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## **Translational and transnational queer fandom in China: the fansubbing of *Carol***

Ting Guo, University of Exeter, and Jonathan Evans, University of Portsmouth

This article analyses the Chinese fan translations of the film *Carol* (2015) and relevant paratexts by Jihua subtitling group, one of the most well-known Chinese lesbian fansubbing groups actively and explicitly advocating for LGBTQ rights in China, in order to develop understanding of transnational and translational queer fandom in China. There are thriving fan translation communities in China that work to translate media products that are not officially imported into the country, including LGBTQ media. The article first puts forward a theory of translational fandom in order to explain the role of translation in fandom, before exploring how Jihua network uses fan translation as part of its queer world making, focusing on its translation of Todd Haynes's *Carol*, reviews of the film and the paratextual materials created by Jihua network that position its translation. Rather than solely importing ideas about female homosexuality through the film, it is argued that Jihua has strategically used this film to make a cultural intervention in domestic debates.

Keywords: *Carol*; fansubbing; queer cinema; translation; world making

### **Introduction**

This article analyses an instance of translational and transnational fandom in mainland China: the fan translation of English-language LGBTQ films. Despite, or perhaps because of, censorship, there are thriving fan communities around international queer cinema in China. Most of this fan activity takes place on the internet in specialised forums, such as those run by Jihua subtitling group, an influential Chinese lesbian

fansubbing online community that we will analyse in this article. The presence of such transnational fandoms in mainland China adds an important international dimension to Chinese queer pop, one that connects it to developments in queer culture around the globe.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that homosexuality was decriminalised in 1997 and depathologised in 2001 in mainland China, there is censorship of the representation of LGBTQ people and lifestyles in mainstream media. Combined with policies that limit the number of foreign films imported into China (Matthew Dresden 2018), this has led to an effective ban on foreign queer cinema in China. As Jing Jamie Zhao, Ling Yang and Maud Lavin (2017, xvi) express it, the Chinese government has a “no encouraging, no discouraging, and no promoting” approach to LGBTQ communities, which has the result of silencing discussions and eliminating their representation on screen. As such, local production is rather limited, with few out-gay films being made.

The comparative dearth of domestic LGBTQ media has therefore led to people who want to see queer representation in the cinema or TV shows having to seek it out in international media through non-official channels. Fansubbing (fan subtitling) groups have been at the forefront of introducing and translating international media in China (see Guo 2017, Liu and Seta 2014, Zhang 2013, Zhang and Mao 2013). The demand for LGBTQ media content has also encouraged Chinese LGBTQ communities to share resources and collaborate in the translation of foreign queer films and TV dramas (especially English-language ones given their international dominance), as well as the formation of LGBTQ fan subtitling groups. It is clear that the development of broadband and internet technologies has supported fan subtitlers (Zhao, Yang and Lavin 2017, xviii), just as it has also supported other intercultural queer fandoms in China, for example, *danmei* or boys love (also known as *yaoi*) fandom (Ling Yang and Xanrui Yu

2017, 4). Given this importation of international queer media, there is a risk that an “international gay/lesbian identity” (Dennis Altman 2001, 86) can displace or replace already existing local queer identities, which have a rich history in China (Bret Hirsch 1990; Tze-Lan D. Sang 2003). Fansubbers (fan subtitlers) can contribute to the way in which this international gay identity is negotiated and even rejected through how they frame texts and ideas and how they translate terms and expressions.

Through an analysis of the network of translators, paratextual framing of translated texts and a case study of translations of *Carol* (Dir. Todd Haynes, 2015), this article will analyse how LGBTQ fansubbing in China contributes to the phenomenon of queer popular culture in China and how it negotiates international queer identities through translation. It is important to note that, while we analyse a specifically lesbian case study, the phenomenon of queer fansubbing is more widespread in China; groups such as QAFone translate male-male focused content, for instance. We follow André Lefevere’s (1992) argument that translation is part of a larger group of rewriting practices that mediate texts to readers and viewers, which for Lefevere include anthologisation, criticism and editing, and which we expand to include the paratextual framing of media products on websites and forum discussions. Our discussion of translation, therefore, expands beyond a narrow focus on textual translation (e.g. the relationship between utterances in the subtitles and the utterances in another language in the film script), or what Roman Jakobson (2012, 127) famously called “interlingual translation,” to include presentation and other ways of mediating the texts.

