

The Transformation of Subtitled Viewing Habits and the Growing Reception of Asian Visual Content

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This study examines the historical aversion to subtitles in the English-speaking world and explores how this perception has evolved with the rise of global streaming platforms. The research combines survey data from Japanese audiences with interviews conducted with more than 100 online English instructors working on international learning platforms. The findings indicate that subtitle literacy—defined as the ability to process and appreciate subtitled audiovisual content—has grown significantly, particularly among younger viewers. This shift is attributed to the widespread use of VOD services, social media engagement, and mobile viewing, all of which normalize multitasking and cross-linguistic exposure. Once viewed as distracting, subtitles now function as cultural and narrative bridges that facilitate global content circulation. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of user experience design and creative subtitling strategies in enhancing accessibility and intercultural understanding in global media communication.

1. The Background and Transformation of Subtitling Aversion in the English-Speaking World

Historically, the act of “reading subtitles” has not been a common viewing behavior in the English-speaking world. This tendency is rooted in structural factors shaped by the unique media ecology of Anglophone countries. In the United States and the United Kingdom, domestically produced audiovisual content in English has long dominated television and film, while foreign-language works have been confined to limited screenings in cinemas and niche programming slots on television^[5]. Such an environment inherently restricted exposure to non-English content, limiting the necessity of engaging with subtitles.

Educational practices in English-speaking countries have also contributed to this pattern. In many Anglophone education systems, the development of oral comprehension and conversational skills has traditionally been prioritized over the cultivation of visual-linguistic processing skills. As a result, the act of reading on-screen text has not been embedded as a routine or natural component of media consumption. In contrast to the Japanese “telop” culture—where variety shows frequently display on-screen captions—English-language television has maintained a relatively low reliance on textual elements^[6].

Cultural and psychological factors further reinforced the aversion to subtitles. Within the historical context of Hollywood’s global dominance, subtitles were often associated with foreign-language “art house” films, which were stereotyped as niche, intellectually demanding, or inaccessible to general audiences^[7]. In American culture, the perception that “reading is work” has also shaped leisure practices: reading during entertainment media consumption was often seen as incompatible with relaxation. Consequently, between the 1980s and the early 2000s, many foreign films released in the United States were predominantly offered in dubbed versions rather than subtitled formats.

In recent years, however, the proliferation of streaming platforms and the ubiquity of mobile devices have driven a profound shift in viewing habits, particularly among younger

audiences. Subtitling is increasingly accepted as a natural part of audiovisual consumption. The rise of social media and short-form video platforms has normalized silent viewing with captions, making the presence of on-screen text an expected component of the media experience. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook routinely employ automatic captions to ensure content is understandable across varied viewing environments, fostering habits of visual information processing^[1].

Empirical evidence supports this shift. According to a Netflix user analysis (2021), approximately 80% of subscribers utilize subtitles in some form, with 40% regularly keeping English subtitles enabled for English-language content (Morning Consult, 2021). Similarly, a 2021 report by the UK’s Ofcom found that more than half of viewers aged 18–34 actively use subtitles, confirming the growing subtitle literacy among younger generations (Ofcom, 2021).

Globalization has also contributed to this transformation by increasing linguistic diversity within English-speaking populations. The rise of non-native English speakers and the proliferation of diverse accents have made sole reliance on auditory comprehension more challenging. English subtitles are increasingly functioning as an essential, rather than supplementary, component of media consumption. Even among native speakers, factors such as regional dialects, slang, rapid speech, or overlapping background music have amplified the practical value of subtitles for accurate comprehension.

In this way, subtitles are evolving from a tool of cross-linguistic translation into a visual medium that accommodates intralingual diversity. The normalization of subtitling in the English-speaking world reflects both growing linguistic pluralism and the broader shift toward non-audio-centric information consumption. This cultural transformation fosters subtitle literacy among Anglophone audiences and, in turn, creates new pathways for the global circulation and acceptance of non-English audiovisual content, including media from Asia.

2. The Mainstreaming of VOD and Subtitled Viewing: The Rise of Subtitle Literacy

2.1 Traditional Subtitling Practices Among English-Speaking Audiences

Historically, English-speaking audiences have not regarded subtitled viewing as a mainstream practice. In cinemas across the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, English-language films have overwhelmingly dominated the screens, while non-English films were relegated to limited releases or niche art house circuits^[2]. As a result, most viewers lacked regular exposure to subtitles and often avoided them, citing reasons such as “subtitles are distracting” or “they make it difficult to focus on the screen.”

