

The Principles in Xiangji Operation: The Theoretical Crystallization of Chinese Economic Anthropology

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The Chinese nation is a large family made up of multi-ethnic integration. In the process of adapting to its natural ecosystem and sociocultural background, all ethnic groups have formed their own unique ethnic cultures. In cross-cultural and cross-regional economic activities, the influence of many non-economic factors such as ethnic cultural values cannot be ignored. It is on this premise that the book “The Principles in Xiangji Operation” combines western economic anthropology theory with China's reality through field survey data from Guizhou, and puts forward the theory of xiangji (interphase) management. This way, it has successfully introduced a theoretical system of economic anthropology with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: Xiangji(interphase) Management, Cross-cultural Economic Activities, Economic Anthropology

INTRODUCTION

Economic development in ethnic minority areas is not only a purely economic issue, but, it is also a focus of cultural anthropology. Based on the theory of Western cultural anthropology, the book “The Principles in Xiangji Operation” puts forward the dimension of “cross-cultural management” and constructs the research field and research orientation of Chinese economic anthropology while considering the highly diverse ecological heterogeneity of national cultures in China. The theory is not only a summary of the central government's economic development in Guizhou in the 20th century and before, but, it also serves as a guide for the current practices for poverty alleviation and Rural Revitalization in China.

BACKGROUND OF THE INTERPHASE BUSINESS PRINCIPLES

Every theory is influenced by its author's academic literacy, personal experience and social background. Mr. Yang Tingshuo, the author of The Principles in Xiangji Operation, had a large family and he lived with his 10 siblings. Mr. Yang was deeply interested in natural sciences because most of his brothers and sisters studied natural sciences. But, because of his inherent visual impairment, it was difficult for him to get engaged in natural sciences research. Therefore, after several setbacks, Mr. Yang

was admitted to the Chinese Department of Guizhou Normal University in 1963. After graduation from the university, he was assigned to teach in Gaopo Township of Guiyang City. Mainly Miao and Buyi people were living there. During his teaching period, he had a deep understanding of the local Miao and Buyi cultures. In 1979, Mr. Yang Tingshuo, a graduation student in Yunnan University, systematically studied the relevant theories of Ethnology under the guidance of Mr. Jiang Yingliang who was an ethnologist.

After receiving his master's degree, Mr. Yang went to Guizhou Institute for Nationalities to teach there. But, at that time, Guizhou Institute for Nationalities did not offer specialized courses in ethnology. So, Mr. Yang could teach only related courses of history there. It was under such circumstances that he applied the theory and method of Ethnology for teaching history, and leading a group of undergraduates to conduct ethnological fieldwork many times. This helped him collect huge ethnological fieldwork data for proposition of "Principles in Xiangji Operation". In 1992, two books, *Ethnic Minorities, Culture and Habitat*, and *Southwest and Central Plains in China*, fully demonstrated Mr. Yang's theoretical basis of ecological ethnology and economic ethnology.

In 1993, Mr. Yang was transferred from the Department of Sociology of Guizhou Institute of Nationalities to the Institute of Nationalities of Guizhou Institute of Nationalities to specialize in scientific research on ethnic peoples. Wu Zhiguo, Dean of Guizhou Institute of Nationalities, declared that Mr. Yang was solely responsible for the design and implementation of the questions for the national social science subject of the Eighth Five-Year Plan "Analysis of Non-Economic Restrictive Factors Affecting the Social Development of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Areas". This happened because the subject designer and organizer, Professor Zhao Lin, was busy at that time. Then, after two years of investigation and sorting out, "Interphase Business Principles" got published.

DIMENSIONS OF RESEARCH ON THE PRINCIPLES IN XIANGJI OPERATION

"The Principles in Xiangji Operation" encompasses cross-ethnic and cross-regional economic activities as the research theme. Moreover, such activities are not fully expressed in terms of "cross-cultural", "cross-regional", and "cross-ethnic" aspects. Therefore, Mr. Yang innovatively uses the word "phase" in this book. He called the social and natural entities stipulated by the system of non-economic constraints restricting cross-ethnic economic activities as "*xiang* (phase)". This basic concept runs through the whole book and is also the cornerstone of his theory of economic anthropology. Each "*xiang*" includes at least three subsystems, namely, the unique social and traditional culture of the nation, the specific habitat (the country to which it belongs), and the corresponding legal policies, and administrative systems (Yang1995). These three subsystems are combined in different ways in each region and nation to construct various "phases" which are different from each other and have rich connotations. The same nation, because of its different habitats, may also show different "phases". In the same ecological environment in the same region, because of the different forms of cultural expression among different nationalities, there may be different "phases".

