

Queering the Translation:  
Unveiling Chinese Fansubbed Homosexuality in *Queer as Folk*

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#### **Abstract**

This thesis examines the Chinese fansubbing of *Queer as Folk* through the lens of feminist and queer translation theories, exploring how fansubbers navigate linguistic and cultural challenges in translating queer content. By analyzing translation strategies, the study investigates how fansubbing contributes to the formation and activation of queer identities among Chinese audiences, emphasizing its subversive potential in challenging heteronormative hegemonies in China. The research employs back translation to identify key translation differences, revealing the complexities involved in conveying queer language and identities in a socio-political context that often marginalizes LGBTQ+ expressions. Furthermore, the thesis situates fansubbing as a form of queer screen activism, highlighting its role in fostering public discourse on sexuality and gender diversity. Ultimately, this study positions fansubbing as not only a translation practice but also a communal and activist endeavor that reshapes cultural understandings of queerness in China.

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction: Queering the Unspeakable .....	1
1.1 Research Background: Queer Theory and Queer Translation .....	1
1.2 Research Questions .....	5
Chapter 2 Literature Review .....	8
2.1 Fansubbing the Queer in China .....	8
2.2 Queering Chinese Media .....	11
2.3 Queering Fansubbing: A Screen Activist Practice and Chinese Queer Subjectivity .....	16
Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework .....	20
3.1 Definition of Key Terms in Chinese Queer Context .....	20
3.1.1 Fansubbing .....	20
3.1.2 Sex, Gender and Sexuality .....	21
3.1.3 Queer / Ku'er .....	22
3.1.4 Homosexuality .....	24
3.1.5 Comrade / Tongzhi .....	26
3.1.6 Queerness .....	27
3.2 Theoretical Framework .....	27
3.2.1 Localization of Queer Theory in China .....	28
3.2.2 Feminist Translation .....	34
3.2.3 Queer Translation .....	36
Chapter 4 Methodology .....	39
4.1 Data Collection (Source Material) .....	39
4.1.1 <i>Queer as Folk</i> .....	39
4.1.2 YYeTs Fansubbing Group .....	40
4.2 Data Organizations Strategies .....	43
4.3 Data Analysis Strategies .....	45
4.3.1 Back Translation .....	45
4.3.2 Comparative Textual Analysis .....	46
Chapter 5 The Analysis of Chinese Fansubbed <i>Queer as Folk</i> .....	47
5.1 Supplementing .....	48
5.2 Hijacking .....	53
5.3 Specification .....	62
5.4 “Generalization”: A Challenge to Translating Queerness .....	72
5.5 (Self-)Censorship and Omission .....	79
Chapter 6 Findings .....	84
6.1 Findings Part One: Translating Queer .....	85
6.2 Findings Part Two: Fansubbing as A Queer Screen Activist Practice .....	88
Chapter 7 Conclusion .....	94
7.1 Conclusion .....	94
7.2 Research Contribution .....	96
7.3 Limitations and Future Research .....	99
References .....	102

## Chapter 1 Introduction: Queering the Unspeakable

### 1.1 Research Background: Queer Theory and Queer Translation

Since the 1990s, queer theory has been recognized as a form of activism and critical endeavour that challenges traditional heteronormative conventions and social norms. As Noreen Giffney (2009: 7) suggests, queer theory emphasizes the significance of discourse analysis, focusing on the power of language. Traditionally, queer theory evolved alongside gay liberation movements and struggles for queer legal rights. However, the intersection of queer theory with language-focused discourse analysis has often been overlooked, leading to the emergence of queer translation as a significant new field. Elizabeth Sara Lewis (2010: 5) defines queer translation as encompassing both the translation of queer texts and the work of queer-identifying translators. This research investigates how the application of queer theory to gendered language in fansubbed translations, particularly within the Chinese context, not only reveals the complexities of navigating cultural and linguistic challenges but also highlights fansubbing as a subversive, collaborative practice that negotiates and activates queer identities.

This thesis is concerned with the language of queerness and its cultural signification by way of queer translation. Christopher Larkosh (2007: 66) raises the provocative question, “Is translation a closet?” He explores how queer translators may express their sexuality in their personal lives but not necessarily in their translations, especially in repressive contexts. This thesis extends Larkosh’s inquiry to the practice of fansubbing, asking, “Is fansubbing a closet?” Fansubbers, who are self-appointed translation commissioners (Pérez-González

2007: 71), engage in queer translation by selecting and interpreting content to subtitle. This thesis argues that fansubbing goes beyond mere language translation; it involves reimagining gender identities and positions translation as a queer praxis—a dynamic process that challenges and redefines established gender norms in linguistic expressions (Spurlin 2017: 173).

Queer translation in this thesis refers to a form of social activism that bridges queer theory and fansubbing. To fully understand the activist dimension of fansubbing, it is essential to consider feminist translation strategies. Fan translators often incorporate paratextual materials—such as footnotes and introductions—into their translations, providing readers with contextual information and advocating for feminist and LGBTQ+ rights. These paratextual spaces become subversive locations where new meanings are created, challenging the marginalization of queer texts and individuals within the heteronormative cultural matrix.

This thesis builds on the questions raised by Keith Harvey (2000) regarding the motives behind translating queer texts, the cultural integration of these texts, and the identities and positionalities of the translators. While Harvey's work highlights questions such as *why* a text is translated in a particular way, *who* translates it, and whether translation functions as a form of concealment or revelation (the closet metaphor), this thesis extends these inquiries into the context of Chinese fansubbing. It explores how Chinese fansubbers negotiate linguistic and cultural challenges in queer translations, how their identities influence their translation choices, and how these translations contribute to the visibility and formation of queer communities under conditions of censorship.

Fansubbing, as a form of queer translation, is an act of intellectual activism that fosters knowledge and awareness, particularly in the translation of American queer media into Chinese. It has attracted an emotionally receptive audience in China and established an alternative discourse on sexuality. Many Chinese viewers have expressed their appreciation for activist fansubbing collectives, whose translations of American queer texts evoke profound emotional responses among those interested in issues of sexuality. Fansubbers, through practices like adding footnotes, paratexts, and on-screen explanations, create engaging translations that spark discussions on sexuality (Jiang 2023: 373). As Hongwei Bao (2021a: 27) asserts, a queer world is emerging through community media in China, and this thesis argues that digital queer activism, particularly through the fansubbing of American queer content, is part of this emergence. Translation plays a crucial role in the formation of identities and the dissemination of knowledge regarding the LGBTQ+ community in China, making queer translation, especially in the context of fansubbing, a significant form of media activism.

The lack of official access to Western TV and media platforms like Netflix has made fan translators indispensable in bringing and translating queer media content to Chinese platforms, such as YYeTs<sup>1</sup>. Numerous studies and user testimonials (see Guo 2021; Guo and Evans 2020; Wang 2017) highlight how YYeTs actively disseminates queerness in China through fan-driven efforts, shaping unique characteristics within the local media

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<sup>1</sup> YYeTs (人人影视, YY refers to people, eTs stands for English TV shows) is a well-known fansubbing group that focuses on translating and subtitling Chinese television dramas and other media content into different languages. Fansubbing groups like YYeTs play a significant role in making media accessible to international audiences by providing subtitles in various languages, often for content that may not be officially available in those regions. YYeTs is recognized for its dedication to high-quality translations and timely releases, contributing to the global popularity of Chinese dramas and other media.

landscape. This approach inspires queer viewers to seek a sense of belonging online, as evidenced by their active participation in online communities and forums discussing YYeTs's subtitled content.

The censorship of queer-related audiovisual works in China has intensified the need for alternative forms of queer content dissemination. Since the early 2000s, the China National Radio and Television Administration (CNRTA) has officially censored queer-related audiovisual works, regardless of their origin. The situation worsened in December 2015, when CNRTA introduced a regulation prohibiting television shows and films featuring “non-traditional sexual relationships” and “unconventional non-mainstream marriages,” effectively targeting media with LGBTQ+ themes (CNRTA Official Website 2021: n.p.)<sup>2</sup>. This crackdown on queer content extended to social media platforms like Sina Weibo, which, in 2018, initiated a crackdown on LGBTQ+ content, citing compliance with the China Internet Security Law. This policy sparked widespread disapproval among users on Chinese social media platforms, leading to further restrictions on the creation and distribution of local LGBTQ+ films.

Given the stringent censorship of queer content on official Chinese broadcasting platforms and the limited availability of both local and foreign queer material, this thesis explores the fansubbing of *Queer as Folk* from English to Chinese as a unique form of queer activism in China. The thesis examines the contested status of queer globalization and localization, posing a critical question: Does Western queer theory overlook China, or why does queer theory need China? Departing from traditional translation studies, this

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<sup>2</sup> Article 16-68: 不得展示和宣扬不健康、非主流的婚恋观和婚恋状态 (in English: It is forbidden to display and promote unhealthy or non-mainstream views and statuses on marriage and relationships.)



research focuses on audiovisual translation—specifically fansubbing queer content—through the lens of gender and queer studies. Fansubbing is viewed not merely as a linguistic transfer but as a cultural narrative practice that actively engages with issues of queer identity, contributing to the localization and reshaping of queerness within the Chinese context.

Using the TV series *Queer as Folk* as a case study, this research investigates the fansubbers' gender-sensitive translations and explores the development of an alternative discourse on sexuality that challenges the dominant heteronormative narratives present in Chinese mainstream media. By synthesizing insights from feminist/queer translation studies, queer theory, and sexuality and language studies, this thesis argues that fansubbing, particularly of the queer content in *Queer as Folk*, serves as a form of self-reflection and self-recreation. This practice contributes to a distinct brand of queer activism in China—one that is less politically driven but instrumental in disseminating queer knowledge and fostering diversity. Through fansubbing, an online non-conformist discourse on sexuality emerges, navigating the challenges posed by strict Chinese government media controls and prevailing public homophobia.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This thesis explores the intricate relationship between queerness and fansubbing, emphasizing the need for a gender-focused approach rooted in feminist translation studies. This relationship is intricate because it involves the negotiation of queer identities within a cultural and linguistic framework that often marginalizes or misrepresents queer

expressions, making it essential to approach these dynamics with a nuanced understanding of gender and power. The relatively new concept of queer translation is pivotal in examining the intersections of gender, sexuality, and translation dynamics. This study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on both the practical and theoretical aspects of queer language, serving as an empirical investigation as well as a scholarly discussion. The dual approach of this thesis—merging practical exploration with theoretical inquiry—highlights the specific practice of fansubbing while offering valuable insights for the future trajectory of feminist and queer translation theory within women and gender studies.

In this context, I argue that the process of “fansubbing the queer” involves transplanting Western queer perspectives into a Chinese cultural, linguistic, and national queer framework. This act facilitates the indigenization and domestication of the original text’s queerness, aligning it with the unique local Chinese context. Considering the inherent cultural and ideological nature of language as a social construct, de Toro (2009: 80) suggests that translation inevitably generates new codifications, textual elements, and cultural meanings. My thesis analyzes fansubbing as a form of queer-driven activism, characterized by Wang and Zhang (2017: 303) as a “process of technology democratization.” The localization process offers the potential to liberate ordinary Chinese citizens from both authoritarian and commercial pressures, empowering them to challenge official state dominance and showcasing “the diversity and complexity of China’s media landscape at the grassroots level” (Jiang 2023: 364).

Therefore, this thesis seeks to answer two primary research questions related to fansubbing as queer activism:

- (1) How do fansubbers translate English queer content into Chinese, and what strategies do they use to preserve the original queer identities and expressions?
- (2) In what ways does fansubbing function as a form of queer screen activism, challenging heteronormativity within the Chinese context?

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Fansubbing the Queer in China

Fansubbing, a practice linking conventional translation with the unique dynamics of fandom, has garnered increasing attention in translation studies. Research in this field, as discussed by Leonard (2005), Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez (2006), and later by Dwyer (2012), and Pérez-González (2020), has predominantly focused on translation techniques and intercultural practices. Munday (2009) notes that despite the significant growth of fansubbing over the past three decades, it has only recently come to the forefront of translation research. As a subset of audiovisual translation, fansubbing represents a “virgin area of research” (Munday 2016: 275), particularly in the context of translating queer content within Chinese language and culture. Jiang (2023) underscores the scarcity of studies in this area, noting a gap in the exploration of sexuality translation. This scarcity is noteworthy, especially considering the contentious academic standing of fansubbing, often perceived as “resolutely esoteric, niche” in various cultural contexts (O’Hagan 2012: 31). Such contentions raise questions about the academic exploration of fansubbing, especially in relation to queer content in China, setting the stage for this research to explore these under-examined intersections.

Despite the importance of fansubbing in translation studies, its development is challenged by the tight censorship policies in China. These policies severely restrict access of foreign electronic entertainment products, especially in domains where the government maintains tight control over media content without a comprehensive and transparent rating

system (Wang and Zhang 2016). In this restrictive environment, fansubbing emerges as a crucial means of “queer media activism,” particularly in the dissemination of queer-themed audiovisual works (Guo 2021: 204). Guo (2021: 205) emphasizes that within the Chinese context, fansubbing is not just about providing access to foreign media but also involves the critical act of recontextualizing these media texts for local consumption. This process allows queer content to be tailored to and resonate with the experiences and perspectives of local audiences, thus playing a pivotal role in queer cultural criticism and activism. In this way, fansubbing goes beyond mere translation, becoming an essential tool for the circulation and understanding of queer narratives within the tightly controlled Chinese media landscape.

For example, several studies have shown the practical application of fansubbing in queer activism. Jing Jamie Zhao (2017) underscores the critical role of The Garden of Eden Subtitling group in translating and disseminating *The L Word* to Chinese audiences. This online queer subtitling community not only facilitated access to this content but also fostered a vibrant engagement among Chinese fans through its online forum. Guo and Evans (2020) in their analysis of the Chinese fan translations of the film *Carol* by the Jihua subtitling group, a notable Chinese lesbian fansubbing community that champions LGBTQ rights, demonstrate how fansubbing serves as a medium for advocacy and visibility in a restrictive environment. Wang (2017) delves into the broader social phenomenon of fansubbing in China, with a focus on the YYeT's group. His study explores how fansubbing navigates China's complex socio-political landscape to bring contemporary foreign audiovisual content to Chinese audiences. In doing so, fansubbing

becomes a crucial site for the representation and negotiation of queer identities, particularly in a context where such identities are often marginalized. However, a notable gap in this research is the limited incorporation of queerness and gender in discussions of translation, which often focus more on the strategies and creativity of the translation process than on the socio-political implications of translating queer content. This gap underscores the need for research that explicitly addresses the intersection of fansubbing, queerness, and gender in the Chinese context, which is the focal point of this study.

For instance, Luise von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández (2019) have highlighted the pressing need for heightened gender awareness in the realm of audiovisual translation, noting the field's slow integration of gender-focused theories. Despite the global trend towards incorporating sexuality as an analytical category in translation studies since the 1990s, as Santaemilia (2018) points out, such advancements have not been widely reflected in China's mainstream translation practices. In response to these limitations, the rise of queer subtitling groups in China is a significant development, driven not by coincidence but by the government's prohibition of queer-themed content in mainstream media and the limited domestic productions of such content (Guo 2021). Here, digital technologies, particularly social media, play a crucial role in facilitating the transnational mobilization of queer and feminist content, enabling a more rapid and widespread dissemination of these narratives (*ibid.*). Wong (2012, 2018) observes a profound transformation in Chinese-language media over the past decade, influenced by the interplay of queer globalization and localization. This "queer exchange" between the West and China has catalyzed the production, circulation, and consumption of content tailored for gender, sexual, and

sociocultural minorities. It has ushered in a “queer turn” in contemporary Chinese-language film, television, pop music, and related celebrity and fan cultures (Zhao and Wong 2020). However, this “queer turn” exists in tension with the increasingly restrictive socio-political environment in China, where state control over LGBTQ+ content has intensified. Fansubbing, in this context, becomes a vital tool for bypassing censorship, allowing queer content to circulate despite these restrictions. This transformation, and the role of fansubbing within it, forms a critical part of this research, examining how these developments have reshaped the landscape of queer representation and activism in Chinese media, particularly in maintaining visibility and fostering subtle resistance in a constrained environment.

## 2.2 Queering Chinese Media

In academic and everyday discourse, *media* often encompasses both a variety of cultural forms, texts, and practices, all rich in symbolic content, and the medium of transferring that content to an audience. Particularly pertinent to this thesis, media encompasses cultural screen practices, which are crucial in the communication and representation of queer themes. In the early 2000s, the advent of digital technology enabled many Chinese-speaking internet users to access Western media with queer themes, largely through the efforts of Chinese fansubbing groups. Before this, mainstream media in China offered limited or no representation of queer identities, often reinforcing heteronormative ideologies. Zhao (2017) highlights how fansubbing created a new space for alternative, queer narratives to circulate, allowing for a broader spectrum of gender and

sexual identities to be visible and discussed within Chinese communities. This shift is central to my research, which examines how fansubbing not only translated queer content but also acted as a form of screen activism, challenging dominant media representations and fostering a sense of queer identity and community. Later, Hongwei Bao's (2021a) work *Queer Media in China* sheds light on the range of queer media forms in China, including films, websites, zines, and film festivals, all pivotal in the emergence of queer communities in urban China. While Bao does not examine the role of fansubbers in this context, his emphasis on the influence of grassroots media as a tool for queer screen activism is significant. The research gap raises questions about the broader implications of fansubbing as a part of this grassroots movement. Do fansubbing activities align with the kind of queer screen activism Bao describes, or do they represent a different facet of queer activism in China? This section of my literature review explores the work that considers how fansubbing contributes to the visibility and political activism of the LGBTQ+ community in China.

