

## **Project Description**

### **Title**

Encounters and Transformations : Cultural Transmission and Knowledge Production in a Cross-literary and Historical Perspective 1850-1960

### **Context and Significance of Research Project**

The period from the late Qing to the first decade right after the establishment of the PRC and the Nationalist government' retreat to Taiwan (1850 to 1960) marks one of the most significant moments in modern Chinese and Taiwanese history. Both places witnessed extreme forms of violence and upheaval such as wars, civil war, foreign occupation, and anti-colonial struggle. The drastic political changes brought about great social and cultural transformations. The century following 1850 is a period of continuous cultural encounters and conceptual exchange, through which intellectuals and writers served an important role of cultural mediators. They frequently borrowed or appropriated Western ideas, and gradually developed their own varied visions of “modernity” or worldviews.

Previous scholarship dealing with this period tends to assume a dichotomy between the East (either China or Taiwan) and the West, privilege certain notions such as nation building, or focus simply on China and predominantly on the socio-political realm. Consequently, this conference proposes a comparative approach as well as a global perspective to re-examine the multi-layered cultural configurations, knowledge production, and historiography primarily in China and Taiwan during 1850 and 1960. Some papers will draw examples from the post-1960 period in order to fully outline the trajectories and sketch the forms of cross-cultural interactions. By inviting a comparative and a broader contextual methodology, this project and proposed conference will enable us to move beyond geopolitical borders academically and disciplinarily, cross the still-powerful chronological boundaries such as the late Qing, the republican period, and to trace parallel patterns in different contexts. Rather than thematising historical writings and literary rewritings/translations, the papers to be presented question the politics of historiography, problematise the process of translations, exploring other possible paradigms to theorise the knowledge production and cultural flows and exchange in inter-Asia and global contexts.

### **Conference Themes and Main Questions**

The proposed conference brings together 19 scholars of Chinese studies, Taiwanese studies, comparative literature, as well as historians in Taiwan, Singapore and the West. While the main conference theme appears broad, the proposed bilingual conference (English and Chinese) and three-way network (Asia, America, and Europe) will focus on the following three sub-themes:

- 1) historiography and knowledge production,
- 2) cultural transmission and paradigm shift, and
- 3) cross-cultural flows and encounter

Based on these three sub-themes, we are particularly interested in exploring the following questions:

- How to narrate or represent the cultural, ethnic, or colonised “other”?
- What is the relationship between Western (European) historical theories and practices and traditional Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese historiographical traditions?
- How have Western literary traditions and genres interacted with and contributed to Chinese and Taiwanese literary traditions and genres?
- How are the notions such as modernity or nation-building illustrated in popular literature? How has popular literature challenged the canonical literary tradition?
- How have historical writing, textbooks, and travellers’ writings contributed to the general knowledge production especially the notions of “Chineseness” and “Taiwaneseeness”?
- What processes of transmission mediate literary and cultural exchanges between for instance China and the West? What are the results or impacts of those changes?
- How have texts travelled from one context to another? What is gained, lost, or developed during the cultural exchanges or translations? What discourses are preferred and legitimized over others, and why?
- What are the limits, politics, and questions of literary translations and trans-lingual practices?

We hope that additional themes and topics will emerge during the proposed two-day conference.

### **Conference Aims**

Through the selected case studies from different historical moments and contexts, this project aims:

- 1) to extract and better understand the general patterns of cultural exchange and common strategies adopted by intellectuals or writers at that time to deal with this period of pivotal transformations through an interdisciplinary approach,
- 2) to enhance academic exchange between Taiwan-based scholars and those outside Taiwan,
- 3) to promote Taiwanese and Chinese studies in humanities-based subjects by offering scholars with similar research interests a channel for discussion and for testing, and deepening their research results, and
- 4) to provide a sound basis for future research projects in this area and explore possibilities for formal or informal institutional collaboration in the near future.

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