The rapid expansion of Video-on-Demand (VOD) platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ has transformed this landscape. VOD allows users to freely select audio and subtitle options, and English speakers have increasingly adopted the practice of pairing English audio with English subtitles. Interviews conducted with online English instructors for an online English-learning platform revealed that subtitles are frequently used for practical reasons: watching late at night without sound, difficulty hearing dialogue over background music and sound effects, understanding dialects and slang, or following content while multitasking.

This trend is supported by platform data. According to Netflix (2021), approximately 80% of users engage with subtitles in some capacity—a figure reflecting a general trend toward increased subtitle usage, although the breakdown between language types and frequency was not fully detailed, and about 40% keep English subtitles permanently enabled even when watching English-language content^[3]. Likewise, the UK’s Ofcom (2021) reported that over half of viewers aged 18–34 actively use subtitles, indicating that subtitled viewing has become normalized among younger audiences^[4]. These findings collectively point to the emergence of a generation of English-speaking viewers with higher “subtitle literacy,” for whom visual textual processing has become a routine part of media consumption.

2.2 Subtitle Familiarity and the Reception of Asian Content

The widespread adoption of same-language subtitling has substantially reduced the psychological resistance of English-speaking audiences toward subtitled content. Behaviors that were once considered disruptive to immersion—such as “having to read while watching”—are increasingly perceived as natural. As a result, the barrier to engaging with non-English audiovisual content has been significantly lowered.

This growing subtitle familiarity is closely tied to the international success of recent Asian media. For instance, *Parasite* achieved both commercial success and critical acclaim in the U.S., culminating in an Academy Award for Best Picture, despite being entirely subtitled. Similarly, titles such as *Squid Game* and *Shōgun* have gained global popularity through simultaneous VOD releases, with social media amplification driving viral engagement across English-speaking markets.

These cases illustrate the synergistic effect of two factors: the high production value of Asian audiovisual content and the willingness of a new generation of English-speaking viewers to embrace subtitled media as part of their everyday viewing habits.

This convergence suggests that subtitle literacy is not merely a linguistic adaptation but also a cultural shift that facilitates the global circulation of non-English media^[3].

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data Sources and Methodological Approach

The discussion in this study is based on the analysis of two complementary datasets. The first is a quantitative survey on subtitled viewing conducted in Japan by CCCMK Holdings, a professional market research firm. The second consists of qualitative interviews conducted by the author between 2021 and 2024, which were designed to interpret and extend the insights obtained from the Japanese survey. These interviews were conducted with English instructors from more than 50 countries through the online English-learning platform. The following sections detail these two research components.

3.2 Survey on Subtitled Viewing Behavior in Japan

The first dataset derives from the Survey on Subtitled Viewing of Audiovisual Content, conducted jointly by Digital Hollywood University and CCCMK Holdings in January 2025. The survey targeted Japanese residents aged 15 to 69 and was administered online using an internet-based panel method. A total of 1,805 valid responses were collected. The sample was evenly stratified by age and gender, with 100 respondents from each demographic segment. To capture the anticipated prevalence of subtitled viewing among younger cohorts, additional oversampling was conducted for “university students” and respondents in their twenties, with 200 supplementary participants in each group.

The questionnaire consisted of 4 screening questions and 13 main items, designed to capture both behavioral and attitudinal aspects of viewing practices and subtitle usage. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including age, gender, and occupation. High school and university/graduate students were classified by educational status rather than age category. All participants reported viewing audiovisual content—via television or online streaming platforms—at least once every two to three months.

Table 1: Age and Gender Distribution of Respondents in the Survey on Subtitled Viewing of Audiovisual Content

Participants	Male		Female	
High School Students	100	6%	100	6%
University & Graduate Students	201	11%	200	11%
20s	201	11%	200	6%
30s	100	6%	101	6%
40s	101	6%	10	6%
50s	100	6%	101	6%
60s	100	6%	100	6%
Total	903	50%	902	50%

