film titles (e.g., Liu, 2003) puns and wordplay (e.g., Qian, 2000), cultural references (e.g., Ji and Dai, 2009; Zhou, 2015), humour (e.g., Dong, 2007), and taboo language (e.g., He, 2018). On the whole, the dominant approach has been prescriptive, emphasising normative translation strategies and regulatory compliance (e.g., Wang, 2002; Muo and Cai, 2010; Wu, 2013). Only in recent years, partly influenced by developments in Euro-American scholarship, has there been growing interest in crowdsourced translation (e.g., Cao, 2018), machine translation and post-editing (e.g., Zhao, 2021), though these studies have largely retained a process-focused orientation.

This divergence in research orientations can be attributed, in part, to the limited scholarly attention and a strong pedagogical focus on the prescriptive and procedural dimensions of AVT within mainland China's still-evolving disciplinary framework. To compensate for these limitations, scholars in mainland China have often turned to the rich and diverse body of Eurocentric translation theories, adapting them to fit local contexts. This research does not contend that theoretical development is inherently more valuable than practical application, nor does it suggest that applying Eurocentric frameworks to Chinese contexts is misguided. Rather, it seeks to illuminate how AVT research in mainland China has been significantly influenced by Western theoretical paradigms, ones that were themselves shaped in response to issues rooted in Western cultural and media environments. As a result, features unique to the Chinese AVT landscape have frequently been overlooked or underexplored.

Consider, for example, the fansubbing phenomenon, which is one of the most dynamic and widely studied developments in the global evolution of AVT. While often treated as a universally emergent trend, the conditions that fostered fansubbing in mainland China (and other parts of Asia), particularly around Anglophone media, differ meaningfully from those in English-speaking regions. A key factor is the sociocultural role of English as both a foreign language and a global lingua franca. In these target contexts, the acceptance of English as a source language (SL) significantly influences how English-language audiovisual content is received and consumed, often imbuing it with elevated cultural capital. Consequently, notions of what constitutes an *adequate* translation (see Chapter 3), or how much mediation is necessary between the SL and the target language (TL), are not fixed but shift depending on sociocultural positioning and historical moment.

In contrast, when the Chinese language functions as the SL and is subtitled for Anglophone audiences, it does not yet occupy a comparable sociocultural position. Chinese has not received

the same global cultural attention as English, and as a result, viewer expectations and subtitling norms have remained comparatively static. This asymmetry underscores the importance of examining AVT, and particularly fansubbing, not only through a process-oriented lens (e.g., copyright, workflow, quality assurance), but also through a product-focused perspective. Such an approach highlights how subtitles themselves reflect evolving norms shaped by time, cultural dynamics, and shifting patterns of intercultural exchange.

Some scholarly work within the mainland Chinese context has already begun moving in this direction, particularly in areas such as subcultural fandom (e.g., Sun, 2012, 2014), activist subtitling (e.g., Wang and Zhang, 2017), and censorship (e.g., Liang, 2018). However, much of this research relies on ad hoc examples and rarely incorporates sustained textual analysis grounded in larger data sets. There remains a pressing need for more systematic, data-driven approaches. While the argument may by now seem somewhat clichéd, it bears repeating that globalisation and digitalisation over the past three decades have profoundly reshaped the English-Simplified Chinese AVT landscape, and particularly in subtitling, both in terms of theoretical engagement and production practices. One especially noteworthy development is the growing trend of television programs being re-subtitled, whether by fans or commercial entities, which is a phenomenon that needs a closer and more systematic investigation.

With the advent of new technologies at the turn of the century, particularly DVDs and the Internet, fansubbing became a viable option within mainland China's emerging digital content market. By the 2010s, further technological advancements, such as the rise of global streaming platforms and the proliferation of user-generated subtitles (such as "cybersubtitling", as termed by Díaz-Cintas (2018, p. 132), led to the emergence of more mature, participatory modes of AVT. These developments introduced new standards and expectations for subtitle consumption, particularly among increasingly discerning digital audiences. For instance, many streaming platforms have reintroduced older networked television series originally aired decades ago, now offering subtitles in multiple languages to appeal to a global audience.

Beyond corporate efforts, fansub communities have also begun to revisit and revise earlier subtitle versions. These newer iterations often emerge in response to perceived shortcomings in quality, format, ideological framing, cultural relevance, or simply because earlier translations have become outdated to contemporary audience bases.

Despite its prevalence, this phenomenon of re-subtitling, whether by fans or corporations, has received limited scholarly attention. Critical questions remain underexplored: What changes

occur in retranslated subtitles compared to their initial versions? Are patterns of change consistent between fansub and commercial re-subtitling? What motivates these revisions? Are they linguistic, ideological, cultural, or regulatory in nature?

To address these questions, this study adopts a data-driven, norm-oriented approach grounded in the framework of DTS. It draws in particular on the work of Toury (2012), Chesterman (2016), and Pedersen (2011). Through the analysis of three purpose-built subtitle corpora, each representing a different re-subtitling scenario, this research traces the evolution of subtitling norms and examines how these norms shift over time, across agents, and in response to changing sociocultural conditions in the TC.

1.2 Research Rationale, Gap, and Contribution

As outlined in Section 1.1, re-subtitling, whether carried out by fans or commercial entities, has become a visible yet under-examined feature of the English-Simplified Chinese AVT landscape. While AVT research has expanded globally, much of it remains Eurocentric and theory-driven, with relatively little sustained attention to non-Western, digitally mediated contexts. This study addresses that imbalance by focusing on re-subtitling as a lens through which to observe shifts in translation norms, audience expectations, and socio-political influences in mainland China's evolving media environment.

Although recent developments in technology, distribution, and audience participation have encouraged a diversity of subtitling practices, scholarly engagement with re-subtitling in this context has been limited. In particular:

- *Conceptually*, re-subtitling has not been consistently looked at as a distinct phenomenon.
- *Empirically*, there is little systematic comparison between fan-produced and commercial re-subtitles in relation to the evolution of norms, the impact of preference and orientation towards different audiences.
- *Theoretically*, the *Retranslation Hypothesis* has rarely been applied within AVT, leaving open questions about whether norm shifts follow strictly chronological or fidelity-based trajectories, or are shaped by other sociocultural and agent-specific factors.
- *Contextually*, the mainland Chinese subtitling environment, characterised by the interaction of regulatory frameworks, grassroots creativity, and corporate localisation, remains underrepresented in global AVT scholarship.

- *Practically*, there is limited research linking textual variation in re-subtitling to audience reception and preferences, particularly in digitally converged media environments.

These gaps form the basis for the study's contributions, each aligned directly to one of the points above:

- *Conceptually*, it treats re-subtitling as a distinct practice within AVT, differentiating it from literary retranslation and expanding the conceptual scope of the field.
- *Empirically*, it provides a systematic comparison of English-Simplified Chinese subtitles and their retranslations across fan and commercial domains.
- *Theoretically*, it re-examines *Retranslation Hypothesis* in an AVT setting, testing its relevance against subtitling data and reframing it through the lenses of audience, agency, and regulation.
- *Contextually*, it situates re-subtitling within the mainland Chinese media environment, highlighting how translation norms are shaped by regulatory pressures, grassroots participation, and platform logics.
- *Practically*, it generates insights relevant to subtitling vendors, localisation teams, and streaming platforms, by linking subtitling strategies to audience expectations and credibility in challenging market conditions.

By positioning re-subtitling as a productive site of analysis, this study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how subtitling operates not as a fixed process, but as an evolving and culturally situated form of translation, especially in the current digital age.

1.3 Research Questions

This research seeks to explore the phenomenon of English-Simplified Chinese re-subtitling over the past two decades, with particular attention to how subtitling norms have evolved across different time periods, audience bases and patronages. The overarching question guiding this thesis is:

> ***In the context of English-Simplified Chinese re-subtitling from the 2000s to the 2020s, what changes have occurred in retranslated subtitles compared to the initial versions?***

To address this rather broad question, the thesis undertakes a comparative, product-oriented analysis of three self-built corpora, each representing a distinct re-subtitling scenario and forming the basis of a dedicated case study:

- **Diachronic fan re-subtitling** (**RQ1**, Chapter 6): What changes can be identified between early and later fan-produced subtitles of the same audiovisual text, and how do these reflect evolving norms in fansubbing practice?
- **Synchronic fan-commercial re-subtitling** (**RQ2**, Chapter 7): How do fan retranslations differ from coexisting commercial subtitle versions within the same timeframe, what drives these synchronic retranslation, and what do such differences reveal about patronage, audience orientation, and subtitling norms?
- **Diachronic commercial re-subtitling** (**RQ3**, Chapter 8): How have commercial retranslations of the same audiovisual text changed over time, and what do these shifts reveal about the influence of industry practice, regulatory pressures, and audience expectations?

This framework allows for a structured yet flexible analysis of re-subtitling phenomena across distinct audience bases, patronages and timeframes. By comparing textually with carefully selected linguistic markers (i.e., cultural references, see Chapter 4) and underlying norms across these corpora, the study aims to provide a nuanced account of how subtitling practices have adapted to evolving sociocultural, technological, and institutional conditions in the mainland Chinese context.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured across nine chapters.

Chapter One introduces the study by outlining the research context, rationale, identified gaps, central research questions, and an overview of the chapters that follow.

Chapter Two presents the contextual background of the research. It begins with a historical overview of AVT in China and moves towards the emergence of fansubbing and re-subtitling practices. Particular attention is paid to the socio-political, technological, and linguistic developments that have shaped the AVT landscape over the past two decades.

Chapter Three reviews the theoretical foundations of the study. It focuses on norm theory within the DTS paradigm, which forms the central analytical lens of this research. This chapter

also discusses retranslation and the RH, situating the study within broader theoretical conversations about repeated translation and shifting textual expectations over time.

Chapter Four shifts the focus from theoretical discussion to practical analysis, introducing cultural references as a key site for identifying translation problems and tracing norm shifts. The chapter begins by explaining why cultural references are particularly relevant to this study, before outlining the subtitling strategies used to render them. These strategies, adapted from Pedersen's (2011) taxonomy, form the basis for the comparative analysis conducted in later chapters.

Chapter Five describes the research methodology, including the design of the three self-built corpora that represent distinct re-subtitling scenarios: diachronic fan re-subtitling, synchronic fan re-subtitling of commercial subtitles, and diachronic commercial re-subtitling. This chapter outlines data collection procedures, sampling criteria, and the mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Chapter Six presents the first case study, focusing on diachronic fan re-subtitling through a comparison of two generations of fan-made subtitles for Doctor Who (2005). The analysis examines how subtitling strategies, orientation, and intervention shift over time, reflecting changes in audience expectations, linguistic norms, and fan engagement. This chapter addresses RQ 1 and explores how the *Retranslation Hypothesis* applies to evolving fan subtitling practices.

Chapter Seven turns to synchronic fan re-subtitling of commercial subtitles, using four Netflix originals, i.e., Stranger Things, Bridgerton, The Queen's Gambit, and The Witcher, as case studies. It compares official Simplified Chinese subtitles with near-simultaneously released fansubs to investigate how fansubbers diverge from or resist commercial norms. Special attention is given to audience orientation, genre knowledge, and strategies for rendering cultural references. A focused comparison of two fansub versions of The Witcher explores internal variation within fan communities. This chapter contributes to answering RQ2.

Chapter Eight investigates diachronic commercial re-subtitling through three successive subtitle versions of the sitcom Friends, produced by Sohu (2012), Netflix (c. 2015), and Bilibili (2022). The analysis considers how shifting regulatory policies, platform-specific constraints, and evolving audience expectations shape translation decisions. Key issues include censorship, intertextual awareness, and the tension between localisation and faithfulness. This chapter

examines both linguistic and institutional factors that influence subtitle variation over time and addresses RQ 3.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis by synthesising key findings across the three case studies. It reflects on the broader implications for AVT research, norm theory, and retranslation studies, and discusses limitations of the current research while proposing directions for future study.

Chapter 2 Audiovisual Translation in Mainland China

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the historical and contextual foundation for the present study, tracing the evolution of AVT in mainland China and the shifting norms that have emerged under changing technological, socio-political, and cultural conditions. Understanding this trajectory is essential for situating the recent phenomenon of re-subtitling within a longer history of translation practices, media policy, and audience engagement. It also helps to clarify how the conditions under which subtitles are produced, distributed, and received have changed over time, influencing both the constraints and possibilities of subtitling in the present day.

The discussion proceeds chronologically. Section 2.2 outlines three broad phases in the development of AVT: the early film translation era (1896-1949), when subtitling first appeared during the silent film period; the dubbing era (1949-1990s), marked by state control and centralised media production; and the digital era (1990s-present), characterised by the rise of cybersubtitling, fansubbing communities, and, more recently, re-subtitling practices. The section concludes by summarising how these stages collectively create the conditions for the re-subtitling scenarios examined in later chapters.

Section 2.3 offers concluding reflections on the implications of this developmental trajectory for the current research, linking the historical context presented here to the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3.

By situating re-subtitling within this broader historical arc, the chapter highlights the ways in which past practices, institutional arrangements, and audience behaviours continue to shape, and at times constrain, contemporary subtitling norms in mainland China.

2.2 AVT Development in Mainland China

2.2.1 Early Film Translation (1896-1949)

First Exposure

The history of AVT in mainland China is often narrated from the post-1949 era, yet its origins can be traced as far back as 1896, just one year after the birth of world cinema. On 29 June 1896, a screening advertised as a “western moving picture” (Chinese: 西洋影戏) took place at Xu Yuan (Chinese: 徐园), a private garden estate in Shanghai’s French Concession. Owned by a

prominent local entrepreneur and cultural patron, Xu Yuan, also known as “Shuangqing Villa” (Chinese: 双清别墅), served as a gathering place for Shanghai’s upper classes, who were invited to enjoy not only early cinematic experiences but also exhibitions of flowers, music, painting, and calligraphy (Zhao, 2011, p. 1).

This event is widely recognised as the earliest recorded film screening in China, and the Shanghai Library’s ink painting of Xu Yuan (see Figure 2.1) offers rare visual documentation of the venue and its elite social setting. Despite being described as “public”, the screening was highly exclusive. An advertisement in *Shun Pao* (Chinese: 申报, see Figure 2.2), published the same day, records that admission was set at 0.3 Spanish Dollars, which was a sum far exceeding the daily income of most Chinese citizens at the time, when average GDP per capita was approximately 10.2 Spanish Dollars annually (Zhao, 2011). This notice is also widely acknowledged by later Chinese scholars as the first documented reference to film in China (see Cheng, 1980).

Although this moment did not involve translation, it is significant for what it reveals about the early consumption of foreign audiovisual material in China: from the outset, it was shaped by wealth, education, and urban privilege. The selective framing of foreign cultural content, a function that translation would later formalise, was already embedded in class and accessibility divides. It was not until the 1910s, as imported silent films became increasingly common, that the demand for translation grew substantially. In this period, four primary modes of early AVT emerged prior to the rise of dubbing: live commentary, film synopsis handouts, printed-in subtitles, and the Sino-phone system.


徐園告白

本園於二十日起夜至十二點鐘止內設文虎清茶
並電戲法西洋影戲以供
遊人隨意賞玩向因滬
橋北一帶馬路未平限人
遊覽現已平坦馬車可直
抵園門維冀諸君踏月來
遊足供清談之興揚鑣歸
去可無徒步之厭遊資仍
照舊章准十三夜外加燃
火大戲遊資每位三角此
佈

Figure 2.1 An ink painting of Xu Yuan. Archive code: DY-0153

Figure 2.2 An ink painting of Xu Yuan. Archive code: DY-0153

Live Commentary

The earliest recorded method of AVT in the TC was live commentary, adapted from the Japanese *benshi* tradition (Japanese: 弁士). In the Chinese context, these *benshi*, referred to as film commentators (Chinese: 影戏解说员), stood beside the screen and provided real-time narration of the plot, character backgrounds, and dialogue. As film director Weiyi Wang recalls in an interview (Li and Li, 2009), such performances were often delivered in regional dialects, with two commentators seated on either side of the screen, taking turns to animate the story and engage the audience. Their delivery blended elements of traditional Chinese vernacular storytelling with early cinematic showmanship, effectively blurring the boundary between translation and performance.

Wang's own recollection offers a vivid glimpse of this practice:

> "The interaction between audience and film there was fascinating—something I didn't see in other cinemas. They placed two tall stools on either side of the screen, with one person speaking in Suzhou dialect and the other in Cantonese, because many Cantonese people lived in that area. [...] For example, the villain's lines were scolded in Suzhou dialect. I only went once, but it left a deep impression—the audience was fully engaged in the story, and many sound effects came from the audience themselves. [...] The atmosphere was lively" (Li and Li, 2009, p. 98, my translation).

Improvised, performative, and deeply audience-oriented, live commentary prioritised cultural resonance and audience engagement over linguistic fidelity or fixed standards. Yet, as the demand for foreign films grew in the 1920s, so too did calls for less intrusive, more standardised forms of translation, prompting the adoption of alternative methods (Zhang, 2006).

Film synopsis

From the 1920s to the mid-1930s, the post-World War I environment fostered rapid global film industry growth. In China, this period saw a notable expansion in cinema numbers and the increasing commercialisation of film exhibition. For many audiences, the primary means of making foreign films comprehensible was through printed film synopsis handouts (or film manuals) distributed at theatre entrances (see Figures 2-3 for an example). Typically containing brief cast introductions and plot summaries (Zhang, 2002), these handouts functioned as both interpretive guides and promotional material, rather than as interlingual translation in the modern AVT sense.

Figure 2.3 Film synopsis for Shirley Temple's "Bright Eyes" from Grand Theatre in 1935[1]

As competition among urban theatres intensified, synopses became part of venue branding and marketing (Wang, 2020). Theatres not only increased their imports of foreign films but also invested in enhancing interiors, with printed synopses serving as a key point of differentiation. Though a typical synopsis measured approximately 184 mm × 130 mm, printed in duplex colour over 2-4 pages (or 8-16 for longer narratives), many cinemas commissioned bespoke designs to match the venue's aesthetic. For example, as Zhang (2002) notes, for Grand Theatre (Chinese: 大光明电影院), both texts and images were printed in a dark coffee-brown hue to match the warm lighting of the auditorium (as shown in Figure 2.3). High-quality paper, three-panel folding, and careful layout often turned these handouts into keepsakes for patrons.

Despite their cultural value, synopses also reflected socioeconomic boundaries. Foreign films were concentrated in cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, and remained a luxury largely accessible to upper-class audiences. As such, these synopses operated as both interpretive tools and cultural artefacts, bridging the commercial aims of theatre owners with the aspirational desires of elite viewers (Ding, 2014).

Yet, by the 1930s, rising production costs forced cinemas to shorten synopses, limit print runs, and impose restrictions on free distribution (Huang and Liu, 2019). In addition, content quality also declined and widely criticised (Zhang, 2002). As foreign films became more common and audiences more discerning, a more immediate and textually integrated solution was needed.

[1] Available at: https://dk.pinterest.com/pin/345932815106538942/ (Accessed on 20 April 2022)

Printed-in Subtitles

A turning point came in 1922, when the Peacock Motion Picture Corporation (Chinese: 孔雀电影公司), registered in the United States, opened a branch in Shanghai (Liu and Kong, 2019). The following year, it introduced a subtitling innovation for the American film *The Toll of the Sea* by printing Chinese subtitles directly onto the film strip, known as "printed-in subtitles" (Chinese: 摄制字幕法).

This marked the formal arrival of subtitling in the Chinese film industry and was quickly embraced by both audiences and distributors. By the spring of 1933, most imported films screened in Chinese cinemas were accompanied by these integrated subtitles (Liu and Kong, 2019). Compared to previous methods, printed-in subtitles provided a more seamless experience and allowed viewers to follow dialogue and plot in real time, without relying on supplementary materials or live narration.

While the method quickly gained traction, its limitations were also clear. Production was costly (even more so than film synopses), and its effectiveness depended heavily on audience literacy, which was quite a challenge in a period when literacy rates were still low (Liu and Kong, 2019). For many viewers, especially outside major cities, subtitles remained inaccessible. As a result, the search continued for solutions that were both more inclusive and less dependent on reading skills.

Sino-phones

In 1939, the search for a more accessible and less literacy-dependent form of film translation led to the introduction of the "Sino-phone" system (Chinese: 译意风), a technological innovation that replaced text with live audio interpretation. Originally developed for simultaneous interpretation at international conferences, the system was adapted for cinematic use at Shanghai's Grand Theatre (Grand Theatre Film Company, 2009).

A modified version of this system was installed behind cinema seats, with patrons paying a deposit to rent headsets and receiving a "Sino-phone" coupon before being shown how to use the device (see Figure 2.5). During the screening, a live interpreter's voice replaced what contemporary reviewers described as the "non-sense foreign language" with clear, standard Mandarin (Anonymous, 1939, my translation). The role was typically performed by a single female interpreter, known as a "Sino-phone Lady" (Zhang, 2006, p. 44), who narrated dialogue line by line, adjusted tone to match the scene, and occasionally introduced characters or summarised plot points. Reviewers praised the clarity and adaptability of these performances, particularly for

audiences with little or no English (Anonymous, 1939). In scenes with only music, interpreters encouraged audiences to remove their earpieces and enjoy the atmosphere (Anonymous, 1939), reflecting an emerging awareness of immersion as central to the viewing experience.

Figure 2.4 "Sino-phone" coupon and devices[1].

Over time, Sino-phone narration evolved from straightforward plot delivery to a more expressive and culturally attuned form of interpretation, incorporating emotional nuance, character differentiation, and references embedded in the SC (Kang, 2007). However, the format had clear drawbacks: a single voice for all characters reduced dramatic clarity, and the high cost of equipment prevented widespread adoption beyond well-funded urban theatres.

By the early 1940s, fully dubbed films began to replace the Sino-phone. Dubbing not only maintained audiovisual fidelity but also offered consistent, character-specific voices without requiring real-time interpretation, making it a more practical and scalable solution for a growing, increasingly literate audience in the TC.

2.2.2 The Dubbing Era (1949-1990s)

Film Dubbing

After the foundation of Modern China in 1949, dubbing quickly became the dominant mode of AVT. The release of Private Aleksandr Matrosov (Russian: Рядовой Александр Матросов, Chinese: 普通一兵) in May that year, dubbed by the newly established Northeast Film Studio (Chinese: 东北电影制片厂, the current Changchun Film Studio, Chinese: 长春电影制片厂), was

[1] Available at: https://finance.sina.cn/2021-03-06/detail-ikkntiak5528170.d.html?from=wap (Accessed on 20 April 2022).

successfully released and well-received, particularly in the northeast (Tan, 2014). This marked the beginning of institutionalised dubbing practices in the newly found People's Republic of China (hence force, mainland China) and set the tone for AVT norms from the top-down for the next several decades.

The rise of dubbing coincided with the broader ideological and cultural shifts in mainland China, as the new government sought to remove Hollywood influence, especially after the Korean War broke out in 1950 (Rao and Shao, 2006). As a result, it promoted Soviet imports as politically aligned alternatives. In this context, dubbing quickly became not just a tool for linguistic transfer, but a means of ideological mediation. By 1950, Northeast Film Studio had produced 30 dubbed films from the Soviet Union alone, and within a year had expanded its team to over 100 staff working across seven dubbing units (Tan, 2014).

From early on, dubbing practices were heavily standardised. Translation decisions followed a top-down structure, with clear expectations for linguistic clarity, tonal uniformity, and full adaptation into the Chinese language. Audience preferences were assumed to be monolithic, and the norms that governed dubbing were largely dictated by institutional expectations rather than audience feedback. These norms were prescriptive in nature, reflecting the centralised, state-run structure of the media industry at the time.

The dominance of Soviet films also played a role in shaping what counted as a "standard" dubbed version, as according to Li (2008, pp. 48-52), 421 of the 857 foreign films imported between 1949 and 1965 came from the Soviet Union. This uniformity further entrenched a narrow set of stylistic and ideological norms. However, the situation changed dramatically during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). With Sino-Soviet relations already strained, and foreign media tightly restricted under campaigns of anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism, film translation almost came to a halt. Only 48 foreign films were imported during the entire ten-year period, most from countries like North Korea, Vietnam, Albania, and Romania (Tan, 2014).

It was not until after 1976, with the end of the Cultural Revolution, that diverse foreign films began reappearing in Chinese cinemas. In the 1980s, the return of foreign media and the state's renewed openness led to what many consider the golden age of dubbing in China. Shanghai Dubbing Studio (Chinese: 上海电影制片厂) and Changchun Film Studio became major players, translating over 1,300 foreign films between them in less than a decade (Du, Li and Chen, 2013). Yet even during this flourishing period, the framework for dubbing remained largely unchanged: state-run, professionally managed, and aimed at a broad, imagined "general public".

This historical backdrop is important not just for its institutional context but for understanding how different the AVT landscape would become after 2000. Where dubbing was top-down and monologic, later on cybersubtitling, especially in fan or grassroots settings (see Chapter 6, 7 and 8), introduced very different approaches, which are often decentralised, flexible, often experimental, and shaped by evolving and diverse audience demands. While dubbing had established a strong foundation for AVT in mainland China, its standardised norms and production logic stood in contrast to the participatory, bottom-up practices that would emerge in the era of subtitling.

In this sense, the dubbing era forms both a historical precedent and a point of contrast. The shift from dubbing to fansubbing, and eventually to re-subtitling by both fans and commercial entities, reflects not only changes in technology and access, but deeper shifts in how translation is understood, produced, and consumed in the mainland Chinese context.

Television Dubbing

Similar to the early film dubbing industry, the emergence of television translation in mainland China was also highly top-down and closely tied to socio-political priorities. With the launch of Beijing Television (Chinese: 北京电视台) in 1958, the first television station in the mainland, later renamed China Central Television (CCTV, Chinese: 中央电视台), the domestic television industry began to take shape, and AVT for television started to develop alongside the already thriving film dubbing sector. AVT activities at this stage were no longer limited to films alone but expanded to include international news, television programmes, documentaries, and other forms of media. Nevertheless, dubbing remained the dominant translation method.

According to Chen (1981), around 1960, CCTV began airing *International News* (Chinese: 国际新闻) three times a week, each broadcast lasting fifteen minutes. At that time, the majority of foreign news content came from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and a few other allied countries. In 1963, CCTV signed a content-sharing agreement with the British company Visnews, although cooperation was later interrupted and only resumed in June 1971[1], which helped diversify mainland China's television news sources.

The first formally dubbed foreign television programme aired in mainland China was *Around the World* (Chinese: 世界各地), launched in October 1977. Focused on life in other countries and

[1] Available at: https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%BB%B4%E6%96%AF%E6%96%B0%E9%97%BB%E7%A4%BE/4680693#reference-[1]-258672-wrap (Accessed on 20 March, 2022).

regions, it played a key role in broadening the TA's worldviews. According to former CCTV International Department Director (Zhang and Gao, 1998), before 1995, most foreign television content broadcast on CCTV, including *Around the World*, came as gifts from foreign embassies or was acquired through barter and purchases. In 1979, CCTV established its own dedicated dubbing unit and broadcast its first dubbed foreign series, *Povratak otpisanih* (English: *The Return of the Written Offs*), a 1976 Yugoslav production, laying an important foundation for the development of television dubbing in mainland China (Ma, 2005).

From 1985 onward, CCTV expanded its international partnerships, signing agreements with major media organisations such as Columbia Broadcasting System, News Corp Australia, and Charoen Pokphand Group in Thailand (Zhang, 1997). Meanwhile, the domestic television sector grew rapidly. In 1979, there were only 32 television stations in mainland China; by the end of 2002, there were 360 stations, alongside 130 radio stations and 2,058 television channels[1]. This expansion inevitably led to a shortage of domestic content, prompting many stations to import and broadcast foreign programmes to fill their schedules.

Although the then Ministry of Radio, Film and Television[2] (MRFT, Chinese: 广播电影电视部) stipulated that no more than 30% of broadcast content should be foreign imports, in practice, many stations, especially at county-level, exceeded this limit, with some broadcasting 50% or even 80% foreign content (Fang, 1998). According to Ma (2005), by October 1996, CCTV alone aired approximately 400 episodes of dubbed foreign television annually; by 1998, the figure had risen to between 2,000 and 2,500 episodes, not including anime and cartoons.

This unprecedented exposure to foreign media, or "non-Chineseness", significantly reshaped audience expectations. It laid the groundwork for a later mismatch between the growing appetite for diverse foreign content and the increasingly restrictive media regulations imposed by authorities. Combined with the rise of the internet in the late 1990s, this shift eventually pushed AVT in mainland China into the era of cybersubtitling, in which subtitling, instead of dubbing, resurged among audiences seeking greater control over what and how they consumed foreign audiovisual media.

[1] Available at: https://baike.baidu.com/item/电视台/374832?fr=aladdin (Accessed on 20 March 2022).
[2] MRFT (1949-1998) was the predecessor of State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT, Chinese: 国家广播电影电视总局, 1998-2013), the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT, Chinese: 国家新闻出版广电总局, 2013-2018) and The National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA, Chinese: 国家广播电视总局, 2018-current).

2.2.3 Cybersubtitling (1990s-Current)

Pre-cybersubtitling

By the mid-1980s, film translation in mainland China began to decline, while television translation and digital media technologies were on the rise. Around this time, the circulation of audiovisual content via videotapes, and later VCDs and DVDs, quickly expanded, offering mainland Chinese audiences greater access to foreign media. Unlike the limited and state-approved content available on traditional broadcasting platforms, these formats allowed for greater diversity and autonomy in viewing choices.

However, this boom also paved the way for rampant piracy. According to a survey by Ye (1998), pirated content in China was dominated by American films, followed by productions from regions such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and a variety of Western and Asian countries. The surge in pirated materials dealt a serious blow to the domestic film market and dubbing industry, which entered a steep decline after 1997 (Deng, 2016).

To meet consumer demand, pirate distributors had to find cost-effective ways to localise foreign content. Dubbing, with its high production costs and longer turnaround time, was largely unfeasible. Subtitling, by contrast, offered a quicker and more economical solution. As a result, subtitles re-emerged in mainland China after decades of relative absence, marking a turning point in AVT practices.

Despite the generally poor quality of these subtitles, often created by amateurs seeking to maximise profits, they quickly gained favour among viewers. A 2000 survey conducted by Sina News revealed that 70.37% of respondents preferred watching subtitled films over dubbed ones (Duan, 2001), signalling a shift in audience expectations and laying the groundwork for the resurgence of subtitling in the digital age.

Fansubbing

As noted earlier, before the rise of home media, access to foreign audiovisual content in mainland China was highly restricted, curated, and distributed through a top-down model. This changed significantly with the spread of technologies, which expanded access and diversity beyond state-approved programming. Shortly thereafter, the rapid development of the Internet enabled foreign content to bypass physical distribution altogether, allowing user-generated and user-selected media to flourish. These changes laid the groundwork for participatory subtitling practices, most notably, fansubbing.

As in many other countries, fansubbing in mainland China was initially tied to the distribution of Japanese anime. According to CCTV's children's channel[1] (2016), the first Japanese animation series to reach mainland Chinese audiences was the 1980s version of *Astro Boy* by Osamu Tezuka (Japanese: 手塚治虫), broadcast on CCTV the same year it aired in Japan with its original name *Mighty Atom* (Japanese: 鉄腕アトム, Chinese: 铁臂阿童木). Its success ushered in a wave of foreign animated content, including *Mickey Mouse* and *Transformers*, which captivated young viewers but also raised concerns about foreign influence (Sun, 2014). By the early 2000s, efforts to prioritise domestic animation led to reduced anime programming on television, pushing fans to create and circulate their own subtitles online.

The earliest known mainland Chinese fansub group was "Planet" (Chinese: 行星字幕组). Although being an anime fansub group, Planet did not even have proper Japanese-Chinese translators and had to make secondary translations based on English subtitles that were already made available in Europe and the U.S.[2], which is also one of the practical reasons why most mainland Chinese fansub groups later mainly translated Anglophone series. According to a former group member[3], in 2000, Planet disbanded and re-formed as the "Wandering Subtitles Group" (Chinese: 漫游字幕组) with only five initial members, and one of whom was the inventor of the well-known timecode software Popsub.

By 2002, as subtitling software and peer-to-peer (P2P) technologies became more accessible to mainland Chinese users, the domestic distribution of media began shifting from physical formats like videotapes to digital files shared online. Alongside this transition, fansub groups evolved beyond anime, increasingly focusing on English- and Korean-language audiovisual content. These groups also began setting up dedicated websites and forums to coordinate their work and engage with wider audiences.

One of the earliest and most influential of these forums was F6 (http://www.friends6.com/forum/index.php), established around 2002 and named after the popular American sitcom *Friends* (Wang, 2017). As mainland China's first major Anglophone television forum, F6 played a pivotal role in shaping the early fansubbing landscape until its permanent closure on 7 October 2014 (Modunun, 2022). In its early days, subtitling was a solo

[1] Available at: https://shaoer.cctv.com/2016/08/31/VIDAyq4zksUEJGASjriKQP2g160831.shtml (Accessed on: 28 Jan 2023).
[2] Available at: http://news.sina.com.cn/m/2011-11-18/184523489180_2.shtml (Accessed on: 20 April 2022).
[3] Available at: http://news.sina.com.cn/m/2011-11-18/184523489180_2.shtml (Accessed on: 20 April 2022).

effort, with individuals handling the entire process, from translation and proofreading to timecoding, often taking two to three days to complete a single episode. As the community matured, collaboration became the norm, with members dividing tasks and streamlining workflows (Modunun, 2022).

To credit their work, fansubbers listed all participants' aliases at the end of each subtitle file. Over time, many of these collaborative units adopted distinctive group names, several of which went on to become iconic in the mainland Chinese fansubbing scene. Notably, TLF (The Last Fantasy), FRM (Chinese: 磐灵风软字幕组), YDY (Chinese: 伊甸园字幕组), and YYeTs (Chinese: 人人影视字幕组) all trace their origins back to the F6 community. As fanbases expanded and interests diversified, these teams branched off to form independent forums, often centred on specific genres. For example, FRM, founded in May 2005, became known for its work on science fiction series such as *Doctor Who* (2005) and medical dramas like *Grey's Anatomy* (2005). Many of its translators had medical backgrounds, and the group even recruited healthcare professionals as consultants to ensure high terminological accuracy[1].

Despite the growing dedication and popularity of fansub groups, their early efforts remained largely under the radar. For the most part, the beneficiaries of this grassroots, participatory culture were limited to students, researchers, and niche online communities. Fansubbing functioned as a hidden subculture, enthusiastic but peripheral to mainstream media consumption (Sun, 2014). Yet, it quickly changed with the explosive popularity of *Prison Break* (2005), a Fox television series that became a breakout hit in mainland China.

Before *Prison Break*, fansub groups at the time, although all derivatives of the original F6 forum, tended to operate independently, translating different series according to personal or group interests without much overlap. However, the race to subtitle *Prison Break* introduced direct competition among fansub groups, most notably between YDY and FRM. This rivalry thrust fansubbing into the public eye. In August 2006, *The New York Times* interviewed Chengtai Ding, a member of FRM, bringing unprecedented visibility to the community and its practices[2] (French, 2006). This period saw a rapid proliferation of fansub groups, many of which began establishing dedicated forums, recruiting volunteers, and cultivating distinct identities. According to Hua (2007), FRM's forum had over 420,000 registered members at the time, while YDY's website had received more than 400 million visits. With this surge in popularity came a shift in organisation:

[1] Available at: http://wiki.yyets.net/doku.php?id=yyets:about (Accessed on 20 April 2022).
[2] Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/08/business/worldbusiness/08iht-china.2422918.html (Accessed on 25 April, 2025).

fansub groups began to develop their own internal structures, standardised workflows, and brand awareness. What started as hobbyist collaboration was becoming a more coordinated and strategic enterprise.

However, the rise of fansubbing did not go unnoticed by authorities. In December 2009, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) launched a widespread crackdown on copyright infringement, shutting down over 530 unlicensed websites, including btchina.net, the then largest torrent-sharing site in mainland China. Since fansub groups relied heavily on such platforms for sourcing content, the crackdown significantly disrupted their operations and forced a re-evaluation of their future.

In response, most fansub groups reaffirmed their non-commercial and volunteer-driven identity in an effort to avoid further legal risk. However, the crackdown also prompted new developments. Some groups began exploring partnerships with officially licensed video platforms that needed reliable subtitling services. For instance, YYeTs collaborated with the internet company NetEase to translate a series of online courses from Yale University (Wang, 2017). This collaboration not only demonstrated a shift from grassroots piracy to contributions to open education and digital learning, but also officially blurred the line between amateur and professional subtitling practices.

At the same time, as fansubbing communities matured, some began revisiting earlier projects, editing or entirely retranslating previous subtitles to address criticisms around quality. This process of reworking older subtitles, driven by internal standards as much as external feedback, has laid the groundwork for the broader re-subtitling phenomenon that emerged more prominently in the following decade.

Re-subtitling

Entering the 2010s, the growing demand for online streaming fundamentally reshaped subtitling practices in the TC context. International platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, and Amazon Prime not only offered over-the-top (OTT) services but also took responsibility for the global localisation of their productions, including the re-release of previously aired cable series. To avoid copyright conflicts, these platforms typically commissioned new translations in multiple languages, even for titles that already had existing commercial or fansub subtitles in various regions. As a result, re-subtitling, once a relatively rare phenomenon, became increasingly frequent and institutionalised across global markets, including mainland China.

While the scale and speed of such practices are unprecedented, the circulation of multiple translated versions is not entirely new in the mainland Chinese context. Studies on literary retranslation in mainland China, for example, have shown that revision, replacement, and coexistence of translations have long occurred in response to ideological shifts, institutional change, and evolving audience expectations, particularly in politically sensitive or culturally salient domains (e.g.,Pan, 2014). This suggests that retranslation functions less as a corrective mechanism driven by linguistic ageing (see, e.g., "passive retranslation" in Section 3.1.3), and more as a conscious response to changing sociocultural conditions (see, e.g., "active retranslation" in Section 3.1.3).

This re-subtitling trend, of course, is not limited to commercial platforms. Within mainland Chinese fansubbing communities, retranslation also gained momentum. Early fansubs from the 2000s were frequently criticised for their uneven quality, limited technical resources, and inconsistent cultural mediation (see "*fansubbing*"). As observed in studies of retranslation and reinterpretation in mainland Chinese popular culture on screen, participatory translation environments often encourage iterative revision rather than definitive versions, with later translations responding both to earlier renderings and to shifting audience literacy (see Jiang, 2020).

These re-subtitling efforts reflect both diachronic motivations, such as changing familiarity with the source culture (SC) and improving linguistic competence, as well as synchronic concerns, such as dissatisfaction with newly released official subtitles or the desire to offer alternative interpretations that better resonate with their audiences. Similar dynamics have been identified in research on activist and grassroots translation in mainland China, where revision and retranslation among fansubbing activities are used to negotiate ideological constraints and to construct alternative discourses alongside official versions (Jiang, 2023). Although not always labelled as "retranslation" in a strict sense, such practices really normalise of the recurrence of revision and retranslation in subtitling as well as multiplicity in contemporary mainland Chinese translation culture.

At the same time, the label "amateur" no longer fully captures the current state of fansubbing in the TC. As discussed earlier, many fansubbers have transitioned into professional translation roles and collaborated with authorities. The boundaries between grassroots and commercial subtitling have blurred, creating a hybrid landscape where fan-produced and industry-produced subtitles increasingly coexist, and sometimes compete.

In light of this, this thesis examines three typical re-subtitling scenarios within the TC audiovisual landscape:

- **Diachronic fan re-subtitling** (see Chapter 6), using *Doctor Who* (2005) as a case study. This chapter compares two generations of fansubs for the same show, examining how subtitling norms shifted over a ten-year span, from broadly framing Anglophone television as cultural "other" to a more nuanced, intertextual engagement. The case reveals how increased audience familiarity and fandom specificity have transformed translation strategies over time.
- **Synchronic fan re-subtitling** (see Chapter 7), focusing on four Netflix original series. Here, fansub groups released alternative subtitles shortly after official versions became available. Rather than bridging a temporal availability gap, these re-subtitles, with different preference and priorities in mind, offered a parallel subtitling service tailored to different audience needs within the global media ecosystem.
- **Diachronic commercial re-subtitling** (see Chapter 8), analysing three official translations of *Friends* (1994) across two decades. This chapter traces how three commercial re-subtitling releases, by *Sohu* in 2012, Netflix around 2015, and Bilibili in 2022 respectively, has been shaped by shifts in platform policy, state regulation, and sociocultural norms.

These case studies demonstrate how re-subtitling in the TC context reflects not just technical or temporal shifts, but broader changes in media consumption, cultural literacy, and translation ideology. As the AVT landscape becomes more decentralised, participatory, and transnational, re-subtitling as a phenomenon offers a unique site for investigating how translation and subtitling norms adapt, diverge, and evolve.

2.3 Conclusion

In the early stages of film translation in China, methods such as live film synopses, printed-in subtitles and Sino-phone system were sufficient to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. At the time, a single version, however basic, could satisfy the expectations of a relatively uniform audience, for whom foreign films remained a niche novelty and a distant cultural other.

In addition, the dominance of dubbing throughout much of the twentieth century reflected not just technological or literacy constraints, but also the broader top-down control of media access.

AVT practices followed prescriptive norms, and audiences had little room to question or contribute to the translation they received.

This began to shift around the 1990s with the gradual liberalisation of media access, and more dramatically ever since the 2000s with the rise of digital technologies. The Internet in particular allowed audiences to move from passive consumption to active participation, critiquing, revising, and producing subtitles on their own terms.

These changes triggered a fundamental transformation in AVT norms. A single, authoritative translation could no longer meet the expectations of increasingly diverse, media-savvy audiences. Instead, multiple subtitle versions, produced by both fans and professionals, began to coexist, each shaped by different linguistic proficiencies, cultural literacies, and viewing priorities. The boundary between amateur and professional has grown increasingly blurred, especially with the rise of participatory models such as fansubbing and crowdsourcing.

The history of AVT in mainland China thus reveals a deeper evolution in translation norms and audience agency: from a time when live commentary sufficed, to a present in which re-subtitling has become a dynamic response to differentiated audienceship. A more systematic discussion of these evolving norms and variation follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Retranslation and Norm Theories

3.1 Retranslation: Theories and Practices

3.1.1 Literary Retranslation

As defined in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Pan, 2014), retranslation refers either to the act of translating a previously translated work again into the same language, or to the resulting retranslated text. Given the descriptive nature of this research, the primary focus here is on analysing the retranslated texts rather than the translation process.

Retranslation as a theoretical concept only began to be systematically explored in TS towards the end of the twentieth century (Chaume, 2018b). Early scholarship on the topic was almost exclusively concerned with literary translation, particularly sacred texts, canonical works, and dramatic texts (Brownlie, 2006; Koskinen and Paloposki, 2010). Non-literary works, such as scientific or technical texts, also received some attention, but were often seen as less relevant to discussions of retranslation, given their focus on the transmission of factual information rather than artistic or stylistic nuance (Koskinen and Paloposki, 2003).

This privileging of literary retranslation stems in part from scholarly views like that of Berman (1990), who saw retranslation as a progressive act of improvement. Berman argues that successive translations gradually come closer to conveying the essence of the ST, eventually producing a good or even canonical translation. Retranslations of literary works, therefore, are seen as desirable because they embody and reveal deeper layers of the original, whereas retranslations of technical texts, which aim simply at transmitting objective knowledge, are regarded as unnecessary (Xu, 2003).

Berman's theory, developed from a strongly source-oriented perspective, views greater fidelity to the ST as a sign of translational progression. On another note, Bensimon (1990) offers a slightly different rationale, as he suggests that first translations tend to be more target-oriented because a foreign text must initially be adapted to fit the receiving culture's norms in order to gain acceptance. Only after the text has become less foreign can later retranslations afford to move closer to the original (Bensimon, 1990).

Despite some differences in emphasis, both Berman and Bensimon proposed a critical view centred on the notion of lack. Namely, that retranslations arise to address shortcomings in the initial translation. These shortcomings might include mistranslations, omissions, stylistic

awkwardness, or a loss of cultural nuance (Massardier-Kenney, 2015). However, as Massardier-Kenney (2015) also points out, this discourse of lack has tended to sometimes overlook other important motivations for retranslation.

Retranslations may as well emerge from the desire to address new or different reception context, changing cultural dynamics, or simply to explore alternative interpretative possibilities, which are all functions that do not necessarily imply that earlier translations were deficient. In this broader perspective, retranslation can be seen as a means of actualising the latent potential of a text, keeping it alive for the evolving readerships rather than simply correcting perceived flaws.

3.1.2 *Retranslation Hypothesis*

This idea, that first translations are more target-oriented while later retranslations are more source-oriented, has since been further developed, and is commonly referred to as the *Retranslation Hypothesis*. It suggests that the first translation of a text into a given language tends to adapt the text to the norms and conventions of the TC, while subsequent retranslations move closer to the original ST. Early translations often suppress the foreignness of the ST, favouring readability and cultural assimilation (Baker and Saldanha, 2019).

While the *Retranslation Hypothesis* has been influential, it has also been subject to critique. Research has shown that first translations are not always domesticating, nor do all retranslations necessarily adopt a more source-oriented strategy (e.g., (Koskinen and Paloposki, 2003, 2004, 2010; Hanna, 2016). Even in cases where the hypothesis pattern holds, it is now widely acknowledged that the hypothesis may often simplify a much more complex and variable set of translational behaviours. Factors such as genre, patronage, commissioning bodies, translator ideology, and evolving audience preferences all play a role in shaping the orientation of any given translation.

To account for this complexity, this study treats the *Retranslation Hypothesis* as a useful point of entry rather than a universal law. It will be employed in conjunction with DTS (see Section 3.2.1) and supplemented by more targeted tools, including Toury's initial norms (Section 3.2.3) and Pedersen's orientation norms and intervention strategies (Section 3.2.4). The *Retranslation Hypothesis*, in this context, functions not as a prediction model but as a comparative lens, broadly aligned with Venuti's (1995, 2018) concept of domestication and foreignization, for exploring how re-subtitling respond to shifting norms over time and across contexts.

3.1.3 Re-subtitling as Active and Passive Retranslation

Although retranslation has traditionally been discussed in literary contexts, it is by no means limited to them. As outlined in Chapter 2, the past two decades have seen a sharp rise in subtitle retranslation within mainland China, a phenomenon driven by fansubbing, crowdsourcing, and the growth of streaming platforms. To better understand the motivations behind this surge, this section turns to Pym's (2014, p. 82) distinction between "passive" and "active" retranslations, a typology that proves especially useful for interpreting re-subtitling practices in this context.

According to Pym (2014), passive retranslations typically appear over extended periods and tend to respond to slower-moving cultural or linguistic shifts in the TC. They do not necessarily compete with earlier versions but reflect diachronic evolution (e.g., multiple *Bible* translations over centuries). Active retranslations, on the other hand, emerge within the same generation or cultural moment and often engage critically with earlier translations. They are typically motivated by dissatisfaction, rivalry, or alternative value systems, and arise in response to differing patronages or diverging audience expectations.

This distinction becomes particularly important when considered alongside the *Retranslation Hypothesis*. While the hypothesis is primarily concerned with passive retranslations, those that evolve as familiarity with the ST increases, the rise of active retranslation, especially in fansubbing, complicates this linear, diachronic model. Active retranslations arise not from the aging of earlier translations, but from immediate, contested negotiations of meaning within the same timeframe. Recognising both types is crucial to understanding the full range of re-subtitling practices.

Re-subtitling in the mainland Chinese context exhibits characteristics of both passive and active retranslation. In some cases, earlier subtitle versions become "dated" due to shifts in language use, audience literacy, or cultural familiarity, prompting passive retranslation. A case in point is the two fansub versions of the 2005 revival of *Doctor Who*, where the initial Simplified Chinese subtitles were released alongside the show's original broadcast, and a new version was created a decade later by a different generation of fansubbers (see Chapter 6). By Pym's definition, the latter qualifies as a passive retranslation shaped by diachronic change.

Conversely, some re-subtitling efforts are better described as active retranslations. These do not respond to the passage of time but rather emerge as real-time critiques of existing translations. A strong example is the fansub versions of *Stranger Things* (2016), which were released almost simultaneously with Netflix's official subtitles (see Chapter 7). Here, the

retranslation was not merely an update, but an alternative interpretation, offering a parallel service that challenged the commercial version on stylistic or ideological grounds.

Of course, not all synchronic retranslations are inherently active, nor are all diachronic ones necessarily passive, yet it remains valuable for examining the shifting motivations, audiences, and norms underlying different forms of re-subtitling practices. These motivations can also be examined through Venuti's (2004, pp. 29-30) concepts of the “creation of value” and the “ideology of commercialism”. Active retranslations, especially in fansubbing, often aim to reinterpret the ST through new sets of values, generating alternative receptions within the TC. Fansub versions, for instance, frequently position themselves in opposition to official subtitles, highlighting different ideological or cultural stances. By contrast, passive retranslations tend to align with commercial imperatives, aiming to refresh outdated translations for market readability, comprehension, and relevance.

Whether driven by ideological divergence, linguistic refinement, or audience engagement, both forms of retranslation justify themselves through difference whether cultural, functional, or interpretative. Analysing these differences offers a productive lens for tracing the evolution of subtitling norms (Koskinen and Paloposki, 2004). In a rapidly shifting media environment such as mainland China’s, where socio-political conditions, platform dynamics, and audience expectations evolve quickly, re-subtitling becomes a powerful site for observing both diachronic and synchronic change.

To examine these evolving practices more systematically, the following section introduces the concept of translation norms, and how these norms provide a structured framework for tracking shifts in subtitling strategies over time.

3.2 Norm Theories

3.2.1 Descriptive Translation Studies

To systematically examine the evolving subtitling practices discussed earlier, particularly the shifting norms visible through re-subtitling in the TC context, it is essential to ground the analysis within an established theoretical framework. One of the most influential approaches for studying actual translation behaviour is DTS. Rather than prescribing what translations should be, DTS is concerned with describing and analysing what translations actually are across different historical and cultural contexts, which is a perfect fit for this rather product-oriented, comparative research. This section aims to introduce the concept of translational norms as

developed within the DTS tradition and to explain why DTS offers a particularly suitable paradigm for this research.

Research on describing what translations and translators actually are, or have been, is by definition descriptive. In contrast to its competing paradigm supported by prescriptivist scholars who normally seek a sense of a "good" translation, descriptive studies promoted and refined by scholars, especially Toury (1981, 1991, 1995, 2012), are based on objective and empirical observation of actual translation practices, as opposed to prescribing what translation should be like (see Pedersen, 2018). Gaining more scholarly attention in the 1980s and 1990s, Holmes (1988) proposed that DTS could be divided into three primary categories of research, focusing on the product, function and process respectively.

Product-oriented DTS focuses on the description of specific translations, comparative descriptions of different translations of the same ST (in the same language or in different languages), and the description of larger corpora of translation, which sparked corpus analysis in translation studies in the early 1990s.

Function-oriented DTS studies the contexts rather than translated texts, considering the function, influence, and value of translation in the target context, and the analysis of how translations affect the context.

Lastly, *process-oriented* DTS aims for a systematic description of what happens in the translator's head as they translate, leading to translation psychology, but it may also include the investigation of more conscious decision-making processes, the choice of global strategies, or the structuring of translation services.

In accordance with Holmes' taxonomy, this study adopts a primarily product-oriented approach, analysing a self-built corpus of actual subtitles and their conscious retranslations across varied contexts. However, given the influence of sociocultural factors such as censorship, patronage, and audience expectations, particularly salient in the TC subtitling landscape, it also incorporates elements of function-oriented DTS. This dual approach allows for a more comprehensive investigation of how subtitling practices reflect and respond to shifting norms within specific cultural and institutional frameworks.

Although DTS initially emerged from literary translation studies, it has since been widely adopted in other fields, including AVT. Scholars such as Remael (2000) and Díaz-Cintas (2004) have demonstrated that DTS offers a sufficiently coherent yet flexible framework well suited to

AVT research. As Díaz-Cintas (2004, p. 31) notes, DTS provides a "very valuable starting point" for studying subtitled texts due to its focus on observable translational behaviour and its adaptability to media-specific constraints.

Within this framework, Toury (1995, 2012) advocates for a methodology grounded in empirical observation, one that avoids reliance on isolated or anecdotal examples and instead focuses on identifying recurring patterns across a corpus of purposefully selected material. This emphasis on regularities makes DTS particularly suitable for exploring how norms function across time, space, and audience. A corpus-informed method, when combined with contextual insights, can thus help illuminate the shifting dynamics between ST and TT, SC and TC, and how these forces jointly shape AVT practice.

Ultimately, this study positions itself at the intersection of product- and function-oriented DTS, using textual comparison as a primary mode of analysis while remaining attentive to the broader sociocultural forces that inform subtitling strategies in the TC context.

3.2.2 Toury's Concept of Translation Norms

Translation, particularly AVT in an increasingly digitalised context, is a communicative and collaborative practice typically governed by shared styles, conventions, and expectations. These are often referred to as *translation norms*. Terms such as norms, conventions, and rules, as well as notions of descriptiveness and prescriptiveness, are used differently by various scholars and carry distinct meanings across disciplinary contexts (Pedersen, 2011).

The concept of norms in translation theory was first introduced by Levý, (1969) and Even-Zohar (1971, 1979) but has primarily been disseminated by Toury from the late 1970s onwards. For Toury (2012, p. 63), norms arise from the understanding that translation is a socially learned activity, and that norms function as the culturally internalised translation of general values into practical "instructions" that guide behaviour in specific contexts. In other words, they express a culture's ideas about what counts as "right or wrong, or adequate or inadequate" in translation performance.

In the following sections, Toury's theory of norms will be discussed in more detail through four key components: (a) the concepts of *acceptability* and *adequacy* in translation, (b) the multiplicity of translational norms, and (c) Toury's taxonomy of norms.