Despite the growing interest in queer translation practices from translation studies (William Spurlin 2014; David Gramling and Aniruddha Dutta 2016; BJ Epstein and Robert Gillett 2017; Brian Baer and Klaus Kaindl 2017), not much attention has been paid to the translation of popular queer media or cinema in translation studies.

Work in the field analyses the Italian (Irene Ranzato 2012) and Spanish (Roberto Valdeón 2010; Antonio J. Martínez Pleguezuelos 2018) dubbing of American media, focusing mainly on TV shows such as *Will & Grace* (Valdeón; Martínez Pleguezuelos) and older films such as *Boys in the Band* (Ranzato). In all cases, the analyses focus on the linguistic aspects of the translation, particularly “gayspeak,” and we go beyond this by exploring the way in which the subtitled text was presented and the relationship between (queer) fandom and translation.

While we draw from translation studies, our work is also indebted to fan studies’ theories and perspectives. Recent work in this field has explored aspects of queer fandom, particularly slash fiction, racial dynamics and online fan communities in women’s queer fandoms (Julie Levin Russo and Eve Ng 2017). However, it has not analysed translation as a (queer) fan practice. Research focusing on queer fandom in the Chinese context (Maud Lavin, Li Yang and Jing Jamie Zhao 2017) does mention translation, especially of boys’ love materials (Yang and Xu 2017), but does not focus, as we do, on how translation is a central part of fans’ interaction with texts. As such, through our interrelation of fan and translation studies, this article contributes to both disciplines through shedding light on translational queer fandoms in China.

We elaborate a theory of translational fandom in the first section of this article in order to make clearer the relationship between fandom, translation and queer world making (Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner 1998), which allows an exploration of the contribution of queer fansubbing to queer popular culture in relation to Jihua in the following section. Our third section analyses specific instances of translation (understood to include paratextual presentation as well as textual translation) of *Carol* in order to demonstrate how Jihua negotiates English-language representations and notions of queerness. There are other more influential subtitling groups with more

subscribers and bigger translation teams in China than Jihua.<sup>2</sup> Many of these do translate queer (understood as inclusive of all forms of LGBTQ culture) films or TV series, especially if they are internationally popular and in demand in China. However, Jihua is one of the Chinese fansubbing groups actively advocating for LGBTQ rights and explicitly promoting themselves as a LGBTQ online community. Analysing their positioning and practice, especially their translation of non-Chinese queer films can provide us with valuable information about how transnational queer cinema is translated and circulated and how this translation intersects with the building of Chinese LGBTQ communities and the development of queer cinematic culture in China.

### **Towards a Theory of Translational Fandom**

Fandom has long been characterised by the production of derivative works such as fan fiction, fan art and fan songs (Henry Jenkins 1992; Hiroki Azuma 2009).<sup>3</sup> Fan translation fits into this pattern as it is the creation of a new work – the subtitles in the cases we are looking at, but there is also fandubbing to a lesser degree (Dingkun Wang and Xiaochun Zhang 2016) which creates the dubbing script as well as the recorded performances of the (amateur) voice actors in the new dub. Like other derivative works produced by fans, fan translations also demonstrate how fans interpret and engage with media texts through their interpretive decisions as translators in the text itself, as well as the paratextual material they generate, from synopses of the films or TV shows to forum discussion among translators. Fan translation can therefore demonstrate how texts are received and how they are interpreted by part of the audience, which is significant for understanding the global circulation of media texts and ideas.

The connection between translation and fandom has been explored much more by translation studies rather than fan studies,<sup>4</sup> with much earlier work focusing on the

translation techniques used by fansubbers and how they differed from commercial translation practice (Abé Mark Nornes 1999; Jorge Díaz Cintas and Pablo Muñoz Sánchez 2006; Luis Pérez González 2007). This work played a crucial role in delineating the sorts of strategies used by fansubbers, which were often more literal than in commercial translation and aimed to give more access to the translated culture than mainstream subtitles, which tended to remove or attenuate culture specific features and make the text more easily readable for the audience (Nornes 1999).<sup>5</sup>,