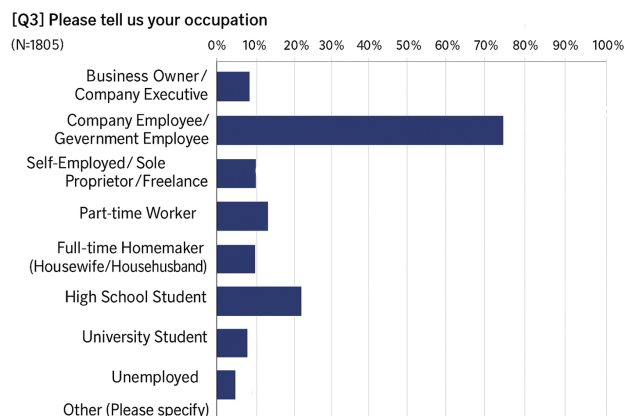


Figure 1: Occupational Distribution of Respondents in the Survey on Subtitled Viewing of Audiovisual Content

3.3 Survey of English Subtitle Usage Among Online English Instructors

This component of the study aimed to investigate the actual practices and cultural contexts of subtitle usage among native English speakers. To achieve this, we conducted an interview-based survey targeting online English instructors affiliated with Online English conversation service, representing a diverse range of national backgrounds. The participants comprised 112 instructors from over 50 countries (39% male, 61% female), ranging in age from their 20s to 50s.

Data collection employed a mixed-method approach, including Zoom interviews, Google Forms questionnaires, and open-ended responses via Slack chat. The instructors' countries of origin included the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, South Africa, Benin, Lebanon, and Hungary, among others.

The survey consisted of multiple exploratory items designed to capture both behavioral and cultural dimensions of subtitle use

- (1) Whether participants use English subtitles when viewing audiovisual content,
- (2) Their preference between dubbing and subtitling, and
- (3) Perceived generational or cultural differences in subtitle usage trends.

Open-ended responses formed the core of the dataset, allowing participants to elaborate on their motivations for using (or not using) subtitles, the types of media consumed (e.g., films, anime, YouTube), and viewing practices such as multitasking, variable playback speed, or coping with low volume or background noise. These qualitative insights were used as foundational data to explore international diversity in viewing habits and perceptions of subtitling culture.

Table 2: summarizes the distribution of respondents by nationality and age group

	Age			Total
	< 30	~40	40+	
US	6	7	0	13
Canada	1	0	1	2
UK	2	2	0	4
South Africa	6	0	0	6
Australia	1	0	0	1
Ireland	0	1	0	1
New Zealand	0	0	0	0
Total	16	10	1	27

4. Findings

4.1 Survey on Subtitled Viewing of Audiovisual Content Among Japanese Audiences

In the survey, participants were asked whether they watch Japanese audiovisual content with Japanese subtitles. Among respondents, 11.9% answered that they watch with subtitles “almost every time,” 14.2% “frequently,” and 22.7% “occasionally.” Combined, 48.8% of respondents reported using Japanese subtitles for Japanese-language content to some degree. Conversely, 51.2% stated that they “never” watch with subtitles, suggesting a polarized pattern of viewing behaviors (Figure 2).

The reasons for watching Japanese audiovisual content with Japanese subtitles are summarized in Figure 3 and can be categorized into four main themes:

- (1) Physical or environmental constraints that make listening difficult or require muted playback:
 - (a) Difficulty hearing due to surrounding noise (26.8%)
 - (b) Watching in transit where audio cannot be played (14.1%)
 - (c) Viewing in workplaces or restaurants where audio is restricted (9.8%)
 - (d) Watching without earphones in environments where speakers cannot be used (14.9%)
 - (e) Muting or reducing audio at home out of consideration for family members (12.3%)
- (2) Enhancing speech intelligibility or linguistic comprehension:
 - (a) Difficulty hearing dialogue overlapping with background music or sound effects (20.7%)
 - (b) Difficulty understanding voices due to dialects, speech patterns, or tone (25.8%)
 - (c) Need for support in understanding technical or specialized terms (21.7%)
- (3) Improving the quality of the viewing experience:
 - (a) Understanding scripts and dialogue more accurately and deeply (24.2%)
 - (b) Feeling that reading subtitles makes content more enjoyable or memorable (23.0%)
 - (c) Responses related to viewing styles are summarized in Figure (4) including tendencies toward fast-forwarding or focusing on visuals or audio only. Viewing contexts, shown in Figure 5, indicate that multitasking is common: 63.7% watch content “while eating,” 35.8% “while doing housework or getting ready,” and 22.1% “as background while working or studying.”