Despite the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1997 and its depathologization in 2001, censorship and gate-keeping continue to significantly limit queer representation in state-owned Chinese media. The government's policy of "no encouraging, no discouraging, and no promoting (不支持, 不反对, 不提倡)" towards queer communities has resulted in a conspicuous absence of homosexuality in mainstream media representations (Chen and Wang 2019; Guo and Evans 2020). This, coupled with stringent restrictions on foreign film imports (Dresden 2018) and the requirement of government approval for domestic productions, means that movies featuring queer themes often face substantial barriers to



production and distribution (Bao 2021a). This has led many queer films to be produced “unofficially or underground,” facing the constant risk of official bans post-production (Bao 2021a: 33). In this environment, ambivalent forms of queer representation have emerged, characterized by unique Chinese traits. Song (2022: 13) in *Televising Chineseness: Gender, Nation, and Subjectivity* notes that, on television, same-sex desire is often portrayed under the guise of brotherhood (*ge'mer* 哥们儿) or sisterhood (*gui mi* 闺蜜), effectively masking the true nature of these relationships. Zhao (2020: 484) argues in *Queerness within Chineseness* that such censorship is a response to public homophobia, upholding China’s traditional “hetero-patriarchal-structured sexual morality.”

In this social context, fansubbing plays a critical role. It becomes a key avenue for circulating queer content that is often subject to government censorship (Wang and Zhang 2017), filling a significant gap in the mainstream media landscape. This aligns with Bao’s (2021a: 35) observation that “queer community media has emerged in China’s complex media landscape, amid a booming informal and grassroots cultural economy.” Fansubbing, therefore, stands as a crucial tool in disseminating queer narratives, offering alternative representations and voices in a media environment where such content is frequently suppressed or obfuscated. Fansubbers often operate outside formal media channels, using online platforms and peer-to-peer networks to distribute their work. This decentralized approach makes it harder for authorities to track and censor the content, thereby providing a vital space for marginalized voices to be heard.

Further, Zhao (2020: 464) emphasizes the transformative potential of queer pop culture, particularly its capacity to challenge and reconstruct prevailing societal discourses

in China. By questioning foundational assumptions and power structures related to mainstream values on marriage, kinship, class, and the nation-state, queer pop culture acts as a critical medium for social critique and change. This is especially significant in a country where Chinese nationalism and its conceptualizations of national unity influence the production and distribution of media content. Unlike in some Western contexts where television is often criticized as “mediocre and trivial popular culture” (Lodziak 1986: 2), in China, television is primarily positioned as being produced for educational purposes and contributes to a broader framework of knowledge generation in the nation. The educational heteronormative perspective on the role of state media in society presents both challenges and opportunities for the representation of queer content. In essence, Xudong Zhang (2008: 7) interprets Chineseness as:

[China is] mired in increasing imbalance, disparity, conflict, and contradictions as it becomes an awkward new player in the global economy and in global power relations. In this process, various components of what used to be imagined as part and parcel of a congruent, uniform sociogeographic and cultural-ideological space called China are now moving in different, sometimes opposite directions. At the same time, there are political, social, intellectual, and artistic forces that are mobilized to articulate and justify the new coherence, new rationale, and new meaningfulness of China’s unity—as a nation, as an empire, as a “form of life,” or as a sociopolitical order (as disorder).

Likewise, exploring the complex landscape of queer media within the Chinese television context, Jingsi Wu (cited in Song 2022: 34) conceptualizes television as an “aesthetic public sphere.” In this role, television is not just a medium for entertainment but also serves societal functions like cultivating patriotism, promoting certain lifestyles, and contributing to social harmony and stability. This framework presents unique challenges and

opportunities for the representation of queer narratives, which often diverge from—mostly heteronormative— socially endorsed themes.

Therefore, Helen Hok-Sze Leung (2008: 129) encourages a new understanding of *Chineseness* and *queerness*, noting that both have transcended national boundaries and are deeply intertwined with cultural and sexual identity politics. In this context, *queer* is often perceived as an element of *otherness*, triggering public cultural panic and perceived as a threat to China's hetero-patriarchal-structured sexual morality (Zhao, 2020). This perception significantly influences how queer content is portrayed and received in the public domain. Chinese pop scholar Qian Wang (2015: 153) further argues:

Queer is an umbrella term not only indicating the sexual acts and identities for the sexual and gender minorities who do not fit into the fixed conventional heterosexual category, but also indicating the abnormality, deviance, and alternativeness of ideologies, activities, and lifestyles for some marginal communities who challenge the social structure and formation controlled by the governing body and the dominating groups. The queer, therefore, encompasses the sexual and non-sexual minorities who are viewed as the trouble-makers and noise-makers in China's otherwise harmonious society.

Indeed, the politicization of sex, sexuality, gender, and the body in Chinese queerness transcends historical eras and geographical boundaries, making it a persistently relevant and influential factor in shaping societal dynamics. For instance, throughout various dynasties in China, attitudes towards same-sex relationships and non-conforming gender expressions have shifted, reflecting broader social and political changes. In contemporary China, queer identities and issues are often at the center of debates about modernization, human rights, and social harmony (for a detailed discussion, please see Kang (2009)). This ongoing engagement with queerness as a political issue means that it continues to shape

societal dynamics—how people relate to each other, how communities form, and how identities are recognized and valued. This politicization is not limited to academic discussions, but manifests in media representation, often encountering resistance in mainstream channels due to the challenging and unharmonious nature of queer identities and narratives.

### **2.3 Queering Fansubbing: A Screen Activist Practice and Chinese Queer Subjectivity**

Fansubbing, or fan translation, represents a unique form of activism within the realm of media and culture. As defined by Baker (2019: 453), an activist is “someone who poses a challenge to the mainstream values of the political, economic, cultural, or social elite.” In this light, fansubbing in China acts as a redistributive power mechanism from cultural elites to grassroots users, particularly in the queer context. Fansubbing challenges the prevailing heteronormative narrative and creates alternative spaces for discussing sexuality (Jiang, 2023). These alternative spaces feature digital and community-based platforms where queer content can be shared and consumed without the constraints of mainstream media censorship, such as the use of encrypted messaging apps, private social media groups, and niche online forums that operate under the radar of government surveillance. By translating and distributing content often ignored or censored by mainstream media, fansubbers enable the circulation of diverse and queer perspectives. They leverage digital platforms and informal networks to bypass traditional gatekeepers, thus empowering marginalized communities to share their stories and foster a more inclusive cultural

discourse. Bao (2021a: 9) emphasizes the role of queer media activism, noting that:

Intensified media censorship and tight restrictions over China's civil society have shaped queer activism in a specific way: one that is less obsessed with political rights but more reliant on cultural activism; that is, the use of art, culture, and media in expressing queer identities and in shaping queer communities. Such an approach functions as a context-specific and culturally sensitive type of political activism; they also shape distinct types of queer identities.

The evolution of digital video culture in China aligns with the progression of queer activism. In a setting where public gatherings and protests are politically sensitive, queer activism often unfolds within private, exclusive spaces and through culturally oriented activities like film screenings and academic lectures (Bao 2021a: 110). These activities, however, are typically limited to urban, educated elites, leaving broader, grassroots engagement largely inaccessible. This elitism in queer activism contrasts with the more democratized nature of fansubbing, where access to queer media and the ability to participate in queer discourse extend beyond privileged circles, reaching wider online communities. In this context, fansubbing becomes a powerful tool of queer activism because it enables the dissemination of marginalized voices and perspectives that are often suppressed by mainstream media. By translating and adapting content, activists can reach broader audiences and foster understanding and solidarity across different communities. Specifically, queer fansubbing in China strategically employs translation practices and conventions to emphasize and promote discussions of sexuality and queerness. Fansubbers in China use these practices to challenge the dominant heteronormative narratives perpetuated by mainstream media. By doing so, they create alternative spaces—

such as online forums, encrypted messaging apps, and private social media groups—where queer voices can be expressed and heard without the constraints of censorship. These spaces allow for the sharing of diverse queer experiences and foster a more inclusive and dynamic cultural discourse that supports the broader movement for queer rights and visibility in China.

Queer activism in China, rather than solely pursuing legal rights for sexual minorities, leverages the concept of queer to challenge and disrupt established knowledge and power structures. Baer and Kaindl (2017) note that this form of activism aims to subvert heterosexual social norms and destabilize traditional models of gender and sexuality. In this context, fansubbing evolves into a form of activism that not only opposes dominant heteronormative and patriarchal discourses but also engages in transformative translation practices. These practices contribute to efforts to dismantle and question entrenched norms around gender and sexuality in China. Although Zhao (2017: 73) previously noted a gap between online fan discussions and tangible, real-world activism within the queer fan community, Jiang (2023) contends that while activist translation may not immediately lead to radical social change or legal reforms, it represents a significant form of resistance against the constraints of a heteronormative state.

Likewise, Duraner (2021) emphasizes the crucial role of translation as intellectual activism in disseminating knowledge and raising awareness of queer subjectivity and queer bodies in relation to social and discursive power. This observation suggests a need for further exploration into how virtual fan activities can more effectively impact offline queer activism. Nonetheless, fansubbing the queer does create what Pratt (2011: 343) describes

as “queer performance spaces.” These spaces allow individuals to express their identities, preferences, and perspectives in ways that resonate with queer culture and challenge conventional norms, signifying an important step in the broader context of queer activism and representation.

## Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Definition of Key Terms in Chinese Queer Context

Kang (2009: 41) contends that Western sexological views on male same-sex relations found a place in China during the first half of the twentieth century because they mirrored similar conceptual contradictions present in traditional Chinese perspectives. To thoroughly explore the intricate dynamics of queer representation and activism in Chinese audiovisual translation and fansubbing, I need to define the key terms used throughout this thesis. In this section, I provide definitions of crucial gender and sexuality concepts as they apply to the Chinese context, ensuring a clear and comprehensive understanding for my analysis. Some definitions align with their English counterparts, but most have evolved new meanings through localization within Chinese social contexts.

#### 3.1.1 Fansubbing

Fansubbing, short for “fan subtitling,” (字幕组制作) is the process in which fans of foreign-language films, television programs, or other forms of media create and distribute their own translated subtitles. Díaz Cintas and Remael defined fansubbing (2007: 8) as:

A translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavors to recount the original dialogue of the speakers, as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards, and the like), and the information that is contained on the soundtrack (songs, voices off).

In this research, fansubbing focuses on *Queer as Folk*, a series that is not officially available



in Chinese. Fansubbing thus provides wider access to this media for Chinese-speaking audiences. Fansubbing involves translating the original dialogue, timing the subtitles to match the audio, and adding the subtitles to the video. This is often done by fan communities and shared online. In the recreation process, fans “digitize, translate, add subtitles to and make available online unauthorized copies of TV series and films” (Condry 2010: 194). In this research, fansubbing functions as both a tool for language transfer and a medium for mediating queer activism.

### 3.1.2 Sex, Gender and Sexuality

In Chinese society, the term “sex” (生理性别, biological sex) typically refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish male and female bodies. These characteristics include chromosomes, hormonal profiles, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sexual characteristics. This definition aligns with the traditional, biomedical understanding of sex as a binary and biological construct.

“Gender” (社会性别, social sex) refers to the social and cultural roles, behaviors, and identities that society considers appropriate for men and women. Unlike “sex,”<sup>3</sup> which is about biological differences, “gender” is about how people experience and express their identities through norms, expectations, and personal choices. This includes how individuals perceive themselves and how they interact with others based on these roles. In recent years, Chinese gender studies have increasingly acknowledged that gender is not binary (just male or female) but a spectrum, recognizing diverse gender identities beyond traditional roles.

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<sup>3</sup> In spoken Chinese, the concept of “性别” (sex/gender) is used without distinction.

This evolving understanding challenges traditional gender norms and promotes a more inclusive view of how gender is experienced and expressed in society.

Sexuality (性取向) refers to the ways in which individuals experience and express sexual attraction, desire, and relationships. It encompasses a range of identities and orientations, such as heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and more.

Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick (2003: 1)<sup>4</sup>, authors of the seminal work *Language and Sexuality* and scholars in gender studies and sociolinguistics, argue that “sex,” “gender,” and “sexuality” each have distinct and non-interchangeable meanings, highlighting the importance of understanding these concepts within their specific contexts:

The change reflects a general tendency, at least among social scientists and humanists, for scholars to distinguish *gender* (socially constructed) from *sex* (biological), and to prefer *gender* where the subject under discussion is the social behavior and relations of women and men.

Further, Cameron and Kulick (2003: 1-4) argue the alternative meaning of *sex* as “erotic desire/practice” has increasingly given way to the term *sexuality* in the realm of theoretical discourse:

Sexuality, like gender, is intended to underline the idea that we are dealing with a cultural rather than purely natural phenomenon. ... something like “the socially constructed expression of erotic desire”—has been narrowed so that it refers primarily to that aspect of sexuality which is sometimes called *sexual orientation*.

### 3.1.3 Queer / Ku'er

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<sup>4</sup> I chose to add the definitions provided by Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick (2003), because their work combines language studies and gender studies. Cameron and Kulick's definitions accurately meet my research criteria by providing a similar understanding of Chinese gender concepts.

The introduction of queer theory to China marked not only the emergence of a theoretical discourse but also initiated a profound dialogue on the intricacies of translation, addressing the complexities inherent in translating the essence of *queer* within the Chinese cultural and linguistic context. The term *queer* had been transliterated as *ku'er* in Taiwan by a radical intellectual journal *Isle Margin* (岛屿边缘), as explained in Lim (2008: 235):

The compound term *ku'er* consists of the Chinese characters *ku* (meaning “cruel” and “cold” as well as “very” and “extremely”; it is also the transliteration of the English slang “cool” meaning fashionable or having street credibility) and *er* (meaning “child,” “youngster,” and “son”).

In 2000, queer theory made its inaugural entrance into the People’s Republic of China through the formal introduction of Lin Yinhe’s edited compilation, *Ku'er Lilun* 酷儿理论 (literally “a cool kid theory” (in Bao 2021b: 01)). This work not only introduced queer theory to the People’s Republic of China but also marked the beginning of an ongoing process of interpretation and integration, blending Western theoretical frameworks with the unique contours of Chinese society and language. Over the last past two decades, *ku'er* has evolved into a buzzword within Chinese queer communities, influencing perspectives and shaping new understanding of sexuality.

However, it is equally important to introduce the use of queer in Western settings. The term *queer*, originally denoting “strange,” underwent a derogatory transformation in the 1920s but was later reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community in the 1980s. It evolved into a more inclusive term, extending beyond its initial association with gay and lesbian. The process of “reclaiming” a word, previously used as an insult, is a labeling strategy also employed by other marginalized groups. According to Cameron and Kulick (2003: 27-28):

[But] in addition, “queer” represented a bolder attempt to reshape the sexual-political landscape. It was not intended simply as a new label for the existing categories “gay” and “lesbian”; it was part of a whole discourse on sexuality whose aim was to produce a new category. That category was defined in a deliberately broad and loose way, to embrace all kinds of positions based on a rejection of orthodox, heteronormative assumptions.

### 3.1.4 Homosexuality

Kang (2009: 41) pointed out that the Western term “homosexuality” was translated into Chinese as *tongxing ai* (同性爱) or *tongxing lian'ai* (同性恋爱), carrying the dual meanings of “same-sex love” and “same-sex sex(uality).” This translation was commonly used in sexual education manuals and appeared in key journals focused on women, education, sex, and love, as well as in urban tabloid newspapers from the 1910s to the 1940s. Chinese popular culture has taken a long time to include the word and the political concept *queer* into its cultural vocabulary of terms describing various non-normative practices involving same-sex desire and language, and has resorted to using the essentialist term *homosexuality* to register sexual alterity among men. It is for this reason that homosexuality still often features as the main term even in popular culture, and it is still part of the same social vocabulary as the much more modern, imported, term *queer*. I am defining it here in order to clarify this coexistence of sexual terms. The contemporary Chinese translation of *homosexuality* is a direct import from the Western medical terminology that defines a specific group of individuals (pathologically) based on a distinct sexual essence/preference<sup>5</sup>. Hirsch (1990: 07) noted that “because classical Chinese

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<sup>5</sup> Kang (2009: 41) also notes sexological concepts such as “perversion” and “disease” were employed in other studies of the term homosexuality.