The Acceptability and Adequacy of Translation

Toury (1995) frames translation as an act situated within the TC, a target-oriented emphasis that remains one of the most debated aspects of his theory. His analytical model, particularly the concept of the "problem + solution" unit or "coupled pair" (Toury, 1995, p. 38), has been criticised as partial or incomplete for not fully integrating the role of the SC (see Pym, 2014; Pedersen, 2011). In the revised edition of his seminal work, Toury (2012) acknowledges this complexity by arguing that translation is not a uniform activity, and no single feature will characterise all translations across cultures or historical moments.

To address this diversity, Toury (2012, p. 70) proposes two interwoven principles that underpin translation practice: *acceptability* and *adequacy*. Acceptability refers to the production of a text designed to occupy a specific position within the TC. Adequacy, on the other hand, involves constituting a representation of a ST from another language and culture. Toury (2012) argues that translation is always marked by a tension between these two poles: any move toward one necessitates a move away from the other. Rather than a binary, they form a continuum where translators negotiate trade-offs depending on the norms and expectations in each case.

To explore this relationship between SC and TC in translation, Toury introduces the concept of coupled pairs， units of analysis comprising ST items and their corresponding TT solutions. These may include metaphors, cultural references, puns, etc., and serve as indicators of strategy. As Toury explains:

> "[o]nce established, the members of a pair can be compared with each other in greater detail. After a large number of isolated pairs have been studied, *regular patterns* should be looked for which may have governed all these pairs, or subgroups thereof" (1995, p. 81, italics in original).

Crucially, acceptability and adequacy are not static, as they could evolve under the influence of temporal, cultural, and socio-political factors. For instance, foreign language policy in mainland China has had a profound effect on translation norms. English education only gained national emphasis after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1979, but rapidly expanded in the decades that followed. Since 2001, English has been part of mainland China's nine-year compulsory education system since primary school programmes (Adamson, 2004). As of April

2020, China's Daily Online reported that an estimated 400 million mainland citizens were learning English, comprising approximately over 28.3% of the population[1].

While these figures do not necessarily imply advanced proficiency across the board, they do point to a significant cultural shift. A broad base of English learners has gained at least a foundational understanding of its grammar, phonetics, and associated cultures. It follows that the criteria by which audiences view translations, especially in terms of adequacy and acceptability, are likely to have shifted as well. For audiences with greater linguistic and cultural awareness, translation choices that once felt acceptable may now appear insufficient, awkward, or patronising. These changing expectations in turn reshape the norms that guide subtitling practices.

Such a cultural transformation is exactly the kind of context Toury (2012, p. 86) refers to when discussing the "multiplicity of translation norms", which is addressed in the next section. In the mainland Chinese context, the rapid rise in English literacy has coincided with the growth of the Video-On-Demand (VOD) industry and an expanding globalised media environment. These overlapping forces have intensified demand for AVT, especially subtitling, making the field particularly ripe for norm-based investigation.

The Multiplicity of Translation Norms

Translational norms, like other social norms, are acquired through socialisation and inherently involve a degree of sanction, whether formal or informal. As mentioned previously, Toury (2012, p. 65) notes that norms exist on a "continuum", ranging from the highly individual and idiosyncratic to those that closely resemble rules. Some norms are more rigid and prescriptive, while others are relatively fluid and context-dependent.

Importantly, not all norms are equally binding at any given time or place, and variation within norms is common. Toury emphasises that norms are not fixed entities but evolve alongside cultural and historical developments. However, new norms do not simply replace old ones; rather, different sets of norms tend to coexist. As in any sociocultural domain, this coexistence results in what Toury (2012, p. 77) calls "trendy", "old-fashioned", or "progressive" translations, each reflecting different value systems or interpretive communities.

[1] The percentages are calculated approximations based on data from *China Statistical Yearbook* (Chinese: *中国统计年鉴*). According to *China Statistical Yearbook*, the population in 1985, 2008 and 2020 are 1.059, 1.328, and 1.412 billion, respectively. Available at: http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2021/indexch.htm (Accessed: 01 September 2022).

Moreover, translational norms are not only shaped by the broader sociocultural context in which they operate, but they also vary across and within cultures. As Toury (2012, p. 86) puts it: "whatever its exact content, there is absolutely no need for a norm to apply to the same extent, or at all - to all sectors within a culture", let alone across different cultures. This internal variability means that even within a single culture, multiple, competing translational norms may exist simultaneously, depending on the genre, mode, or even the ideological stance of a translator or translation community.

This recognition of multiplicity is particularly relevant in the field of re-subtitling, where divergent expectations among audiences, platforms, and subtitlers often result in overlapping and competing norms. In fast-evolving contexts like the TC audiovisual landscape, such norm multiplicity provides a useful lens for analysing why different subtitling practices emerge, coexist, and sometimes contest one another in the form of re-subtitling.

Toury's Taxonomy of Norms

As discussed earlier, norm variation can occur both within and across cultures, and their binding force can vary in strength. While some translation norms take on prescriptive functions, especially those that resemble institutionalised rules, they remain, for scholars working within the DTS framework, key objects of analysis rather than standards to uphold (Brownlie, 1994). Toury (2012) argues that translational norms influence not only the final product but also the entire translation process. Traces of these norms "can be noticed in every aspect of the end product" (Toury, 2012, p. 81).

To provide a more structured understanding, Toury (2012, pp. 79-84) categorises translational norms into three major types: initial norms, preliminary norms, and operational norms.

Initial norms concern the translator's underlying orientation towards the act of translation. They reflect the translator's decision to adhere more closely either to the norms of the TC (leading to greater *acceptability*) or to those of the SC (prioritising *adequacy*). This initial choice shapes the overall translational approach and indicates where the translator positions the translated text in relation to its source.

Preliminary norms deal with the broader conditions under which a translation is undertaken. These include the existence and nature of any translation policy (e.g. institutional or editorial preferences), and the degree of directness of the translation, whether it is rendered from the original ST or via an intermediate language. In the context of re-subtitling, where time constraints

and distribution networks can shape subtitling practices, preliminary norms are often embedded within platform-specific or industry-level decisions.

Operational norms, by contrast, guide the actual decision-making during the translation process. They influence the translation's textual makeup, such as the segmentation, condensation, and rendering of specific units (e.g. idioms, cultural references, or stylistic choices). Operational norms govern which elements from the ST are preserved and which are transformed, and thus play a crucial role in shaping the observable ST-TT relationship. They are particularly relevant in AVT, where spatial and temporal constraints often lead to systematic modifications and can reveal clear patterns when studied across corpora.

This taxonomy provides a useful framework for identifying how different layers of norms operate simultaneously in subtitling practice. In the context of re-subtitling, as will be explored in subsequent chapters (see Chapter 6, 7 and 8), norm variation can often be traced back to different configurations of these three types, highlighting shifts not only in textual strategies but also in broader cultural, audience-based expectations.

3.2.3 Chesterman's Concept of Norms in Translation

A different but complementary taxonomy of norms is provided by Chesterman (1993, 2016), who distinguishes between *professional norms* and *expectancy norms*, focusing respectively on the translation process and the translation product.

Professional norms, also known as process norms, govern accepted translation methods and the translator's conduct. Chesterman further classifies these into three key subcategories (2016, pp. 66-68):

Accountability norms, which concern the translator's responsibility for the choices made during the translation process;

Communication norms, which reflect the view of translation as an act of social interaction aimed at optimising communicative efficiency between parties;

Relation norms, which guide the relational dynamics between the ST and TT, i.e., how closely the translation should adhere to its source.

What sets Chesterman's approach apart from Toury's is its evaluative orientation. While Toury's framework, rooted in DTS, deliberately avoids making value judgments, Chesterman

argues that understanding what makes a "good" translation is both necessary and inevitable within professional practice. His norms are concerned with competent professional behaviour, not simply with observable regularities across all translations. This has raised questions within the discipline. As Brownlie (1994, p. 11, italics in original) points out:

> "[i]t is unclear whether Chesterman's higher order professional norms are based on textual studies or consultation of the people concerned. Similarly Toury's claim that all translational phenomena can be accounted for by the *adequacy/acceptability* dichotomy needs to be tested. In a descriptive approach it would seem preferable to postulate only very general types of norms or even simply the concept of norm, allowing detail to emerge from actual studies".

Brownlie's caution is well taken here. This study treats both the above-mentioned and subsequent categories of norms not as fixed labels but as guiding tools. Rather than applying them prescriptively, it allows norms to emerge inductively from close textual and contextual analysis. This approach not only maintains the descriptive ethos of DTS but also better accommodates the variability and complexity of re-subtitling practices in the TC context.

That said, in contrast to professional norms. Chesterman's *expectancy norms*, or product norms, are based on recipient expectations. Chesterman defines them as "the expectations of readers of a translation (of a given type) concerning what a translation (of this type) *should* be like" (2016, p. 62, italics in original). These expectations are not limited to linguistic fidelity or stylistic fluency; they are shaped by multiple factors, including prevailing translation traditions within the TC, ideological or economic pressures, institutional patronage and censorship, power dynamics between SC and TC, and the influence of parallel texts or textual conventions common within the TL.

As Hermans (1991, p. 166) notes, the notion of a "correct" translation is one that aligns with "the correctness notions prevailing in a particular system", and adopts the solutions regarded as normatively appropriate for a given communicative situation. This invites a deeper question, echoing both Toury's and Chesterman's concepts. Correct or acceptable for whom? By whose standards? To what extent are these standards shared among all readers or, in the context of this research, among different audience segments within the TL community?

In an era marked by increasing cultural and linguistic fluidity, such notions of correctness or acceptability are far from fixed. They are especially unstable in the field of subtitling, where translation often involves complex trade-offs between fidelity, fluency, timing, visual constraints,

and where audiences may range from casual viewers to culturally literate and highly dedicated fan/audience communities.

3.2.4 Pedersen's Subtitling Norms for Television

Within the framework of DTS, Pedersen's (2011) model presents a subtitling-specific approach to identifying translation norms, tailored to the audiovisual medium. His work is particularly relevant to this study for two reasons. First, it is firmly grounded in the practice of television subtitling, a fast-paced, norm-governed mode of translation with unique constraints. Second, it centres on what Pedersen (2011, p. 41) terms as "Extralinguistic Cultural References", which are items rich in cultural specificity that often require translators to make strategic decisions.

Pedersen's focus on cultural references, referring to people, institutions, places, food, or other culturally bound entities unfamiliar to the TA, mirrors Toury's concept of coupled pairs, i.e., problem-solution units extracted from ST and TT for comparative analysis. Like coupled pairs, cultural references highlight points of cultural and interpretive tension in translation and are thus particularly useful for investigating the subtitler's strategic choices, which reflects what Toury terms as operational norms. This study also aims to adopt cultural references as the primary site of analysis, using them to trace subtitling strategies across multiple versions and explore the norms that underlie those choices (See Chapter 4).

In his pan-Scandinavian corpus of over 100 subtitled Anglophone films and TV programmes, Pedersen (2011, pp.190-208) identifies four types of empirical subtitling norms:

Technical norms, related to media-specific constraints, such as reading speed, subtitle length, and condensation.

Orientation norms, indicating whether subtitles are source-oriented (foreignizing) or target-oriented (domesticating).

Guidance norms, concerning the extent to which subtitles aid comprehension of culturally unfamiliar material.

Other lower-level norms, habitual translation behaviours that may not be formally codified but still influence subtitling practice.

Of these, *orientation norms* and *guidance norms* are especially relevant to this study.

Orientation norms offer a direct link to Toury's initial norms, which address the translator's underlying choice between *adequacy* (more source-oriented) and *acceptability* (more target-oriented). This concept is particularly pertinent in cases of re-subtitling, where a later version may shift this orientation in response to changing audience expectations or evolving norms.

Guidance norms, on the other hand, address when and how translators employ interventional strategies to aid viewer comprehension of cultural references, particularly when those references are *monocultural* (i.e., entirely foreign and unfamiliar to the TA). Pedersen (2011, pp. 106-110) observes that interventional strategies (such as generalisation, specification and substitution) are used far more frequently for *monocultural* references than for more accessible types (e.g., *transcultural* items). He also notes that these strategies reflect an awareness of *transculturality* (the degree of cultural overlap between ST and TT) and *extratextuality* (whether the viewer is likely to recognise the reference from outside the text).

This dimension of guidance norms aligns closely with Leppihalme's (1997) typology of interventional strategies for translating culture-bound elements, particularly her classification of strategies such as retention, addition of explanations, or full substitution. Both Leppihalme and Pedersen share a functionalist perspective (see e.g., Reiss and Vermeer, 2014), as in they are concerned not only with what strategy is used, but with how it facilitates or obstructs communication between the source and target audiences.

In this regard, Pedersen's orientation and guidance norms form a bridge between Toury's descriptive taxonomy and Chesterman's functional-evaluative perspective. Orientation norms parallel Toury's initial norms, while guidance norms capture the degree of operational intervention evident in the treatment of cultural references. Both also shed light on broader expectancy norms in Chesterman's view, since audience expectations often determine whether orientation shifts or interventions are perceived as necessary, excessive, or appropriate.

That is to say, Pedersen's model offers a media-specific yet theoretically connected framework for this study. By examining how cultural references are treated across multiple subtitle versions, this study traces variation in orientation (echoing Toury's initial norms) and levels of intervention (reflecting Toury's operational norms and Pedersen's guidance norms). These variation, in turn, point to evolving expectancy norms within the TC context as theorised by Chesterman, and ultimately reveal how subtitling practices evolve in response to changing audience expectations within the TC context.

3.2.5 Norm Theories in Mainland Chinese Translation Scholarship

While Pedersen's (2011) model provides a useful operational starting point for this study, particularly in its treatment of cultural references as sites where subtitling norms become visible, his model is grounded solely in pan-Scandinavian broadcast contexts, where subtitling practices are relatively institutionalised and audiences comparatively homogeneous. Applying this model to the mainland Chinese audiovisual environment therefore requires contextual grounding. This is not because norm theories are less suited to the mainland Chinese context, but because subtitling norms in mainland China emerge under a different set of conditions, shaped by regulation, platform-driven distribution, uneven audience preferences and SC familiarity, as well as the parallel circulation of professional and participatory subtitles which is unique especially to the mainland Chinese subtitling landscape. These factors complicate assumptions of a stable or unified target system on which much early norm-oriented research implicitly relies.

Mainland Chinese TS scholarship, much like the western counterpart, has traditionally concentrated on literary and institutional translation, where norm theories have provided productive insights. Diachronic research has traced the evolution of translational norms, particularly those concerning stylistic register, linguistic choices, and degrees of mediation, as functions of shifting ideological climates, publishing regimes, and target readerships (see, e.g., Li, 2014). These studies align well with Toury's conception of norms as probabilistic and historically situated, but they also extend it by foregrounding the interplay between institutional authority and translator agency.

Building on this perspective, Xu and Tian (2020) conceptualise norm dynamics through centre-periphery movement within the target system. Their analysis shows how institutional actors such as publishers, editors, and translators function as "norm entrepreneurs" (Xu and Tian, 2020, p. 660), repositioning translational practices according to ideological, commercial, and aesthetic priorities. This account is particularly relevant to contemporary AVT, where platform-based production has expanded the range of agents involved in subtitling and intensified competition over normative legitimacy.

Similarly, a complementary strand of research emphasises how translators operate under partially competing norms. Hu's (2020) risk-management model demonstrates how institutional translators navigate pressures related to fidelity, political appropriateness, and audience accessibility through strategic judgement. Norms are thus treated as negotiable expectations whose relative weight varies according to perceived risk and reward. This re-conceptualisation is

especially pertinent to re-subtitling, where heterogeneous agents respond to divergent institutional constraints and audience orientations.

Further complicating the dynamics of norm formation are studies that focus on norm deviation as a strategic and productive act. Yu (2024), for instance, examines the translation of dialects in Chinese literary translation and shows that norm violations do not always trigger sanctions. In some cases, such deviations may serve as symbolic capital, legitimised by factors such as translator prestige, institutional endorsement, or shifts in audience expectations. This strategic deployment of deviation aligns with Yu and Xu's (2017) sociological account of norm genesis. Their study traces how norm-breaking can evolve into norm-making, not through random disruption, but through an agentive process of negotiation and field restructuring. Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), their study highlights how innovations introduced by strategically positioned translators can stabilise into new norms once they gain recognition within the field.

At a broader level, mainland Chinese norm-oriented scholarship has also emphasised the role of institutional authority and cultural self-positioning in shaping translation norms. Chang's (2015) study of source-initiated translations adds a macro-political dimension to this discussion. Investigating Chinese state-sponsored translations of domestic literature into English, Chang illustrates how translation strategies, such as the increasing retention of culture-specific items, correspond to evolving narratives of national self-representation. In this case, shifts in mainland China's "auto-image" (Chang, 2015, p. 102) shape the normative parameters of translation practice, reinforcing the idea that norms are not only textual or institutional, but also entangled in larger geopolitical and ideological frameworks.

Despite these developments, norm theory in mainland Chinese scholarship has remained largely concentrated on literary and institutional translation. AVT, and subtitling in particular, has received comparatively limited attention from a norm-theoretical perspective. Where norms are addressed in AVT research, they are often framed prescriptively, in terms of technical standards or regulatory requirements, rather than reconstructed descriptively from translated products. This risks conflating norms with guidelines and obscures the variability and contestation that characterise subtitling in digitally mediated, platform-based environments.

These limitations become especially evident in the context of re-subtitling, where multiple subtitle versions coexist across time, platforms, and distribution channels. Unlike the relatively stable institutional settings examined in much existing mainland Chinese norm research, re-

subtitling involves heterogeneous agents, including professional and freelance subtitlers, streaming platforms, and fan communities, each operating under distinct normative assumptions. In such contexts, norms are more plausibly identified through recurring patterns across versions than through reference to centrally imposed standards.

Against this backdrop, the present study adopts a product-oriented, descriptive approach to norm analysis. Drawing on Pedersen's (2011) orientation and guidance norms, it situates these concepts within the mainland Chinese AVT context and uses cultural references as empirical points of comparison across initial subtitles and their retranslations. Operational norms are reconstructed through patterned variation in orientation and degrees of intervention. By tracing how these patterns shift across versions, the study engages with mainland Chinese scholarship that foregrounds norm dynamics, negotiation, and agency, while extending norm theory to the underexplored domain of audiovisual re-subtitling.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter positions the present study within the paradigm of DTS, adopting a primarily product-oriented and norm-based perspective. Rather than prescribing what subtitling should be, the aim here is to describe and analyse what subtitling practices were/are, particularly within the specific sociocultural and historical context of mainland China. In this sense, the study follows Holmes' and Toury's conception of translation as a cultural, norm-governed activity that reflects shifting audience expectations across changing contexts.

Toury's framework (1995, 2012) provides the foundation. Of particular relevance are initial norms, which reveal the translator's underlying orientation toward the ST or TT, and operational norms, which indicate the kinds of textual adjustments observable in the translation product. These categories are well suited to examining how different versions of subtitles for the same audiovisual texts diverge or evolve.

To tailor this framework to subtitling, the study adopts Pedersen's (2011) subtitling-specific model. His orientation norms align well with Toury's initial norms, and his guidance norms extend Toury's operational norms by highlighting the degree and type of intervention in the rendering of cultural references. The orientation and guidance norms together sharpen the analytical focus of this study, allowing systematic observation of both where subtitling choices are oriented and how much intervention is applied (see Chapter 4).

Finally, the variation observed in orientation and level of intervention across diachronic and synchronic re-subtitling cases ultimately reflect what Chesterman (1993, 2016) terms expectancy norms. These norms are shaped by audience expectations, institutional pressures, and TC conventions, and they materialise in the form and features of the subtitled product. By triangulating Toury's descriptive model, Pedersen's subtitling-specific taxonomy, and Chesterman's communicative and product-oriented insights, this study seeks to provide a theoretically robust and media-appropriate analysis of how orientation and intervention operate as key dimensions of norm variation in subtitling within the evolving audiovisual landscape of the TC context.

Before turning to the research methods and overall methodological framework in Chapter 5, Chapter 4 further establishes the key unit of analysis for this norm-based comparative study, i.e., the coupled pair. It explains why cultural references are selected as the primary form of coupled pairs and outlines how they are identified, categorised, and analysed through the subtitling strategies applied to them.

Chapter 4 Subtitling Cultural References

4.1 Introduction: Identifying Translation Problems as Coupled Pairs

While Chapter 3 introduced the norm-based theoretical framework of this study, this chapter shifts focus to how such norms can be observed in practice through a specific linguistic marker, i.e., translation problems, with a particular emphasis on cultural references. Broadly speaking, translation problems associated with cultural references demand more than a straightforward substitution of ST segments with their TT equivalents but more creative and cognitive effort and often result in strategic variation across subtitle versions.

defines a translation problem from a psycholinguistic perspective as occurring "when a subject realises that, at a given point in time, s/he is unable to transfer or to transfer adequately a source-language text segment into the target-language". While this definition is valuable, it remains largely process-oriented. In this study, translation problems are instead approached from a product-oriented perspective, by analysing the translated text itself to identify where and how difficulties surface in the final output. This perspective is particularly useful when the translator's internal cognitive processes are inaccessible, as it allows problem-solving behaviour to be inferred from the textual features and strategies observable in the TT.

Within DTS, Toury (2012, p. 103) expands on the notion of translation problems by introducing the concept of "coupled pairs". That is, a method of identifying "a series of (ad hoc) coupled pairs of replacing + replaced segments". In his view, these pairs do not merely represent one-way solutions to problems; rather, they illustrate a dynamic interaction between problems and their corresponding solutions. This approach allows researchers to reconstruct, from the product itself, what was likely perceived as problematic in a given context.

This two-way analysis is especially relevant here, as this study examines not just one, but two sets of coupled pairs: (1) ST vs. initial TT subtitle translation, and (2) ST vs. retranslated TT subtitle version. By comparing how similar problems are handled across these different versions, it becomes possible to trace not only variation in strategic solutions, but also shifts in what is perceived as a problem in the first place.

For example, if a cultural reference is initially treated with an overt interventional strategy (e.g., specification or generalisation), but is later rendered in a more neutral or straightforward way (e.g., direct translation) in the retranslation, this may suggest that the original problem has

diminished in relevance, perhaps due to increased SC literacy, hence evolving audience expectations. Conversely, if a previously unproblematic ST segment is retranslated using a more interventionist strategy, this may reflect changing assumptions about TA familiarity, sensitivity, or interpretive needs.

Such variation provide valuable insight into evolving relations between ST and TT, and more broadly, between the SC and TC. In turn, they enable the identification of shifts in orientation and interventional norms (see Chapter 3), especially within different subtitling contexts operating within the same language pair.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: Section 4.2 outlines the rationale for selecting cultural references as the specific type of translation problems examined in this study and clarifies the term's scope within the research. Section 4.3 then introduces the taxonomy of subtitling strategies adapted from Pedersen (2011), which forms the basis for the comparative analysis in subsequent chapters. Finally, section 4.4 concludes the chapter and leads to the next that discusses the research methodology.

4.2 Cultural References in Subtitling

4.2.1 Cultural References as Translation Problems

One of the main challenges in examining translation problems from a primarily product-oriented perspective lies in the very fact that every translated text is the outcome of a series of choices, regardless of whether an explicit problem is identifiable. As Gambier and Van Doorslaer (2010, p. 417) observe, "[e]ven where there is no problem, the translator makes a decision: the absence of a problem does not lead to a non-strategic behaviour". Every translation choice is therefore strategic, whether it involves solving a perceived problem or applying a familiar, routine solution[1], such as a conventional equivalent for a recurring term.

However, in practice, distinguishing between routine and non-routine solutions is often far from straightforward, as this boundary largely depends on the translator's own experience, expertise, and knowledge (Gambier and Van Doorslaer, 2010). From a product-oriented perspective, this raises a key methodological question: what kinds of translation problems are most conducive to comparative analysis, ones that do not depend at the level of individual style or competence, but in terms of broader systemic or cultural patterns.

[1] A routine translation can be similar as having an Official Equivalence, which will be discussed in later section of this chapter.

This study argues that cultural references provide precisely such an analytical lens. Unlike purely linguistic issues, the challenge posed by cultural references stems not from syntactic or grammatical complexity but from their cultural specificity, often tied to a particular historical, social, or fandom context. As Archer (1991) puts it, these references create cultural bumps, moments where different knowledge worlds collide, prompting translators to intervene and mediate in ways that negotiate not only meaning, but also cultural distance and proximity.

This view is echoed by Chiaro (2009, p. 155), who includes cultural references among the broader category of "translational hurdles" in AVT. Chiaro identifies three macro types of such "hurdles": (1) highly culture-specific references (e.g., place names, sports, institutions, famous people); (2) language-specific features (e.g., terms of address, taboo language); and (3) areas of overlap between language and culture (e.g., songs, rhymes, jokes). While only the first category directly concerns cultural references, the third, where language and culture intersect, likewise involves cultural knowledge.

From this perspective, cultural references offer a relatively objective lens for analysis in a product-oriented study of AVT. They serve as textual evidence where translation decisions are likely to vary in response to shifting norms, expectations, and assumptions about the TA's encyclopaedic knowledge. This makes them ideal for tracing differences across coupled pairs and observing how translation problems are addressed, or redefined, across varied versions.

However, despite the prominence of cultural references in translation research as a whole, there is little consensus on terminology.

Existing studies have referred to them using a range of nomenclature, including *culture-bound lexical units* (Tomaszczyk, 1983) and *cultural bumps* (Archer, 1991; Leppihalme, 1997). Within AVT scholarship, the most common terms are *extralinguistic cultural references* (Pedersen, 2011), *culture-specific references* (Ranzato, 2016) and also simply *cultural references* (Díaz-Cintas and Remael, 2021).

This research adopts the term cultural references (henceforth, CRs) following Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2021), precisely because it serves as a straightforward, general umbrella concept that accommodates both real-world references and intertextual allusions without overly restricting its scope or definition. As Hatim and Mason (1990, p. 223) argue, translation is not only a bilingual activity but also a bicultural one, requiring translators to "mediate between cultures" and navigate ideological, moral, and sociocultural differences. These cultural incompatibilities

frequently manifest in textual references to specific histories, geographies, or other cultural concepts that lack immediate equivalents in the TT, thereby causing translation problems.

That said, it is also important to acknowledge that, particularly in the context of fansubbing, the boundaries between what constitutes a "translation problem" and what is treated as a "strategic choice" are not always clear-cut. In many cases, especially where the TA is presumed to share a certain level of cultural or fandom literacy, CRs may not necessarily function as barriers to comprehension. Instead, as later chapters demonstrate, CRs can often become highly performative sites of negotiation, where subtitlers choose to either preserve, modify, or heavily intervene, not simply to aid comprehension, but to signal expertise, assert authority, or even mark their translations as distinct from other available versions. In this sense, the subtitling of CRs in fansubbing may go beyond a reactively problem-solving act and operate more proactively as a means of positioning, branding, and community-building, that reflects the subtitler's imagined audience bases.

The following section further clarifies the taxonomy of CRs and sets out the subtitling strategies applied in this study, situating them within the norm-based theories outlined in Chapter 3.

4.2.2 Categorisation of Cultural References in Subtitling

Within the scope of AVT, extensive research has explored the rendering of CRs, with significant contributions from Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007, 2021), Pedersen (2011), and Ranzato (2016). Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007, p. 201) offer a broad classification that distinguishes CRs along "geographical", "ethnographic", and "socio-political" lines, showing how these references are closely tied to specific cultural settings.

Similarly, Pedersen (2011) proposes a detailed lexical taxonomy comprising twelve categories, including weights and measures, proper names, professional titles, food and beverages, literature, government, entertainment, education, sports, currency, technical material, and a miscellaneous "other" category. While comprehensive, Pedersen's (2011, pp. 59-60) model is not without limitations. Some categories overlap conceptually (e.g., weights and currency), while others, such as "entertainment", are arguably too vague for consistent classification across diverse texts.

Based on this categorisation, Pedersen (2011, p. 43) introduces the term *extralinguistic cultural reference,* and defines it as a reference expressed through language that points to an

extralinguistic entity or process, identifiable by a culturally relevant audience. However, as Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2021, p. 202) point out, the line between intralinguistic and extralinguistic references is often difficult to draw. This is because extralinguistic references are always conveyed through language but rely on cultural knowledge outside the text for full understanding. For instance, in British English, the phrase "making tea" may appear linguistically straightforward, which refers to the act of preparing a beverage. Yet, in certain cultural or regional contexts, it could idiomatically means having dinner. Grasping this alternative meaning depends not on the language itself, but on familiarity with specific cultural practices. Such cases illustrate how cultural meaning is often embedded in everyday language, making it hard to categorise a reference like that as purely idiomatic (e.g., intralinguistic) or strictly culture-bound (e.g., extralinguistic).

Other than the perspective of intra- or extra-linguistic, Ranzato (2016, p. 64) offers an alternative view by distinguishing between real-world and intertextual references, and further classifying CRs by their cultural origin, i.e., from the "source culture", "intercultural", "third culture", or "target culture". While this model is valuable for identifying the perceived origin of a reference, it becomes less effective in a globalised media environment, where cultural markers increasingly circulate beyond national or linguistic borders. In such contexts, audience familiarity with a given reference may hinge less on cultural proximity but more on factors like media exposure, personal interests, cultural and language proficiency.

To address these complexities, this study adopts Pedersen's (2011, pp. 106-113) concepts of *transculturality* and *polysemioticity* as more flexible analytical lens. Transculturality, also informed by Snell-Hornby (1988) and Leppihalme (1997), assesses the cultural distance between SC and TC. It highlights how familiar or foreign a CR is likely to appear to the TA, which is a factor that strongly influences subtitling choices. High familiarity may allow a direct rendering, while greater distance may necessitate adaptation or substitution.

Polysemioticity complements transculturality by drawing attention to the multimodal environment of subtitling. As Pedersen (2011) notes, subtitles operate within a polysemiotic framework where meaning is constructed across multiple channels. Following Gottlieb (1997), these include non-verbal visual (e.g., images), non-verbal audio (e.g., music, sound effects), verbal audio (e.g., dialogue), and verbal visual (e.g., on-screen text). When a CR is reinforced across several channels, "intersemiotic redundancy" (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 20) increases, reducing

the explanatory burden of the subtitle. Conversely, low redundancy may prompt subtitlers to intervene more explicitly.

Figure 4.1 Example of a gloss placed on the top of the screen, which is the official Chinese translation of *Death in the Clouds*. S04E07, retranslated by YYeTs in 2018.

Figure 4.2 Example of a gloss placed at the right corner of the main subtitling area, which reads "the outfit of the Doctor in this episode, *The Man in the Brown Suit"* S04E07, retranslated by YYsTs, in 2018.

A good example of this can be found in the Agatha Christie-themed episode of *Doctor Who* (2005, S04E07). In one scene, a copy of Christie's *Death in the Clouds* is prominently displayed on screen (see Figure 4.1). The visual cue itself is enough to convey the intertextual reference, yet

the Simplified Chinese translation of the title also appears at the top of the screen, ensuring accessibility for viewers less familiar with this work of British literature. This shows how the subtitles may reinforce a reference even when intersemiotic redundancy is high. By contrast, the same episode features the character's brown suit, an allusion to Christie's *The Man in the Brown Suit,* but without any verbal or visual reinforcement (see Figure 4.2). In this case, a gloss is added within the subtitles to make the covert intertextual reference explicit. In both instances, the degree of intervention observable in the product reflects assumptions about audience knowledge and illustrates how subtitles can function as cultural mediation beyond linguistic transfer.

These two examples also highlight how transculturality and polysemioticity interact, in that the former concerns cultural distance, while the latter the degree of intersemiotic support. They illustrate how subtitles can vary both in orientation (towards the ST or the TT) and in the level of intervention employed.

In short, this study does not aim to apply or challenge existing models, nor to introduce new terminology. Rather, it builds on Díaz-Cintas and Remael's (2021) broad classification of CRs. From the perspective of the TC, all references not originating in mainland China, whether real-world or intertextual, synchronous or asynchronous (Ranzato, 2016), are treated as CRs relevant to this research. This definition provides a flexible yet consistent framework for examining variation in subtitling strategies across commercial and fan practices, and for exploring how these variation reflect audience expectations and evolving norms in the English-Simplified Chinese context.

Accordingly, the study adopts a five-category framework: four domains of real-world CRs: (a) Geographical, (b) Ethnographic, (c) Socio-political, and (d) Asynchronous, together with (e) Intertextual CRs, which include overt and covert allusions as well as extended macroallusions.

The category of real-world CRs follow Díaz-Cintas and Remael's (2007, 2021) model, which includes three primary domains, Geographical, Ethnographic, and Socio-political. Additionally, this study incorporates a fourth category of real-world CRs: Asynchronous References, as defined by Ranzato (2016), that "do not belong to the same time in which the members of the audience live" (Ranzato, 2016, p. 75), which refer to cultural items that are temporally distant for the contemporary audience but remain contextually relevant within the narrative.

The four categories of real-world CRs are:

- ***Geographical CRs***: references tied to specific locations or regions;
- ***Ethnographic CRs***: items linked to cultural practices, education, or everyday life;
- ***Socio-political CRs***: events, figures, or institutions with political or historical significance;
- ***Asynchronous CRs***: cultural items that are contextually relevant within the narrative but temporally distant from the audience's contemporary experience at the time of viewing.

Examples of real-world CRs include:

"This is a photograph of the Daniels family of Southampton." (*Doctor Who*, S01E01, Geographical)
"I could do A-levels." (*Doctor Who*, S01E01, Ethnographic)
"The assassination of President Kennedy." (*Doctor Who*, S01E01, Socio-political)
"Ugh, you know I don't do double VHS." (*Stranger Things*, S04E02, Asynchronous)

The fifth category concerned in this study is ***Intertextual CRs***, drawn from Ranzato's (2016) typology, which includes:

- *Overt intertextual allusions*: explicit references to other texts, works, or media;
- *Covert intertextual allusions*: subtler references that rely on shared cultural knowledge;
- *Intertextual macroallusions*: extended or episode-long parodies and pastiches.

Examples of intertextual CRs include:

"Do the words **'**Billy, don't be a hero' mean anything to you?" (*Friends*, S01E01, overt intertextual allusion)
"- Really? - Mopey Dick." (*Stranger Things*, S04E01, covert intertextual allusion, a word play on *Moby Dick*)
"Would the Doctor please come to the Diary Room?" (*Doctor Who*, S01E12, intertextual macroallusion, as the whole episode is a parody of various British reality TV game shows, including an overt reference to the show *Big Brother*)

The next section outlines the subtitling strategies used to render these CRs, examining how approaches vary according to transculturality and polysemioticity. These concepts provide extra

lenses for analysing orientation and intervention norms in subtitling, thereby bridging the theoretical discussion of Chapter 3 with the empirical findings presented in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

4.3 Subtitling Strategies of Cultural References

The subtitling strategies adopted in this research for rendering CRs are primarily drawn from Pedersen's (2011) work, which offers one of the most detailed and widely cited taxonomies developed specifically for subtitling. His model, positioned within the DTS framework, is based on a corpus of English-to-Scandinavian subtitles. While there are considerable linguistic and cultural differences between these language pairs and the English-to-Simplified Chinese focus of this study, Pedersen's taxonomy remains highly relevant however some adaption of it has been required for the purpose of this study.

Pedersen (2011, p. 76) identifies seven baseline strategies for rendering what he terms "extralinguistic" cultural references, which are: Retention, Specification, Direct Translation, Generalisation, Substitution, Omission and Official Equivalent.

Although this study does not adopt Pedersen's concept of "extralinguistic" concept in full, the strategies derived from his taxonomy still provide a flexible and systematic framework for analysing how CRs are handled in subtitling practice. In particular, they are useful for examining two key dimensions introduced in Chapter 3: orientation norms (related to Toury's initial norm in terms of source- vs. target-oriented strategies), and levels of intervention (as a part of Pedersen's operational norms in terms of the use of interventional strategies ranging from minimal changes to heavy mediation).

Given the greater structural, orthographic, and cultural distance between English and Simplified Chinese compared to English and Scandinavian languages, this study refines Pedersen's model to better suit the language pair under investigation.

In particular, Retention is divided into two distinct sub-strategies: Complete Retention, where the ST item is carried over unchanged (usually in its SL script), and Transliteration, where ST items are rendered phonetically into Simplified Chinese characters to enhance accessibility and standardisation.

Additionally, this study expands on Pedersen's framework by incorporating glossing as a key interventional strategy. These are categorised into three forms based on their placement and function: "+in-text gloss" (embedded within the subtitle line and accompanied by other strategies), "+gloss" (appearing outside of the main subtitle lines and accompanied by other

strategies), and "Gloss" as a standalone strategy (as in it is not accompanied by any other texts). Glossing is considered here not just as a strategy for aiding comprehension but also as a marker of audience engagement and community-building, which is particularly common in fansubbing practices.

The strategies ultimately adopted in this study therefore comprise eleven categories: (a) Complete Retention, (b) Transliteration, (c) Direct Translation, (d) Specification, (e) Generalisation, (f) Substitution, (g) Omission, (h) Official Equivalent, (i) Gloss, (j) + in-text gloss, and (k) + gloss. The following sections present each of these strategies in detail, along with the rationale behind their adoption and adaptation.

4.3.1 Complete Retention and Transliteration

As Pedersen (2011, p. 77) explains, Retention involves preserving the original CR in the TT, with only minimal adjustments for linguistic or formatting compatibility. It is often regarded as the most source-oriented strategy and closely aligns with Levý's (1969, p. 156) "minimax strategy", which proposes that translators favour solutions yielding maximum effect with minimal effort. Among Eurocentric subtitlers working between closely related languages and writing systems, this is a relatively common approach (Pedersen, 2011).

When the language pair differs more substantially, however, such as between English as the SL and Simplified Chinese as the TL, the unmodified retention of Latin script is less accessible for the TL audience, given the ideographic nature of the Chinese language. In such cases, simple retention often requires adaptation in the form of transliteration, which allows SL proper names or culture-bound terms to be rendered in a script familiar to the TL audience.

Pedersen further notes that Retention may take different forms depending on the extent of adjustment to the TT system. He distinguishes between *Complete Retention*, where the CR is reproduced exactly as it appears in the ST (typically in the original script), and *TL-adjusted Retention*, where minor modifications are introduced to "ease the transition" (Pedersen, 2011, p. 78). Building on this framework, the present study formalises the distinction by treating Complete Retention and Transliteration as two analytically separate sub-strategies. This refinement is particularly important given the marked orthographic and phonological distance between English and Simplified Chinese.

This distinction also enables tracing diachronic variation between initial and retranslated subtitles. As later chapters demonstrate (see Chapters 6 and 8), Complete Retention is more

typical of early subtitle versions, particularly grassroots fansubs from the early 2000s, where subtitling styles were less uniform and a strong emphasis on ST fidelity prevailed. By contrast, more recent retranslations, especially those shaped by standardised practices, whether through commercial guidelines or increasingly professionalised crowdsourced fansubbing, tend to favour Transliteration as a strategy of normalisation and accessibility enhancement (see Chapters 6 and 7). This shift suggests an evolution in subtitling norms, where Transliteration functions not only as a practical adaptation but also as a marker of professionalisation and institutional influence across both fan and commercial contexts. The following example pair illustrates this contrast in more detail (Examples 4-1a and 4-1b).

	Example 4-1a, *Doctor Who*, S01E02, CR Type: Ethnographic
Original Dialogue 1	But, hold on, they did this once on **Newsround Extra**.
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)
	但是, 等一下, 他们曾经在 **Newsround Extra** 干过一次
Back Translation	But, wait, they did it once at **Newsround Extra**.
Strategy	Complete Retention
	Example 4-1b, *Doctor Who*, S04E01, CR Type: Geographical
Original Dialogue 2	and you got on a bus to **Strathclyde**.
Subtitles	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2018)
	坐大巴去了**斯特拉思克莱德**
(Gloss)	**苏格兰西南部**
Back Translation	Took a coach to **Strathclyde**
	the southwest of Scotland.
Strategy	Transliteration + gloss

In Example 4-1a, the early fansub of the ethnographic CR *Newsround Extra*, a UK-specific programme, retains the reference verbatim in the original SL script. No translation, transliteration, or any forms of mediation is provided. This strategy aligns with what Pedersen (2011) terms Complete Retention and reflects a strongly source-oriented approach.

In contrast, Example 4-1b presents a similar case of a proper-name CR, i.e., Strathclyde, which may also be considered a monocultural reference with relatively low transculturality, as it is unlikely to be widely recognised by non-UK audiences. Here, the geographical name is transliterated into Simplified Chinese characters (i.e., "斯特拉思克莱德"), which makes the item more recognisable to a TL audience and creates visual coherence by maintaining a consistent script within the subtitle line. In addition, a line of gloss is provided (i.e., "the southwest of Scotland") to further clarify the reference for viewers unfamiliar with the UK's geography.

While this solution could be described in Pedersen's taxonomy as a combination of TL-adjusted Retention and Specification (see Section 4.3.2), the present study classifies it more precisely as Transliteration with the addition of gloss. This refinement highlights two key features of the strategy: (1) the orthographic adaptation, whereby the SL item is re-scripted into Chinese characters, and (2) the supplementary explanation, which provides semantic elaboration beyond the transliterated form. Separating these elements is particularly important in the English-Simplified Chinese context, where significant orthographic and cultural distance often requires both forms of intervention to work together.

4.3.2 Specification

Specification refers to the strategy of adding information to the TT that is not explicitly present in the ST, resulting in a more semantically detailed or explicit CR in the subtitle. Pedersen (2011, p. 76) differentiates between two types: *Completion*, where abbreviations or names are expanded in full, and *Addition*, where supplementary information (such as profession, genre, or function) is inserted to aid comprehension. Although still relatively source-oriented, Specification introduces a degree of intervention, as it expands the semantic load of the original reference to enhance clarity or contextual relevance for the TL audience. It may be seen as complementary to Generalisation (see Section 4.3.4), since both strategies involve modifying the semantic scope of the CR in the TT, though in opposite directions, either by reduction or by enrichment.

Examples of cases of Specification via Addition is presented in Example 4-2.

	Example 4-2a, *Doctor Who*, S04E12, CR Type: Ethnographic
Original Dialogue 1	It's like an outer space **Facebook**.
Subtitles	Initial (FRM, 2008) 这简直就像外太空的 **Facebook 社交网**
Back Translation	It's just like an outer space **Facebook social network**.
Strategy	Specification
	Example 4-2b, *Friends*, S01E18, CR Type: Ethnographic
Original Dialogue 2	Yes, and I get my ya-yas from **IKEA**.
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005) 没错，而且我是在**"宜家家俱"**买的
Back Translation	Yes, and I bought it from **"IKEA furniture"**
Strategy	Specification

In Example 4-2a, "Facebook" is retained in its original SL form (a case of Complete Retention), while the explanatory term "social network" is appended to clarify its function. This addition suggests that in 2008, Facebook might not yet have been widely recognised among TL viewers, and the expansion mediated potential gaps in technological and cultural familiarity. In Example 4-2b, the transliterated brand name "IKEA" (i.e., "宜家") is specified as "furniture", reinforcing its commercial identity and resolving any residual ambiguity. In both cases, Specification enriches the semantic load of the CR, not by altering the reference itself, but by elaborating its contextual relevance.

Other than Addition, Specification via Completion is illustrated in Example 4-2c.

Example 4-2c, *Stranger Things*, S04E9, CR Type: Geographical	
Original Dialogue	Yeah, **TWA**, **Pan Am**, **Eastern**.
Subtitles	Initial (Netflix, 2022) 对 **环球航空**、**泛美航空** **美国东方航空**
Back Translation	Yeah, **Trans World Airline**, **Pan America Airline**, **American Eastern Airline**
Strategy	Specification

In this case, the acronyms "TWA", "Pan Am", and "Eastern" are each rendered in expanded form to clarify their referents. This way of rendering not only enhances accessibility for TL viewers who may be unfamiliar with the historical context of mid-20th-century U.S. aviation, but also addresses potential ambiguity. The term "Eastern", for instance, could easily be confused in the TC with the still-operational China Eastern Airlines (Chinese: 东方航空). The addition of "American" pre-empts this confusion by explicitly marking the CR's national origin, distinguishing it from any misleading associations.

While Specification is categorised in this research as a relatively more source-oriented strategy (see Section 4.3.9), its application here, compared to the two types of Retention discussed previously, reveals a more nuanced and interventional form of mediation. This is shaped not only by presumed gaps in cultural knowledge but also by the potential for cross-cultural misrecognition within the TL context. As such, this case illustrates how Specification can function simultaneously as a source-oriented strategy and a tool for cultural mediation in subtitling practice.

4.3.3 Direct Translation

In contrast to Specification and other strategies that involve semantic elaboration, Direct Translation refers to the rendering of an ST item into the TL without altering its original meaning. Pedersen (2011, p. 83) conceptualises this strategy as encompassing both *calque* and *literal translation*, drawing on Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) model. In Pedersen's 2011 taxonomy, *calque* denotes a morpheme-by-morpheme rendering, while *shifted direct translation* corresponds more closely to conventional literal translation, allowing for minor grammatical adjustments.

However, as he also notes, the boundary between these subcategories is often blurred in practice, since the final TT outcome tends to be indistinguishable regardless of the specific sub-process used. Building on this observation, the present study does not separate calque and literal translation analytically. While the distinction is valid in theory, both strategies result in outcomes that preserve the original meaning with minimal intervention and a strong ST orientation. For the purposes of this research, therefore, they are grouped together under the broader label of Direct Translation, ensuring analytical consistency across subtitle versions.

Example 4-3, *Stranger Things*, S04E9, CR Type: Geographical	
Original Dialogue	Yeah, **TWA**, **Pan Am**, **Eastern**.
Subtitles	Retranslated (YYeTs, 2022)
	嗯 **环球 泛美 东方**
Back Translation	Yeah, **Trans World**, **Pan America**, **Eastern**
Strategy	Direct Translation

See Example 4-3 for an instance. The same set of American airline references (i.e., TWA, Pan Am, and Eastern) are rendered through straightforward literal translation into the TL. The references remain semantically intact, undergoing only linguistic transformation. This stands in contrast to the commercial subtitle example provided by Netflix (see Example 4-2c), where the same CRs were expanded through Specification, with full institutional names used to clarify each airline's identity.

Here, the fan retranslation adopts a more minimalist approach, omitting elaboration and reflecting both a stronger source orientation and a lower degree of intervention. This choice may also reflect stylistic preferences for brevity and spatial economy within the subtitle line. Importantly, since this version constitutes a synchronic fan retranslation (see Chapter 7) of the commercial Netflix version, the departure from Specification towards Direct Translation may also indicate a deliberate differentiation in subtitling ethos, aligning the retranslation with assumptions about a more culturally literate or engaged audience.

4.3.4 Generalisation

In contrast to Specification, Generalisation as a strategy reduces the specificity of a CR in the TT compared to its ST counterpart. This strategy, as outlined by Pedersen (2011, p. 76), normally has two subtypes: Superordinate Term, where a more general category replaces a specific item, and Paraphrase, where the CR is reformulated in broader or less culturally anchored terms. In both cases, Generalisation tends to increase the semantic abstraction of the TT and reduce cultural specificity, often to enhance comprehensibility, manage spatial constraints, or accommodate assumed audience unfamiliarity with the source context.

	Example 4-4a, *Doctor Who*, S04E01, CR Type: Geographical
Original Dialogue 1	and you got on a bus to **Strathclyde**.
Subtitles	Initial (YYeTs, 2008) 竟然上了去苏格兰的汽车
Back Translation	Even got on a bus to **Scotland**.
Strategy	Generalisation (via superordinate term)
	Example 4-4b, *Friends*, S01E01, CR Type: Ethnographic
Original Dialogue 2	There's **rocky road** and **cookie dough** and **bing cherry vanilla**.
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005) 有**各种点心糖果冰淇淋**.....
Back Translation	There are **a variety of dessert, candy and ice cream**...
Strategy	Generalisation (via paraphrase)

This strategy is illustrated in the two examples above. In Example 4-4a (*Doctor Who*, S04E01), the same geographical name, “Strathclyde” (which in Example 4-1b was rendered through transliteration) is here replaced by the superordinate term *Scotland* in the TT. Whereas transliteration preserved the cultural specificity of the reference, Generalisation abstracts it into a broader category that is far more recognisable to a general TL audience. In Example 4-4b, the culturally embedded American ice cream flavours, i.e., “rocky road”, “cookie dough”, and “bing cherry vanilla”, are paraphrased as “a variety of desserts, candy, and ice cream”, stripping away cultural detail in favour of simplified description. Such a rendering aids comprehension, especially under subtitle space constraints, but clearly leans toward TT accessibility at the expense of ST cultural fidelity (Pedersen, 2011, p. 89).

This contrasts with the earlier case of American airline abbreviations (Example 4-2c), where commercial subtitles expanded the acronyms into their full institutional names, i.e., an instance of Specification. Both Specification and Generalisation are interventional strategies involving active mediation, but they diverge in orientation and effect. Specification is typically more

source-oriented and informative, preserving cultural detail by elaborating it for the audience, whereas Generalisation is more target-oriented and pragmatic, streamlining references for immediate comprehension. Put simply, both strategies aim to assist the viewer, but one does so by enriching context, while the other does so by simplifying it.

From a product-oriented perspective, Generalisation foregrounds readability and acceptability, often at the cost of ST specificity. These choices reveal subtitlers' assumptions about what their audience can recognise, what needs clarification, and what can be sacrificed for fluency. As outlined in Chapter 3, such decisions are embedded within broader shifts in subtitling norms and audience expectations.

4.3.5 Substitution

Substitution involves replacing the original CR with an alternative item that is more accessible or resonant for the TL audience. Pedersen (2011, p. 89) distinguishes two common subtypes: *Cultural Substitution*, where an SC reference is replaced by a culturally equivalent term from the TC, and *Situational Substitution*, where the item chosen may not be an equivalent but fits the narrative or communicative purpose in the TT context.

Like Generalisation and Specification, Substitution is an interventional strategy, but it typically involves a more radical departure from the ST. Instead of translating the original CR, the subtitler actively replaces it with a different reference or expression. This subtitling strategy often simplifies the viewing experience or adapts to spatial and temporal constraints, but it also reflects a greater degree of interpretive agency. Because the substituted item is frequently subjective and semantically non-aligned with the original, this strategy is considered highly target-oriented.

Example 4-5a, *Doctor Who*, S04E01, CR Type: Intertextual		
Original Dialogue	the **holy grail** of the modern age.	
Subtitles	当代人的**救心丸**	Initial (FRM, 2008)
Back Translation	Modern people's **heart saving pill**.	
Strategy		Substitution (cultural)

A case of Cultural Substitution is illustrated in Example 4-5a above. In the original dialogue, the expression "holy grail" is rendered in the TT subtitle as "救心丸" (literally, "a heart-saving pill"). While not a literal translation, this expression conveys a similar sense of something vital or life-

saving, but does so through a reference more culturally familiar to a mainland Chinese audience. The Christian-rooted metaphor is thus replaced with one that resonates more directly in the TL, shifting the reference while maintaining its functional meaning.

Example 4-5b, *Friends*, S04E07, CR Type: Intertextual	
Original Dialogue	What's that first letter, **"N" Or "M"**?
Subtitles	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2018) 第一个字是什么 **未还是末**
(Gloss)	《桑苏西来客》 N or M?
Back Translation	What's that first character, **未 or 未**?
(Gloss)	N or M? N or M?
Strategy	Substitution (situational) + gloss

Other than Cultural Substitution, a clear example of Situational Substitution is listed above in Example 4-5b. In the ST dialogue, the phrase "*N or M?*" refers to the title of Agatha Christie's wartime espionage novel, which plays on the ambiguity of initial letters used as codenames, and functions as a wordplay within the Agatha Christie-themed episode of *Doctor Who*. However, the same phrase is potentially unlikely to carry the same interpretive weight for TL viewers unfamiliar with Christie's work or with the stylistic use of initial-based titles in English.

To address this, this CR is transformed into a contextually equivalent form of linguistic ambiguity by substituting "N or M" with two similar-looking Simplified Chinese characters: "未" (Wei, literally, "not yet") and "末" (Mo, literally, "end"). These characters are frequently confused due to their near-identical structure, and their pairing introduces a comparable sense of uncertainty. This substitution preserves the spirit of the original pun by recreating its functional effect, which is a sense of ambiguity rooted in visual similarity. While not a cultural equivalent, the substitution achieves a parallel effect through a carefully as well as creatively localised wordplay.

In addition, a gloss is added above the subtitle line, i.e., "《桑苏西来客》", which is the official Simplified Chinese title of *N or M?* in published translations (literally, "*The Visitor from Sans Souci*"). This secondary layer preserves the intertextual allusion that would otherwise be lost in the substitution, signalling to genre-savvy or culturally literate viewers that this is a deliberate Christie reference while also informing less familiar audiences of its literary source.

4.3.6 Omission

Among all subtitling strategies, Omission is perhaps the most immediately recognisable. It involves the complete removal of a CR from the TT without replacement or rendering. While Omission may be perceived as a form of loss or even failure, Pedersen (2011) recognises it as a legitimate strategy, provided it results from deliberate decision-making rather than negligence. In this sense, Omission can reflect the subtitler's prioritisation under spatial, temporal, or contextual constraints, particularly when the CR is deemed peripheral to the narrative or unlikely to be understood even with mediation.

	Example 4-6a, *Doctor Who*, S04E07, CR Type: Geographical
Original Dialogue 1	Chief Inspector Smith, from **Scotland Yard**, known as the Doctor.
Subtitles	Initial (FRM, 2008) Smith 总督察 人称"博士"
Back Translation	Chief Inspector Smith, known as "the Doctor".
Strategy	Omission
	Example 4-6a, *Doctor Who*, S01E12, CR Type: Intertextual
Original Dialogue 2	ever since **Big Brother** 504 when they all walked out.
Subtitles	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2018) 自从第 504 集 他们全体出走之后
Back Translation	Ever since episode 504, when they all ran away.
Strategy	Omission

For instance, in Example 4-6a (above), the CR "Scotland Yard", a metonym for the British police force based in London, is omitted entirely in early fansubs. This decision may reflect subtitler unfamiliarity, assumptions about audience recognition, or a judgment that the reference was not narratively essential. Produced at a time when subtitling practices in the TC context were still relatively unstandardised and access to online resources was limited, such omissions often signalled the practical challenges faced by grassroots fansubbers, especially when references were not central to plot development.