Do you watch Japanese-language video content with Japanese subtitles? (Incl. auto-generated, excl. foreign works) (N=1805)

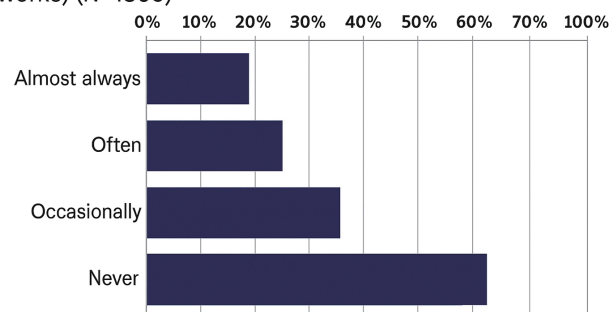


Figure 2: Responses on Watching Japanese Audiovisual Content with Japanese Subtitles

Please let us know why or in what situations you add subtitles to Japanese-language visual works or video content. (Multiple answers, N=881)

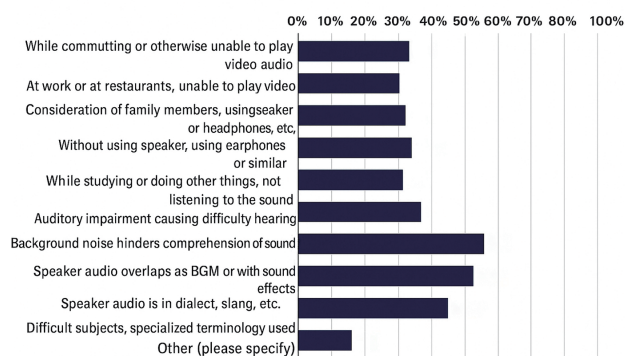


Figure 3: Reasons Reported for Watching Japanese Audiovisual Content with Japanese Subtitles

How often do you do the following when watching video content?

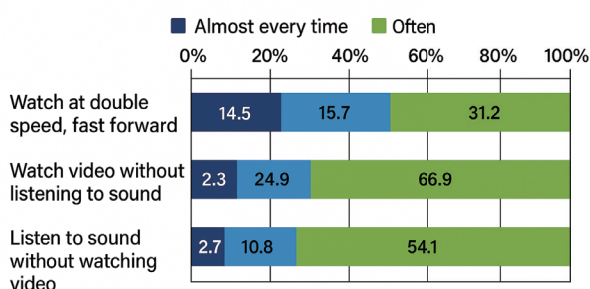


Figure 4: Responses on Fast-Forwarding, Visual-Only, and Audio-Only Viewing of Audiovisual Content

Please let us know where/situations you commonly watch video content. (N=1805) (Multiple choice)

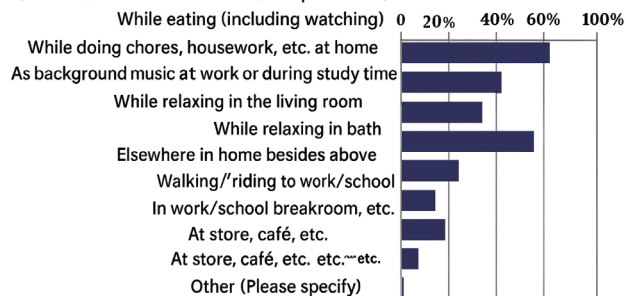


Figure 5: Responses Regarding Locations and Situational Contexts When Watching Audiovisual Content

4.2 Survey of English Subtitle Usage Among Online English Instructors

As shown in Table 3, the proportion of respondents who reported “regularly using” English subtitles exceeded 50% in all surveyed countries: 71% in the United Kingdom, 68% in the United States, 66% in Australia, 62% in Canada, and 54% in South Africa. While South Africa also displayed a relatively higher preference for dubbing, its overall rate of subtitle usage remained high.

Table 4 summarizes the types of content viewed with subtitles and the primary reasons for using them, broken down by nationality. Across all groups, the most frequently cited reason for using subtitles was comprehension, followed by background noise as the second most common factor.

