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Reception and Translation of Korean Media in the UK and British Media in Korea

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ABSTRACT: *This paper introduces our ongoing project, Towards Diversity, Equality and Sustainability in Streaming: Translating British Media in Korea and Korean Media in the UK, supported by the Fund for International Collaboration and the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK. The project aims to increase the understanding of the reception and translation of Korean media in the UK and British media in Korea. In terms of tickets sold in both countries, British media in Korea and Korean media in the UK are still marginalised. This suggests that there is a lack of connection between the two media industries and a scarcity of research addressing the production, collaborative production and reception of media contents. In the age of streaming, over-the-top (OTT) and streaming platforms seem to be the most efficient way to introduce the Korean and British media content to audience groups in the other country. Therefore, focusing on streaming, this project brings together practitioners and stakeholders of media content industries and researchers from Film Studies, Fan Studies, and Translation Studies in Korea and the UK in order to explore ways to promote Korean and British media content in translation through streaming services with the goal of promoting mutual exchange and sustainable media industries in each country. It highlights the importance of translation which gives access to foreign culture, while at the same time it underscores the need to explore ways to promote local culture and local production in translation. The results of this project can be widely used in and applied to relevant industries which have to make daily decisions on what and how to promote and distribute media and have ramifications on relevant scholarships and stakeholders of industries. In addition, while we live in the age of fast media, whereby audiences consume numerous media everyday, i.e. through binge-watching, this project brings much attention to the matter of sustainability and it suggests how slow media can be a feasible alternative to fast media by, for instance, hosting a gathering for audiences of certain films or TV programs and making an archive of media produced in the past and rereleasing or reusing them.*

KEYWORDS: British, Korean, media, reception, streaming, sustainability, translation

논문초록: 본 논문에서는 저자들이 현재 영국 국제 협력 펀드와 경제 사회 연구 위원회(Economic and Social Research Council, ESRC)후원으로 진행중인 프로젝트 ‘스트리밍에서 다양성, 평등, 지속가능성을 위해: 영국에서의 한국 미디어와 한국에서의 영국 미디어 번역’을 소개한다. 본 프로젝트는 영국에서의 한국 미디어와 한국에서의 영국 미디어의 수용과 번역에 대한 이해를 향상시키는데 목적이 있다. 양국에서 판매된 영화 티켓 수를 고려하면 한국에서의 영국 미디어, 영국에서의 한국 미디어는 여전히 주변화되어 있다고 볼 수 있다. 이것은 곧 양국간 미디어 산업 연결고리가 약하며 미디어 콘텐츠 제작, 공동제작, 수용에 대한 연구도 미비하다는 것을 의미한다. 현 스트리밍 시대에서 OTT를 비롯한 스트리밍 플랫폼이 양국의 관객들에게 상호 국가의 미디어 콘텐츠를 소개하는 가장 효과적인 방법이라고 판단된다. 따라서 본 연구는 스트리밍에 초점을 두고 한국과 영국의 미디어 산업

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전문가 및 관계자, 영화학, 팬 연구, 번역학의 학자들과 함께 한국과 영국의 미디어 콘텐츠를 번역을 통해 홍보하는 방안을 모색하며, 궁극적으로 양국간 활발한 교류와 지속가능한 미디어 산업을 증진시키고자 하는데 목적을 둔다. 본 연구는 외국 문화로의 접근을 가능하게 해 주는 번역의 중요성을 환기시킴과 동시에 로컬 문화와 로컬 프로덕션 홍보의 중요성도 강조한다. 본 연구의 결과는 어떤 미디어 콘텐츠를 어떻게 홍보하고 배포할지 매일 의사결정을 해야 하는 관련 업계의 정책 결정에 활용될 수 있고 관련 학계와 산업 관련자들도 참조할 수 있다. 또한 ‘몰아보기’ 등을 통해서 소비자가 매일 엄청난 양의 미디어를 소비하는 현 패스트 미디어 시대에서 본 연구는 지속가능성이라는 이슈에 주목하며 슬로우 미디어가 그 대안이 될 수 있음을 제안한다. 슬로우 미디어를 실천하는 방식으로 특정 영화나 TV프로그램에 대한 시청 모임을 주최하거나 과거에 제작된 미디어 콘텐츠에 대한 아카이브를 제작하고 다시 재상영하거나 재활용하는 방안을 제안한다.