In contrast, Example 4-6b presents a more calculated instance of Omission. The CR *Big Brother* is excluded from the subtitle during its second mention in the same episode, for it has already been rendered the first time it was introduced. This appears to be a strategic choice to avoid redundancy, reduce subtitle density, or maintain narrative pacing. In this case, Omission operates as a pragmatic and selective intervention to cut unnecessary repetition, aiming for a smoother viewing experience.

Across both cases, Omission demonstrates an active engagement with textual and contextual factors, whether it is to navigate space constraints, perceived audience familiarity, and the

narrative relevance of CRs. While Omission is clearly target-oriented, it is not easy to classify in terms of intervention. As Pedersen (2011, pp.101-102) notes, Omission sits ambiguously between minimal change and intervention. On one hand, omitting a potentially confusing CR can be a form of mediation, easing comprehension by reducing cognitive load. On the other, no additional material is introduced, and the TT does not overtly reshape the ST content.

This dual nature explains why Omission cannot be firmly placed at either end of the intervention spectrum (see Section 4.3.9). Nonetheless, it remains a distinctly target-oriented strategy, as it reflects a tendency to prioritise clarity, accessibility, or perceived relevance for the TA by moving further away from the ST material.

4.3.7 Official Equivalent

Unlike the other strategies in this taxonomy, Official Equivalent operates less as a subtitler's discretionary technique and more as an administrative or institutionalised solution. As Pedersen (2011, pp. 97-98) points out, these are often proper terms or names that have acquired fixed translations through repeated use or official adoption, making them effectively "permanent equivalents". This is distinct from situational substitutions, which rely on the subtitler's judgment and sometimes creative intervention.

Because such equivalents are externally established and widely accepted, their use often bypasses the subtitler's need to assess orientation norms. For this reason, building on Pedersen's model, scholars such as Bywood (2019) have opted to exclude this category from orientation analyses altogether. Pedersen (2011, p. 76) himself even remarks that Official Equivalent is "not so much a strategy, but rather an equivalent with a distinct status".

Despite Pedersen's own reservations about classifying Official Equivalent as a core subtitling strategy, particularly in relation to the orientation spectrum, this study includes it due to its high relevance in the English-Simplified Chinese context, where the past two decades have seen a rapid increase in established equivalents, driven by mainland China's opening-up, institutional standardisation as well as community adoption through internet usage. Recognising this category makes it possible to examine how subtitlers navigate institutional expectations and respond to processes of linguistic standardisation. Tracking the uptake of such equivalents across different versions also helps to reveal broader shifts in subtitling practice, especially in retranslation contexts.

Example 4-7a, *Doctor Who*, S04E12, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 1	It's like an outer space **Facebook**.	
Subtitles	Initial (FRM, 2008) 这简直就像外太空的 **Facebook 社交网**	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2018) 简直就像外太空版**脸书**
Back Translation	It's just like an outer space **Facebook social network**.	Just like Outerspace version of **Facebook**.
Strategy	Specification	Official Equivalent
Example 4-7b, *Friends*, S01E18, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 2	Yes, and I get my ya-yas from **IKEA**.	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005) 没错，而且我是在**"宜家家俱"**买的	Retranslation (Bilibili, 2022) 没错 而且我的是在**"宜家"**买的
Back Translation	Yes, and I bought it from **"IKEA furniture"**	Yes, and I bought it from **"IKEA".**
Strategy	Specification	Official Equivalent
Example 4-7c, *Doctor Who*, S04E07, CR Type: Geographical		
Original Dialogue 3	Chief Inspector Smith, from **Scotland Yard**, known as the Doctor.	
Subtitles	Initial (FRM, 2008) Smith 总督察 人称"博士"	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2018) 我是**苏格兰场**的史密斯总督察 人称博士
Back Translation	Chief Inspector Smith, known as "the Doctor".	I am Chief Inspector Smith from **Scotland Yard**, people call me "the Doctor".
Strategy	Omission	Official Equivalent

This can be seen in Examples 4-7a and 4-7b. Revisiting the "Facebook" and "IKEA" cases (discussed in Section 4.3.2), the retranslated versions adopt the established TL equivalents "脸书" (literally "face book") and "宜家" (literally "pleasant home"), both of which were widely recognised in mainland China at the time. Unlike the initial subtitles, which added glosses such as "social network" and "furniture" to aid comprehension, the retranslated versions rely solely on Official Equivalents, reflecting a shift toward lexical standardisation and a growing cultural familiarity with these CRs.

A similar pattern emerges in Example 4-7c. While "Scotland Yard" was omitted in the initial subtitles, it reappears in the retranslation using the officially recognised TL equivalent "苏格兰场" without any additional mediation.

In all these examples above, Official Equivalent functions less as an act of translation than as an indicator of established linguistic consensus, whether formal or informal. Such equivalents can originate through different channels. Some, like "苏格兰场", are officially sanctioned and widely standardised across institutional and media platforms. Others, such as "脸书", originate

as widely used vernacular forms, often popularised online, but over time acquire a near-official status through their recognisability and embeddedness in the TL.

4.3.8 Glosses

In addition to the baseline strategies adapted from Pedersen (2011), this study incorporates glossing as a subtitling strategy, which is particularly relevant in the TC context. Although not usually recognised as a professional strategy, glossing is often associated with fansubbing, where it has been characterised as a form of "abusive mediation" (Pérez-González, 2014, p. 79). While glosses are frequently linked to the use of "headnotes" (i.e., supplementary notes added above the subtitle line to provide contextual or explanatory information), this study identifies three distinct types of glosses based on their varied formatting and positioning in the case study corpora:

a) **+ *in-text gloss***: appears within the subtitle line, usually in combination with another strategy such as Direct Translation or Transliteration.
b) **+ *gloss***: appears as a separate subtitle line, again typically accompanying another strategy.
c) ***Gloss***: appears independently of the main subtitle line, often in headnote style or freely positioned across the screen.

By distinguishing these types, glossing can be examined here not merely as an ad hoc stylistic device but as a consistent strategy, particularly in fan-driven retranslation where cultural and intertextual mediation is often prioritised.

Expanding on this, Figures 4-3 and 4-4 (below) illustrate further variation in the aesthetics and positioning of glosses. These range from centrally placed screen translations, which use colour and typography to match the original visual text, to more free-form annotations that identify franchise-specific elements. Figure 4.3 exemplifies the translation of non-diegetic on-screen text, while Figure 4.4 functions more explicitly as a gloss by identifying symbolic motifs within the *Witcher* franchise and linking them to corresponding episode numbers. The latter is a clear case of active mediation, supplying fandom-specific knowledge for the TA.

Figure 4.3 Example of a standalone gloss as screen translation, The Queen's Gambit, S01E01, retranslated by YYeTs.

Figure 4.4 Example of standalone glosses in varied, more free-formed positions across the screen, The Witcher, S01E08, retranslated byYIGUI.[1]

Although screen translations of non-diegetic elements, such as the rendering of "Paris" in Figure 4.3, are not usually classified as glossing because they lack explicit explanation, their spatial and visual treatment can nevertheless perform a gloss-like, audience-oriented function.

[1] In Simplified Chinese (my translation): First line: Episode 3 - Clawed Lily (Kingdom of Temeria)
Second line (left): Episode 1 - The Great Sun (Empire of Nilfgaard); second line (right): Episode 6 - Dragon
Third line: Episode 4 - The Sword of Destiny Broken in Brokilon Forest
Fourth line (left): *Episode 2 - Obsidian Star Wrapped in Eels (Yennefer); fourth line (right):* Episode 7 - Golden Lion (Kingdom of Cintra)
Fifth line: Episode 5 - Double-Eared Bottle (The Fateful Bond of Geralt and Yennefer).

Such interventions operate paratextually, guiding interpretation and highlighting contextual cues. In this light, glossing is reframed as a multimodal strategy embedded within subtitling on top of mere linguistic supplementation, particularly in fansubbing.

By broadening the concept in this way, glossing can account for how contemporary fansubbing combines translation with commentary and contextualisation. These practices extend beyond basic equivalence, functioning as tools that actively shape audience reception. They also reflect the increasingly blurred boundary between subtitling and paratext, as visual markers, formatting, and embedded explanations influence interpretation. In this sense, glossing is defined less by format or content than by function: an interpretive act embedded directly in the screen space. For further discussion of this phenomenon, see Section 7.4.3 in Chapter 7.

Beyond the multimodal aspects, the following examples offer a closer textual analysis of gloss content-wise.

Example 4-8a, *Doctor Who,* S01E02, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 1	But, hold on, they did this once on **Newsround Extra**.	
Subtitles	Initial (FRM, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	但是, 等一下, 他们曾经在 **Newsround Extra** 干过一次	但 等等 以前**《少儿新闻特辑》** 上播过
(gloss)	/	**BBC 面向 6～16 岁儿童的新闻节目 世界上最长的儿童新闻节目**
Back Translation	But, wait, they did it once at **Newsround Extra**.	But, wait, it's been on **"Children's News Special"** before.
(gloss)	/	**BBC's news programme for children aged 6 to 16, the longest-running children's news programme in the world.**
Strategy	Complete Retention	Generalisation + gloss
Example 4-8b, *Doctor Who*, S01E13, CR Type: Geographical		
Original Dialogue 2	We go to **Marbella** in 1989.	
Subtitles	Initial (FRM, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	我们去 1989 的**马贝拉**	我们去 1989 年的**马贝拉[西班牙旅游胜地]**
Back Translation	We go to **Marbella** in1989.	We went to **Marbella [Spanish tourist attraction]** in 1989.
Strategy	Transliteration	Transliteration + in-text gloss

See Example 4-8a for an instance of separate gloss ("+ gloss"). While the initial subtitle retains the reference to *Newsround Extra* without translation or explanation (see Section 4.3.1), the retranslation replaces the English name with the more generalised "Children's News Special", demonstrating Generalisation via Paraphrase. This is supplemented by a separate line of gloss, which identifies the programme as a "BBC news programme for children" and adds that it is "the longest-running children's news programme in the world". This twofold additional gloss

functions as an explicit explanatory tool that aims to offer encyclopaedic knowledge that goes beyond the semantic scope of the main subtitle.

Example 4-8b illustrates an in-text gloss ("+ in-text gloss"). The geographical CR "Marbella" is transliterated in both the initial and retranslated versions; however, in the retranslation, a brief gloss is inserted directly into the subtitle line, identifying it as a "Spanish tourist destination". Unlike the additional line in Example 4-8a, this in-text gloss is seamlessly integrated into the TT and provides immediate clarification in a more concise form.

Both examples demonstrate a high level of intervention, with glossing used as an active form of cultural and encyclopaedic mediation. Whether presented separately or within the subtitle line, glosses serve to bridge cultural distance, particularly in cases where more ST-oriented strategies alone may not sufficiently convey the full meaning or relevance of the SC reference.

4.3.9 Strategy Coding Procedure and Category Boundaries

While the strategy categories outlined in Sections 4.3.1-4.3.8 are defined primarily through formal linguistic features, subtitling in practice is rarely reducible to a single, clear-cut operation. Many translations combine multiple mechanisms, such as phonetic rendering, semantic transfer, explanatory addition, all within the same line. This section outlines the coding procedure adopted in this study and explains how overlapping or ambiguous cases are resolved for analytical consistency.

This study assigns a single dominant strategy to each CR simply for enabling systematic comparison. The classification reflects a coding decision made for research purposes, not a claim about the inherent nature of each translation. In cases where multiple strategies are arguably present, this study applies a principle of intervention priority: the strategy involving greater interpretive or explanatory effort is prioritised. This aligns with the intervention model discussed in Section 4.4, where strategies are positioned along a continuum from minimal change to highly interventional.

Particular care is taken in distinguishing between Transliteration, Direct Translation, and Official Equivalent, as these often overlap in form but differ in function. The categories are defined as follows:

- Transliteration: phonetically motivated renderings, often unfamiliar to the TL audience, and dependent on SL sound.

- Direct Translation: literal or near-literal semantic transfer of ST components.
- Official Equivalent: TL forms that function as conventionalised, recognisable items, regardless of how they were rendered.

Official Equivalent is therefore treated as a status-based category rather than a form-based one. A rendering is coded as an Official Equivalent only when it is demonstrably stabilised in the target language and no longer perceived as novel or marked as foreign. This logic is illustrated in Example 4-7c (the 2018 retranslation, Section 4.3.7), where the term "Scotland Yard" is rendered as "苏格兰场". Although the TT expression is semantically transparent, consisting of "苏格兰 (literally, Scotland)" and "场 (literally, Yard)" and thus resembling a Direct Translation at the formal level, it is classified as an Official Equivalent because it has become institutionally entrenched in the mainland Chinese context and is widely recognisable as the conventional designation for this referent.

A similar rationale applies to the rendering of the term "Scotland" itself. While its TL rendering "苏格兰" is transliterated in form, it is classified as an Official Equivalent due to its long-standing familiarity, widespread usage, and stable presence across media, educational materials, and public discourse in the TC.

By contrast, the transliterated TL form of "Strathclyde" (i.e., "斯特拉思克莱德", Section 4.3.1), although likewise phonetically rendered, is classified as a Transliteration rather than an Official Equivalent. At the time of this research, no Simplified Chinese-language encyclopaedic entry (e.g. Baidu Baike) existed for this term, and its occurrence in mainland Chinese media was confined to highly specialised contexts. This limited circulation suggests that the referent remains peripheral to general TA awareness, and that the TT form has not yet achieved conventionalised status. Accordingly, the rendering is treated as Transliteration.

It should be noted that such classifications are historically contingent. With the continued expansion of SL visibility and cultural circulation in the TC, referents that are currently unfamiliar, such as "Strathclyde", may in future become conventionalised and thus qualify as Official Equivalent at that time.

To ensure consistency in strategy classification, this study adopts a two-stage coding procedure. First, a formal analysis is conducted of the TT construction, whether it is phonetic, semantic, hybrid, or explanatory in nature. Second, a functional assessment determines the rendering's status in the TL. This includes consideration of:

- its frequency across media and subtitle corpora;
- its recurrence in institutional or public discourse;
- and the presence of a dedicated entry in reference platforms such as Baidu Baike.

Importantly, Baidu Baike is not treated as an authoritative source, but as a pragmatic indicator of public uptake and lexical conventionalisation. The presence of an entry suggests that a term has entered general awareness in the TL; and likewise its absence points to limited circulation. These indicators inform, but do not override, contextual and interpretive judgement in classification.

It is worthy emphasising again that this study does not claim that each strategy category exists in isolation. It simply seeks to trace broader translational tendencies and in turn capturing shifts in subtitling norms, audience expectation, and cultural mediation than rigid, discrete definitions of individual strategies. The classification system should therefore be read not as an absolute taxonomy, but as a descriptive tool and spectrum that reflects both the complexity of subtitling practice and the normative pressures under which subtitlers operate.

4.4 Categorisation of Subtitling Strategies from Two Perspectives: Orientation and Intervention

As outlined earlier in this chapter, this study categorises subtitling strategies along two analytical dimensions: orientation norms (source- vs. target-oriented) and levels of interventional (the degree of intervention, from minimal change to high mediation). While these two dimensions (orientation and intervention) provide a useful typology for comparing strategy patterns, they do not operate in isolation from cultural and contextual factors. As discussed in Section 4.3.9, strategy classification in this study also reflects subtitlers' expectations about the TA's familiarity with the SC reference. Such expectations influence whether a rendering is constructed anew, adapted with mediation, or drawn from conventionalised TL forms. The typology below should therefore be read alongside these reflexive considerations, particularly when interpreting diachronic shifts or differences across patronage types.

The orientation model builds on Pedersen's (2011) taxonomy, developed from a product-oriented perspective. As Pedersen notes, the orientation spectrum is based on semantic rather

than syntactic operations, making it particularly useful for analysing how CRs are rendered in existing subtitles, especially in relation to broader strategies of domestication and foreignization.

By contrast, Pedersen conceptualises intervention primarily as a process-oriented category. This study, however, argues that intervention can also be assessed productively from a product-oriented perspective. In other words, the degree of intervention is not only visible through subtitlers' reported decision-making but also traceable in the textual evidence of the finished subtitles. This dual focus enables a more holistic view of subtitling as cultural mediation, especially in fan-generated contexts where interventions tend to be more visible, multimodal, and paratextual.

In terms of orientation, this study follows Pedersen's (2011) categorisation along a continuum from source-oriented to target-oriented.

- Source-oriented strategies include Complete Retention, Transliteration, Direct Translation, and Specification.
- Target-oriented strategies include Generalisation, Substitution, and Omission.

These poles (ST- vs. TT-oriented) capture the extent to which a strategy preserves the cultural specificity of the ST reference or adapts it to the TT context.

Pedersen excludes Official Equivalent from his orientation model on the grounds that it represents a pre-established solution rather than a case-by-case translational choice. This study follows that reasoning, excluding both Official Equivalent and the glosses from the orientation spectrum. Both resist neat placement within the ST/TT binary: Official Equivalents are standardised, top-down forms, while the glosses may be read as either TT-oriented (facilitating comprehension) or ST-oriented (expanding on and clarifying source meaning).

In terms of intervention, this study adapts Pedersen's framework to distinguish between:

- Minimal-change strategies: Complete Retention, Transliteration, Direct Translation, and Official Equivalent. These preserve the ST reference with little interpretive input.
- Interventional strategies: Specification, Generalisation, Substitution, and Glosses. These involve added explanation, paraphrasing, or cultural adaptation designed to support comprehension.

In Pedersen's 2011 model, Omission falls outside the intervention spectrum. While it involves a choice and could be seen as interventional, it introduces no linguistic transfer into the TT. For the same reason, Omission is also excluded from the intervention binary in this study.

Bringing these distinctions together, the full set of strategies analysed in this research is categorised as follows in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Categorisation of subtitling strategies by orientation and level of intervention

Strategy	Orientation	Intervention
Complete Retention	ST-oriented	Minimal Change
Transliteration	ST-oriented	Minimal Change
Specification	ST-oriented	Interventional
Direct Translation	ST-oriented	Minimal Change
Generalisation	TT-oriented	Interventional
Substitution	TT-oriented	Interventional
Omission	TT-oriented	/
Official Equivalent	/	Minimal Change
Gloss	/	Interventional
+ in-text gloss	/	Interventional
+ gloss	/	Interventional

As argued above, this revised framework allows for a more holistic analysis of subtitling strategies by capturing not only the orientation of translation choices but also the varying degrees of intervention involved, which is particularly significant when comparing both professional and fan-generated subtitles.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the rationale for treating CRs as a distinct category of translation problem within a primarily product-oriented, DTS framework. The treatment of these references across different subtitle versions provides insight into wider shifts in subtitling norms. By adopting a dual categorisation of CRs, i.e., real-world and intertextual, and incorporating the parameters of transculturality and polysemioticity, the study approaches CRs not as isolated challenges but as key indicators of how meaning is negotiated between SCs and TCs, as well as across different TAs.

To enable systematic comparison, the chapter has also presented a revised taxonomy of subtitling strategies, adapted from Pedersen (2011) and refined for the English-Simplified

Chinese context. These refinements include distinguishing between Complete Retention and Transliteration, while recognising glossing as a strategy in its own right, particularly in fansubbing. The strategies have further been classified along two analytical dimensions: orientation (ranging from source- to target-orientation) and interventional (ranging from minimal change to high mediation), as introduced in Chapter 3.

By applying this framework to both initial and retranslated subtitles, the study is able to trace how CRs are handled over time and across different subtitling contexts. This, in turn, supports a more precise analysis of how both professional and fan-generated subtitles navigate cultural distance and respond to evolving audience expectations in later chapters (see Chapter 6, 7, 8).

Chapter 5 Methodology

5.1 Introduction: Identifying Translation Problems as Coupled Pairs

Following the research background and positioning outlined in Chapter 2, the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 3, and the identification of the core units of analysis, i.e., namely, the initial and retranslated CRs as "coupled pairs" in Chapter 4, this chapter sets out the methodological framework adopted in the present study. Focusing on the phenomenon of English-Simplified Chinese re-subtitling from the early 2000s to the 2020s, the study employs a comparative case study design and adopts a norm-based, mainly product-oriented approach grounded in DTS. The aim is to trace how subtitling norms, particularly those governing the rendering of CRs, have shifted over time, across different types of audiences, and under varying forms of patronage.

To support this investigation, three self-built subtitle corpora have been compiled, each corresponding to a distinct re-subtitling scenario in the TC: (a) diachronic fan re-subtitling, (b) synchronic fan re-subtitling of commercial subtitles, and (c) diachronic commercial re-subtitling of initial fansubs. Each of these corpora forms the basis of one case study, directly aligned with the research questions introduced in Chapter 1: Case 1 addresses RQ1 by examining diachronic fan re-subtitling, Case 2 addresses RQ2 through synchronic comparison of fan and commercial subtitles, and Case 3 addresses RQ3 by analysing diachronic commercial re-subtitling. The sections that follow outline the rationale for this research design, the selection criteria for the case studies, and the analytical procedures used to address the study's research questions.

5.2 Rationale for A Product-oriented Approach

As discussed in Chapter 2, the motivations behind re-subtitling are complex and multifaceted. Retranslations arise not only from shifting interlingual and intercultural dynamics between SCs and TCs, but also from temporal distance, technological development, evolving audience expectations, and changes in patronage and agency. Compared to other AVT modes that usually demand higher budgets, longer production timelines, and more specialised personnel (such as dubbing or voice-over), subtitling is relatively flexible, cost-efficient, and technically accessible. It is therefore more frequently re-subtitled in response to emerging needs, whether to update older versions, to meet new institutional demands, or to address different audiences. These conditions underpin the three re-subtitling scenarios investigated in this study.

In the English-Simplified Chinese context, most subtitle versions of Anglophone television series produced in the early 2000s originated from grassroots fansub groups. This trend was shaped partly by the continued dominance of dubbing in state-sanctioned AVT and partly by restrictions on foreign media imports (see Chapter 2). As a result, online fan-driven communities emerged as alternative spaces for accessing and circulating international content. While such fansubs have sometimes been dismissed in academic discourse as amateurish (see L. Li, 2016), these assessments are neither fixed nor universal. As argued in Chapter 3, concepts of *adequacy* and *acceptability* are context-dependent, reflecting shifting norms and changing audience expectations.

Against this backdrop, the present study adopts a primarily product-oriented approach within the framework of DTS. The focus here is not on subtitlers' mental processes (as in process-oriented studies) nor solely on the broader social functions of subtitles (as in function-oriented research), but on the subtitles themselves as textual artefacts. Product-oriented analysis provides a systematic way of comparing multiple versions of the same audiovisual STs across different temporal and production contexts, thereby allowing subtitling strategies to be observed directly and norm variation to be identified. Contextual information such as patronage and TA orientation is then inferred from other complementary sources, including uploaded metadata and production timelines recorded on subtitle-sharing platforms.

By grounding the research in a product-oriented framework, this study ensures that its analysis remains both empirically focused and methodologically replicable, while still attentive to the cultural and institutional conditions in which re-subtitling takes place.

5.3 Rationale for Case Selection

This study adopts a comparative case study design to investigate re-subtitling practices in the TC over a 20-year span. Each of the selected cases represents a distinct re-subtitling scenario, allowing for systematic cross-case comparison of subtitling strategies, context-specific influences and reflected norms and audience expectations.

5.3.1 Case Study 1: Diachronic Fan Re-Subtitling - *Doctor Who* (2005)

This first case study directly addresses RQ1, which asks what changes can be identified between early and later fan-produced subtitles of the same audiovisual text, and how these reflect evolving norms in fansubbing practice. It focuses on diachronic fan re-subtitling, where the passage of time is the primary driver of retranslation. To examine this type of retranslation, a

selected case should aim to control for other variables often associated with re-subtitling, such as changes in patronage or TA demographics. Ideally, both the initial and retranslated subtitles should be produced under similar patronages (i.e., fansub groups) and intended for comparable audiences.

The selected programme for such comparison is *Doctor Who* (2005), a long-running British sci-fi series that has been consistently subtitled into Simplified Chinese by fansubbers. The show was initially subtitled by one fansub group (FRM) and circulated online in near real-time with its UK broadcast since 2005, and it was later retranslated by another fan community (YYeTs) from 2015 onwards[1]. The ten-year interval between the two fan subtitle generations provides a suitable timeline for observing potential shifts in translational norms and subtitling strategies (see Chapter 6, Section 6.2.1).

Doctor Who is chosen not only for its diachronic availability but also for its high density of CRs, particularly those that are relatively monocultural and UK-specific, as well as intertextual elements embedded within the *Doctor Who* fandom discourse. Many of these references are deeply tied to the show's internal cultural setting and fandom lore, which may be relatively unfamiliar to global audiences. Some CRs may have become more recognisable to mainland Chinese viewers over time due to increased cultural exchange and media exposure, while others remain foreign or require more specialised knowledge, particularly within fandom subcultures.

This layered complexity of *Doctor Who* makes it an ideal case for exploring how fansubbers adapt to shifting audience expectations and changes in cultural familiarity diachronically. With its long-running global fanbase, a convergence between the role of subtitlers and audiences becomes particularly visible in the use of interventionist strategies such as frequent glossing. These practices raise important questions about how fansubbers decide what counts as relevant, how they imagine their audiences, and how they navigate cultural boundaries when translating for a participatory, highly engaged audienceship. In this way, the case provides a concrete basis for answering RQ1, by tracing how fansubbing practices evolve diachronically through changes observable in the subtitle product.

5.3.2 Case Study 2: Synchronic Fan Re-Subtitling - Netflix's Global Hits

[1] Data information is collected based on the upload information on two of the biggest online subtitle repositories: ASSRT (https://assrt.net) and SubHD (https://subhd.tv/).

This second case study directly addresses RQ2, which asks how fan retranslations differ from their commercial counterparts produced in the same timeframe, and what these differences reveal about patronage, audience orientation, and subtitling norms. Unlike Case Study 1, where the passage of time is the key driver of retranslation, the focus here is synchronic comparison: examining how institutional and grassroots patronage shape subtitling strategies when working with the same ST.

Synchronic retranslation is relatively uncommon in commercial contexts, since companies are unlikely to reinvest resources in re-subtitling within a short timeframe. In fan communities, however, such practices are far more frequent, often arising from perceived shortcomings in the initial versions, ideological disagreement, or simply a sense of rivalry between groups. Having already examined fan-fan retranslation, this case turns instead to fan retranslations of commercially produced subtitles.

Netflix is chosen as the commercial source for initial subtitles in this case due to its highly structured and centralised approach to subtitling. Subtitles for Netflix originals are typically prepared ahead of release and follow platform-specific, language-pair style guides designed to ensure global accessibility and consistency (see, e.g., the Timed Text Style Guide in varied TLs[1]). Crucially, Simplified Chinese is routinely included among these pre-release subtitle sets, reinforcing the expectation that Netflix content comes with built-in subtitles. Therefore, any alternate subtitle versions appearing shortly after release, especially those produced by fans, can be reliably classified as deliberate retranslations rather than first attempts.

Building on this logic, the case study identifies on four globally popular Netflix original series that meet this criterion and have been re-subtitled by fans: *Stranger Things* (Season 4), *Bridgerton* (Season 1), *The Queen's Gambit*, and *The Witcher* (Season 1). Each has an official Simplified Chinese subtitle set alongside a near-synchronous fan retranslation produced by two of mainland China's most influential fansub groups (YYeTs and YIGUI, see Section 7.1.1). These paired versions provide a valuable basis for analysing how the same ST is interpreted and localised under two contrasting subtitling regimes: corporate and grassroots.

This comparison is further shaped by a divergence in intended audiences. Netflix's Simplified Chinese subtitles, though technically accessible worldwide, are not intentionally distributed in mainland China due to platform restrictions and are therefore more likely aimed at Chinese-

[1] Available at: https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/sections/22463232153235-Timed-Text-Style-Guides (Accessed on 27 August 2025).

speaking viewers in regions such as Singapore, Malaysia, or the overseas diaspora. By contrast, fan retranslations of these Netflix Originals are created specifically for mainland audiences, many of whom are familiar with fansubbing conventions and locally rooted viewing practices. These different audience orientations highlight how subtitlers' assumptions about their viewers directly inform the strategies they employ.

Finally, this case also illustrates the increasingly blurred line between professional and non-professional subtitling. Since Netflix discontinued its in-house subtitling platform Hermes in 2018, it has relied on a dispersed network of freelancers (see Section 7.1.1). In the English-Simplified Chinese language pair in particular, many of these freelancers have prior experience in fansubbing (see Chapter 2). This crossover complicates any strict amateur/professional binary, highlighting how institutional affiliation, rather than individual background alone, shapes the normative features embedded in the final subtitle product.

5.3.3 Case Study 3: Diachronic Commercial Re-Subtitling - *Friends* (1994)

This case study relates to RQ3, which considers how commercial retranslations of the same audiovisual text evolve over time and what these shifts reveal about the influence of industry norms, censorship, and institutional factors. Unlike the previous two cases, which focus on fan retranslation, this case traces the trajectory from grassroots subtitling to commercial retranslations, and then to subsequent commercial updates across different streaming platforms. In doing so, it highlights how both state regulation and market positioning influence subtitling practices as the subtitle products move from informal to formal distribution, and from one institutional context to another.

Friends (1994) is selected for this case due to its uniquely layered subtitling history in the mainland Chinese context. Originally subtitled by a fansub group in the early 2000s, *Friends* became one of the earliest and most influential Anglophone sitcoms introduced to mainland Chinese audiences via grassroots means. This foundational fansubbing effort was later followed by three distinct commercial re-subtitling efforts: Sohu's release in 2012, Netflix's global version (c. 2015), and Bilibili's 2022 retranslation. Each of these versions can be seen as not only a retranslation of the original fansubs but also, in varying degrees, revisions of each other, which reflects platform-specific priorities, institutional policy shifts, and evolving cultural sensibilities.

These versions also emerge under markedly different regulatory and industrial conditions. Sohu's 2012 release benefited from a relatively relaxed regulatory environment and attempted to retain elements of fansubbing style to appeal to an already engaged audience. Netflix's

international version, in contrast, reflects a more standardised and globally oriented approach, shaped by platform-wide localisation policies but not bound by mainland Chinese censorship. Bilibili's 2022 version, however, was produced under heightened regulatory scrutiny, resulting in heavy content modification and censorship to comply with contemporary domestic guidelines.

As such, the inclusion of *Friends*, with its unique history, thus offers a rare opportunity to examine how commercial subtitling strategies evolve over time, as well as in response to institutional, ideological, and technological pressures. It also allows for a layered analysis of how commercial platforms reinterpret and repackage the same audiovisual text to align with new distribution models and audience orientations. Further details on context, metadata, and examples are presented in Chapter 8 (see Section 8.1.3).

5.4 Data Collection and Analysis Process

To give a clear overview of the materials forming the basis of this study, Table 5.1 summarises the three corpora, indicating their seasons and episodes, subtitle versions, subtitling agents, and release periods. This consolidated view highlights both the diversity of production contexts (fan vs. commercial) and the comparability of datasets across the three cases. The selection of specific seasons, episodes, and CRs is discussed in detail in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, in connection with the respective case studies.

Table 5.1 Overview of the Three Corpora Used in This Study

Case Study	Seasons / Episodes	Subtitle Versions		Subtitled by	Release Dates
Doctor Who	S01 (13 eps) S04 (13 eps)	Initial: Retranslation:	FRM (fansub) YYeTs (fansub)	FRM (2005, 2008) YYeTs (2015, 2018)	2005, 2018
Netflix Originals	*Stranger Things* S4 (9 eps) *Bridgerton* S1 (8 eps) *Queen's Gambit* (7 eps) *The Witcher* S1 (8 eps)	Initial: Retranslation 1: Retranslation 2:	Netflix (commercial) YYeTs (fansub) YIGUI (fansub)	Netflix (2019-2022) YYeTs (2019-2022) YIGUI (2019-2020)	2019-2022
Friends	S01 (24 eps)	Initial: F6 (fansub) Retranslation 1: Retranslation 2: Retranslation 3:	 Sohu (commercial) Netflix (commercial) Bilibili (commercial)	F6 (2005) Sohu (2012) Netflix (c.2015) Bilibili (2022)	2005-2022

With the rationale for each case study established in the previous section, the following section outlines the procedures for data collection and the analytical methods used to examine subtitling strategies across the three re-subtitling scenarios.

Prior to the analysis, all subtitle files (typically in ".srt" or ".ass" format) of each case study have been collected from open source subtitle platforms such as ASSRT and SubHD, alongside

official streaming services where available. All files were processed using Aegisub to standardise timestamp alignment and for subsequent extraction of relevant segments.

Notably, ever since the 2010s, most fan-made and some commercial retranslated subtitles appear in a bilingual format, displaying the original English dialogue alongside the Simplified Chinese translation. While primarily intended to aid viewers with varying levels of English proficiency, this format also proved methodologically advantageous. The simultaneous presence of ST and TT on screen helped facilitate accurate segment alignment and made it easier to identify CRs.

Once identified, CRs are extracted from the ST and matched with their corresponding TT translations to form "coupled pairs" (see Chapter 2). These pairs, as already introduced, serve as the core analytical units for this study, allowing for close comparison of how the same reference is rendered across different versions, time periods, and production contexts.

The main analysis proceeds in two stages. First, a quantitative examination of subtitling strategies is conducted. Drawing on the classification system adapted from Pedersen (2011) (see Chapter 4), each instance is coded according to its translation strategy (i.e., Complete Retention, Transliteration, Direct Translation, Specification, Generalisation, Substitution, Omission, and glosses), orientation (i.e., source- or target-oriented), and level of intervention (i.e., minimal changes or interventional). This quantitative stage helps to map patterns and variation in strategy use across corpora.

To illustrate how this classification was applied in practice, Table 5.2 presents an example of a set of six Geographical CRs (underlined and bold) identified in *Doctor Who* S04E01[1]. For each instance, the table shows the ST dialogue, the renderings in FRM and YYeTs subtitles, back translations for clarity, and the corresponding coding decisions. This example demonstrates step by step how the quantitative dataset was constructed and how the strategies were categorised.

Table 5.2 Example Coding Sheet with Back Translations (Doctor Who, S04E01, Geographical CRs)

Episode	ST Dialogue	CR Type	FRM (2008)	Back Translation	Strategy	YYeTs (2018)	Back Translation	Strategy

[1] The complete coding dataset comprises 1,353 cultural reference instances across the three corpora (352 in Case 1, 683 in Case 2, and 318 in Case 3). Due to its size, the full dataset is not reproduced in this thesis but is archived digitally by the researcher and can be made available upon request for verification or further research purposes.

1		within the **Greater London area** alone,	Geographical	我们在仅仅**大伦敦地区**已经有一百万客户了	We already have a million customers just in **Greater London area**	Direct Translation	这还只是**大伦敦区**的数字	This is only the figure for **Greater London area**	Direct Translation
2		and you got on a bus to **Strathclyde**.	Geographical	你一个人晃晃悠悠竟然上了去**苏格兰**的汽车	ou wandered around and got on a bus to **Scotland**	Generalisation	坐大巴去了**斯特拉思克莱德** 苏格兰西南部	took a coach to **Strathclyde** (southwest Scotland)	Transliteration + Gloss
3	**S04E01**	I went to **Egypt**. I was going to go barefoot and everything.	Geographical	我去了**埃及**	I went to **Egypt**	Official Equivalent	我去了**埃及** 准备要去光脚徒步什么的	I went to **Egypt**, planning to go barefoot hiking and everything	Official Equivalent
4		you don't mean a creche in **Notting Hill**.	Geographical	你说的"育儿" 不是**诺丁山**的什么托儿所吧?	By 'creche you don't mean some nursery in **Notting Hill**?	Official Equivalent	应该说的不是**诺丁山**那种托儿所吧	It shouldn't be referring to that kind of nursery in **Notting Hill**	Official Equivalent
5		You know like when you go to **Cambodia**,	Geographical	比如去**柬埔寨**就要打 有外星疫苗吗	For example, when going to **Cambodia** you have to get alien vaccines?	Official Equivalent	就像你去**柬埔寨**的时候要打预防针之类的	Like when you go to Cambodia, you need to get vaccinations or something	Official Equivalent
6		'Cause my friend Veena went to **Bahrain** and she...	Geographical	我朋友 Veena 去了**巴林** 她得...	My friend Veena went to **Bahrain** and she had to...	Official Equivalent	因为我朋友维娜去**巴林岛**的时候 她...	Because when my friend Veena went to **Bahrain Island**, she...	Specification

As noted in row 2 of Table 5.2, the rendering of cultural references can sometimes involve more than one strategy (e.g., Transliteration + gloss). For the purposes of quantitative analysis, only the dominant strategy is categorised, with glosses treated as overriding. This methodological decision reflects the intrusive and interventional nature of glossing, which exerts a stronger impact on orientation and intervention than the strategies it accompanies. Thus, when multiple strategies co-occur, only the gloss is coded, while the secondary strategy is excluded. Although this necessarily simplifies certain nuances, it avoids double-counting and ensures consistency.

Most importantly, the rule is applied systematically across all three corpora, enabling comparability and reliability in the statistical analysis. At the same time, it must be stressed that the quantitative results provide only a supplementary, macro-level view of strategy distribution; they are not intended to capture every nuance of decision-making, as this is primarily a product-oriented study. The quantitative stage therefore serves as a foundation for, and is complemented by, the subsequent qualitative analysis, which explores individual instances in greater depth.

To further enhance reliability, the coding procedure was piloted on a small subset of CRs prior to full-scale analysis. Coding decisions were revisited after an interval to check intra-coder consistency, and ambiguous cases were logged and, where necessary, checked with the supervision team to ensure consistency. While this study is primarily conducted by a single researcher, these measures were taken to maximise transparency and replicability.

In the second stage, qualitative analysis is carried out to explore notable examples in depth, as already demonstrated in Chapter 4. These case-specific observations enrich the interpretation of the quantitative findings, particularly in relation to evolving norms, perceived audience needs, and the broader sociocultural and institutional pressures that at times shape re-subtitling strategies.

This two-stage, mixed-method approach provides a norm-based account of how English-Simplified Chinese subtitling strategies over CRs have shifted across time, patronage, and audience expectation. Combining quantitative and qualitative analysis allows the study to trace macro-level trends while offering interpretive depth at the micro level. In doing so, it aims to move beyond isolated examples and impressionistic readings, which is a common limitation criticised in retranslation research (see e.g., Gürçağlar, 2019), to develop a more grounded, evidence-based understanding of norm variation across re-subtitling scenarios.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework for analysing English-Simplified Chinese re-subtitling across three scenarios: (1) diachronic fan retranslation, (2) synchronic fan retranslation of commercial subtitles, and (3) diachronic commercial retranslation, each corresponding to one of the research questions set out in Section 1.3 (RQ1-RQ3).

Grounded in a product-oriented DTS approach, the study employs a mixed-methods design that combines quantitative analysis of subtitling strategy distribution with qualitative textual analysis, focusing on CRs as the core analytical units. The three self-compiled and aligned corpora enable systematic comparison across the dimensions of time, patronage, and audience orientation, collectively addressing the overarching research question by tracing how subtitling norms evolve in the context of retranslation.

While this study focuses specifically on the rendering of CRs, it recognises that other subtitling norms, such as technical parameters relating to segmentation, reading speed, or line length (see, e.g., Pedersen, 2011; Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2021), also evolve over time. These remain outside

the scope of the present analysis, which concentrates on cultural and linguistic mediation as the most productive lens for investigating shifts in re-subtitling practice. The following chapters present each case in detail, applying the methodological tools set out in this chapter to uncover patterns of norm variation in the rendering of CRs across the re-subtitling landscape.

Chapter 6 The Regeneration of Fansubs: The Shifted Cultural Focus in the Case of Diachronic Fan Re-Subtitling of *Doctor Who* (2005)

6.1 Introduction

In the Simplified Chinese-speaking TL context, the term *zimuzu* (Chinese: 字幕组, literally "subtitle group") is commonly equated with "fansub" in both academic and informal discourse. However, it is important to note that *zimuzu* contains no explicit reference to fans or fandom, and thus does not inherently convey a fan orientation but a collective voluntary act from the grassroot. While it may be argued that the voluntary, non-commercial nature of these groups suggests fan-like behaviour, such characteristics alone do not clearly indicate what kind of fan investment is involved, or what the object of fandom actually is.

Rather than assuming a stable or uniform notion of fandom, this chapter examines how the focus of fan engagement itself may shift over time: from a broad fascination with Anglophone television as a cultural genre, to a more specific, intertextual affiliation with particular media texts. In doing so, it considers how diachronic fansubbing practices reflect evolving orientations of fandom, and how such shifts reshape audience engagement with foreign media.

This chapter is guided by the first research question:

> *What changes can be identified between early and later fan-produced subtitles of the same audiovisual text, and how do these reflect evolving norms in fansubbing practice?*

As discussed in Chapter 2, two U.S. television programmes were crucial in shaping the formation of Simplified Chinese subtitling communities: *Friends* (David Crane and Marta Kauffman, 1994) and *Prison Break* (Paul Scheuring, 2005). The first inspired the establishment of F6, an online forum founded in 2002 that became a hub for sharing amateur subtitles and discussing Anglophone media. The second, with its fast-paced narrative, sparked a wave of fansubbing activity as newly formed groups competed to release subtitles with minimal delay. Many of these groups originated from F6, among them FRM, which gained visibility both domestically and internationally, even being profiled in the *New York Times* in 2006 (see Section 2.2.3).

A defining feature of these communities was their rapid subtitling approach, that is, producing subtitles week by week in close synchrony with the original broadcasts. For instance, in 2005,

FRM's subtitles for *Prison Break* were typically released with only a one-day delay, allowing the TL audiences to watch and discuss each episode almost simultaneously with their ST counterparts. This practice not only facilitated timely access to content but also fostered a more engaging viewing culture, in which the fansubbing practice functioned not merely as a linguistic transfer, but also a means of community-building. The emergence of such an engaging and participatory viewing culture arguably helped cultivate a fanbase among the audience**,** yet, what this fanbase was actually centred around remains open to further discussion.

Indeed, forums such as F6 began explicitly around clearly fandom-centred activities, notably the popular sitcom *Friends*. Yet, as fansubbing groups like FRM gradually expanded their reach to subtitling a broad spectrum of Anglophone television, which often spans genres from science fiction to crime drama and beyond, the central object of fandom started to shift. Rather than being fans of specific television series, these communities increasingly came to engage with Anglophone television more broadly, treating it as a genre in itself. In the TC context, this broader engagement is often reflected in the use of a neologism like *meiju* (Chinese: 美剧, literally, American drama) and, by association, *yingju* (Chinese: 英剧, literaraly**,** British drama), which categorise US and UK television into collective groups of recognisable, genre-like cultural products. This collective mode of reception might mirror how Western audiences often approach Japanese *anime* as a general category, rather than as a collection of individual series.

It is well acknowledged that the fansubbing phenomenon in American and Eurocentric contexts initially emerged from the amateur subtitling of *anime*. While *anime* encompasses a wide array of genres, which often ranges from comedy to fantasy, it has often been treated as a singular category in Western contexts. As Pérez-González (2007, p. 263) points out, this tendency toward generalisation stems from the perception of *anime* as a monolithic cultural "other". A similar pattern can be observed in early Simplified Chinese fansubbing activities, where Anglophone television was likewise approached as a collective otherness. Despite its internal diversity, Anglophone television was often perceived through a lens of novelty and genre-like homogeneity, shaped by its unfamiliarity within the TC.

This framing of Anglophone television as a unified foreign category played a key role in shaping early fansubbing communities. Under the influence of F6, fansubs reached wider audiences, generating increasing demand and giving rise to groups dedicated to a range of series. However, it also became increasingly rare for later fansubbing groups to centre themselves around a single show ever again as F6 had done with *Friends*. Groups like FRM (as introduced above) and YYeTs (as frequently discussed in both practice and scholarship, see, e.g., Wang, 2017) subtitled

across genres, making it difficult to categorise them, or their audiences, as fans of any one particular show. Instead, they can be understood as fans of Anglophone television as a cultural category, a phenomenon comparable to Western fandom of *anime*. For mainland Chinese audiences newly exposed to this content, enthusiasm often lay less in individual programmes than in the cultural genre as a whole, that is, the SC itself.

This enthusiasm was also shaped by local conditions. The rise of fansubbing in mainland China marked a shift from top-down media dissemination to grassroots, user-generated practices. At the same time, the expansion of English education in the early 2000s exposed audiences to English as a SC more intensively than Japanese ever was in Western contexts. Consequently, the "foreignness" of Anglophone television to the mainland Chinese audiences was not static: as linguistic and cultural familiarity increased, so too did expectations of subtitles.

To explore how this shifting familiarity influences subtitling practices, this chapter compares two generations of fansubs for the same show, i.e., *Doctor Who* (2005). Both sets of subtitles are analysed from a product-oriented perspective, with attention to orientation and intervention using the analytical categories outlined in Chapter 4. As O'hagan (2008) observes, fans often demonstrate an emphasis on genre-specific knowledge. This chapter considers how such knowledge is mobilised in diachronic fansubbing practices, as earlier subtitles may draw more broadly on the SC, whereas later subtitles appear to reflect increasing *Doctor Who*-specific engagement. In this way, the analysis explores how changing levels of cultural and linguisitc familiarity shape both the strategies of fansubs and the interpretive expectations of their audiences.

As explained in Chapter 5, *Doctor Who* represents both British culture as an SC and a long-running media text with a complex, self-referential fan discourse. Importantly, neither FRM (initial fansubs) nor YYeTs (retranslations) was exclusively dedicated to the show. Both were broad-based fansubbing communities with a general interest in Anglophone television, regularly subtitling a variety of series. This reduces selection bias and allows for a more objective analysis of how subtitling strategies, and the focus of fansub engagement, shift over time.

6.2 (Re)Subtitling *Doctor Who*

6.2.1 Introduction

For data consistency and methodological control, this study focuses on Seasons 1 and 4 of the 2005 revival of *Doctor Who* (see Table 6.1). The initial aim was to examine fansubbing activity

from the early 2000s, which naturally narrowed the scope to the first four seasons, originally aired and fansubbed between 2005 and 2009. However, closer examination of subtitling patterns revealed that Seasons 2 and 3 were primarily retranslated by a single subtitler (see Appendix A), raising concerns about the influence of individual style or idiosyncrasies on the final product.

Table 6.1 Details of selected Doctor Who seasons and their diachronic fan retranslations.

Seasons	Episodes	Length	Initially subtitled by	Subtitle available since	Retranslated by	Retranslation available since
***Doctor Who* S01**	13	9.75h	FRM (Fansubbed)	9 May-20 September 2005	YYeTs (Fansubbed)	17 September 2015
***Doctor Who* S04**	13	9.75h	FRM (Fansubbed)	13 April-9 July 2008	YYeTs (Fansubbed)	22 June 2018
Total	26	19.5h				

By contrast, both Seasons 1 and 4 were initially subtitled by the fansub group FRM and later retranslated by YYeTs, with multiple contributors involved in each version. This collaborative production model reduces the risk of personal bias and allows for a more reliable investigation of recurring strategies and shared norms. As such, these two seasons were selected to provide a manageable and representative corpus for analysing diachronic variation in fansubbing practice.

Season 1 was originally subtitled between May and September 2005, and Season 4 between April and July 2008. These subtitles were released in close sync with the original BBC airings, with FRM typically uploading completed versions within a week of broadcast. This time-sensitive, episodic mode of fansubbing contrasts with the retrospective nature of YYeTs' retranslations, which were uploaded as complete-season packages in September 2015 (Season 1) and June 2018 (Season 4). The roughly ten-year interval between the initial and retranslated versions offers a clear temporal framework for exploring how fansubbing strategies shift over time in response to evolving audience expectations, fandom norms, and cultural familiarity.

6.2.2 CRs in *Doctor Who*

In the two selected seasons of *Doctor Who* (2005), a total of 352 instances of CRs were identified. These references fall into five main categories, as defined in Chapter 5: Geographical, Ethnographic, Socio-political, Intertextual and Asynchronous references.

As shown in Table 6.2, Intertextual CRs are the most prominent category, accounting for approximately one-third of all instances. In *Doctor Who*, such references are frequently woven into dialogue not only to enrich the narrative, but also to characterise the main character (i.e., the Doctor) as witty, intellectually agile, and culturally literate, which are all qualities consistent with his portrayal as a long-lived alien with encyclopaedic knowledge of Earth.

These references are also particularly abundant in episodes with historical settings, such as those featuring Charles Dickens (S01E03) or Agatha Christie (S04E07), where the dialogue is enriched with allusions to their works and biographical details. Such episodes typically feature a higher density of intertextual references and period-specific language than those set in contemporary or futuristic contexts.

Table 6.2 CR distribution

Type	N	%
Geographical	93	26.42%
Ethnographic	74	21.02%
Socio-political	51	14.49%
Intertextual	120	34.09%
Asynchronous	14	3.98%
Total	352	100.00%

By contrast, Asynchronous CRs, that is, references "that do not belong to the same time in which the members of the audience live" (Ranzato, 2016, p. 75), are the least frequent (N=14, 3.98%). This scarcity reflects the fact that only four of the twenty-six episodes analysed are set in historical periods distinct from the original 2000s audience. It is important to distinguish between asynchronous episodes and Asynchronous CRs: an episode may take place in a past era (such as set in Victorian England or during the Second World War), yet not every reference within it necessarily functions as temporally distant. For instance, Dickens's or Christie's works are treated as timeless classics and thus recognisable even to a contemporary audience. In such cases, the asynchronous setting primarily serves as a platform for intertextual engagement, while Asynchronous CRs signal historical distance more directly (such as the portrayal of a mail-coach to the modern audience).

On the other hand, the real-world CRs, those that are more synchronous and contemporary in nature, constitute the majority of the corpora, accounting for over 60% of all instances. These

include Geographical, Ethnographic, and Socio-political references, with Geographical references being the most prevalent and Socio-political ones the least frequent (see Table 6.2). The prominence of real-world CRs reflects the series' grounding in contemporary contexts set in the UK and everyday cultural knowledge, particularly through references to proper names, ethnic identities, and political institutions or ideologies. While these references may appear more straightforward than Intertextual or Asynchronous CRs, they still present potential challenges in subtitling, particularly in terms of cultural specificity, relevance, and accessibility for the different generations of TA and fansubbers in a diachronic sense.

To examine how such challenges are negotiated, the following analysis applies the two key analytical dimensions introduced in Section 4.4 (i.e., orientation and intervention), which are used consistently across all three case studies. Here, they provide the framework for evaluating how different generations of fansubs approach the translation of CRs, and how these strategies reflect broader diachronic shifts in practice and audience expectation.

6.2.3 Norm Variation

In Tables 6-3 and 6-4 below present a detailed breakdown of orientation and interventional tendencies across all five types of CRs in both the initial and retranslated fansubs. Overall, the data suggests that the differences in orientation between the two generations of fansubs remain relatively marginal, whereas the shift in interventional tendency is more pronounced and analytically notable.

Table 6.3 Detailed breakdown of orientation tendency across different types of CRs in Doctor Who

ST-orientation	Geographical	Intertextual	Socio-political	Asynchronous	Ethnographic	Overall
Initial	68.42%	56.18%	68.75%	44.44%	46.46%	57.08%
Retranslation	82.86%	57.58%	70.00%	40.00%	38.78%	56.30%
Variation	14.44% (↑)	1.4 (↑)	1.25% (↑)	4.44% (↓)	7.68% (↓)	0.78% (↓)

As shown in Table 6.3, the overall ST-orientation of both sets of subtitles remains comparable, with the retranslation only 0.78% lower than the initial subtitles, suggesting a marginally more domesticating tendency. Across most CR categories, variation is minimal: Intertextual and Socio-political CRs show slight increases in ST-orientation (at 1.4% and 1.25%, respectively), while Ethnographic and Asynchronous CRs decline (at 7.68% and 4.44%, respectively). The most notable shift is found in Geographical CRs, with a 14.44% increase in ST-oriented strategies.

Nonetheless, these overall fluctuations, though subtle, are sufficient to challenge the assumptions of the *Retranslation Hypothesis*, which typically anticipates a shift from target-oriented initial translations to more source-oriented retranslations. This deviation suggests that this case of diachronic fan retranslation may be shaped by more complicated and context-specific factors, such as evolving subtitling conventions, shifting perceptions of foreign cultural accessibility, and changing expectations regarding the TA's familiarity with and literacy in the SC. These dynamics may, in turn, influence how different types of CR are subtitled. To further explore this shift, the analysis now turns to the second analytical dimension, i.e., level of intervention, which provide a complementary perspective on how fansubs negotiate the balance between SC and TC through varying degrees of textual mediation and interpretive modification.

Table 6.4 Detailed breakdown of interventional tendency across different types of CRs in Doctor Who

Interventional	Intertextual	Socio-political	Ethnographic	Geographical	Asynchronous	Overall
Initial	50.00%	32.00%	54.39%	24.44%	53.85%	41.18%
Retranslation	73.50%	41.18%	60.27%	26.88%	53.85%	52.72%
Variation	23.50% (↑)	9.18 (↑)	5.88% (↑)	2.44% (↑)	0.00% (/)	11.54% (↑)

Table 6.4 reveals a more substantial diachronic shift in interventional tendency, with the retranslation showing an increase, to various degrees, across nearly all CR categories. The overall proportion of the usage of interventional strategies rises from 41.18% in the initial subtitles to 52.72% in the retranslation, indicating a growing inclination among later fansubs to mediate more actively in the TT subtitles. This shift is particularly prominent in Intertextual CRs, which see a 23.5% increase in using more interventional strategies, followed by Socio-political CRs (at 9.18%) and Ethnographic CRs (5.88%). Even Geographical CRs, which are typically considered more straightforward due to their frequent reliance on proper names, exhibit a slight increase at 2.44%. Interestingly, Asynchronous CRs show no variation between the two generations, which is likely a statistic coincidence due to the lower count of this particular type of CR (N=14, out of a total of 352, as shown in Table 6.2).

