CHAPTER 14

Conclusions

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When we decided to engage with this edited book, our main aim was to fill in a gap identified in the existing literature on transmedia studies after the publication of two major volumes; *Global Convergence Cultures: Transmedia Earth* (Freeman and Proctor 2018) and *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies* (Freeman and Gambarato 2019) that, as stated in our introductory chapter, did not fully engage with countries from the Asia and Pacific Region.

The range of countries represented in this edited collection, from China to Malaysia, Australia to South Korea, via Cambodia, Japan, and Indonesia, is evidence of the accomplishment of our initial aim. It is worth mentioning however, that since our first call for chapters an additional effort to fill the gap in the analysis of transmedia from an Asian perspective was made by Dal Yong Jin (2019) with a special section mostly dedicated to South Korea in the *International Journal of Communication*. An additional aim for us was to try to identify key characteristics from different practices within the Asia and Pacific region. Through this process we are not trying to define a "Pan-Asian transmedia", rather we are interested in

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seeing if some of the specific features identified by the authors of the chapters of this book could help us identify a direction that further research focusing on transmedia should follow in addition to highlighting the need for more studies of transmedia from an Asia and Pacific perspective.

First, there is a need to re-address the definition of transmedia, or identify the boundaries of the concept. When Gu and Zhao mention in Chapter 2 the concept of "IP management" as the Chinese equivalent of transmedia storytelling, they are discussing a practice different from the canonic definition given by Jenkins (2003). This canonical practice is replicated in the Malaysian animation industry as reported in Chapter 4 by Umar Hakim Mohd Hasri and Md Azalanshah Bin Md Syed. However, the concept mentioned by Gu and Zhao is in fact an idea generated from Chinese online literature and mostly refers to adaptation of online literature into web series, films, games, animations, plays, and other products. Only a few Chinese franchises actually develop products that expand the original stories. The online novel series the *Grave Robbers' Chronicle*[1] is a case in point. Starting with the online novel series, its author constructed a fictional world developing many extra stories on different platforms that span from online literature to painting albums and from online movies to stage play. This creates an "impure" transmedia universe where adaptations and expansions coexist.[2]

The idea of "impurity" seems to be at the center of Gu and Zhao's chapter and their concept of "idea universe" to describe transmedia practice, where fictional and nonfictional media texts and other forms of audience engagement coexist. This manifestation of transmedia practice could be an interesting starting point from which to expand and redefine Jenkins' original concept of transmedia storytelling. Further transmedia research should, therefore, depart from Jenkins' canonic and entertainment-centered concept and explore the peripheries. This will help us to avoid embracing the contentious idea of Scolari (2017) that all media content could be considered as transmedia. While Scolari's idea demonstrates the increasing importance of transmedia in the media industry, it is accompanied by a potential loss of meaning: if everything is transmedia, there is no transmedia anymore.

Second, challenging "the center" from "the periphery" is the aim of a number of chapters in this book. While Sung-Ae Lee's chapter suggests that consumer engagement could be driven by how producers use different media, the following two chapters question this approach. Jenna Ng and Shen Jiang and Ting Ting Hu and Yue Wang's chapters do not only offer case studies as an example of bottom-up transmedia

authorship challenging top-down discourses but they also make clear the importance of audiences' participation in the circulation and consumption of transmedia products. This seems to suggest that audiences do not necessarily engage as we expect them to do (Gilardi et al. 2018). This is an additional direction for further transmedia research: the specificity of different audiences and their role in the reception, interpretation, and distribution of transmedia content. This is not only from the perspective of an individual country or small community as suggested by Freeman and Proctor (2018) in their "cultural specificity model" (4), nor from a global perspective looking at how cultural differences are disappearing (Machin and Van Leeuwen 2007), but from a transcultural and transnational perspective. The role of the audience in facilitating the flow of media content across national and cultural boundaries has precedent in scholarship such as Jenkins, Ford, and Green's "spreadable media" framework (2013), which examines the industrial, behavioral, and cultural reasons for audiences to share media content. Jenkins, Ford, and Green argue that the dissemination of media by audiences rely on pre-established networks that utilize media content to facilitate ongoing communication or community building. In this way, new meanings are attached to media content as the content is passed between communities. Scholars examining transcultural fandom emphasize the formation of new fan identities that emerge when engaging with media content across cultural and national boundaries. In particular, Chin and Morimoto (2013) advocate for an approach to fan studies that focuses on the "subjective moment of affinity" (99) regardless of where the fan, or media content originates. A focus on the creation of fan identities enables scholars to interrogate the role of fans and audiences in the dissemination of media content, but also to reflect on the function of media content in the formation of subjectivities that transcend national boundaries. In this volume, this is achieved in Keith Wagner and Liang Meng's examination of the role that different audiences play in the flow of transmedia products, and Susana Tosca's exploration of how fans from different cultures appropriate and redesign the original text based on their specific cultures, values, and beliefs. To build on Freeman and Proctor (2018), we could call this a *cultural comparative model* that could look, for example, at the different levels of motivation from the more "passive" consumers mentioned by Tosca in her chapter to the more active "cultural intermediaries" (Hutchinson 2016) in the context of transmedia products.

