

# **Transnational Culture, Transnational Approach and Transnational Identity: An Introduction**

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The word “transnationalism” could be addressed by various disciplines. It was first popularized in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to describe a new way of thinking about relationships between cultures. Later on, it was widely used by the field of economics in the 1960s to refer to the establishment of corporations with organizational bases in more than one nation (Martinelli) . In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first ten years of this new millennium, scholars have been widening and enriching the meanings of the word in several different intellectual traditions. In terms of geo-politics, it refers to the immigrations across the national borders and the immigrants “whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders” (Schiller 48); in terms of social sciences, it means the diminished significance of national boundaries in philosophical ideas and ideological expressions. In the field of literary and cultural studies, transnationalism becomes an effective approach to reveal the profound yet still unexplored implications that derive from literary texts, languages, translations and art across the world. Through the study of transnationalism we are capable of examining and highlighting the interchanges between textual and cultural discourses across visible or invisible borders or boundaries. The seven articles of close readings presented below in one way or another reveal the essence of transnational cultural studies by exploring the transnational culture, transnational memory and transnational identity in the literary texts.

The seven articles are diverse in terms of themes, subjects and theoretical approaches, which, at first glance, bear no relation to one another. They are written by scholars from different countries and different continents, three from China, two from Russia, one from Iran, one from the U.S. and one from Estonia, the topics

of which ranging from the fame of Chinese woman writer to the state of minority language writers in Eastern European countries, from Masculinity to Lesbianism, from Arthurian legends to postmodern novels. Even the scholars from the same countries are diverse in their subject matters. Among the three Chinese scholars, only Yao Sijia takes Chinese writer and literary works as her subject matter, tracing Eileen Chang's reception in China and the United States. The other two, Tang Yili makes an insightful comment on German scholar Vladimir Biti's new book *Tracing Global Democracy: Literature, Theory, and the Politics of Trauma*, and Zhang Xi, co-working with Robert Tindol, explores the lesbian theme in American woman playwright Hellman's masterpiece *The Children's Hour*. Two Russian contributors both cast their eyes far beyond their national boundary, but in different directions. Natalia M. Dolgorukova explores Arthurian Literature in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, while Igor Shaytanov examines the English renaissance sonnet. The Iran researcher Azra Ghandeharion focus on American writer Philip Dick respectively. Juri Talvet from Estonia surveys the minority language writers in Eastern European countries in the era of globalization.

Although the seven articles are varied gatherings, they do have one thing in common. If read as a whole, the concept of transnationalism emerges from the deep layers. In other words, if we put the eight articles in a transnational matrix, they will cultivate the sense of sharedness among researchers. It is in this transnational space that the nine contributors from five different countries across three different continents justify the aesthetics of their own.

All the seven articles adopt transnational approach which is in truth a cultural dialogic methodology (Iwabuchi). They aim to advance transnational intellectual dialogue over diverse issues, different generations and various nations. This transnational dialogue is carried out on different levels. Interestingly, the two young scholars from China, Yao Sijia and Tang Yili, both pay attention to the relations between literature and the globalized political circumstances. Yao Sijia examines Eileen Chang's fame in the framework of multiculturalism, while Tang Yili examines Vladimir Biti's claim that the concept cosmopolitanism is derived from the personal or national traumatic experience, and explores cosmopolitanism's impact on European and non-European cultural and political space. In some sense Eileen Chang's different receptions in China and the U.S. in different political and cultural atmospheres is a good example of this cosmopolitan impact proposed by Vladimir Biti. Scholars from Iran and Estonia all carry out dialogue in political and ideological sense. Azra Ghandeharion, also from Iran, offers an example of this dialogue and conflict by examining how and why the ideological hyper-

masculinity, embodied in war hero, finds its crisis in postwar American literature and movies. What “the cosmopolitan gaze” of this Iran researcher concerns is in what way this dialogue and conflict between nationalism and postcolonialism exerts their effect on man’s psyche and act (Hakutani 68). Vietnam War serves as the cultural background for the emasculated men in Dick’s postmodern novel, *Scanner Darkly*, and almost thirty years later, Linklater adapts the novel by replacing Vietnam War with Irap War. This recontextualization of the postwar settings is a cultural strategy only occurred in a transnational cultural background. Juri Talvet from Estonia, taking the advantage of being an outsider of mainstream culture, or in his own term being a member of “peripheral” nation and culture, reflects on the cultural identity of minority language writers in the era of Globalization. Two Russian scholars happen to focus on early English literature, Arthurian Literature in the middle age and Sonnet in the flowering Renaissance. Natalia M. Dolgorukova proposes that from the perspective of transnationalism, especially in terms of vernacular, the boundary between history and fiction will be blurred and the proportion of the two will be dramatically different. Igor Shaytanov reconsiders the genre issue of the old lyric form — sonnet from the perspective of the well-known Russian scholar Bakhtin’s verbal genre. From this perspective, English Renaissance sonnet reveals some sense of modernity. Zhang Xi and Robert Tindol’s study of the Lesbian Theme in Hellman’s *The Children’s Hour* itself is a successful transnational collaboration between Chinese scholar and American Scholar. What’s more, this article illustrates how powerful and productive of the prefix “trans” is. Transnationalism not only encompass the movement of people, cultural exchange, citizenship, nor does it merely cover multinational literature, linguistic and cultural translations, this generative prefix “trans” is also related to transnational sexualities, transgendered subjectivities and transsexuality, to name just a few. Viewing the theme of Lesbianism from transnational perspective, the lesbianism in this play was not deliberately planned as an erotic claptrap, but as an artistic expression of Hellman’s insight into a deviant-phobic society. Hellman’s intentions of presenting the deformation of the social acceptance of lesbianism set up a psychological battlefield on which the heroine’s internalized homophobia becomes a complex psychological trauma.

The above analysis shows that the examination of literary text in a particular socio-historical context is important, but transnational perspectives will further enrich such explorations by giving a new insight from cosmopolitan experiences and through the meditation of transnational connections. All the seven articles reveal how hegemonic constellations of power/knowledge are articulated and

challenged as well in a transnational era. The seven articles in some sense all identify the growth of transnational cultural diasporas (Hall) and reconceptualize the “landscape of group identity” (Appadurai 191).

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