The overall trend toward greater intervention indicates a diachronic change in subtitling practice. While the quantitative data alone cannot fully explain this development, it may be associated with factors such as evolving audience expectations, increasing familiarity with the SC, and a broader acceptance within fansubbing communities of explanatory or inclusive strategies. These possibilities are explored in greater depth through qualitative examples in the following section.

6.3 Strategy Distribution

Figure 6.1 and Table 6.5 illustrate the overall strategy distribution across both generations of fansubs, that is, the initial subtitles (FRM) and retranslated subtitles (YYeTS) of the series produced with a ten-year interval. As shown in the bar chart below, Official Equivalent stands out as the most frequently employed strategy in both generations. In the retranslation, the reliance on this particular strategy is even higher, making it one of the few strategies that are used more frequently in the retranslation than in the initial subtitles.

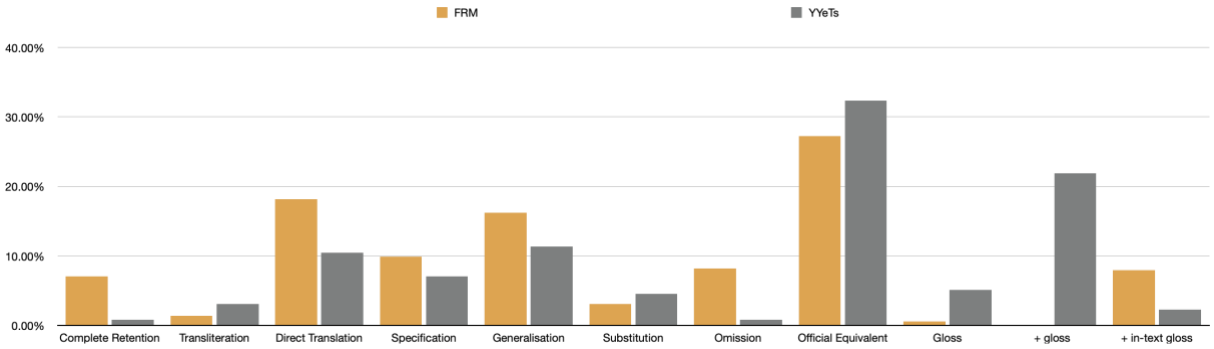

Figure 6.1 Bar chart of strategy distribution in both generation of fansubs

Table 6.5 Overall strategy distribution in Doctor Who

Strategy		Initial		Retranslation
Complete Retention	25	7.10%	3	0.85%
Transliteration	5	1.42%	11	3.13%
Direct Translation	64	18.18%	37	10.51%
Specification	35	9.94%	25	7.10%
Generalisation	57	16.19%	40	11.36%
Substitution	11	3.13%	16	4.55%
Omission	29	8.24%	3	0.85%
Official Equivalent	96	27.27%	114	32.39%
Gloss	2	0.57%	18	5.11%
+ gloss	0	0.00%	77	21.88%
+ in-text gloss	28	7.95%	8	2.27%
Total	352	100.00%	352	100.00%

Other than Official Equivalent, Transliteration also demonstrates a modest increase in the retranslation, suggesting a growing tendency among later fansubs to preserve the phonetic form of certain SL expressions, particularly for proper names and technical terms. This shift is especially noteworthy when considered alongside the sharp decrease in Complete Retention

and Omission. In earlier fansubs, these two strategies are often found employed to address translation problems posed by CRs that might be considered either untranslatable or self-explanatory, and thus either retained in their original form or deleted entirely within the constraints of subtitling. By contrast, the increased use of Transliteration in the retranslation reflects a more standardised approach adopted by later generations of fansubs, one that maintains the foreignness of the reference in the TL form. This evolution, alongside the increased use of Official Equivalent, can be understood in a diachronic context, as fansubbing practice gradually shift in response to the growing SC literacy and digital competence of both audiences and fansubbers. As both become more internet-savvy and increasingly accustomed to foreign media and content, later generations of subtitles appear more confident in preserving the foreignness more systematically and in identifying appropriate TL equivalents. There is also a growing trust suggested in the audience's ability to engage independently with transliterated or culturally marked content, rather than relying on the earlier strategies of retaining the SL term verbatim or omitting the reference altogether.

At the same time, however, not all foreignness is left to the audience's encyclopaedic knowledge. The most striking diachronic change is the rise of glossing strategies, particularly + gloss, which appears exclusively in the retranslation. Gloss as a standalone strategy also increases, while + in-text gloss declines. This suggests a stronger emphasis on explicit mediation: as outlined in Section 4.3, explanatory content is placed separately from the main subtitle line to provide cultural or contextual information with minimal interference in the primary subtitle area.

This rise in glossing, along with increased use of strategies such as Official Equivalent and Transliteration, collectively contributes to the overall trend toward a more interventional fan retranslation. These developments suggest a diachronic shift in fansubbing practice, influenced by evolving audience expectations and a growing acceptance of mediated subtitling strategies. The implications of this shift will be examined in greater detail through the qualitative analysis in the next section.

6.3.1 The Most Prevalent Solution for Both: Official Equivalent

As pointed out above, the most frequently employed strategy in both generations of fansubs is Official Equivalent, a type of ready-made solution established in the TC. In addition, it is particularly significant that the retranslation makes even more extensive use of Official Equivalents than in the initial subtitles.

As discussed in Chapter 5, an Official Equivalent is categorised as one of the more interventional strategies and not included in the dichotomy of being ST- or TT- oriented in that the decision to use it is often "administrative rather than linguistic" (Pedersen, 2011, p. 97). It may consist of any strategy or combination of strategies that has already been accepted by the TC audience, either through authoritative usage or conventional practice. Once an Official Equivalent has been established, it generally poses no further translation problem, regardless of how linguistically complex or culturally creative the solution may be.

In this context, the increased use of Official Equivalent in the retranslation may signal a shift toward more standardised, culturally embedded fansubbing norms, which largely answers to a growing SC familiarity and literacy of such terms among the TA over time.

Example 6-1a, S01E09, CR Type: Socio-political		
Original Dialogue	I'm hanging in the sky in the middle of a German air raid, with a **Union Jack** across my chest but, hey, my mobile phone's off!	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	我吊在半空中 四周都是德国的空袭 我胸口穿着**英国国旗** 但 嘿 我的电话关掉了！	我在一场德国空袭中被悬在半空 胸前还穿着**米字旗**图案 不过没关系 我把手机关啦
Back Translation	I'm hanging mid-air, surrounded by German air raid. I am wearing **a British national flag** on my chest, but hey, my phone is off!	I am hanging mid-air in a German air raid Wearing **a rice character flag** in front of my chest, but that's ok I turned off my phone!
Strategy	Generalisation	Official Equivalent

Such an instance is demonstrated in Example 6-1a (above), which is excerpted from an asynchronous episode set in London in 1941 during World War II. In the original dialogue, one of the protagonists describes her perilous situation by emphasising that she is suspended mid-air during a German air raid while wearing a "Union Jack" T-shirt, which is an ironic contrast that underscores her precarious position in enemy territory. The CR, i.e., "Union Jack", functions as a socio-political symbol that is presumably accessible to the TA, as it may be considered a transcultural CR. According to Pedersen (2011), a transcultural reference is not bound exclusively to the SC but is considered retrievable from the shared encyclopaedic knowledge of both ST and TT audiences, regardless of the origin of the referent. However, the accessibility of such transculturality is not fixed, as it may shift over time as public education and media exposure of such knowledge evolve across different generations within the same region.

In the initial subtitle, this CR is paraphrased and generalised as "British national flag", while the retranslation adopts a TL-specific Official Equivalent "米字旗" (literally, "rice character flag"). This initial choice may reflect the fansubber's then priority of clarity and immediate

comprehension, anticipating that the term "米字旗" might still have been unfamiliar to many viewers in the early 2000s. Such paraphrasing is consistent with early fansubbing practice, which often assumed lower SC literacy and relied on explanatory or simplifying strategies such as Specification and Generalisation (see Figure 6.1).

By contrast, the retranslation adopts "米字旗", which is a more solution combines Specification, by identifying the referent as a flag, with a visual metaphor based on the resemblance between the character "米" and the design of the Union Jack. This approach resonates with the visual orientation of the TL, which, as a logographic system, often exploits character structure and resemblance to aid comprehension.

Although not an officially codified term, "米字旗" has by the time of retranslation (i.e., the 2010s) become a de facto standard in the TC, appearing in encyclopaedia entries, media reports, and public discourse. As Pedersen (2011, p. 98) notes, the "official" status of an equivalent derives not from institutional sanction but from established familiarity and recognisability. In this sense, the case of "米字旗" exemplifies how an Official Equivalent may crystallise over time into a culturally intuitive and visually resonant solution.

The diachronic move from paraphrasing to Official Equivalent illustrates both a change in subtitling strategy and a shift in assumptions about audience literacy. Whereas the initial subtitle sought to mediate potential gaps in encyclopaedic knowledge, the later retranslation reflects greater confidence in the TA's familiarity with transcultural references, shaped by broader cultural shifts and the evolving norms of the fansubbing landscape in the TC.

Example 6-1b, S04E02, CR Type: Geographical		
Original Dialogue	- Wait a minute. One mountain, with smoke, which makes this... - **Pompeii**. We're in Pompeii.	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2008)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2018)
	- 等等 一座山 在冒烟 那就是说... - **庞贝（意大利古城 被火山摧毁）** 我们在庞贝	- 等一下 就一座山 还冒着烟 所以这里是... - **庞贝** 我们是在庞贝
Back Translation	- wait, one mountain, with smoke, that means... - **Pompeii (ancient Italian city, destroyed by a volcano)**, we are in Pompeii	- Wait a minute, just a mountain, and it's smoking, so this is... - **Pompeii**. We're in Pompeii.
Strategy	Official Equivalent + in-text gloss	Official Equivalent

Example 6-1b presents another case where the diachronic shift in subtitling strategy reflects a changing expectation of the TA's growing foreign cultural familiarity, especially with transcultural CRs. In this example of rendering the geographical CR, "Pompeii", the initial

subtitle in 2008 complements an Official Equivalent with an in-text gloss, explicitly clarifying what “Pompeii” refers to, i.e., “an ancient Italian city destroyed by a volcano”, to support and maximise audience understanding, particularly in consideration of viewers who may not have been familiar with the reference at the time. In contrast, the 2018 retranslation relies solely on the Official Equivalent, which demonstrates more confidence in the established TT equivalent term without feeling the need for further elaboration.

From a diachronic perspective, this change, again, illustrates how a once potentially monocultural or simply non-TC reference becomes normalised over time, as a result of broader exposure to global media and increased public education in general cultural knowledge in the TC context and an evolving assumption about audience literacy. Later fansubs exhibit less need for explanatory mediation, not because the reference itself has changed, but because the successive generations of TA’s encyclopaedic knowledge may have expanded over time, therefore expecting different rendering approach.

Moreover, as discussed above, strategies such as Complete Retention and Omission are predominantly employed in the initial fansubs and are rarely used again in the retranslation (see Figure 6.1). These strategies are particularly common in the early rendering of transcultural, proper name CRs, such as geographical ones. However, in later retranslation, these approaches are increasingly supplanted by strategies such as Official Equivalent and Transliteration, as evidenced by the rise of these strategies in Figure 6.1. In addition to reflecting the presumed expansion of the TA’s encyclopaedic knowledge of the SC, as previously argued, this shift also illustrates a broader linguistic trend toward standardisation, whereby CRs are consistently transliterated into the TL form.

Example 6-2, S01E03, CR Type: Geographical		
Original Dialogue	- I got the flight a bit wrong. - I don't care. - It's not 1860, it's 1869. - I don’t care. - And it's not **Naples**. - I don't care. - It's **Cardiff**. - ... Right.	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	- 这次飞行出了点错 - 我不在乎 - 现在不是 1860 年，而是 1869 年 - 我不在乎 - 这儿也不是 **Naples** - 我不在乎。 - 这儿是 **Cardiff（威尔士主要海港）** - 好的	- 我降落错地方了 - 无所谓 - 不是 1860 年是 1869 年 - 无所谓 - 而且也不是**那不勒斯** - 我真不在乎 - 是**卡迪夫** - 好吧
Back-Translation	- This flight has gone a bit wrong. - I don't care. - Now is not 1860, it’s 1869 instead. - I don’t care. - This is not **Naples** either. - I don't care. - This is **Cardiff (major Welsh seaport**). - Okay.	- I landed in the wrong place. - Doesn’t matter. - It’s not 1860, it’s 1869. - Doesn’t matter. - And it’s not **Naples** either. - I really don't care. - It’s **Cardiff**. - Okay.
Strategy	Complete Retention + in-text gloss	Official Equivalent

Such shift towards standardisation is clearly exemplified in Example 6-2 (above), where the initial fansub retains the CRs “Naples” and “Cardiff” completely in their original form, with an additional in-text gloss provided for the latter, i.e., “Cardiff (major Welsh seaport)”, to clarify the geographical location. This added mediation aligns with the trend observed in previous examples, reflecting an earlier assumption of the initial fansubbers that such references might not be readily understood by their TA at the time. However, the mixture of English and Simplified Chinese within the same subtitle lines is rather conspicuous, particularly given the linguistic distance between the two very different languages. Furthermore, there is also a certain degree of inconsistency in the initial subtitles, where only one CR is glossed over while the other is not, as well as the two CRs are retained in their original English forms yet the gloss puts “Welsh” in the TL form. This mixture of linguistic forms may also reflect a degree of arbitrariness in the early fansubber’ choices. while it could be argued that one referent is potentially perceived as more recognisable than the others, the pattern appears somewhat irregular and unregulated, suggesting a somewhat more ad hoc approach driven by an individual fansubber.

In contrast, the retranslation exhibits a more standardised rendering of both terms, with each being put into their TL Official Equivalent, which are both via Transliteration. “Naples” is rendered as “那不勒斯” (pronounced in Chinese: Na’Bu’Le’Si), and “Cardiff” as “卡迪夫” (pronounced in Chinese: Ka’Di’Fu). This is yet another demonstration on how Official Equivalent as a strategy may in practice encompass other or a combination of other strategies, in this case transliterations, depending on convention and usage. The fact that these transliterations have become the accepted official forms of the proper names of these SC locations reflects the broader institutionalisation of such renderings in the TL.

In addition, the removal of the in-text gloss in the retranslation further echoes the trend observed in the previous example, where the gloss for “Pompeii” is similarly omitted. However, this reduction in glossing for transcultural references, such as geographical locations, should not be interpreted as a general decline in the use of this type of highly interventional strategies in later fansubs. On the contrary, as shown in Figure 6.1, the overall frequency of glossing increases significantly in the retranslation. This suggests that while glosses are still (if not more) actively employed, they are applied more selectively, often reserved for more culturally embedded references rather than for terms that have become more recognisable to the TA, such as common encyclopaedic knowledge of transcultural geographical names.

This trend further supports the assumption outlined in the introduction to this chapter, that a diachronic shift in fansubbing practices may reflect a changing orientation within grassroots

subtitling communities. Whereas earlier fansubs might appear more focused on mediating the unfamiliarity of the SC due to the limitation of the time period, later retranslations appear to exhibit a growing confidence in the TA's common foreign cultural literacy. Consequently, the function of fansubbing evolves from primarily mediating general cultural gaps to enhancing more specific genre accessibility and textual engagement in more nuanced ways (see Section 6.4.).

On the other hand, in the following section, Transliteration, as another increasingly prominent strategy, often used to replace earlier approaches such as Complete Retention and Omission, will be examined separately in greater detail.

6.3.2 The TL-Specific Solution: Transliteration

Transliteration as a translation strategy is by no means exclusive to the TL. In fact, it is widely employed across various language pairs to approximate the phonetic features of foreign terms. However, in this context, it is considered a TL-specific solution due to the distinctive structural and linguistic differences between the SL and the TL. Specifically, the logographic nature of Simplified Chinese is in stark contrast to the alphabetic structure of English, for the Chinese characters are usually phono-semantic compounds, which typically consist of a semantic radical that hints at the general category or meaning of the word, and a phonetic component that provides a rough indication of pronunciation. This structural disparity creates a unique translational situation in which phonetic rendering through transliteration is not a purely phonemic process because the characters used in transliteration inevitably carry their own semantic meanings, even when chosen primarily for their phonetic value.

Unlike in alphabetic languages, where transliteration typically involves a relatively more straightforward mapping of sounds or letters, transliteration in Simplified Chinese must navigate this inherent tension between phonetic approximation and the unavoidable semantic residue embedded in each character. As a result, transliterations often appear as sequences of seemingly unrelated characters that do not carry much coherent meaning in the TL, making their foreignness all the more conspicuous to the TA visually and cognitively. In this way, transliteration in Simplified Chinese often not only functions as a more complex adaptation but also as a visible marker of cultural and linguistic otherness as transliteration in the TL is usually easier to recognise.

Example 6-3a offers a good illustration of the shift from earlier fansubs which often relied on Complete Retention, where cultural foreignness was found largely left intact and unmediated, toward more regulated strategies such as Transliteration.

Example 6-3a, S04E07, CR Type: Geographical		
Original Dialogue 1	I was deep in the **Ardennes**, trying to find Charlemagne.	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2008)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2018)
	我在 **Ardennes** 深处 寻找查理曼大帝	我深入**阿登高地** 试图找到查理曼大帝
Back Translation	**I ventured deep into the Ardennes in search of Charlemagne.**	**I delved into the Ardennes Highlands, trying to find Charlemagne.**
Strategy	Complete Retention	Transliteration + Specification

In the initial 2008 fansub, the geographical term "Ardennes", a third-culture CR, is retained entirely in the TT subtitles. By contrast, the 2018 retranslation adopts a hybrid approach by combining a phonetically approximate transliteration, i.e., "阿登" (pronounced in Chinese: A'Deng), with an added Specification, i.e., "highlands". This intervention helps anchor the reference within a more accessible conceptual frame for the TA by enhancing comprehension without resorting to an explicit in-text gloss, while still preserving the foreign identity of this proper name.

From a linguistic and semiotic perspective, the rendering of "Ardennes" as "阿登" exemplifies the inherent complexities of transliteration within a logographic writing system such as Simplified Chinese. While the constituent characters are primarily selected for their phonetic correspondence, they each carry inherent semantic load as independent characters. The character "阿" is commonly used as a prefix for names or terms of endearment, while "登" typically connotes actions such as "to climb" or "to register" depending on the context. This mismatch often makes transliterated terms semantically opaque while visually marking the foreign identity of the CR to the TL audience. This is probably the reason why later fansubbers feel the need to mediate more explicitly by adding a clarifying element, i.e., "highlands", to specify the nature of the referent.

It is also particularly significant when considered alongside the patterns observed in Table 6.3 and Table 6.4, where Geographical CRs exhibit both the highest increase in ST-oriented renderings in the retranslation and a simultaneous rise in the use of interventional strategies. Such a finding challenges the conventional assumption that intervention is inherently aligned with target orientation. As Pedersen (2011, p. 101) notes, intervention usually implies domestication, aiming to shift the text closer to the TC to aid audience comprehension. In turn, findings such as this instance suggests a more complex dynamic, where sometimes, interventional strategies such as Specification are employed not to simplify or culturally adapt the ST content into the TT, but rather to preserve and promote foreign culture visibility for the TL

audience. This arguably reflects the often educational and informative nature of fansubs which often voluntarily promote cross-cultural literacy and engagement.

A parallel trend can be observed in the handling of more monocultural CRs, those embedded in the specific socio-cultural context of the SC but lacking widespread transcultural salience. Examples 6-3b and 6-3c both highlight Ethnographic CRs involving real-life British public figures, where the diachronic shift in subtitling strategy reflects the changing approaches in different generations of fansubs in terms of mediation and contextualisation of CRs.

In Example 6-3b, the CR, Michael Palin, who is a well-known British travel presenter, is initially handled via a Complete Retention and accompanied by an in-text gloss integrated directly into the subtitle line to explain his identity and relevance. In the 2018 retranslation, the same referent is transliterated into the TL form, with a similar gloss presented in a separate line.

Similarly, in Example 6-3c, the name Patrick Moore is first retained without additional explanation, while the retranslation transliterates the name and adds a short gloss noting his title, lifespan, and role as a "renowned amateur astronomer". This evolution from minimal intervention to elaborated mediation reflects a shift away from the earlier "minimax" tendency (Levý, 1969) common in fansubs, where fansubbers often defaulted to retention or omission when faced with CRs that were difficult to translate or culturally opaque.

Example 6-3b, S04E04, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 2	- I phoned Veena and she said she hadn't seen hide nor hair. - I've just been travelling. - Oh, hark at her, **Michael Palin**.	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2008)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2018)
	- 我给 Veena 打电话 她说一直没看着你 - 我只是...去旅行了 - 哦 听听她的口气 都成了 **Michael Palin** 了 **(英国知名的旅游节目主持人)**	- 我给维娜打过电话 她说你的人影都没看见 - 我只是旅游去了 - 听听这口气 **迈克尔·帕林**附体吗 **英国著名旅行节目主持人**
Back Translation	- I called Veena. She said she hasn't seen you at all. - I just... went traveling. - Oh, listen to you sounding like **Michael Palin** now. (*a well-known British travel show host*)	- I called Veena—she said she hasn't seen a trace of you. - I was just off traveling. - Listen to that tone, what, you turned into **Michael Palin** now? *Famous British travel documentary presenter*
Strategy	Complete Retention + in-text gloss	Transliteration + gloss
Example 6-3c, S01E04, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 3	- Like it said on the news, they're gathering experts in alien knowledge. Who's the biggest expert of the lot? - **Patrick Moore**? - Apart from him.	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	- 就像新闻中所说,他们在寻找外星人方面的专家,谁是最厉害的专家呢? - **Patrick Moore** - 除了他	- 就像新闻里说的 他们在召集具有外星知识的专家 那些人里谁是最权威的呢 - **帕特里克·摩尔** - 除了他 **帕特里克·摩尔爵士 1923-2012 著名业余天文学家**

Back Translation	- Just like they said in the news, they're looking for experts on aliens. Who's the best expert? - **Patrick Moore**? - Besides him?	- Just like the news said, they're gathering experts in extraterrestrial knowledge. Who's the most authoritative among them? - **Patrick Moore**? - Besides him? **Sir Patrick Moore (1923-2012), renowned amateur astronomer.**
Strategy	Complete Retention	Transliteration + gloss

It is important to note, however, that early fansubs did intervene at times, but such efforts were applied selectively and most often to transcultural CRs that were already partly accessible to audiences. In those cases, glosses were typically embedded directly into the subtitle line (i.e. in-text glosses) to clarify a referent's identity or significance. Retranslations of the same transcultural CRs, however, frequently omit such glosses, reflecting the TA's increased familiarity with these items over time. Retranslations of the same transcultural CRs, by contrast, frequently omit such glosses, reflecting the TA's increased familiarity with these items over time.

More recently, however, glossing practice has shifted toward monocultural or infracultural CRs, typically terms and proper names with little resonance beyond the SC. These glosses tend to be brief and separated from the subtitle line (i.e. the + gloss format or standalone glosses). Rather than functioning as extended explanations intended to ensure comprehension, they operate as markers of the fansubbers' cultural fluency, signalling awareness of cultural specificity while providing only minimal information to aid recognition.

This marks a different kind of evolution, shaped less by assumed increases in SC literacy than by the rise of internet literacy. In the current digital landscape, audiences are accustomed to encountering unfamiliar cultural items and are more likely to consult search engines, fan wikis, or online encyclopaedias for clarification. Subtitlers seem to anticipate this behaviour, offering glossed transliterations not as full explanations but as searchable cues for further exploration. In this sense, the growing use of glossing in later fansubs reflects not only a shift in subtitling norms but also an alignment with the evolving media literacy of digitally native, typically younger audiences. Glossing strategies in later fansubs are discussed further in Section 6.4.

Example 6-4a, S01E02, CR Type: Geographical		
Original Dialogue 1	-I can't open the door. Stay there, don't move. -Where am I gonna go, **Ipswich**?	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	- 我打不开这门 呆在那儿别动 - 我能去哪儿呀 **我倒想呢**	- 我打不开门 待在里面 不要动 - 我又能去哪 **伊普斯维奇**吗**[英国地名]**
Back Translation	- I can't open this door. Stay there, don't move. - Where could I possibly go? **I wish I could**.	- I can't open the door. Stay inside, don't move. - And where would I even go, **Ipswich [a British location]**?
Strategy	Omission	Transliteration + in-text gloss

Example 6-4b, S01E08, CR Type: Geographical		
Original Dialogue 2	Third prize at the bowling. First two got to go to **Didcot**.	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	保龄球比赛第三名 前两球**全中**	保龄球第三名 第两名可以去**迪德科特**
Back Translation	Third place in the bowling match, first two shots **were strikes**.	Third prize at bowling, the top two get to go to **Didcot**.
Strategy	Omission	Transliteration

Examples 6-4a and 6-4b further illustrate the broader trend of standardisation through the replacement of earlier Omissions with more explicit strategies such as Transliteration and occasional + in-text glosses.

In Example 6-4a, the CR, i.e., Ipswich, a British town, is entirely omitted in the 2005 fansub and replaced with a vague, paraphrased response that avoids the geographical CR altogether. This omission not only removes a monocultural referent but also dampens the dry humour of the original dialogue, where the protagonist sarcastically proposes Ipswich as an absurd escape destination while trapped behind a locked door. The understated comedy relies on the town's monocultural significance, which is something that the original British audience is expected to recognise. In the 2015 retranslation, however, the referent is retained through Transliteration and accompanied by a brief gloss marking it as a British location, although also without any further elaboration on its specific connotations.

A similar pattern appears in Example 6-4b, where "Didcot" is omitted in the 2005 fansub and substituted with a line that misrepresents the original context. By contrast, the 2015 retranslation retains the reference through straightforward Transliteration, consistent with the broader tendency to render proper names in standardised TL form.

These examples reflect a consistent shift away from Omission, which is previously the go-to strategy for handling these low-salience and monocultural CRs, toward the preservation of these referents phonetically. Even when these names hold little cultural significance for TL audiences, their kept transliterated form signals a subtitling norm that increasingly prioritises consistency and fidelity to the source text. By contrast, earlier over-localised or non-specific renderings often obscured these nuances, reflecting both the assumed limitations of the TA's SC literacy and, at times, the fansubber's own restricted digital resources during the early 2000s.

6.3.3 The TA-Specific Solution: Gloss

If Transliteration can be considered the most TL-specific solution, particularly due to the fundamental linguistic disparity between English and Simplified Chinese, then the use of glosses can be argued here as the most TA-specific strategy, as it is almost exclusive to fansubbing within the broader landscape of AVT practices. Importantly, the term "TA" here, i.e., target audience, does not refer to the broader TL audience as a whole, but more narrowly to the fansub-consuming audience within the TC. Those who consume subtitled content via commercial platforms are not the focus of this case study, as they tend to exhibit distinct preferences and expectations regarding subtitle style and viewing experience, or at the very least, different priorities (see Chapter 7).

Pérez-González (2014, pp. 79-80) characterises glosses, or "headnotes", as one of the most "abusive" forms of mediation in fansubbing; that is, a form of "aesthetic activism" designed to counteract the "shortage and cultural insensitivity of commercial translations", echoing earlier *anime* fansubbing practices. Typically appearing at the top of the screen, these glosses are not only supplemental but often also central to the fansubbers' efforts to resist smoothing over foreignness. As Pérez-González (2014) observes, conventional subtitles compress and domesticate in order to preserve synchronicity, whereas fansubbing deliberately breaches those norms through experimental forms of mediation.

Such notion of "abusive mediation" is visible both textually and graphically in the fansubs analysed here, particularly in the retranslation ones, which shows a notably more liberal and experimental use of glosses (see also Pérez-González, 2006; Nornes, 1999). This practice clearly reflects the so-called breach of conventional subtitling norms, where glossing is typically not considered as an option.

Textually, glosses explain and comment, often functioning as informal annotations beyond diegetic content. Graphically, they are not confined to "headnotes". In this study, glosses are also found appearing in multiple screen positions, sometimes signalled through distinct fonts, colours, or sizes.

In terms of formatting, the glosses identified in this corpus fall into three main types:

a) ***Gloss***, a standalone explanation outside the subtitle area;
b) ***+ gloss***, an external gloss accompanying another subtitling strategy;
c) ***+ in-text gloss***, an embedded gloss within the subtitle line, usually in brackets.

Notably, the standalone Gloss strategy is found applied exclusively to Intertextual CRs in both corpora, whereas both the + gloss and + in-text gloss formats appear across all CR categories and are most frequently paired with ST-oriented strategies. It is also worth noting that the + gloss format occurs only in the retranslations, indicating a temporal shift in glossing conventions within the TC fansubbing landscape. Supported by both quantitative and qualitative data, the following sections examine these patterns further in terms of visibility, intervention, and orientation.

Gloss as a standalone strategy

As mentioned above, the increased usage of glosses in the retranslations marks one of the most noticeable variation observed in this study. Referring back to Table 6.5 (in Section 6.3.), it is clear that there are only 2 instances of Gloss as a standalone strategy in the initial subtitles, compared to 18 occurrences in the retranslations.

In the initial fansubs, both instances of Gloss occur in the same episode (*Doctor Who*, S01E02), where two diegetic soundtracks are introduced just before the destruction of the planet Earth. These two soundtracks (see Examples 6-5a and 6-5b below) are framed within the dialogue as "classical music" and a "traditional ballad" to mourn Earth's final moments, though they are in fact Soft Cell's *Tainted Love* and Britney Spears' *Toxic*. The humour of the scene lies in this deliberate mismatch between the solemn framing and the actual pop content, which the contemporary 2005 audience, both domestic and international, would likely have recognised, particularly the Spears track.

Example 6-5a&b, S01E02 CRs Type: Intertextual

Context	Host: According to the archives, this was called an iPod, it stores classical music from humanity's greatest composers. Play on! ***"Tainted Love" from Soft Cell playing*** ... Host: Earth death in ten minutes. The planet's end! Come gather, come gather! Bid farewell to the cradle of civilisation. Let us mourn her with a traditional ballad. ***"Toxic" from Britney Spears playing***	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	爵士乐 "玷污的爱情" 演唱者 Soft Cell ... 爵士乐： "中毒" Britney Spears 演唱	英国 1980 年代初的双人组合"Soft Cell"的代表作《Tainted Love》 ... 布兰妮·斯皮尔斯 《中你的毒》 为播放这幕 剧组特意制作了该单曲的黑胶唱片版
Back Translation	Jazz, "Tainted Love", Sung by Soft Cell ... Jazz, "Poisoned", Sung by Britney Spears"	"Tainted Love", the representative work of the British duo Soft Cell from the early 1980s ... Britney Spears, "Poisoned by You"

		The crew created a vinyl version of this single especially for this scene.	
Strategy	Gloss		Gloss

Although these intertextual references are not explicitly named in the SL dialogue, they are embedded in the plot and carry clear narrative and comedic weight. As such, both generations of fansubbers appear to have considered them important enough to carry intra-linguistic mediation for the TA. The presence of Gloss in the 2005 versions suggests that even within the more restrained subtitling practices of the time, constrained by less developed subtitling technology and more limited SC and internet literacy in the TC, fansubbers were still willing to intervene when a CR was recognisable. Crucially, however, the initial glosses are minimal and descriptive: both are formatted in much the same way, simply identifying the music genre, song title, and artist, with only minor differences in punctuation. These glosses aim to aid comprehension in a compact, unobtrusive manner, supporting the audience without disrupting the flow of the scene.

By contrast, the retranslations adopt a more expansive and paratextual approach. For the first CR, i.e., *Tainted Love* by Soft Cell, the gloss includes not only the artist's name and the song title, but also additional cultural context to specify that "Soft Cell" is a British duo from the early 1980s, and that this particular track is regarded as their most representative work. The use of Complete Retention for both the artist and the song title, along with the added explanatory layer, appears to be motivated by several factors: the increasing temporal distance between the 1980s and the 2015 audience, the absence of a Baidu Baike (the Chinese Wikipedia equivalent) entry for the song or the artist at the time, as well as the fact that this CR is likely considered monocultural from the perspective of the TL-speaking audience. Although *Tainted Love* might be regarded as a classic in British musical history, its recognition and cultural relevance do not necessarily extend into the TC context. This additional cultural distance may have prompted fansubbers to intervene more explicitly and extensively by offering more context to ensure the impact of the scene is not lost on the audience.

On the other hand, the second CR, i.e., Britney Spears' *Toxic*, is treated quite differently. The artist's name is transliterated, and the song title is rendered using its official TL equivalent. The gloss here is notably more concise, likely reflecting the artist's transcultural status and the assumption that fewer contextual cues are necessary. Spears' global fame and the song's chart-topping success likely reduce both generations of fansubbers' perceived need to mediate meaning for the TA.

However, a more "abusive" form of mediation emerges in the second gloss for this CR in the retranslation, which appears just two seconds after the first. Unlike the initial gloss, this one goes beyond cultural explanation and offers behind-the-scenes trivia, noting that the production team created a 7" 45 rpm vinyl version of *Toxic* specifically for filming (Burk and Smith, 2018). Although seemingly trivial, this type of information represents genre- or production-based insider knowledge valued within fan communities. It reflects a mode of fan knowledge exchange that aligns with Jenkins' (2006, p. 135) idea of a new *participatory culture*, in which fans collaboratively contribute to a deeper understanding of the media text. In this way, the glosses function not only as a subtitling device, but also as gestures of fan-to-fan communication, delivering a piece of paratext that transforms the subtitling space into a site of shared cultural production.

Drawing on Baym's (1998) work on soap opera fandom, Jenkins (2006, p. 139) argues that "[f]ans are motivated by epistemophilia—not simply a pleasure in knowing but a pleasure in exchanging knowledge". With the advent of the Internet, this epistemic drive has been further amplified in fansubbing practice, arguably more than in any other form of grassroots fandom. Fansubbers exercise full control not only over the production and distribution of subtitles, but also over deciding what kinds of information are worth sharing. Through collaborative effort, fan communities can "accumulate, retain, and continually recirculate unprecedented amounts of information", which is a capacity that far exceeds what any individual could achieve alone (Baym, 1998, pp. 115-116).

This includes types of knowledge that go well beyond the scope of inter-linguistic translation, such as production trivia, that would normally be excluded from conventional subtitling practice due to institutional constraints and stricter quality control. With the convergence of consumer and producer roles, however, a new generation of "prosumers" (Iwabuchi, 2010; Denision, 2011), brings a more audience-driven and fandom-oriented ethos to subtitling. This sense of epistemophilia, a shared enthusiasm not just for consuming but for curating and circulating knowledge, is one of the most distinctive features of fansubbing, especially as it manifests in the breach of mainstream subtitling norms. In this case study, it is most visible through two intertwined agendas: to inform and to include.

The informative function has already been touched upon in earlier sections. As with the categorisation of CRs, this agenda involves two main types of knowledge: real-world information (e.g., geographical, ethnographic or socio-political CRs) and intertextual references, which include not only cultural allusions but also production trivia, as in Examples 6-5a and 6-5b. These

interventions are not arbitrary; rather, they reflect a desire to enhance the TA's engagement with the text while reinforcing a sense of insider status, both for the fansubbers and the audience base they expect. In particular, the mediation of real-world CRs in fansubs is typically oriented toward transcultural and monocultural encyclopaedic knowledge from the SC, anticipating that the TA may not have acquired or recognised such information due to cultural and linguistic barriers. Rather than adhering rigidly to professional subtitling norms, or worrying whether such interventions might appear condescending, fansubbers often prioritise accessibility to all potential audiences. Their aim is to be as considerate as possible to the TA by catering to the lowest common denominator in terms of SC literacy. This form of mediation spans all CR categories identified in this research and is most frequently achieved through glosses used in combination with other strategies (see the next subsection).

The inclusive agenda extends this ethos further. Here, glosses are employed not simply to guarantee comprehension, but to ensure that even highly specialised or obscure references remain open to all viewers. This is particularly relevant for infracultural CRs, those that, as Pedersen (2011, p. 108) notes, "could not be assumed to be within the encyclopaedic knowledge of the ST nor the TT audience, as it is too specialised or too local to be known even by the majority of the relevant ST audience". The anecdotal gloss accompanying the *Toxic* scene fits neatly into this inclusive category. Further examples of such glossing are shown in Figures 6-2 to 6-5 (below), which are all elaborate intertextual CRs likely familiar only to dedicated Whovians, a highly specialised audience subset.

Figure 6.2 Example of anecdotal gloss[1] positioned at top centre (headnotes) of the screen, S01E01.

Figure 6.3 Example of anecdotal gloss[2] positioned at top right corner of the screen, S01E02.

[1] Gloss translation, "This is the first time the term 'Doctor Who' is ever used in the credits". Unlike the ones in season 4, Glosses like this is present in every episode of season 1 and each appears individually instead of altogether in a block (see Figure 6.5).
[2] Gloss translation, "This is the first time in the show's history that the Doctor has been shown crying".

Figure 6.4 Example of gloss[1] positioned at top-right corner of the subtitling area, S04E07.

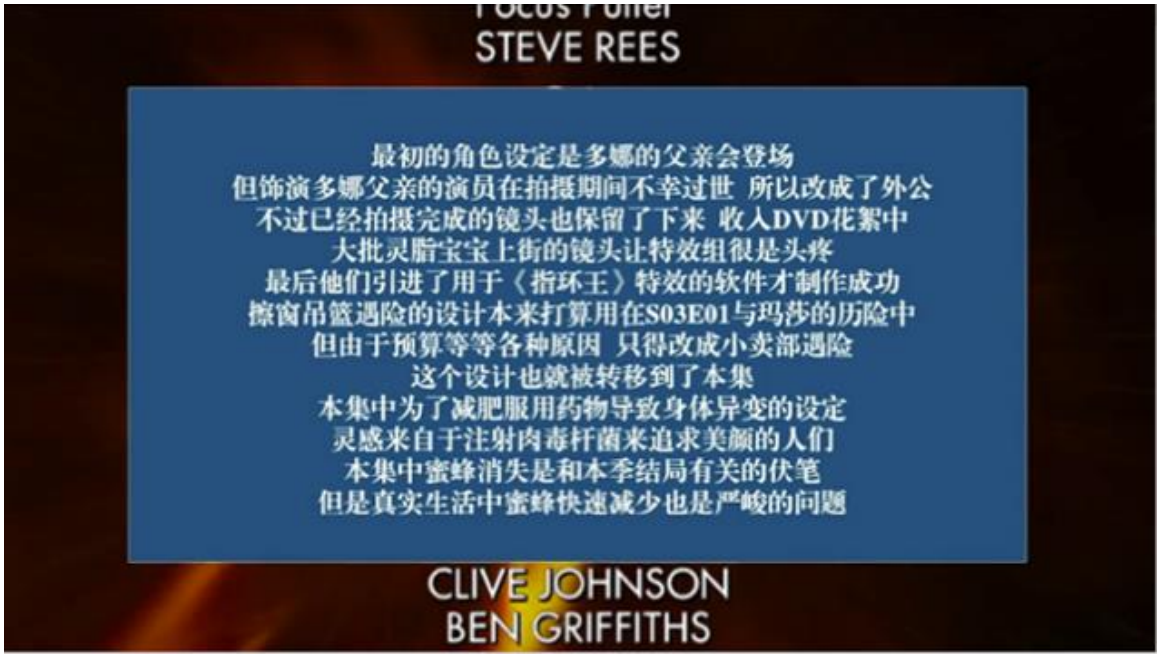

Figure 6.5 Example of anecdotal gloss[2] of the episode, which is positioned in the middle of the frame with a blue coloured block, S04E01. Glosses like this is present at the end of every episode in season 4.

[1] Gloss translation, "Refers to detective Poirot".

[2] Gloss translation, "The original character was supposed to be Donna's father. However, the actor who played Donna's father unfortunately passed away during filming, so the role was changed to her grandfather. Footage that had already been shot was kept and included in the DVD extras. The scenes featuring a large number of Adipose (the alien fat babies) on the streets were a major challenge for the visual effects team. In the end, they had to use special effects software originally developed for *The Lord of the Rings* to complete the work. The window-cleaning basket accident was originally intended for S03E01 during Martha's adventure, but due to budget and other constraints, it was changed to a shop incident. That design was later repurposed for this episode. The plot point in this episode about taking diet pills leading to body transformation was inspired by people using botox injections in pursuit of beauty. The

Figure 6.2 presents an anecdotal gloss placed as a headnote at the top-centre of the screen, embedded within the episode's credit sequence. The gloss explains that this was the first time the actor's name appeared alongside the title "*Doctor Who*". This is a piece of insider knowledge that, while trivial for casual viewers, holds weight for long-time fans attuned to the meta-narrative surrounding casting and branding in this particular fandom and franchise.

Figure 6.3 demonstrates a more subtle case of glossing, which is positioned in the top-right corner of the screen, again clearly separated from the main subtitle line. The gloss clarifies that this particular shot features the first time ever that the character, the Doctor, is crying on screen, which is yet another intertextual detail more likely to resonate with long-time fans than general audience. This placement and phrasing imply that the gloss is not essential for understanding the story**,** but rather enriches the emotional and historical context for those already engaged in the franchise's continuity.

Figure 6.4 shows a more refined glossing strategy, with the gloss placed in the top-right corner of the subtitling area. The on-screen dialogue, "Why a Belgian detective?", is a somewhat humorous, offhand line whose full impact depends on recognising its reference to Hercule Poirot, and the gloss clarifies this intertextual allusion by naming the character overtly, i.e., "refers to Detective Poirot". Positioned just above the subtitle line, it functions as an optional cue: close enough to be noticed without cluttering the main subtitle, and easier to process than headnotes at the very top of the screen, which require a shift of gaze away from the central viewing area.

Figure 6.5, by contrast, represents the most visually and textually expansive, and arguably the most "abusive" form of glossing. Here, a coloured block appears at the centre of the screen after the episode ends, compiling multiple items of trivia ranging from behind-the-scenes decisions to season-long narrative arcs. Present at the end of every episode in Season 4 and remaining visible for around 25 seconds, these extended translator's notes resemble a DVD "extras" feature more than a subtitle, transforming the fansub into a fan-produced paratextual artefact.

These four cases exemplify the full range of the inclusive agenda. Glosses are used not merely to bridge cultural gaps but to open access to infracultural knowledge that might otherwise remain inaccessible, even to SL audiences. Such choices reflect an understanding of the TA not as a passive mass but as a layered, participatory community of insiders and newcomers, SC-

disappearing bees in this episode are a foreshadowing of this season's finale, but in real life, the rapid decline of bee populations is also a serious issue".

literate and less informed alike. Whether subtle or conspicuous, these glosses are deliberate acts of inclusion, inviting viewers into deeper engagement with both the text and the fandom that surrounds it.

Gloss combined with other strategies: the + gloss and + in-text gloss formats

Aside from non-diegetic cases, where Gloss as a standalone strategy is common, the most frequent glossing occurs when CRs are explicitly referenced in the ST dialogue. As noted earlier, the retranslations introduce a visual/structural format absent from the initial fansubs: glosses presented as separate lines that accompany other subtitling strategies. Unlike the earlier in-text gloss format (embedded within the subtitle line in brackets or parentheses, see Example 6-1b, 6-2, 6-3b, 6-4a), these new glosses, here termed + gloss, are visually separated and placed at the top-right corner of the subtitling area (see Figure 6.4). This layout keeps the gloss spatially close to the CR while minimising disruption to the main subtitle.

As shown in Table 6.6, the initial fansubs from 2005 and 2009 exclusively rely on the in-text gloss format (N=28). In the retranslation corpus, however, this format declines noticeably (N=8), while the use of + gloss rises sharply and becomes the dominant glossing style in the 2015 and 2018 fansubs. This shift reflects a broader movement away from embedding explanatory information within the subtitle line towards a more spatially strategic and aesthetically streamlined presentation. This technical shift reflects a broader norm variation in fansubbing practice over time, likely driven by (a) advances in subtitling technology that enable flexible placement/formatting and (b) conventions consolidated through generations of community experience, experimentation, and standardisation from the grassroot over time.

Table 6.6 Strategies that are employed with glosses and their orientation tendencies

	Initials						Retranslations					
Strategy	**+ gloss**			**+ in-text gloss**			**+ gloss**			**+ in-text gloss**		
Complete Retention	0		3	10.71%		0	0.00%		0	0.00%		
Transliteration	0	0%	1	3.57%	77.27%	6	7.79%	76.92%	2	25.00%	80%	
Direct Translation	0		12	42.86%		38	49.35%		2	25.00%		
Specification	0		1	3.57%		6	7.79%		0	0.00%		
Generalisation	0		5	17.86%		14	18.18%		1	12.50%		
Substitution	0	0%	0	0.00%	22.73%	0	0.00%	23.08%	0	0.00%	20%	
Omission	0		0	0.00%		1	1.30%		0	0.00%		
Official Equivalent	0	/	6	21.43%	/	12	15.58%	/	3	37.50%	/	
Total	0		28	100.00%		77	100.00%		8	100.00%		

More importantly, Table 6.6 shows that the + gloss format is overwhelmingly paired with ST-oriented strategies in both the initial and retranslated fansubs, most notably with Direct Translation. This suggests a consistent preference across both generations to preserve the foreignness of the original in the main subtitle while shifting supplementary explanation to the accompanying gloss.

Alongside Direct Translation, Generalisation and Official Equivalent are also frequently paired with + gloss. In these instances, Generalisation tends to be paraphrastic rather than a shift to a clear "Superordinate Term" (see Chapter 4; Pedersen, 2011, p. 85). Such formalised renderings maintain recognisability, avoid intrusive explanation in the main line, and resist the more domesticating effects of Substitution or Omission. This recurring pattern across both generations of fansubs underscores a continued fansubbing ethos, i.e., to include and to inform, as argued above, and is further illustrated through the detailed examples discussed below.

The strategic reliance on + glosses alongside ST-oriented approaches is exemplified in Examples 6-6a and 6-6b, both of which involve overt (i.e., directly mentioned) intertextual CRs drawn from historical or literary contexts. In Example 6-6a (below), the line "Watson, come here. I need you" quotes the first intelligible sentence ever transmitted by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876. Both fansub versions preserve the original ST wording via Direct Translation, but the retranslation supplements it with a gloss that offers the brief historical context. This piece of paratext not only clarifies the CR but also elevates its narrative weight by anchoring it in real-world history, while simultaneously showcasing the later fansubber's encyclopaedic knowledge. Notably, the main subtitle remains untouched by this explanatory layer, preserving both pacing and textual fidelity.

Example 6-6a, S01E08, CR Type: Intertextual		
Original Dialogue 1	**Watson, come here. I need you.**	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	沃森 过来 我需要你	**华生 过来 我需要你** **1876 年 3 月 10 日贝尔通过电话向同事呼救 是人类史上通过电话说的第一句话**
Back Translation	**Watson, come here. I need you.**	**Watson, come here. I need you**. **On March 10, 1876, Bell called for help from his colleague over the telephone — the first words ever spoken via telephone in human history.**
Strategy	Direct Translation	Direct Translation + gloss
Example 6-6b, S01E03, CR Type: Intertextual		
Original Dialogue 2	For God's sake, that American bit in **Martin Chuzzlewit**, what's that about?	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)

	美国人热衷于 **Martin Chuzzlewit**,那是怎么回事?	话说**《马丁·翟述伟》**里面那个美国人 是怎么回事 **狄更斯的确在连载故事销量不佳时** **加入该美国人小角色吸引人气 但成效不佳**
Back Translation	Why are Americans so obsessed with *Martin Chuzzlewit?*	Well, what's the deal with that American character in ***Martin Chuzzlewit***? **It's true that Dickens added that small American character to the story when its serialized sales were struggling, hoping to boost interest, but it didn't work very well.**
Strategy	Complete Retention	Official Equivalent + gloss

Similarly, in Example 6-6b, the CR is the direct mention of the name of a character from Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In the initial subtitle, the reference is retained in its original SL form with no additional explanation, which reflects the "minimax" preference that prevails in early fansubbing practice as discussed in the previous section. The retranslation, however, renders the title into its official TL equivalent, and dedicate two long separate lines of gloss explaining that Dickens did in fact introduced an American character into the narrative in response to poor sales of the serialised novel, albeit with limited success. In this way, the gloss not only identifies the novel but situates it within Dickens's transatlantic reception history. What reads in English as a throwaway joke thus becomes, in translation, a moment of collective meta-literary commentary.

In both examples, the main subtitle lines in the retranslations are preserved with minimal intervention and a clear ST-oriented focus, while any clarification is delegated to the visual margins. These examples reinforce the argument that later fansubbers increasingly favour preserving the foreignness of the ST in the central subtitle, using paratextual glosses to provide additional elaboration. Unlike the in-text glosses typical of the initial fansubs, which are often more intrusive in the main subtitle lines, these + glosses function more as interpretive cues which represent subtle invitations for audiences to engage further based on their own curiosity, media literacy, or willingness to seek out additional information. This stylistic and strategic shift reflects a growing assumption of cultural fluency and digital agency among the TA, and exemplifies a subtitling approach that seeks to balance fidelity to the SC with accessibility and engagement for a diverse and participatory audienceship.

Example 6-7a, S01E03 CR Type: Socio-political & Intertextual		
Dialogue	**I pushed boxes at the Boston Tea Party.**	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)

	我在波士顿倾茶事件中倒了几箱茶	**[老版 S02E04-E09 博士同伴迷惑戴立克的说辞]** **还在波士顿倾过茶[美国独立战争导火线]**
Back Translation	**I dumped boxes of tea at the Boston Tea Pouring Incident**.	**[Classic Who S02E04-E09 The Doctor's companion's rhetoric to confuse the Dalek]** And **Poured Tea in Boston [The fuse of the American War of Independence]**
Strategy	Specification	Generalisation + Gloss

This combination of informative and inclusive glossing is not confined to real-life CRs or established literary allusions, but extends into the Doctor Who franchise itself. Example 6-7a illustrates this layered mediation, where a single line of dialogue contains multiple CRs. The phrase "I pushed boxes at the Boston Tea Party" invokes both a real-world socio-political event and an intertextual allusion to the character's supposed involvement in it. Given the Boston Tea Party's prominence in Western history and its coverage in Chinese school curricula, the use of an Official Equivalent in the initial subtitles suffices, as the reference already forms part of the TL's encyclopaedic knowledge.

In the retranslation, however, the CR is treated with more complexity. The subtitle is accompanied by two types of glosses, each aimed at different aspects of the reference. The first gloss provides intertextual genre-specific knowledge, identifying the original episode numbers (i.e., "Classic Who S02E04-E09") in which a character once used this line to confuse a Dalek, an alien antagonist creature in the *Doctor Who* universe. The second in-text gloss offers real-world contextualisation, labelling the Boston Tea Party as "the fuse of the American War of Independence".

The glosses here are compact yet meaningful. The first acts as a breadcrumb for fans interested in exploring the show's extended canon, while the second anchors the reference historically for any viewers that might be less familiar with Western political history. This dual mediation not only enhances comprehension but actively welcomes diverse audience groups from curious newcomers to dedicated Whovians.

This more liberated approach to glossing reinforces both the inclusive and informative agendas of later fansubbers. As Pérez-González (2014, p. 75) notes, fansubbers, as "media co-creators", are expected to possess genre fluency informed by shared values, practices, and expectations of the fandom. This knowledge becomes crucial in fostering what he calls the "internal cohesion of audienceships", which is in fact improved by the involvement of

knowledgeable community members sharing their expertise in translation tasks. The fansubbers' visible presence as a knowledgeable and generous guide fosters a collaborative, dialogic viewing experience. Through such paratextual interventions, fansubbers build a subtitling norm that accommodates both cultural insiders and outsiders, crafting a space where even a brief line like "I pushed boxes at the Boston Tea Party" becomes a layered, interactive point of engagement between the broader SC and specific franchise knowledge.

Example 6-7b, S01E02 CR Type: Intertextual		
Dialogue	Go on, **Jimbo**. Go home.	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	继续，**小家伙，**回家吧	走吧 **小伙子** 回家去 **英国 80 年代动画片《小飞机金波》 第七任博士伙伴小时候最喜爱的电视节目**
Back Translation	Go on, **little guy**, go home.	Come on, **laddie**, go home. **The 1980s British animated series Jimbo and the Jet-Set The Seventh Doctor's companion 's favourite TV show as a child.**
Strategy	Generalisation	Generalisation + Gloss

Another example appears in Example 6-7b, where the original line contains a subtle intertextual CR that draws on both the *Doctor Who* universe and broader British pop culture. The CR, "Jimbo", is rendered quite generically in both versions of subtitles ("little guy" / "laddie"), preserving the tone of the line while omitting the specific referent. Yet the retranslation also supplements this with a + gloss, identifying "Jimbo" as a 1980s British children's cartoon and further noting its place in the backstory of a *Classic Who* companion.

What stands out here is not so much the gloss's informative or inclusive function, but rather its triviality. The reference itself is peripheral to the plot and unlikely to affect narrative comprehension or character development. Moreover, the companion in question is not part of the revived television series post-2005, but of *Classic Who* since 1963, making the gloss dependent on an extended canon that is even less familiar to the modern, casual audiences. The inclusion of this information, then, appears less about general viewer comprehension but more about asserting a form of genre fluency of the fansubbers.

This kind of glossing also reflects the key shift observed across the retranslations in this case, in which the "fan" status shifts from general SC literacy toward franchise-specific expertise. While earlier fansubs often highlighted the fansubber's interest in Western culture more

generally, later ones foreground fandom-specific authority. This is visible too in Example 6-6a (Boston Tea Party), where glosses provide both real-world context and *Classic Who* continuity. In both cases, the glosses function less as essential interpretive aids and more as subtle declarations of fan identity, which serves as paratextual nods to viewers who share, and potentially want to share in the future, the same encyclopaedic knowledge.

This paratextual signalling becomes even more explicit in intertextual glosses from the 2005 revival itself, where such CRs are arguably more recognisable to the contemporary audience of the series in this century.