Table 3: Patterns of Subtitle and Dubbing Usage Across Five English-Speaking Countries

Country	Use English Subtitles Often (%)	Prefer Dubbing (%)	Use Both (%)
US	68	20	12
Canada	62	25	13
UK	71	18	11
South Africa	54	30	16
Australia	66	21	13

Table 4: Types of Content and Reasons for Subtitle and Dubbing Usage in Five English-Speaking Countries

	Sub				No Sub	Reason							Sub	Dub
	Live	Anime	Game	You Tube		Comp.	Noise	Mobil	Skip	Multi-task	Dia-lect	Volu-me		
US	13	5	2	7	0	7	7	3	2	2	5	3	8	1
Canada	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
UK	3	1	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
South Africa	4	4	0	2	2	4	1	0	0	0	4	2	4	0
Australia	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Ireland	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
New Zealand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	22	12	2	10	5	16	10	3	2	2	13	5	13	

5. Discussion

5.1. Findings from the Survey on Subtitled Viewing Among Japanese Audiences

The survey results reveal a polarized pattern of viewing behavior: nearly half of respondents reported watching Japanese audiovisual content with Japanese subtitles, while a similar proportion stated that they “never” use subtitles. The reasons for watching Japanese content with Japanese subtitles are diverse but can be organized into four key categories.

First, a significant proportion of respondents use subtitles in situations where physical or environmental factors make listening difficult or discourage the use of audio. This indicates that subtitles function primarily as a viewing aid, closely tied to urban lifestyles and the increasing prevalence of mobile viewing contexts. Second, subtitles are employed to address limitations in auditory clarity and linguistic comprehension. Even for native speakers, the responses indicate a growing awareness that subtitles can support the accurate understanding of content. Those who actively use subtitles do so not only to compensate for inaudible dialogue but also to enhance the overall quality of the viewing experience, reflecting the role of subtitles as cognitive and interpretive tools.

Third, the findings highlight a strong affinity between subtitles, social media use, and multitasking behavior. A defining characteristic of contemporary viewing habits is simultaneous media consumption, such as watching videos while browsing social media or using other applications. Under such conditions, reliance on auditory information alone becomes challenging, and subtitles provide an effective visual complement. The proliferation of smartphones and tablets has normalized this “multitasking viewing” behavior, which diverts attention away from audio and reinforces the functional importance of subtitles as a primary channel of comprehension.

Finally, the survey illustrates how changes in viewing behavior are reshaping the role and function of subtitles. Subtitles are

no longer perceived merely as a supplementary tool but are increasingly central to the viewing experience, especially in dispersed-attention environments. For instance, 61.4% of respondents reported engaging in accelerated viewing—combining those who answered “almost always” (14.5%), “frequently” (15.7%), and “occasionally” (31.2%)—indicating a clear preference for efficient, time-compressed information consumption. Additionally, a notable proportion reported deliberately decoupling audio and visual elements in their media use, with 27.4% “watching without listening to audio” and 13.5% “listening without watching visuals.”

These findings suggest that subtitles have evolved into a primary visual medium for comprehension, reflecting a structural transformation in media engagement from traditional passive “audio-visual” viewing to more flexible and active forms of information acquisition. Consequently, future approaches to subtitle design and audiovisual user interfaces (UI) will need to account for increasingly diversified and multitask-oriented viewing practices^[5].

5.2. Survey of English Subtitle Usage Among Online English Instructors

The findings of this survey suggest that subtitles, once regarded in the English-speaking world as “distracting” or “a hindrance to viewing,” are now increasingly accepted as a standard supportive feature. The survey of Japanese audiences revealed that the tendency to watch domestic audiovisual content with same-language subtitles is particularly pronounced among younger generations. This pattern appears to be driven by shifts in lifestyle, attention to comprehension, evolving media habits, and the rise of subtitle literacy.

A similar transformation is evident in English-speaking contexts. English speakers are progressively adopting the habit of watching English-language content with English subtitles, which in turn has familiarized them with reading subtitles and likely reduced their psychological resistance to non-English audiovisual content. According to Ofcom (2021), more than half of viewers aged 18–34 in the United Kingdom reported that they “actively use” subtitles, indicating a clear generational gap in subtitle literacy^[4].