While this research established the ways in which fansubbing tends to differ from commercial practice, a second wave of fansubbing research has shifted focus away from textual issues to focus more on social practices of fansubbing. In addition to researching the motivation of fansubbers (Massidda 2015, 35-43), topics such as immaterial labour (Luis Pérez González 2013), prefiguration in activist spaces (Mona Baker 2016), subcultural capital (Douglas Schules 2014), and self-mediation (Luis Pérez González 2014, 229-283) have come to the fore, questioning how translation is used by fansubbers and activist groups. This interest in the social aspects of fansubbing finds echoes in Matt Hills' (2017, 83-84) discussion of the "communities of imagination" found in fandom and through fansubbing, where an aesthetic appreciation of a text will bring together fans across national boundaries. In the Chinese context, Dingkun Wang and Xiaochun Zhang (2017) have analysed the ways in which fansub groups use gamification to encourage participation in the community. While they argue that fansubbing is a form of "activism" because it breaks copyright laws, we would argue that activism requires a goal of social change (as was the case of the amateur subtitlers discussed by Baker 2016), but not all fansubbing aims for a social change beyond the enjoyment and discussion of media texts, and not all fansubbing can therefore be considered activist. These understandings of fansubbing as a social activity,

with its own forms of (sub)cultural capital and relation to economic and political contexts (such as power) complements, rather than erases, the earlier work on fansubbing as a translation practice, allowing a more holistic understanding of the practice that encompasses both its linguistic aspects and social aspects. Indeed, the decisions regarding translation strategies are themselves related to the sorts of audiences and “communities of the imagination” aimed at by the fansubbers and are, as such, intimately related to the social practices of fansubbing.

It is clear that fansubbing needs to be understood as part of transnational and transcultural fan practices. As C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby (2007, 179) argue, there are problems with assuming that “fan” means the same thing in all places or how one might investigate fandom globally (196), yet fandoms do exist across national boundaries. Fansubbing offers one concrete way in which fans engage texts from other locations and in other languages, creating communities of interest through this practice. Bertha Chin and Lori Hitchcock Morimoto (2013) are somewhat more positive about transcultural fandom (they reject the term “transnational”), focusing on actually existing fandoms across cultural borders. They draw from their own experience as transcultural fans as well as from the literature on transcultural fandom, highlighting the international communities of affect that arise from shared interest in and fandom of specific texts. Chin and Hitchcock Morimoto’s examples of transcultural fandom include a “Japanisation” of Hong Kong film star Leslie Cheung and *yaoi* (boys’ love) re-imaginings of Harry Potter (2013, 99-103). In both these cases, texts (understood in a wide sense that would include stars) from one cultural tradition are read and rewritten through another cultural tradition. There is clearly something transformative in these practices, and indeed one could argue that they represent a translation (in the metaphorical sense) of these texts into another culture.

We posit the notion of “translational fandom” as a way of conceptualising the fan practices that result in fansubbing and other forms of fan translation such as scanlation (the fan translation of comics) and romhacking (the fan translation of video games). Translational fandom, as we see it, is a subcategory of transcultural fandom that focuses on the translation of texts as part of the fan community. If fan practices typically involve the sorts of derivative works discussed by Jenkins (1992) and Azuma (2009) and explored in the transcultural context by Chin and Hitchcock Morimoto (2013), in other words, the creation of fan fictions, fan art, etc., then translational fandom channels those energies into translating texts. These translations could take the form of written translations, as is the practice in some comics fandoms (Jonathan Evans 2017, 324), but as our focus here is on queer cinema fandom, then the translations will take the form of subtitles and translations of paratextual materials. The translations produced are evidence of the fansubbers’ continuing engagement with and interpretation of the texts translated. Translation is both “interpretation” and “reformulation” (Susan Bassnett 2014, 3), in a way that is similar to other fan productions. Though interpretation in fan fiction and fan art is quite obvious to readers and viewers, the interpretation in translation, while equally central to the practice, requires more subtle reading to see: it is often present in the choice of words, in syntactical choices and the ways in which it addresses the audience. This subtlety, as well as the need to be able to read across languages in order to analyse translations, may have led to the general lack of attention to translation in fan studies, but translations still offer an important creative outlet for fans that reveal the ways in which they negotiate texts.