In Example 6-8a, a line about "900 years" is glossed with a note reconciling a continuity mismatch (i.e., his age was reset from the original 953 back in classic era to 900 in the modern era) which is trivia enough that only long-time audiences or particularly detail-oriented fans would even notice.

Likewise, in Example 6-8b (excerpted from S01E11), a brief reference to "Platform One" is accompanied by a gloss directing the viewers back to a previous episode in the same season (i.e., S01E02), so reframing what could otherwise be seen as a generic science fiction made-up name as a deliberate call-back in a narrative canon.

In the same logic, in Example 6-8c, a remark about a "giant spider" is tied back to the 2006 Christmas special. While none of these glosses are essential to comprehension, each effectively anchors the reference in the series' narrative, encouraging audiences to read across episodes and engage with the series as a cumulative, interconnected text.

	Example 6-8a, S01E04, CR Type: Intertextual	
Dialogue 1	When you say **900 years**. . .	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	你说到 **900 年**	你刚才说**九百年** **老版 S24E01 中博士提到自己 953 岁 但自本集开始博士年龄设定为 900 岁**
Back Translation	When you say **900 years**...	Just now, you said **nine hundred years** **In Classic Who S24E01, the Doctor stated his age as 953, but starting from this episode, the Doctor's age was reset to 900.**
Strategy	Direct Translation	Direct Translation + Gloss
	Example 6-8b, S01E11, CR Type: Intertextual	
Dialogue 2	- You don't need a passport. - It's all very well going to **Platform One**, in Justicia and the Glass Pyramid, but what if we end up in Brazil? I might need it.	

Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	- 你不需要护照的 - 能到爪斯提奇亚一号月台和格拉斯金字塔很棒的 但如果我们在巴西就结束了呢？ 我需要这个	- 你用不着护照 - 在审判星球和水晶金字塔上或**一号平台**倒是用不着可 万一要去巴西呢 我可能需要的 **一号平台见 S01E02**
Back Translation	- You don't need a passport. - It's great you can get to Platform One on Justicia and the Glass Pyramid, but what if we end in Brazil? I might need it.	- You won't need a passport. - You wouldn't need one on the Justice planet, or the Crystal Pyramid, or **Platform One**, but what if we go to Brazil? I might need it. *Platform One referenced in S01E02*
Strategy	Direct Translation	Direct Translation + Gloss
	Example 6-8c, S04E07, CR Type: Intertextual	
Dialogue 3	- I found my husband with another woman. A younger, prettier woman. Isn't it always the way? - Well, mine was with **a giant spider**, but, same difference.	
Subtitles	Initial (F6, 2005)	Retranslation (YYeTs, 2015)
	- 我发现我丈夫和别的女人在一起 一个更年轻更漂亮的女人 世事是不是总是这样? - 其实我那个是和**巨型蜘蛛**有奸情 其它方面和你碰见的是一样的	- 我发现我丈夫出轨了找了一个年轻漂亮的 难道不总是这样吗 - 我被个**巨型蜘蛛精**顶了不过差不多 **[2006 年圣诞特辑《落跑新娘》]**
Back Translation	- I found my husband with another woman, a younger, prettier woman. Isn't that always the way? - Actually, mine was having an affair with **a giant spider**. Apart from that, exactly the same.	- I found out my husband cheated on me with someone younger and prettier. Isn't it always like that? - I got replaced by **a giant spider monster**, but pretty much the same thing. **[2006 Christmas Special "The Runaway Bride"]**
Strategy	Direct Translation	Specification + Gloss

These instances demonstrate that even within the more narratively accessible story arcs of the 2005 revival of *Doctor Who*, later generations of fansubbers often intervene with additional, archival detail and fandom-specific knowledge. The + gloss format functions not merely as a linguistic or cultural aid, but as a tool of intra-fandom orientation that aims to guide casual viewers back to earlier episodes, seasons even, and to cultivate a potential audienceship that is not only informed but actively engaged in the show's evolving narrative.

More significantly, these glosses reinforce the "fan" status and interpretive authority of the fansubbing group. By demonstrating this level of genre-specific expertise, later fansubbers increasingly position themselves as cultural ambassadors not only for the SC but also for the specific franchise.

In this sense, the examination of diachronic retranslations here reflects a broader shift in fansubbing over the past two decades, which redirects from early fandubbers' approach to Anglophone television as a genre, to later generations' focus within specific fandoms such as *Doctor Who* within the SC. This change, arguably, has been shaped by factors such as the expansion of English-language education, increased access to digital platforms, and the growing

availability of foreign media within the TC context. As a result, fan identity has become more specialised, reflected not only in choices of subtitling strategies of CRs but also in paratextual interventions aimed to include and inform as well as engaging a more SC-literate and fandom-savvy new audience.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed RQ1: *What changes can be identified between early and later fan-produced subtitles of the same audiovisual text, and how do these reflect evolving norms in fansubbing practice?* By comparing initial fansubs of *Doctor Who* from the mid-2000s with retranslations from the mid-2010s, the analysis has demonstrated that diachronic change is evident both in the strategies employed and in the underlying norms that guide fansubbing.

Three major changes characterise the shift. First, strategy-wise, there is a decline in Complete Retention and a corresponding increase in Transliteration and Official Equivalents, reflecting a move toward greater consistency and standardisation, and signalling increased SC literacy among both fansubbers and their audiences. Second, glossing emerges as the most striking diachronic development. What began as occasional, in-text clarifications in the initial subtitles expands in the retranslations into multiple formats (+ in-text gloss, + gloss, and Gloss). These later glosses are more visible and flexible, functioning not only as explanatory notes but also as paratexts that circulate trivia, intertextual cues, and fandom knowledge. Third, there is a broader normative shift in interventional tendency. Early fansubs typically operated under a "minimax" ethos, minimising intervention unless necessary for comprehension, whereas later fansubs, by contrast, are more willing to intervene, shaped by an epistemophilic drive to inform and include their audiences.

Although the aggregate balance between source- and target-oriented strategies shifts only minimally, the retranslations nevertheless reveal a thematic and cultural transformation. Early fansubs reflect a broad fascination with Anglophone television as a foreign genre, whereas later fansubs display a more participatory engagement with *Doctor Who* as a franchise. This transition illustrates how fansubbing evolved alongside its communities: from subtitles produced primarily as tools of access to subtitles positioned as vehicles for fandom performance, interpretive commentary, and collective knowledge circulation.

In this sense, diachronic retranslation is not simply a matter of moving closer to or further from the source. It instead embodies a hybrid ethos shaped by community expectations and media literacy. Later fansubs preserve foreignness more systematically while also scaffolding

interpretation through paratextual cues. In doing so, fansubbers increasingly put themselves less as invisible intermediaries and more as visible cultural insiders, curating and circulating fandom knowledge. In short, the diachronic changes identified here in this case demonstrate how retranslation can reflect evolving fansubbing norms in the TC context, from pragmatic, access-driven subtitles in the early 2000s to more participatory, fandom-oriented practices in the 2010s.

Chapter 7 Fan Re-Subtitling of Netflix's Global Hits: The Case of Synchronic Retranslations

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 The Ones with Active Retranslations

While Chapter 6 examined diachronic retranslation within fansubbing communities in the TC by analysing two generations of *Doctor Who* fansubs produced a decade apart, this chapter shifts the focus to synchronic fan re-subtitling. Specifically, it investigates the active retranslation of four Netflix original series by mainland Chinese fansub groups, where both official and fan-produced subtitles coexist within a compressed timeframe, i.e., synchronic retranslation.

This chapter is guided by the second research question:

> *How do fan retranslations differ from coexisting commercial subtitle versions within the same timeframe, what drives these synchronic retranslations, and what do such differences reveal about patronage, audience orientation, and subtitling norms?*

Building on the thesis's overarching inquiry into the phenomenon of English-Simplified Chinese re-subtitling from the 2000s to the 2020s, this chapter focuses on how subtitles diverge when produced in parallel rather than on how they change over time. In other words, it explores how fan-produced subtitles operate as alternatives that respond to, resist, or reframe existing commercial translations.

It is important to clarify that the use of the term "synchronic" here does not imply that the retranslated subtitles were produced simultaneously with the initial ones. Rather, it distinguishes them from diachronic retranslations (as in Chapter 6), where the passage of time plays a decisive role in prompting updates or revisions. In contrast, synchronic retranslations are produced in close temporal proximity to the initial versions. These cases align with Pym's (2014) notion of "active" retranslation (see Section 3.1.3), in that they are created with full awareness of existing translations and often in direct response to them. The motivation behind such retranslations is not to correct outdated work or reflect evolving linguistic norms, but instead to offer alternative interpretations of the source material, fulfil different audience expectations, or even assert a sense of rivalry with the initial subtitles, challenging, critiquing, or reframing their reception within particular audience bases.

The four series selected for this case study were drawn from Netflix's "Top 10 Most Popular Shows (English)" list (global and all-time), as featured on Tudum[1], the platform's official companion site. This list was cross-referenced with two of the largest subtitle-sharing platforms in the TC context: SubHD (https://subhd.tv/) and ASSRT (https://assrt.net/). Of the ten most popular series, five had not yet been retranslated according to these fansub databases. Among the remaining five, which had all been retranslated by YYeTs, the largest and most influential fansub group in the TC since the late 2000s (see Chapters 2 and 6). Two of these entries (*Stranger Things*) represented different seasons of the same programme (see Table 7.1), and one title (*The Witcher*) was also retranslated by a second group, YIGUI, as discussed later.

Table 7.1 Top Netflix titles (by 25 February 2024) by hours viewed and their retranslation status in the TC.

Title	Year of Release	Hours Viewed	Runtime	Views	Retranslations
Wednesday: Season 1	2022	1,718,800,000	6:49	252,100,000	No
Stranger Things 4	2022	1,838,000,000	13:04	140,700,000	Yes
DAHMER: Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story	2022	1,031,100,000	8:55	115,600,000	No
Bridgerton: Season 1	2020	929,300,000	8:12	113,300,000	Yes
The Queen's Gambit: Limited Series	2020	746,400,000	6:37	112,800,000	Yes
The Night Agent: Season 1	2023	803,200,000	8:11	98,200,000	No
Stranger Things 3	2019	716,100,000	7:33	94,800,000	Yes
Bridgerton: Season 2	2022	797,200,000	8:30	93,800,000	No
Fool Me Once: Limited Series	2024	591,200,000	6:25	92,100,000	No
The Witcher: Season 1	2019	663,600,000	8:00	83,000,000	Yes

Only one season per series was selected to keep the scope manageable and ensure balanced representation within the synchronic re-subtitling corpora. *Stranger Things* Season 4 was chosen over Season 3 due to its higher view count. For *The Witcher* (Season 1), however, both retranslated versions were included.

The YYeTs version is grouped with their other retranslations in the Retranslation 1 corpus, which includes all four series handled by YYeTs. By contrast, the Retranslation 2 corpus concerns only *The Witcher* (Season 1), the sole series with two distinct fan retranslations. This corpus

[1] Available at: https://www.netflix.com/tudum/top10/most-popular/tv (Accessed on 25 February 2024). The statistics is calculated based on views in their first 91 days on Netflix.

therefore brings together the initial Netflix subtitles, the YYeTs version, and the YIGUI version. Comparing both fan-produced versions really address that they may be created under different workflows, employ different strategies, and appear to target different audiences. This distinction will be examined further in Section 7.4.

The final corpora therefore comprise the initial and retranslated subtitles of four Netflix series: *Stranger Things* (Season 4), *Bridgerton* (Season 1), *The Queen's Gambit*, and *The Witcher* (Season 1), the last of which includes two distinct fansub versions (YYeTs and YIGUI). As shown in Table 7.2, all four series were released between 2019 and 2022 with official Simplified Chinese subtitles. In most cases, fansubs followed within a week: YYeTs produced versions for all four series almost immediately, while YIGUI's *The Witcher* retranslation unfolded within three months' time. This extended timeline likely reflects both the complexity of the fantasy setting and YIGUI's emphasis on genre-specific nuance. The coexistence of official and YYeTs subtitles may also have reduced the pressure for speed, allowing YIGUI to focus on meeting the expectations of a more niche, genre-savvy audience (see Section 7.4).

Table 7.2 Details of selected retranslated Netflix titles and their fan retranslations.

Title	Episodes	Length	Initially subtitled by	Subtitle available since	Retranslated by	Retranslation available since
Stranger Things 4	9	13h	Netflix (Commercial)	27 May 2022 (Part 1) 1 July 2022 (Part 2)	YYeTs (Fansubbed)	28 May-3 June 2022 (Part 1) 8 July 2022 (Part 2)
Bridgerton: Season 1	8	8h 8m	Netflix (Commercial)	25 December 2020	YYeTs (Fansubbed)	27 December 2020 - 3 January 2021
The Queen's Gambit: Limited Series	7	6h 34m	Netflix (Commercial)	23 October 2020	YYeTs (Fansubbed)	25-29 October 2020
The Witcher: Season 1	8	7h 58m	Netflix (Commercial)	20 December 2019	YYeTs (Fansubbed)	20-22 December 2019
					YIGUI (Fansubbed)	30 December 2019 - 4 March 2020
Total	32	35h 40m				

A crucial distinction must be made between official Simplified Chinese subtitles and mainland Chinese fansubs. Netflix's official subtitles are commercial interlingual translations, released simultaneously with content for a global audience. Given the late-2010s/early-2020s context of rapid internet expansion and streaming platform dominance, it is highly unlikely that fansubbers were unaware of these official versions, regardless of how they accessed the content (e.g., via Netflix subscription, torrenting, or other informal channels). For this reason, any Simplified Chinese subtitles published after the official release but not produced by Netflix are considered active retranslations here: unofficial versions created with full awareness of, and in deliberate response to, official ones.

This contrasts with diachronic re-subtitling, where later generations revisited "outdated" translations or filled gaps left by the absence of official subtitles. In the synchronic retranslation examined here, the question is no longer why fansubbers return to older texts, but why they choose to retranslate content that is already available and accessible, often within a short timeframe. This motivates the second research question, as in what drives synchronic variation in fan re-subtitling of official translations in the early 2020s?

This chapter argues that the answer lies in patronage and potentially divergent audience bases. On the surface, the distinction appears straightforward: official subtitles are commissioned by commercial entities such as Netflix, while fansubs are produced by grassroots communities like YYeTs and YIGUI. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.3), the boundary between these spheres has become increasingly blurred.

Netflix, for example, originally managed subtitling in-house and later launched the *Hermes* test system (test.hermes.nflx.io) to recruit freelance subtitlers directly. Yet by March 2018, just one year after its launch, the company discontinued the programme. At the *Languages & The Media 2018* conference, Netflix's Localization Solutions Manager suggested that vendors could contribute more effectively to the localization process by focusing on their strengths and taking responsibility for recruiting, training, and onboarding (Bond, 2018). This marked a strategic shift away from internal oversight toward a scalable outsourcing model in which subtitling tasks were assigned to external language service providers (LSPs).

These LSPs, in turn, often contract freelance translators, many of whom may have prior experience as fansubbers. This is particularly visible in the English-Simplified Chinese language pair, where many professional subtitlers have emerged from grassroots fan communities (see Section 2.2.3). However, this personnel overlap does not imply equivalence in the final products, since the same subtitler may operate according to very different norms in professional and fansubbing contexts.

While fansubs are guided by community values, cultural knowledge, and the preferences of particular texts, commercial subtitles are more systematically governed by institutional constraints. Platforms like Netflix manage consistency across markets through highly prescriptive tools such as the Timed Text Style Guides (TTSGs). These documents regulate various aspects of subtitle production from character limits and segmentation to terminology and timing, and, as of August 2025, covered 52 languages (Netflix, 2025). While these guides ensure uniformity and legibility across languages, they also restrict subtitlers' autonomy, often

prioritising global standardisation over cultural specificity. Other streaming platforms such as Disney+ follow a similar model, outsourcing localisation to external vendors while focusing internally on broader workflows and product delivery (cf. Bond, 2018; Kim, 2021). Although efficient, this model reinforces the structural divide between corporate and grassroots subtitling from the top down.

By contrast, fansubs are not so much bound by platform-imposed style guides. Many groups develop their own conventions and guidelines, but these are generally more flexible and less prescriptive than their commercial equivalents. Fansubbers are normally able to retain control over tone, terminology, and translation strategy. Their priorities typically emphasise audience expectations, community norms, and cultural resonance over scalability and consistency.

In terms of audience expectations, fansubbing in the TC context has long been perceived as a countercultural practice that resists both corporate influence and state censorship (Wang and Zhang, 2017). For Netflix content, however, censorship is not the main concern, since the platform is unavailable in mainland China. Instead, precisely because the platform does not operate locally, mainland fansub communities may assume that Netflix's official Simplified Chinese subtitles are aimed at diaspora audiences or global viewers rather than those in mainland China. This perception, in turn, may motivate the production of alternative versions that speak more directly to local viewers.

Consequently, differences in audience expectations may directly shape the subtitling strategies adopted in these fan retranslations. These variations can be observed in the rendering of CRs, the use of genre-specific terminology, and even in subtitling aesthetics and preferences. These elements will be explored in greater depth in the comparative analysis sections that follow.

7.1.2 The Imagined Target Audiences

Before turning to the case analyses, this section offers a brief clarification of how this chapter uses the concept of TA(s). Rather than treating TA as a stable viewer group or a demographic category, this term is used to refer to the imagined audiences constructed by different subtitling agencies at the moment of production. In other words, each version of subtitles, whether produced officially by a platform like Netflix, or unofficially by fansub groups such as YYeTs or YIGUI, is shaped by assumptions about who the viewers are, what they know, and how they are likely to engage with the content.

These assumptions are closely tied to the patronage model and production context under which subtitles are created. As outlined in Section 5.3.2, Netflix is not officially available in mainland China. Despite this, official Simplified Chinese subtitle tracks circulate widely through informal channels, often alongside locally distributed fansub versions. This creates a situation where subtitle producers are not all addressing the same audience. While official subtitles may be oriented towards a generalised global TA, retranslations often reflect alternative audience positioning in the mainland that are shaped by different circulation environments, genre knowledge, and viewing preferences.

As a result, each subtitling agency (e.g., commercial or grassroots) constructs its own TA. For platforms like Netflix, the TA is typically general, platform-based, and international. For generalist fansub groups such as YYeTs, the TA is most likely to be imagined as mainland Chinese audiences accessing content via torrents or subtitle repositories. For more niche groups like YIGUI, the TA is often defined even more narrowly, shaped by shared genre expectations, participatory viewing norms, or fandom familiarity.

These differences in imagined TA do not merely reflect stylistic choices, as they actively shape the logic of retranslation practices, particularly synchronic ones. In this context, subtitle variation emerges less as an effort to correct or improve previous versions (like the ones discussed in Chapter 6), but more as a way of addressing TAs that the existing subtitles do not fully accommodate. This dynamic is specific to the Simplified Chinese subtitling ecology surrounding this Netflix case, where informal circulation intersects with regional platform restrictions and overlapping subtitling communities.

That is to say, this chapter examines how these differences in TA are reflected in the subtitles of the four Netflix series, without assuming a single audience model. It explores how fansubs assert their agency through synchronic re-subtitling and what this phenomenon reveals about the TC subtitling industry in the era of global streaming. To do so, the following sections combine quantitative and qualitative analyses to trace how subtitling norms shift across different retranslation contexts.

The discussion begins with a quantitative overview of strategy distribution across the official subtitles and the first retranslation corpus, namely, the YYeTs versions of all four selected series. This is followed by qualitative examples that shed light on how subtitling choices may reflect differences in audience expectations, viewing preferences, and genre familiarity, even when dealing with the same CRs.

In addition, Section 7.4 offers a focused comparative analysis of *The Witcher* (Season 1), examining two fan retranslated versions: one produced by YYeTs, a generalist fansubbing community with broad appeal, and the other by YIGUI, a group specialising in fantasy content. This complementary case reflects how subtitling norms can be shaped not only by audiences but also by each group's expertise, thematic focus, and priorities.

7.2 Strategy Distribution

In the case study of Retranslation 1, a total of 683 CRs were identified. Subtitling strategies are compared across the initial Netflix subtitles and the Retranslation 1 corpus, which consists of YYeTs's versions of all four series. The results are presented in Table 7.3 and visualised in Figure 7.1. The Retranslation 2 corpus, which contains YIGUI's independent version of The Witcher (Season 1), is treated separately and will be presented in Section 7.4.

Table 7.3 Overall strategy distribution of four Netflix Originals

Strategy	Netflix (Initial)		YYeTs (Retranslation 1)	
Complete Retention	2	0.29%	3	0.44%
Transliteration	49	7.17%	63	9.22%
Direct Translation	98	14.35%	119	17.42%
Specification	96	14.06%	72	10.54%
Generalisation	105	15.37%	85	12.45%
Substitution	19	2.78%	18	2.64%
Omission	11	1.61%	2	0.29%
Official Equivalent	302	44.22%	309	45.24%
Gloss	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
+ Gloss	0	0.00%	9	1.32%
+ in-text gloss	1	0.15%	3	0.44%
Total	683	100.00%	683	100.00%

In the main corpus (Retranslation 1), the most frequent strategy in both the initial and retranslated versions is Official Equivalent, accounting for 44.22% in the former and rising slightly to 45.24% in the latter. Transliteration (from 7.17% to 9.22%) and Direct Translation (from 14.35% to 17.42%) also show moderate increases, suggesting a general shift toward greater ST orientation in the fan-produced subtitles.

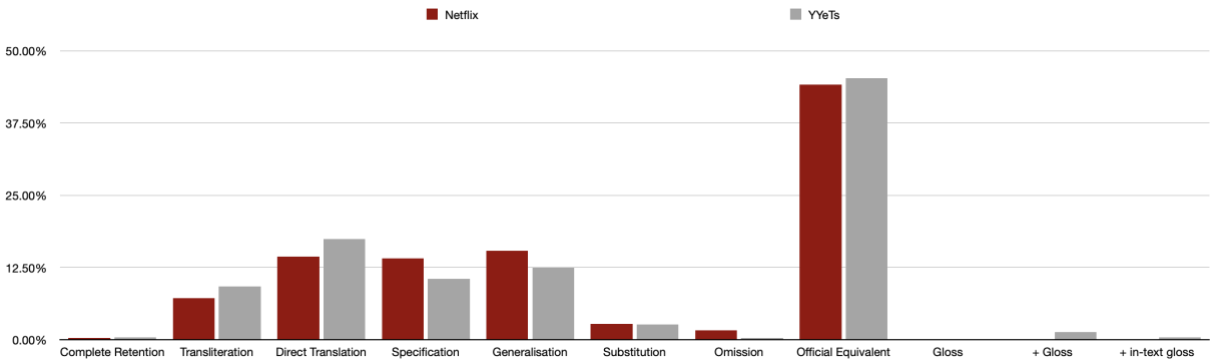

Figure 7.1 Bar chart of overall strategy distribution of four Netflix Originals

In contrast, more TT-oriented strategies such as Specification and Generalisation decrease, falling from 14.06% to 10.54% and from 15.37% to 12.45%, respectively. Although glossing remains relatively infrequent, the appearance of + gloss and + in-text gloss formats in the retranslations (both absent from the initial subtitles) suggests a subtle yet deliberate effort to enhance contextual clarity when rendering CRs. This tendency aligns with features often associated with mainland Chinese fansubbing practices, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Compared with the diachronic retranslation patterns in Chapter 6, where shifts across time and generational change were more pronounced, the differences here are more restrained. In synchronic re-subtitling, fansubs work alongside current, professionally commissioned translations, with far less linguistic and temporal distance between versions, even when both target the same language but potentially address different audiences.

In addition, the increasing standardisation of subtitling practices across both professional and amateur domains may also have contributed to the convergence of norms. As discussed in the previous chapter, fansubbing today often follows more systematised workflows, influenced by the broader industry environment. At the same time, as outlined in the previous subsection, the growing reliance on freelance and outsourced subtitlers operating through cloud-based systems has already blurred the distinction between fansubbers and professionals. Many now work across both spheres, sharing tools and platforms with comparable subtitling strategies and habits.

Moreover, improved English proficiency and digital literacy among younger generations in the TC context have further raised the standard of fansubbing, narrowing the gap between fan and professional outputs. Therefore, in this context, when discrepancies in strategy or conventions *do* arise, they become especially revealing. Rather than reflecting differences in individual ability, such variations really highlight the institutional frameworks and audience orientations that

shape each form of subtitle production. The following two sections (7.2 and 7.3) explore these norm variations in greater depth, focusing on the two dimensions introduced in Chapter 5: orientation and interventions, illustrated with detailed examples.

7.3 Variation in Orientation Norms

7.3.1 Overall Trends in Orientation

A closer breakdown of orientation norms across different types of CRs reveals that not all categories follow the overall trend to the same extent. While the YYeTs retranslations demonstrate an overall increase of 6.52% in ST orientation, the degree of change varies more notably across CR types. As shown in Table 7.4, Socio-political CRs exhibit the most significant shift, increasing by 16.17%, followed by Asynchronous CRs at 13.28%. Notably, these two categories also represent the lowest levels of ST-orientation in both the initial subtitles and the retranslations, whereas all other categories (Ethnographic, Geographical, and Intertextual) consistently align with a more foreignizing tendency, in line with the overall corpora trend in both the initial and retranslated subtitles.

Table 7.4 Variation in Orientation across different CR types in four Netflix Originals

ST-oriented	**Socio-political** n=56	**Asynchronous** n=47	**Ethnographic** n=264	**Geographical** n=128	**Intertextual** n=188	**Overall**
Initial (Netflix)	47.83%	38.24%	63.01%	82.46%	69.15%	64.47%
Retranslation 1 (YYeTs)	64.00 %	51.52%	72.9%	86.54%	67.71%	70.99%
Variation	16.17% (↑)	13.28% (↑)	9.89% (↑)	4.08% (↑)	-1.44% (↓)	**(↑)** 6.52%

The relatively limited representation of Socio-political and Asynchronous CRs in this case may partially explain their more domesticating tendencies in both initial and retranslated subtitles. As discussed in Chapter 4 (and consistent with findings from Chapter 6) the cultural distance between TC and SC audiences may present a greater challenge, in which this cultural 'bump' is further intensified by the historical settings of all four series, which range from the mediaevalesque era to the 1980s, periods that are temporally distant from contemporary audiences in the TC. In response to this considerable temporal and cultural gap, initial commercial subtitlers may adopt more TT-oriented strategies for these CR types to mitigate unfamiliarity, contrasting with their more foreignizing treatment of other, more frequently encountered categories.

7.3.2 Strategy Shifts

Example 7-1 (below) from Stranger Things (Season 4, Episode 5) illustrates how a Socio-political CR is treated differently in the initial subtitles and the retranslation. In the official Netflix version, the metaphorical reference "Uncle Sam" is paraphrased as "the U.S. government", replacing the figurative term with its literal referent and generalising the expression for clarity and accessibility. This shifts the focus from what is actually said to what is meant. By contrast, the fan retranslation preserves the metaphor, using the established Chinese equivalent "山姆大叔" (literally, uncle Sam) that maintains both rhetorical tone and fidelity.

Example 7-1, *Stranger Things*, S04E05, CR Type: Socio-political		
Original Dialogue	**Uncle Sam** wants me to go fight some war in the jungle.	
Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2022	YYeTs (Retranslation 1), 2022
	美国政府希望我入伍去参加越战	**山姆大叔**要我去丛林里打仗
Back Translation	**The U.S. government** wanted me to enlist in the Vietnam War.	**Uncle Sam** wanted me to fight a war in the jungle.
Strategy	Generalisation	Official Equivalent

Interestingly, this treatment recalls patterns noted in Chapter 6, where early-2000s fansubbers often opted for more accessible renderings, assuming their audience had limited SC literacy. That tendency was shaped by the context of the time (e.g., restricted internet access and narrower exposure to global media) which affected both subtitlers and audiences.

By the early 2020s, however, professional subtitlers no longer faced these constraints. Their continued preference for paraphrasing seems less about competence and more about risk-averse choices designed to maximise comprehension. It reflects an underlying assumption that viewers may lack the cultural knowledge to decode "Uncle Sam" unaided. Fansubbers such as YYeTs, by contrast, appear either more confident in their audience's cultural competence or more ideologically committed to preserving the ST. Their decision to retain "Uncle Sam" reflects a clearly ST-oriented strategy, diverging from the cautious, domesticated approach of the commercial version.

Beyond transcultural CRs such as "Uncle Sam", this domesticating tendency in the initial, commercial subtitles is also evident in the treatment of infracultural references, expressions embedded in the SC but potentially unfamiliar to the TA. These CRs often fall outside the encyclopaedic knowledge of the TA, which might require subtitles to adapt for greater accessibility. As illustrated in the three examples (Example 7-2a, b and c) below, the Netflix subtitles display a more domesticating approach by generalising three of the most frequent

forms of address associated with British peerage titles found in the corpus, i.e., “Lord”, “my lord”, and “your grace”.

While peerage titles (e.g. baron, viscount, duke) are classified as Socio-political CRs due to their enduring institutional significance in the SC, the associated forms of address (e.g. “your grace”) are categorised as Asynchronous (see Chapter 4). These expressions were historically relevant during the Regency era but have largely disappeared from everyday usage, even among native English-speaking audiences. This temporal distance can create translational challenges, as even the SA may experience a sense of historical distance, and let alone the TA, for whom such references are both culturally and socially distanced from their daily life.

Example 7-2a, *Bridgerton*, S01E01, CR Type: Asynchronous		
Original Dialogue 1	[Lady Bridgerton, a viscountess, to her daughter] Should your brother wish to be obeyed as **Lord** Bridgerton,	
Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2020	YYeTs, (Retranslation 1), 2020
	你哥哥要是想让别人尊他为布里杰顿**大人**	如果你哥哥希望被人尊为布里奇顿**勋爵**
Back Translation	If your brother wants people to honour him as **Master** Bridgerton.	If your brother wishes to be honoured as **Lord** Bridgerton.
Strategy	Generalisation	Official Equivalent
Example 7-2b, *Bridgerton*, S01E04, CR Type: Asynchronous		
Original Dialogue 2	[Lady Featherington, a baroness, to her husband] **My Lord**?	
Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2020	YYeTs, (Retranslation 1), 2020
	大人？	老爷
Back Translation	**Master**?	(history) **Husband**
Strategy	Generalisation	Specification
Example 7-2c, *Bridgerton*, S01E04, CR Type: Asynchronous		
Original Dialogue 3	[A maid to Daphne, the duchess] **Your Grace**.	
Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2020	YYeTs, (Retranslation 1), 2020
	大人	公爵夫人
Back Translation	**Master**	**Duchess**
Strategy	Generalisation	Specification

To address this, the initial Netflix subtitles adopt generalised honorifics in the TL, prioritising comprehension and functional equivalence over historical or cultural specificity. This approach ensures that viewers can follow the interpersonal dynamics without needing prior knowledge of the British peerage system. In Example 7-2, three distinct forms of address, i.e., “Lord”, “my lord”, and “your grace”, are all rendered as “大人”. This Chinese term, historically used to address officials or patriarchs, conveys respect and authority and is roughly equivalent to “master” or “sir” in English. However, while it signals deference, this TL term “大人” does not concern rank

distinctions, flattening status differences into a single domesticating solution designed for immediate accessibility.

By contrast, the fan retranslations take a more specific and culturally attentive approach. In Example 7-2a, "Lord" becomes "勛爵", a formal literary equivalent that has no modern function but evokes Classical Chinese and reinforces the historical tone. In Example 7-2b, "my lord" is rendered as "老爷", a term historically used in premodern China to address the male head of a household. While not an exact match for a British title, it carries comparable domestic authority and resonates with TC audiences familiar with period drama and literature. Here, the fansub departs from strict equivalence and opts for strategic localisation. In Example 7-2c, "your grace" is specified as "公爵夫人" (literally, duchess), explicitly identifying both rank and gender. Unlike English, where "your grace" applies to both dukes and duchesses, the fansub chooses a gender-exclusive term that mirrors what is already visually quite apparent on screen.

From the perspective of Gottlieb's model, this level of specification could be read as redundant, as the visual channel already conveys the necessary information, i.e. "intersemiotic redundancy" (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 20). In a typical commercial subtitling context, such redundancy would likely be avoided for the sake of efficiency and readability, especially in this case, where a more generalised "大人" as used in the Netflix subtitles is two characters shorter than the fansubbed "公爵夫人". On the other hand, Pedersen's (2011, p. 113) concept of "polysemiotics" offers an alternative point of view for understanding this choice. By recognising audiovisual texts as inherently multimodal, Pedersen emphasises that subtitlers must often navigate meaning across different channels and face the challenge of deciding when to reduce or reinforce information. And in this case, the fansubs deliberately reassert the referent verbally, showing a commitment to semantic precision and ST adequacy even at the cost of brevity.

Moreover, what counts as "redundancy" is not the same for all audiences. What commercial subtitlers and general viewers may consider unnecessary detail can be valued by fansub audiences as added precision. This contrast aligns with Toury's (1995) continuum between *adequacy* and *acceptability*: commercial subtitles usually lean toward acceptability, privileging fluency and accessibility, while fansubs lean toward adequacy, privileging SC and ST specificity. The choice to retain or specify certain CRs reflects attentiveness to a more informed or invested audience. More broadly, this tendency marks a shift in later fansubbing practices, which push back against the accessibility-focused constraints of both commercial subtitling and earlier fansub models. Contemporary fansubbers often prioritise adequacy, even at the risk of seeming

redundant, e.g., through detailed, long lines of intertextual glosses (see Chapter 6). In doing so, they emphasise their distinct identity within the subtitling ecosystem and position their work in contrast to commercial subtitles, at times as a subtle expression of rivalry.

However, fansubs are not always adhering to a ST orientation. While the previous examples illustrate a clear ST-oriented tendency in the retranslation, it is important to note that fansubs do not always adhere rigidly to this approach. In practice, their strategies are applied flexibly, depending on the CR type, the genre context, and the perceived ideological or political sensitivities of the TA. The following example shows how ST fidelity can be moderated in politically sensitive cases.

Example 7-3, *Stranger Things*, S04E07, CR Type: Socio-political		
Original Dialogue	- What? - **The commies.**	
Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2022	YYeTs (Retranslation 1), 2022
	- 什么？ - **共匪**吗？	- 什么 - **苏共**
Back Translation	- What? - **The communist bandit**?	- What - **The Soviet communists**
Strategy	Substitution	Specification

In Example 7-3, the CR “commies” appears in a fictional exchange between American protagonists referencing their Soviet antagonists, against the backdrop of the Cold War. The term is an informal, derogatory label for all communists, which reflects political hostility to an extent. Although this term is not inherently a swear word, it conveys the antagonistic sentiment within Cold War discourse.

In the commercial subtitles, “commies” is translated as “communist bandit”, an expression originated during the Chinese Civil War (1927-1949), where it was used by the Nationalist Party (KMT) to delegitimise the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Although this term is historically and politically specific to the CCP rather than Soviet communists, it effectively conveys the sense of aggression and ideological contempt that is in line with the original tone. However, this is not an Official Equivalent but a cultural substitution, shifting the reference from a Cold War Western context to one politically significant in the TC.

In contrast, the fan retranslation specifies the referent as “Soviet communists”, avoiding both the broader category of “communists” and the derogatory language of the initial commercial version. This strategic choice of Specification distances the subtitle from contemporary CCP

associations and can be read as more of an act of self-censorship than a precise fidelity to the ST.

This suggests an interesting contradiction in the traditional view of fansubbing practice. While often framed as ideologically resistant to state regulation, fansubbers may still make strategic choices that align with dominant socio-political norms extend to fansubbing activities, especially when dealing with relatively sensitive content. Rather than challenging state narratives, the fansubber's decision here seems to then reflect a cautious approach, potentially aimed at reducing risk and avoiding controversy.

7.3.3 Summary

The analysis in this section points to a moderate but consistent shift toward greater ST-orientation in the YYeTs retranslations compared with the official Netflix subtitles. Quantitatively, this tendency is most pronounced in categories that pose greater cultural or temporal distance, such as socio-political and asynchronous CRs. Qualitatively, the examples show how this orientation manifests in practice. Fansubs often preserve cultural resonance that the official versions flatten for accessibility. At the same time, fansubs also adopt more cautious strategies in politically sensitive contexts, suggesting that their orientation is at times flexible and responsive to ideological as well as cultural considerations.

Overall, then, YYeTs' retranslation practice reveal both a stronger inclination to retain ST features and a flexible awareness of audience and ideological constraints, complicating traditional, simple binary between foreignizing fansubs and domesticating commercial subtitles.

7.4 Variation on Interventional Tendency

7.4.1 Overall Trends in Intervention

In contrast to the diachronic case (Chapter 6), where retranslations showed slightly greater TT-orientation and a marked rise in intervention (+11.54%), the synchronic retranslations here use fewer interventional strategies overall, with a 5.43% decrease (see Table 7.5).

Table 7.5 Variation in Intervention across different CR types in four Netflix Originals

Interventional	Geographical	Ethnographic	Socio-political	Asynchronous	Intertextual	Overall
Initial (Netflix)	24.80%	44.19%	23.21%	52.17%	22.34%	32.89%
Retranslation 1 (YYeTs)	13.28%	34.09%	26.79%	55.32%	21.81%	27.46%
Variation	-11.52% (↓)	-10.10% (↓)	3.58% (↑)	3.15% (↑)	-0.53% (↓)	**(↓)** 5.43%

The steepest reductions occur in Geographical and Ethnographic CRs (-11.52% and -10.10%), both of which also register higher ST orientation (see Table 7.4). This pattern supports Pedersen's (2011, p. 101) claim that intervention typically pushes translations toward TT orientation, since subtitlers are "unlikely to intervene to make a TT more foreignized".

7.4.2 Strategy Shifts

This reduced reliance on intervention is particularly evident in Example 7-4 (below), where Geographical CRs are treated differently in the two versions. The initial Netflix subtitles generalise "England" to "Britain", specify "London's East End", and clarify that "Oaxaca" is a city, all interventions designed to aid comprehension. By contrast, the fan retranslations retain the original terms with minimal adjustment, reflecting a preference for Official Equivalents or direct renderings.

	Example 7-4a, *Bridgerton*, S01E03, CR Type: Geographical	
Original Dialogue 1	We must bring forward our plans to vacate **England** as soon as possible.	
Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2020	YYeTs, (Retranslation 1), 2020
	我们得提前离开**英国** 越快越好	我们需要加快离开**英格兰**的计划 越快越好
Back Translation	We need to get out of **Britain** as soon as possible.	We need to accelerate our plans to leave **England**, and the sooner the better.
Strategy	Generalisation	Official Equivalent
	Example 7-4b, *Bridgerton*, S01E06, CR Type: Geographical	
Original Dialogue 2	with a right hook like an **East End** prizefighter.	
Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2020	YYeTs, (Retranslation 1), 2020
	她有个像**伦敦东端** 冠军拳击手似的右钩拳	像**东区**冠军拳击手一样会右钩拳
Back Translation	She's got a right hook like a champion boxer from **the east end of London**.	A right hook like an **East End** champion boxer.
Strategy	Specification	Direct Translation
	Example 7-4c, *The Queen's Gambit*, S01E04, CR Type: Geographical	
Original Dialogue 3	He had business in **Oaxaca**.	
Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2020	YYeTs, (Retranslation 1), 2020
	他要到**瓦哈卡市**出差	他要去**瓦哈卡**出差
Back Translation	He's on a business trip to **Oaxaca City**.	He's on a business trip to **Oaxaca**
Strategy	Specification	Official Equivalent

As Pedersen (2011) explains, audiences can process CRs via encyclopaedic knowledge, deictic cues, or interventional mediation. Unlike the "your grace" to "duchess" example in 7.2c, where fansubbers intervened selectively for accessibility, the examples above show commercial

subtitlers mediating even monocultural or transcultural CRs. This suggests an assumption that their TA either lacks the knowledge to decode such references or prefers less foreignness, which are both expectations not typically shared by fansub audiences.

Later generations of fansub viewers, particularly in the 2020s, generally have stronger English proficiency and greater global media literacy than their early 2000s predecessors. This shift raises tolerance, and even preference, for a sense of foreignness in subtitles (see Chapter 6). Fansubs thus tend to preserve ST specificity while trusting their TA to interpret foreign elements, whereas commercial subtitlers operating under platform-imposed norms more likely to continue relying on interventions to secure maximum accessibility.

Another reason for the higher level of intervention in the Netflix subtitles may come from the prescriptive guidelines that commercial subtitlers are expected to follow. Netflix's Timed Text Style Guides (TTSGs), for example, while mostly only set out general style rules (e.g., character limits, punctuation, line treatment, on-screen text), can still shape interlingual subtitling decisions. The Simplified Chinese TTSG, for instance, requires that "measurements should be converted to the metric system unless the original unit of measurement is plot relevant" [1]. Such prescription directly shapes subtitling choices, as illustrated in Example 7-5.

These examples reveal the contrasting orientations of commercial and fan-produced subtitles in rendering units of measurement. Commercial subtitles, operating under prescriptive guidelines, are primarily concerned with readability and accessibility for a broad, often casual audience on streaming platforms. Fansubs, by contrast, privilege cultural fidelity and immersive engagement appealing to dedicated viewers drawn to specific series and more receptive to SC elements.

	Example 7-5a, Stranger Things, S04E04, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 1	Stand **five feet** away from the bars at all times.	
Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2022	YYeTs (Retranslation 1), 2022
	时刻与护栏保持 **1 米 5** 以上的距离	时刻跟铁栏杆保持**五英尺**距离
Back Translation	Keep a distance of **1.5 metre** or more from the guardrail at all times	Keep **five feet** away from the bars at all times.
Strategy	Substitution	Official Equivalent
	Example 7-5b, Stranger Things, S04E07, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 2	Well, they took about **a pound** of flesh.	

[1] Available at: https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/215986007-Chinese-Simplified-Timed-Text-Style-Guide (Accessed on 5 July 2022).

Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2022	YYeTs (Retranslation 1), 2022
	它们差不多咬掉了我**一斤**肉	它们咬掉了**一磅**肉
Back Translation	They took almost **a catty** of my flesh.	They took **a pound** of flesh.
Strategy	Substitution	Official Equivalent
	Example 7-5c, Bridgerton, S01E01, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 3	What she is is **two stone** heavier than she ought to be.	
Subtitles	Netflix (Initial), 2020	YYeTs (Retranslation 1), 2020
	她比她的理想体重足足重了**两英石**	事实是她超重了 **2 英石[约 13 公斤]**
Back Translation	She's **two stone** heavier than her ideal weight.	The truth is that she was **2 stone [about 13 kilogrammes]** overweight
Strategy	Official Equivalent	Official Equivalent + in-text gloss

This divergence is particularly clear in Example 7-5a, where the Netflix version replaces “five feet” with “1.5 metres” in accordance with the Simplified Chinese TTSG. While this strategy facilitates instant comprehension for viewers unfamiliar with imperial measures, it precludes the TA’s encounter with the original SC convention. The fansub, in contrast, retains the CR, aligning with its audience’s expectation of authenticity and willingness to engage with foreign units. Example 7-5b displays a similar pattern. Netflix localises “a pound” as “a catty”, deploying a familiar Chinese unit, whereas the fansub keeps the Official Equivalent to preserve the SC element and its potential informative intention[1].

There are, however, exceptions. In Example 7-5c, the culturally specific unit “stone” is retained in the Netflix subtitles, likely because it is plot-relevant and closely tied to the historical and cultural setting of *Bridgerton*, where conversion to a metric unit would disrupt the period authenticity. The fansub likewise preserves the term “stone” but supplements it with an in-text gloss, a hybrid strategy that balances fidelity to the ST with selective clarification. Notably, this selective glossing suggests that fansubbers operate under situational rather than prescriptive guidelines, intervening only where they perceive a high cultural or educational value.

This overall shift away from intervention is also evident in the notably restrained use of glossing strategies in the YYeTs retranslations. Unlike in Chapter 6, where YYeTs made frequent use of glosses to clarify intertextual references in *Doctor Who*, glossing is rarely employed in the fan retranslations in this case. Out of 683 CRs, only 12 involve glossing, 9 of which are concentrated

[1] The phrase “a pound of flesh” also carries an intertextual resonance with Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. Neither the Netflix subtitles nor the YYeTs version signal this resonance which suggests that both sides of the subtitlers either did not recognise the allusion or, more simply, chose not to foreground it, prioritising the literal semantic meaning of the phrase.

in *The Queen's Gambit* to explain specialised chess terms or biblical allusions. Glossing thus appears reserved for domain-specific or infracultural content less likely to be inferred from context alone.

While the lack of glossing is expected in Netflix subtitles since platform guidelines discourage explanatory notes, it is more striking for YYeTs, which faces no such constraints. One explanation may lie in the synchronic nature of these retranslations. YYeTs may have felt less need to intervene when working alongside a professionally produced, broadly accessible version already positioned as authoritative for general viewers. In this context, their sense of rivalry seems to rest less on being more explanatory and more on offering a version that is distinctly ST-oriented and culturally adequate for their own TA.

As noted earlier, glossing and other interventional strategies typically function to domesticate or mediate foreign elements for the TT. YYeTs' preference for more ST-oriented renderings naturally reduces the use of such strategies. Moreover, as a large and generalist fansub group, YYeTs may show variation across sub-teams. It is not unlikely, for instance, that the subtitlers of *Doctor Who* as shown in Chapter 6 were more dedicated fans of those specific programmes, and thus more inclined to provide detailed contextualisation when needed.

Still, the broader trend toward minimal glossing likely reflects shifts in fansubbing practice, especially among generalist groups. By the early 2020s, TC fansub audiences had become more globally and culturally literate, reducing their reliance on explanatory notes. For transcultural or widely recognisable CRs (e.g., Geographical and Ethnographic references) there is simply less need to mediate or guide comprehension. This is consistent with the quantitative data (see Table 7.5), which shows these two categories register the steepest reductions in interventional strategies in the retranslations compared to the Netflix versions.

7.4.3 Summary

The overall decrease in interventional strategies in these synchronic retranslations is best understood in terms of the normative frameworks governing subtitle production. Commercial subtitles, bound by prescriptive style guides, tend to privilege accessibility and standardisation, whereas fansubs, operating outside such constraints, have greater freedom to pursue adequacy and specificity.

These differing conditions of practice in turn reflect assumptions about audience needs. Commercial subtitles prioritise clarity and universality, targeting casual or general viewers, while

fansubs appeal to a more culturally engaged audience that values foreignness and fidelity to the original.

Furthermore, this contrast is not confined to the commercial-fan divide alone. As the next section will demonstrate, it becomes even clearer when different fan retranslations of the same programme are compared. The two fan versions of *The Witcher* provide a particularly striking case, revealing how even within fansubbing, different groups adopt distinct norms, shaped by their particular focus and intended audiences.

7.5 The One with Two Retranslations: *The Witcher* (2019)

7.5.1 Introduction

As noted in Section 7.1.1, among the Top 10 series in Netflix's Global Hits, only half have been retranslated into the TL, with the others presumably not considered worth re-subtitling by fansubbers, possibly due to their relative lack of popularity in the TC. However, *The Witcher* (2019) stands out for having been retranslated twice: first by YYeTs, the largest fansubbing community in the TC, and later by YIGUI, a group specialising in the fantasy genre.

YIGUI initially gained recognition as a fansub group for its work on the popular HBO series *Game of Thrones (*Benioff and Weiss, 2011-2019*)*. They produced subtitles for the series as well as localised many of its derivative works, including comics, reviews, fanfictions, fandom wiki pages and more. Over time, YIGUI expanded beyond this particular fandom, transitioning to subtitling other popular fantasy series, including *The Witcher*, which was one of their prominent projects. Their early focus on this iconic series was important in establishing their reputation among mainland Chinese audiences.

What distinguishes YIGUI's work on *The Witcher* is their distinctive subtitling style and their awareness of the franchise's transmedia complexity. The whole *Witcher* universe spans the original Polish novels by Andrzej Sapkowski, the globally popular role-playing games published by CD Projekt, and, more recently, the Netflix adaptation. Each of these iterations carries its own narrative logic, fan base, and terminology. Whereas subtitling practices typically focus on translating the audiovisual product in isolation, YIGUI adopt a more holistic approach by drawing on the established Chinese translations of the novels and the localised versions of the games to ensure consistency and narrative cohesion across media.

This approach stands in contrast to that of YYeTs, whose version of *The Witcher* takes a more generalist stance for a broader audience (see previous sections). YIGUI operates with a much

narrower TA in mind, that is the dedicated fans of the fantasy genre who are likely familiar with the broader *Witcher* universe and expect the fansubs to reflect that depth.

As such, YIGUI's subtitles are notably more interventional. They frequently incorporate additional information (e.g., character backstories, timeline clarifications, and lore references, see more in Section 7.4.3) to enhance coherence and immersion. This section compares the initial Netflix subtitles with both sets of fan retranslations, with particular attention to the divergent glossing strategies employed by YYeTs and YIGUI. In doing so, it highlights how YYeTs' generalist orientation contrasts with YIGUI's fan-oriented approach, setting the stage for the detailed analysis in Section 7.4.3.

What renders this *Witcher* case particularly distinctive, both among the rest of the Netflix titles examined in this chapter and across the thesis as a whole, is the extent to which glossing functions a paratextual supplement as well as the organising logic of the subtitle stream. In contrast to other Netflix case studies, where fan-added glosses typically serve to translate on-screen text or occasionally unpack CRs, YIGUI's subtitling of *The Witcher* transforms glossing into a sustained and deliberate interpretive strategy. Crucially, this move is both stylistic and responsive to the structural complexity of the ST, which operates across multiple media (novels, games, series), temporalities, and fandom-specific discourses. While the use of interventional strategies appears sporadically in other cases, here it becomes systematic and, more importantly, expected, producing a subtitle track that reads as both translation and paratext. In this sense, *The Witcher* exemplifies an extreme case where fandom epistemologies (see Chapter 6) and transmedia density recalibrate what counts as normative subtitling practice in the fansub culture in the TC.

7.5.2 Strategy Distribution and Norm Variations

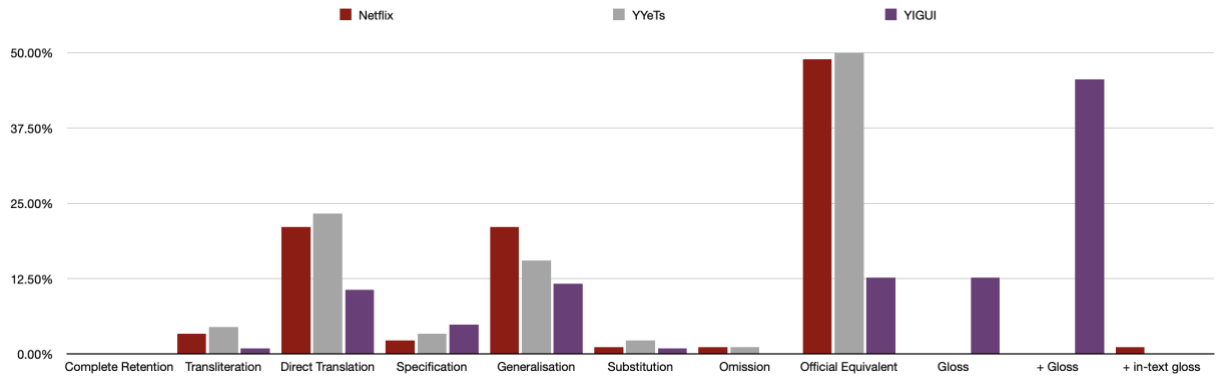

Figure 7.2 Bar charts of strategy distribution across three versions.

As illustrated in Figure 7.2, the strategy distribution in YIGUI's fansubs of *The Witcher* reveals striking differences that are even more pronounced than those observed between the initial Netflix subtitles and YYeTs' version, despite the fact that both YYeTs and YIGUI operate within the fansubbing sphere. What most clearly distinguishes YIGUI's version is its dramatically higher reliance on glossing strategies. This comes alongside a noticeably lower reliance on strategies such as Direct Translation, Generalisation, and Official Equivalent. Instead, YIGUI lean heavily on additional textual explanation as their primary technique for handling CRs.

This quantitative shift points to a fundamentally different subtitling logic, one that reflects a very particular set of assumptions about their audience. Rather than prioritising brevity or seamlessness, YIGUI seems to approach its work with an expectation that its viewers value detailed explanation, clarification, and active engagement with specialised or genre-specific references even at the cost of textual economy or reading fluency that normally concerns subtitlers in the industry. This is further expanded on in Section 7.5.3.

Tables 7-6 and 7-7 reinforce this finding. Both sets of fan retranslations show a stronger tendency toward ST-orientation than the initial Netflix subtitles, but YIGUI stand out for their very different handling of interventional strategies. Whereas YYeTs show a slight decrease (4.49% lower than the initial subtitles, see Table 7.5 in Section 7.3), YIGUI present a dramatic increase of 49.51%, driven almost exclusively by their extensive use of glossing. Glossing here is no longer a supplementary tool anymore but a defining feature of YIGUI's subtitling style.