The three subsystems of "phase" play different roles in economic development, and the specific period of their roles would also be different. Eco-environment is the basis for existence and development of national economy and an important factor restricting economic development. Although relying on contemporary science and technology, ecosystems can be changed in a short time and in a small scope. The changes caused by science and technology are still very small in the face of powerful ecosystems. Such changes in ecosystems may lead to ecological regression. The change even may lead to ecological catastrophe. As long as external disturbance is eliminated, the ecosystem may restore its original appearance according to its natural law.

Ethnic culture is a relatively stable and continuous system formed by the long-term integration of human society with nature and ecosystem. It exists in the form of the greatest energy that can mobilize the development of the ethnic economy. According to the needs of the ethnic culture, the ecosystem may be actively transformed and utilized. The relationship between national culture and ecosystem is of "interactive checks and balances". The relative stability of the ethnic culture also means that it will cost a

lot to change an ethnic culture. Therefore, such man-made changes can have extremely complex effects on economic activities and they play an important role in the success or failure of economic activities.

Among the three subsystems of “phase”, the most unstable factors are state regime, law and policy system, which often undergoes changes. However, as this subsystem reflects the will of the ruling group, it can mobilize all forces and have effective impact on the ethnic economy in a short period of time. These impacts will also affect the ecosystem and ethnic culture of ethnic areas, and even may lead to ecological catastrophe and distortion of the ethnic culture.

The influence of the three subsystems of “*xiang*” on ethnic economy varies in time, scope and consequences. It is this difference of subsystems that embodies the existence and function of “*xiang*”. The whole theoretical exploration of “The Principles in Xiangji Operation” revolves around the theme of “*Xiangji* (Interphase) Operation”. The restrictive effect of ethnic culture on interrelated economic activities is elaborated in Chapter 3, 4 and 5 of the book, Culture Theory (Part 1) (Part 2) (Part 3). In these three chapters, Mr. Yang deconstructs the ethnic culture into four levels. He explains the influence of ethnic culture on economic activities in the process of interphase operation, combining with the specific matters of Guizhou minority culture.

The natural environment is the product of evolution of earth according to the natural law. It is totally independent of human consciousness. However, all human economic activities are inseparable from the natural environment. Man can only find the starting point of his own activities in the natural environment; select the objects of his own processing and utilization; and avoid the natural factors that are unfavorable to him, so as to achieve the success of economic activities (Yang 1995). The natural factors of “interphase management” are discussed in detail in Chapter 6 of the book. About this subsystem, Mr. Yang points out that there would be a “space attenuation effect” in “interphase management”. The farther from the main body of business activities, the worse the investment effect.

The third subsystem of “phase” - policy system- is discussed in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, “strength theory” and “policy theory”. For this subsystem, Mr. Yang focuses on Guizhou's economic development under the out-of-control of planned economy, and points out that when formulating policies, we need to take the different ecological and cultural backgrounds of ethnic areas into full account in order to make policy formulation and implementation feasible.

After analyzing the three subsystems of “inter-phase management”, Mr. Yang also puts forward the corresponding countermeasures in view of the problems existing in the process of Guizhou's economic development- this is given in Chapter 9 “Game Theory”. Finally, in order to help the readers better understand the “inter-operation principle”, Mr. Yang also illustrates the economic and cultural changes in minority areas during the process of Guizhou's operation and development through field investigation.

ACADEMIC ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY OF INTERPHASE BUSINESS PRINCIPLES

Ethnology and economics are the two main disciplines to carry out research on cross-cultural economic activities in the western academic circles. There have always been incompatible contradictions between communication and cohesion, which has caused a lot of controversy.

The cross-cultural economic activities based on Ethnology are represented by Polanyi (Chen et al 2012). But it caused a major controversy, namely, the controversy of entity theory and formalism. The long-debated case was still going on until the book *The Principles in Xiangji Operation* was completed. To deal with this controversy, Mr. Yang fully realizes that the basic unit of western economics research is the individual's economic rationality. The basic point of ethnology research is ethnic culture, which focuses on the common rationality of groups. There has been incompatibility in the theoretical framework of the two disciplines from the beginning. Therefore, the debate between substantialism and formalism cannot reveal its essence. So, a new concept of “phase” needs to be put forward. It is hoped that with the help of the concept of “phase”, we can grasp the ancient and modern differences and national differences of cross-cultural economic activities as a whole, so as to grasp the mechanism of various non-economic factors, the duration, the spatial scope involved, and even the impact on economic activities.

