

The Analysis on Theoretical Predicament for the Transcultural Studies of Imagology

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[Abstract] Under the influence of Culture Studies, Transcultural Studies of Imagology conducts the comprehensive multi-disciplinary research by synthesizing the resources from other disciplines to its own concern and method. As Transcultural Studies of Imagology tries to research how the image of China presented in the Western cultural discourse becomes the mirror image for China's cultural identity in its modernization, the deconstructive and constructive research methods, however, discords with the question of concern for Transcultural Studies of Imagology. Therefore, mismatching the question of its concern and the research method, Transcultural Studies of Imagology could hardly make any progress and thus, falls into a predicament.

[Keywords] transcultural studies of imagology; image of china; cultural identity; mirror image of the other

Introduction

Originating from Comparative Literature studies, imagology, which focuses on the comparative studies of image presentation in literary works, is now under the strong influence of Culture Studies, and thus, has become more and more interested in the research of the exploration of the consciousness of the subject's cultural identity hidden in the discourse of the image descriptive texts (Leerssen, 2007, p. 25). Culture Studies regard that a subject's cultural identity is constructed by social discourse and is constantly changing, which means that the image of the other constructed by the subject in some way actually reveals the inner desire and cultural identification tendency of the subject's self. Hence, the research interest in identification becomes the study paradigm for imagology. That is to say, the study of images in imagology shifts from the aesthetic concern in the sphere of Comparative Literature to the concern of cultural identification, which necessitates the integration of transcultural studies and imagology together in image construction studies.

Since the Transcultural Studies of Imagology aims to seek the relationship between image discourse and a subject's cultural identity, it constantly breaks the borders of various disciplines and thus, invites the criticism of being labelled as "none-disciplinary" or "pan-disciplinary" studies (Cao, 2002, p. 167). In order to keep away from those critics and make use of various disciplines to serve image studies, Transcultural Studies of Imagology establishes the question of concern as the research purpose to motivate and synthesize various other disciplines. Scholar Zhou Ning made it very clear that the aim of the Transcultural Studies of Imagology is the question of concern to explore the way from academic research to ideology (Zhou, & Li, 2013, pp. 10-11). The purpose of Transcultural Studies of Imagology set by Zhou Ning actually comes from his experience in the case study of the image of China in the eyes of Western Civilization. However, it is the mismatch between the question of concern and its method of solution in this case study that finally results in the theoretical predicament for the Transcultural Studies of Imagology.

The Question of Concern for Transcultural Studies of Imagology

There are three questions of concern in the case study about the image of China in the eyes of Western Civilization by Transcultural Studies of Imagology. The first question of concern that Transcultural Studies of Imagology tries to explore is to reveal the discourse of modernity by the Western Civilization in its image presentation of China. According to the theory of Transcultural Studies of Imagology, the image discourse of the other is actually the reflection of the subject's inner cultural identification. Hence, the image of China made by Western Civilization somehow speaks to the changing identity and cultural values of European nations in their modernization. Europe in the 17th century depicted China as an ideal modern for monarchy because the Europeans who suffered from separation and division in the Middle Ages longed for a strong monarchy to guarantee a united market that was necessary for the development of capitalism. In contrast, Western Civilization in the 19th century saw China's monarchy as a corruptive and tyrant one since the modernization of capitalism required an open market in China, but China, under imperial rule, shut its door against modern capitalism. It is not surprising that the image of China in the 19th century seen as stagnant and half-barbarian is actually speaking the cultural identity of the Europe as modern and civilized.

Since Western Civilization takes the lead in global modernization and exerts a great influence over other nations in their modern development, the second question of concern that Transcultural Studies of Imagology tries to study is to find out how the discourse of modernity of West Civilization dominates the construction of the image of China by other nations around the world. Consequently, the third question of concern that Transcultural Studies of Imagology attempts to research follows the same logic and tries to inquire to what degree the image of China, under the strong influence of discourse about modernity by Western Civilization, affects the construction of modern China's self-image and cultural identification.

Generally speaking, the question of concern that Transcultural Studies of Imagology constantly inquires is to explore how the image of China dominated by the discourse of modernity by the Western Civilization wakes up China's cultural consciousness, becomes the external reference as the Big Other in China's remaking of its self-image and affects China's reconstructing its cultural identity since the modernization of China has been on the way.

The Research Method for Transcultural Studies of Imagology

As mentioned above, the question of concern for Transcultural Studies of Imagology actually consists of two aspects, namely, the essence of China's image in the view of Western Civilization and the function of China's image in modern China's reconstructing of its cultural identity. Thus, it is no wonder that the two aspects of the question of concern implicitly require two different research methods accordingly.