[language] lacked a medical or scientific term comparable to “homosexuality” or “homosexual,” and “instead saying what someone ‘is,’” Chinese authors would usually say “whom he ‘resembles’ or what he ‘does’ or ‘enjoys’” (Lim 2008: 236). As a result, starting from the early twentieth century, as Hinsch points out, there has been a transformation marked by “a Westernization of Chinese sexual categories and a Westernization of the overall terms of discourse about homosexuality.” He posits that fluid notions of sexuality, which embraced the idea that individuals could engage in a spectrum of sexual acts, have been supplanted by the rigid Western binary of heterosexual/homosexual.

The differences between the Western notion of *queer* and the Chinese concept of *homosexuality* highlight distinct cultural perspectives on non-normative sexualities. Rooted in cultural specificity, *queer* in the Western context embraces fluidity and challenges binary constructions, emphasizing individual identity. Conversely, “同性恋,” in early 1990s, reflects a Chinese perspective that appears to eschew rigid categorizations, focusing on the modality of love and interpersonal connections rather than fixed identity labels. Later, Sang (2003: 292-293) argues that “the idea of there being an extraordinary homosexual nature confined to a small percentage of the population did not become the overruling paradigm for understanding homoerotic desire,” because “*tongxing'ai* (literally same-sex love) is primarily signified as a modality of love or an intersubjective rapport rather than as a category of personhood, that is, an identity.” These differences underscore the intricate interplay of cultural perspectives, historical influences, and varying conceptualizations of non-normative sexualities in Western and Chinese contexts.

### 3.1.5 Comrade / Tongzhi

Until the 1990s, “同性恋” (tongxinglian, or same-sex love, defined above) was the prevailing discursive term used in Chinese, while “gei-lo,” “gay,” or “gaizu” served as regional and subcultural expressions (Lim 2008: 237). The shift commenced with the adoption of the term “tongzhi” (literally translating to “people with the same will”), which is the Chinese equivalent of the Soviet Communist term “comrade.” The widespread adoption of its initial meaning can be attributed to a statement by Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), the founding figure of Republican China. His dying wish, “The revolution has yet to triumph; comrades still must work hard” (translated in Lim 2008: 237), played a pivotal role in establishing “tongzhi” as the prevailing form of political address in China, especially after the formation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. The term conveyed solidarity, equality, and mutual support. However, with the economic reforms of the 1980s, *tongzhi* as a political address began to lose favor, creating space for its reappropriation by queer communities. This reappropriation sought to find a culturally resonant term to signify community and solidarity without relying on Western LGBTQ+ terminology. In its new context, *tongzhi* invokes a sense of camaraderie and collective identity, vital in a society that values social harmony and collective well-being.

This term began to be utilized as a discursive expression for same-sex sexuality (Chou 2000) during the organization of Hong Kong’s first lesbian and gay film festival in 1989. Subsequently, the term was introduced to Taiwan in 1992 when a section on lesbian and gay films was featured at the Taipei Golden Horse International Film Festival (Lim 2008; Bachner 2017). Despite potential ambiguity and confusion arising from the blending of its

appropriated meaning with its political reference and sensitivity, the term has seen increased usage in China to denote same-sex relationships (For example, see Fang 1995; Li 1998; Li and Wang 1992; Zhang 1994; Chou 1996). The use of *tongzhi* also helps navigate the political sensitivities around LGBTQ+ issues in China. It provides a way to discuss and advocate for queer rights using a term that is less likely to provoke negative reactions from authorities and the broader public compared to directly adopting Western terms like gay or lesbian.

In summary, it is important to highlight that in queer criticism related to the Chinese context, terms like *ku'er*, *tongzhi*, and *tongxinglian* coexist and are employed, sometimes interchangeably, by different groups for distinct reasons and objectives. Broadly speaking, these terms demonstrate youthful rebelliousness, creativity, and social distinction within Chinese queer context.

### **3.1.6 Queerness**

In this research, queerness refers to the depiction and discussion of LGBTQ+ identities, themes, and experiences as seen in Chinese social media and fan-subtitled versions of the television series *Queer as Folk*. This includes how queer content is presented, interpreted, and interacted with by users online, and its role in shaping the visibility and understanding of LGBTQ+ communities within the Chinese digital and cultural context.

## **3.2 Theoretical Framework**

Queer theory, feminist translation, and queer translation are the theoretical

frameworks I have used in this thesis to explore fan translations of the television series *Queer as Folk*. In the chapters that follow, I analyze and compare the English source texts with their fan-subtitled versions to identify how queer content is adapted and represented. My aim is to understand how fan translators navigate the cultural and linguistic challenges of conveying queerness and how their work contributes to the visibility and new understanding of LGBTQ+ identities and issues in Chinese social media.

### 3.2.1 Localization of Queer Theory in China

Queer theory in China is fundamentally a matter of localization of translation, and is intricately connected to fansubbing queer content. Below, I explore the ways in which queer theory is adapted and understood within the Chinese context. In the early 2000s, queer theory began to make its way into the intellectual and academic realms of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This transition is distinctly reflected in the translated titles of two pivotal queer theory works: Wang Fengzhen's *Guaiyi Lilun* (怪异理论 literally “peculiar theory”) and Li Yinhe's *Ku'er Lilun*, (酷儿理论)<sup>6</sup> both published in 2000. Notably, the difference in the translation of the term “queer” is indicative of the diverse evolution of queer theory across Chinese regions. Bachner (2017: 77) observed that:

...the circulation of queerness in the Sinophone world and from Chinese-speaking cultures to global audiences has been an interculturally sensitive issue, both terminologically and politically. And it is one that implicates multiple processes of translation.

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<sup>6</sup> I assert the term 怪异 (Guaiyi Lilun) often implies something strange or abnormal in Chinese, which can reinforce negative views about queer identities. This goes against the inclusive nature of queer theory. A better term is 酷儿理论 (Ku'er Lilun), which uses the transliteration 酷儿 (ku'er) for “queer” and avoids negative connotations. This term more accurately represents queer theory and is later to be better received by the community.



However, in exploring the intricacy of non-normative sexualities and queer politics, it becomes evident that the roots of modern understanding have traversed both epochs and cultures. Acts and expressions now categorized as queer have persisted throughout Chinese history. For example, same-sex relationships in China is a longstanding practice that extends from ancient times to the late imperial eras, as chronicled in Bret Hinsch's work (1990), *Passions of the Cut Sleeve<sup>7</sup>: The Male Homosexual Tradition*. Hinch (1990) provides extensive evidence that homosexuality was widely accepted in ancient Chins, particularly within the royal class. Hinsch documents numerous instances where emperors and high-ranking officials maintained same-sex relationships, which were often regarded with cultural tolerance and even celebrated in literary records.

In China, traditional historical and cultural narratives often depict same-sex relationships as natural and socially integrated, unlike in the West, where homophobia has been more pervasive due to religious and cultural taboos. This difference underscores the assertion in China that homophobia and homosexuality, as understood in the modern Western context, are imports from Western culture (Liu 2010: 296). In the Chinese context, same-sex relationships were often seen through lenses of comradeship and familial loyalty rather than strictly sexual or identity-based categories. This historical backdrop of cultural tolerance and harmony<sup>8</sup> towards same-sex relationships explains why Chinese queer theory often diverges from Western models. The fluidity and adaptability of the concept

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<sup>7</sup> The term "cut sleeve" itself originates from a story about Emperor Ai of Han, who cut off his sleeve rather than disturb his sleeping male lover, showcasing the deep affection and acceptance of such relationships within the imperial court. This historical acceptance contrasts sharply with contemporary government censorship and societal challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in modern China.

<sup>8</sup> While Chinese tradition of same-sex erotic relations is characterized by cultural tolerance and harmony, significant government censorship in the media still exists regarding LGBTQ+ representation. This paradox arises from the contrast between historical cultural acceptance and contemporary political control aimed at maintaining social stability and aligning with current government policies. (related to footnote 5)

of queer in China reflect ongoing negotiations between traditional cultural understandings and modern influences, illustrating that localization and interpretation of queer theory in China are neither singular nor fixed. Instead, these notions continually adapt to new meanings, reflecting a fluid and ever-changing of the presence of queerness in Chinese popular culture and cultural discourse.

Nevertheless, the conceptual foundation for theorizing non-normative sexualities in China continues to rely to the origins of the terminology as it is formulated in Western thought. For a long period, queer theory has been seen as an import from the West and the US. Queer theory can find its trace in a special issue of *Difference: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, edited by Teresa de Lauretis in 1991 and titled *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*. In the introductory remarks for this issue, de Lauretis contrasts the term *queer* with *lesbian and gay*, suggesting that queer can serve as a critically disruptive term challenging the established discourse of “white gay historiography and sociology” (1991: iv). Later, Annamarie Jagose’s (1995) book *Queer Theory: An Introduction* signaled the evolving and ambiguous nature of queer theory, emphasizing its openness and the unpredictability inherent in its origin and progression.

Building on de Lauretis’s (1991) and Jagose’s (1995) work, I argue that the integration of queer theory within Chinese society reveals a crucial dynamic: local knowledge and perspectives do not merely accept or reject queer concepts but actively enrich and reshape them with distinct Chinese characteristics. The term *tongzhi* reflects Petrus Liu’s concept of “Oriental exceptionalism” (Liu 2015: 46), countering Western universalism by showcasing distinct non-Western perspectives. In order to answer Petrus Liu’s (2015)

question, “Why does China need queer theory?” practicing queer theory in the context of fansubbing *Queer as Folk* demonstrates that local knowledge and concerns do not reject queer concepts but enrich and reshape them with Chinese characteristics. As Chu highlights, adapting queer theory in China involves integrating and modifying queer concepts to fit local elements (Chu 2008, cited in Liu 2010: 297). This thesis demonstrates that what is considered “queer” is constantly expanded and revised by what is “Chinese.” This idea aligns with Judith Butler’s assertion that queer is a site of collective contestation, always redeployed and twisted from prior usage (Butler 1993: 228). *Fansubbing Queer as Folk* illustrates this accurately, as Chinese fans actively reinterpret and recontextualize the show to resonate with local audiences, challenging traditional norms in cultural and sexual identity.

It is evident that both “Chineseness” and “queerness” transcend national boundaries. Exemplified in *Queer as Folk*, the intersection of queerness and Chineseness in fansubbing creates new global and local expressions, incorporating diverse linguistic, cultural, and individual features. Hongwei Bao’s (2021b: 283) insight into the inherent openness and uncertainty of queer theory is particularly relevant here. The process of fansubbing *Queer as Folk* in China highlights queer theory’s intrinsic nature of challenging societal norms and resisting dominant forces like hetero-patriarchy. This practice leads us to question what aspects of queer theory travel and transform in the Chinese context. By examining how Chinese fansubbers reinterpret and adapt *Queer as Folk*, we can see the fluidity of queer theory in action and its potential for fostering new, innovative expressions of queerness. In essence, the act of fansubbing *Queer as Folk* in China underscores the dynamic and

evolving relationship between queer theory and Chinese cultural contexts. This ongoing adaptation enriches our understanding of queer theory, showing that it is not static but continually shaped by and responsive to local influences and global connections.

Further, I contend that the development of queer theory in China resonates with the concept of “traveling theories,” a term coined by Edward Said (1984). I invoke Said’s theory because he emphasized how theories are dynamic and can undergo significant transformations as they move from Western to non-Western contexts, leading to shifts in representation and institutionalization. In this light, queer theory intersects with diverse queer identities, power dynamics, experiences, lives, and values in China. As it travels, queer theory adapts to local contexts through processes of translation, both linguistically and culturally. However, the core question remains: what aspects of queer theory are translated effectively, and what aspects are lost or transformed in this process? This investigation highlights how queer theory in China evolves as a “traveling theory,” reflecting a unique blend of global influences and local specificities. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for appreciating the fluid and evolving nature of queer theory within the Chinese context.

I continue to draw on Chinese feminist scholar Min Dongchao’s (2017) concept of an “alternative traveling theory,” which she describes as focusing on “the complexities of the relationship between power and influence that underpins what does and what does not travel” (Min 2017: 7). This perspective is particularly relevant to my argument about the localization and transformation of queer theory in China. Building on Edward Said’s idea of “traveling theory,” I contend that Min’s concept captures the unique dynamics at play when queer theory moves from the West and a type of analysis to China.

In the context of fansubbing *Queer as Folk*, what travels includes the core themes of the show, such as the celebration of queer identities, the exploration of same-sex relationships, and the challenge to heteronormative structures. These elements resonate with Chinese audiences and find new expressions through the fansubbers' efforts. However, not everything translates seamlessly. Cultural nuances, specific Western LGBTQ+ historical references, and certain socio-political critiques may not travel as effectively. These aspects often require adaptation or are sometimes omitted due to local sensibilities, government censorship, or the need to align more closely with Chinese cultural norms and values. This selective travel highlights the fluid and evolving nature of queer theory in China, as it adapts to local contexts while maintaining its core principles.

Queer theory's journey to China is not merely a matter of translation but involves a profound reconfiguration influenced by local discourses, cultural values, and social practices. In this process, historical legacies, power structures, and socio-political climates play crucial roles. Min's idea of an "alternative traveling theory" illuminates how queer theory is negotiated and resisted within the Chinese context, revealing the power dynamics that shape which aspects of queer theory are embraced and which are altered or rejected. I believe that Min's approach is essential for understanding the integration and transformation of queer theory in Chinese society. It highlights the importance of recognizing local adaptations and the influence of power relations on the visibility and acceptance of queer identities and discourses. By focusing on these nuances, I gain deeper insights into the complex interplay between global queer theoretical frameworks and local cultural contexts. This understanding is vital for advancing gender and queer studies in a

way that is sensitive to cultural specificities and global interconnectedness.

### 3.2.2 Feminist Translation

In this research, I approach translation studies from a feminist standpoint, particularly focusing on Chinese subtitles in *Queer as Folk*. Feminist translation theory, which emerged from the Western feminist movement in the 1960s, aims to combat gender discrimination within translation studies and practice. It redefines the dynamics between translations and their originals, emphasizing that translation involves not only linguistic skills but also cultural, ideological, and contextual factors. To achieve these goals, feminist translators typically employ three strategies: supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and hijacking (Flotow 1991: 74–80; see also Flotow 1997 and Simon 1996). Feminist translation challenges traditional hierarchies and conventional roles assigned to women, questioning the fidelity rule and the notion of a central, fixed meaning in translation. This perspective introduces fresh insights and advancements to the field of translation studies. In this thesis, I explore the influence of feminism on fansubbing through three key aspects.

First, feminism influences the meaning of a text by questioning absolute authority, including the traditional primacy of the original text. Feminist translation views each text as a product of its author's identity, shaped by ideological, cultural, and political contexts. Additionally, every reader's unique perspective contributes to the diversity of the text's interpretation. Consequently, the authority of the original text, as emphasized in traditional translation studies, must be re-evaluated. According to Chinese feminist translation scholar Zhongli Yu (2015: 20), feminist translation is regarded as an act of re-creation:

Feminist translation theory takes translation as a creative activity and regards translation as production rather than reproduction, because feminist translators exercise their agency and creativity in translation activities to serve feminist agendas.

By applying feminist translation theory to the fansubbing of *Queer as Folk*, I argue that the practice serves not only as a communication tool but also as a (re)creation of Chinese queer identity. Fansubbing aims to promote gender equality, challenge patriarchal language structures, and represent queer experiences without perpetuating stereotypes. This feminist approach to fansubbing underscores the transformative potential of translation as a form of activism, providing a platform for marginalized voices and fostering a more inclusive representation of queer identities in Chinese media.

Second, from a feminist perspective, mainstream language is governed by male-dominated power, which is one of the major origins of the oppression of women. Through language, women have been inculcated with values that reinforce male superiority, thus submitting to a subordinate status<sup>9</sup>. The situation of queer individuals in a heteronormative society parallels that of women in a patriarchal society. Just as feminist translation seeks to disrupt the male-centric discourse, queer fansubbing challenges heteronormative language structures. By doing so, it reclaims and redefines queer identities in a context that often marginalizes and misrepresents them.

Third, I contend that feminist translation theory revolutionizes the status of translators. Traditionally, translations were seen as mere derivatives of the original, with

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<sup>9</sup> A typical example is the translation of body language in feminist works, where translators actively challenge and subvert patriarchal norms embedded in the original texts.

translators relegated to passive roles. This mirrors the historical subordination of women to men. Feminist radicals began by liberating language, identifying it as a fundamental cause of women's oppression. Reformists further contend that language reflects societal discrimination against women. Feminism demands an interventionist approach to translation, aiming to recreate texts in ways that challenge patriarchal norms (Chen 2016).

In fansubbing *Queer as Folk*, this feminist approach actively disrupts the traditional hierarchy that places the author as the sole authority over a text's meaning. Translators, empowered by feminist principles, transform from mere appendages of the author to active participants in meaning creation. This shift mirrors the improvement in the status and identity of women, asserting that both translators and women can challenge and reshape oppressive structures. Through feminist translation strategies, fansubbing becomes an act of resistance and empowerment, promoting gender equality and ensuring more accurate representations of queer identities.