핵심어: 영국, 한국, 미디어, 수용, 스트리밍, 지속가능성, 번역

1. Introduction

This paper is a report on our collaborative research project, ‘Towards diversity, equality and sustainability in streaming: Translating British media in Korea and Korean media in the UK.’ This project was conceived as a research network, bringing together scholars working in Translation Studies and Film and Media Studies from across the UK and South Korea. The network members were: Jinsil Choi, Hye Jean Chung, Jonathan Evans, Matt Hills, Ji-Hae Kang, Jieun Kiaer, Kyung Hye Kim, Su-Yeon Seo, Chi-Yun Shin, and Zoe Shacklock. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the project aims to increase understanding of the reception and translation of Korean media in the UK and British media in Korea. While translation is key to understanding foreign media content, analysing multifaceted aspects of media promotion, distribution, circulation, production, and reception from different perspectives would increase our understanding of reception and translation of media in the UK and Korea.

Part of the context for this project is the free trade agreement between Korea and the UK which came into effect on 1 January 2021 (Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy 2023). The agreement between the two countries covers a wide range of sectors, including the media industry, which suggests more direct cultural exchange and collaboration. However, in terms of cinema ticket sales in the Korean film market, national (i.e. Korean) and US (Hollywood films, in particular) productions have taken the largest share. British media has been typically marginalised in Korean media culture, which is evident in terms of ticket sales: In 2021, US films (61.9%) took the largest ticket sales, followed by Korea (29.7%), Japan (6.1%), and the UK (0.4%). Korean (54.4%) and US (40.8%) film ticket sales accounted for up to 95.2% in 2022, followed by Japan (3.8%) but the UK took only 0.3% (Korean Film Council, 2023). Part of the aims of the project, then, was to understand why British cinema and TV attracted less attention and to examine what successful British TV shows and films had done.

In the UK, Korean films have attracted a niche audience of Asian film fans (often being

distributed by labels such as Tartan and Third Window which target cinephile audiences; Crisp, 2015, p. 39ff). However, there is growing recognition of Korean cinema in recent years. From the 71st BAFTA awards in 2018, Korean films started to receive attention such as *Agassi/The Handmaiden* (71st), *Parasite* (73rd), and Yoon Yeojeong from *Minari* (74th). Continuous attempts have been made to introduce Korean films to the British audience through various events, such as the annual London Korean Film Festival. The 'Early Korean Cinema. Lost Films from the Japanese Colonial Period' event in 2019 was also jointly hosted by British Film Institute, Korean Film Archive, University of Sheffield, and Korean Culture Centre UK. What Korean cinema events there are in the UK are typically supported by research institutes and government-affiliated centres, rather than more commercial film festivals. In light of such low consumption of British films in Korea, and Korean films in the UK, there is a lack of connection between the two media industries and a scarcity of research addressing the production, collaborative production and reception of media contents.

Over-the-top (OTT) and streaming platforms seem to be the most efficient way to introduce the Korean and British media content to audience groups in the other country. In addition to the existing platforms like Netflix, 2021 saw Korean-made OTT platforms increase their number of subscribers: Wavve has increased from approx. 3.31 million to 3.70 million, and Tving increased from 2.76 million to 3 million (Kim, 2021). Disney+ and Apple TV+ (will) join the Korean market in 2021, increasing competition for attention. Similarly, in the UK, in Q1 2019, the five most used VOD services include BBC iPlayer, YouTube, Netflix, ITV Hub, and All4 (Ampere Analysis, 2019). In 2021, Parrot Analytics reported the UK market demand share by original platform for all digital originals, and Netflix has more than half the market demand share (52.7%), followed by Amazon Prime Video (11.7%), Hulu (8.9%), Disney+ (5.4%), and Apple TV+ (5.0%), although this ranking changes when examining the UK market demand share by original platform by genre.