Fan translation also serves a community purpose: it makes accessible texts to other fans who may not have the linguistic capacities to access (read or view) them in



the original. To be sure, one can watch a TV show in another language and still enjoy it, but the engagement is stronger when one understands the dialogues, as characters become more sharply defined, motivations become clearer and so on. The community aspect of fandom has long been central to fan studies, and, as we discussed earlier, the social aspect of fansubbing has been investigated more recently in translation studies. Crafting, in both its digital and traditional senses, following David Gauntlett (2018), brings people together in a form of community, especially when crafted materials are circulated in the community (and not just kept for oneself). Fan production, including fan translation, could be considered a form of crafting and takes part in this dynamic. However, fan translation actually makes texts accessible to a wider public, whereas other forms of fan productions enhance and extend discussion through interpretation.

Given that the case study we analyse in this article involves the translation of an LGBTQ film, this community building and service aspect of fansubbing dovetails with Berlant and Warner's notion of "queer worldmaking" (1998). They use the term "world" as it refers to a grouping that is too large to identify all the people in, which is found in multiple locations, and which must be "learned" rather than inherited (Berlant and Warner 1998, 558). Their definition of "queer" is left implicit, being explained only as "estranged from heterosexual culture" (547), which we take to be an inclusive understanding of queerness that includes all forms of non-heteronormative sexualities. In a Chinese context, where LGBTQ representation is effectively censored in mainstream cinema and broadcast TV, this sense of a queer world that is made is an important aspect of queer fandom and queer fansubbing offers one way that that queer world is made, through the translation of texts that offer forms of LGBTQ representation and queer narratives which would otherwise be inaccessible. As Berlant and Warner argue, cultural texts such as films and TV shows "[index] a virtual social

world” (Ibid.), in other words, a shared mental space of possibility. Queer media help create this “world,” and while one might argue that translated media index a strange or foreign queer world, that already opens up possibilities of a local, domestic one.

Through such a local, and in our case, specifically Chinese queer world, people can imagine what it means to be queer in a Chinese context and connect with others in that queer world.

Queer translational fandom in China, then, offers fans of queer media two important things: 1) a space to engage with and interpret texts through subtitling practice and 2) the construction of a fan community and queer world through that subtitling and those texts. Having discussed how this works in theory, we turn to a case study of Jihua to explore how it works in practice.

### **A queer fansubbing community: Jihua subtitling group**

Strictly speaking, Jihua was not a fan group when it was founded in 2011, but an online Chinese lesbian community which shares and exchanges lesbian related content from lesbian films, novels and stories. However, the reputation that it has gradually built up for the translation of foreign lesbian films has attracted an increasing Chinese audience, especially Chinese lesbian film fans, which has made Jihua an interesting LGBTQ fan group, reflecting our notion of translational fandom. Jihua (悸花) literally means “fall for the flower,” referring to desiring women. Since its establishment, Jihua has quickly developed into one of the major lesbian social and media sharing sites in China. It had around 80-100 core members from 2015-2018 (83 in 2015, 106 in 2016, 78 in 2017),<sup>6</sup> and 147,262 registered users on its website (<http://les.org.cn/>) as of May 2019. A team dedicated to subtitle translation was formally set up by Jihua in January 2013 and since

then this team has focused on translating non-Chinese lesbian related media contents including films, TV dramas, interviews, and film reviews. As is the case for many other fan subtitling groups, members of Jihua subtitling group are all volunteers and do not receive any financial payment for their work. Between 2015 and 2017, they translated 89 foreign feature films and documentaries, 99 short films and interviews and 35 TV series (450 episodes in total). In addition, Jihua has also played an increasingly active role in supporting other Chinese lesbian and feminist groups' activities, including translating their videos from Chinese into English and providing Chinese subtitles for foreign films exhibited in the annual Shanghai Pride Film Festival, one of the most influential queer film festivals in China. In the past five years, it has developed wide connections to and close collaborations with online Chinese queer feminist communities, such as leschina.com (through its public account "herinfilm" at Wechat, a Chinese social media platform like Facebook), "Feminist Voice" (though its public accounts at both Wechat and Weibo, a Chinese microblogging site)<sup>7</sup> and individual queer feminist activists such as Li Maizi, one of the five well-known Chinese feminist activists detained by Chinese police in 2015.