Table 7.6 Variation in orientation across three versions in The Witcher

Strategy	**Netflix (Initial)**			**YYeTs (Retranslation 1)**			**YIGUI (Retranslation 2)**			**Tendency**	**Variation 1**	**Vibration 2**
Complete Retention	0	0.00%		0	0.00%		0	0.00%				
Transliteration	3	3.33%	53.33%	4	4.44%	62.22 %	1	0.97%	56.67%	**ST-oriented**	(↑) 8.89%	(↑) 3.34%
Direct Translation	19	21.11%		21	23.33%		11	10.68%				
Specification	2	2.22%		3	3.33%		5	4.85%				
Generalisation	19	21.11%		14	15.56%		12	11.65%				
Substitution	1	1.11%	46.67%	2	2.22%	37.78 %	1	0.97%	43.33%	**TT-oriented**	**(↓)** 8.89%	**(↓)** 3.34%
Omission	1	1.11%		1	1.11%		0	0.00%				
~~Gloss~~	~~0~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~0~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~13~~	~~/~~	~~/~~			
~~+ Gloss~~	~~0~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~0~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~47~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~/~~
~~+ in-text gloss~~	~~1~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~0~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~0~~	~~/~~	~~/~~			
Total	45 (90)	100%	100%	45 (90)	100%	100%	30 (103)	100%	100%			

Table 7.7 Variation in intervention across three versions in The Witcher

Strategy	Netflix (Initial)			YYeTs (Retranslation 1)			YIGUI (Retranslation 2)			Tendency	Variation 1	Variation 2
Complete Retention	0	0.00%		0	0.00%		0	0.00%				
Transliteration	3	3.37%		4	4.49%		1	0.97%				
Direct Translation	19	21.35%	74.16%	21	23.60%	78.65%	11	10.68%	24.27%	**Minimal Change**	**(↑)** 4.49%	**(↓)** 49.51%
Official Equivalent	44	49.44%		45	50.56%		13	12.62%				
Specification	2	2.25%		3	3.37%		5	4.85%				
Generalisation	19	21.35%		14	15.73%		12	11.65%				
Substitution	1	1.12%		2	2.25%		1	0.97%				
Gloss	0	0.00%	25.84%	0	0.00%	21.35%	13	12.62%	75.73%	**Interventional**	**(↓)** 4.49%	**(↑)** 49.51%
+ Gloss	0	0.00%		0	0.00%		47	45.63%				
+ in-text gloss	1	1.12%		0	0.00%		0	0.00%				
~~Omission~~	~~1~~	~~1.11%~~	~~/~~	~~1~~	~~1.11%~~	~~/~~	~~0~~	~~0.00%~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~/~~	~~/~~
Total	89 (90)	100.00%	100%	89 (90)	100.00%	100%	103 (103)	100.00%				

YIGUI's extensive reliance on glosses, especially when contrasted with the restrained approach of Netflix's commercial subtitles and YYeTs' generalist version, reflects a fundamentally different subtitling logic. It presumes a fandom-literate audience that values detailed contextualisation over conciseness and signals the emergence of subtitling norms shaped by YIGUI's niche positioning within the fansubbing community. This statistical prominence provides empirical support for the broader claim made in Section 7.5.1, that *The Witcher*'s transmedia density and interpretive demands create conditions under which intervention becomes the norm rather than a random exception.

The next section examines this shift in greater detail through a qualitative analysis of glossing types, focusing on their forms, functions, and what they reveal about the group's subtitling ethos, audience expectations, and strategies for engaging with the highly genre-specific world of *The Witcher*.

7.5.3 Extra Glossing in YIGUI's Retranslation

As Tables 7-6 and 7-7 show, the total number of CRs identified in The Witcher varies slightly across the three versions: both the Netflix subtitles and YYeTs' retranslation include 90 CRs, while YIGUI's version records 103. The extra 13 CRs appear only in YIGUI's version and all stem from standalone glosses, i.e., explanatory insertions with no direct ST cues. Most of these glosses expand on visual or paratextual elements, reflecting YIGUI's highly interventional approach.

In total, 60 glosses are identified in YIGUI's retranslation, making up nearly 60% of all CRs in their version. This stands in sharp contrast to the near absence of glossing in Netflix and the 12 instances in YYeTs. Of these 60 glosses, the majority (i.e., the other 47 cases) functions in ways already discussed in Chapter 6's analysis of *Doctor Who* fan retranslations of the late 2010s, where glosses largely appear as translator's notes or clarifications of intertextual references embedded in the SC and fandom. This kind of glossing, while still typical of fansubbing practice and rarely found in commercial subtitles, are often confined to less intrusive placements, such as at the edge of the screen or during the credits.

What distinguishes this *The Witcher* case is YIGUI's 13 standalone glosses, which are far more visual, spatial, and integrated directly into the on-screen content. Unlike in the *Doctor Who* case, these glosses here interact more creatively with the visual environment of the scene, expanding the communicative space of the subtitles beyond conventional boundaries. This strategy reflects both YIGUI's assumptions about their audience's familiarity with the SC and their expectation that viewers will actually welcome this denser, more immersive, information-rich approach.

These extra 13 glosses can be further categorised into four distinct groups based on their function and focus:

a) glosses addressing visual information (e.g., on-screen text, maps, symbols);
b) glosses addressing the audio channel (e.g., lyrics, fictional languages);
c) glosses unpacking intertextual macro-allusions (e.g., parody, franchise lore);
d) translator's notes (e.g., meta-commentary, justification, correction).

This interventional ethos is also reflected in how their subtitles are packaged and distributed. In addition to the standalone glosses discussed above, YIGUI consistently offer two parallel subtitle files for each episode of *The Witcher*, a pattern observable across all episodes they uploaded on the SubHD repository (i.e., one of the two subtitle file sources used for this research, see Section 5.3.2). For every episode, audiences are offered a "完整注释版" (Chinese: complete annotation version) and a "无注释版" (Chinese: non-annotated version)[1]. This distinction appears in the file names themselves and is further reinforced through metadata and paratextual release notes. The group explicitly states in the repository page: "建议使用完整注释版，获得最好的观看体验。除非对原著小说熟悉于心，否则不建议使用无注释版" (Chinese: We recommend using the complete annotated version for the best viewing experience. Unless you

[1] See https://subhd.tv/a/UKHTHL (accessed on 7 February 2026).

are thoroughly familiar with the original novels, we do not recommend using the non-annotated version.) Such explicit guidance suggests a high level of audience awareness and a deliberate anticipation of varying degrees of familiarity with the *Witcher* franchise. Audiences who are already deeply embedded in the narrative universe or who prefer a more minimal subtitle experience can choose the streamlined version, while those seeking richer interpretive support can opt into the annotated track. This approach demonstrates an understanding of subtitling, as well as a well-established working pathway for subtitling, as an audience-oriented act of media curation. This design of YIGUI's offers optionality instead of standardising reception, enabling capable, digital literate audiences to self-select their preferred level of engagement. It also reflects a conception of subtitling, especially fansubbing, as infrastructural labour, as it facilitates access, scaffolds comprehension, and tailors the text for differentiated publics. In this light, the act of releasing dual versions (on top of the fact that they are already actively retranslating) serves both practical and ideological functions. YIGUI as a standout case caters to the uneven distribution of fan knowledge, while reinforcing the group's authority as knowledgeable mediators who organise and manage the conditions of reception across diverse audience positions.

This level of intentional audience design, manifested both in subtitle content and distribution format, provides the contextual backdrop against which the following examples of YIGUI's standalone glosses can be more fully understood and categorised.

Glosses for information on the visual channel

These glosses translate or contextualise elements visible on screen, such as symbols, texts, or genre-specific details not immediately recognisable to the TA.

In fansubbing scholarship, glossing is typically understood as an added explanatory device accompanying a source term or concept, offering context otherwise inaccessible. In YIGUI's practice, however, the boundary between translation and gloss is blurred. While translating visible on-screen text may not traditionally qualify as glossing, what stands out here is not simply the act of translating but the density, visibility, and stylistic design of YIGUI's renderings over information on the visual channel. Frequently paired with extra notes or contextual cues in the same visual space, YIGUI's handling of on-screen text often takes on a gloss-like function.

These interventions are not only designed to translate but also to explain, label, and categorise information for its audience, extending far beyond the typical remit of commercial subtitling.

Even in more generalist fansubbing, such as YYeTs' work discussed in Chapter 6, this level of visual intervention is rare.

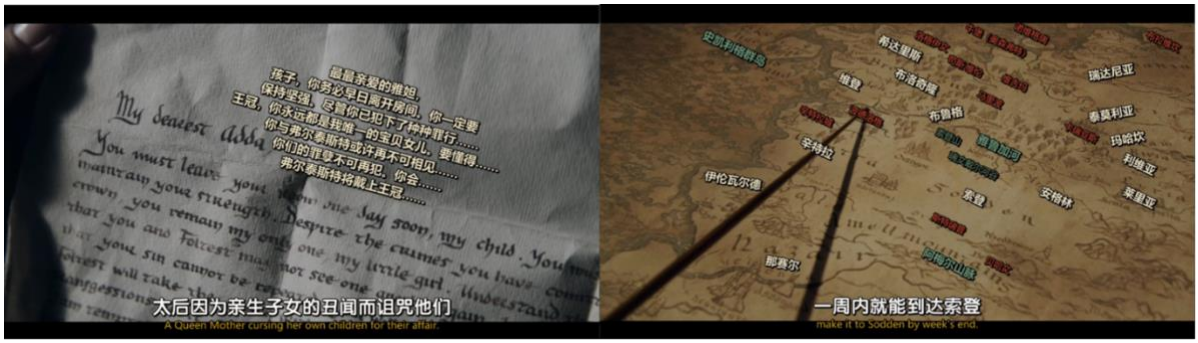

Figure 7.3 Examples of clustered glosses, The Witcher, S01E03 (left), S01E07 (right)

Figure 7.4 Examples of headnotes, The Witcher, S01E01 (left), S01E03 (right)

As shown in Figures 7-3 and 7-4 below, YIGUI's retranslation exemplifies a form of heavy screen translation absent from both the Netflix subtitles and the YYeTs version. Through the angled placement of glosses aligned with the semiotic structure of the on-screen text (see the letter in Figure 7.3, left), combined with colour-coded categories (see the map in Figure 7.3, right, i.e., green for rivers and mountains, red for cities, white for countries, YIGUI departs significantly from conventional subtitling norms. While more conventional approaches tend to prioritise plot-relevant content, conciseness, and unobtrusive readability, YIGUI notably embraces a more interventional and visually layered method.

These examples reflect what Pérez-González (2014, pp. 81-82) terms "pictorial subtitles", which "creatively exploit the semiotic affordances of submodes [...] such as colour, font, perspective, and other compositional variables [...] to articulate an immersive spectatorial experience for their viewers". By engaging such semiotic resources, YIGUI aims to provide additional contextual information as well as a more immersive, genre-sensitive experience for their TA.

This strategy presupposes a highly engaged audience, both capable of and willing to process denser visual input. Rather than perceiving such density as excessive, YIGUI's viewers are likely to value the integration of visual, textual, and spatial information as an enhancement of their fandom experience.

Furthermore, beyond translating on-screen texts, YIGUI extends its subtitling practice to clarify visual references that are significant primarily within fan communities, using glosses to explicate elements that casual viewers might overlook. In Figure 7.4 (above, left), glosses are employed to unpack the symbolic meaning of the emblem associated with the Nilfgaardian Empire, offering contextual insight into its narrative and thematic relevance. Figure 7.4 (above, right) presents a case where a magical sign cast by the protagonist is accompanied by two lines of glosses, one identifying the specific spell ("Aard") and another explaining how signs function within the lore of the *Witcher* universe. These are both highly genre-specific knowledge, likely to resonate with viewers familiar with the video game series or broader franchise. While casual viewers may regard such density as excessive, fandom-oriented audiences are more likely to interpret these glosses as enriching, deepening immersion and interpretive engagement.

Example 7-6, YIGUI's *The Witcher*, S01E02, CR Type: Intertextual	
Context	The character on screen is a bard singing about monsters in the world.
TT Gloss (Top)	这首歌词化用自短篇小说《世界边缘》中**上波萨达**村民描述的种种怪物。
Back Translation	The lyrics are an adaptation of the monsters described by the villagers of Upper Posada in the short story *The Edge of the World*.
TT Gloss (Middle)	**亚斯克尔** 简中&游戏 丹德里恩 全名 朱利安·阿尔弗雷德·潘克拉茨 游吟诗人
Back Translation	Jaskier In Simplified Chinese & video game: Dandelion Full name: Julian Alfred Pankratz Bard
TT Subtitle	**♪带刺的梭子鱼♪**
Back Translation	The pike with the spike

Figure 7.5 Example of name tags of characters (middle), The Witcher, S01E02, by YIGUI.

Other than the four examples discussed above, another distinctive feature of YIGUI's subtitling practice is their use of glosses to introduce characters as they appear on screen (see the middle TT gloss in Example 7-6 and demonstrated beside the character in Figure 7.5). This strategy has been a hallmark of YIGUI's work since their work on the second season of *Game of Thrones* (Guancanghai, 2019). At that time, they observed that many viewers struggled to recall characters after the year-long hiatus between seasons. In response, YIGUI began adding "name tags" to nearly every character introduction, a move that has since become one of the group's defining stylistic signatures and a competitive advantage within the fansubbing community.

Interestingly, this practice bears some resemblance to SDH (Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing), where speaker identification is used when the source of dialogue is unclear. Yet YIGUI's approach is far more elaborate: while SDH typically confines itself to a simple speaker label, YIGUI's name tags offer multiple layers of information beyond basic identification. In a way, YIGUI appropriates and expands this SDH convention, transforming it from a purely functional cue into a more complicated, fandom-driven practice of contextualisation.

This technique works particularly well in *The Witcher*, where the narrative complexity of the first season is further deepened by multiple timelines and storylines across different kingdoms. The inclusion of name tags helps the audience, especially those less familiar with the franchise, to follow the plot more easily. At the same time, YIGUI is clearly aware of the risk of visual overload. To balance informativeness with readability, the name tags are carefully designed with

varied font sizes, styles, and layout to highlight the most relevant details without overwhelming the viewer by drawing attention to every text equally (see the top and middle gloss in Figure 7.5).

As shown in Figure 7.5, the most prominent element in this "tag" is the character's name as rendered in the Netflix series, followed by other existing, alternative Simplified Chinese translations drawn from the novels and the video game adaptation. These translations sometimes differ due to their localisation history and context. In this particular example, Netflix translates the character's name according to the original Polish name "Jaskier" instead of the English equivalent "Dandelion" used in other media products. YIGUI's gloss explicitly acknowledges this variation, accommodating readers, players, and viewers across different branches of *The Witcher* fandom. Subsequent lines provide the character's full name and their role or position within the storyworld, creating a layered yet accessible reference system.

Overall, this approach exemplifies the epistemophilia characteristic of fansubbing communities (see Chapter 6), where dense contextualisation is prized not only for clarity but as an integral part of the fan experience itself. At the same time, YIGUI's attention to visual design ensures that information density enhances rather than disrupts the viewing experience.

Glosses for information on the audio channel

These glosses address auditory elements, most notably lyrics and the use of fictional or foreign languages in dialogue. They may clarify the significance of specific lyrics or explore the linguistic roots of fictional languages, offering insights that deepen audience engagement with the auditory dimension of the text.

In the same example as shown in Figure 7.5, where glosses are used to provide diegetic information by contextualising lyrics within the narrative. The TT subtitle line here is framed with two eighth-note symbols, clearly marking it as song lyrics. This typographic device distinguishes musical content from spoken dialogue and echoes SDH conventions, where visual cues are employed to signal different sound modes. By deliberately highlighting the present of music, YIGUI acknowledges the multimodal nature of audiovisual storytelling and guides audiences to attend to the interplay of sound, image, and narrative.

Figure 7.6 The Witcher, S01E02, by YIGUI

Example 7-7, YIGUI's *The Witcher*, S01E02
CR Type: Intertextual

Dialogue	[in Elder] Beast!
TT Gloss	本剧绿色字幕均为**上古语**，这是精灵（上古种族）使用的语言。 原著中的上古语词汇主要从爱尔兰语、威尔士语和苏格兰盖尔语等语言借用素材。
Back Translation	The green subtitles for this show are all in **Elder Speech**, which is the language spoken by the Elves (an ancient race). The original Elder vocabulary borrows material mainly from languages such as Irish, Welsh and Scottish Gaelic.
TT Subtitle	禽兽！
Back Translation	Beast!

A similar strategy is employed in the case of multilingual dialogue. As listed in Example 7-7 and illustrated in Figure 7.6 (above), green font is used to signal the use of "Elder Speech", a fictional language spoken by the Elves. This colour-coded differentiation is accompanied by two lines of glosses explaining the narrative function of "Elder Speech" and its linguistic origins in real-world languages such as Irish, Welsh, and Scottish Gaelic. This dual strategy of visual marking plus contextual glossing again resonates with SDH to some extent, where colour is often used to separate voices or audio sources. Rather than serving accessibility alone, YIGUI's approach here extend such techniques beyond accessibility, using them to foreground the cultural and linguistic depth of the *Witcher*'s world.

These interventions do more than aid comprehension. They reflect an insider's familiarity with the genre and an appreciation of the narrative's complexity. In this way, they reinforce fansubbing as a product made by fans for fans, while celebrating the linguistic and cultural layers embedded in the source material.

Interestingly, the only gloss in the Netflix subtitles (an in-text gloss, see Table 7.9) also occurs in this context, marking "Elder Speech" with a square bracket. This choice likely reflects platform-level adherence to SDH or accessibility guidelines. Such conventions, however, are not common in English-to-Simplified Chinese subtitling within the TC, particularly in mainland China. The contrast points to broader differences in priorities. While commercial subtitles emphasise accessibility, dedicated fansubbing teams like YIGUI privilege often prioritise community-oriented engagement and interpretive depth, shaped by the expectations and viewing habits of their audiences.

Glosses for Intertextual Macro Allusions

These glosses situate CRs within the wider *Witcher* universe and beyond, drawing connections to the original novels, the video games, and even broader cultural traditions.

Example 7-8 shows how YIGUI uses glosses to unpack what Ranzato (2016) terms *covert macroallusions* (see Chapter 4) within a particular *The Witcher* episode that draws directly from several well-known stories such as *Rapunzel*, *Snow White*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. This move further illustrates YIGUI's commitment to informing their TA and guiding them through the layered intertextuality of the series.

Example 7-8, YIGUI's *The Witcher*, S01E01 **CR Type: Intertextual**	
Gloss	本集中 杰洛特的故事发生于纪元 1233 年 改编自短篇小说《勿以恶小》（Mniejsze zło, The Lesser Evil, 兩害取其輕） 出自《猎魔人卷一：白狼崛起》（Ostatnie życzenie, The Last Wish, 獵魔士：最後的願望） 化用了《长发姑娘》《白雪公主和七个小矮人》《睡美人》等童话故事
Back Translation	In this episode, Gerald's story takes place in the year 1233. Adapted from the short story *Mniejsze zło, The Lesser Evil* From *Ostatnie życzenie, The Last Wish* A parody of fairy tales such as *Rapunze*l, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Sleeping Beauty*, etc.

Much like the Agatha Christie episode of *Doctor Who* discussed in Chapter 6, which operates simultaneously as homage and parody, this episode of *The Witcher* similarly engages with the conventions of European folk and fairy tales. The glosses provided by YIGUI help navigate intertextual CRs both within *The Witcher* universe and beyond, bridging the gap between SC references and the TA's encyclopaedic cultural knowledge. That is, on the one hand, they anchor the episode within Sapkowski's literary canon by identifying the specific short stories adapted. On the other, they explicitly point out the broader intertextual allusions which may otherwise go unnoticed by viewers unfamiliar with such rewriting of genre tropes.

This layered glossing strategy does more than just inform. It invites both casual viewers and dedicated fans into a shared cultural and narrative space. By explicitly mapping out these intertextual links, YIGUI enhances accessibility for newcomers while reinforcing the depth and richness of the story and world for invested fans, i.e., to inform and to include, as argued in Chapter 6, which is a signature fansubbing practice in the mediation of genre-specific knowledge.

Translator's Notes

Translator's notes often are direct commentary from the fansubbers, offering insights, justifications for specific translation choices, and, at times, corrections of perceived errors in earlier translations.

These glosses also highlight one of the clearest differences between commercial subtitling and fansubbing. Commercial subtitles, subject to stricter industry regulation, leave little room for personal commentary. By contrast, fansubbers, especially in smaller, more specialised groups, often use these notes as a way to communicate directly with their audience. These not only provide extra context or clarification but also help strengthen a sense of connection and shared community between subtitlers and viewers.

This practice recalls the translator's notes discussed in Chapter 6, where later-generation *Doctor Who* fansubbers added blocks of commentary at the end of episodes, sometimes in the form of columns or mini-essays during the closing credits, offering production trivia, background context, or anecdotes. While YIGUI's notes in *The Witcher* appear more frequently as headnotes accompanying specific scenes, the ethos is similar. Both practices reflect a fansubbing culture that goes beyond interlingual translation and into a more dialogic and participatory mode of communication with their audience.

Example 7-9, YIGUI's *The Witcher*, S01E06 **CR Type: Intertextual**	
Dialogue	Est Est, small.
TT Gloss	东之东是产自陶森特公国的高档葡萄酒。 它的名字来源于意大利拉齐奥大区葡萄酒品牌"Est! Est!! Est!!! di Montefiascone"。 Est 是拉丁文中"是"、"（这里）有"的第三人称单数变格，与英文中的"East"没有关系。
Back Translation	The "East of East" is a premium wine produced in the Duchy of Toussaint. Its name is inspired by the Italian wine brand "Est! Est!! Est!!! di Montefiascone" from the Lazio region. "Est" is the third-person singular form of the Latin verb meaning "is" or "there is", and has no relation to the English word "East".
TT Subtitle	东之东 小杯的
Back Translation	East of Easrt, small glass.

A clear example of this somewhat communicative glossing, particularly in correcting what fansubbers perceive as past translation inaccuracies, can be seen in Example 7-9. In this scene, the subtitle renders the line "Est Est" as "East of East" (Chinese: 东之东), adopting an already established Official Equivalent widely used in the mainland Chinese Witcher fandom to refer to an in-universe wine. This translation has long circulated in previous fan translations and game localisations, becoming a sort of default, ready-made solution that is familiar to the TL fandom and poses little to no translation challenge for subtitlers.

But interestingly, despite choosing this minimal-change strategy in the main subtitle line, YIGUI still opts to intervene, not in the translation itself, but in the gloss that accompanies it. The gloss takes the opportunity to explain that "Est" actually comes from Latin, meaning "is" or "there is", and has absolutely nothing to do with the English word "East". In other words, YIGUI

overtly points out in this three-line long gloss that while the translation “East of East” may be functionally correct and readily accepted, it is, strictly speaking, a misreading of the original term.

This intervention is highly characteristic of YIGUI’s practice, as its work is not confined to subtitling dialogue alone but also extends to informing the audience and positioning itself as both a community led by and for knowledgeable fans and a reliable, responsible mediator of the ST. In this sense, by adding translator’s notes, or more broadly, inserting a voice, YIGUI’s gloss here serves a communicative and explanatory function as well as a community-building one, reinforcing YIGUI’s dual identity as both a group of fansubbers and cultural insiders that are deeply invested in the integrity of the ST and who its TA can trust.

This practice, then, can be seen as a contemporary extension of what Nornes (1999, p. 29) terms “abusive subtitling”, though not in the sense of preserving linguistic foreignness, but in a broader way of resisting the conventional limits of subtitling practice itself. While Nornes originally developed this concept to critique the domestication and sanitisation of foreign audiovisual content in commercial translation, YIGUI’s subtitling operates abusively in a different register that is aesthetic and epistemic. This is further explored in Pérez-González’s (2014) notion of abusive mediation paradigm in fansubbing, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Here, the “abuse” is not directed at the SL or SC per se, but rather at the normative assumptions of fansubbing itself, particularly the expectation that subtitlers should remain invisible and refrain from overly shaping how the audience interprets the text, i.e., the translator’s invisibility (see Venuti, 1995, 2018). YIGUI’s fansubs, however, refuse to leave meaning-making entirely to the audience. Crucially, this is not the same kind of intervention seen in commercial subtitles, which often step into aid comprehension on the assumption of lower SC literacy. Instead, YIGUI’s glosses actively guide how the text ought to be read, by embedding fandom knowledge, correcting perceived errors, clarifying narrative ambiguity, and at times, asserting their own authority as leaders within the fan community.

In this sense, YIGUI’s approach might be read as a fandom-specific evolution of abusive mediation, one that turns subtitling into a highly authored, participatory space of fandom media. Rather than preserving otherness in Nornes’ sense, what is foregrounded here is a sense of insiderness, a way of subtitling across languages and across fandom boundaries with an emphasis on the epistemophilia and on the expectations of their intended audiences.

However, this level of intervention is not without risk. Returning to the “name tags” technique discussed earlier (in the “Glosses for information on the visual channel” subsection), Example

7-10 (and illustrated in Figure 7.7 below) offers a case where this otherwise helpful strategy arguably overreaches.

Example 7-10, YIGUI's *The Witcher*, S01E06, CR Type: Intertextual	
Context	In this scene, main character Ciri the princess and the druid Mousesack are walking through the forest, while the disguised doppler who has taken on Mousesack's appearance accompanies her, while she had no idea.
TT Gloss (Top)	本集中 希瑞拉的故事发生于纪元 1263 年
Back Translation	In this episode, Ciri's story takes place in the year 1263
TT Gloss (Middle left)	辛特拉的希瑞菈 繁中 琴特拉的奇莉拉 游戏 辛特拉的希里雅 全名 希瑞菈·菲欧娜·伊伦·雷安伦 "辛特拉幼狮" 辛特拉公主
Back Translation	Cirilla of Cintra In Traditional Chinese: Cirilla of Cintra; In video game: Cirilla of Cintra Full name: Cirilla Fiona Elen Riannon "Lion cub of Cintra" Princess Cirilla
TT Gloss (Middle right)	**变成莫斯克模样的变形怪**
Back Translation	**A shapeshifter transformed into Mousesack's appearance**

As noted, YIGUI's use of "name tags" often serves to clarify character identities, relationships, or affiliations to help viewers navigate *The Witcher*'s layered universe. Yet in this particular scene, that very intervention risks undermining one of the episode's most crucial narrative moments. In this scene, Ciri, the main character, is walking with what appears to be Mousesack, a trusted druid from her past (see Figure 7.7, Ciri, on the left; "Mousesack", on the right). Crucially, attentive viewers, who have stayed tuned for the past episodes, would already know that this is in fact a doppelganger in disguise. In this sense, despite YIGUI's gloss identifying the character as "a shapeshifter transformed into Mousesack's appearance" does not technically spoil unknown information, it does end up eliminating any lingering ambiguity within the immediate scene, cutting short the suspense that might otherwise emerge from the audience's own inference.

Figure 7.7 The Witcher, S01E06, by YIGUI. *Extensive glossing used to annotate character identity and narrative timeline. Top gloss provides temporal context; clustered glosses on the left is the "name tag" the character Ciri with franchise-specific metadata, including her name variants across different media; right gloss identifies the shapeshifter disguised as Mousesack.*

Rather than allowing time and space for the audience to recall and process, the name tag directly reveals the character's true identity, highly prioritising information delivery over natural narrative pacing or subtlety. In this regard, the "abuse" in YIGUI's practice lies in fact more in its active manipulation of how the audience experiences and processes the story. This intervention reflects YIGUI's multifaceted role within the fandom: they are subtitlers, as well as community leaders and knowledge brokers who often claim authority to mediate and manipulate the text from the top down. Their intervention here exemplifies both the power and the risk of a subtitling practice that extends beyond translation to inform, include, correct, and at times even reframe the ST on behalf of its intended audience.

7.5.4 Summary

The comparison of the three versions of *The Witcher* (2019) subtitles reveals that variation in subtitling practice emerges not only between commercial and fansubbed versions, but also across different modes of fansubbing itself, shaped above all by subtitlers' assumptions about their intended TA. While generalist groups like YYeTs prioritise accessibility and clarity within a relatively ST-oriented framework, more specialised collectives such as YIGUI cater to general viewers but place particular emphasis on dedicated, fandom-driven audiences.

YIGUI's practice reflects a deeper engagement with the source material, drawing not only on the Netflix series but also on the wider *Witcher* universe of novels, video games, and other transmedia artefacts. This expertise, combined with the epistemophilia characteristic of fan communities, underpins their more interventional subtitling strategy.

Through frequent glossing and contextual commentary, YIGUI's fansubs seek to enrich the viewing experience, foster cultural literacy, and assert their role as authoritative mediators of *The Witcher*'s complex storyworld. This may also explain their decision to undertake a retranslation despite the availability of both an official version and a fan retranslation. Their intervention positions YIGUI in contrast to commercial subtitles as well as in competition with other fansubbing efforts, presenting their work as, from their perspective, simultaneously more accessible to their intended fandom and more faithful to the ST.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed RQ2*: How do fan retranslations differ from coexisting commercial subtitle versions within the same timeframe, what drives these synchronic retranslations, and what do such differences reveal about patronage, audience orientation, and subtitling norms?* The comparative analysis demonstrates that synchronic variation emerges a reflection of institutional constraints, community positioning, and assumptions about audience literacy and preference.

Netflix subtitles, produced under vendor contracts and prescriptive style guides, privilege accessibility, standardisation, and cross-market scalability. Generalist fansub groups such as YYeTs display a stronger ST orientation, but their restrained visual style and relative lack of intervention mean their outputs converge with commercial norms more than diverge from them. By contrast, specialist groups such as YIGUI operate within a notably different logic. Their subtitles are highly interventional and visually elaborate, incorporating glosses, colour coding, name tags, and translator's notes that transform fansubbing into a site of paratextual mediation for a more immersive, fandom-specific mode of viewing experience.

What drives these synchronic differences, then, is the patronage structures and audience orientations that underpin each version. Commercial subtitles are bound by platform-level priorities that assume a broad, heterogeneous viewership. YYeTs, while situated within fansubbing traditions, still address a relatively general audience and therefore maintain readability and restraint. YIGUI, by contrast, target a genre-savvy audience and position themselves as both cultural mediators and fandom leaders. In this context, retranslation

becomes a mode of differentiation and rivalry, a way of asserting interpretive authority and marking one's work as more adequate than coexisting alternatives. Crucially, these competing strategies are always framed through assumptions about who the audience is and how they are expected to engage with the texts. Synchronic retranslation therefore reveals how subtitling norms are reshaped in practice through this ongoing negotiation of audience expectations in the streaming era and in the wider digital age.

Chapter 8 From Classic Six to Censored Sex: The Case of Diachronic Commercial Re-Subtitling of *Friends* (1994)

8.1 Introduction

Building on the analyses of diachronic and synchronic fan retranslations in the previous two chapters, this chapter shifts the focus to commercial re-subtitling. It examines how the same audiovisual text, i.e., *Friends* (1994), has been retranslated across different institutional contexts over two decades.

In doing so, this chapter is guided by the third research question:

> *How have commercial retranslations of the same audiovisual text changed over time, and what do these shifts reveal about the influence of industry practice, regulatory pressures, and audience expectations?*

To answer this, this chapter traces the trajectory from the F6 fansubs to three major commercial retranslations released by Sohu (2012), Netflix (c. 2015), and Bilibili (2022). The analysis proceeds as follows.

Section 8.1 introduces the case by tracing the decade-long retranslation history of *Friends* within its broader regulatory and institutional context. Section 8.2 analyses F6's initial fansubs (2005) as a baseline for comparison. Section 8.3 examines Sohu's 2012 retranslation, produced under relatively permissive conditions yet already displaying fan-oriented features. Section 8.4 turns to Netflix's version (c. 2015), which reflects global corporate subtitling norms rather than mainland Chinese state regulation. Section 8.5 analyses Bilibili's 2022 version, produced under heightened censorship and met with strong audience criticism, as evidenced in *danmu*, a type of on-screen comments characteristic of platforms such as Bilibili. The chapter concludes with a diachronic comparison, showing how commercial subtitling in the TC has been progressively shaped by, and responsive to, evolving regulatory frameworks and institutional pressures from the top down, but also by audience expectations and participatory practices made visible in digital spaces from the grassroots.

It is worth noting that this chapter is also the only case study in the thesis that incorporates an analysis of *danmu*. This is a deliberate methodological choice rather than an omission. Among the three case studies in Chapter 6, 7, and 8, *Friends* occupies a distinctive position: it has circulated in mainland China for over two decades, exists in multiple fan-produced and commercial subtitle versions, and enjoys a particularly high level of audience familiarity and cultural literacy. These conditions create a viewing environment in which audiences are both able and motivated to comment explicitly on translation choices, censorship, and perceived shifts in meaning (which will be discussed further in Section 8.5). Moreover, Bilibili's unique *danmu* affordance makes such reception visible in a way that is not available for the earlier fan-based cases such as the ones examined in Chapters 6 and 7. As a result, *Friends* offers a uniquely suitable site for examining audience reception alongside diachronic commercial re-subtitling, without extending this dimension to cases where comparable reception data are not consistently available.

8.1.1 The One with Three Commercial Retranslations

Although Friends was never introduced into mainland China through official channels during its original run, its strong reception, primarily facilitated by F6's voluntary fansubs, eventually attracted the attention of official distributors. Over the past two decades, this led to multiple licensed releases across commercial streaming platforms. Among these, three stand out as representative of their respective eras: Sohu (2012), Netflix (c. 2015), and Bilibili (2022). Each platform provided Simplified Chinese subtitles that may be regarded as active retranslations of the initial F6 fansubs, albeit to varying degrees. Some involved only minimal revisions to align with platform guidelines (particularly Netflix, discussed further in Section 8.4), while others were extensively reshaped by censorship and institutional requirements (as with Bilibili, see Section 8.5).

Despite all three being commercial retranslations, audience reception varied substantially. These differences were shaped not only by subtitling strategies but also by sociocultural, regulatory, and institutional conditions that defined subtitling practices in the TC region.

Sohu and Bilibili, two of the largest mainland streaming platforms, acquired the rights to stream all ten seasons of *Friends* in 2012 and 2022, respectively. Their acquisitions took place under very different regulatory environments with increasing scrutiny applied to foreign media in mainland China. Regulations governing imported television significantly influenced both the

accessibility and localisation of *Friends*, often requiring modifications to ensure compliance with censorship guidelines and cultural policies.

By contrast, Netflix, a U.S.-based streaming service, secured the rights to stream *Friends* in the U.S. beginning 1 January 2015 (D'Addario, 2014). Although there is no official record of when Simplified Chinese subtitles were introduced, it is likely they were added in 2015 or 2016, in conjunction with the platform's expansion into international markets, including the launch of a Simplified Chinese-language service in Singapore in January 2016[1]. Unlike Sohu and Bilibili, Netflix's version was shaped not so much by state-imposed regulation but rather commercial licensing agreements and corporate subtitling policies. As will be shown in Section 8.4, Netflix's subtitles broadly align with the patterns identified in the previous chapter, which examined the platform's initial subtitling practices alongside synchronous fan retranslations (see Chapter 7).

Viewed diachronically, the three commercial versions of *Friends* provide a comparative lens for examining how commercial re-subtitling has been shaped. While the primary focus of this chapter remains on Sohu (2012) and Bilibili (2022), as both were subject to state regulation but under different conditions, Netflix's version offers a supplementary perspective, illustrating how platform-specific policies and global norms influence translation practices outside a state-imposed regulatory framework.

8.1.2 The influence of evolving state regulations on audience reception

Sohu's acquisition of *Friends* in 2012 took place during a formative stage in mainland China's streaming industry, when foreign audiovisual content was subject to relatively limited oversight. As one of the first platforms to introduce Western television to mainland Chinese audiences, Sohu capitalised on the show's enduring popularity and on the loyal fanbase cultivated by F6 fansubs ever since the early 2000s.

By contrast, Bilibili's acquisition of *Friends* in 2022 occurred within a much more restrictive regulatory landscape. Since 2014, the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) has introduced increasingly stringent controls on imported programming, including mandatory permits, quotas, and ideological scrutiny. NRTA's September 2014 directive requiring pre-approval for all foreign shows (Luo and Su, 2014), which effectively ended simultaneous release with overseas markets. Further restrictions followed in 2018, when the NRTA imposed a 30% ceiling on foreign content in the daily schedules of streaming platforms (Alderson, 2018). Within

[1] Available at: https://www.tnp.sg/news/singapore/what-you-need-know-about-netflixs-singapore-launch (Accessed 3 February 2025).

this tightened environment, Bilibili's ability to broadcast *Friends* in 2022 underscored its market position but also demonstrated its capacity for regulatory compliance.

Such compliance, however, came at the expense of textual integrity. Bilibili's 2022 version was heavily modified to conform to censorship standards, with the removal or alteration of LGBTQ+ references, sexually suggestive dialogue, and politically sensitive jokes (Wang, 2022). These interventions went beyond isolated edits, at times excising entire scenes, thereby disrupting character development and narrative coherence. The effects were particularly visible to long-time fans who had previously engaged with uncensored versions of the series. For this audience, the cuts were not only conspicuous but also perceived as disrespectful both to the integrity of the source material and to marginalised communities whose representation was erased.

Censorship also extended to interlingual translation. Jokes involving innuendo or taboo topics were frequently paraphrased or replaced with euphemisms in the Simplified Chinese subtitles, creating dissonance with the unaltered English audio track. The problem was further magnified by the widespread TC convention of bilingual subtitling (see Section 5.4). Because English captions appeared directly beneath the censored Chinese subtitles, discrepancies were immediately evident. For viewers with even modest English proficiency, these mismatches increased cognitive load and drew attention to the very interventions they were intended to conceal. As a result, the flow of the programme was repeatedly disrupted, undermining the overall viewing experience for both first-time audiences and returning fans.

This negative reception of Bilibili's release was intensified by direct comparison with Sohu's earlier version. Before 2012, *Friends*, like most Anglophone television, had never been commercially subtitled in mainland China. Grassroots fansubbing groups such as F6 had been central in introducing the series to mainland Chinese audiences, operating outside state channels and offering uncensored access. At a time when imported foreign programmes were scarce and often dubbed under the supervision of state bodies such as the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), these fansubs were widely regarded as more authentic, faithful, and audience-oriented than commercial alternatives. This history cultivated a deep scepticism toward institutional subtitles, often associated with state and corporate interference.

Against this backdrop, Sohu's 2012 version was surprisingly well received, even among viewers loyal to fansubs. Several factors explain this reception. First, Sohu benefitted from operating in a comparatively permissive regulatory moment, enabling the release of uncut

content. Second, the platform adopted subtitling practices resonant with grassroots conventions, including the use of glosses, an uncommon feature in commercial subtitling at the time, and the creation of a dedicated online portal that fostered a sense of fan community (see more in Section 8.3). Most notably, Sohu offered audiences the extended cut of *Friends*, material unavailable even on U.S. streaming services or broadcast networks. These strategies positioned Sohu not simply as a distributor but as a mediator between grassroots and institutional practices, bridging sceptical fans and commercial audiences.

Bilibili's censored version, by contrast, was widely viewed as a regressive step. Its extensive cuts clashed with the expectations formed by both fansubs and Sohu's precedent, fuelling disappointment among audiences who had waited years for the series to return legally after its removal from Sohu in 2013 and again in 2018 due to copyright expiration (Yao, 2019). Whereas Sohu had demonstrated that *Friends* could be made available in full a decade ago, Bilibili's approach epitomised the constraints of contemporary state regulation. Further evidence of audience frustration is presented in Section 8.5 through a brief corpus linguistic analysis of *danmu* comments posted on Bilibili alongside the series.

In short, the divergent receptions of Sohu's and Bilibili's retranslations illustrate how shifts in state regulation have directly influenced both subtitling practices and audience response. While Sohu leveraged a relatively flexible regulatory environment to align commercial subtitling with fan expectations, Bilibili's heavily censored version highlighted the intensifying reach of state intervention. These diachronic contrasts underscore how evolving frameworks of patronage have determined both the availability of the final product and the prevailing norms of subtitling orientation and intervention in mainland Chinese context, as explored in the following sections.

8.1.3 Overall Strategies across Three Retranslations

Table 8.1 presents the frequencies and proportions of different strategies used for CRs across the four versions of *Friends* Season One (1994). Out of a total of 318 instances, all were subtitled, with the sole exception of Bilibili's 2022 version, which contains 317, one fewer due to the omission of a censored scene. The missing scene, in which the main characters attempt to set fire to someone's belongings as part of a ritual, may have been removed to comply with SAPPRFT's 2014 regulations against content that "propagates cults and superstition" (Wang and Zhang, 2017, p. 304). Alternatively, the deletion may reflect concerns about depictions of arson, which, in the absence of an official rating system in mainland China (Grealy *et al.*, 2019), could be deemed unsuitable for minors.

Table 8.1 Overall strategy distribution across four versions of Friends

Strategies	F6		SOHU		NETFLIX		BILIBILI	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Complete Retention	9	2.83%	1	0.31%	1	0.31%	0	0.00%
Transliteration	37	11.64%	21	6.60%	29	9.12%	17	5.36%
Direct Translation	85	26.73%	53	16.67%	79	24.84%	50	15.77%
Specification	22	6.92%	38	12.26%	43	13.84%	37	11.99%
Generalisation	66	20.75%	59	18.55%	63	19.81%	67	21.14%
Substitution	12	3.77%	14	4.40%	15	4.72%	12	3.79%
Omission	22	6.92%	1	0.31%	1	0.31%	2	0.63%
Official Equivalent	54	16.98%	66	20.44%	85	26.42%	71	22.08%
Gloss	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
+ in-text gloss	11	3.46%	30	9.43%	0	0.00%	27	8.52%
+ gloss	0	0.00%	35	11.01%	2	0.63%	34	10.73%
Total	318	100.00%	318	100.00%	318	100.00%	317	100.00%

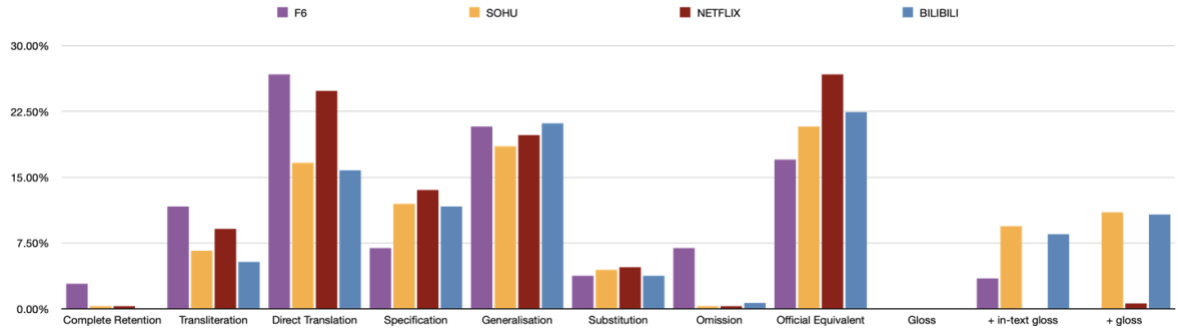

Figure 8.1 Overall strategy distribution across four versions in barcharts

Figure 8.1 illustrates these distributions in bar chart form. Each set of bars (from left to right: F6, Sohu, Netflix, Bilibili) shows how the relative proportions of subtitling strategies vary across versions. The chart makes clear that strategies such as Complete Retention and Omission are much more common in the initial fansubs but largely disappear in the commercial retranslations. Similarly, the use of Transliteration and Direct Translation declines over time, with the exception of Netflix, where both remain comparatively frequent.

Some strategies, notably Generalisation and Substitution, remain relatively stable across versions. Others, particularly Specification and Official Equivalent, are consistently more prominent in the commercial retranslations, reflecting broader shifts in industry norms within the TC. The general upward trend is interrupted only by Bilibili, which shows a slight decrease.

Finally, glossing strategies (+ in-text gloss and + gloss) become increasingly visible in mainland commercial subtitling, with the exception of Netflix's global version. This finding is consistent with Chapter 7 and with Netflix's own prescriptive subtitling guidelines (TTSGs, see Section 2.2.3.3), which explicitly discourage more free-formed practices such as glossing. The following

sections analyse each version in detail, with particular attention to orientation and intervention normative variation.

8.2 The Initial Subtitle: F6's Fansub in 2005

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 6, F6 was the first mainland Chinese online forum dedicated to Anglophone television and film, established in the early 2000s with the release of subtitles for *Friends*, from which the forum took its name (i.e., Friends Six, or F6). It quickly became a hub for both fansubbing and discussion, playing a pivotal role in shaping mainland Chinese audiences' early grassroots engagement with international television.

When *Friends* entered its final run with Seasons Nine (2002-2003) and Ten (2003-2004), F6 prioritised subtitling these episodes as they aired in the U.S., rather than immediately translating the earlier seasons. This approach allowed the group to provide mainland audiences with a timely, week-by-week viewing experience that closely paralleled that of American viewers. Once the series concluded, F6 gradually returned to subtitle the earlier seasons. Although the precise timeline is difficult to establish, the earliest available version of F6's Season One subtitles can be traced to April 2005, based on upload records on ASSRT.

This timeline directly informs the methodological choice to focus on Season One as a case study. First, the majority of the series was translated between 2003 and 2006, within a relatively short span, meaning that significant diachronic variation across seasons is unlikely. Second, all three subsequent commercial retranslations (i.e., Sohu, Netflix, and Bilibili) were all released as complete ten-season sets, suggesting that they too were commissioned in their entirety prior to release. Analysing one season therefore provides a representative and efficient sample without compromising validity.

Referring back to Table 8.1, F6's overall orientation and interventional tendencies are further broken down in Tables 8-2 and 8-3. As shown, F6's subtitles display a predominantly ST orientation, coupled with limited reliance on interventional strategies. This pattern is consistent with findings from Chapter 6 on early fansubs of *Doctor Who* (2005, 2008), reflecting a broader tendency in early 21st-century mainland Chinese fansubbing toward minimal intervention.

Table 8.2 F6's orientation tendency

Strategies	N	%	Tendency
Complete Retention	9	60.47%	ST-oriented
Transliteration	37		
Direct Translation	85		
Specification	22		

Generalisation	66		
Substitution	12	39.53%	TT-oriented
Omission	22		
Total	253	100%	

Direct Translation	85		
Official Equivalent	54		
Specification	22		
Generalisation	66		
Substitution	12	37.50%	Interventional
Gloss	0		
+ in-text gloss	11		
+ gloss	0		
Total	296	100%	

Table 8.3 F6's interventional tendency

Strategies	**N**	%	**Tendency**
Complete Retention	9	62.50%	Minimal Changes
Transliteration	37		

The following sections identify and discuss several idiosyncrasies of the F6 fansub, emphasising its alignment with ST-orientation and minimal changes. These features are considered within the then cultural and societal context while also point to the limitations of fansubs in meeting wider audience needs, helping to explain the later demand for commercial retranslations such as Sohu's.

8.2.1 The Most Frequent Strategy: Direct Translation

Overall, Direct Translation emerges as the most frequently employed strategy in F6's version, accounting for 26.73% of all cases (see Table 8.1). As a highly ST-oriented and minimally interventional method, it represents one of the most straightforward approaches to subtitling, demanding little cognitive effort to "transfer connotations or guide the TT audience in any way" (Pedersen, 2011, p. 83).

	Example 8-1a, *Friends*, S01E03, CR Type: Ethnographic
Original Dialogue 1	I personally could have a **gallon** of Alan.
Subtitles (F6)	我个人可以喝下一**加仑**的亚伦
Back Translation	I could personally drink a **gallon** of Alan.
Strategy	Direct Translation
	Example 8-1b, *Friends*, S01E09, CR Type: Ethnographic
Original Dialogue 2	Come on. An **80-foot** inflatable dog let loose over the city. How often does that happen?
Subtitles (F6)	来吧。 80 英尺长的充气狗在城市上空游荡。 这样的机会有多少？
Back Translation	Come on. **Eighty-foot**-long inflatable dogs roaming over the city. What are the chances of that?
Strategy	Direct Translation
	Example 8-1c, *Friends*, S01E15, CR Type: Ethnographic

Original Dialogue 3	How about Tony's? If you finish a **32-ounce** steak, it's free.
Subtitles (F6)	东尼餐厅如何? 吃下 **32 盎斯**的牛排就免费
Back Translation	How about Tony restaurant? Finish eating **32 ounces** of steak, it's free.
Strategy	Direct Translation

For example, in Examples 8-1a, 8-1b & 8-1c, conventional non-mainland Chinese units of measurement (i.e., gallon, foot, ounce) were rendered exactly as in the source material, without substitution or any mediation. While this version of the subtitles dates back to the early 2000s, it aligns with findings from the previous chapter on subtitles from the early 2020s, where fansubs similarly favoured preserving CRs in their original form (see Example 7-5b, Section 7.4.2). This longstanding trend underscores the fansubbing ethos of retaining foreign elements while remaining accessible to domestic audiences (see Chapter 6).

Example 8-2a, *Friends*, S01E08, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue	Me and the gang at **Java Joe's**.
Subtitles (F6)	我和大伙儿摄于在**爪哇乔家**
Back Translation	Me and the guys photographed at **Java Joe's place**.
Strategy	Direct Translation

Despite F6's intent to remain straightforward and ST-oriented through direct translations, this strategy sometimes resulted in CRs being inadequately, or even inaccurately, rendered in the TT. Example 8-2a illustrates this issue.

According to the IMDb page for this specific episode, the CR "Java Joe's" is as a precursor to "Central Perk", the café where the main characters regularly meet. And in this episode, a character simply mentioned the café by this earlier name. F6's literal rendering is faithful to the ST at a lexical level but fails to signal the intended referent of a coffeehouse. In American English, "Java" is a well-established slang term for coffee, a usage rooted in Java Island's historical role as a major coffee producer. While this association would be more readily accessible to the ST audience, it is far less familiar to the mainland viewers, leaving the directly translated TT semantically hollow.

In consequence, F6's translation provides neither the intertextual cue within the series (that "Java Joe's" was the precursor to "Central Perk") nor the broader cultural association with coffee. Although this example may be dismissed as relatively minor, since proper names often invite

ambiguity, the next case, Example 8-2b, illustrates a more significant instance in which Direct Translation produces outright mistranslation rather than mere vagueness.

In this case, the CR "Pennsylvanian Dutch" poses a particular challenge. Although both components, i.e., "Pennsylvanian" and "Dutch", are individually straightforward to translate, F6's literal rendering as "a Dutch in Pennsylvania" misrepresents the term's actual meaning. In reality, "Pennsylvanian Dutch" refers not to Dutch nationals but to the descendants of early German-speaking immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania before 1800 (Bronner and Brown, 2017).

Example 8-2b, *Friends*, S01E21, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue	- Hi, I'm Mon...Nana. - Monana. - It's **Dutch**. - You're kidding. I spent three years in Amsterdam. [character started to speak Dutch] **- Pennsylvania Dutch**.
Subtitles (F6)	- 我叫摩娜娜 - 摩娜娜 - 对，是**荷兰人的名字** **-** 你在开玩笑吧 我在阿姆斯特丹住了三年 - 我是**宾州的荷兰人**
Back Translation	- My name is Monana. - Monana. - Yeah, it's **a Dutch name**. - You're kidding. I lived in Amsterdam for three years. - I'm **a Dutch in Pennsylvania**.
Strategy	Direct Translation

The humour of the scene depends entirely on this ethnographic nuance. The character, having invented a false identity, is exposed when the person she is deceiving, who had "spent three years in Amsterdam", begins speaking Dutch. To cover her lie, she improvises by claiming to be Pennsylvanian Dutch. The joke works precisely because Pennsylvanian Dutch communities are known not to speak Dutch, rendering her explanation both clumsy and absurd.

In this case, Direct Translation does more than distort the cultural and ethnographic significance of the CR. It also generates misinformation in the TT and undermines the scene's humour. By missing the cultural specificity of the CR, the subtitles strip the exchange of its intended irony, depriving the TT audience of the comedic effect accessible to the ST audience.

Similar issues appear in Examples 8-2c and 8-2d, where "Chunky" and "The New School" are rendered literally. Both function as CRs familiar to the American SC audience, serving as punchlines accompanied by canned laughter even without visual cues. Their comedic impact

relies on cultural recognition. “Chunky”, a Nestlé candy bar[1] produced in New York, is a widely recognised product; whereas “The New School”, an educational institution in New York City[2], is more infracultural, likely familiar to local or academic circles rather than the general public. Within the show’s New York setting, both references resonate with a domestic audience, but their recognition diminishes outside that context, especially for international audiences.

Example 8-2c, *Friends*, S01E23, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 1	I was looking at stuffed animals, and Susan wanted a **Chunky**.
Subtitles (F6)	我想买填充玩具苏珊想买**“矮胖”**
Back Translation	I wanted to buy stuff toy and Susan wanted to buy **“short and fat”**.
Strategy	Direct Translation
Example 8-2d, *Friends*, S01E21, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 2	- Do I take classes at **the New School**? - No.
Subtitles (F6)	- 我在**新学校**上过课吗? - 没有
Back Translation	- Have I taken lessons in **a new school**? - No.
Strategy	Direct Translation

The literal translations, i.e., “short and fat” for “Chunky” and “a new school” for “The New School”, reduce these CRs to surface-level definitions that obscure their intended meanings. Although quotation marks around “Chunky” mark it as a proper noun, this typographic signal alone does not supply sufficient context, resulting in partial loss of meaning. Similarly, “The New School” is stripped of its specificity as a cultural marker, comparable to the earlier case of “Pennsylvanian Dutch”, where lexical accuracy came at the expense of cultural relevance.

Such examples demonstrate a recurring pattern in F6’s subtitles: Direct Translation applied without sufficient bicultural consideration. This tendency can be partly attributed to the TC audience’s more limited exposure to American references back in 2005, when these fansubs were produced. Since then, however, socio-cultural shifts, such as the nationwide expansion of English education (see Chapter 3), have raised audience expectations and cultural awareness.

[1] Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20180327161700/https://www.nestleusa.com/brands/chocolate/chunky (Accessed 11 February 2025).
[2] Available at: https://www.newschool.edu/ (Accessed 7 March 2025).

These shifts render the F6 version a typical case of an "aged" translation, where evolving SC-TC dynamics and shifting audience competencies create a demand for retranslations.

In sum, while Direct Translation is ST-oriented and preserves the foreignness of the original text, it risks generating ambiguity or outright errors when cultural context is overlooked. This was a common limitation of early fansubbing practices that often led to partial misinterpretation or humour loss. As TA familiarity with the SC has increased, later commercial retranslations have attempted to correct such shortcomings through more contextually sensitive strategies (see Section 8.3).