5.3. Subtitling Culture and a Turning Point in Audiovisual Reception

One plausible explanation for the recent increase in the acceptance of non-English audiovisual content in the English-speaking world is the widespread adoption of the practice of watching English-language content with English subtitles. Both the interviews with online English instructors and the domestic audience survey confirm that this viewing style has become increasingly common, particularly among younger generations. The rise of this practice is closely linked to the proliferation of VOD platforms and the emergence of new media environments, including social networking services (SNS). In contexts where audio cannot be played, or in multitasking situations characterized by “ambient viewing,” audiences actively rely on subtitles as a visual complement. This shift is not merely a matter of convenience; it reflects a growing frequency of English-speaking audiences encountering cross-cultural contexts and linguistic nuances through subtitles.

Subtitle literacy has contributed to a broader transformation in audiovisual literacy, expanding traditional models of comprehension toward more layered and multimodal engagement. Traditional reception, which relied primarily on the dual channel of “audio + visuals,” is shifting toward a tri-layered comprehension model of “audio + visuals + text.” Viewers are increasingly developing the ability to process multiple layers of media simultaneously. This indicates a reduction in the psychological and cognitive barriers to “reading” audiovisual content, rather than a simple technological evolution in subtitling^[1].

Notably, streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have made “English audio + English subtitles” a highly accessible and increasingly common configuration, often remembered by user preference and frequently used by younger viewers. This interface architecture encourages subtitled viewing even without explicit user selection, structurally guiding audience behavior. In fact, Netflix’s 2021 official report indicated that approximately 80% of users employ subtitles in some form, and around 40% keep English subtitles permanently enabled for English-language content^[2]. This demonstrates that subtitled viewing is no longer a matter of individual preference but has become a cultural practice shaped by technology and UI strategy.

Such developments have dramatically lowered the psychological barrier to subtitles for English-speaking audiences, creating a receptive environment for non-English audiovisual works such as *Parasite*, *Squid Game*, and *Shōgun*. Consequently, the current transformation of subtitling culture represents more than the evolution of a supplementary technology; it signifies a shift in information-processing modalities and a reconfiguration of the global circulation structure of audiovisual content. These findings have profound implications for the future of translation subtitling, UI/UX design, and the creative strategies that underpin global media distribution.

5.4. A Comparative Perspective on Subtitling Culture in the English-Speaking World and Japan^[4]

A persistent cultural attitude in the United States has been encapsulated in the notion that “reading is work”, implying that the act of reading is cognitively effortful and thus incompatible with relaxation-oriented entertainment such as films and television dramas. This perspective contributed to a long-standing reluctance toward subtitles, particularly in leisure contexts. Indeed, from the 1980s through the early 2000s, the majority of foreign films screened in U.S. theaters were presented in dubbed versions, reflecting the prevailing preference to avoid on-screen reading. Such aversion to subtitles historically functioned as a barrier preventing English-speaking audiences from engaging with high-quality non-English audiovisual works.

By contrast, several factors have facilitated the broader acceptance of subtitling in Japan:

(1) Influence of Education and Media Habits

Japanese schooling traditionally emphasizes reading comprehension, fostering habits of processing information through written text. Additionally, the pervasive “telop” culture—frequent use of on-screen captions in television programs, variety shows, and even YouTube content—has normalized visual textual support. As a result, Japanese audiences exhibit little resistance to subtitles, accelerating their adoption as a natural part of the viewing experience.

(2) National Disposition Toward Precision and Detail

Japanese audiences demonstrate a strong inclination to receive information accurately and often express discomfort with ambiguous or partially audible dialogue. This tendency to rely more on textual information than purely auditory cues aligns with a precision-oriented media culture, which actively encourages the use of subtitles to ensure full comprehension.

Together, these educational, cultural, and psychological factors illustrate why subtitled viewing has been more readily internalized in Japan than in many English-speaking countries, and they provide a comparative framework for understanding global differences in subtitling culture^[4]

6. Future Perspectives and Recommendations

6.1. Redefining the Role of Translation Subtitles

In recent years, subtitles have been increasingly redefined not merely as linguistic bridges but as creative media elements that complement the narrative, aesthetic, and immersive qualities of audiovisual works. Streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have popularized the concept of “creative localization,” which goes beyond literal translation to convey cultural nuance and resonate with the sensibilities of target audiences.

For instance, culturally specific terms such as the Japanese *senpai* or the Korean *oppa* cannot be fully conveyed through direct translation. Subtitle creators must adopt a range of strategies—such as paraphrasing, selective retention, or explanatory cues—to preserve the intended cultural nuance. This requires not only linguistic expertise but also a creative sensibility aligned with the work’s direction and emotional tone.