There are at least two notable features of the development of Jihua. The first is its inclusivity. Despite its self-labelling as an LGBTQ group, Jihua's websites and social media accounts are open to the public. Although Jihua has recently reduced posting direct links for downloading on its website to avoid censorship, Chinese audiences can indirectly access its translated films and TVs from its Wechat public account and its accounts in major LGBTQ friendly media sharing sites in China such as Bilibili.com and acfun.tv. Since all its translated films and TV dramas are marked with the name of Jihua subtitling group, the dissemination of their translations in turn publicizes and normalizes the existence of LGBTQ subtitling groups in China. This

consequently encourages the recruitment of new volunteer translators and makes the group more sustainable. As two Jihua subtitlers we interviewed explained, they joined the subtitling group after watching some films translated by Jihua.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, translation serves as an important bridge within and beyond Chinese LGBTQ communities. Not merely a response to (or a workaround of) censorship of foreign media in China, the translation of queer films and TV dramas is also an active move by Jihua to create a LGBTQ friendly and inclusive space open to the public as part of queer world making.

The second prominent feature is Jihua's active use and appropriation of queer films in the Chinese context. One of the problems of the use of non-Chinese, often Anglophone, queer cinema in a Chinese context is the importation of foreign, and often American, forms of queerness that risk erasing local histories and practices. The colonial aspect of international queer culture is heavily criticised by Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt, who follow Joseph Massad in referring to it as "The Gay International" (2016, 17). Through importing and translating foreign queer forms and contents, Jihua have exerted an impact on local LGBTQ culture and conveyed messages that are likely to shape the direction and emphasis of the Chinese LGBTQ movement. However, despite this influence in general, queer fan groups such as Jihua are not solely promoters of foreign queer culture or "mouthpieces" of any LGBTQ organizations. On the contrary, given the fact that they are not just a fan group formed on the basis of their interests in queer media, but also an active social platform for Chinese LGBTQ communities, Jihua are very attentive, if not more than other communities, to the trends of international LGBTQ communities and are both strategic and self-reflexive in the process of their introduction and translation work. This can be found in both their translations of the media content (e.g. films and TV dramas) and the paratextual

apparatus around the texts, including introductions, discussion fora and the use of viewers' comments, as we examine in the next section.

### **Translating *Carol***

*Carol* was strategically chosen by Jihua because of the expected impact of this film due to its star cast and success. Jihua's translation has been so popular that it dominated almost all the searches related to the film in China. This popularity is undoubtedly related to the fact that Jihua's translation of this film is one of the earliest Chinese translations available online. According to the working journal of Jihua, a dedicated team was set up to translate this film on 18 December 2015, only one day after the official release date of this film in US, 17 December 2015.<sup>9</sup> The translation was completed and proofread within three days and firstly published on Jihua's website on 25 December 2015. As the notes on the translation indicate, this translation was undertaken collaboratively by Jihua volunteers. The 118-minute film was divided into four sections and was completed by four different translators and proofread by two proofreaders. Three Jihua members contributed to the production and proofreading of the timeline of the translated subtitles and another Jihua member did the post-editing. This collaborative model is not new and has been widely adopted by fan subtitling groups around the world (Massidda 2015). Given the time pressure of subtitling popular films, collaboration is the most efficient way to produce a good quality and quick translation. However, in the case of Jihua, this collaborative model also means a unique opportunity for Jihua volunteers to meet (virtually most of time), communicate, organize and collaborate with people whom they do not know but who have similar interests in lesbian related content. It generates a sense of belonging that is hard to find

offline due to the various barriers and constraints that LGBTQ people face in Chinese society, which consequently motivates its volunteers to challenge and break these barriers and constraints through their translation.

This sense of belonging (or “world,” to refer back to Berlant and Warner’s [1998] terminology) could be expanded to a wider audience through the paratexts of the translated films. Between November 2015 and February 2016, that is, both before and after the official release of the film *Carol* (2015), Jihua translated around 11 short films and interviews about the film, including interviews with Cate Blanchett, who plays the role of Carol, at the international women’s conference and at the film’s premiere at London Film Festival, as well as an interview with the cast at Cannes. These translated interviews were disseminated through Jihua’s own website and other major Chinese media sharing sites such as Bilibili.com and Tudou.com.cn, raising the Chinese audience’s expectation of this lesbian themed film and drawing their attention to the social and cultural significance of this film outside of China. Clearly, for Jihua, the purpose of translating this film is not just to make an award-winning foreign lesbian film available to Chinese audience, but also to raise the Chinese public’s awareness of homosexuality and to support the Chinese LGBTQ community. This dual goal can be confirmed in Jihua’s introduction to this film accompanying its translation:

Compared to many LGBT films, the film *Carol* does not have many hot sex scenes or grieving confessions. On the contrary, using restraint and control, it highlights the courage in pursuing true love when homosexual people were pressured to receive conversion therapy. Unlike many classic LGBT films such as *Thelma & Louise* (1991), *Carol*, as a feminist film, is not packed with complaints, shock and mourning. Instead, it is restrained but powerful, sad but not hurt, and ends with a promising future. It tells us, no matter which era *we* live in, no matter whether or not that world is fair and accommodating, *our* right to love should never be taken away. [our translation and emphasis]<sup>10</sup>

In this introduction, Jihua classifies *Carol* as a feminist queer film and highlights the film's refined and powerful presentation of a journey to true love. And the repeated references to “women” (我们,we/ our) at the end drew audience's attention to this film's relevance and significance for Chinese viewers: no matter the time and location where *we* are in, *our* right to love should always be upheld.

Jihua's advocacy for the film *Carol* and LGBTQ communities can be more explicitly seen in its translated film reviews, especially Jihua's translation of Heather Hogan's article “The ‘Carol’ Oscars Snub: The Problem Isn't Lesbians, It's Misandry” (Hogan 2016a; 2016b). In this article, Hogan points out that it was the non-male focused experience in *Carol* rather than the gay topic made it not nominated by the Academy for the Best Picture and the Best Director. Jihua's Chinese translation was published in the Wechat account “Herinfilm” around 40 days after the publication of Hogan's review and four Jihua volunteers were involved the production of translation (two translators and two proof-readers). Comparing Jihua's translation and the source, Jihua has presented Heather Hogan's review very differently in its layout, font and paragraph division. Key terms and sentences referring to the inequalities and discrimination that the film has encountered in the Academy are in red script, and some sentences are taken from their original paragraphs to be independent paragraphs in order to highlight their significance. For example, the second paragraph of the source text was divided into four sections in Jihua's translation. Three places were coloured red: the translation of the clause “it (the Academy) has no problem with gay films” (同志题材电影并不会遭到排斥), the figure 76% (of voters being male) and “a queer coming” (弯成正果). And what was originally presented as a note: “It should come as no surprise that 94% of Oscar voters are also white, which led once again this year to a list of all-white acting nominees” was placed as an indented separate paragraph, with bold

and bigger font. All these emphasis and changes underlie Jihua's own interpretation of the article as well as its positioning.

Additionally, in the original review (Hogan 2016a) there is a collaged picture with the promotional posters of the eight Best Picture nominees by the Academy, and one image of a scene from *Carol* where Carol and Therese meet Tommy Tucker, a private detective disguised as a salesman. Apart from providing the Chinese translations of the titles of these films in the form of a table below the picture, Jihua inserted additional three images taken from the film *Carol*: one is the official film poster, the other two representing Carol dancing with Harge, with only his back visible to audience, and the mirrored image of Carol and Therese kissing in the hotel. These images were carefully placed around the discussion of the relationship between Carol and Therese in the article. For those who might not have seen this film, the addition of these images build ups and guides their expectations. On the other hand, this use of images encourages people who have already seen the film to recall their memory of it and visually shift their attention to women's vision of men highlighted by Hogan.

At the same time, new emoji are also inserted to express the translators' views. For example, where Hogan writes "The internet has been all a dither trying to figure out what the heck happened, with many entertainment magazines, including Vanity Fair, deciding that ultimately Carol was just too gay," a popular emoji of Xiao S (Dee Hsu), a Taiwanese TV host celebrity known for her quick-witted caustic humour and dramatic facial expression, is inserted to show that the translators are not convinced by this explanation. And next to Hogan's comment: "Unfortunately, encouraging women to forget men isn't a great strategy when you're trying to convince an organization historically dominated by masculinity to acknowledge your genius," another emoji of



Xiao S, with the word “indifference” in Chinese, is inserted to indicate the translators’ disagreement with the intention of pleasing an organization dominated by men.

