Translation Studies:
Shifts in Domestication and Foreignisation in Translating Japanese Manga and Anime (Part Two)

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Abstract: The increased demand for manga and anime overseas and the initial slow pace of official licensed companies in providing translated versions of these led to fans taking it upon themselves to unofficial translate manga and anime and make it available to audiences outside Japan. Part two looks at the rise of these unofficial scanlations and fansubs as well as the legal grey zone in which they often inhabit.

Fansubs and Scanlations

Before delving into the world of manga and anime and the effect of domestication and foreignisation translation has had on them, I will briefly have a look at fansubbing and scanlation which will both feature prominently throughout the coming sections.

3.1 A Brief History

Fansubbing, or fansubs, are Japanese anime that have been translated and subtitled in another language, primarily English, by 'fans' of the series rather than officially licensed companies and professional translators. Scanlation, a combination of the words 'Scan' and 'Translate', is essentially the same thing, just with the written manga form instead[1]. Fansubbing and scanlation came about due to the lack of or extremely slow pace of English translations and also because of the initial western views of anime and manga as being children's cartoons, and therefore much too violent and complicated for their countries, leading to a lot of heavy alterations and domestication.

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3.2 Fansubs

Fansubbing began back in the late 1970s to early 1980s with VHS and laserdiscs. This was on a very small scale with VHS tapes with anime recorded from Japanese T.V., being shipped back to America to be translated then passed around and endlessly copied by the small US anime fan base of the time. These early fansubbed releases took a great deal of time, money and technical knowhow to produce. A Laserdisc player, multiple VCRs and a PC where all required to produce an English subtitled tape. Into the 1990s and early 2000s anime became much more popular and socially acceptable, fansubbing also evolved with the times. Fansubber's were quick to adopt new technology, expensive and time consuming VHS tapes were replaced with CDs which took up far less room, could hold far more data and allowed for better video quality[2]. Cheaper and easier to use encoding software meant many more people joined the ranks of anime fansubbers in the West. More people led to the emergence of well-organized fansub groups, rather than the one or two-man operation of old. These groups would pass their work around university anime clubs, conventions or post them to customers, however it was by far the internet that had the greatest impact on fansubbing as a whole. The early days of 56k modems were slow but still offered new ways for patient anime fans to access fansubs. Then, advancing speeds of both the internet and computers led to better quality fansubs being distributed through file hosting websites and IRC channels. Today high quality anime fansubs can be downloaded over BitTorrent programs in minutes or watched on online streaming sites mere hours after appearing on T.V. in Japan.

3.3 Scanlations

Manga scanlation has a very similar history and group structure as that of fansubs, however are far easier to produce. These days anyone with access to a scanner, editing software and a working knowledge of Japanese language can produce a manga scanlation in an easily distributable PDF format[3]. The early predecessor of scanlations came about in the 1980s and were just simple English scripts to accompany the Japanese manga. Like original fansubs, these were passed around anime clubs or distributed via CDs in the post and later emailed over the internet. The first digital versions were made by replacing the Japanese text with English using simple software such as Microsoft paint[4]. Like the name suggest, modern Scanlations came about with the introduction of the digital scanner as well as the internet. Unlike before where there was a wait for the newest release to be posted to fans to start translating, people in Japan could simply scan the manga and send it via email to the scanlation group. Throughout the 2000s, dozens of scanlation groups flooded the internet with translated manga. Just like with fansub groups, these scanlation groups are often well organised, with different members assigned to different roles such as scanners, translators or proofreaders. However, unlike fansubbers, who have to deal with a more complex

translating process and much larger file sizes, scanlations are produced and uploaded onto the internet much faster.

3.4 Legality and Change

While both fansubs and scanlations have been around for several decades they are nevertheless illegal under international copyright law. However, they are often seen as being in somewhat of a legal 'grey zone' with varying points of view on whether they are a good or bad thing. Fansubs and scanlations were often the only way to access anime and manga without having to wait years for it to come to the West or the only way to view material that had not been censored or edited. In later years, a sort of unspoken rule emerged between the fan groups and publishers/distributors that once an anime or manga series was acquired by an official Western company with the English language license the fansubbers or scanlators would cease producing their translations and encourage fans to support the official versions[5]. The fan groups also saw themselves as helping to promote manga and anime overseas, backed-up with admissions from official Western publishers/ distributors employees saying that they often use these fan translations to determine which series would be the next big hit[6]. However for all the chivalrous fan groups, there were others who chose to disregard the rules, both spoken and unspoken, by continuing to translate licensed work and making money from the work that should legally be going to the official copy-right holders. This led to both Western and Japanese publishers and distributors to finally crackdown through legal action and court orders against several fan groups and websites during the late 2000s. This has become an ongoing battle with both sides arguing over various points like fan groups saying that Western companies charge too much for manga and anime, with the companies then saying they do this to cover the losses they make from scanlations and fansubs[7]. Fansubs and scanlations have now also moved beyond just anime and manga and now are often seen as a whole new form of translation being used for unlicensed translations of books, T.V programs and movies[8].

Whatever your stance on fansubbing and scanlation there is no doubt that they have had a big influence on the anime and manga industries of both Japan and the West. They have effected how anime and manga is licensed, released, viewed and as I will look at in part 3, translated.

1．History of Scanlation: http://www.insidescanlation.com/history/history-1-1.html (accessed 15th Oct 2014)

2．R.Isler, The Fansubbing Dilemma 7th February 2008, http://www.ign.com/ articles/2008/02/07/the-fansubbing-dilemma?page=1 (accessed 15th Oct 2014)

3．Ibid

4．R.Law, Internet Scanlations vs. International Copyright: The Manga Publishing

Industry Adapts to a Changing World ,2011 pg8, http://rachelliaw.com/RachelLiaw_ HonorsThesis.pdf (accessed Oct 10th 2014)

5．I.Condry, The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story, Duke University Press 2013, pg. 175

6．C. Brienza, Manga in America: Transnational Book Publishing and the Domestication of Japanese Comics, Bloomsbury 2016, pg 89

7．B. Alverson Dear Manga, You Are Broken, (web blog) March 26th 2010 (accessed 18th Oct 2014)

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