8.2.2 "Minimax" Strategies: the exclusive usage of Complete Retention and Omission

As mentioned earlier, there are two types of strategies, i.e., Complete Retention and Omission, that are almost exclusively employed in F6's fansub and rarely used in any of the retranslations (see Table 8.2). Interestingly, these two strategies represent opposite ends of the orientation normative spectrum: Complete Retention, among the most ST-oriented approaches, preserves the original CR in its entirety; while Omission, one of the most TT-oriented, removes the CR altogether to prevent potential comprehension issues for the TA. As Pedersen (2011, p. 96) notes, when used responsibly, Omission effectively "stops a problematic foreign item from entering the TT in any form at all", and this strategy is fairly common in the subtitling practice where spatial and temporal constraints often necessitate selective omission to maintain readability and coherence for the TA.

Example 8-3a, *Friends*, S01E12, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 1	[Character looks into a photo] Hey, when did you and Susan meet **Huey Lewis**?
Subtitles (F6)	嗨,你和苏珊什么时候认识的 **Huey Lewis**?
Back Translation	Hey, when did you and Susan meet **Huey Lewis**?
Strategy	Complete Retention
Example 8-3b, *Friends*, S01E15, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 2	Sorry, that's, that's **'pathet',** which is Sanskrit for 'really cool way to live'.
Subtitles (F6)	抱歉，是 **pathet** 在梵语中代表很酷的生活方式
Back Translation	Sorry, it's **pathet.** It's Sanskrit for cool lifestyle.
Strategy	Complete Retention

In the two examples above (Example 8-3a and 8-3b), Complete Retention is applied to two different kinds of CRs: American singer and actor “Huey Lewis”, and a foreign term from a third culture, “pathet”. However, the effectiveness of this strategy differs in each case due to the way these references function within the dialogue and how they are delivered.

In the case of Huey Lewis, the referent itself serves a comedic purpose, as the main character mistakenly identifies a female in the photograph as a male, i.e., Huey Lewis. The humour relies on the audience recognising the referent’s appearance or at least their gender. However, F6’s decision to retain the CR without additional context, although very ST-oriented, may result in a loss of meaning for its TA, who may not be familiar with the singer and thus miss the intended reference and potentially reduce the impact of the line.

In contrast, the Sanskrit term “pathet”, which loosely translates to “a cool way to live”, does not demand the same level of external knowledge. Within the dialogue, the character immediately explains the term, using it as a display of intellectual superiority. Here, the humour arises from the character’s often pretentious use of obscure vocabulary, so even if the TA does not grasp the word fully, the ambiguity itself reinforces the comic effect. In this case, retention as a strategy is actually quite effective.

While Complete Retention adheres closely to the ST, F6 also made frequent use of Omission, primarily to enhance TT readability, as illustrated in Examples 8-4a to 8-4d.

Example 8-4a, *Friends*, S01E08, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 1	Nothing, just your overcoat sounds remarkably like **Brent Mussberger**.
Subtitles (F6)	没什么，你的外套很吵
Back Translation	Nothing. Your coat is noisy.
Strategy	Omission
Example 8-4b, *Friends*, S01E05, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 2	I just couldn't stop laughing at your **Norman Mailer** story.
Subtitles (F6)	你的故事让我笑得嘴巴合不拢
Back Translation	I couldn’t stop laughing at your story.
Strategy	Omission
Example 8-4c, *Friends*, S01E16, CR Type: Intertextual	
Original Dialogue 4	When I was 8, and I wouldn’t let her have my **Judy Jetson** thermos,
Subtitles (F6)	我 8 岁时我不给她我的热水壶

Back Translation	When I was 8 I didn't give her my thermos
Strategy	Omission
	Example 8-4d, *Friends*, S01E03, CR Type: Ethnographic
Original Dialogue 3	Hey, Pheebs, you gonna have the rest of that **Pop Tart**?
Subtitles (F6)	菲此，你还想吃那个吗？
Back Translation	Pheebs, you still want to eat that?
Strategy	Omission

The reference to Brent Mussberger (in Example 8-4a), an American sports broadcaster, occurs during a scene where one of the characters, at a funeral, tries to discreetly listen to a football game while maintaining an appearance of respect. He hides the radio in his coat to avoid being noticed but is eventually caught when the volume becomes too loud. F6 omitted the reference to Mussberger entirely, likely because he might not be considered widely recognisable to the TA at the time. Instead, the subtitles use a more general description by referring to the coat as "noisy". This approach shifts the focus from a specific reference to a broader comedic situation, thereby making the humour more accessible to the TA. However, while the joke is partially retained through its absurdity, the omission also strips away the cultural specificity of the original reference, ultimately compromising the authenticity of the viewing experience compared to that of the SC audience.

Similar omissions occur in Examples 8-4b and 8-4c, where references to "your Norman Mailer story" and "my Judy Jetson thermos" are simplified into "your story" and "my thermos". These changes preserve sentence structure but at the expense of intertextual depth. Such omissions may reflect F6's assumption that these CRs would be unfamiliar to the TA, but they may also point to the subtitlers' own limited familiarity with American literary or pop culture. Evidence from Section 8.2.3, where F6 sometimes used glosses to explain CRs, suggests that these omissions were not always systematic strategies but sometimes ad hoc responses to gaps in knowledge.

In comparison, Example 8-4d can be seen as a more justifiable instance of intentional omission. The CR "Pop Tart" is visually represented on screen, so reducing simply to "that" does not necessarily hinder comprehension. Although "Pop Tart" is a well-known brand in the U.S., F6 may not have considered it culturally significant or recognisable enough for the TA. In this context, Omission arguably makes the line more accessible, as otherwise a literal rendering or other more interventional approach might end up disrupting the flow of the scene, by drawing unnecessary attention to a referent already clarified visually.

The incorporation of both Complete Retention and Omission in F6's fansub also suggests that the group was not strictly guided by an ST-/TT-orientation dichotomy. Rather, they appear to have relied on what Levý (1969, see Section 4.3.1) terms minimax strategies, i.e., solutions that aim for a passable translation with minimal effort and intervention. Complete Retention can be seen as one of the least-interventionist approaches, preserving the CR in its original form without modification. Omission, though categorised in this study as falling outside the minimal-change/intervention continuum (see Section 4.4), could nonetheless be seen in this minmax sense, as in the CR is removed entirely, with no attempt to modify or replace it. In both cases, the subtitles avoid engaging directly with the CR. The choice to employ such strategies likely reflects the relatively low level of foreign cultural literacy in the TC at the time, much like the frequent reliance on Direct Translation discussed earlier. Both subtitlers and audiences appear to have accepted a lower threshold for what counted as *adequate* subtitling.

This pragmatic yet inconsistent use of strategies is characteristic of F6's subtitles, which, as the only available version at the time, faced no immediate competition. With little pressure to refine their work or adopt more systematic approaches, minimax solutions were sufficient. As cultural literacy and English education expanded, and as fansubbing communities proliferated, the landscape, and with later commercial subtitling, became increasingly competitive. Once multiple versions were available, audiences began to compare them more critically, which pushed both fansubbers and later professionals to correct earlier mistranslations and adopt more sophisticated strategies.

8.2.3 Other Early Fansubbing Features: In-text glosses only and outdated Official Equivalents

Alongside F6's preference for less interventional strategies and its reliance on minimax solutions, two further traits stand out as characteristic of early 2000s fansubbing: the exclusive use of in-text glosses and the persistence of outdated Official Equivalents. Both features highlight how early fansubs balanced their commitment to informing audiences with the technical and cultural constraints of the time.

The Exclusive Use of In-text Gloss

Despite a general tendency toward minimal intervention, with 62.5% of F6's strategies fall into minimal-change approaches (see Table 8.3), its subtitles did at times employ more interventional strategies, such as glossing. Glossing is a defining feature of fansubbing practice, reflecting both a desire to inform and a commitment to include the audience. As discussed in Chapter 6, this practice responds to a strong epistemophilia among fan communities, rooted in

the wish to preserve and share cultural and linguistic nuance rather than settling for a surface-level, passable translation.

Yet, when F6 incorporated glosses, they were always confined to the subtitle line itself, i.e. in-text glosses, rather than more dynamic forms such as standalone or repositioned glosses that became common in later fansubbing practices. This pattern aligns with the findings in Chapter 6 (see Table 6.15), where other mid-2000s fansubs also relied entirely on in-text glosses. In this sense, in-text glossing can be regarded as a defining feature of early fansubbing in the TC context.

This tendency can also be largely attributed to technical constraints, as the subtitling tools available at the time offered only basic formatting and positioning options. Within these limitations, in-text glosses were the most practical way to provide explanatory details while still meeting fansubbers' informative agenda.

Example 8-5, *Friends*, S01E10, CR Type: Intertextual	
Original Dialogue 1	The fifth dentist caved, and now they're all recommending Trident?
Subtitles (F6)	第五个牙医也终于屈服了？ 他们现在都推荐 Trident 香口胶了？ **（香口胶广告：4/5 的牙医推荐 Trident）**
Back Translation	And the fifth dentist has finally caved in? They now all recommend Trident gum? **(Chewing gum advertisement: 4/5 dentists recommend Trident)**
Strategy	Complete Retention + Specification + in-text gloss

This practice is illustrated in Example 8-5 (above). The line "the fifth dentist caved, and now they're all recommending Trident" alludes to the slogan "4 out of 5 dentists recommend Trident" from a popular chewing gum commercial. Since this intertextual CR likely fell outside the TA's encyclopaedic knowledge, F6 added clarification, specifying that Trident is a chewing gum and appending a bracketed gloss. The brackets distinguish the gloss from the dialogue while also signalling that this line references an advertisement. Without this extra context, the "fifth dentist" remark might otherwise appear random to the TA.

As subtitling technology advanced over time, greater access to more sophisticated software has allowed later generations of subtitlers, including both fansubbers and, at times, commercial subtitlers, to position glosses more dynamically. These glosses can now appear in separate lines, placed elsewhere on the screen, or seamlessly integrated into the frame itself (see Chapter 7). These advancements in subtitling practices have improved readability and preserved the visual integrity of the original media, ensuring a more refined and viewer-friendly presentation.

Outdated Official Equivalents

One advantage of diachronic research on norms is its ability to trace how subtitling practices evolve across different periods. In this case, retranslations also reveal variation between patronages as well as reflect broader shifts in subtitling conventions over time. A particularly clear marker of such shifts is the iteration of Official Equivalents, most evident in the translation of film titles.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, during the early reform period, mainland China's dubbing and subtitling infrastructure was limited and still developing. As a result, mainland distributors often relied on the established translation practices from Taiwan and Hong Kong, both of which had a head start in foreign film translation (Yu, 1993). Consequently, many films circulated in the mainland were initially under Taiwanese or Hong Kong titles, which functioned as de facto official equivalents at the time.

When restrictions on foreign imports later eased, films began to receive new official titles sanctioned by mainland authorities. This created a transitional phase, in which earlier equivalents, already familiar to the mainland audiences, gradually gave way to updated mainland versions. F6's subtitles, produced in 2005, reflect this moment of overlap, as seen in Examples 8-6a and 8-6b.

	Example 8-6a, *Friends,* S01E19, CR Type: Intertextual	
Original Dialogue 1	This is me in **The Sound of Music**.	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
	这是演**"真善美"**的我	这是我参演**《音乐之声》**
Back Translation	This is me playing in **"Truth, Goodness and Beauty"**	This is me playing in **Sound of Music**
Strategy	Official Equivalent	Official Equivalent
	Example 8-6b, *Friends*, S01E21, CR Type: Intertextual	
Original Dialogue 2	Did you ever see **Dead Poets Society**?	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
	看过**春风化雨**吗?	你看过**《死亡诗社》**吗
Back Translation	Have you seen **Spring Wind and Rain**?	Have you seen **Dead Poets Club**?
Strategy	Official Equivalent	Official Equivalent

Illustrated above, both "Truth, Goodness, and Beauty" (Chinese: 真善美, for The Sound of Music) and "Spring Wind and Rain" (Chinese: 春风化雨, for Dead Poet Society), used in F6's subtitles, were the official Taiwanese titles of these films, rooted in established Chinese idioms. The former conveys moral values directly, while the latter metaphorically praises teachers

through the image of spring wind and nourishing rain. Such poetic renderings exemplify a common practice in Taiwan, where translated film titles often offered audiences a thematic preview.

By contrast, later mainland Official Equivalents (such as Sohu's), i.e., literally "sound of music" and "dead poets (or poem) club", adopt more literal approaches. Though less evocative, they align more closely with the ST, reflecting a tendency consistent with the *Retranslation Hypothesis*.

This diachronic shift, from Taiwanese idiomatic titles to updated mainland equivalents, illustrates both changing translation conventions and evolving audience expectations as mainland China has developed (and still been developing) its own subtitling infrastructure. It further exemplifies the broader transition in Simplified Chinese subtitling as Taiwan and Hong Kong gradually ceded their earlier influence on mainland authorities.

8.3 The First Retranslation: Sohu in 2012

8.3.1 Introduction

From the early 2010s, several mainland streaming platforms, which had previously focused on domestic content, began acquiring licenses for Anglophone series, especially American ones. This move, supported by major investments in licensing (Sun, 2014), reflected both the established demand fostered by fansubs since the early 2000s and a gradual turn away from piracy. Among these platforms, Sohu stood out. It not only imported a wide range of American series but also created a dedicated catalogue under the fan-coined term *meiju* (Chinese: 美剧, literally, American dramas), thereby attracting and legitimising audiences who had long engaged with foreign television through unofficial channels.

In 2012, Sohu became the first platform to legally stream *Friends* in mainland China, a milestone for viewers accustomed to F6's fansubbed versions. Its release included subtitles prepared for the extended cut of the series, an unusual choice, since most international distributors used the original NBC broadcast length, with extended editions typically limited to DVDs[1]. By offering this rarer version, Sohu positioned itself as fan-oriented in a way that even Netflix U.S. later did not.

Beyond episode length, Sohu also integrated fandom-oriented features into its platform, including interactive elements such as fan surveys, a "*Friends* loyalty test", and dedicated

[1] Available at: https://www.looper.com/1399346/friends-why-two-versions-sitcom-syndicated-unedited-dvd/ (Accessed 20 February 2025).

sections like "*What Friends Has Taught Us*" and "*Friends in China*" on the series' official streaming page[1]. Additionally, Sohu also encouraged viewer engagement via Sina Weibo (a mainland Chinese equivalent for Twitter, or X) hashtags. These initiatives brought fandom-driven practices into an officially sanctioned space, bridging grassroots participation with commercial distribution.

From providing the extended cuts to including fandom-friendly features, these strategies both marked a turning point for *Friends* in mainland China and reflected the broader cultural climate of the early 2010s, when foreign, particularly Anglophone, media was entering mainstream circulation under relatively lenient state regulation. By acknowledging the existing fan culture and incorporating its practices, Sohu set a precedent for later commercial subtitling, mirroring in many ways the evolutionary trajectory observed in later fansubbing practice discussed in the previous two chapters.

8.3.2 Norm Variations

In line with the broader cultural trend toward global media consumption in the TC, this shift is also reflected in Sohu's subtitling strategies. As shown in Tables 8-4 and 8-5, while the overall orientation between F6's fansubs and Sohu's retranslation differs only marginally (Sohu being just 0.17% more ST-oriented), the latter shows a marked increase in intervention, with an 18.34% rise in interventional strategies compared to its predecessor.

Table 8.4 Sohu's orientation tendency compared with F6's

Strategy	F6		SOHU		Tendency
	N	%	N	%	
Complete Retention	9	60.47%	1	60.64%	ST-oriented
Transliteration	37		21		
Direct Translation	85		53		
Specification	22		38		
Generalisation	66	39.53%	59	39.36%	TT-oriented
Substitution	12		14		
Omission	22		1		
Total	253	100%	187	100%	

This pattern suggests a deliberate effort by Sohu to correct potential mistranslations in F6's version through more interventionist choices, most notably the increased use of glosses. The significance of this shift lies both in the sheer frequency of glossing and in the fact that this was

[1] Available at: https://tv.sohu.com/s2012/friends/ (Accessed 20 February 2025).

the first-time commercial subtitles in the TC openly adopted a technique previously associated with fansubbing. Through traditionally regarded as less professional within commercial AVT, glossing here signals a more audience-sensitive approach.

Table 8.5 Sohu's interventional tendency compared with F6's

Strategy	F6		SOHU		Tendency
	N	%	N	%	
Complete Retention	9	62.50%	1	44.16%	Minimal Changes
Transliteration	37		21		
Direct Translation	85		53		
Official Equivalent	54		66		
Specification	22	37.50%	38	55.84%	Interventional
Generalisation	66		59		
Substitution	12		14		
Gloss	0		0		
+ in-text gloss	11		30		
+ gloss	0		35		
Total	296	100%	317	100%	

Sohu's subtitles for *Friends* thus demonstrate a hybrid orientation, which are fan-friendly in their willingness to supplement context through glosses, yet also professional in their systematic effort to restore previously omitted CRs and avoid mistranslations. These strategies were not simply about improving readability, but about preserving the cultural essence of the ST for audiences who were becoming increasingly familiar with Western media. This approach reflects both growing accessibility to foreign cultural content and shifting expectations among a more engaged and media-literate TA.

The following section examines these interventional strategies in greater detail, highlighting how Sohu's subtitles correct earlier errors, provide additional context for CRs, and strategically deploy glosses to enhance comprehension while retaining the original's cultural resonance.

8.3.3 Increased Implementation of Interventional Strategies

Improving Accuracy: Correcting Earlier Mistranslations

In response to the limitations of Direct Translation as a subtitling strategy in the initial F6 fansubs as discussed in Section 8.2.1, Sohu's commercial subtitles in 2012, not even a decade later, demonstrate a more adept ability to accurately render the source material. This improvement can likely be attributed to the involvement of more professionals in contrast to their fansubbing predecessors, who were entirely unpaid and worked voluntarily in an era with relatively lower SC literacy and less cultural familiarity.

At the same time, the continuity of certain strategies, most notably glossing, also raises the possibility of personnel transfer between the two domains (see Chapter 7). Some fansubbers may have moved into professional subtitling and carried their practices with them, blurring the boundary between amateur and institutional norms. While direct evidence of such migration is limited (and not the focus of this research), the overlap suggests that fan-driven techniques not only influenced commercial subtitling from the outside but may also have been internalised through the movement of practitioners themselves.

Example 8-7a, *Friends*, S01E21, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 1	**Pennsylvanian Dutch.**	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
	我是**宾州的荷兰人**	我是**德裔宾夕法尼亚州人**
Back Translation	I'm **a Dutch in Pennsylvania**.	I'm **a Pennsylvanian of German descent**.
Strategy	Direct Translation	Generalisation
Example 8-7b, *Friends,* S01E23, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 2	I was looking at stuffed animals, and Susan wanted a **Chunky**.	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
Main Subtitle	我想买填充玩具苏珊想买**"矮胖"**	我想买个填充玩偶 苏珊想买**巧克力棒**
Gloss		**Chunky 是雀巢的一款内含坚果的巧克力棒**
Back Translation (Main subtitle)	I wanted to buy stuff toy and Susan wanted to buy **"short and fat"**.	I wanted to buy stuff toy. Susan wanted to buy **chocolate bar.**
(Gloss)	/	**Chunky is a Nestlé chocolate bar containing nuts.**
Strategy	Direct Translation	Generalisation + Gloss

In the same examples of "Pennsylvania Dutch" and "Chunky" discussed earlier, Sohu's retranslation (as seen in Example 8-7a and 8-7b above) manages to convey the correct meaning of the CRs through more interventional strategies, such as Generalisation and + gloss.

For instance, "Pennsylvanian Dutch" is clarified as "a Pennsylvanian of German descent", an intervention that sacrifices brevity but captures the ethnographic nuance and restores the humour built on the false equivalence with "Dutch". Similarly, Sohu's retranslation of "Chunky" attempts to improve F6's literal rendering, i.e., "short and fat". By generalising it to "a chocolate bar" in the main subtitle, while providing a more detailed gloss with additional, even trivial, context (such as the manufacturer "Nestlé", the product type "a chocolate bar", and its ingredients "nuts"), the referent is very clearly explained and described to the TA.

The division of strategies here is clear. The main subtitle ensures accessibility for general viewers, while the gloss caters to more engaged audiences seeking cultural depth. This

combined strategy mirrors later fansubbing practices (post-2015, see Chapter 6), which increasingly balanced inclusivity with epistemophilia. By adopting this fan-driven model, Sohu aimed to improve semantic accuracy as well as acknowledging fandom's appetite for contextual enrichment. Such choices set Sohu apart from subsequent platforms like Netflix and Bilibili (see Sections 8.4 and 8.5), which pursued very different subtitling priorities.

Enhancing Clarity: Providing Additional Glosses

As previously noted (see Section 8.2.3), early fansubs did employ glossing, but only in the form of in-text glosses (N=11), likely due to technical limitations at the time. By contrast, Sohu's commercial retranslation makes much heavier use of glosses (see Table 8.5): in-text glosses remain common (N=30), but there is also a notable rise in the "+ gloss" format (N=35), where explanations appear in separate lines. As argued in Chapter 6, this format allows for more information than in-text glosses, which are confined to the subtitle line and therefore tend to be concise.

For instance, in the same "noisy coat" example discussed in Section 8.2.2, F6 omits the CR "Brent Musburger" altogether. In contrast, Sohu's retranslation (see Example 8-8a below) retains the CR, consistent with the *Retranslation Hypothesis* by reverting to the ST through transliteration. Recognising, however, that the reference might still be unfamiliar to the TA, Sohu supplements it with an in-text gloss identifying Brent Musburger as a sports commentator. This balances fidelity with accessibility but differs from the more elaborate "+ gloss" format seen in the "Chunky" example, where added context is presented in separate lines. In-text glosses, by comparison, provide concise clarification, maintaining clarity without interrupting the flow of the subtitle.

Therefore, in-text glosses are most commonly employed to clarify straightforward references, such as job titles, brief descriptions, or instances of language variation. Examples 8-8b and 8-8c illustrate this well.

Example 8-8a, Friends, S01E21, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 1	Nothing, just your overcoat sounds remarkably like **Brent Mussberger**.	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
	没什么，你的外套很吵	没什么 你的外套听上去很像**布莱登·马斯伯格[体育解说员]**
Back Translation	Nothing. Your coat is noisy.	Nothing, your coat sounds like **Brent Mussberger [sports commentator].**
Strategy	Omission	Transliteration + in-text gloss
Example 8-8b, Friends, S01E21, CR Type: Ethnographic		

Original Dialogue 1	- Excuse me? - There's an open call for Cats. I'm thinking we go down there, sing "Memories".	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
	- 什么 - “猫”剧还有一个缺额 我想我们可以去唱**“回忆”**	-什么 -《猫》剧还有一个缺额 我想我们可以去唱**《回忆》[剧中名曲]**
Back Translation	- What? - There is still an open spot for the “Cats” musical. I think we can go sing **“Memories”**.	- What? - There is still an open spot for the “Cats” musical. I think we can go sing **“Memories” [famous song in the musical]**.
Strategy	Direct Translation	Direct Translation + in-text gloss
	Example 8-8c, Friends, S01E15, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 2	- Cappuccino. - **Grazie**	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
	卡布其诺	- 卡布其诺 - **谢谢[意大利语]**
Back Translation	Cappuccino.	- Cappuccino. - **Thank you [Italian].**
Strategy	Omission	Direct Translation + in-text gloss

In the first case, the CR “*Memories*”, a well-known number from *Cats*, was initially rendered literally in F6’s version, whereas the Sohu retranslation adds concise context, explicitly identifying it as a famous song from the musical for viewers who may not recognise the reference.

In the second case, F6 omits the line entirely when a character thanks the barista with a “Grazie” in Italian, likely for its brevity and the fact that gratitude is already visually conveyed. Sohu, by contrast, retains the line and adds an in-text gloss marking it as Italian. This strategy preserves the linguistic diversity of the scene while also signals Sohu’s commitment to faithfully rendering the source material well.

By ensuring that even subtle cultural and linguistic details are retained, Sohu demonstrates an approach reminiscent of fansubbing practice, which often prioritises the SC for the TA. At the same time, as a commercial platform, this strategy also enhances Sohu’s reputation by positioning it as both culturally attentive and responsive to audience expectations. Beyond in-text glosses, which by nature remain concise, Sohu’s frequent use of the “+ gloss” format in separate lines further demonstrates this commitment.

	Example 8-9a, *Friends*, S01E21, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue	- That's probably because of your **Amish** background. - What? - You're Pennsylvania Dutch, right? - **Right. Till I bought a blow dryer. Then I was shunned**.	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
(Main subtitle)	- 因为你有**阿米许**的血统 - 什么	- 那可能是因为你的**门诺教派**背景 - 什么

	- 你不是宾州荷兰人吗 - **对，直到我买了吹风机被逐出村里**	- 你不是德裔宾夕法尼亚州人吗 - **对 直到我买了吹风机 就被驱逐了**
(Gloss)	/	**门诺教派后人远离科技产品过着农业生活**
Back Translation (Main subtitle)	- Because you have Amish heritage. - What? - Aren't you a Dutch from Pennsylvania? - Yes, until I bought a hair dryer and was banished from the village.	- That's probably because of your Mennonite religion background. - What? - Aren't you a Pennsylvanian of German descent? - Yeah, until I bought a hair dryer and got banished.
(Gloss)	/	**Mennonites live an agrarian lifestyle away from technological products.**
Strategy	Direct Translation + Generalisation	Direct Translation + Official Equivalent + gloss

In Example 8-9a, returning to the "Pennsylvania Dutch" scene, the characters engage in a follow-up exchange. One character, who had earlier lied about being Pennsylvania Dutch, is confronted with a reference to her supposed "Amish background". Caught off guard, likely having forgotten her previous fabrication, she escalates the lie by claiming she was banished from her community for using a blow dryer, an exaggeration of stereotypes surrounding Amish and Mennonite rejection of modern technology. The humour in this scene thus relies heavily on the audience's understanding of the two ethnographic references (i.e., the Pennsylvania Dutch and Amish communities) and the relationship between them, particularly their distinct cultural practices.

While F6's subtitles remain largely ST-oriented, a certain level of cultural knowledge is essential to fully appreciate the comic effect. As such, the lack of explanation for these cultural references may lead to confusion or reduced comprehension for the TA. This likely explains why Sohu's retranslations include additional contextual information, by updating "Amish" to the Official Equivalent "Mennonite religion" and adding a gloss explaining their agrarian, technology-averse lifestyle. This additional gloss allows for a more detailed explanation compared to in-text glosses, offering the necessary cultural background for its TA.

A similar pattern is evident in Example 8-9b, where a character is called "Yoko", an allusion to Yoko Ono and her association with the breakup of the band *Beatles*. The initial subtitle specifies her full name, following TC convention, but leaves the allusion unexplained. Sohu's retranslation, however, supplements the reference with a gloss that makes the connection explicit. This ensures that the CR, as well as the underlying joke, remain accessible to the TA.

Example 8-9b, Friends, S01E10, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue	- Hi, Max. - **Yoko**.	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
	- 马克斯	- 麦克斯你好

	- 嗨，**小野洋子**	- **洋子** **小野洋子造成披头士成员不合**
Back Translation	- Max - Hi, **Yoko Ono**.	-Hi Max. - **Yoko.** **Yoko Ono caused the members of the Beatles to fall out.**
Strategy	Specification	Direct Translation + gloss

With a good number of examples, to conclude briefly, Sohu's use of glosses represents a notable shift in the TC commercial subtitling industry, directly drawing on fansubbing conventions. Whereas commercial platforms often favour simplification for the sake of broad accessibility (see Chapter 7), Sohu adopts a more inclusive strategy that mirrors fansubbing practices valuing cultural explanation and audience engagement.

Preserving Nuance: Restoring Omitted CRs

Beyond glossing, Sohu's retranslation also employs more interventional strategies, particularly Specification (see Table 8.4). This mediating approach clarifies references that in F6's fansubs were often retained unmediated, transliterated without explanation, or omitted altogether (see Section 8.2). By doing so, Sohu makes previously ambiguous CRs more comprehensible, bridging cultural gaps without relying solely on glosses. See the below three instances for example.

In Example 8-10a, the CR "Danielle Steel" refers to a possibly well-known American author among the SC audience, i.e., a monocultural reference, and is used in the original dialogue by a love-struck character to describe her romantic feelings. The initial F6 subtitle simply retains the name, assuming either recognition or inference from context. In contrast, Sohu's retranslation specifies Steel's association with the romance genre and explicitly links the character's emotions to the type of literature she is referencing to, i.e., romance. Without this clarification, the metaphorical weight of the reference and its role in reinforcing the character's sentiment may not be represented in full to the TA.

Example 8-10a, Friends, S01E12, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 1	I mean, I'm feeling things I've read about in **Danielle Steel books** you know?	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
	我现在的感觉只有在 **Danielle Steele 的书**里才找得到.	我现在有种**丹尼尔·斯蒂尔的言情小说**中的感觉
Back Translation	The way I'm feeling right now can only be found in **Danielle Steele's books**.	I'm feeling like in **a Danielle Steel romance novel**.
Strategy	Complete Retention	Specification
Example 8-10b, Friends, S01E18, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 2	All right. **Cincinnati**. No blinds. Everybody, ante.	

Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
	未见牌不得下注，下注吧	来吧 **辛辛那提玩法** 下注吧
Back Translation	No blinds, ante.	Come on. **Cincinnati style**, ante.
Strategy	Omission	Specification
	Example 8-10c, Friends, S01E14, CR Type: Ethnographic	
Original Dialogue 3	That's right, each. And a **rob roy**.	
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation, 2012)
	对，每人各一瓶**罗伯罗伊**	对 每人一瓶 再要瓶**罗伯·罗伊威士忌**
Back Translation	That's right, **a bottle of rob roy** each.	That's right, each. And **a bottle of rob roy whisky** too.
Strategy	Transliteration	Specification

Similarly, in Example 8-10b, the CR "Cincinnati" appears within a poker game setting, which is very much visible on screen. The initial F6 subtitle omits the reference completely, simplifying the line within the already established poker context of the scene. While this omission prevents potential confusion among non-expert viewers, it comes at the cost of a semantic loss of the original dialogue. Sohu's retranslation, in turn, restores the referent and specifies that it denotes a particular poker style, thus preserving the reference while still keeping it intelligible for viewers unfamiliar with the game.

A similar intervention appears in Example 8-10c, where the CR "Rob Roy" is initially handled through bare transliteration. As argued in Chapter 6, this strategy contributes little to semantic transfer. The Sohu retranslation improves on this transliteration by specifying that Rob Roy is a whisky, ensuring that the reference functions meaningfully without the need for further elaboration.

To wrap up this section, Sohu's subtitles consistently address gaps left in the initial fansubs by clarifying CRs that would otherwise risk ambiguity or miscomprehension. This shift toward a more interventionist approach aligns with the *Retranslation Hypothesis*, which holds that later retranslations refine earlier versions and move closer to the ST. Notably, this retranslation represents a significant step in the commercial subtitling industry within the TC context, as it integrates fansubbing techniques and ideologies that were once exclusive to non-commercial, grassroot practices. Sohu's retranslation emerged during a period of substantial social and cultural transformation, when the TC became increasingly receptive to globalised media. The loosening of state control, coupled with the growing influence of the internet and international media consumption, created a unique moment in the history of subtitling in mainland China. This short-lived phase allowed for a more dynamic and diverse cultural exchange in the commercial

subtitling landscape, which, unfortunately, has not been sustained in the subsequent decade (see Bilibili's case in Section 8.5.).

8.4 The Revised Version: Netflix around 2015

8.4.1 Introduction

Before analysing the quantitative and qualitative data for this section, it is necessary to note that Netflix's version of *Friends* is unlikely to be a newly commissioned retranslation. Instead, the evidence indicates that it represents a revision of Sohu's 2012 subtitles.

As outlined in Chapter 7, Netflix differs from mainland Chinese platforms such as Sohu or Bilibili not only in terms of its patronage but also in its TA. Since Netflix is unavailable in mainland China, its Simplified Chinese subtitles were very much likely intended for TL viewers in other Netflix-accessible regions. These audiences may differ from mainland viewers in language proficiency and viewing habits, which in turn could shape subtitling strategies. Moreover, since Netflix's subtitles are not subject to mainland Chinese state regulation, one might expect significant divergence from versions produced under domestic constraints.

However, a preliminary examination suggests otherwise. Netflix's subtitles are almost identical to Sohu's 2012 release and, unlike the platform's usual practice[1], do not include subtitle credits by the end of each episode. This indicates that Netflix's version, rather than a full-scale retranslation, aligns more closely with what Paloposki and Koskinen (2010) describe as revisions, likely motivated by pragmatic concerns such as cost or speed of release.

According to Paloposki and Koskinen (2010), retranslation entails the creation of a new translation where one already exists, typically introducing new stylistic, linguistic, or ideological approaches. Revision, by contrast, involves working primarily from an existing translation rather than producing a new version directly from the ST, and may range from minor surface-level changes to extensive rewriting.

In Netflix's *Friends* subtitles, the changes are minimal: glosses found in Sohu's version have been removed (see Table 8.1), in line with commercial subtitling standards that avoid glossing. Additional alterations are largely confined to minor corrections, unit conversions, and terminology updates.

[1] Available at: https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/115000303072-What-is-my-responsibility-when-it-comes-to-supplying-Netflix-with-translator-credits (Accessed on: 6 Sept 2025)

The inclusion of Netflix's version in this study is justified not by the scale of its textual interventions but by what it reveals about subtitling norms. While retranslation and revision are theoretically distinct, both represent adaptive processes shaped by external pressures, including sociocultural shifts, financial considerations, industry conventions, and audience expectations. As Koskinen (2018) observe, the choice between revision and retranslation may be influenced by factors such as gender or genre. For the present study, however, the distinction is less critical. What matters is that Netflix's version, though closer to a revision, offers a useful perspective on how platform-specific policies and global industry standards influence subtitling practices beyond state-governed supervision.

8.4.2 Norm variations

Tables 8-6 and 8-7 summarise the orientation and interventional tendencies of the three subtitle versions [1]. Compared with Sohu's 2012 retranslation, Netflix's revision displays a 16.72% decrease in intervention, primarily due to the removal of glosses, though it remains marginally more interventionist than the F6 fansub (+1.62%). In orientation, Netflix shows a modest increase in ST-orientation relative to F6 (+5.48%).

Table 8.6 Netflix's orientation tendency compared with F6's and Sohu's

	F6			SOHU			NETFLIX		
Complete Retention	9	3.56%		1	0.53%		1	0.43%	
Transliteration	37	14.62%	60.47%	21	11.17%	60.64%	29	12.50%	65.95%
Direct Translation	85	33.60%		53	28.19%		79	34.05%	
Specification	22	8.70%		39	20.74%		44	18.97%	
Generalisation	66	26.09%		59	31.38%		63	27.16%	
Substitution	12	4.74%	39.53%	14	7.45%	39.36%	15	6.47%	34.05%
Omission	22	8.70%		1	0.53%		1	0.43%	
	253	100.00%	100%	188	100.00%	100%	232	100.00%	100%

Table 8.7 Netflix's interventional tendency compared with F6's and Sohu's

	F6			SOHU			NETFLIX		
Complete Retention	9	3.04%	62.50%	1	0.32%	44.16%	1	0.32%	60.88%
Transliteration	37	12.50%		21	6.62%		29	9.15%	

[1] Before comparing the statistics, it is necessary to clarify why two nearly identical versions (Sohu's retranslation and Netflix's revision) nonetheless produce variations in Tables 8-6 and 8-7. Although the two versions are textually very similar, the difference arises from the treatment of glosses. As explained in Chapter 5 (section 5.4), glosses are coded as overriding strategies in the quantitative analysis. Because Netflix removed glosses while otherwise preserving Sohu's translations, items coded as "+ gloss" in Sohu reappear as their base strategies (e.g. Direct Translation) in Netflix. This methodological rule accounts for the slightly higher ST-orientation in Netflix's data despite the overall similarity of the two versions.

Direct Translation	85	28.72%		53	16.72%		79	24.92%	
Official Equivalent	54	18.24%		65	20.50%		84	26.50%	
Specification	22	7.43%		39	12.30%		44	13.88%	
Generalisation	66	22.30%		59	18.61%		63	19.87%	
Substitution	12	4.05%	37.50%	14	4.42%	55.84%	15	4.73%	39.12%
Gloss	0	0.00%		0	0.00%		0	0.00%	
+ in-text gloss	11	3.72%		30	9.46%		0	0.00%	
+ gloss	0	0.00%		35	11.04%		2	0.63%	
	296	100.00%	100%	317	100.00%	100%	317	100.00%	100%

At first sight, this pattern appears inconsistent with Pedersen's (2011, p. 101) claim that subtitlers are "unlikely to intervene to make a TT more foreignized" (see Chapter 7). The explanation lies in Netflix's use of Specification. Rather than clarifying CRs via glosses, Netflix tends to specify terms directly, thereby increasing intervention while simultaneously heightening ST-orientation. This practice demonstrates how revision can complicate the assumed correlation between intervention and domestication. Examples 8-11a and 8-11b (below) illustrate this pattern.

In Example 8-11a, the CRs "Showtime", "HBO", and "Cinemax" are generalised as "movie station" in the initial F6 fansub, a strategy that prioritises accessibility at the expense of specificity. Sohu's retranslation, by contrast, retains the original terms, reflecting a strongly ST-oriented approach. Netflix largely follows Sohu but introduces a subtle modification by adding the clarification "television network" to the CR "Showtime". This adjustment suggests a deliberate anticipation of audience expectations: while "HBO" and "Cinemax" were judged recognisable enough to remain untranslated, "Showtime" was deemed to require explanation. The intervention illustrates how Netflix's revision, though minimal overall, strategically targets areas where its intended Simplified Chinese audience might need additional support.

Example 8-11a, *Friends*, S01E11, CR Type: Ethnographic			
Original Dialogue 1	Weekend At Bernie's is on **Showtime**, **HBO**, and **Cinemax**.		
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)
	电影台有许多好电影	**Showtime** **HBO** 和 **Cinemax** 都正在播《老板度假去》呢	**Showtime** **电视网**、**HBO** 和 **Cinemax** 正在播《老板度假去》呢
Back Translation	**The movie station** has lots of good movies.	**Showtime**, **HBO**, and **Cinemax** are all play *Weekend At Bernie's*.	**Showtime television network**, **HBO**, and **Cinemax** are all play *Weekend At Bernie's*.
Strategy	Generalisation	Complete Retention	Specification
Example 8-11b, *Friends*, S01E18, CR Type: Intertextual			
Original Dialogue 2	**Bye Bye Birdie**!		
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)

	再见...小鸟	**"再见了...小鸟"[电影名]**	再见了 **《鸟人》**
Back Translation	**Goodbye...little bird**	**"Goodbye...little bird" [movie title]**	Goodbye ***Birdy***
Strategy	Direct Translation	Direct Translation + in-text gloss	Specification

A similar pattern is visible in Example 8-11b, which involves the intertextual CR *Bye Bye Birdie!,* a reference to a 1963 musical and Broadway production. F6 renders this literally as "Goodbye...little bird", reducing the reference to a generic farewell and losing its intertextual force. Sohu adds an in-text gloss ("[movie title]"), signalling the CR despite the absence of an official Chinese equivalent. Netflix, however, translates the CR as 《鸟人》 (literally, *Birdman*), most likely due to confusion with the film *Birdy* (1984). While the use of guillemets ("《》") correctly marks it as a title, the mistranslation undermines accessibility by replacing one cultural reference with another.

This example highlights a key limitation of commercial subtitling. Professional practices streamline form and avoid glosses, but they do not always ensure cultural accuracy. By contrast, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, later fansubbing practices often demonstrate greater contextual research and explanatory commitment. Netflix's selective revisions therefore reveal the platform's broader agenda: to update and standardise earlier subtitles in line with institutional guidelines and audience assumptions. Even when minimal or flawed, such revisions function as strategically motivated interventions rather than mechanical updates.

Beyond Specification, two additional patterns emerge in Netflix's revision: the conversion of units via Substitution and the adoption of Official Equivalents.

Example 8-12, Friends, S01E09, CR Type: Ethnographic			
Original Dialogue	Come on. An **80-foot** inflatable dog let loose over the city.		
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)
	来吧。**80 英尺长**的充气狗在城市上空游荡。	来吧 **80 英尺**的充气狗在城市上空游荡	来吧 **24 米**的充气狗 在城市上空游荡
Back Translation	Come on. An 80-foot long inflatable dog roaming over the city sky.	Come on. An **80-foot** inflatable dog roaming over the city sky.	Come on. An **24-meter** inflatable dog roaming over the city sky.
Strategy	Direct Translation	Direct Translation	Substitution

In Example 8-12, the CR "80-foot" is rendered literally in both F6 and Sohu, but in Netflix's revision it is converted into the metric equivalent "24-meter". This substitution reflects Netflix's Timed Text Style Guides (TTSGs) for Simplified Chinese, which mandate conversion of imperial measurements into the metric system unless plot-relevant (see Chapter 7). Unlike its predecessors, Netflix's version thus prioritises standardisation and ease of comprehension for a Simplified Chinese-speaking audience, sparing viewers the effort of converting units themselves.

Later fansubbing conventions, by contrast, tend to retain the imperial unit while adding a gloss with the metric equivalent. Such a hybrid approach arguably balances fidelity to the ST with accessibility in the TC, offering a more inclusive solution than either strict foreignization or full domestication. The absence of glosses in commercial versions once again underscores the divide between fansubbing and professional subtitling. Regardless of how "fan-friendly" a commercial platform might appear (e.g., Sohu, see Section 8.3), it just simply cannot replicate the community-driven ethos of fansubbing, which privileges explanation and cultural mediation. Commercial subtitles remain more bound by efficiency-oriented industry norms, which discourage such interventions in favour of fluency and standardisation.

Yet Standardisation is certainly not merely restrictive. In certain contexts it enhances consistency, improves accessibility, and over time reflects rising levels of foreign cultural literacy in the TC. As audiences become more familiar with foreign CRs, ready-made Official Equivalents emerge, reducing reliance on ad hoc or descriptive strategies. The following examples (8-13a and 8-13b) illustrate this process, showing how foreign references undergo revision and regulation through the process of retranslation.

	Example 8-13a, Friends, S01E06, CR Type: Geographical		
Original Dialogue 1	Suddenly, we realized we were in **Yemen**.		
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)
	突然我们发现自己身在叶门	突然我们发现自己身在叶门	突然我们发现自己身在也门
Back Translation	Suddenly we found we were in **Yemen**.	Suddenly we found we were in **Yemen**.	Suddenly we found we were in **Yemen**.
Strategy	Transliteration	Transliteration	Official Equivalent
	Example 8-13b, Friends, S01E12, CR Type: Ethnographic		
Original Dialogue 2	If you'd told me vegetarian **lasagna,** I would've made vegetarian lasagna.		
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)
	如果你告诉过我 你要**素面条**,我就会给你做素的了.	如果你告诉过我你要**素面** 我就会给你做素的了	如果你事先告诉我 你要**素的千层面** 我就会给你做素的了
Back Translation	If you told me you want **vegetarian noodles**, I would've made you vegetarian ones.	If you told me you want **vegetarian noodles**, I would've made you vegetarian ones.	If you told me you want **vegetarian lasagna**, I would've made you vegetarian ones.
Strategy	Generalisation	Generalisation	Official Equivalent

In Example 8-13a, the retranslations reflect a deliberate move toward standardisation. The CR "Yemen" is transliterated as "叶门" (ye'men) in both the initial fansubs and Sohu's version, but revised in Netflix's subtitles to "也门". adopting the Official Equivalent of the country's name in the TT. This shift from "叶" to "也" illustrates the evolution of linguistic conventions: earlier translations relied on provisional transliterations in the absence of an established equivalent. A

parallel development is evident in Example 8-13b, where “lasagna”, previously generalised as simply “noodles,” is updated in Netflix’s version to the official translation “千层面”, providing a more precise and culturally appropriate rendering. These revisions demonstrate how retranslations promote terminological consistency by aligning subtitles with prevailing equivalents, while also signalling increased confidence in the TA’s familiarity with foreign CRs. They thus reflect a broader shift away from excessive mediation as SC literacy expands within the TC context.

8.4.3 Conclusion

Netflix’s version of *Friends* constitutes a revision rather than a full retranslation, with changes shaped less by stylistic intervention than by commercial subtitling standards and platform-specific policies. The removal of glosses, the specification of CRs, and the systematic conversion of units follow prescriptive guidelines designed to enhance accessibility and readability (see Chapter 7). At the same time, the increased use of Official Equivalents reflects a gradual rise in SC literacy and the ongoing standardisation of foreign terms within the TC. Overall, Netflix’s minimal revisions demonstrate how even small-scale interventions can regulate subtitling practice, enforcing industry standards while also signalling shifting assumptions about the TA’s cultural competence.

8.5 Bilibili’s retranslation in 2022: The one with censorship

8.5.1 Norm Variations

Bilibili’s 2022 version of *Friends* diverges significantly from Sohu’s 2012 retranslation and Netflix’s revision, above all because of its extensive censorship, ideological modifications, and strict regulatory compliance. While all three represent commercial retranslations of the initial F6 fansubs, Bilibili’s subtitles emerge as the least ST-oriented (Table 8.8) yet the most interventional (Table 8.9). This tendency reflects not only linguistic and cultural mediation but also the imprint of state-imposed constraints on foreign media within the TC context.

Table 8.8 Bilibili’s orientation tendency compared with F6’s, Sohu’s and Netflix’s

	F6			SOHU			NETFLIX			BILIBILI		
Complete Retention	9	3.56%		1	0.53%		1	0.43%		0	0.00%	
Transliteration	37	14.62%	60.47%	21	11.17%	60.64%	29	12.50%	65.95%	17	9.14%	56.45%
Direct Translation	85	33.60%		53	28.19%		79	34.05%		50	26.88%	
Specification	22	8.70%		39	20.74%		44	18.97%		38	20.43%	
Generalisation	66	26.09%	39.53%	59	31.38%	39.36%	63	27.16%	34.05%	67	36.02%	43.55%

Substitution	12	4.74%		14	7.45%		15	6.47%		12	6.45%	
Omission	22	8.70%		1	0.53%		1	0.43%		2	1.08%	
	253	100.00%	100%	188	100.00%	100%	232	100.00%	100%	186	100.00%	100%

Table 8.9 Bilibili's interventional tendency compared with F6's, Sohu's and Netflix's

	F6			**SOHU**			**NETFLIX**			**BILIBILI**		
Complete Retention	9	3.04%		1	0.32%		1	0.32%		0	0.00%	
Transliteration	37	12.50%		21	6.62%		29	9.15%		17	5.40%	
Direct Translation	85	28.72%	62.50%	53	16.72%	44.16%	79	24.92%	60.88%	50	15.87%	43.49%
Official Equivalent	54	18.24%		65	20.50%		84	26.50%		70	22.22%	
Specification	22	7.43%		39	12.30%		44	13.88%		38	12.06%	
Generalisation	66	22.30%		59	18.61%		63	19.87%		67	21.27%	
Substitution	12	4.05%		14	4.42%		15	4.73%		12	3.81%	
Gloss	0	0.00%	37.50%	0	0.00%	55.84%	0	0.00%	39.12%	0	0.00%	56.51%
+ in-text gloss	11	3.72%		30	9.46%		0	0.00%		27	8.57%	
+ gloss	0	0.00%		35	11.04%		2	0.63%		34	10.79%	
	296	100.00%	100%	317	100.00%	100%	317	100.00%	100%	315	100.00%	100%

Tables 8-8 and 8-9 provide a detailed breakdown of the strategies used across all four versions of the *Friends* case, categorised by orientation and intervention tendencies. The data reveal that Bilibili's retranslation records a 4.02% decrease in ST-orientation and a 19.01% increase in interventional strategies compared with the initial F6 fansubs.

Given the relative similarity in patronage and TA between Bilibili and Sohu, compared with the greater differences between Bilibili and either F6 (as a grassroots fansubbing community) or Netflix (as an overseas commercial platform), Sohu's version provides the most relevant benchmark. While both Bilibili and Sohu display comparable levels of intervention (55.84% and 56.51% respectively), the nature of their interventions differs markedly. Sohu's subtitles typically intervene to clarify CRs for its audience and to remain closer to the ST, whereas Bilibili's interventions primarily render CRs more TT-oriented. This distinction is particularly evident in Bilibili's markedly higher reliance on Generalisation, the only strategy it employs more frequently than the other retranslations or the initial subtitles (see Figure 8.1 in Section 8.1.3). As a TT-oriented strategy, this reliance can be attributed both to regulatory pressures, which encourage paraphrasing to comply with censorship requirements, and to Bilibili's commercial preference for domesticated content that reduces the foreignness of the ST.

The following sections explore specific instances where CRs have been over-generalised in this context, illustrating how Bilibili's subtitling practice reflects the combined influence of censorship and commercial priorities.

8.5.2 Mediation for broader accessibility

A key feature of Bilibili's retranslation is its consistent reliance on generalisation and explanatory paraphrase. These strategies serve to streamline viewing, ensuring that potentially unfamiliar CRs are rendered into easily grasped terms. However, in doing so, Bilibili frequently suppresses the ST's cultural density, offering a more homogenised, TT-oriented product.

Example 8-14a, Friends, S01E08, CR Type: Ethnographic				
Original Dialogue 1	Me and the gang at **Java Joe's**.			
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)	Bilibili (Retranslation 3, 2022)
	我和大伙儿摄于在**爪哇乔家**	我和大伙摄于在**爪哇 乔家**	我和大伙摄于在**爪哇 乔家**	**咖啡店留念**
Back Translation	Me and the guys photographed at **Java Joe's place**	Me and the guys photographed at **Java Joe's place**	Me and the guys photographed at **Java Joe's place**	**Coffee shop memories.**
Strategy	Direct Translation	Direct Translation	Direct Translation	Generalisation
Example 8-14b, *Friends*, S01E11, CR Type: Intertextual				
Original Dialogue 3	- Right. No big deal. - Okay. - In **bizarro world**.			
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)	Bilibili (Retranslation 3, 2022)
	- 对，没什么大不了的 - 在**疯狂世界**中才叫没什么	- 是啊 没什么大不了的 - 好 - 除非在**疯狂世界**中**[漫画超人中的地方]**	-是啊 没什么大不了的 -好 - 除非在**疯狂世界**中	- 是啊 没什么大不了的 - 好 -除非**他是个疯子**
Back Translation	- Right. No big deal. - It's not a big deal in crazy world.	- Right. No big deal. - Okay. - Unless it's in crazy world [a place in Superman comics]	- Right. No big deal. - Okay. - Unless it's in crazy world	- Right. No big deal. - Okay. - Unless **he's crazy**.
Strategy	Generalisation	Generalisation + in-text gloss	Generalisation	Generalisation

See Example 8-14a (above), the same "Java Joe's" reference, as previously discussed (in Section 8.2.1), for an instance. Although the initial fansubs and the two earlier commercial retranslations all retain the name "Java Joe's" through Direct Translation, they all fail to activate its cultural and linguistic resonance. The connection between "Java" and coffee remains opaque, and the fandom-specific knowledge that "Java Joe's" anticipates the later café setting is lost. Bilibili, by contrast, replaces the CR with a generic "coffee shop", which makes the semantic link explicit but simultaneously erases the particular referent. Although generalised, the rendering improves quick comprehension by signalling the café setting, yet simultaneously erases the specific reference to "Java Joe's" and its narrative role in the original dialogue. Such a move typifies commercial subtitling practices, as seen also in Netflix's version (see Chapter 7).

A similar pattern emerges in Example 8-14b. The CR "Bizarro World", drawn from the *Superman* universe and denoting a world where everything is reversed, is used here sarcastically to mean the opposite of "no big deal"; namely, that it is a big deal. Bilibili reduces this to the paraphrase "Unless he's crazy", eliminating both the intertext and the ironic reversal. retaining only the pragmatic force of the line. Sohu's 2012 version, by contrast, generalises the term as "crazy world" but supplements it with an in-text gloss identifying the *Superman* reference. This rare fansub-oriented move preserved intertextuality in a commercial context (see Section 8.3). The fact that Bilibili, working later and with access to both the initial fansub and Sohu's subtitles, still chose further domestication is especially telling. Despite Sohu's more ST-oriented precedent, Bilibili opts for a TT-centred rendering, likely based on an assumption that its audience would benefit more from a domesticated phrasing. This illustrates how patronage and broader sociocultural conditions shape subtitling choices, and how the *Retranslation Hypothesis* fails here, i.e., rather than moving closer to the ST, the later version diverges further.

Example 8-15a, *Friends*, S01E11, CR Type: Ethnographic				
Original Dialogue 3	Weekend At Bernie's is on **Showtime**, **HBO**, and **Cinemax**.			
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)	Bilibili (Retranslation 3, 2022)
	电影台有许多好电影	**Showtime** **HBO** 和 **Cinemax** 都 正在播《老板度假去》呢	**Showtime** **电视网**、**HBO** 和 **Cinemax** 正在播《老板度假去》呢	**美国电视网** **HBO** **电视网**和**电影频道** 都有《柏尼斯之周末夜》
Back Translation	**The movie station** has lots of good movies.	**Showtime**, **HBO**, and **Cinemax** are all play *Weekend At Bernie's*.	**Showtime television network**, **HBO**, and **Cinemax** are all play *Weekend At Bernie's*.	**U.S television network**, **HBO television network** and **the movie channel** all have *Weekend At Bernie's*.
Strategy	Generalisation	Complete Retention	Specification	Generalisation + Specification
Example 8-15b, *Friends*, S01E08, CR Type: Ethnographic				
Original Dialogue 4	It's like **Mardi Gras without the paper-mâché heads**.			
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)	Bilibili (Retranslation 3, 2022)
	简直一团乱	就好像**没有吉祥物的狂欢节**	就好像**没有吉祥物的狂欢节**	就好像**没有吉祥物的狂欢节** **死气沉沉的**
Back Translation	**It's a mess.**	It's like **a carnival without the mascot**.	It's like **a carnival without the mascot**.	It's like **a carnival without the mascot**. **It's lifeless**.
Strategy	Omission	Generalisation	Generalisation	Generalisation

This tendency is not confined to simplification but extends to over-explanation. Example 8-15a exemplifies this pattern (the same examples discussed in Section 8.4.2). Here, Bilibili generalises "Showtime" and "Cinemax" into their basic functions ("television network" and "movie channel"), while explicitly labelling "HBO" as a television network. This added specification can be perceived as unnecessary, given that Sohu's 2012 version retains the original CRs without any modification, suggesting they were already sufficiently recognisable to the TA Considering this precedent, Bilibili's excessive mediation in 2022 reflects an overcautious

approach to ensuring comprehension, even in cases where the audience may not necessarily need further intervention.