One of the research methods is to deconstruct the image of China in the eyes of Western Civilization. The deconstructive method attempts to expose the cultural hegemony of modernity in the image discourse that is produced and distributed in the European modern historical culture context by the analysis of the genealogy of China's image discourse and from the perspective of post-colonialism criticism. This deconstructive method borrows many theoretic resources from Culture Criticism in Western postmodernism, especially Edward W. Said's post-colonialism, which provides a unique perspective in understanding the relationship between discourse and power in the construction of China's image. Although geographically Said's post-colonialism

represented by his *Orientalism* doesn't refer to China and the Far East and chronically limits his research concern after the 19th century, as a critical method to reveal and analyze the discourse of Western cultural imperialism, Said's post-colonialism theoretical approach was extended by many scholars to many other academic research fields, not only the concept of "the Orient" being generalized to the entire East Asia, South Asia and even Africa and South America, but also the concept of "the Occident" being expanded from the narrow sense of Western Europe represented by Britain and France to the area like North America where Western Civilization's cultural values prevail (Zhou, 2011, pp. 347-348). As a discourse system to understand and dominate the external others since modernization, the discourse of Orientalism that interprets the other non-western nations in a scientific way, categorizes them into academic disciplines and translates them as various knowledge is, as a matter of fact, proclaiming the cultural hegemony of Western Civilization, narrating grandly the Cultural Values like liberty, civilization and progress in the Western World.

Therefore, functioned as a tool to maintain cultural ideology, the discourse of Orientalism transforms the other non-western world into nothing but the verification of the cultural values of the Western modern civilization. In this regard, the reality of the other is indifferent and unimportant. What really matters is the image of the others in the imagination of the subject's self, as this image in the imagination actually plays a role in subject's cultural identification. French scholar Daniel-Henri Pageaux presented the ideological and utopian functions of images in constructing a subject's cultural identity. In terms of the former function, the other's image is usually depicted by the subject as an inferior one, so that the subject could satisfy itself by identifying with its own cultural ideology; while in terms of the latter, the other's image is promoted to an ideal and superior level, so that the subject could be critic of its cultural reality with the utopian imagination (Meng, 2001, pp. 154-166).

In Zhou Ning's case studies in Transcultural Studies of Imagology, the image discourse of China in the view of Western civilization is successfully deconstructed as the presentation of the cultural desire, identification and values of the West in its awake of cultural consciousness during its modernization. It does not matter whether the image discourse of China matches the cultural reality of China. Zhou Ning's study originated from the cultural critic theory in the Western academic context and succeeded in borrowing this theoretic idea into the question of China. It not only enriched Said's Orientalism but also set up the starting point to research the relationship between China's image and the West cultural identification. Scholar Wu Lisheng once remarked that "Zhou Ning's research effectively transforms the questions of the masters like Said into the concern of our own...and this signifies for the academia of China the end of consumption and transportation of post-modern academic thoughts from the West" (2008, p. 61).

The deconstructive method that Transcultural Studies of Imagology applies in the case study of China's image formation is very successful and effective in revealing the cultural hegemony of the image discourse by Western civilization. If the question of concern for Transcultural Studies of Imagology needs to be responded to wholly, another research method should be introduced in answering the other aspect of the question of concern, namely, the function of China's image in modern China's reconstructing cultural identity. However, it is the mismatch between this research method and the other aspect of the question of concern raised by Transcultural Studies of Imagology that leads to the theoretical predicament.

The Mismatch between the Question of Concern and the Research Method

Breaking the border of the Comparative Literature discipline and transforming from an aesthetics studies paradigm to the research paradigm of cultural studies, imagology evolves its way to the concern of transcultural studies and prefers the research on the correlative interaction between the discourse presentation of national images and the vicissitude of national cultural identification. The case study of the image of China in the eyes of Western Civilization clearly shows the academic research interests of Transcultural Studies of Imagology and the methods of solutions it applies to its question of concern when it successfully exposes, with the deconstructive method, the image discourse of China is nothing but the reflection of the hegemonic power and cultural identity of the Western modern civilization.

Since the image discourse of China is shaped in the eyes of Western Civilization by the yardstick of modernity, there comes another question of concern that Transcultural Studies of Imagology needs to respond to. Can this same image of China, in turn, wake up China's cultural consciousness and reform China's cultural identity when China is on the way to modernity? It is this question of concern that Transcultural Studies of Imagology is trapped in a predicament on account that the inaptitude of the constructive method fails to answer the question of concern. It is paradoxical that the deconstructive method Transcultural Studies of Imagology uses in its academic research could, on the one hand, reveal the true nature of the image discourse of China, but on the other hand, results in the impossibility for this image discourse of China to function in a constructive way as a mirror image guiding the evolution of China's cultural identity in modern times.

Scholar Zhou Ning kept quiet alert to transplant the critic approach of post-colonialism which originated from Orientalism in Western Civilization's cultural context, to the academic concern for the reality of China's present questions. Zhou Ning worried that "born in the Western Civilization's cultural context, the cultural critic method from the post-colonialism means the openness and tolerance of the Western culture and presents the energy for self reflection and criticism, however, it may be made use of by some narrow culture conservatives and fanatic nationalists as a weapon against the West and even the modern civilization in the cultural context of post-colonial or post half colonial societies" (2011, p. 389). In Zhou Ning's perspective, although the cultural critic theory of post-colonialism has been very popular since it was introduced in China, the present research situation is quite worrying.