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, from a political economy point of view, transmedia storytelling exemplifies corporate synergy and

practices that benefit IP owners such as Walt Disney (Star Wars, Pirates of Caribbean, Marvel Cinematic Universe, etc.) This is evidence of media control, not only intended as media conglomeration but also as the ability to use media and expand stories and ideas across platforms to maximize profits.

What becomes evident in the chapters of Part III of this book is that "alternative practices are nevertheless present and proffer other potential uses of transmedia storytelling" (Edwards 2012, 1). Transmedia can, indeed, empower anybody able to develop multiplatform projects as in the case of Martin Potter, Kim Munro, and Hongwei Bao's chapters. These authors all, in one way or another, look at how transmedia could socially improve disadvantaged communities. The underlying focus of these chapters is a conceptualization of transmedia as a public sphere where social and political issues are discussed, and where the potentiality for social change is raised. As highlighted by Hogwei Bao in his chapter, this potentiality is present also in highly centralized and controlled media structures such as in the case of China. In all these cases, transmedia is not valued for the number of audiences attracted to a media franchise, but for its transformative nature.

The multifaceted functions of transmedia as an approach to engagement are explored in Reid and Gilardi and Lam's chapters on formal education. In these case studies, audience engagement with media texts is transposed to student learning. The strength of a transmedia approach to education in cross-cultural settings lies in the "opening up" of materials to student's own contextual environments. Much like transmedia storytelling invites audience participation in the creation of new meaning or the construction of a cohesive narrative, a transmedia influenced teaching philosophy invites students to actively build a "narrative" of knowledge drawing from their own personal experiences. Courses designed to provide the space for both broad and deep exploration potentially foster student learning that emphasizes agency and creativity over rote learning.

It should not be surprising that a transmedia approach can promote integration and student agency if considering that, as per Jenkins (2006) description of the Matrix Universe, transmedia narratives are "encyclopedic, containing a rich array of information that can be drilled, practiced, and mastered by devoted consumers" (97). As stated by Gilardi and Reid (2011), the similarity between this description and what learning is and what educators would expect from their students is evident. Despite this evident link between transmedia and learning practices, the integration

of transmedia approaches in formal educational settings is still to be fully developed and its effectiveness evaluated.[3]

To summarize, this book shows a clear need to depart from the canonic definition of transmedia given by Jenkins and to start exploring the concept from different and comparative perspectives. While communication studies will still play a central position in explorations of transmedia, the need to look at the concept from different perspective becomes crucial. Politics, activism, sociology, education, gender, and other fields could certainly enrich current understandings of transmedia, its boundaries, and its implementation worldwide. Meanwhile communication studies should further look at what motivate transmedia audiences, better define how transmedia could work as a public sphere and introduce transmedia into their curriculum to help students better understand the complexity of the contemporary media ecology.

Notes

1. This Chinese franchise would deserve the attention of Transmedia Scholars for the complexity of the story worlds, audience engagement, and the heavy use of mobile formats.
2. For a discussion about the interconnection between Transmedia, adaptation, and expansion see Dena, Christy. 2019. "Transmedia Adaptation: Revisiting the No-adaptation Rule." In *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*, edited by Matthew Freeman and Renira Rampazzo Gambarato, 195–206. New York: Routledge.
3. For a recent literature review of Transmedia in Education, see González-Martínez, Juan, Esteban-Guitart, Moisès, Rostan-Sanchez, Carles, Serrat-Sellabona, Elisabet, and Meritxell Estebanell-Minguell. 2019. "What's Up with Transmedia and Education? A Literature Review." *Digital Education Review* 36: 207–222. Accessed 17 February 2020. http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/der/article/view/26784/pdf_1.

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