### 3.2.3 Queer Translation

...we have come to understand translation not as a mere linguistic process or linear operation but as intimately intertwined with new forms of textual and cultural *production*, exceeding the *reproduction* of a text from one language into another.

William J. Spurlin (2017: 173), *Queering Translation*

In my theoretical exploration of fansubbing queer content, I ground my work in the concept of a "cultural turn" in translation studies, as proposed by Bassnett and Lefevere in 1990. This cultural turn marked a profound shift, reflecting the influence of critical theories from cultural studies across the humanities and social sciences. It transformed the



field of translation studies, altering its framework, terminology, and focus (Kedem, 2019). The era saw the emergence of postcolonial and feminist translation theories, which highlighted the role of translation in reclaiming the voices of colonized cultures and empowering women. These theories revealed the intricate dynamics of power, ideology, and ethics in translation, emphasizing the translator's agency. Reflecting on this period, Bassnett (2002) noted it as a time when new intellectual alliances were formed in the study of translation's history, practice, and philosophy.

Building on this foundation, feminist translation theory seeks to promote gender equality, challenge patriarchal language structures, and represent women's experiences without perpetuating stereotypes. As an extension of this dialogue, queer translation emerges, addressing issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Elizabeth Sara Lewis (2010) advocates for a queer approach to translation that enhances visibility for queer individuals and challenges heteronormative power structures. However, translating queer texts often presents challenges, such as a tendency to emphasize heteronormative elements or a lack of careful interpretation due to heteronormative biases.

These challenges are particularly evident in recent scholarship exploring the intersection of queerness and translation. Notable collections like *Queer in Translation* (Epstein and Gillett, 2017) and *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer* (Baer and Kaindl, 2018) attempt to bridge the gap between queer theory and translation studies. Although the term "queer" in translation studies might initially seem unconventional due to its association with non-binary difference and fluidity, when paired with translation, it becomes surprisingly familiar. Epstein and Gillett (2017) argue that translation has always

been inherently queer, making it an apt metaphor for exploring queerness itself. Their work employs a critical and deconstructionist approach common in queer theory, focusing on translating queer content and the reciprocal influence between queerness and translation.

On the other hand, *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer* by Baer and Kaindl (2018) seeks to use queer theory to critique dominant models of translation theory and practice. It explores the political potential of queer theory as a critical practice, as envisioned by Butler (1993, cited in Kedem, 2019), emphasizing the need for queer theory to include a self-critical dimension if it is to maintain its dynamic and plural nature. This self-critical approach is crucial for ensuring that queer theory remains elastic as a political practice and can effectively counter its critics.

In my thesis, I investigate whether queer theory has undergone the self-examination advocated by these scholars and whether translation can be understood as a queer praxis. By bridging theoretical debates in queer theory with practical applications in translation studies, I aim to demonstrate how fansubbing queer content can serve as a case study in applying the principles of queer theory to translation practices.

## Chapter 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Data Collection (Source Material)

#### 4.1.1 *Queer as Folk*

I chose *Queer as Folk* for my research due to its pioneering role in depicting queer lives and experiences on television. As one of the first series to center queer narratives, it significantly impacted the representation of LGBTQ+ identities in mainstream media. By focusing on Season One, I aim to examine the foundational elements of the show that establish its thematic and narrative framework. This initial season not only introduces key characters and their struggles with identity, love, and community but also sets the stage for the ongoing exploration of queer relationships and social issues. Analyzing Season One allows me to investigate the show's cultural significance and its implications for understanding queer representation within the context of Chinese fansubbing practices. The subject of analysis, *Queer as Folk*, was a groundbreaking UK television series that made its debut in the late 1990s. This influential series was later adapted into an American version, retaining the same title, and went on to inspire various international adaptations. The narrative unfolds within a dynamic urban backdrop, focusing on the lives of a diverse group of gay men and women. It focuses on their intricate personal experiences, relationships, and the unique challenges they encounter as integral members of the queer community. *Queer as Folk* garnered significant attention for its daring and unapologetic portrayal of queer characters and their lives. Notably, the series courageously addresses pivotal issues such as sexuality, relationships, identity, and societal acceptance.

The primary source material for this research is drawn from the first season of the TV series *Queer as Folk* (USA, 2000-2001). The data were collected through my extensive viewing of Chinese fansubbed 22 episodes. To a certain extent, this study mirrors my own experience of cross-cultural viewing of *Queer as Folk* as a Chinese gay man. Although not strictly autobiographical, the thesis is undeniably influenced and shaped by numerous personal encounters, where both sexual and textual discoveries unfolded during the examination of fan translations and the original English-speaking queer scenes.

#### 4.1.2 YYeTs Fansubbing Group

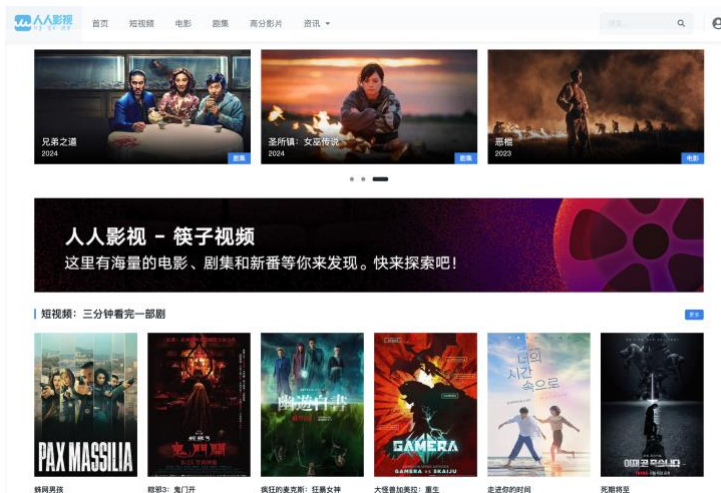
YYeTs Fansubbing Group, established in 2003 and known in China as Renren Yingshi (人人影视), stands out in this research. Wang (2017: 167) describes YYeTs as “the largest fansubbing group in China.” Focused on distributing American TV shows, YYeTs identifies itself as a non-profit organization. The mission, as stated on the website, revolves around the ethos of “sharing, learning, and progressing,” with a strict policy against commercial profit (“forbidding appropriation for commercial profit.”) (YYeTs 2024: n.p.). This philosophy is exemplified in their fansubbed series *Queer as Folk*, as shown in figure 1 (YYeTs 2024: n.p.).



(Figure 1: “only for learning, commercial profit is prohibited” slogan in YYeTs fansubbed *QAF*)

The scope of YYeTs extends beyond entertainment. It attracts a wide audience interested in various aspects of popular culture and subtly challenges the effectiveness of state censorship. In spite of governmental crackdowns starting in 2008 to curb fansubbing of content deemed “lewd, obscene, and violent” (Xie and Huang 2010: 429), YYeTs continues to provide translated subtitles and downloads for a diverse range of foreign media, including films, TV shows, and public lectures. Wang (2017: 168) commends YYeTs for its pivotal role in “translating materials for civic education,” highlighting its impact on society.

A notable development occurred on February 3, 2021, when the Shanghai Public Security Bureau initiated an investigation into YYeTs for potential copyright infringement. The police in Shanghai arrested 14 suspects, investigated 3 companies involved in the case, and seized 20 mobile phones and 12 computer hosts and servers, amounting to more than 16 million Chinese Yuan (Shanghai Public Security Bureau, 2021). Despite these significant legal hurdles, YYeTs remains active, with a website that continues to be accessible, as illustrated in the figure 2.



(Figure 2: The home page of YYeTs)

The screenshot from the YYeTs official website demonstrates the platform's resilience and continued operation. The website features a clean, modern design with a diverse range of content prominently displayed. This includes popular TV series and movies, both domestic and international, indicating the platform's extensive library. The navigation bar at the top offers easy access to various categories such as TV series, movies, variety shows, and anime, showcasing YYeTs' wide-ranging appeal to Chinese-speaking users. The featured content at the top of the page includes a mix of Chinese and international titles, emphasizing the platform's role in bridging cultural gaps through media. Below this, a banner promotes the platform's extensive library and new episodes for users to explore, further highlighting its broad content offerings. The horizontal scrolling section labeled “短视频：三分钟看完一部剧” (Short Videos: Watch a Whole Drama in Three Minutes) suggests YYeTs' innovative approach to providing condensed summaries or highlights of TV series, catering to users seeking quick, on-the-go entertainment. Despite the legal challenges, the continued accessibility and functionality of the YYeTs website underscore the platform's enduring popularity and significance within the fan-subbing community. The variety and diversity of the content available also reflect YYeTs' commitment to providing a comprehensive and engaging viewing experience for its users.

However, scholars like Cai (2008), Gao (2014), Wang (2017), and Chen (2020) have extensively point out that fansubbing owes its popularity to the growth of restrictive government censorship, limited access to foreign media, and high costs associated with movie tickets and official video releases. In this research, fansubbing is particularly evident

in the context of *Queer as Folk*. Due to strict censorship policies in China, queer content often faces significant barriers to mainstream distribution. Fansubbing platforms become critical avenues for Chinese audiences to access and engage with queer narratives that are otherwise censored or inaccessible.

For the selected subtitles, I explore how YYeTs fansubbers mediate the representation of queer identities from English to Chinese. My analysis reveals that fansubbers not only translate the language but also navigate the cultural and political sensitivities surrounding queer content. This act of translation is a form of activism, challenging heteronormative and patriarchal norms by making queer stories available to Chinese viewers. As someone who has experienced the transformative power of *Queer as Folk*, I recognize the profound impact that fansubbing can have on individual self-discovery and acceptance within a restrictive societal context. The fansubbed versions provided by YYeTs serve as a vital lifeline for queer individuals seeking representation and understanding in a landscape where such content is often suppressed. Through my research, I aim to highlight the crucial role that fansubbers play in fostering a more inclusive and diverse media environment in China.

#### **4.2 Data Organizations Strategies**

This research employs feminist translation strategies to organize data analysis. By focusing on specific feminist translation strategies, this study aims to explore how Chinese fansubbers navigate and reinterpret queer content within a restrictive cultural and political landscape. Feminist translation strategies, as articulated by scholars such as Luise von

Flotow (1991), emphasize the translator's role in challenging patriarchal and heteronormative norms. This approach is particularly pertinent for *Queer as Folk*, a series that centers queer identities and experiences. In the context of Chinese fansubbing, feminist translation strategies are instrumental in making queer narratives accessible and resonant for Chinese audiences, who might otherwise be excluded from such representations due to censorship and cultural barriers. The translation strategies used in this study include:

**Supplementing (Chapter 5.1):** Adding extra information or commentary to the original text to fill in gaps or provide additional layers of queer meaning.

**Hijacking (Chapter 5.2):** Purposefully altering or reinterpreting the original text to challenge or subvert dominant ideologies.

**Specification (Chapter 5.3):** Clarifying and elaborating on queer terminologies and cultural references to enhance understanding.

**“Generalization”: A Challenge to Translating Queerness (Chapter 5.4):** Addressing the complexities and challenges of translating queer content within Chinese cultural context.

**Self-censorship and Omission (Chapter 5.5):** Analyzing instances where fansubbers might self-censor or omit certain content due to cultural or political constraints.

These strategies are interconnected, with some overlap between supplementing and hijacking, both of which are a “very visible and explicit form of interventionism, not necessarily demanded by the text itself, but rendered pertinent by the dissonance between the value and intention of the text in its time and contemporary perception” (Simon 1996:



35).

### **4.3 Data Analysis Strategies**

#### **4.3.1 Back Translation**

This research employs back translation as a method to demonstrate and analyze the translation differences. Back translation involves retranslating the Chinese fansubbed versions back into English, a process I will conduct myself, allowing for a detailed comparison with the original dialogues. This method is particularly crucial for identifying how queer terminologies, gender expressions, and culturally specific references to queer identities are altered or adapted in the translation process. By using back translation, I aim to uncover how fansubbers navigate the complexities of translating queer narratives from English to Chinese. This approach highlights the specific choices made by fansubbers regarding language, cultural adaptation, and potential self-censorship, revealing how these choices impact the representation of queer identities.

While my involvement in the back translation process strengthens the analysis by ensuring familiarity with both the original and translated texts, it also presents limitations, such as potential bias in interpreting nuances that may differ between cultures. Through a gendered comparative analysis, I demonstrate how translation strategies like supplementing, hijacking, and specification are applied in practice and how they contribute to or challenge the visibility and understanding of queer content in a Chinese context. The insights gained from back translation provide a deeper understanding of the transformative potential and limitations of fansubbing as a form of queer activism and cultural mediation.

### 4.3.2 Comparative Textual Analysis

Through comparative textual analysis, I aim to examine the differences and similarities in translation approaches, particularly focusing on how various translation strategies impact the representation and reception of queer identities. This method helps to contextualize the fansubbing practices within the broader landscape of translation studies and queer representation, providing a comprehensive understanding of how different translation choices influence the portrayal of queer content across cultural and linguistic boundaries. I will investigate how the representation of gender and sexuality is affected by these strategies. For example, certain phrases or expressions may be altered to reflect normative gender roles, impacting the visibility and complexity of queer identities. By comparing the fansubbed texts with the original English versions, I can assess the implications of these translation choices on audience reception and understanding, particularly within the constraints of China's socio-cultural landscape.

This analysis not only highlights the intricacies of translation practices in fansubbing but also reveals the ways in which these practices can serve as acts of resistance against heteronormative narratives. Through this comparative approach, I aim to demonstrate how fansubbing functions as a critical site for negotiating queer representation, shaping audience perceptions, and fostering a deeper engagement with queer content in a Chinese context.

## Chapter 5 The Analysis of Chinese Fansubbed *Queer as Folk*

In this chapter, I analyze the Chinese fansubbed version of the first season of *Queer as Folk* (USA, 2001) by the YYeTs group. My analysis centers on the gender-conscious translation strategies employed in these subtitles. I investigate the translation choices related to the portrayal of queerness, aiming to unravel the rationale behind these critical modifications. Fansubbing is interpreted not only as a means of challenging homophobia and heteronormativity in China but also as a form of creative expression within the grassroots media sector. Fansubbing serves a dual purpose: firstly, as a platform for queer social advocacy in China, enhancing the representation and voices of queer individuals in a media environment dominated by state censorship. Secondly, it illustrates the concept of creative cultural adaptation, with fansubbing acting as an innovative form of audiovisual translation that produces content that is both “new” and culturally resonant for its audience. In this context, fansubbing empowers translators to reinterpret or even redefine the notion of “queer” within Chinese cultural norms, using established local gender stereotypes.

This chapter presents a twofold analysis of *Queer as Folk*. It begins by challenging the perception of fansubbing as a straightforward translation from English to Chinese, proposing instead that it is a creative process involving the adaptation and integration of Western queer concepts into Chinese culture. It then examines how fan translations and creations have transformed, adjusted, and adapted the representation of queerness on screen, thus influencing and reshaping Chinese queer theory. This analysis aims not only

to portray the identity of the Chinese queer community in media but also to expose the underlying homophobia and heteronormativity in contemporary China.

## 5.1 Supplementing

*Supplementation*, also referred to as *compensation*, was introduced by von Flotow (1991) as part of her advocacy for feminist translation, aiming to enhance visibility and empowerment in women's works. Supplementing is a translation strategy used to bridge gaps between two languages, compensating for features that may be lost in translation. It involves adding necessary information to convey the original text's nuances effectively. Feminist translators, in particular, focus on supplementing to preserve and emphasize the expression of gender distinctions present in the original text. In this study, I consider how fansubbers actively intervene in the text to address language disparities, often creating new and unique expressions or wordplay. I view supplementing as not only a feminist translation strategy but also as a means to preserve and compensate for queer elements.

### **Example 1** (QAF, s1e1, 0:03:29.20-0:03:32.70):

Michael's self-narration:

These days it takes real guts to be a queen,  
in a world full of commoners.

Chinese fansubbing:

在这个满是伪直男的世界里,  
当皇后[基佬]是需要勇气的。

Back translation:

In this world filled with pseudo-straight men,  
being a queen [gay man] requires courage.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> I performed the back translation to compare the Chinese fansubbed version with the original English text, ensuring accuracy and clarity in the translation analysis.

In this example, Michael's self-narration is translated by the YYeT's group with a notable shift in focus and terminology. The original phrase "a world full of commoners" is rendered as "a world filled with pseudo-straight men" (伪直男) in Chinese, which introduces a specific cultural commentary on the phenomenon of men who present themselves as heterosexual but may engage in homosexual behavior or possess latent queer identities. This reflects a deeper layer of critique on heteronormativity and the performative aspects of gender and sexuality in contemporary society.

From a women and gender studies perspective, this translation can be analyzed through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Butler posits that gender is not a stable identity but rather a series of acts and performances that are socially regulated (Butler 1990). By translating "commoners" to "pseudo-straight men," the fansubbers highlight the performative nature of heterosexuality and question its authenticity, thus aligning with Butler's critique of the binary and essentialist views of gender and sexuality. Moreover, the term "queen" is supplemented with "[gay man]" (基佬) in the translation. This supplementation serves as a form of clarification and cultural adaptation, ensuring that the intended meaning of "queen" as a term within queer vernacular is understood by the Chinese audience.

