



Selected Papers of #AoIR2024:
The 25th Annual Conference of the
Association of Internet Researchers
Sheffield, UK / 30 Oct - 2 Nov 2024

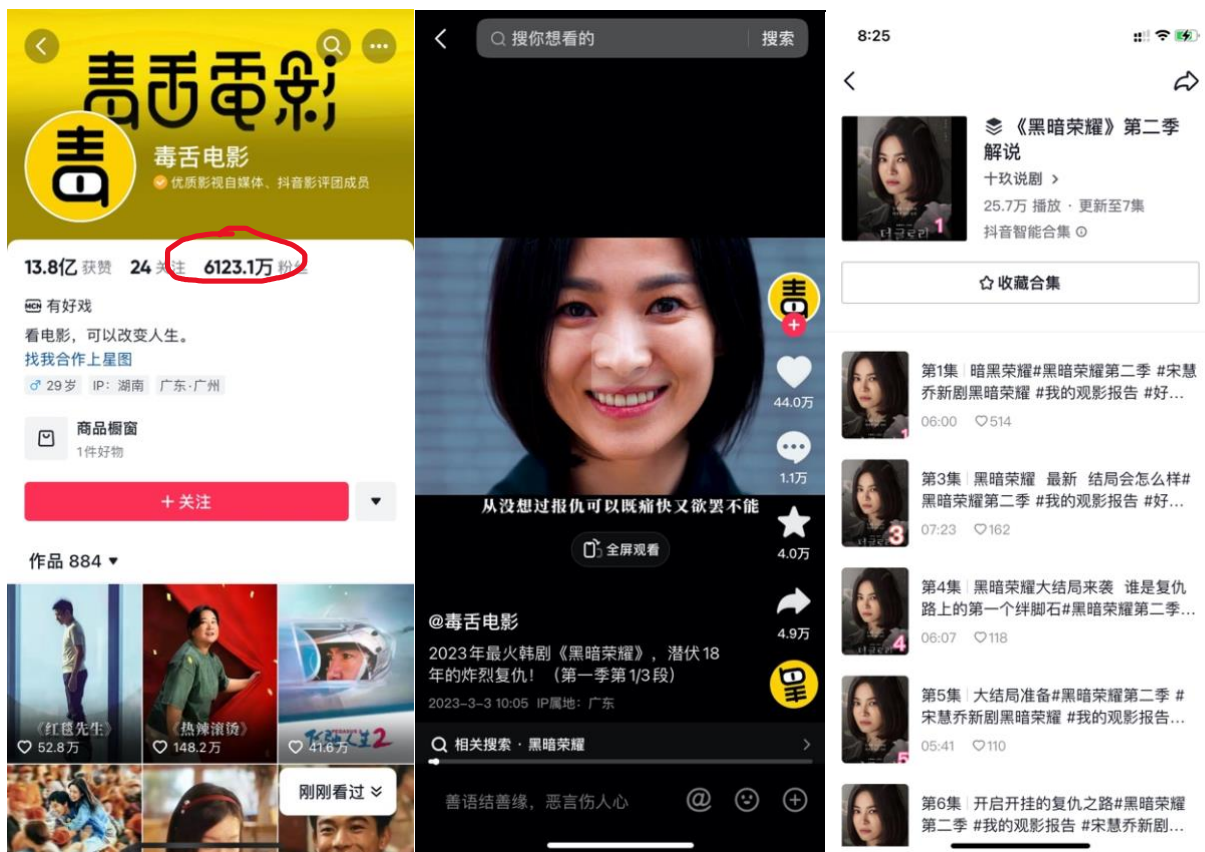
THE ROLE OF THE DRAMA INTERPRETATION INDUSTRY IN THE TRANSNATIONAL RECEPTION OF KOREAN TV SERIES IN CHINA

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This article examines how the drama interpretation industry on video-streaming platforms influences the transnational reception of Korean TV series in China. Proliferated in 2020, drama interpretative videos re-create transnational TV series with user-generated commentaries. Combined with diverse background music and creators' interpretations, these interpretive videos extract drama clips from the long episodes and reproduce hours-long TV series into 3-5 minute short-form videos. These video accounts proliferate rapidly on Chinese video-streaming platforms: one of the most popular interpretive accounts, *Dushe Film (Du she)*, accumulated more than 30 million users on Douyin in three months from April to July 2020 (Pic. 1).

These videos are important because, on the one hand, they disseminate international dramas to a wider audience and generate more viewership; on the other hand, these videos may be detrimental to the transnational television industry as audiences may no longer watch the original TV series when consuming the dramas in a snackable way. Focusing on their impact not only helps with understanding the video-editing industry on audience reception of transnational TV series but also develops research on the impact of mobile media on TV industries.

Suggested Citation (APA): Hui, Lin. (2024, October). *The Role of the Drama Interpretation Industry in the Transnational Reception of Korean TV Series in China*. Paper presented at AoIR2024: The 25th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Sheffield, UK: AoIR. Retrieved from <http://spir.aoir.org>.



(Pic.1 The left: it shows one of the largest drama-editing accounts with 6.1 million followers.