Zhou Ning pointed out that occupied with consuming the cultural study theories, the scholars, however, are short of the concern for realities and necessary critical thinking on the post-colonialism theories, which consequently brews a mood of nationalism full of closed cultural conservatism and finally, results in an unbalance of culture psychology in foreign affairs (2011, p. 389). In other words, although the cultural critic theory in post-colonialism could successfully reveal Western hegemony in its image discourse of China, on one hand, it could not inspire the reconstruction of China's cultural consciousness of modernity, on the other. That's the reason why Zhou Ning remarked pessimistically that "the way built by the cultural critic method from the post-colonialism aiming at waking up China's cultural consciousness of modernity in the beginning, would probably lead to nihilism in the end. In the case study of Transcultural Studies of Imagology on the question of China, we have already mastered the method of deconstruction, but at the end of this deconstruction research method, we could not see the direction of liberation clearly" (2012, p. 8).

The explanation of why Zhou Ning was so pessimistic about the direction of Transcultural Studies of Imagology in its case study of China could be inferred from his worries about the contradictory paradox in China's reconstruction of its cultural identity under Western Civilization's discourse of modernity indicated in the image presentation of China.

The modernity that China's modern cultural consciousness needs to achieve could not be consummated without the mirror image as "the other" from Western modern civilization on the one hand, and paradoxically, on the other hand, the mirror image served as "the other" from the discourse of modernity by Western Civilization could not offer the meanings and values for the autonomy of the thought of China's cultural identity.

In China's modern history, China's traditional values are greatly challenged by the discourse of modernity from West Civilization. Traditional China is viewed by the Western discourse of modernity as the image of a "half-barbarian" nation. The prosperity and strong power of modern Western civilization not only impresses the literati of China, but also builds up a mirror image as an example to shine an exclusive path to modernity. It is undoubtedly reasonable for the Chinese literati to identify with the values of Western civilization as the only solution to China's problem in the transition from a traditional old China to a modern new nation. However, the cultural critics of post-modernism, especially the post-colonialism approach deconstruct the true nature of the modernity of the West as nothing but the cultural hegemony in the discourse disguised as liberty, democracy, civilization, and progress, etc. If China wants to modernize itself by the norms of Western Civilization, it needs first to legitimize the cultural hegemony of the West, then eradicate all traditional Chinese cultural values and substitute the Western cultural identity for the traditional Chinese one.

In a word, for China, modernization of China means to westernize itself and also to accept the inferior and barbarian image of China in the eyes of Western Civilization. It is both painful and difficult for China to acknowledge the inferiority of its once glorious cultural achievement in the past and embrace the superiority of the West in modern times. It is also becoming impossible for China to replace its own cultural identity with the Western one, especially when culture critics of post-colonialism lay bare the discourse of modernity as nothing but cultural hegemony. Therefore, since the mirror image of Western Civilization is deconstructed as a cultural illusion, it is dangerous and problematic for China to identify itself either with the discourse of modernity of the West, which would lead to the cultural nihilism, or in return with the traditional values in history, which would result in a narrow and conservative nationalism. In this way, although it successfully starts with the first question of concern, the case study of Transcultural Studies of Imagology is trapped in the theoretical predicament at its research terminal when the cultural identity of China's subject cannot extricate itself from the narrative framework of modernity dominated by the discourse of Western Civilization.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, the theoretical predicament for the Transcultural Studies of Imagology is largely caused by the ineffective response of its research method to the question of concern on the relations between image discourse and cultural identification. In the perspectives of the Transcultural Studies of Imagology, there are two functions of the image discourse of China in the eyes of Western Civilization. On the one hand, this image functions as the mirror image through which the cultural subject of the West reflects its own cultural consciousness, and on the other

hand, this same image discourse of China with its latent grand narration of the modernity plays a potential role in making a mirror image of the Other identified with by the cultural subject of China and dominates the imagination of China on its own modernization.

The research method then transforms itself from deconstructing the image discourse of China to constructing the cultural subject of China in the discourse of modernity presented by Western Civilization. The key problem of the research method is that China's identification with modernity can not extricate itself from the discourse of the Western Civilization in the mirror image of the other and thus, go beyond the refrains of the framework of modernity in Western thoughts. In this regard, though the cultural critic theory from post-colonialism could deconstruct the mirror image of the other, the subject of China's cultural consciousness could go beyond the refrains of the modernity in Western thoughts presented in a grand narration. Therefore, it is implied that Transcultural Studies of Imagology could not shoulder the responsibility to reconstruct China's cultural identity after it successfully accomplish deconstructing the image of China in the eyes of the Western Civilization.

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