The use of the term "pseudo-straight men" also brings to light the concept of hegemonic masculinity, as discussed by Raewyn Connell. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of masculinity that is culturally exalted and often positioned in opposition to other forms of masculinity, including queer masculinities (Connell 1995). By introducing this term, the fansubbers not only critique the dominant masculine ideals but

also expose the fluidity and complexity of male sexual identities, challenging the rigid binaries imposed by heteronormative society.

**Example 2** (QAF, s1e2, 0:15:01.05-0:15:04.35)

In this scene, Michael seeks advice from his gay friend Emmett regarding a heterosexual date with his admirer and co-worker, Tracy. As Emmett hands a sports magazine to Michael, encouraging him to familiarize himself with sports for the date, the fansubber ensures cultural context by mentioning Liza Minnelli, a queer idol.

Emmett:

Here's a sports mag.

Better bone up.

Just in case the conversation veers away from Liza's weight problem.

Chinese Fansubbing:

这里有一期体育杂志，

临时抱下佛脚吧，

以防话题从丽莎[丽莎·明尼利，同志偶像]的体重问题转移到体育上。

Back Translation:

There's a sports magazine here.

Let's make a last-minute effort,

to prevent the conversation from shifting from Liza's [Liza Minnelli, queer idol] weight issue to sports.

The Chinese fansubber adds an explanatory note, identifying Liza Minnelli as a “queer idol” (同志偶像). This supplementation provides context for the Chinese audience, many of whom may not be familiar with Minnelli's iconic status within the American queer community. This aligns with feminist translation strategies that aim to retain and highlight the cultural and gender-specific references of the source text (Simon, 1996).

Furthermore, the fansubber's decision to include an explanatory note can be seen as an act of cultural preservation and education. In China, where queer culture is often marginalized and less visible, such explanations help bridge the cultural gap and promote a deeper understanding of queer references. This strategy aligns with feminist goals of

increasing visibility and representation for marginalized communities (Spivak, 1993).

The translation also subtly critiques the gendered expectations placed on Michael as he prepares for his date with Tracy. Emmett’s humorous advice underscores the performative aspect of masculinity, as Michael feels compelled to conform to gender and heteronormative interests like sports. This critique is preserved in the Chinese translation, highlighting the tension between Michael’s queer identity and the expectations of heterosexual dating.

**Example 3** (QAF, s1e18, 0:19:44.63-0:19:48.69)



(Figure 2: “Gays’ Whiskers”)

In this scene, Emmett talks to his friends Michael and Brian about his experience of a random hook-up with a man (in the closet). The term “whiskers” is introduced as a culture-specific queer metaphor in the conversation:

Emmett:

So I did (the sex). And, uh,  
Afterwards, I, uh...I got a glimpse of his face  
[Excited and whispering] It was...

Brian:

[Surprised] No shit!  
You f...ked...

Michael:

So she really is his beard?

Emmett:

They don't call her "whiskers" for nothing.

The scene depicted in the image (above) presents a moment where queer slang plays a crucial role in the conversation, showcasing how language is intricately linked with culture—especially within the queer community. Emmett references the colloquial term “whiskers,” used metaphorically to describe a woman who acts as a “beard,” i.e., someone who knowingly or unknowingly conceals a closeted person’s homosexuality. Emmett’s quip, “They don’t call her ‘whiskers’ for nothing,” carries a humorous undertone within the community, playing on the dual meaning of “whiskers” as both literal facial hair and as a signifier for the woman’s role in concealing her partner’s sexual identity. This example illustrates how language within the queer community serves as both a marker of identity and a tool for navigating societal norms.

In translating this for a Chinese-speaking audience, the fansubbers add a sidenote: “同性恋的胡须: 指同性恋为了掩饰身份而找的女友或妻子” (back translation: “Gay whiskers: Refers to a girlfriend or wife that a gay person finds to conceal their identity”). This sidenote is crucial for several reasons. First, it is necessary to highlight the cultural specificity of the term “whiskers,” offering a direct explanation that might otherwise be lost in translation. This ensures that both the humor and cultural significance are not missed by the Chinese audience. Second, it serves an educational purpose, informing viewers who may not be familiar with the concept of “whiskers” in this context, thereby broadening their understanding of queer culture and vernacular.

The use of sidenotes or paratexts in fansubbing is a strategic choice that reflects an awareness of the audience’s potential unfamiliarity with certain cultural references. This



strategy emphasizes the translator's role not just as a language converter but as a cultural mediator. By providing this additional context, the fansubbers help to preserve the richness of the original dialogue and ensure that the queer cultural references resonate with the new audience. This translation choice also reflects a broader commitment to inclusivity and representation within media. By taking the time to explain "whiskers" in a culturally sensitive way, the fansubbers facilitate a more inclusive viewing experience that acknowledges and validates queer identities and experiences. It exemplifies how translation can be a powerful tool for cultural exchange and understanding, particularly in the context of marginalized communities. Through supplementing, the fansubbers not only maintain the integrity of the original text but also engage in a form of cultural advocacy, promoting visibility and understanding of queer experiences. It highlights the transformative potential of fansubbing as a medium for both preserving and disseminating queer cultural knowledge across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The approach aligns with feminist translation strategies that aim to preserve and clarify gendered and culturally specific expressions (von Flotow, 1991).

## **5.2 Hijacking**

In her pivotal work on the development of queer translation studies, Elizabeth Sara Lewis (2010) identifies "hijacking" as a key strategy in queer translation. This approach involves the translator, especially one with feminist or queer perspectives, taking ownership of the text to align it with their political intentions. E-chou Wu (2013: 29) elaborates on this concept, explaining that it allows the translator to assert their voice, especially when

dealing with source texts that are “conventional and patriarchal (or heteronormative).” In such cases, the translator has the liberty to “correct” the text to reflect queer sensibilities (Lewis 2010: 11). While this method has sparked debate for potentially straying from fidelity to the original text, and privileging feminist or queer interpretations, I view hijacking not as a deviation but as a strategic tool to surface and amplify queer voices.

**Example 4** (QAF, s1e3, 0:14:06.46-0:14:10.50)

On his way to the nightclub after finishing dinner with Michael and, Ted unexpectedly runs into Blake. Michael hints that Blake might have a crush on Ted, but Ted dismisses the idea, expressing disbelief that someone as good-looking as Blake could develop feelings for him. The conversation unfolds with Ted asserting his doubts, navigating the complexities of self-perception and potential for unexpected connections:

Michael:

[sincerely] You know, it is possible that  
Someone could actually like you.

Ted:

Yeah, it’s possible.  
[some lines omitted]

Ted:

Anyway, I’m sure Brian’s more his type.

Michael:

[frowning] How do you know that?

Ted:

[complaining] Because Brian’s everybody’s type.  
[Chinese fansubbing] 布莱恩是同志大众的梦中情人。  
[Back translation] Brian is the dream lover of the *tongzhi* community.

This translation exemplifies “hijacking,” where the fansubber appropriates a general term and infuses it with specific cultural and political meaning. By using *tongzhi* (同志), the fansubber acknowledges the shared cultural experiences of the Chinese-speaking queer community, bringing a sense of belonging and collective identity to current Chinese queer

identity. In the original dialogue, Ted's remark, "Brian's everybody's type," is a general statement about Brian's appeal. However, the fansubber's choice to translate this as "Brian is the dream lover of the *tongzhi* community" transforms this general statement into a culturally specific one, invoking *tongzhi* as a term that carries the weight of queer identity and political struggles in China. This shift not only localizes the sentiment but also embeds it within the ongoing discourse of queer theory and identity politics in China.

The localization of *tongzhi* in this context illustrates how queer theory has become part of an ongoing dialogue about the complexities and politics of translation. As Schoonover and Galt (2016: 20) observed, "Western-style queer theory has a neo-imperialist quality that limits understandings or radical practice." By choosing *tongzhi*, the fansubber resists this limitation, ensuring that the translation speaks to a uniquely Chinese queer experience, while also challenging the dominance of Western queer narratives. This translation choice highlights how power dynamics play out in the localization and interpretation of queer theory in diverse socio-cultural contexts, demonstrating how fansubbers can subvert globalized queer representations and align them with local, culturally resonant identities.

The scene displays a meaningful interaction that touches on issues of self-worth and the perception of attractiveness within the queer community. Michael's attempt to reassure Ted that he could be liked for who he is represents a supportive friendship dynamic often present in narratives centered around queer characters. Ted deflects Michael's compliment by suggesting that Brian, presumably a more conventionally attractive member of their group, is universally desired. This conversation speaks to a common insecurity that physical

appearance is the primary basis for attraction within the gay community. Ted's line, "Because Brian's everybody's type," reflects a sentiment that certain individuals are deemed more desirable due to their physical appearance or charisma, a notion amplified within the queer community due to its historical emphasis on aesthetic and physical traits.

The Chinese fansubbing translates this line as “布莱恩是同志大众的梦中情人” (Brian is the dream lover of the tongzhi community). The term “tongzhi” is a politicized term within the gay community in Chinese, originally meaning “comrade” and repurposed to refer to members of the LGBTQ+ community. This translation choice goes beyond direct translation; it encapsulates an inclusive yet exclusive feeling within the queer community, indicating that Brian is a paragon within the gay community. The use of “梦中情人” (dream lover) romanticizes the idea of Brian, elevating him to an almost unattainable ideal. This amplifies the sense of longing and desire often present in the discourse surrounding attraction, particularly where certain types are idolized. By translating the phrase this way, the fansubber not only communicates the literal meaning of the dialogue but also adds depth to the narrative by highlighting social dynamics within the queer community. This approach enriches the audience's understanding and invites reflection on broader implications of identity, attraction, and self-esteem. It becomes a tool for cultural translation and social commentary, contributing to the visibility and discourse of queer experiences within the Chinese cultural context.

Hijacking as a translation strategy challenges Western-centric queer theories and identities by highlighting their reliance on privileged language and association with Western discourses, particularly those of the United States. Hongwei Bao (2021b: 02) asserts:

If we acknowledge that queer theory was first produced in a Western context, and that it has now become accepted or even institutionalized in many parts of the world, it is necessary to ask what this process looks like in each social and cultural context and what factors may have shaped the process.

Building on Bao's observation, the practice of hijacking in fansubbing serves as a form of resistance and adaptation, ensuring that queer theory is not merely transplanted but is instead transformed to resonate with local audiences. This strategy acknowledges the unique cultural, social, and linguistic landscapes that shape how queer identities and issues are understood outside the Western paradigm. Furthermore, hijacking exposes the limitations of Western-centric queer theories that may not fully account for the complexities and nuances of queer experiences in different cultural settings. It highlights the importance of developing localized queer theories and practices that are informed by and responsive to specific cultural and social dynamics.

Hijacking, therefore, can be seen as an act of queer activism that not only facilitates comprehension and relatability but also empowers local LGBTQ+ communities by validating their experiences and identities within their own cultural frameworks. It resists the homogenization of queer identities and advocates for a multiplicity of voices and perspectives in the global discourse on queerness. This flexibility enables translators to adapt their strategies based on the cultural context and the significance of gendered concepts (Spivak, 1993).

Let us examine another example of hijacking:

**Example 5** (QAF, s1e4, 0:33:14.77-0:33:18.11)

Justin is afraid of going back home now that his mother knows he is gay and having

a relationship with Brian, opting instead to seek refuge at Michael's house.

Michael:

[complaining] This is my house,  
You've got your own. Go home!

Justin:

[chewing] I can't.

Michael:

[unbelieving] What?

Justin:

[chewing] I can't.  
My mom knows.

[Michael's mother] Debbie:

[inviting] Well, she can go to my *p-flag group* at the centre,  
[Chinese fansubbing] 那她可以去我办的同性恋家属联谊会。  
[Back translation] Then she can go to the gay family support group that I organize.

Debbie continuing:

every other Tuesday.  
I'll get her a T-shirt and a button.



(Figure 3: Hijacking “p-flag”)

Hijacking in the context of fansubbing can be seen as a potent form of queer educational activism. The scene in question from *Queer as Folk* illustrates an important moment of support and community within the life of a young gay man, Justin, who is afraid to return home after his mother discovers his sexual orientation and relationship with Brian. Michael's home becomes a sanctuary, and the presence of Michael's mother, Debbie, adds a crucial layer of communal support. In the original English dialogue, Debbie references “P-FLAG,” a well-known support organization for the LGBTQ+ community

focused on families and friends of queer folks. The Chinese fansubbing replaces “P-FLAG” with “同性恋家属联谊会,” which directly translates to “gay family support group.” This translation choice is significant as it unpacks the acronym into a descriptive term that immediately conveys the group’s nature and purpose to an audience unfamiliar with the organization. This is a clear example of hijacking, where the translation bypasses a direct transliteration in favor of a more explanatory phrase.

Hijacking serves as queer educational activism by challenging the dominant medicalized and pathologized perceptions of homosexuality in China. Despite the decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality in 2001, homosexuality in China is still primarily seen through a medical or pathological lens. Cui notes (in Liu 2015: 36) that homosexuality in China is acknowledged more for medical management and as a public health concern, particularly in the context of AIDS prevention. Consequently, queer theory in China has become a medico-scientific concept, spawning bureaucrats and medical professionals who are answerable to the state’s interests (Liu 2015: 36-37). This framework aligns with the state’s historical prosecution of sex between men under “hooliganism” (流氓罪), viewed as a disruption of social order rather than an act of sodomy (Kang 2012: 233-234).

By hijacking the term “P-FLAG” and rendering it as “gay family support group,” the fansubbers not only make the content accessible and relevant but also subtly educate the audience about the importance of community support for LGBTQ+ individuals. This act of translation activism challenges the medicalization and pathologization of queer identities by presenting them in a context of support and normalization. It underscores

the need to move beyond the framework of disease research and public health concerns, advocating instead for a more inclusive and humanized understanding of queer identities. Thus, hijacking in fansubbing becomes a powerful tool for promoting queer theory and activism in a cultural context where it is still heavily constrained by medical and legal frameworks.

**Example 6** (QAF, s1e4, 0:40:26.49-0:43:29.28)

When Debbie and Michael accompany Justin back home, Debbie takes a moment to connect with Jennifer, Justin’s mother. Sincerely looking into Jennifer’s eyes, she offers a compassionate lifeline, saying:

Debbie:

[sincerely looking at Jennifer] Listen, uh...  
 If you ever need to talk to somebody,  
 I work over at the liberty diner,  
 on liberty avenue.  
 [pause]...cause I know what you’re going through...  
 The finding out [Chinese fansubbing: 发现孩子是同性恋]



(Figure 4: Hijacking the “finding out”)

Hijacking as a translation strategy in fansubbing serves as a useful method to “break the closet in translation,” functioning as a form of activism that amplifies queer voices. Debbie’s phrase “the finding out” delicately references the emotional process of discovering that one’s child is gay. The subtlety of this language reflects the uncertainty



and confusion that often accompanies such a revelation for a parent. The Chinese fansubbing, however, makes a deliberate choice to be more explicit, translating the phrase to “发现孩子是同性恋” (finding out the kid is gay). This direct approach by the fansubbers provides clarity and leaves no ambiguity about the nature of what Jennifer is facing. This example of hijacking does not merely convey the literal meaning of the words but delves into their deeper significance within the context of the narrative.

I revisit Christopher Larkosh's (2007: 66) intriguing question: “Is translation a closet?” This question prompts us to consider how translation can obscure or reveal truths, much like a closet in the context of LGBTQ+ identities, and how can translation be gendered. By explicitly stating the nature of the “finding out,” the fansubbers confront the issue of sexual orientation head-on, bringing it to the forefront and highlighting the specific challenge that Jennifer is experiencing. This translation decision is significant as it breaks through the layers of silence and ambiguity, effectively “breaking the closet in translation.” In doing so, it normalizes the conversation around homosexuality, which is crucial in Chinese culture where such discussions may still be considered taboo or receive limited visibility on screen.

Moreover, by choosing to be explicit in their translation of terms related to same-sex and homosexuality, the fansubbers are fostering a sense of community and understanding. Debbie's character is portrayed as not only empathetic but also knowledgeable about the journey Jennifer is on, offering her own experience as a source of comfort and guidance. This translation enhances the narrative by emphasizing the shared experiences of parents within the LGBTQ+ community and the importance of finding support. Through this

hijacking strategy, fansubbers engage in queer educational activism, advocating for visibility and understanding. They challenge the normative frameworks that often silence queer experiences and instead create space for open and honest conversations. This act of translation is not just about linguistic accuracy but about cultural and social impact, ensuring that queer voices are heard, understood, and validated.