Pic. 2 The middle: it shows one of its sections of a 5-minute drama interpretation of The Glory.)

There is a lack of studies to investigate the impact of the thriving video-editing industry on the reception of transnational TV content. For example, Andrea Esser (2020) discussed the transnational reception of Danish TV series among British audiences to critically reflect on the role of “authenticity” in the appeal of Danish TV. Likewise, finding Chinese youths watch American drama for the perception of an ‘authentic’ way of American life, Yang Gao (2016) investigated how urban Chinese youths engage with American television fiction to construct their self-identities. These studies contributed to examining transnational audiences’ reception of foreign dramas but mainly focused on audiences’ perceptions of the authenticity of television content. Some television scholars examined how social media platforms are used to promote international media content (Gilardi, et al., 2018), and why transnational audiences consume international TV series on video-on-demand platforms (Jin, 2018). However, less is known about how the streaming medium, especially the newly developed video-reproduction industry, might shape the message and affect viewers’ reception of foreign content. Thus, to my best knowledge, this article is a pioneer study to investigate the role of reproduced interpretative short-form videos in transnational TV reception. Drawing on Korean TV reception in China, it addressed questions of how interpretative videos affect Chinese audience reception of Korean TV series, why audiences engage with re-edited Korean TV content in a snackable way, and whether the development of the video-editing industry benefits or detracts international TV industries.

This paper calls for academic attention to this video genre because its development is relevant to the government's cultural policies in the Chinese media landscape. This contrasts with drama interpretation videos on YouTube which thrives for participatory culture, where low-barrier interactive features allow users to re-edit TV series (Jenkins, 2006), or share clips of TV series to participate (Hutchinson, 2016; Ford & Green, 2013). Since 2015, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television has gradually restricted the distribution of foreign TV series in China, either on television stations or video-on-demand platforms¹. However, despite limited access to Korean TV content via television channels, audiences have shifted to watching drama interpretative videos on short-form video platforms as these platforms allow them to consume restricted drama content in a reproduced, user-generated way. In this context, these interpretive videos gain popularity by successfully dealing with the conflicts between restricted cultural regulations and the demands of audiences. Thus, the investigation of re-edited user-generated videos helps understand how these video creators negotiate foreign cultures and modify narratives consistent with mainstream ideologies and audience preferences, contributing to transnational dissemination and localisation processes.

Adopting the Korean drama *Glory* as a case, this study used qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine user-generated commentary videos and their associated comments. The *Glory* series depicts a survivor of a high school bully who pursues revenge against her former tormentors after managing to become a primary school teacher. This drama was selected because it was one of the most popular Korean dramas among Chinese audiences in 2023. Despite the unavailability of official television sources, it has received an impressive score of 8.9/10 on one of the most popular review platforms, Douban, and the hashtag for the new season on Weibo has gathered 2.8 billion views in 2024². To explore the impact of the Douyin video-editing industry of *The Glory* on transnational drama reception, I conducted a qualitative analysis of visual content (n=325) and associated comments of the top 10 most commented clips on the two most popular video-sharing platforms Douyin and Xiaohongshu. Video samples were gathered by inputting the keywords “黑暗荣耀”, “韩剧黑暗荣耀” etc, in the platforms' search areas. The visual and textual components of interpretive videos were analysed using a coding sheet that was developed based on an initial examination of the data and then adjusted through inductive reasoning. Besides, I supplemented this with in-depth interviews with sixteen big fans of *Glory* interpretative videos. Interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted approximately 50 minutes to an hour. With the above methods, I examined how users consume foreign dramas through re-produced short-form videos, why they enjoy watching interpretive video clips, and what implications these videos have for transnational TV reception.

This study argues that recreated interpretive videos on video-sharing platforms enhance the dissemination of international TV series and foster transnational viewership, but they may undermine the spread of Korean culture. As Jin (2018) argued, the new Korean wave in China is relevant to the rapid growth of social media. It found that these interpretive short-form videos have become one of their major sources for accessing the

¹ the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television. https://www.nrta.gov.cn/art/2015/5/21/art_1588_43710.html

² <https://radii.co/article/the-glory-song-hye-kyo>

content of Korean TV series that are not legally distributed in China. Beyond accessibility, viewers find these videos helpful due to creators' localized interpretations, which makes foreign TV series more understandable to Chinese audiences. Based on qualitative content analysis, this study also found that short-form video creators always replaced obscure terminologies with terms familiar to audiences within the Chinese cultural context. Similar to the localisation of TV formats, these short-form videos retained some appealing narratives for Chinese audiences (Zhang & Fung, 2014), such as retaliation plots, while converting some sensitive narratives to socially and politically acceptable ways in their interpretations. Because of this, Chinese viewers mainly discussed drama plots and characters without noticing or mentioning Korean culture and cultural differences in the comment section. Therefore, this study argues that interpretive videos can be regarded as a form of user-generated localisation of international TV series, making foreign dramas understandable to local audiences and helping with the dramas' dissemination, while this re-production of TV series, which eliminates cultural differences, is detrimental to the spread of foreign culture.

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