Apart from these additions and changes in terms of representation, there are also many adaptations and reformulations by the translators at the linguistic level. For example, Jihua presented the title of the review as a question: “口碑极高的《卡罗尔》被冷落，到底是因为触碰了奥斯卡直男癌们的哪根神经？” (The highly praised “Carol” was left out; which nerve of those Oscar male chauvinists did it touch on earth?), while another version of the title was provided at the end of the review along with the names of translators and proof-readers and noted as the original title of the source text: “Carol 奥斯卡提名被冷落：问题不在同志，是贬抑男性” (“Carol” was left out of the Oscars: the problem is not its “gay” theme, but its degradation of males). Evidently, rather than speaking in the author’s voice, as translators are usually expected to do, Jihua translators chose to make their own presence visible and their voice heard by the public. As the proofreader of this translated review revealed, they chose and translated this review precisely to respond to the criticisms of the film by some Chinese netizens who judged the value of the film *Carol* on the basis of the Academy panel’s choice.<sup>11</sup> From the in-text emphasis in bold and red font and inserted emoji to the two versions of the title, it is obvious to any Chinese audience that this text has been “hijacked” by its Chinese translators. All these show Jihua’s strong self-identification and its self-empowering ability, both of which are crucial features for queer fandom groups to initiate and facilitate social change.

Focusing more specifically on the subtitles of the film itself, at present, there are at least three Chinese translations of the film *Carol* available online. Two translations are produced by Jihua,<sup>12</sup> and the other is by Transcarter, a Chinese fan subtitling group dedicated to the film star Cate Blanchett. Transcarter’s translation was released slightly

earlier than Jihua's. To demonstrate how Jihua's translation differs from other fan groups', we will compare these three translations of the scene when Carol gave up the custody of her daughter and walked out on Harge, her husband, and the two male lawyers. In this scene, Carol says:

"I'm no martyr. I have no clue... what's best for me. But I do know... I feel, I feel it in my bones... what's best for my daughter."

The three translations by Transcarter and Jihua are:

Transcarter: "我不是什么烈士，我不知道什么对我来说是最好的，但我打心底里知道什么对我女儿是最好的。"

(Back translation: I'm not martyr, I don't know what is **the best** for me. But I do know from my heart what is **the best** for my daughter.)

Jihua early translation: "我不是烈士，我也完全不清楚什么是对我最有利，但我心里清楚什么才是对我女儿最有利的。"

(Back translation: I'm not martyr, I don't know at all what is **the most beneficial** to me. But I know for sure what is **the most beneficial** for my daughter.)

Jihua revised version: "我不是什么烈士，我不知道自己最需要什么，但我知道，我非常清楚我的女儿最需要的是什么。"

(Back translation: I'm not martyr, I don't know what myself **needed most**. But I know, I know very well what my daughter **needs most**).

Transcarter's version translated "the best" literally, but Jihua translators avoided the established translation of this word, interpreting it as "最有利" (beneficial) in the first version and revising it as "最需要的" (needed most) in the second version. The word "最有利" [beneficial] suggests the financial sacrifice that Carol was aware that she had to make and her understanding of what her husband can offer to her daughter financially as well as the potential uncertainty that her relationship with Therese might bring to her. The phrase "最需要的" (needs most) used in the revision highlights the needs, which

could be emotional, that Carol perceived as meaningful in her and her daughter's lives, echoing later Carol's request for the right to regular visits with her daughter. Evidently, Jihua translators were concerned about the translation of this scene and want to clarify what Carol means in this particular context. And their revision clearly demonstrates their emphasis on Carol's self-perception and active pursuit of a life that she longs for.

The second notable difference between Transcarter's and Jihua's translations of this scene is the sentence: "What use am I to her, to us, if I'm living against my own grain?" Transcarter rendered the phrase "living against my own grain" as "否认自己的天性" (deny my own nature), while Jihua firstly interpreted it as "压抑我自己的天性" (suppressing my own nature) and later "不能按照自己的意愿生活" (couldn't live as I wish). Transcarter's and Jihua's first translations are very similar and both focuses on the emphasis of Carol's 'nature' or sexual orientation. Jihua's revised version, however, interprets the source text slightly differently. It retains the structure of the source text, "I'm living against..." and renders "my own grain" as "wish", highlighting Carol's subjective perception of the self and her control of her own life. This subtle change presents a more lively and interesting Carol: rather than making an implicit statement of her "lesbian" identity, she is stressing the significance of being self-conscious and live her life according to her wishes.