It is thus our contention that OTT and streaming platforms offer a perfect space to provide audiences with a variety of British and Korean media contents. These platforms, particularly the streaming giant Netflix, strive to diversify their programmes in terms of genre, languages, themes and format, and attempt to include more media contents that have largely been marginalised in traditional distribution. Providing different ways of consuming media and enabling viewers to decide when, what, and where to watch media contents of their choice can empower audiences and encourage them to explore media from around the world. As an example of their efforts to promote diverse programming, Netflix partnered with National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) in 2020 to highlight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content by presenting various contents telling the indigenous stories (NAIDOC, 2020). A wider range of British media contents, not limited to films, are available on OTT and streaming platforms, and Netflix has invested significantly in Korean media contents by either directly producing 'original contents' or purchasing the license. This has increased British and Korean audiences' exposure to Korean and British media contents.

2. Research gap

Research on the mutual distribution and reception of media products has typically come from media studies, where scholars such as Virginia Crisp (2015) have explored the formal and informal distribution networks of East Asian Cinema. In Korea, films produced by renowned British filmmakers, such as Alfred Hitchcock, Richard Lester, and Hugh Hudson, attracted scholarly attention in relation to their production style and features (Kim, 2016, 2013a), while some comparative studies on New Wave films in the two countries were carried out (Chung, 2018). Encouraged by the unprecedented success of *Interstellar* (Dir. Christopher Nolan) in Korea (Yonhap News Agency, 2014), some studies on the film have been carried out in media studies (Kim, 2020; Lee & Kim, 2019), but studies on British Films such as these are relatively rare, with few exceptions like Kim Si-mu's (2019) work, which specifically and exclusively discusses British film directors. The distribution practices of Netflix and the ways in which it shapes user experience have been explored by Ramon Lobato (2019), while use patterns and the response of streaming services are largely under-researched both in Korea and international academia.

The research that we have discussed so far seldom, if ever, approaches the complexities of translation: this is an area we wanted to address in this project. Within Translation Studies, there has been some work on translation for Netflix (Pedersen, 2018) and other services like Rakuten Viki (Dwyer, 2017). The forthcoming issue of the journal *Target*, co-edited by the authors and Kim Kyung Hye, focuses on the ways in which translation for streamed media differs from translation in other media.

The existing research does not specifically focus on Korean-UK exchange, nor does it address post-Brexit and post-Covid realities. One exception includes a project carried out more than ten years ago, funded by the National Research Foundation Korea, on cultural branding of Korea to fit British culture (Oh, 2008). The film industry was part of this project, branding Korean film culture to fit British media culture, because Korean films were most frequently mentioned among Korean culture related articles in *The Guardian* and *The Times* during the period between June 2002 and June 2006 (Oh, 2008, p. 355), but their project does not engage in any issue of translation and streaming platforms, even when such dialogue and exchange cannot be possible without translation. Our project thus contributes to knowledge through exploring the ways in which translation can be used as part of the development and promotion of British and Korean media in the other country using streaming and OTT services, leading to more sustainable creative industries in both countries.

3. Aims and research questions

This project explores ways to promote Korean and British media content in translation through streaming services with the goal of promoting mutual exchange and sustainable media industries in each country. As mentioned, there was a clear research gap in the literature on the way in which translation would intersect with other elements of distribution and reception of streaming platforms, especially in the Korean and British context. As such, our aims included developing a greater understanding of the role of translation in the streaming media (including both film and TV). In order to further examine that reception, we considered forms of reception, which included both mainstream press reviews and other, more informal forms of reception found in fandom. We wanted this research to be of interest to industry as well as academia, so we also sought out best practice and success stories. The most complex of our aims was to develop sustainable practices in translation and media, i.e. ones that would both provide meaningful employment and reduce or repair damage to the environment. Our research questions were thus:

- RQ1 What patterns are there to streaming services' distribution of British media in Korea and Korean media in the UK?
- RQ2 How are British media in Korea and Korean media in the UK made popular?
- RQ3 How do the translation strategies used in the UK and Korea offer access to the foreign culture and represent it?
- RQ4 How have fan communities discussed, challenged, rewritten or otherwise remediated British media in Korea and Korean media in the UK?
- RQ5 How can best practices of translation and presentation be instrumentalised in the promotion of British media in Korea and Korean Media in the UK?
- RQ6 How can the translation of media products for an international audience promote economically and environmentally sustainable media industries in Korea and the UK?