A similar pattern is evident in Example 8-15b. The phrase “Mardi Gras without the paper-mâché heads” references the famous New Orleans festival, with its parades, elaborate costumes, and oversized masks, to convey that the situation feels dull and inauthentic without its defining elements. Across all four versions, however, these referents are paraphrased away to varying degrees.

F6 reduces the line to the generic statement “It’s a mess”, which omits the nuance in the original completely. Sohu and Netflix both generalise “Mardi Gras” as “carnival” and “paper-mâché heads” as “mascot”, diluting the cultural specificity while retaining some of the structural logic of the comparison. Bilibili, as the most recent retranslation, might have restored the missing CRs, but instead it reproduces the same generalisations and further expands the line with a descriptive addition “It’s lifeless”. This extension reinforces the affective tone but leaves the CRs absent. The increased subtitle length thus functions not to recover the ST but to ensure the audience grasps the intended meaning with minimal effort.

The analysis of this case here does not necessarily suggest that Bilibili is obliged to be closely to the ST, nor that returning to the ST would automatically produce a “better” translation. Rather, it illustrates how different forms of patronage and sociocultural pressures complicate the *Retranslation Hypothesis*. In Bilibili’s case, the preference for domestication and explanatory mediation reflects subtitling priorities distinct from both fansubbing practices and more fan-friendly commercial approaches such as Sohu’s.

8.5.3 Mediation for censorship compliance

As mentioned in the Introduction, Bilibili’s 2022 release of *Friends* drew significant criticism for its extensive censorship. This research identifies two primary methods of censorship in its execution:

a) *textual mediation through altered dialogue*, which dilutes, obscures, or in some cases distorts the meaning of the original lines;
a) *omission of entire scenes*, particularly where sensitive themes cannot be managed through subtitling alone.

Textual Mediation

Textual mediation in subtitling most frequently appears in relation to LGBTQ+ themes and other politically or socially sensitive topics. Professional subtitlers in mainland China tend to exercise caution in these areas by employing techniques such as substitution, generalisation, omission, or, where unavoidable, the deletion of scenes altogether (see Wang, 2020).

In Example 8-16a, the initial fansubs and the first two commercial retranslations all employ Specification, as a strategy, explicitly rendering "strip" as "strip dance" to preserve the referent, if not even further enhance clarity for their audiences. Bilibili's 2022 version, however, substantially modifies its original meaning by rephrasing the line as "go out and have fun". This modification effectively obscures any reference that even remotely resembles adult entertainment and neutralises potentially sensitive or forbidden content in order to appeal to a broader audience and reduce regulatory risks.

Example 8-16a, *Friends*, S01E01, CR Type: Ethnographic				
Original Dialogue 1	**Strip joint!**			
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)	Bilibili (Retranslation 3, 2022)
	脱衣舞酒店。	**脱衣舞俱乐部**	**脱衣舞俱乐部**	**出去玩玩儿**
Back Translation	**Strip dance hotel.**	**Strip dance club.**	**Strip dance club.**	**Go out and have fun.**
Strategy	Specification	Specification	Specification	Generalisation
Example 8-16b, *Friends*, S01E15, CR Type: Ethnographic				
Original Dialogue 2	- What's up? - In the cab on the way over, Steve blazed up a **doobie**. - What? - Smoked a **joint**, you know? Lit a bone. Weed, hemp, ganja...			
Subtitles	F6 (Initial, 2005)	Sohu (Retranslation 1, 2012)	Netflix (Retranslation 2, c. 2015)	Bilibili (Retranslation 3, 2022)
	- 怎么了 - 他坐计程车来时 燃了**一根草** - 什么 - 抽了一根**大麻**...	- 怎么了 - 坐计程车来时 史提夫抽了一根**大麻烟** - 什么 -抽了一根**大麻**之类的...	- 怎么了 - 坐计程车来时 史提夫抽了一根**大麻烟** - 什么 -抽了一根**大麻**之类的...	-怎么了 -我们坐计程车来时 史提夫**老毛病又犯了** - 什么 - 他吸了一种**很奇怪的药**
Back Translation	- What's up? - He lit up **a grass** in the cab on the way over - What? - Smoked a piece of **marijuana**...	- What's up? - In the cab on the way over, Steve smoked a **marijuana cigarette.** - What? - Smoked a piece of **marijuana** something like that...	- What's up? - In the cab on the way over, Steve smoked a **marijuana cigarette.** - What? - Smoked a piece of marijuana something like that...	- What's up? - When we took the cab on the way over, Steve f**ell back to his old habit again**. - What? - He smoked a type of **very weird medicine**.
Strategy	Direct Translation	Direct Translation	Direct Translation	Generalisation

A similar divergence is evident in Example 8-16b. Both Sohu and Netflix translate the colloquial terms "doobie" and "joint" directly as "marijuana cigarette" and "marijuana", straightforward renderings that align with dictionary definitions and involve little deliberate mediation. Interestingly, the initial F6 fansub uses the colloquial "grass", which captures some of the

original's informal register while preserving its reference to drugs. Bilibili's version, nevertheless, paraphrases the entire passage: "fell back to his old habit" replaces "doobie", and "weird medicine" substitutes for "joint". These shifts deliberately obscure the reference to drug use altogether, recasting it in vague and morally ambiguous terms.

Although this is consistent with mainland China's stringent regulations on the portrayal of drug use in the media, known as the "zero-tolerance policy" (Lin, 2023), which forbid any positive or neutral depiction of illegal substances, it does raise concerns about the necessity of such censorship, as its more direct renderings in previous versions did not appear to cause any issues. This may indicate that Bilibili's enhanced censorship measures are pre-emptive, in addition to being a direct manifestation of the heightened state scrutiny of foreign media that was previously discussed. Commercial platforms like Bilibili especially under the stricter regulation may implement even more strict "self-censoring" strategies to avoid conflicts with censors or to keep their translations within mainstream audience expectations (Pérez-González, 2014, p.130). This could also be accounted for as another explanation of the increased use of strategies such as Generalisation observed in Bilibili's retranslation, where paraphrases to circumvent often occur.

Omission of entire scenes

Although scene deletions are not the main focus of this research, they nonetheless provide valuable insight into how censorship operates in subtitling. Bilibili's extensive editing of a family-friendly series like *Friends* reflects both regulatory compliance and commercial pragmatism. While government regulations drive most of the restrictions, Bilibili's editorial decisions emphasise its strategic focus on accessibility and controversy avoidance. By strictly adhering to regulatory expectations, the platform ensures its ability to maintain official distribution rights (i.e., licensed rather than pirated content) within the TC media landscape.

The choice to cut entire scenes or instead to alter dialogue through subtitling often depends on the nature of the content and its degree of visual dependency. For instance, it is found in this research that:

a) *Politically or legally controversial content* is typically removed in its entirety, as its ideological implications cannot be mitigated through textual modification alone.

A striking example is Season 4, Episode 11, which on Bilibili runs only 13 minutes and 17 seconds of its original 22[1]. The episode's central storyline follows one of the main characters becoming a surrogate mother for her brother, a plotline that directly contravenes mainland China's ban on surrogacy, which prohibits all forms of surrogacy arrangements (Luo, 2024). Given that surrogacy is both illegal and central to the episode, either regulators or Bilibili itself likely deemed the content too sensitive to release in any form. Rather than modifying dialogue, nearly half of the episode was excised, ensuring compliance and avoiding scrutiny.

b) *Sexual or taboo content* is more often mediated through textual alteration in the subtitles, reducing directness or explicitness while keeping the general scene structure intact (see Examples 8-16a and 8-16b for the mediation on "strip joint" and "marijuana").

c) *LGBTQ+ themes* are censored to varying degrees depending on visibility. When the references are purely textual (e.g., dialogue-based), the TT subtitles can be rewritten to neutralise or alter meaning. Where representation is visually explicit, however, entire scenes are usually cut to comply with regulation.

In fact, the LGBTQ+ related censorship is one of the most widely criticised aspects of Bilibili's release of Friends. It reflects strict regulatory guidelines laid out in the General Rules for Auditing the Content of Online Audiovisual Programmes (Chinese:《网络视听节目内容审核通则》), issued on June 30, 2017 by the China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA, Chinese: 中国网络视听节目服务协会) under SAPPRFT supervision. According to Article 8 of this 2017 document, certain prohibited content must be edited or removed before they can be broadcast. Specifically, Article 8.6.2 explicitly categorises "homosexuality" under the broader umbrella of "obscenity, pornography, vulgarity, and low taste", listing it alongside "incest, sexual perversion, sexual assault, sexual abuse, and sexual violence" (my translation)[2].

By aligning itself so closely with government policies and exercising an extra layer of caution, Bilibili's removal of LGBTQ+ content in *Friends* has drawn criticism not only from long-time fans but also from the general public. Its strict adherence to regulation, or arguably self-censorship, was widely seen as excessive, especially given that earlier versions of the show circulated in

[1] Available at: https://www.bilibili.com/bangumi/play/ep511823?spm_id_from=333.1391.0.0&from_spmid=666.25.episode.0 (Accessed 4 March 2025).
[2] Available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/zgjx/2017-07/01/c_136409024.htm (Accessed 4 March 2025).

mainland China with fewer alterations. Alongside these deletions, subtitling itself became a tool of censorship, with lines rewritten or significantly altered to comply with ideological expectations. Although less visible than outright cuts, such textual manipulation is equally controversial, since it directly reshapes characterisation and narrative intent.

This censorship was particularly poorly received among younger audiences, who tend to be more globally connected, familiar with unedited versions, and technologically literate enough to voice their dissatisfaction online. A key site for this criticism was within Bilibili's own *danmu* (or danmaku) feature, a pseudo-simultaneous commenting interface that overlays viewer comments directly onto the screen. As will be discussed in the next section, *danmu* has evolved from a tool of audience engagement into a form of voluntary subtitling and digital activism, enabling viewers to collectively critique censorship, reconstruct deleted dialogue, provide glosses and cultural notes, and even correct mistranslations in real time. Unlike conventional comment sections, its time-synchronised format intensifies interactivity, creating an immersive and visually immediate space for audience resistance.

8.5.4 *Danmu*-facilitated subtitling

Before examining specific instances of *danmu*-facilitated subtitling and reception, it is necessary to clarify how *danmu* are conceptualised in this study. *Danmu* are treated here both as empirical material and as an analytical lens. As empirical material, they consist of audience-produced comments that are synchronised with particular subtitle segments and CRs, and that recur across episodes and viewing contexts. As an analytical lens, *danmu* make visible forms of audience response that are embedded in the platform environment itself, allowing reception to be examined without shifting the focus of the study towards interviews or ethnographic observation. This use of *danmu* remains compatible with the product-oriented framework of DTS adopted throughout the thesis, as the emphasis lies not on individual subjective reactions, but on patterned and publicly articulated responses that emerge in relation to translated products. In this sense, *danmu* operate as a supplementary layer of evidence that situates subtitle choices within their immediate reception context, rather than replacing close textual analysis.

Danmu (Chinese: 弹幕, literally "barrage curtain") refers to the overlaying of comments that "fly" across the screen or appear at the top or bottom Yang (2021, p. 2). Typically, these comments move from right to left, producing a dynamic flow across the viewing interface. This directionality exploits established reading habits in most languages (i.e., left to right, top to

bottom), creating a visual convergence effect that allows viewers to process the scrolling text with relative ease[1] (see Figure 8.2).

Originating from the Japanese term *danmaku* and first popularised on Nico Nico Douga (Japanese: ニコニコ動画[2]) in 2006, *danmu* creates a highly participatory viewing experience by synchronising comments with precise video moments (Hamasaki *et al.*, 2009). Unlike traditional comment sections, which remain spatially and temporally detached, *danmu* fosters an immersive, pseudo-synchronous mode of communication that enhances collective engagement (Johnson, 2013). It is considered pseudo-synchronous because the real-time interaction it seems to create is, in fact, an illusion. User audiences post comments as they watch, which then reappear at the corresponding timestamp for all subsequent audiences. Since most users do not watch simultaneously (except during particularly popular releases), the act of posting remains asynchronous. Yet, because *danmu* is anchored to the video timeline rather than to a chronological thread, it generates a sense of immediacy and shared presence even across staggered viewing. The accumulation of comments strengthens this illusion, making earlier posts appear as part of an ongoing discussion and creating the distinctive experience of watching "alone yet together" (Chen, Gao and Rau, 2017).

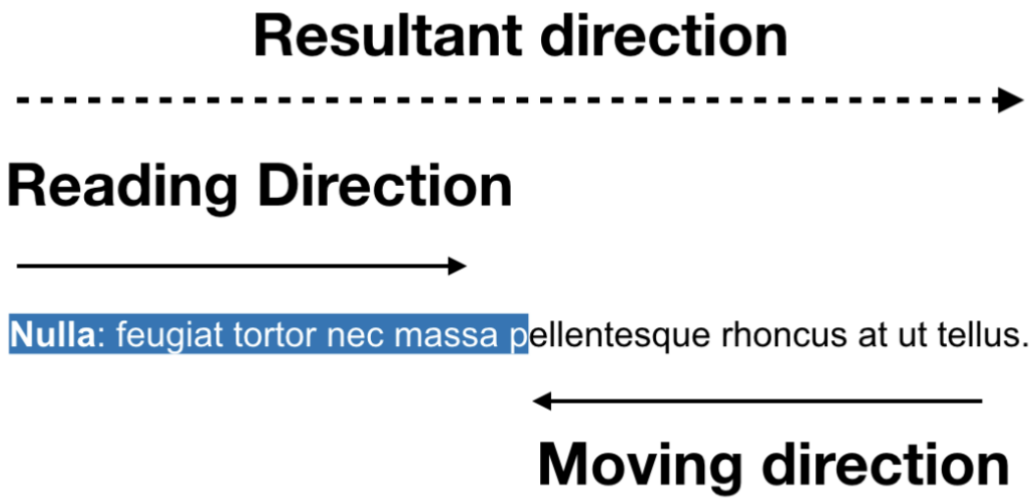

Figure 8.2 Schematic of the reading direction of danmu, cited from the Danmaku Use Case Specification (Chinese: 弹幕用例规范) https://w3c.github.io/danmaku/usecase.zh.html#fig-generatedID-5 (accessed 6 March 2025).

[1] Available at: https://w3c.github.io/danmaku/usecase.zh.html#fig-generatedID-5 (Accessed 6 March 2025).
[2] Available at: https://www.nicovideo.jp/ (Accessed 6 March 2025).

Following its success in Japan, *danmu* spread rapidly in mainland China, first on platforms like Bilibili and later integrated into Tencent Video (Yin, Jia and Lu, 2025). It soon became a more direct and dynamic channel for audience reactions, meme creation, and educational discussions, shaping a new form of digital co-viewing (Ouyang and Zhao, 2016).

In the context of AVT, *danmu*'s voluntary nature, i.e., any registered user can post freely, and its flexible modes of display have given rise to a subtitling practice even more grassroots than fansubbing: *danmu subtitling*. This emergent form of collaborative translation allows viewers to provide translations, most commonly for untranslated foreign-language videos (Yang, 2021). Unlike fansubbing, which, despite being voluntary and community-driven, still relies on semi-structured teams, *danmu subtitling* is more decentralised and personal. All viewers with bilingual proficiency can contribute instant, crowd-sourced translations, fostering a dynamic and collective mode of knowledge-sharing.

This aligns closely with Jenkins' (2006) concept of participatory culture, where users actively engage in media production, blurring the line between producers and consumers. *Danmu subtitling* further lowers the threshold for becoming a "prosumer", since contributions do not require affiliation with a fansub group or adherence to fixed translation standards. Instead of formal quality control, subsequent viewers act as both audience and assessors, enabling multiple translations to coexist and evolve through interaction.

In this way, *danmu subtitling* reflects Johnson's (2013, p. 299) idea of "meta-interactive sociality", in which video consumption becomes communal and participatory. Unlike traditional subtitles, including fansubs, it is free-form and spontaneous, cultivating a shared space where translations are constantly negotiated and refined. As Yang (2021, p. 4) suggests, this form of engagement is even "dethroning content as the most important element on such websites", shifting emphasis from content consumption to user interaction and interpretation.

An example of this *danmu*-facilitated communal translation process can be seen in Example 8-17 (illustrated in Figure 8.3), where an intertextual reference sparks discussion and collaborative improvement among viewers.

In this example, one character deliberately plays hard to get with his date, prompting his friend to criticise his behaviour as "testosterone-y", a display of toxic masculinity. In response, the male character uses humour as a defence mechanism (which is a critical trait of his character) by stating "Which, by the way, is the real San Francisco treat". The CR here, "San Francisco Treat",

references Rice-A-Roni, a pasta and rice dish that originated in San Francisco[1]. The humour in this response is derived from the phonetic similarity between “Rice-A-Roni” and “testosterone-y”, making the comeback a form of wordplay.

Example 8-17, *Friends*, S01E20 (Accompanying Figure 8.3)

Subtitle	ST Dialogue	TT subtitles	TT subtitles (back translation)
	- Call her. Stop being so testosterone-y. - Which, by the way, is **the real San Francisco treat**.	- 打给她 别这么大男子主义 - 我得说一句 这还是**旧金山特色**	- Call her, don’t be such a male chauvinist - I have to say, this is **a San Francisco characteristic**.
Danmu	Intention	Danmu Text	Danmu Text (back translation)
Type A	An inquiry	为啥是 treat 啊	Why is it a treat?
Type B	A simple explanation	testosterone 睾酮	testosterone, testosterone [in Chinese]
Type C	A detailed explanation	这里女生们嫌弃小钱钱明明喜欢约会对象还玩欲擒故纵，很“典型大猪蹄子”，也就是 testosterone-y。 所以小钱钱才接了一句“testosterone-y 真的是旧金山的美味哦”。	The girls here resent Chandler for playing hard to get when he clearly likes his date, which is very ‘typically a pig of a man", aka testosterone-y. That's why Chandler picked up on the line ‘testosterone-y is really a delicacy in San Francisco.’’
Type D	Expression of gratitude	赞美绿字科普君	Praise the green text explaining guy.
		感谢绿字君	Thank you green text.
Type E	A correction	绿字乱科普，实际上是一个产品 Rice-a-roni，San Francisco treat 的谐音梗	The green word explains it wrong. it is actually a word play on a product called “Rice-a-roni", a San Franciso treat.

[1] Available at: https://www.ricearoni.com/heritage (Accessed 7 March 2025).

Figure 8.3 Example of danmu explaining, debating, and correcting the real referent and meaning of Chandler's line "the real San Francisco treat", Friends S01E20 on Bilibili (screenshot 3 March 2025).

Bilibili's subtitles, however, obscure this humour. "Testosterone-y" is paraphrased as "male chauvinist", which conveys the sense but drops the specific term, while "San Francisco Treat" is rendered as "a San Francisco characteristic", which, though not inaccurate, strips the line of contextual relevance and the intended pun. Because of this partial loss of meaning, *danmu* comments quickly emerge. One user asks why the line suddenly mentions a "treat" (see Type A in Example 8-17). This is a common usage of *danmu* in which viewers seek clarification on

unfamiliar, or puzzling, references. Such inquiry type of *danmu* typically prompt the following two types of *danmu* responses:

- *Basic explanations* (see Type B) provide dictionary-level clarification, such as glossing "testosterone" into TL, but without any further contextual elaboration of the joke.
- *In-depth explanations* (see Type C) offer more elaborate interpretations. In this case, this type of *danmu* elaborates that, allegedly, the character's joke relies on gender stereotypes, equating "testosterone-y" to being "a pig of a man", and thus inferably linking pig, or pork, as the "San Francisco Treat".

These responses, in turn, often prompt appreciation (see Type D), where other viewers thank or praise the user who supplied the explanation. Yet corrections (see Type E) may also follow, as in this case, one danmu refines the explanation given in the previous in-depth response, critiquing its speculative nature while explicitly linking "San Francisco Treat" to its intended referent, Rice-A-Roni, i.e. correcting the previous comments.

This chain of inquiry, explanation, gratitude, and correction demonstrates how *danmu* can function as a participatory translation and negotiation channel. Viewers collaboratively clarify and refine meaning, even when official subtitles fail to convey it. Although the process is asynchronous, its time-synchronised display of accumulations of *danmu* products creates an illusion of simultaneity, allowing subsequent viewers to engage as if the discussion were unfolding live. This fosters the "alone yet together" experience, where users asynchronously contribute while feeling as part of a collective viewing community. Through a combination of interactive exchanges, *danmu* facilitates a way of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication that the conventional static, linear subtitles may not fully achieve.

Beyond audience discussions, *danmu* is also used to correct or supplement official subtitles, often resembling a form of crowdsourced glossing similar to fansubbing. This practice is frequently driven by epistemophilia, i.e., a desire to share and refine knowledge, within fan communities (see Chapter 6).

An example can be seen in Figure 8.4, where the characters fold envelopes while whistling a tune. Since there is no dialogue, neither Bilibili's official subtitles nor Netflix's English Closed Captions provide mediation. Certain *danmu* users, however, identify the tune as the *March from the River Kwai* (Chinese: 《桂河大桥进行曲》), also known as the *Colonel Bogey March* (Chinese: 波基上校进行曲), from the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (Chinese: 《桂河大桥》). Here, a

handful of highly SC-literate viewers facilitate audience understanding by annotating the covert reference that is not even critical to the main narrative. Such detail is not always achievable in conventional subtitling, which depends heavily on the individual subtitler's literacy. *Danmu*, by contrast, enables a collective knowledge-sharing site, enhancing cultural accessibility beyond what traditional subtitles typically allow. This screenshot (Figure 8.4) also illustrates the dynamic nature of *danmu*: some glosses remain fixed on the screen while others scroll actively across it (from left to right on top of the frame).

Figure 8.4 Danmu pointing out the name of the whistled tune (the top-middle texts), Friends S01E18 on Bilibili (screenshot 3 March 2025).

A comparable case appears in Figure 8.5, revisiting the frequently discussed "Pennsylvania Dutch" scene. When a character falsely claiming to be Dutch is confronted with actual Dutch dialogue, *danmu* users collaboratively provide both the original Dutch text and a TT translation (in green). Unlike pre-prepared fansub glosses, which are finalised before release, *danmu glossing* emerges organically, with multiple users contributing, verifying, and refining translations as new viewers engage. A further instance of correction is shown in Figure 8.6, where users rectify the mistranslation of "The New School".

Figure 8.5 Danmu typing out foreign dialogue (the top-middle texts in green), Friends S01E21 on Bilibili (screenshot 3 March 2025).

Figure 8.6 Danmu correcting the meaning of The New School, Friends S01E21 on Bilibili (screenshot 3 March 2025).

The accuracy of these glosses and corrections derives from the breadth of contributors and the cumulative nature of participation. Unlike traditional subtitling, which depends on a fixed group of subtitlers (whether professional or amateur), *danmu subtitling* draws from a vast and diverse pool of users over time. This crowd-driven process embodies Lévy's (1997) concept of collective intelligence in action in the digital age, as knowledge is continuously co-constructed through interaction instead of delivered from a single authority. Such a participatory model has

the potential to foster more precise, nuanced interpretations of source material and evolves organically as new insights emerge.

8.5.5 *Danmu*-facilitated audience reception

In addition to qualitative examples, this research includes a supplementary *danmu* corpus covering all 24 episodes of *Friends* Season One on Bilibili[1]. A brief quantitative analysis was conducted using AntConc's collocation feature to examine the term "翻译" (translation). Its ten most frequent collocates are presented in Table 8.10.

Table 8.10 Collocation of the word "翻译"（Translation）on AntConc sorted by FreqR

Collocate	Collocate (back translation)	Rank	Freq(Scaled)	FreqLR	FreqL	**FreqR**	Range	Likelihood	Effect
错	wrong	1	288	25	1	**24**	17	140.516	5.388
没	Didn't	2	1620	17	5	**12**	10	28.112	2.339
应该	Should be	3	1056	14	3	**11**	11	28.571	2.677
得	[a structural particle]	3	888	12	1	**11**	11	24.867	2.704
含蓄	Implicit	5	60	8	1	**7**	6	52.000	6.007
出来	out	5	344	7	0	**7**	6	19.547	3.295
这里	here	7	3000	28	22	**6**	16	41.217	2.170
没错	Not wrong	8	76	5	0	**5**	4	25.222	4.988
不行	Not good	9	132	5	2	**3**	3	19.788	4.191
这个	This	10	4428	34	32	**2**	16	40.012	1.889
辛苦	Hardworking	10	40	4	2	**2**	2	23.583	5.592
改	changed	10	52	4	2	**2**	4	21.436	5.213
昨天	yesterday	10	48	4	2	**2**	3	22.087	5.329
委婉	Euphemistic	10	40	3	1	**2**	2	15.921	5.177
哇酷	Wow cool	10	8	2	0	**2**	1	15.745	6.914

By examining on the right-hand frequency (FreqR) of the word "翻译" (literally, "translation"), a common evaluative pattern in audience feedback emerges. Since evaluative expressions in Chinese typically follow the noun or verb, these collocates reveal how viewers discuss "translation" in *danmu*.

Among the most frequent collocates are "错" ("wrong", 24), "没" ("did not", 12), and "应该" ("should be", 11). Their prominence suggests widespread dissatisfaction with Bilibili's subtitles, particularly in relation to mistranslation ("wrong"), omission of meaning ("did not"), and corrective proposals ("should be"). The latter is especially revealing, as it demonstrates active audience participation in proposing alternatives. Importantly, not all critiques reflect subtitling

[1] Data collected on 1 January 2025.

errors per se; some also respond to omissions mandated by regulatory guidelines, which require the removal of politically sensitive or otherwise controversial content, as discussed earlier.

Beyond accuracy and omission, collocates such as "含蓄" ("implicit", 7) and "委婉" ("euphemistic", 2) suggest that audiences perceive the subtitles as overly subtle or softened at times. While not always negative, such comments indicate awareness of paraphrasing or dilution, whether motivated by linguistic simplification or censorship. By contrast, collocates like "辛苦" ("hardworking", 2), in the context of those *danmu*, are more likely acknowledgments of the subtitlers' effort in carefully rephrasing content under constraint than general praise for subtitling labour. This again points to audience awareness of the pressures shaping subtitle production and the difficulty of balancing accuracy with compliance.

This pattern of collocates shows how audience responses are not just spontaneous reactions, but in fact tied directly to subtitle content. Because these comments cluster around specific lines and strategies, they offer a way to trace how translation is received, contested, or supplemented on the platform. What follows is a short reflection on why *danmu* appears only in this case and how it fits within the methodological approach of this thesis.

8.5.6 Danmu as Reception Data and Analytical Resource

This section outlines the role of *danmu* in this chapter and explains how it contributes to a product-oriented approach. *Danmu* is not used across all case studies but becomes analytically relevant in the *Friends* retranslation due to a specific combination of factors: a familiar ST, a platform that enables *danmu* commentary, and a subtitle version shaped by regulation. These conditions create points of meaning loss or distortion that are not addressed through conventional subtitle strategies. *Danmu* responses make these disruptions visible and offer insight into how audiences respond to and repair them.

As shown in the previous sections, viewers use *danmu* to reintroduce omitted dialogue, offer clarifications, and recall previous subtitle versions. These interventions are not scattered or incidental. They tend to cluster around the disrupted segments, highlighting shared expectations around continuity and accuracy. This kind of viewer engagement is usually hard to capture in subtitling research, especially without interviews or ethnographic methods. On Bilibili, however, *danmu* comments are time-stamped and anchored to specific subtitle lines, making this reception layer textually observable, as the *danmu* interface enables real-time interaction with translation, producing a type of "pseudo-synchronous" co-viewing (see Section 8.5.4). This allows norm contestation, memory work, and retranslation to happen within the same space

where official subtitles are consumed. Rather than discussing the subtitles after the fact, viewers respond as they unfold, shaping how meaning is constructed and recovered on screen.

From a methodological point of view, *danmu* in this case work as reception data that directly engage with translation choices. They do not replace textual analysis, nor are they treated here as expressions of personal opinion. Following Yang (2023), *danmu* here can be read as a kind of "meta-" or "archi-text", i.e., audience-produced paratexts that shape how the subtitles are interpreted, and at times, evaluated (see Section 8.5.5). Their role in this chapter is interpretive, offering direct evidence of how viewers with prior knowledge respond to translation shifts, especially those produced under constraint.

This reception layer does not shift this study away from a product-oriented approach. *Danmu* comments are analysed in relation to specific subtitle strategies, using the same descriptive categories applied across the case studies. This remains consistent with the overall DTS framework. As Yang (2020) argues, *danmu* is structured by the platform as a semiotic channel, not simply as an open social space. In this context, *danmu* is part of the translational environment, as it forms a visible layer of audience engagement with the subtitled text, and allows certain forms of reception to become textually traceable without departing from product-based analysis.

What this case suggests is that in platform-based, heavily regulated environments like Bilibili, re-subtitling is no longer limited to professional teams, institutions, or even fansubbing communities. Audiences engage in the translational process within the same space where subtitles are distributed and consumed. This kind of participation, embedded in the platform interface, differs from traditional fansubbing by taking place in a sense of "real time" and in direct response to official subtitle output. It pushes the boundary and scope of the "prosumer" even further, as authority over meaning is no longer held by a single actor. This in turn points to a more distributed subtitling ecology, where norm negotiation happens across different layers of production and visibility. Future research may explore this further, but for the *Friends* case here, *danmu* offer a rare and situated form of audience intervention, and a way to make reception analytically useful without departing from a product-based framework.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed RQ3: *How have commercial retranslations of the same audiovisual text changed over time, and what do these shifts reveal about the influence of industry practice, regulatory pressures, and audience expectations?*

The initial fansubs produced by F6 demonstrate a strong reliance on "minimax" strategies, such as Direct Translation, Complete Retention, and Omission. These approaches created a straightforward but often inconsistent subtitling style, frequently resulting in mistranslations. Such features can be linked to the historical context of early fansubbing, when SC literacy was lower and subtitling technologies restricted glossing to simple in-line formats. In this sense, F6's subtitles exemplify the formative characteristics of grassroots subtitling in the early 2000s: pragmatic, minimally mediated, and at times uneven in quality. These characteristics also provided the baseline against which later commercial retranslations positioned themselves, whether by correcting errors, formalising glossing practices, or standardising terminology. Commercial retranslations that followed can be understood in three broad tendencies.

First, there is a gradual consolidation of norms on an institutional level. While Sohu's early-2010s retranslation adopted fansub-inspired glossing and sought to balance cultural specificity with accessibility, both Netflix's and Bilibili's later versions stripped away these features in favour of prescriptive guidelines, Official Equivalents, and platform-level standardisation. Netflix's removal of glosses for CRs and its conversion of imperial to metric units, for example, show how international style guides and scalability across markets increasingly outweighed creative mediation.

Second, the most recent commercial version, i.e., Bilibili's 2022 release, marks a more radical turn, shaped primarily by censorship. Interventional strategies were used not to clarify the SC but to neutralise sensitive references, while at times entire scenes were removed to ensure compliance with regulation. This regulatory turn prioritised risk avoidance but was widely criticised, as evidenced in the *danmu* comments discussed in this chapter.

Third, due the common dissatisfaction, the role of audience has also undergone a marked shift and becomes particularly visible, especially in the Bilibili retranslation. Unlike earlier commercial versions, Bilibili's often censored subtitles generated sustained audience intervention via *danmu*. These interventions concentrate on moments where meaning is perceived to be interrupted, weakened, or removed, and are shaped by audience's familiarity with earlier fansub and commercial versions. Audience responses frequently mobilise this prior

knowledge to recalibrate meaning, reconstruct omitted dialogue, and reintroduce contextual information, thereby reactivating forms of mediation that have been curtailed in most institutional and commercial context. What emerges is a collective orientation towards maintaining continuity across versions and upholding shared expectations of subtitling adequacy that have developed through the programme's long history of circulation in the TC.

Furthermore, from an analytical perspective, *danmu* foreground dimensions of diachronic commercial re-subtitling that extend beyond the scope of textual comparison. While product-oriented analysis captures how strategies and norms shift across successive versions, *danmu* illuminate how such shifts are negotiated in situ within the platform environment. In contrast to more conventional forms of reception, which are typically limited to post-hoc evaluation, *danmu* enable audiences to intervene directly in the subtitling process at the point of consumption, effectively supplementing the official subtitles as they are being read. This form of technology-enabled, hands-on reception reshapes the relationship between translated text and audience response, and points towards an emerging re-subtitling ecology in which institutional standardisation and regulatory compliance coexist with platform-facilitated audience mediation. Although this study does not pursue this dimension further, the interplay between re-subtitling, platform affordances, and participatory reception suggests a promising direction for future AVT research into how translation authority and responsibility are redistributed in digitally mediated environments.

In sum, from the perspective of RQ3, the diachronic retranslations of *Friends* demonstrate that subtitling practices in the TC context have not followed a straightforward trajectory toward source fidelity (as the *Retranslation Hypothesis* suggests). They are instead shaped more decisively by the interplay of institutional pragmatism, regulatory pressures, and audience expectations. While commercial practice has moved toward standardisation and compliance, participatory interventions on the digital space (such as through *danmu*) increasingly blur the boundaries between professional and grassroots subtitling. This participatory turn signals a reconfiguration of subtitling agency in the current era, challenging conventional notions of authority and opening new directions for AVT research into technology-enabled collaboration and collective intelligence.

Chapter 9 Conclusion and Future Directions

9.1 Overview of the Study

This thesis has examined the practice of English-to-Simplified Chinese re-subtitling in mainland China between the early 2000s and 2020s. The central focus has been on how re-subtitling operates as a norm-governed and socially situated form of AVT. Drawing on the framework of DTS, this study has employed a product-oriented, comparative approach to investigate how subtitling strategies vary across the passage of time, patronage conditions, and audience bases.

Three case studies were constructed to explore diachronic and synchronic re-subtitling across both fan and commercial domains. These included diachronic fan re-subtitling of *Doctor Who* (in Chapter 6), synchronic commercial and fan re-subtitling of four Netflix Originals (in Chapter 7), and the several iterations of diachronic commercial re-subtitling of *Friends* (in Chapter 8). CRs served as the primary site of analysis, functioning as empirical markers through which translational orientation and intervention tendencies were identified.

The findings of this study has proposed that re-subtitling should be approached as a specific mode of AVT, whose norms emerge from the interaction of social, institutional, and technological conditions. These findings speak directly to norm theories within DTS, while also offering empirical perspectives that invite reconsideration of theories such as *the Retranslation Hypothesis* in contemporary digital environments and open up new directions for future research.

9.2 Summary of Findings

9.2.1 Shifts in Orientation: Revisiting the *Retranslation Hypothesis*

This study defines orientation norms as the relative balance between foreignizing and domesticating strategies, identified through strategy patterns such as Complete Retention, Transliteration, Direct Translation, and Specification. Across all three case studies, orientation shifts did not follow a singular direction, as no overarching tendency toward or away from source fidelity could be established. What emerged was a series of patterned variations, shaped by the ways in which subtitlers positioned their audiences and navigated the institutional or community frameworks in which their work was embedded.

In the diachronic fansubbing of *Doctor Who*, the first case study, later subtitles displayed a mild decrease in overt source orientation. This shift did not indicate a decline in fidelity but reflected an evolving conception of adequacy. Subtitlers appeared to assume a more culturally

literate and genre-familiar audience, one less in need of explanatory mediation, especially regarding general knowledge of the SC. Translation strategies adjusted accordingly, with greater reliance on more specific intertextual references and shared fandom knowledge.

In the second case of the Netflix Originals, the fan-commercial contrast was more pronounced. While Netflix's official subtitles tended toward standardisation and general accessibility, fansub groups revealed differing approaches. YYeTs, as a generalist team, did lean more consistently toward source orientation, appealing to audiences presumed to value linguistic precision and cultural fidelity. YIGUI, with a more specific fanbase and stronger genre affiliation, engaged selectively with the ST. Their translations prioritised fan resonance and narrative depth over formal consistency, therefore often resorting to intervention rather than a simple source or target orientation.

The third case, the re-subtitling of *Friends*, revealed even greatest divergence. Sohu's version (an early commercial retranslation) echoed the strategies of early fansubs, while Netflix's later version leaned into globally consistent norms. Bilibili's latest version, shaped heavily by censorship and platform regulation, relied on omission, paraphrase, and domestication. Its orientation was not determined by textual priorities, but by compliance with ideological and institutional requirements, alongside assumptions about audience familiarity and acceptability.

These case studies suggest that shifts in orientation do not follow temporal progression alone. In fan contexts, a shared cultural frame often enabled higher degrees of source orientation. Commercial platforms, on the other hand, particularly those operating under intensified regulatory scrutiny, leaned toward accessibility and compliance. These findings in the orientation norms open up a space for re-engaging with the *Retranslation Hypothesis*. While this thesis does not aim to simply test the hypothesis, it offers observations that complicate its assumptions when applied especially to digital, fast-moving, and multi-agent translation environments such as AVT. Re-subtitling in these contexts reflects a set of negotiated responses to changing translational ecologies instead of a single linguistic trajectory. From a DTS perspective, the observed patterns of orientation reinforce the need to theorise re-subtitling not only through abstract models of translational progression, but via the shifting configurations of agency, regulation, and audience engagement that can better define subtitling in the digital age.

9.2.2 Shifts in Intervention: Beyond Explanation to Engagement

In this study, interventional norm refers to the extent to modify or mediate subtitles through strategies such as Specification, Generalisation, Omission, and glossing. Importantly,

intervention is not inherently progressive or regressive. Its significance lies in what it aims to achieve, whether clarification, alignment with platform constraints, or the performance of group identity.

The diachronic case of *Doctor Who* fansubs showed that later fan versions featured more intervention, but not to simply explain CRs. Instead, subtitlers increasingly drew on insider cues, intertextual allusions, and genre-specific phrasing to speak directly to an imagined, media-savvy audience. Intervention here was more about affective positioning, fostering a sense of community immersion and signalling who the translation was for and how it should be read.

The Netflix Originals further demonstrated how interventional norms shift across groups and contexts. A generalist fansub group such as YYeTs, reduced intervention relative to Netflix, producing direct and fluent subtitles aimed at a linguistically competent audience familiar with fansubbing conventions. YIGUI, by contrast, with a specific fandom positioning, embraced heavy intervention, using annotations, glosses, and playful commentary to strengthen connections within niche fandoms. These divergent strategies show that intervention was not standardised even within the fan domain. It reflected different group ethos, assumptions about audience needs, and the subtitler's own stance toward the ST.

In commercial re-subtitling, the *Friends* case revealed how institutional conditions shape intervention. Sohu's 2012 version adopted fansubbing-style interventions to appeal to digitally native viewers during a period of looser regulation. Netflix later reduced intervention, aligning with its global brand and preference for consistency across markets globally. Bilibili's 2022 version, operating under tighter censorship, intervened heavily through euphemism and omission for the sake of pre-empting scrutiny. In this case, intervention became a defensive strategy shaped by institutional risk and platform governance.

Within a DTS framework, these patterns highlight the need to understand intervention as a context-sensitive practice emerging from how subtitlers position themselves in relation to audiences, institutions, and platform affordances. Agency in re-subtitling was not located in the individual alone anymore, but distributed across subtitler collectives, regulatory conditions, and participatory infrastructures. Emerging audience-facing features such as *danmu* further blurred the lines between production and reception, inserting viewer responses into the subtitle space and reshaping how translation was interpreted in real time.

Intervention, then, is best understood as a strategic negotiation of visibility and control, rather than a fixed stylistic feature. What counts as appropriate mediation is shaped by the specific

guidance, constraints, expectations, and more relational dynamics that modern subtitlers need to navigate across the more recent platform-based and participatory translation settings.

9.2.3 Explaining Norm Variation: Patronage, Audience and Subtitler Positioning

The findings across all three case studies indicate that subtitling norms in re-subtitling are not determined in isolation. Norm variation emerges from the interaction of multiple dimensions within specific translational contexts, where subtitling strategies are negotiated in relation to evolving community conventions, institutional constraints, and forms of audience affiliation. Subtitler positioning further mediates these relationships, shaping how such contextual pressures are interpreted and enacted in practice.

To answer the research questions directly, with regard to RQ1, diachronic developments in fansubbing reflect changing community knowledge, genre familiarity, and expectations of interpretive competence rather than a progression toward either foreignization or domestication. Temporal change therefore functions as a conditioning influence on subtitling practice without prescribing a singular developmental direction.

For RQ2, synchronic contrasts between commercial subtitles and fan retranslations foreground a primary structural distinction between institutionally governed and community-based subtitling practices. Commercial platforms tend to prioritise accessibility and at times risk management in addressing a rather heterogeneous audience group, whereas fansubbing often operates within shared cultural and interpretive frameworks that permit closer engagement with more source-oriented strategies. Within the fan sphere itself, however, strategic orientations diverge according to audience scope and community specialisation. Generalist fansub groups more often emphasise linguistic fidelity and informational clarity for broadly culturally literate viewers, while specialised fan communities adopt stronger forms of intervention to cultivate affective resonance and shared interpretive positioning within the fandom. This layered pattern indicates that translational strategies are shaped both by the commercial-fan divide and the differentiated orientations within participatory subtitling cultures, reflecting the social and institutional locations from which subtitles emerge.

Concerning RQ3, institutional governance and regulatory pressure frequently outweigh temporal development as organising forces in commercial re-subtitling. Earlier versions produced under comparatively loose regulation display mediation practices that even at times resemble fansubbing conventions, whereas later global and domestic platforms increasingly stress on standardisation or compliance in response to branding logics and tightened oversight.

The findings here therefore position re-subtitling in the contemporary AVT landscape as a negotiated practice shaped by a convergence of factors (such as temporality, patronage structures, as well as audience and translator positioning). They also reflect broader transformations in platform-mediated media culture, where boundaries between "professional" and "amateur" subtitling, as well as between cultural production and consumption (i.e., the rise of "prosumers"), become increasingly blurry. Re-subtitling, in this view, operates as a socially situated and platform-mediated translational practice in which traditional positions of translatorship and audienceship are continuously reconfigured.

9.3 Contribution of the Study

This thesis contributes to AVT and retranslation studies at conceptual, empirical, theoretical, contextual, and practical levels (as addressed in Chapter 1), while placing particular emphasis on the implications of re-subtitling in platformised digital media environments.

Conceptually, the study defines re-subtitling as a distinct translational phenomenon within AVT. Unlike literary retranslation, which is typically characterised by temporal distance and canon formation, re-subtitling unfolds within accelerated cycles of circulation shaped by streaming infrastructures, participatory cultures, and regulatory intervention. By foregrounding immediacy, multiplicity, and sociotechnical mediation, this re-conceptualisation expands the analytical scope of retranslation research beyond text-centred, literary paradigms.

Empirically, the thesis constructs three purpose-built subtitle corpora that enable systematic comparison across diachronic and synchronic dimensions in both fan and commercial contexts. The findings demonstrate that norm variations in English-Simplified Chinese re-subtitling are neither temporally nor institutionally linear, but patterned through shifting relations among subtitler communities, platform governance, and audience positioning. This data-driven account provides rare corpus-based evidence for re-subtitling practices in mainland China and contributes to the still limited empirical foundation of AVT norm research.

Theoretically, the study re-examines the explanatory scope of the *Retranslation Hypothesis* in the context of contemporary AVT. Rather than indicating a progressive movement toward ST adequacy, re-subtitling in platform-based environments operates through iterative re-negotiation of translational norms under changing sociotechnical and institutional conditions. The hypothesis, therefore, while remains valuable, requires re-conceptualisation as context-contingent and medium-specific, rather than universally developmental. At the same time, the findings also call for a reassessment of translator agency. (Re)subtitling decisions emerge not

solely from individual translators but from distributed configurations of collectives, platforms, and regulatory structures, signalling a shift from individual-centred translatorship toward networked and institutionally mediated norm production in digital AVT. Closely related to this shift is exactly the increasing convergence of professional and amateur subtitling roles within participatory media environments, where audiences, fansubbers, and commercial translators occupy fluid and overlapping positions in processes of cultural production. Re-subtitling thus exemplifies a form of participatory and platform-mediated translational practice that challenges binary distinctions traditionally assumed in audiovisual translation research.

Contextually, by centring mainland Chinese subtitling ecologies, the thesis addresses the Eurocentric orientation of much AVT scholarship. The interaction of censorship regimes, grassroots fansubbing traditions, and global streaming platforms reveals translational dynamics that diverge from dominant Western production models, thereby broadening the comparative horizon of retranslation and norm theories.

Practically, the findings offer implications for localisation workflows and platform subtitling policies. They indicate that audience engagement is closely tied to cultural framing, genre competence, and ideological positioning, and that excessive standardisation may limit interpretive resonance in digitally literate viewing communities. At the same time, institutional constraints and regulatory risk remain decisive factors in commercial environments. Recognising re-subtitling as a site of negotiated mediation can therefore support more context-responsive subtitling strategies across global streaming infrastructures.

That is to say, this thesis positions re-subtitling as a key focus for understanding how translational norms are reconfigured in contemporary media circulation within AVT. It demonstrates the continued relevance of DTS while also extending its scope toward platform-governed, participatory, and rapidly evolving translation environments.

9.4 Limitations and Future Directions

This study has provided a focused investigation of English-to-Simplified Chinese re-subtitling practices, but several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the research focused exclusively on English-to-Simplified Chinese subtitling. This pairing, situated within a distinctive socio-political and regulatory environment, provides a valuable site for analysis but also limits the transferability of findings to other language pairs, modalities, or cultural contexts.

Second, the norm-based case study approach, though enabling detailed qualitative analysis supported by some quantitative data, necessarily drew on a small number of cases. The conclusions should therefore be read as illustrative rather than statistically generalisable.

Third, the study was primarily product-oriented, grounded in DTS. Although process- and function-oriented elements, such as platform guidance, state regulation, and audience reception, are acknowledged to some extent, these dimensions are addressed only partially due to scope and word count constraints. Moreover, the reception analysis is limited to publicly visible feedback (e.g., *danmu*), which, while valuable, may not fully reflect broader audience interpretations or demographic variations.

Finally, the focus on popular media genres, particularly science fiction and sitcoms, narrows the extent to which findings can be applied to other media types. Subtitling practices may differ substantially in educational, documentary, or niche cultural content, where textual constraints and audience expectations diverge.

Despite these limitations, the research opens up several productive directions for future inquiry:

- **Audience reception.** Empirical methods such as surveys, interviews, or focus groups could provide more granular insights into how audiences interpret, evaluate, and negotiate multiple subtitle versions.
- **Process-oriented research.** Studies that investigate the cognitive, collaborative, and institutional dynamics behind subtitling would complement product-focused analyses.
- **Cross-linguistic comparison.** Comparative work on other language pairs and translation cultures, especially in East Asia and the Global South, would enrich understanding of re-subtitling trends and norm shifts in diverse contexts.
- **Translator identity and fan culture.** Examining the blurred boundaries between fansubbing and professional subtitling would shed light on the sociological and labour dimensions of AVT today.
- ***Danmu* subtitling.** As discussed in Section 8.5.4, *danmu* represents a uniquely participatory and decentralised subtitling phenomenon in the mainland Chinese digital landscape. Future research could explore how it constitutes a form of grassroots translation, reframing notions of authorship, collectivity, and viewer agency.

By building on these areas, future research can continue to challenge monolithic views of subtitling (especially fansubbing) and offer deeper insight into the evolving dynamics of translation in digital, globalised media ecosystems.

Appendix A Subtitler Personnel Details

A.1 *Doctor Who* (Seasons 1-4, Subtitler Personnel Details)

This table provides subtitler personnel details for the first four seasons of the 2005 *Doctor Who* revival. Although the main analysis in Chapter 6 focuses on Seasons 1 and 4, all four seasons are included here to demonstrate the rationale for case selection. As shown, Seasons 2 and 3 were predominantly retranslated by a single subtitler, raising concerns about the influence of individual style or idiosyncrasies on the results. By contrast, Seasons 1 and 4 involved multiple contributors in both the initial FRM subtitles and the YYeTs retranslations, thereby offering a more reliable basis for analysing recurring strategies and shared norms.

	FRM		YYeTs	
	Subtitler	**Proof-reader**	**Subtitler**	**Proof-reader**
Doctor Who S01E01	1	1	4	3
Doctor Who S01E02	1	1	4	3
Doctor Who S01E03	2	1	4	2
Doctor Who S01E04	1	1	4	2
Doctor Who S01E05	1	1	4	3
Doctor Who S01E06	1	1	4	2
Doctor Who S01E07	1	1	3	3
Doctor Who S01E08	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S01E09	1	1	2	2
Doctor Who S01E10	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S01E11	1	1	2	2
Doctor Who S01E12	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S01E13	2	1	3	2
Doctor Who S02E01	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S02E02	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S02E03	1	1	2	2

Doctor Who S02E04	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S02E05	1	2	2	2
Doctor Who S02E06	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S02E07	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S02E08	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S02E09	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S02E10	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S02E11	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S02E12	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S02E13	1	1	1	2
Doctor Who S03E01				
Doctor Who S03E02				
Doctor Who S03E03				
Doctor Who S03E04				
Doctor Who S03E05				
Doctor Who S03E06				
Doctor Who S03E07		2	1	2
Doctor Who S03E08				
Doctor Who S03E09				
Doctor Who S03E10				
Doctor Who S03E11				
Doctor Who S03E12				
Doctor Who S03E13				
Doctor Who S04E01	2	1	4	2
Doctor Who S04E02	2	1	3	2
Doctor Who S04E03	2	1	3	2

Doctor Who S04E04	2	1	3	2
Doctor Who S04E05	2	1	2	2
Doctor Who S04E06	2	3	3	2
Doctor Who S04E07	3	1	2	2
Doctor Who S04E08	2	1	1	1
Doctor Who S04E09	2	1	1	1
Doctor Who S04E10	2	1	1	1
Doctor Who S04E11	2	1	1	1
Doctor Who S04E12	3	1	1	1
Doctor Who S04E13	2	1	1	1

Notes:

- *Unknown* = no subtitler credit was specified in the available subtitle files or episode credits; attribution could not be verified.
- *n/a* = role not applicable for that version.
- *Merged cell* = the same individual(s) carried out both roles for the whole series.

A.2 *Netflix Originals* (Subtitler Personnel Details)

This table presents subtitler personnel details for the four Netflix Originals analysed in Chapter 7 (*Stranger Things* S04*, Bridgerton* S01*, The Queen's Gambit* S01*,* and *The Witcher* S01). While the main text summarises group-level and institutional distinctions, this appendix provides a more detailed breakdown of personnel involvement episode by episode. As shown, Netflix commissioned one subtitler per series (with the exception of *Bridgerton S1*, which was split between two subtitlers), whereas YYeTs operated through a team-based model involving multiple subtitlers and typically one proofreader per series. YIGUI adopted a similar collaborative model but also employed an additional consultant role. These contrasts in personnel structure illustrate the institutional and organisational differences underlying commercial and fan-produced subtitles.

	Netflix		YYeTs		YIGUI		
	Subtitler	**Proof-reader**	**Subtitler**	**Proof-reader**	**Subtitler**	**Proof-reader**	**Consultant**
Stranger Things S04E01			1				
Stranger Things S04E02			5				
Stranger Things S04E03			1				
Stranger Things S04E04			1				
Stranger Things S04E05	1	unknown	1	1		n/a	
Stranger Things S04E06			1				
Stranger Things S04E07			1				
Stranger Things S04E08			1				
Stranger Things S04E09			1				
Bridgerton S01E01	1		8				
Bridgerton S01E02	1		8				
Bridgerton S01E03	1		5				
Bridgerton S01E04	1	unknown	8	1		n/a	
Bridgerton S01E05	1		5				
Bridgerton S01E06	1		6				
Bridgerton S01E07	1		6				
Bridgerton S01E08	1		5				
Queen's Gambit S01E01	1	unknown	2	1		n/a	
Queen's Gambit S01E02			2				

Queen's Gambit S01E03			2				
Queen's Gambit S01E04			2				
Queen's Gambit S01E05			1				
Queen's Gambit S01E06			2				
Queen's Gambit S01E07			2				
The Witcher S01E01	1	unknown	10	2	4	2	2
The Witcher S01E02			10	2	4	2	2
The Witcher S01E03			8	2	4	3	2
The Witcher S01E04			8	2	4	1	2
The Witcher S01E05			7	2	4	1	2
The Witcher S01E06			7	1	4	1	1
The Witcher S01E07			4	2	3	2	1
The Witcher S01E08			6	2	4	3	1

Notes:

- *Unknown* = no subtitler credit was specified in the available subtitle files or episode credits; attribution could not be verified.
- *n/a* = role not applicable for that version.
- *Merged cell* = the same individual(s) carried out both roles for the whole series.

A.3 *Friends* (Season 1, Subtitler Personnel Details)

This table summarises subtitler and proof-reader personnel for all four versions of *Friends* Season 1 (F6, Sohu, Netflix, Bilibili). Unlike *Doctor Who* and the *Netflix Originals*, no contributor names or team information were specified in the available subtitle files or episode credits for any version. Accordingly, all entries are recorded as *unknown*.

	F6		**Sohu**		**Netflix**		**Bilibili**	
	Subtitler	**Proof-reader**	**Subtitler**	**Proof-reader**	**Subtitler**	**Proof-reader**	**Subtitler**	**Proof-reader**
S01	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown

Notes:

- *Unknown* = no subtitler credit was specified in the available subtitle files or episode credits; attribution could not be verified.
- *n/a* = role not applicable for that version.
- *Merged cell* = the same individual(s) carried out both roles for the whole series.

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