### 5.3 Specification

The primary aim of specification (or amplification) is to spotlight the often-observed homoerotic elements in queer screen texts, which are either directly censored or lost in conventional translation processes. The following analysis examines how fansubbers use specification (or amplification) as a strategic tool to dismantle the suppressive forces of heteronormative hegemony which are prevalent in modern China. By using this technique, fansubbers not only ensure that queer voices are accurately represented but also amplify these voices in the translated texts. This analysis highlights the crucial role of faithful representation in translation, particularly in preserving the essence and inherent meanings of queer narratives. Through specification, fansubbers enhance the visibility and understanding of queer elements in Chinese, actively challenging dominant cultural norms and promoting a more inclusive representation of LGBTQ+ experiences.

#### **Example 7** (QAF, s1e1, 0:01:57.15-0:02:07.85)

At the outset of the show, a monologue sets the stage for understanding the atmosphere of queer community dating.

Michael's monologue:

But who wants to be at home, in bed?  
 Especially alone, when you can be here,  
 knowing that at any moment, you might see him.  
 The most beautiful man who ever lived.

Chinese fansubbing:

而谁又愿意待在家，赖在床上呢？  
 特别是单身的时候，明知自己有机会，  
 说不定何时就会遇到那个“他”，  
 那个帅得绝种了的“他”。

In this translation, the fansubbers have chosen to encase the pronoun “him” (他) in quotation marks. This subtle yet deliberate choice serves a dual purpose. First, it emphasizes the gender of Michael’s romantic interest, explicitly signaling that his desired partner is male. This is particularly significant in a context where heterosexual norms are often presumed. Second, the quotation marks around ‘他’ act as a form of specification or amplification, drawing attention to and validating same-sex attraction. This choice by the fansubbers not only preserves but enhances the queer narrative, ensuring that the highlights of the original monologue are not lost in translation but are instead given additional prominence. This example illustrates how fansubbers play a crucial role in challenging heteronormative assumptions and providing visibility to queer narratives in a culturally sensitive and impactful way.

The next example highlights the interplay between linguistic choices and the representation of queer sexuality in the show. In my analysis, I discuss how the subtlety of sexual connotations in the source language is intensified in the target language translation to reinforce the sexual and queer connotations of the dialogue.

**Example 8** (QAF, s1e1, 0:03:21.10-03:22.59)

In Example 8, Emmett expresses his attraction to a man in a pub with the original

dialogue, “I’ll go down on him.” This phrase, while suggestive, retains a certain level of ambiguity and subtlety in English. However, the fansubbed translation renders the phrase as “我去玩他的屌” (back translation: “I’ll go play with his cock”). This translation opts for a more explicit sexual connotation than the source text, removing any ambiguity about the nature of Emmett’s interest.

In contrast with Sun Zhili’s (2001: 22) statement that Chinese translators “should be constantly wary of sexual descriptions in foreign novels and never turn them verbatim into Chinese because Chinese people are very reserved on matters of sex,” fansubbers actively contribute to the visibility and normalization of queer sexual discourse by choosing specificity and explicitness over vagueness. The fansubbers’ choice to employ a more direct and sexually explicit term represents a significant amplification of the sexual meaning in the scene. By doing so, the translation not only conveys the intent of the character but also embraces a bolder expression of queer sexuality. This explicitness preserves the frank and open portrayal of queer desire as depicted in the original and adds a layer of defiance against the possible sanitization or dilution of queer narratives in translation. This decision aligns with the advocacy aspect of representational visibility politics, which emphasizes the importance of public exposure in empowering underprivileged queer minorities and raising awareness of their experiences and challenges.

**Example 9** (QAF, s1e2, 0:14:04.83-0:14:15.80)



(Figure 5: specification of being “obvious”)

In Example 9 (QAF, s1e2, 0:14:04.83-0:14:15.80), Emmett responds to Ted’s accusation of him being a “sissy,” a term that carries derogatory connotations when referring to effeminate behavior in men. My analysis focuses on the interplay between language, translation, and cultural perceptions of masculinity, male femininity, and queerness.

**Original Dialogue:** Emmett: “Are you accusing me of being obvious?”

The phrase “obvious” in English is subtle and can have a wide range of interpretations, from being overtly expressive of one’s queer identity to exhibiting traits stereotypically associated with homosexuality. The use of “obvious” rather than “sissy” in the original dialogue is a less confrontational and potentially less offensive choice of words.

**Chinese Fansubbing:** “你是说看起来娘吗？” (Back translation: Are you accusing me of being effeminate?)

The Chinese translation uses the term “娘” (sissy, effeminate), a colloquial term that directly translates to “effeminate” or “sissy” in English. This term is often used derogatorily to describe men whose behavior or appearance is perceived as traditionally feminine. By translating “obvious” to “娘” (sissy, effeminate), the fansubber amplifies the implications of the accusation, making the reference to effeminacy more explicit. This

specification in translation reflects the cultural context in which the subtitled content is consumed, where “being obvious” might not fully convey the intended meaning without a clearer reference to effeminacy.

Queer masculinity, as explored by scholars such as Jack Halberstam (1998) and Raewyn Connell (2005), challenges traditional notions of masculinity by acknowledging the diversity and fluidity of male gender expressions. Halberstam’s concept of “female masculinity” and Connell’s “hegemonic masculinity” provide frameworks for understanding how different masculinities are socially constructed and hierarchically organized. In this context, Emmett’s character represents a form of non-hegemonic masculinity that deviates from traditional masculine norms. The translator’s choice to use “娘” (sissy, effeminate) brings this deviation into sharper focus by explicitly highlighting Emmett’s effeminate traits. This can be seen as both a challenge to and reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity. On one hand, it confronts the audience with the visibility of non-normative masculinity, potentially subverting traditional gender norms. On the other hand, it risks reinforcing stereotypes by using a term that can carry negative connotations.

In my analysis of this example, I was able to consider the cultural attitudes towards gender expression and identity among the audience for which the translation is intended. In some contexts, the term “娘” (sissy, effeminate) might be reclaimed by the queer community as a term of empowerment or identity. However, without such reclamation, its use could perpetuate negative stereotypes and contribute to the stigmatization of queer or gender-nonconforming individuals. This example allows me to explore how the translation might affect the scene’s reception among Chinese-speaking audiences, particularly in

relation to attitudes about gender expression and the visibility of queer identities. It also allows me to consider how the translation interacts with visual cues, such as Emmett's body language and attire in the gym setting, to construct a portrayal of queerness that aligns with or challenges prevailing cultural norms.

**Example 10** (QAF, s1e20, 0:30:11.62-0:30:13.15)



(Figure 6: Specification of “*He’s already taken*”)

The image provided (above) shows a scene set in a vibrant club atmosphere, with Michael asserting a claim over his boyfriend, David, by telling interested parties that “He’s already taken.” The Chinese fansubbing, however, translates this to “他已经有男朋友了” (He’s got a boyfriend), which is a more explicit declaration of David’s relationship status and sexual orientation. In English, the phrase “He’s already taken” is somewhat ambiguous. It signifies that the person is in a relationship, but it does not specify the nature of that relationship. The English phrase could refer to a romantic partnership with a person of any gender, and it relies on the context within the narrative to provide that specificity. This level of ambiguity can serve as a protective veil, maintaining a degree of privacy or even safety, depending on the social setting.

The Chinese translation removes this ambiguity by explicitly stating “他已经有男朋

友了。” The addition of “男朋友” (boyfriend) provides clear information that the person is in a same-sex relationship. This translation choice is significant for a couple of reasons. First, it directly confronts any heteronormative assumptions an audience member might have. It leaves no room for misinterpretation regarding David’s sexual orientation and relationship status. Second, it is a bold statement in a Chinese cultural context where expressions of queer identity might be more censored or stigmatized.

This is a powerful example of specification and visibility. The fansubbers, by choosing to be explicit, are normalizing same-sex relationships and providing representation within the subtitled content. This can have a profound impact on viewers, especially those who identify with the queer community, as it reinforces the validity and presence of queer relationships. Moreover, this translation could also reflect the translators’ understanding of their audience’s expectations for clarity and authenticity in representing queer relationships. By opting for specificity, the fansubbers ensure that the narrative’s queer elements are not diluted for Chinese-speaking audiences, who might draw significant meaning from seeing direct and unambiguous representations of same-sex love on screen.

**Example 11** (QAF, s1e12, 0:45:47.69-0:45:49.33)



(Figure 7: specification of “couple”)



In this image, we see a scene taking place in a gay bar with the character Brian making a playful inquiry about the status of Michael's relationship with the line: "So, how's the happy couple?" The Chinese fansubbing translates this to "幸福的小夫夫怎么样"[back translation: how's the happy husband-husband?] with the term "夫夫" (*fufu*) used to refer to the "couple".

The English word *couple* is neutral and inclusive; it does not specify the gender of the individuals in the relationship and can apply to any two people who are romantically involved. In the context of a gay bar, where the community is familiar with gay relationships, its use carries an implied understanding of the couple's nature without explicitly stating it. However, the Chinese translation "夫夫" (husband-husband) introduces a specific gendered nuance. In contrast to the conventional term "夫妇" (husband-wife), which denotes a heterosexual couple, "夫夫" humorously subverts the heteropatriarchal norm. By replacing "妇" (wife) with another "夫" (husband), this term directly signals a same-sex male relationship. It both specifies and normalizes the gay couple, offering an explicit acknowledgment in a cultural context where such recognition might still be evolving or socially contentious. This play on traditional terminology highlights the tension between established heteronormative concepts of marriage and emerging LGBTQ+ identities.

In this regard, the choice to use "夫夫" can be seen as an act of visibility and affirmation of male same-sex / male homosexual relationships and coupledness celebrated in the original series. This linguistic solution in Chinese not only reflects the characters' reality within the narrative but also challenges heteronormative assumptions that might be

prevalent among the viewership. By choosing a term that clearly denotes a same-sex relationship, the fansubbers are participating in a form of cultural advocacy, promoting a broader acceptance of diverse relationship structures. Moreover, the use of “夫夫” in the subtitle can resonate deeply with viewers who identify with or support the LGBTQ+ community, as it provides representation and validation. It also has the potential to subtly educate viewers who are less familiar with queer relationships about the language and dynamics of these relationships, thereby fostering understanding and inclusivity.

The fansubbers’ decision to use “夫夫” instead of a more generic term for “couple” demonstrates a deliberate effort to highlight and celebrate the characters’ same-sex relationship. It is a choice that not only translates the language but also carries the values of acceptance and pride from the source material into the target culture. This is an example of how translation can be a powerful tool in the representation and normalization of queer identities in media.

**Example 12** (QAF, s1e5, 0:24:53.39-0:25:00.73)

Marvin:

I married young, before I knew.  
Went into the family business.  
By the time I realized what I was,  
it was too late to change things.

Chinese Fansubbing:

我太年轻就结婚了，还没搞清性取向。  
随后我继承了家业。  
然后意识到自己是同性恋时，  
已经太晚了一切都无法改变了。



(Figure 8: Specification of “what I was”)

The scene depicted presents a deeply personal and complex narrative of Marvin’s self-realization and the subsequent struggle with his identity within the constraints of his existing life choices. In the original English dialogue, Marvin uses the phrases “before I knew” and “what I was,” which are subtly coded language common in the queer community. These phrases are purposefully vague and can reflect the internal conflict and denial often experienced by individuals grappling with their sexuality. The term “knew” implies a journey to self-awareness and acceptance, while “what I was” hints at an understanding of his identity that was delayed or suppressed due to societal or personal pressures.

The Chinese fansubbing, however, opts for specificity and clarity. The translation “还没搞清性取向” (before I figured out my sexual orientation) replaces “before I knew” with a direct acknowledgment of the process of understanding one’s sexuality. This choice explicitly conveys the internal conflict and the search for self-identification that Marvin was undergoing. Moreover, the translation of “what I was” to “自己是同性恋” (realized I was gay) is a direct specification that leaves no room for ambiguity. While the English phrase can allude to a variety of sexual identities or realizations of motivations/desires,

the Chinese translation specifies that the realization is about being gay. This specification provides a clear statement of Marvin's sexual orientation, emphasizing the crux of his late self-realization.

By specifying the nature of Marvin's realization, the translation brings visibility to the concept of gay identity, which can be a powerful statement in a culture where such matters might be less openly discussed. The specificity allows the audience to fully understand the gravity of Marvin's situation, fostering empathy and a deeper connection to his character. The translation reflects an understanding of the audience's potential need for clarity and the cultural context in which these terms are received. The specificity may bridge cultural gaps and make the narrative more accessible to a Chinese-speaking audience.

In summary, the Chinese fansubber's decision to use specific language removes the veil of ambiguity often present in English expressions. This act of specification not only translates the dialogue but also carries the weight of queer experience in a way that resonates within the cultural context of the audience. It is a strategic choice that enhances the narrative's queer elements, aligning with the ethos of queer visibility and advocacy.

#### **5.4 “Generalization”: A Challenge to Translating Queerness**

In my analysis focusing on queer translation strategies, I examined the trend of *generalization*, where the rich and diverse range of queer expressions in English tends to lose its complexity in the translation to Chinese. This phenomenon leads to a more uniform and less distinct conception of queerness. This is not just a reflection of the challenges in translating queer expressions across different cultural contexts; the

generalization also serves as a barometer for the development and sophistication of queer theory in China. The following examples underscore that, although queer theory in China is evolving and making strides, it still necessitates a deeper comprehension and thorough investigation to capture the full spectrum of queer identities and expressions.

In practical application, *generalization* refers to a translation method where terms that are explicitly sexual or distinctly queer in the original text are transformed into broader, more ambiguous expressions in the target language. This approach is consistent with Pedersen's concept of "the use of the same term" (2011: 85). In practice, generalization often entails replacing specific queer terms from the source language with more inclusive, albeit vaguer, terminology, or rephrasing explicit language into similar but less specific expressions (Pedersen 2011). These instances illuminate the current limitations and the progressive trajectory of queer theory in China. This field is in the process of establishing its unique identity and lexicon, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of queer discourse.

I contend that the process of generalization in the case study simplifies and assimilates many LGBTQ+ perspectives within the English setting. The section uncovers a notable linguistic phenomenon: a diverse array of English terms, such as "gay," "queer," "queen," "lesbian," "homo," and "homosexual," each bearing unique cultural and social implications, have been described as a single Chinese term, "同性恋" (*tong xing lian*, literally translating to same-sex love). This translation strategy underscores a critical gap in the Chinese language's ability to express the full spectrum of queer identities. While "同性恋"

adequately conveys the concept of same-sex attraction, it falls short in capturing the diverse cultural and social distinctions embedded within various queer identifiers in English.

I cluster the following examples together because they all demonstrate homogenization of queer expressions in Chinese.

**Example 13** (QAF, s1e1, 0:01:36.42-0:01:38.94)

Of course, that's straight men.  
当然了 那说的是异性恋男人  
*Gay* men it's every nine (thinking about sex).  
同性恋是每 9 秒一次

**Example 14** (QAF, s1e3, 0:04:32.80,0:04:35.70)

You're better off being *lesbians* because...  
你们作为女同性恋更幸福 因为...

**Example 15** (QAF, s1e7, 0:36:17.94,0:36:21.10)

'Cause I'll still be your *queer* son.  
因为我始终是你的同性恋儿子。

**Example 16** (QAF, s1e10, 0:34:21.21-0:34:22.37)

What say we hit a *homo* bar?  
我们去泡个同性恋酒吧怎样?

**Example 17** (QAF, s1e11, 0:12:00.37-0:12:02.81)

...a couple of old *queens* in Palm Springs.  
棕泉市的一对老同性恋。

**Example 18** (QAF, s1e12, 0:26:33.73,0:26:35.82)

I told her I'm an out and proud *homosexual*.  
我跟她说我是个出柜的骄傲同性恋。

In the fansubbed versions of various episodes, there is a noticeable trend where a range of unique English terms describing queer identities are uniformly translated into the single Chinese term “同性恋” (tongxinglian). This trend represents a significant linguistic and cultural condensation/monolingualism of queer diversity. For example, in *Queer as Folk* season 1, episode 1, the English dialogue differentiates “straight men” and “gay men” as “异性恋男人” (heterosexual men) and “同性恋” (homosexual men) in the Chinese subtitles. However, when the original script uses terms like “lesbians,” “queer son,” “homo bar,” and “old queens,” these are all translated into various forms of “同性恋” in Chinese,

without any distinction (QAF s1e3, s1e7, s1e10, s1e11, s1e12). This translation choice leads to a homogenization of queer identities, where specific terms with distinct cultural and community meanings like “lesbians,” “queer,” “homo,” and “queens” lose their specificity in the translated version.

The implications of this translation approach are problematic. They imply that the Chinese fansubbing context may lack the necessary linguistic tools to adequately represent the diverse spectrum of queer identities, possibly due to cultural, social, or regulatory limitations. This not only reduces the representation of different queer identities but also restricts the Chinese audience’s access to the varied and rich diversity of the queer community as portrayed in the original script. This translational uniformity could inadvertently lead to a cultural perception in China where queer identities are viewed as a homogenous entity, rather than a diverse and multifaceted community. Such a simplistic portrayal risks stunting the development and comprehension of queer culture and theory in the Chinese context. This approach, which interprets the translation of “tong xing lian” (同性恋) as either a failure to achieve the modernity and maturity of queer theory, a practice that assimilates queer culture, or as a temporal-spatial alternative to the homogenization of queer lives, limits the interrogation of diverse identities. Generalization obstructs the exploration of “varied gender, sexuality, and local category-trespassing identifications and belongings” (Zhao et al. 2017: 27) in audience and fan activities devoted to both Chinese-language mainstream and underground media. This situation underscores the necessity for a more diverse and inclusive queer vocabulary that can more effectively capture the complexities and variances of queer identities and experiences.