The members of the research project brought expertise in translation, media studies, Korean film, and industry knowledge. Their expertise was combined in order to answer the research questions.

4. Methodology

Network participants worked independently or in small groups to address the research questions, bringing their own research strengths to the project. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the project, the research clusters around the following four key areas: translation, film and TV, fandom and reception, and sustainability. The innovative approach in this project is to view these areas as

interrelated and mutually implicated.

By exploring the strategies used in translation on Netflix and Korean OTT platforms such as Watcha, the project contributes to the gap in the scholarship about how translation on streaming platforms affects media reception. Few studies have examined the role of translation the reception of streaming media content, with exceptions being Di Giovanni and Gambier (2018), Kuscu-Ozbudak (2021) and Ju (2020). The exploration of translation takes place through the textual analysis of subtitles and how they relate to the dialogue of the film they translated, using a comparative case study approach.

The project also explores the nature of the media that are translated and how they are distributed. This research draws from film and TV studies methodologies, again using case studies to explore the media, analysing aspects including cinematography, narrative, gender representation. Through the use of industry data and paratextual analysis, this strand of the research will explore the ways in which the media is recontextualised through streaming and VOD presentation, and how this intersects with the practices of translation and reception. This work draws from recent work on Netflix distribution by scholars like Lobato (2019), as well as from more established methods of analysis in film and TV studies (Gledhill & Williams, 2000).

In order to explore reception more precisely, the project engages with fans of Korean media in the UK and British media fans in Korea. Fan practices will be explored through a combination of analysis of fan created translations, fan created websites and discourse around media properties, and of social media discussing the media under consideration. The research uses a case study method to analyse fan engagement with the texts and understand the motivations for fans' interest in them through textual analysis. Fan studies is now an established field of media studies (key texts include Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 1992; Sandvoss, 2005), and there is a growing body of research on fans of Korean media in the rest of the world (monographs include Chen, 2017; Choi & Maliangkay, 2014; Yoon & Jin, 2017). However, much of this work focuses on music (known as K-pop) and the 'Hallyu/Korean Wave' (Kim, 2013b) of the early 2000s, rather than more recent film and TV productions, and little of it engages with questions of translation or cultural exchange as this project does. Fan translation is an established and growing area of research in Translation Studies (Evans, 2019; Pérez-González, 2019), since translation can be one way for fans to interact with and share their preferred texts, as the notion of 'translational fandom' (Guo & Evans, 2020) suggests. While there is some work on fan translation of Korean media and how it promotes Korean culture (Aisyah & Jin, 2017; Cho, 2014; Duraner et al., 2017), this work focuses on inter-Asian translation rather than translation into English as this project does. Furthermore, this project combines researching fan translation with work on other fan activities, rather than seeing them as separate practices.

In addition to this commercial entwining of translation and media production that stands to benefit Korea and the UK, the project also sees in streaming media possible ways to develop

economically and environmentally sustainable practices in media. Netflix is making a serious move to address the global challenges, especially in relation to environmental sustainability, to the extent that it hired “a director who is a seasoned expert in all aspects of policy issues relating to environmental sustainability” (Netflix, 2021). In this respect, the project draws from work on sustainable media (Rauch, 2018; Starosielski & Walker, 2016) which has explored the environmental impact of media and alternatives to current practices, as well as looking to UN Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) in order to explore how media and cultural exchange through translation can be sustainable, both economically and environmentally. This strand of the research explores industry discourses of sustainability and the costs of media production while seeking examples of reducing environmental impact. This strand uses case studies that analyse specific examples of good practice, while also theorising the relationship between these practices and international cultural exchange.

5. Findings

The project is not yet complete, and so the following should be considered preliminary findings. They summarise the works of the network members as presented at conferences in Busan and London. A fuller version of the findings is planned for publication in the near future, as an edited volume containing chapters by the network members. This edited volume will constitute the definitive findings of the project.