Furthermore, the design of subtitles as part of the overall user experience (UX) has grown increasingly important. Visual elements—including font style, color, size, and timing of appearance—contribute significantly to how viewers perceive and process subtitled content. Decisions on how to represent aspects of spoken delivery—such as emphasis, emotional inflection, sarcasm, shouting, or whispering—can directly influence viewer immersion and emotional engagement.

6.2 Strategic Recommendations for Content Creators and Streaming Platforms

The global dissemination of Asian films and dramas increasingly depends on the implementation of three key subtitling strategies:

(1) Enhanced Multilingual Support

Expanding beyond English to offer simultaneous subtitle releases in major languages such as Spanish, French, and Arabic can significantly broaden international audience reach.

(2) Explanatory Translation Techniques

Employing techniques such as “tooltip subtitles,” dual-line subtitles, or brief annotation subtitles allows for the delivery of concise cultural context—such as customs or background references—while maintaining viewer immersion. This approach facilitates cross-cultural understanding without disrupting the narrative flow.

(3) Subtitle Design Integrated with Audio

Synchronizing subtitle timing, color, and visual emphasis with music and sound effects can create a visually and aurally unified user experience (UX), enhancing emotional resonance and narrative impact.

These strategies embody a new production paradigm that treats subtitles not simply as linguistic aids, but as visual narration, integrated into the creative design of audiovisual storytelling.

6.3 Challenges of International Distribution and Localization for Japanese Cinema

While Japanese cinema has achieved notable international success in the field of animation, live-action films continue to face linguistic and cultural barriers that limit their global reach. Elements such as the nuances of honorific speech and ambiguous interpersonal references often resist direct translation, resulting in subtitled versions that fail to fully convey relational dynamics or emotional subtleties.

To enhance the international dissemination and reception of Japanese live-action films, several measures are essential:

- (1) Development of subtitle creators with cultural and creative literacy, capable of functioning as hybrid professionals bridging translation and direction.
- (2) Close collaboration between directors, screenwriters, and translators, ensuring that subtitling design reflects the intended narrative and emotional direction of the work.
- (3) Localization strategies informed by audience reception trends in each target country, tailoring subtitles to cultural expectations and viewing habits.

Advancing a comprehensive and sophisticated subtitling policy that integrates these elements will be crucial to securing stronger international recognition and appreciation for Japanese live-action cinema.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the growing prevalence of English speakers watching domestic content with English subtitles and explored how this shift has influenced the reception of non-English audiovisual works, particularly Asian productions. Through interview surveys conducted via Online English conversation service and analyses of audience behavior data, the study demonstrates that changes in VOD-era viewing environments, the rise of social media culture, and the increasing demand for visual information support have collectively fostered the establishment of subtitle literacy among English-speaking audiences.

Once regarded in the Anglophone world as “distracting” or “cognitively burdensome,” subtitles are now widely accepted as part of a standard viewing practice, especially among younger generations. This transformation has lowered the psychological barriers to foreign-language content, contributing to the global success of Asian works such as the Korean film *Parasite*, the Netflix drama *Squid Game*, and the Japan-set series *Shōgun*.

Moreover, the findings highlight that subtitles are being redefined not merely as tools of linguistic conversion but as integral components of audiovisual direction and user experience design. In particular, streaming platforms that present “English audio + English subtitles” as a default configuration have structurally reshaped viewing behavior, signaling a broader cultural evolution in audiovisual engagement^[2].

Looking forward, the successful global distribution of Japanese and other Asian audiovisual works will require a subtitling strategy that integrates translation competence, creative direction, and UX-conscious design. Repositioning subtitles from a function of “translation” to a role of “cultural mediation” is essential for enhancing international recognition and appreciation.

As this study suggests, the rise of subtitle literacy is not a mere technological phenomenon but a social and cultural shift, reflecting transformations in language use, media consumption, and viewing practices. This perspective provides a valuable framework for future developments in audiovisual production, education, and media policy. The evolution of subtitled viewing habits and reception patterns offers a new lens for understanding the future of global audiovisual culture. Subtitles are no longer merely auxiliary features; in certain high-profile works, they function as integral expressive elements that support narrative and emotional delivery in the era of global media. Subtitles are no longer merely auxiliary features; in certain high-profile works, they function as integral expressive elements that support narrative and emotional delivery in the era of global media.

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