The consistency of this translation strategy in the fansubbing of *Queer as Folk* underscores the nascent yet developing state of queer theory in China. It mirrors a linguistic environment that is actively seeking the appropriate terminology and expressions to accurately reflect the diverse realities of queer life. As the discourse surrounding queer identities in China continues to evolve, there will likely emerge distinct opportunities for enriched dialogue and progression towards a more detailed and inclusive queer lexicon, fostering a deeper understanding of the queer spectrum of identities.

I also found some more interesting examples of generalization:

**Example 19** (QAF, s1e2, 0:16:32.27-0:16:36.63)

Oh, you could have told her the truth,  
你可以跟她说实话,  
instead of acting like a scared, little *faggot*.  
而不是像个吓破胆的小基佬。

**Example 20** (QAF, s1e4, 0:33:45.05-0:33:47.85)

My dad threatened to disown me.  
我爸威胁我要断绝关系  
He called me a big *queer*.  
他骂我是变态大基佬。

**Example 21** (QAF, s1e6, 0:22:45.72-0:22:48.88)

Are you implying that I'm a scene *queen*?  
你在讽刺我是个喜欢热闹的基佬吗  
You are a scene *queen*.  
你就是喜欢热闹的基佬

**Example 22** (QAF, s1e15, 0:37:24.28-0:37:28.06)

Well, you picked a hell of a f\*\*\*\* time,  
你他妈非要挑这个时候,  
to tell me you're a *fairy*.  
跑来告诉我说你是个基佬吗?

**Example 23** (QAF, s1e19, 0:37:47.34-0:37:28.06)

Shit. F\*\*\* *fruitcake*.  
真烂，该死的基佬。



The recurring translation choice in the examples discussed reveals a tendency to uniformly translate diverse English slurs and colloquialisms with specific meanings within queer culture into the Chinese term “基佬” (ji lao). This term, typically used in a colloquial and sometimes derogatory context to refer to gay men, fails to encapsulate the distinct connotations of the original English terms. For instance, “faggot” is a term that has historically been used pejoratively against gay men, yet it has been reappropriated by some within the LGBTQ+ community as a symbol of defiance or unity. Other expressions like “big queer” and “scene queen” have their own unique cultural meanings—the former as a general identifier within the queer community, and the latter describing someone prominent in the gay social scene. Terms like “fairy” and “fruitcake” also carry their own histories and contexts. However, their translation into the singular term “基佬” in Chinese diminishes their meanings and erases the cultural and social significance of each expression.

The term “ji lao” originated in Hong Kong cinema in the 1980s. It is phonetically similar to the English word “gay” in Cantonese (“基” gei). In the Cantonese dialect, “佬” (pronounced ‘lou’) often refers to men of lower social status or identity. This etymology explains the development of the term “ji lao.” With the broader recognition of homosexuality in China, the Cantonese term “ji lao” [Back Translation: 基佬; Translation: faggot; Cantonese Pronunciation: gei lou] came into widespread use. Carnaghi and Maass (2007: 142) provide insights into the impact of derogatory labels within the community:

Derogatory group labels... are often used to unequivocally portray groups in a disparaging manner. The mere overhearing of these labels is likely to allow social perceivers to identify the users’ (prejudiced) representations of these target groups.

The audience's (un)intentional overhearing of these labels has an impact on the cognitive accessibility of semantic information linked to the targeted group, alters the perspective of the targeted person, and reinforces intergroup prejudices. Ultimately, being subjected to these queer labels can have a detrimental impact on the overall mental and emotional state of the person/group being targeted, as it can evoke unpleasant emotions, internalized bias, and concerns about not fitting societal norms.

In summarizing this section, it is thus important to recognize that the prevalent translation strategy observed here might emerge for various reasons. These could include the absence of equivalent Chinese terms with similar connotations or perhaps a tendency towards a more conservative use of language within the fansubbing community. The consequence, however, is a noticeable homogenization of queer identities and experiences, failing to capture the richness and diversity inherent in the original language and the realities of the LGBTQ+ community. This oversimplification, by reducing complex terms to a singular, generalized equivalent, inadvertently feeds into a cultural narrative in China that potentially views the queer community through a restricted perspective. This phenomenon highlights the critical need for a more expansive queer lexicon in Chinese. Such a lexicon would be capable of more accurately reflecting the multifaceted nature of queer identities and experiences. The employment of 'generalization' in translation here underscores the ongoing challenge of integrating queer discourse into China and emphasizes the essential need for its development, in order to represent the complexities and vibrancy of queer life and culture more authentically.

## 5.5 (Self-)Censorship and Omission

In my queer translation analysis, I discovered something unexpected yet profoundly telling: instances of self-censorship and omission. These features of fansubbing were not just minor alterations; they were choices that seemed to veer away from the essence of the original queer narratives for reasons that were not immediately clear to me. This section presents my attempt to uncover the motivation behind these decisions. It is personal. As someone deeply invested in the authenticity and integrity of queer narratives in translation, I find these instances both intriguing and unsettling. I am not just looking to identify what was changed or left out; I am more driven to understand why. These omissions and alterations are more than linguistic choices; they signify how queer stories are navigated, and sometimes negotiated, within varying cultural and social landscapes. By sharing this exploration, I hope to shed light on the complexities and responsibilities of translating queer narratives, and how these translations can subtly shape our understanding of queer identities across both cultures. While I came across numerous examples of self-censorship and omission, I have chosen to focus on a specific few, each of which uniquely illuminated the intricate dynamics of translating queer narratives.

### **Example 24** (QAF, s1e4, 0:15:21.49-0:15:25.14)

Justin:

That's not love, Daph.

那不是爱，达芙。

That's just f\*\*\*king.

那只是解决性需求。

In this scene, Justin describes his contrasting experiences with Chris, a classmate, and Brian, his more significant romantic interest, to his friend Daphne. This conversation is crucial in understanding Justin's perception of his sexual encounters. However, in the

translation process, a notable alteration occurs: the term “f\*\*\*king” is replaced with “性需求” (sexual needs), a change that significantly impacts the scene’s tone and meaning. The move from “f\*\*\*king” to “sexual needs” in Chinese strikes me as neutralizing or amelioration (i.e. making something better) or even a gesture towards conformity—all in order to avoid the graphic force of the original term: f\*\*\*king.

This alteration can be viewed through the lens of censorship. The original dialogue’s use of “f\*\*\*king” is direct and unabashed, reflecting a raw and honest portrayal of Justin’s experience. It carries an emotional weight, distinguishing the superficiality of his encounter with Chris from the deeper connection with Brian. The translation to “性需求,” (sexual needs) however, strips away the raw explicitness. This choice could stem from an attempt to conform to Chinese cultural norms or broadcasting standards in the audience’s context, suggesting a deliberate softening of the original content’s intensity. This reminds me of Sun Zhili’s (2001: 22) statement that Chinese translators “should be constantly wary of sexual descriptions in foreign novels and never turn them verbatim into Chinese because Chinese people are very reserved on matters of sex.”

**Example 25** (QAF, s1e10, 0:42:10.27-0:42:16.37)



(Figure 9: Omission of “boyfriend”)

In the scene, Michael admits to Tracy that he is gay, and also that he once dated David. In this scenario, the English subtitle reads “David was my boyfriend,” which explicitly states the nature of the relationship between the speaker and David. However, the Chinese text above it simply states, “大卫曾和我交往,” which translates to “David and I once dated” or “were in a relationship.” The term “boyfriend” is omitted in the Chinese translation.

I argue that the omission of “boyfriend” is an example of fansubbers’ self-censorship. In terms of the Chinese gay cultural context, the translation choice to omit “boyfriend” in favor of a more neutral term can have deep implications, reflecting both the linguistic subtleties and the socio-cultural attitudes towards LGBTQ+ identities in China. Chinese language often employs subtler expressions for relationships than English. It is thus common for people to use euphemisms or indirect references when discussing topics considered private or sensitive. This can be particularly true for same-sex relationships due to lingering conservative views on sexuality. The use of “交往” (date) instead of a direct term like “男朋友” (boyfriend) allows for ambiguity, which may be more culturally acceptable for some, for example, homophobic audiences. The choice to use a more ambiguous term may also relate to the audience’s ability to project their interpretations onto the narrative. For individuals familiar with LGBTQ+ contexts, the implication of a romantic relationship is clear, even without the term “boyfriend.” For those less familiar, the vagueness allows for a range of interpretations, potentially reducing the risk of alienating viewers who might be uncomfortable with or opposed to such content.

In environments where direct representation of queer relationships is restricted, subtlety becomes a tool for inclusivity. Queer coding—a character’s sexual orientation is implied by significant subtext without being stated outright (Duarte 2022: n. p.)—allows queer individuals to see themselves in media while maintaining plausible deniability. The choice of words here can be seen as an example of queer coding, providing representation without explicit labels. Given the nature of fansubbing, where diverse fansubbers with distinct perspectives contribute, the degree of openness about one’s sexual orientation within the Chinese gay community is notably varied. This variation could be reflective of the personal experiences and comfort levels of the translators themselves: queer translation is not just a textual exercise but one that is inherently tied to the sexuality and identity of the translator (as discussed previously). Consequently, the choice of translation might echo the internal discretion practiced by some within these communities. This subtler linguistic approach, which can be driven by a mix of habit, desire for privacy, or concern over potential social backlash, serves to navigate the complexities of representation while balancing the desire for authenticity with the pragmatic need for caution in a society that may not be fully accepting of queer identities.

Overall, the collaborative and decentralized nature of fansubbing inherently introduces variation in translation outcomes, as different fansubbers often take responsibility for distinct episodes or segments. This division of labor, coupled with the fansubbers’ diverse identities—including their sexual orientations, linguistic competencies, and personal attitudes toward queer representation—inevitably shapes the translation process. Fansubbers typically engage in a range of tasks, from transcribing and translating

dialogue to localizing cultural references and adjusting subtitles for timing and readability. In this process, individual choices about language, tone, and accuracy are influenced by both personal identity and the socio-political context in which they operate. For instance, one fansubber might interpret and translate “he’s already taken” as the more explicit “he’s got a boyfriend” (Example 10, p. 67), while another might render “David was my boyfriend” as the less direct “David and I dated” (Example 25, p. 80). These discrepancies are not merely stylistic but reflect deeper negotiations of queer identity, with some fansubbers opting for explicit markers of same-sex relationships and others potentially engaging in forms of self-censorship.

Also, self-censorship also arises from a combination of personal and external factors. Fansubbers, as volunteers, operate in a grey zone of cultural production, often navigating pressures from state censorship, media platforms, and their own safety concerns. The frequent repetition of specific terms or the omission of potentially sensitive words like “boyfriend” could be a response to these pressures, reflecting an internalized awareness of the risks associated with queer representation in Chinese media. At the same time, the use of explicit queer terminology in some translations suggests that this self-censorship is not uniform, but rather contingent upon the fansubber’s perception of acceptable risk in each instance. These varied translation strategies thus reveal a tension between the desire to faithfully represent queer identities and the necessity of mitigating potential repercussions. As key agents of queer media activism, fansubbers play a complex role in both advancing and constraining the visibility of queer content, navigating a space that requires constant negotiation between personal expression and external regulation.

## Chapter 6 Findings

This chapter presents the key findings from my research on the Chinese fansubbing and queer content in the television series *Queer as Folk*. These findings reveal how fansubbing not only facilitates the translation of queer narratives but also engages in a complex process of sexualizing and gendering content that reflects and shapes viewers' as well as the translators' understandings of queer identities. This connection between fansubbing practices and gender/sexuality analysis underscores the importance of examining how cultural translation acts as a site for both the reproduction and subversion of dominant norms, thereby illuminating the multifaceted nature of queer representation in contemporary Chinese media. To frame the discussion, I restate the research questions posed in Chapter 1:

- (1) How do fansubbers translate English queer content into Chinese, and what strategies do they use to preserve the original queer identities and expressions?
- (2) In what ways does fansubbing function as a form of queer screen activism, challenging heteronormativity within the Chinese context?

The findings are organized into two interconnected spheres that correspond to these questions:

- (1) *Translating Queer*: This section explores the strategies fansubbers use to address cultural and linguistic barriers while preserving the authenticity of queer identities.
- (2) *Fansubbing as A Queer Screen Activism*: This part investigates how fansubbing acts as a form of activism, challenging dominant heteronormative discourses and



promoting public dialogue on gender and sexuality.

By analyzing these areas, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, social, and political implications of fansubbing in the Chinese context.

### **6.1 Findings Part One: Translating Queer**

Translating queer is a long and complicated process. The fansubbing group YYeTs employs a wide range of feminist translation strategies to translate the many queer elements in *Queer as Folk*. In my research process, I discovered that the fansubbing group YYeTs effectively utilizes supplementing, hijacking, and specification to navigate the cultural and linguistic challenges that arise in translating *Queer as Folk* from English to Chinese. These strategies ensure the integrity of queer identities and expressions is maintained, recreated, and amplified in the translation process.

To begin with supplementing, I found that fansubbers added necessary information to bridge gaps between the original and translated texts, ensuring cultural nuances and queer expressions were preserved. For instance, the translation of “queen” is supplemented with “[gay man]” to clarify the intended meaning within the queer vernacular, ensuring that the cultural nuances are conveyed accurately. Next, the translation of Michael’s self-narration, where “a world full of commoners” is translated as “a world filled with pseudo-straight men,” introduces a cultural commentary that critiques heteronormativity and reflects the performative aspects of gender and sexuality in contemporary society. In addition, fansubbers incorporated additional context to ensure that culturally specific references were understood. This includes the use of paratexts, such

as footnotes and sidenotes, to explain references that may not be immediately familiar to Chinese viewers. For example, Liza Minnelli is identified as a “queer idol” in a sidenote, providing necessary cultural context and enhancing the viewers’ understanding of the reference. The last example of effective supplementing is the translation of the term “whiskers” in the context of a “beard” (a woman who conceals a man’s homosexuality). The fansubbers add a sidenote explaining “whiskers” as “同性恋的胡须: 指同性恋为了掩饰身份而找的女友或妻子” (gay whiskers: refers to a girlfriend or wife that a gay person finds to conceal their identity). This ensures the cultural specificity and humor are preserved for Chinese viewers.

Secondly, the fansubbers used hijacking to align the text with their political intentions, particularly when dealing with heteronormative and patriarchal source texts. An outstanding example is the translation of Ted’s line “Because Brian’s everybody’s type” as “Brian is the dream lover of the tongzhi community.” The use of “tongzhi” (comrade) is a politicized term for the gay community in Chinese, which brings cultural and political significance to the translation. This reflects the shared experiences and identity within the Chinese queer community, aligning with queer theory’s critique of binary and essentialist views of gender and sexuality. Another example of hijacking is seen when Justin seeks refuge at Michael’s house after his mother discovers he is gay. Debbie’s line “Well she can go to my p-flag group at the centre” is translated as “那她可以去我办的同性恋家属联谊会” (then she can go to the gay family support group that I organize). This translation emphasizes the availability of support within the queer community, altering the original text to highlight a more localized and culturally relevant support system. Lastly, by hijacking

“The finding out” as “发现孩子是同性恋” (finding out the kid is gay), the fansubbers made a deliberate choice to amplify queer voices and issues directly. I see this as a form of activism aimed at normalizing conversations about LGBTQ+ identities in a cultural context where such discussions might be suppressed.

While strategies like supplementing, hijacking, and specification made the translation more diverse, generalization tended to make it more homogenous. Fansubbers often simplify or generalize complex queer-specific terms that may not have direct equivalents in Chinese. Instead of using very specific Western queer terms that might be unfamiliar to Chinese audiences, fansubbers use more general terms that convey the essence of the original message without losing its queer context. For instance, in translating the expressions “queer”, “lesbian”, “homo”, “queens”, “homosexual”, “faggot”, “fairy”, “fruitcake” with cultural connotations in the Western context, fansubbers used a more generalized and similar term “同性恋” (homosexual) and “基佬”(faggot). This ensures that the content remains accessible while still conveying the essence of queer identity. Even though generalization may lead to a loss of some nuanced meaning, fansubbers appeared to strive to maintain the integrity of queer identities and expressions in their work. They achieved this by ensuring that the generalized terms still captured the core aspects of the original queer content, thereby preserving the overall message and intent.