The first finding was that there was a good quantity of Korean media available in British streaming sites. Mostly, this was TV shows that were dramatic, and these were often grouped together as Korean or Asian media (as on Netflix), and sometimes as K-drama. Big name films such as *Parasite* and successful TV shows such as *Squid Game* are often used as points of reference, demonstrating their name value in Britain and the spread of their popularity. The result is that Korean media is often seen as something of a genre in itself, rather than being made of different genres. The nationality and origins of the shows is their selling point to British audiences. This reflects the position of translated media in the UK, where most media are in English: it remains a niche taste and as such tends to be consumed as media from elsewhere first and foremost, rather than as examples of specific genres. Furthermore, there was public discussion about how Korean media was connected with Korea as a country and the socio-economic situation (as seen in press reports about *Squid Game*); as we worked on the project, there was an exhibition about Korean culture at the Victoria and Albert Museum that addressed the international success of Korean culture and explicitly linked this to the growing soft power of South Korea.

British media in Korea was less popular, but was available. There was less public discussion of this as specifically *British* media. Elements of adaptation were more common in the Korean presentation of the media: the OCN trailer for *Sherlock*, for instance, mirrored the sorts of shipping undertaken by

fans of the show. Furthermore, we found there were remakes of shows like *Life on Mars* (BBC, 2006-07) into Korean that localised the narrative of the show. In the case of *Life on Mars*, the Korean version changed the dates to make them more applicable to Korean history. This positions British media as media to be consumed and watched in Korea, mirroring a country where people are more used to watching media in translation, but at the same time, it loses some cultural specificity: it is translated media but its British origin is less important.

Our findings in sustainability are somewhat ambiguous at the moment. In some ways, the subtitling and distribution of foreign media in both Britain and South Korea represent a form of recycling of content, which at the same time offers a chance to see another culture. It uses less power and produces less carbon than producing new materials, and it does continue to support jobs as the sales increase. At the same time, streaming itself has environmental consequences. A great deal of power is needed to run server farms, which also create a lot of heat. The minerals needed for computers and tablets and smart TVs to run streaming software also include rare earth metals that are environmentally damaging to mine and recover. This to some extent feeds a cycle of consumption of hi-tech goods which leads to a lot of electronic waste. However, we think it is important to continue developing ways of making these processes more sustainable, both socially and environmentally. We found that many of the tenets of slow media (Rauch, 2018) would help to develop further local media that could equally be marketed internationally.

Finally, we became aware of strong audience engagement with translation in both the UK and South Korea, with fan materials on social media. This showed a continuing engagement with international media that was also critical as it questioned or rewrote some aspects of the films and TV. This demonstrated the continuing use of editing and fragmentation by fans (as first discussed by Jenkins, 1992), as well as the way in which fans would continue to explore narratives beyond what was presented to them.

6. Implications

Taking an interdisciplinary approach, this project provided multifaceted perspectives on streaming from production and circulation to consumption and reception. From a film studies' perspective, this project shed light on how distributors' decisions may shape the focus of media distribution and consumption in the UK and Korea and how remakes can represent transcultural and temporal mobility. From a reception studies' perspective, it showed that how distributors' decisions of promotion strategies reconstruct paratextual elements of imported media on their streaming platforms, such as trailers, and how audience reception may play a key role in shaping and changing distributors' promoting strategies. In this user-participatory streaming culture, it sheds light on the importance of fans and fan discourse in promoting materials. From a translation studies' perspective, it showed how paratextual elements of media such

as trailers, posters, promotional videos and user-generated videos on YouTube can be reconstructed by translation and how various agents such as prosumers may contribute to the meaning making of media in the age of streaming. It highlights the importance of translation which gives access to foreign culture, while at the same time it underscores the need to explore ways to promote local culture and local production in translation. The results of this project can be widely used in and applied to relevant industries which have to make daily decisions on what and how to promote and distribute media and have ramifications on relevant scholarships and stakeholders of industries. In addition, while we live in the age of fast media, whereby audiences consume numerous media everyday, i.e. through binge-watching, this project brings much attention to the matter of sustainability and it suggests how slow media can be a feasible alternative to fast media by, for instance, hosting a gathering for audiences of certain films or TV programs and making an archive of media produced in the past and rereleasing or reusing them.

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