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Editorial: Historicizing the Concept of Transcultural Communication

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jtc-2021-2001>

Published online November 12, 2021

The world is undergoing centennial transformations. Political polarization, economic imbalance, and cultural conflict are defining the world entering into the so-called Post-COVID-19 era. Alongside the widening divide between different systems, groups, and individuals across the globe, how to rebuild dialogue and rethink communication between and beyond cultures is drawing global attention. Multi-disciplinary scholars are seeking new knowledge about humanity, new approaches to culture studies, and new visions of a global community. Among others, communication scholars are taking a theoretical adventure to reflect on old theories and explore new frontiers, particularly intersections between culture and communication.

Journal of Transcultural Communication (JTC) is committed to focusing on cutting-edge scholarship related but not limited to cross-cultural communication, intercultural communication, intra-cultural communication and inter-racial studies. Notwithstanding the unique emphases on each of these areas, this newly launched journal welcomes inter-disciplinary researchers to pay more attention to our collective responsibilities in aiding the world and overcoming cultural boundaries.

A historical view of intercultural communication studies reveals that the earliest school was born out of the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations (IJIR)* and the *International and Intercultural Communication Annual (IICA)*. The former was sponsored by the University of Hawaii in the 1970s, and the latter (later developed into *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*) by the Speech Communication Association (predecessor of the National Communication Association). Built upon these developments and derived from scholarly works in the United States, *IJIR* and *IICA* have now become representative journals of the leading research paradigm.

In 1972, American scholars Samovar and Porter (1972) pointed out in the preface of their book – *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* that due to the

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ambiguities in the use of three words, namely “cross-culture”, “inter-culture,” and “trans-culture”, only “inter-culture” is used “arbitrarily” in the field of intercultural communication. Thanks to monographs and textbooks, this term has been the prevailing term, till recently in defining this field, regardless of the differences that may hinder the consolidation of a recognized discipline. However, a series of key questions still deserve serious and historical reflections. For example, how to identify the differences between “cross-culture”, “inter-culture” and “trans-culture” has been underestimated or avoided by many American scholars. The article of Jiang and Huang (2009) entitled “*An Attempt to Clarify Two Categories and Four Theoretical Approaches of the Intercultural Communication Theory*” is the first paper in China to sort out the three concepts and make contextual comparisons. In a conversation, American intercultural communication scholar Wendy Leeds – Hurwitz also acknowledged the reflective and conceptual efforts in this article.

Summarized from the aspect of intellectual history, “cross-culture” focuses on comparative research, “inter-culture” comes from the field of anthropology and thus holds a strong interpretive tradition, and “trans-culture” has rooted in the philosophical thinking of human interaction with a special emphasis on co-existence and inter-dependence. Both cross-cultural and inter-cultural communication studies are inspired by anthropologists who intend to understand the differences between cultures and explore the deep structure of each cultural system. However, historically speaking, the purpose of cross-cultural and inter-cultural communication research seeks to exploit overseas interests and control over other cultures through an anthropological approach that helps to develop knowledge and train skills. Therefore, these two approaches stayed away from a more humanistic end. In contrast, trans-cultural communication attempts to call for a paradigmatic shift from control-oriented to development-oriented scholarship to deal with different cultures and information communication between cultures.

Trans-cultural communication is not against cross-cultural or inter-cultural communication but builds on it and aims to transcend it to imagine a deeper interconnected and more inclusive communicative ecology in which culture is not the barrier but the catalyst for good human relationship. In other words, trans-cultural communication passes through two stages – cross-cultural and inter-cultural communication. Its purpose is not to maintain, consolidate or even cross cultural boundaries, but to transcend them to make genuine theoretical contributions to a holistic understanding of humanity and a sustainable global community, by which the spirit of *JTC* is founded.

The word “culture” originated in Germany. Through the “Sturm und Drang” movement, Germany’s national consciousness began to awaken, which changed

the binary discourse system of “civilization versus barbarism” advocated by Britain and France during the colonial era (Cao & Zhang, 2005). In the past 200 years, a series of German philosophers and thinkers such as Spindler and Marcuse contended for the notion that “civilization is material and culture is spiritual”. Through the changing discourse paradigm, Germany rhetorically established the spiritual connotation of culture, and at the same time established the advanced and innovative nature of German culture.

The anthropological perspective contains genetic features of racism and colonialism, which generates counter narratives and laid the foundation for theoretical transformation. After World War II, German philosophical thoughts on “culture” gradually spread to other European countries. For example, Coleridge in the United Kingdom was deeply affected by this notion. He devoted his life to introducing the theories of German philosophers to British readers and calling attention to the importance of “culture” in comparison with “steel production” to the country.

An important symbol of France in the history of cultural thought is the Uruguay Round of negotiations. When the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) agreement was signed in 1993, France first proposed the principle of “cultural exception” (des Beauvais, 2014). For example, the French film industry’s incentive policy for domestic creative professionals is a struggle against American cultural invasion. France learned lessons from World War II and hoped to subvert the discourse of colonialism from an anti-anthropological perspective and counter the rise of American cultural hegemony.

The term “transcultural” was originally derived from the study of transcultural management. Some management experts said it was difficult for management research to touch the deep structure of culture. Therefore, this term differs from “intercultural” and its anthropological, ethnographic, and colonialist research orientations. There are essential differences. However, after the launch of the reform and opening up policy, China tried to learn from Japanese management thoughts on how to localize advanced German management culture in Japan. Therefore, it can be said that the field of Chinese management research is surging to return to the “deep cultural structure” and “cultural philosophy”.

From the perspective of intellectual history, both “cross-culture” and “inter-culture” continuously strengthen and deepen the color of colonial and post-colonial ideology and spread hegemony, while “trans-culture” is thinking from the perspective of anti-anthropology, anti-colonialism, and anti-Orientalism, which encapsulates comparatively deeper philosophical thoughts. Based on this, Chinese scholar Tingyang Zhao (2016) puts forward the concept of “Tianxia System” (or translated into “All-under-heaven System”), a rhetorical alternative to the Western ones, aiming to remove the border, seek a state of communication and

cognition beyond the border, and achieve border-less communication. The notion of “A Community with Shared Future for Mankind” is also deduced from this philosophical spirit.

Journal of Transcultural Communication aims to draw attention to it that “transculture” is not a colonial perspective; it aims to abandon prejudices and stereotypes, and allows culture to spread without barriers or borders. Transcultural communication has transcended the boundaries of physical and cultural reality and has fostered a new way of thinking about the philosophical existence of the cultures behind and on different cultural archetypes. Inspired by the “Tianxia system” concept and the notion of building “A Community with Shared Future for Mankind”, transcultural communication transforms and surpasses previous inter-cultural/cross-cultural research paradigms, presenting a new image of research into communication among cultures on a global scale.

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