My research revealed that the fansubbing group YYeTs often employed self-censorship and omission as strategies to navigate the political and cultural sensitivities of translating queer content into Chinese. This approach involved selectively omitting or altering parts of the original content that might have been considered too sexually explicit

or controversial, ensuring the translated material complies with local regulations and cultural norms. In one instance from *Queer as Folk*, the original dialogue uses the f-word to describe sexual activity. The fansubbers chose to translate it as “性需求” (sexual needs), a more generalized and less explicit term. This change avoids the direct and potentially offensive connotations of the original term while still conveying the intended meaning. This translation choice softens the explicitness of the language, making it more acceptable within the cultural and regulatory framework of Chinese media. Through self-censorship and omission, YYeT's fansubbers navigate the complex landscape of political and cultural sensitivities in China. This approach ensures that the translated content remains compliant with local regulations while striving to preserve the core message and integrity of queer identities and expressions, which results in a more normalized and sanitized portrayal of queer content.

## **6.2 Findings Part Two: Fansubbing as A Queer Screen Activist Practice**

In this section, I explore how fansubbing operates as a queer screen activist practice in China, addressing the second research question. My findings reveal that fansubbing serves as a potent tool for activism through several interrelated dimensions. First, fansubbing can be understood as an activist practice that challenges the traditional norms of translation, particularly through the lens of feminist translation theory. Traditional translation theory often upholds the principle of “faithfulness” to the original text, emphasizing that the translator’s role is to accurately and loyally convey the source material’s meaning without deviation. However, feminist translation theory subverts this

principle by advocating for “creative betrayal,” a concept that recognizes the translator’s agency to reframe and reinterpret the text. This approach is particularly significant in the context of queer content translation in China. By resisting the conventional demand for “faithfulness,” feminist translators argue that adhering strictly to the original text can perpetuate the marginalization of women and other oppressed groups, including the LGBTQ+ community. “Faithfulness” in this sense often means reinforcing the existing power dynamics embedded in the source material, thereby depriving both women and translators of their discursive power.

In the practice of fansubbing, this “creative betrayal” becomes an act of resistance. Translators deliberately recontextualize queer language, adapting it to resonate within the Chinese cultural milieu. This process is not merely about linguistic translation but involves a critical engagement with the power structures that dictate which voices are heard and how identities are represented. By choosing to reinterpret rather than simply reproduce the original text, fansubbers challenge the supremacy of the source material and, in doing so, create space for new, localized expressions of queer identities that are more relevant and empowering for Chinese audiences. This act of subversive translation thus becomes a form of activism, as it actively resists and redefines the normative expectations imposed by traditional translation practices and the hegemonic cultural narratives they often support.

Second, the evolution of queer theory in China is deeply intertwined with the ongoing development and transformation of queer notions, which themselves are embedded in the broader context of queer activism. As queer theory has traveled into China, it has

undergone a diverse and dynamic process of reinterpretation, adaptation, and localization. This process is far from linear; instead, it reflects the complexities and nuances of integrating a Western-originated theoretical framework into a distinct cultural landscape. In China, the notions of *tongzhi* (同志) and *ku'er* (酷儿) exemplify how queer identities and politics are being actively reshaped and redefined within a local context. These terms are not mere translations of Western concepts but are deeply embedded in the political and social fabric of Chinese society. *Tongzhi*, which originally referred to comradeship in a socialist context, has been reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community as a term that embodies both solidarity and resistance. Similarly, *ku'er*, a transliteration of the English word “queer,” has taken on unique connotations in China, reflecting the intersection of global queer theory with local experiences and activism.

This process of reinterpreting and localizing queerness is itself a form of activism. It represents a deliberate effort to create and sustain a queer discourse that is relevant and resonant within the Chinese cultural context. By engaging with and reshaping these concepts, Chinese queer activists and scholars are not only participating in a global dialogue but are also asserting their agency in defining what queerness means in their own terms. This evolving discourse challenges the hegemony of Western-centric queer theory and highlights the importance of considering cultural specificity in understanding and advancing queer identities and politics. Furthermore, this localized development of queer theory underscores the diversity of China's queer community. The varying interpretations and applications of terms like *tongzhi* and *ku'er* reflect the multiplicity of queer experiences in China, which are shaped by factors such as region, class, and generation. There's another

layer of diversity from the fansubbers enriches the overall landscape of queer activism in China, demonstrating that the struggle for queer rights and recognition is not monolithic but is instead characterized by a wide range of perspectives and strategies. In this sense, the traveling and evolving nature of queer theory in China contributes to the broader global understanding of queerness while also carving out space for a uniquely Chinese articulation of queer identities and politics. It is through this ongoing process of reinterpretation and adaptation that queer activism in China continues to grow and evolve, challenging both local and global hegemonies and expanding the possibilities for queer expression and solidarity.

Third, this research demonstrates the crucial role that fansubbing platforms, such as YYeTs, play in the dissemination of queer content in China. In a media landscape where queer representation is often subject to strict censorship, these platforms have emerged as vital access points for audiences seeking to engage with queer knowledge and narratives. In China, the widespread censorship of queer content across mainstream media creates significant barriers for LGBTQ+ individuals and allies to access information, stories, and representations that resonate with their identities and experiences. The state-controlled media often either erases queer identities altogether or portrays them in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes and uphold heteronormative values. This erasure not only silences queer voices but also deprives the broader public of the opportunity to engage with diverse perspectives on gender and sexuality.

Fansubbing platforms like YYeTs provide an alternative to this restrictive media environment. They operate as grassroots, community-driven spaces where individuals can

collaboratively translate and share content that is otherwise inaccessible to Chinese audiences. Through the work of dedicated fansubbers, queer films, television shows, documentaries, and other media from around the world are made available in Chinese, often with added contextual explanations that enhance understanding and relevance for local viewers. This collaborative process is inherently activist in nature. By bypassing state censorship and bringing queer content to a Chinese audience, fansubbing platforms challenge the dominant narratives imposed by the state. They create a parallel media ecosystem that not only provides access to diverse queer representations but also fosters a sense of community and solidarity among those involved in the translation and viewing process.

Fansubbing platforms contribute to the broader project of queer activism by making visible the realities of queer lives and experiences. In a context where such visibility is often suppressed, the availability of translated queer content allows for the development of a more informed and empathetic public discourse on issues of gender and sexuality. This, in turn, can lead to greater acceptance and support for LGBTQ+ individuals in Chinese society. By offering a venue for the circulation of queer narratives, fansubbing platforms also play a role in subverting the hegemonic forces of heteronormativity. They empower both translators and viewers to engage with content that challenges conventional norms and opens up new possibilities for understanding and expressing queer identities. In doing so, these platforms not only resist the limitations imposed by censorship but also contribute to the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ rights and recognition in China.

Despite their vital role in providing access to queer content, fansubbing platforms



like YYeTs are not immune to the pervasive censorship mechanisms of the Chinese government. These platforms operate in a precarious space, constantly under threat of shutdown by authorities who monitor and control the dissemination of content deemed sensitive or subversive. Government crackdowns on such platforms are frequent, often resulting in the temporary closure of sites, the deletion of content, or the blocking of access. However, these platforms and their communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience. When faced with shutdowns, fansubbing groups frequently adapt by migrating to new web addresses or using alternative channels to continue their work, ensuring that queer content remains accessible to those who seek it. Moreover, the translators themselves often engage in strategic self-censorship as a means of evading detection and avoiding outright bans. This involves carefully navigating the line between visibility and subtlety, where queer content is translated in ways that might be less conspicuous to authorities while still preserving its core message for the intended audience. By employing euphemisms, coded language, or selectively altering content, fansubbers can reduce the likelihood of their work being flagged by government censors or local media police. This balancing act between self-censorship and the desire to authentically represent queer narratives highlights the complex and often precarious position of fansubbers within China's tightly controlled media environment. Despite these challenges, the commitment of fansubbers to their craft and their communities underscores the enduring nature of this grassroots activism, as they continue to find ways to circumvent censorship and keep queer stories alive.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

### 7.1 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the complex and dynamic practice of fansubbing queer content in the TV series *Queer as Folk*, within the context of China. By examining the translation strategies employed by fansubbers and the cultural implications of their work, I have highlighted the subversive potential of fansubbing as a form of queer activism.

I have argued that fansubbing is not merely a linguistic exercise but a culturally and politically charged act that challenges the heteronormative structures prevalent in Chinese society. My analysis of YYeTs' subtitling work demonstrates how fansubbers navigate the complex interplay between preserving the original queer identities and expressions in the English-language content and making them accessible and resonant to a Chinese audience. Through strategies such as supplementing, hijacking, and the creative adaptation of queer terminologies, I have shown how fansubbers contribute to the formation and activation of queer identities in China, fostering a sense of community and solidarity among viewers.

In my research, I have also underscored the role of fansubbing as a form of digital queer activism, particularly in a socio-political environment where official channels for LGBTQ+ representation are heavily censored. Echoing Bao's observation (2021a: 27) of an emerging "queer world" through community media, this thesis argues that translation is more than language transfer; it is an essential instrument for queer connectivity and advocacy, challenging and reshaping Chinese societal perceptions of queerness. This study highlights the transformative potential of translation as a means of queer activism, offering

fresh perspectives on leveraging language and media to promote queer visibility and representation. Fansubbers, by creating and sharing subtitled content, provide an alternative space for the dissemination of queer narratives, thereby subverting state-imposed limitations on media and contributing to the broader discourse on sexuality and gender diversity in China.

In this thesis, I have also highlighted how fansubbing practices in China are influenced by both local and global queer theories, reflecting the fluid and evolving nature of queerness as it is understood and represented across different cultural contexts. I examined the development, adjustment, and eventual establishment of queer theory within modern China, with a particular emphasis on its interaction with media culture. The concept of queer theory has long been the topic of discussion and analysis in Western settings. However, the intersection of “queer” and “Chineseness” did not occur until the early 1980s. The development of queer theory in the Chinese arena was mostly shaped by Western paradigms. The import was made possible by Chinese-speaking professors who translated and spread important Western theoretical materials after studying abroad. The localized adaptations of queer theory within Chinese fansubbing challenge the dominance of Western-centric perspectives, emphasizing the need for more culturally nuanced approaches to queer activism and scholarship. Helen Hok-Sze Leung (2008: 129) prompts us to recognize that both “Chineseness” and “queerness” have already transcended national confines, raising inquiries about cultural and sexual identity politics. The notion helps to avoid thinking about “Chineseness” as a single fixed/static idea and prevents oversimplifying ethnicity, cultural identity, and language.

Finally, in this thesis I have demonstrated that fansubbing in China is a powerful tool for both cultural translation and social advocacy. It enables the localization and reinterpretation of queer content, making it relevant and impactful within the Chinese socio-cultural landscape. As digital platforms continue to evolve and global media becomes more accessible, I believe that the role of fansubbing in shaping queer identities and fostering inclusive communities will only grow in significance. My research contributes to our understanding of how grassroots media practices like fansubbing can play a crucial role in challenging hegemonic narratives and promoting diversity in societies with restrictive media environments.

## **7.2 Research Contribution**

The significance of this research emerges prominently at the intersection of women and gender studies, queer theory, and translation studies. By applying the lens of “re-gendering translation,” a concept articulated by Christopher Larkosh (2014: 4) that involves reinterpreting and reconfiguring gender and sexual identities within translated texts, this study pioneers a novel approach to examining identities in translation. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of how gender and sexuality can transform and reimagine translation, offering new insights into the ways identities are represented and understood across cultures. It extends the research beyond conventional gender frameworks prevalent in women’s, gay, and lesbian studies, by introducing a distinctive understanding of how linguistic and cultural translations shape these identities. Through the case study of fansubbing *Queer as Folk*, this research demonstrates how translation acts

not just as a linguistic tool, but as a transformative medium that can reframe and challenge traditional gender narratives.

In line with Spurlin's observation (2017) that "translation work has been gendered" (175), this study critically evaluates how gendered perspectives within translation practices are being reshaped. By examining these evolving practices, it makes a significant contribution to gender studies by revealing the specific ways in which translation can both reflect and influence contemporary concepts of gender and sexuality. This research, therefore, not only enriches the field of translation studies with its gender-focused analysis but also offers a fresh, transformative perspective to women and gender studies, highlighting the pivotal role of translation in the ongoing evolution of discourses of gender and sexuality.

This research creates new insights into the ways queer representation in China navigates pervasive censorship and homophobia in mainstream media. By focusing on "non-mainstream love relationships" and the phenomenon of fansubbing, the study reveals how queer translation activism through fan media challenges and subverts restrictive norms. This analysis highlights the innovative strategies employed by queer communities to create and disseminate alternative narratives, significantly advancing our understanding of queer representation in Chinese media. The study presents gender-sensitive perspectives that unravel the complexities of queerness in China, where, as Cao and Guo (2016) note, the dynamic between LGBTQ+ activists and the government is characterized not just by coercion, but also by strategic collaboration.

This research underscores the importance of queer world creation within queer

fandom. In a Chinese context where mainstream media often fails to represent queer narratives, fansubbing emerges as a vital avenue for constructing unique queer worlds. It facilitates the translation and dissemination of diverse queer stories and perspectives, making them accessible in a manner otherwise impeded by mainstream channels. This “shared mental space of possibility,” as Guo and Evans (2020: 520) describe it, allows individuals to explore and connect with queer identities within the Chinese context. This study, therefore, not only sheds light on fansubbing as a tool for queer activism but also reveals its profound impact on the visibility, representation, and solidarity of the queer community in China. In summary:

1. This thesis explores queer fansubbing in China as a transformative force, arguing that it extends beyond translation to become an instrument of societal change within the Chinese context. By incorporating queer narratives into mainstream Chinese media, fansubbing challenges the censorship and homophobia prevalent in the country. This research provides a detailed examination of how fansubbing creates inclusive digital spaces where diverse voices can challenge established societal norms, thereby contributing to the normalization of queer identities in Chinese society;

2. Beyond the screen, this research reveals tangible shifts in real-world conversations and social dynamics. In a context where direct political activism encounters resistance, the subtle power of fansubbing acts as an alternative for change, influencing societal attitudes toward the Chinese queer community. The study argues how fansubbing, as a non-confrontational form of expression, fosters empathy and understanding, thereby becoming a tool for cultural change and promoting open dialogue;

3. The interdisciplinary approach of this research—bridging queer theory, translation studies, women and gender studies—fosters collaborative dialogues and deepens the collective understanding of queer representation and activism. This shared academic commitment to understanding translation, sexuality, and media distribution strengthens community bonds. The research highlights how these decentralized, interconnected fansubbing communities form a dynamic platform for grassroots organizing, facilitating the dissemination of resources and support within the Chinese queer community.

### **7.3 Limitations and Future Research**

The focus of this research, specifically centered on the series *Queer as Folk*, was strategically chosen because of its rich array of queer linguistic elements, making it an ideal subject for in-depth case study and data analysis. However, this deliberate selection also presents a limitation in terms of scope. The queer translation strategies identified and analyzed in this context may not be universally applicable to other queer media or fansubbing practices. While *Queer as Folk* offers a substantial and relevant dataset for exploring queerness within fansubbing, its unique characteristics and narrative style mean that the findings might not fully represent or translate to other media forms or fan translation communities. This specificity should be considered when extrapolating the results to different contexts or media, as the applicability of these strategies may vary depending on the nature and content of other queer media.

This thesis specifically examines the YYeT's fansubbing group, without incorporating a comparative analysis with other fansubbing communities. Consequently, the findings

derived from YYeTs may not fully represent the practices or perspectives of other fansubbing groups, either within China or on a global scale. This limitation is crucial, as different communities may employ varied strategies and hold diverse viewpoints, which could significantly alter the broader understanding of fansubbing practices in queer media translation. Moreover, while this research attempts to speculate on the broader impact and implications of these translation practices on the overall Chinese cultural context, such speculations are inherently subjective. They are influenced by my personal interpretations and experiences, which may not accurately reflect the entire spectrum of fan translation activities in China. Additionally, the back translations used in this study were exclusively provided by myself. This approach, while necessary for drawing contrasts and providing analysis, carries the risk of inaccuracies or biases. The translation process is inherently subjective, and my interpretations may not capture the full or intended meaning of the original content. This aspect must be considered when evaluating the conclusions drawn from these translations.

The methodology employed in this research is primarily qualitative, centered around textual and content analysis. This approach, while rich in providing in-depth insights and understanding of fansubbing practices, inherently limits the ability to quantify the broader significance and impact of these practices. The conclusions drawn about the importance of fansubbing in this context are largely interpretative, relying on a combination of insights from existing research and my own analytical perspective. As such, the findings and assertions regarding the significance of fansubbing, particularly in relation to its influence on societal attitudes or queer representation, should be understood as interpretive rather



than empirical (though practical in translation). While this qualitative methodology allows for a detailed exploration of specific instances of fansubbing, it does not facilitate the measurement of its impact in quantitative terms, such as audience reach or changes in public opinion. Thus, an audience reception-based study would be a much-needed addition to the scant academic literature relevant to the audiovisual translation of gender identities in order to try and understand how the manipulation has influenced the viewers' sense of and response to marginalized identities. In the end, the speculative nature, although grounded in prior research and personal understanding, may not fully capture the varied and complex realities of fansubbing's impact. This highlights the need for further research, possibly incorporating quantitative methods, to complement and expand upon the findings presented here.

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