It is hard to estimate the number of Chinese viewers who watched this film with Jihua's translation. However, there is clear evidence on the internet of the Chinese public's reaction to this film that has been banned from public screening in China and its participation in the ongoing discussion about censored "same-sex relationships" in China. For example, on Douban.com, one of the most influential social media and film review websites in China, the film *Carol* is rated by 136,433 viewers as 8.2 out 10, with 43,952 short comments, and 896 lengthy personal reviews of the film. Although these

reviews and comments seldom address the Chinese translation, they indirectly reveal the social impact enabled and facilitated by the translation. Jihua claims openly in its Wechat public account, “我们不仅输出字幕，还输出思想。” (We do not only provide subtitles, but also produce ideas). Evidently, these “ideas” are not direct copies from the source, but produced or reinterpreted by Jihua itself. It is sufficient to say that through creating a space and making the censored queerness visible strategically, queer fan groups such as Jihua contribute to queer world making (Berlant and Warner 1998) and disrupt potentially colonial and local-knowledge-erasing foreign queer discourse.

As shown in our analysis, translation can be a significant fan activity that serves the fan community. We called this “translational fandom,” which we see in Jihua’s translation practice. In the case of a queer fan community – a specific “community of imagination” (Hills 2017)– fan translation can give access to otherwise censored texts and contribute to queer world making. This needs not to be a simple importation of the foreign text but also a negotiation of its values which serves as an intervention in domestic debate. The engagement with and reworking of texts that we see in other fandoms is in evidence here through the subtitles and other translations and the ways in which they deal with international ideas about queerness as well as the dialogue of the film itself: Jihua’s self-revision demonstrates a continuing attempt to understand the film. The fan translation practices are imbricated with the group’s other activities and thus need to be viewed in the context of both fandom and queer community. Jihua’s practice, then, demonstrates the important role of fan translation in the circulation and adaptation of queer knowledges, which are embedded in the films and other texts they translate and their methods of translation.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article, we use the term "queer" in an inclusive sense to refer to all non-heteronormative sexualities as well trans\* and other non-gender-conforming identities.

<sup>2</sup> The number of subtitling groups in China peaked in 2005. Many were closed down because of the rise of private commercial web-casters and the increasing tightened copyright control by the Chinese government since 2009. However, in 2014, there were still more than 80 active online subtitling groups. See Darrell William Davis and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Cornel Sandvoss (2005, 8) offers a more inclusive definition of fandom based on regular consumption of a text alongside an affective investment in that consumption. We agree that it is not necessary to create



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derivative works to be a fan of a text (or other object), but at the same time the production of derivative works is a common feature of many media fandoms and one that has traceable results.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Schules (2014) makes a similar point about the lack of contact between fan and translation studies work on fansubs.

<sup>5</sup> However, as Tessa Dwyer (2017, 141-148) notes, much of this early work focuses on translation of Japanese media; translations of other cultural products show a wider variety of translation strategies.

<sup>6</sup> We thank Jihua founders for providing this information.

<sup>7</sup> Feminist Voice's Sina Weibo and Wechat account were forced to close down in March 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with two members from Jihua subtitling group, Beijing, 30 March 2019.

<sup>9</sup> We thank Jihua founders for providing this information.

<sup>10</sup> The original Chinese is: 相比许多同性电影热衷于大尺度卖肉,《Carol》没有轰轰烈烈的性爱场面,也没有撕心裂肺的真情表白。相反的,它处处显示出克制和含蓄,以凸显那个同性矫正高压年代里,人们追求真爱的勇气。作为一部女权电影,《Carol》并不像《末路狂花》等老牌经典那样,充满了控诉、震撼和悲恸。相反的,整体来看,它的调子内敛却有力,哀而不伤,并拥有一个难得的明亮结局。它告诉我们,无论身处哪个时代,无论那个世界是否公平、宽容,它都无法夺走我们爱的权力。 Accessed from

<http://les.org.cn/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=41611&highlight=%BF%A8%C2%DE%B6%FB> 18 May 2019.

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion in Zhihu.com, China's largest Q&A social platform, “怎样看待《卡罗尔》没有提名 88 届奥斯卡最佳影片和导演?” (How to see the fact that Carol was not nominated for the best picture and director in the 88<sup>th</sup> Oscar Academy?) Accessed from

<https://www.zhihu.com/question/39496181>

<sup>12</sup> Jihua revised its first translation of Carol and released a new version in blu-ray format in late 2016. The version that we used for analysis is the revised version.