As we all know, according to the understanding of ethnology, culture is supposed to be the sum of social behavior of the members of the whole nation, which also includes human economic activities. Therefore, in specific economic activities, there will be not only direct economic behavior, but also other non-economic factors may be involved. Culture is also a social entity that can be sustained for a long time. Therefore, regardless of the economic behavior of different ancient nationalities, there must be something that can be inherited and learned. Moreover, there will also be non-economic factors that are not affected by specific economic activities, but, they affect economic activities. In this sense, the economic behaviors of non-Western developed countries and nations will not be pure in themselves. There will inevitably be historical relics and new contents for the rise of economic activities in developed countries. There must be similarities and differences in the fact that an individual should make a determination according to his “economic rationality”. Based on the specific ethnic groups under the ethnic cultural statute, once cross-cultural economic activities occur, the parties will have similarities and differences in understanding their nature. So, as far as synchronic accumulation of data is concerned, there must be relativity in the debate that which are substantive differences and which are formal differences, no matter what conclusions are formed. Therefore, if we want to determine the right and wrong, the congregation will have different opinions and a consensus will never be developed. However, if we change the perspective, starting from the integrity of national culture and incorporating the non-economic factors that can trigger economic activities into the category of ethnic culture, we can conclude them as “phase” to carry out the analysis. Then, the similarities and differences of cross-cultural economic activities between ancient and modern, between nations, and between different living backgrounds can be clarified to the maximum extent. Thus, it effectively avoids the disputes caused by the superficial differences on the content of a short period of time.

In view of the fact that the ethnic culture in any sense is constructed by human beings, the ethnic culture itself has the “quasi-life attribute”. That is to say, if it wants to develop and grow, it must absorb material energy from the outside world and accept its operation so as to maintain its existence and development. As an organic part of ethnic culture, economic activities, naturally under such premise, can be expressed as quasi-life attributes. This understanding is consistent with the principle of ecologists studying the life attributes of specific species. The survival of a species is not its own problem, but the frequent exchange of material and energy with the outside world. Biologists know that it is far from enough to discuss the ecological consequences of the organism itself. It is necessary to define the research unit from a larger space in order to reveal the ecological process and ecological consequences of a particular species. It is precisely based on such considerations that the concept of “phase” was put forward. Therefore, we can grasp the particularity of the operation of cross-cultural economy as a whole. It is worth mentioning that Mr. Yang's subsequent work *Introduction to Eco-anthropology* has been further embodied. This analysis method is summarized as “the principle of checks and balances”(Yang 2007). Therefore, if we do not grasp the essence of the following theoretical construction, we cannot grasp the essence of the principles in interphase operation.

In the construction of modern economics, western academia excludes the so-called “barbarian” economic activities from the scope of economic research. This habitual bias is clearly expressed in Taylor's definition of culture. In fact, he did not regard the economic activities of barbarians as economic acts at all, because they lacked the basic economic rationality. Subsequently, with the development of the world system, the previously identified barbarians, after they recognized the economic activities of the developed countries in Europe, their cross-cultural economic activities became more and more intense. As a result, economists had to focus on research, which made the development of economic school based on traditional economies. Thus, the economic research carried out has the connotation of cross-culture, which is also close to the way of livelihood of ethnologists. Interdisciplinary dialogues and dialogues between economics and ethnology also have a solid foundation. It is on this basis that Mr. Yang has absorbed the theories and methods from economics and made a pertinent evaluation and practical application.

It is well known that when Europeans first arrived in the New World, they could exchange a needle for one or two gold from the Indians, and small ornaments for large forests. In the study of economics and

law at that time, they did not regard it as cheating or included in the object of economic analysis, but as the trophy won by political and economic rights activities. In contrast, the pioneers of development economics have greatly improved their understanding. They also hope that developing countries and nations can participate in economic activities and integrate into the international family. But, the theory and practice put forward have never escaped the barrier of Western economics. Lewis, Mulder, Schultz and their related theories are all digested, absorbed, and criticized even under the concept of “phase”.

In Mr. Yang's view, the dualistic economic theory of Lewis looks at the leisure and labor of developing nations from the perspective of the western economy (Lewis, 1979). He advocates that by reducing the leisure time of these ethnic peoples, surplus labor should be used to work, so as to realize the accumulation of primitive capital. However, in the cross-cultural context, leisure and busy, rich and poverty, emotions and “commodities”, the standards of their understanding will be completely different. To transfer surplus labor and realize the accumulation of original capital will inevitably interfere with the operation of ethnic culture and economic activities. Even if primitive capitals are accumulated, productivity will not be formed in the ethnic culture. The crux of the problem is actually shown in the fact that European and American countries' assistance to development and introduction of technology and talent cannot make these countries achieve economic transformation. Subsequently, the criticism and controversy surrounding his dualistic economic theory were fierce on the surface, but did not hit the essence of the problem. On the contrary, the cultural relativity of ethnology has long been the key to the problem.

Gunnar Myrdal also looks at the so-called institutional obstacles to Hindustan's economic activities from the perspective of traditional economic theories (Myrdal 1968). However, he has not noticed that these institutional settings, which hinder the Indian people from realizing economic modernization, can support the operation of their traditional economy and are indispensable. In view of the objective existence of cultural differences, it is self-evident that these systems are not suitable for the economic laws understood by Western scholars. However, as Myrdal understands, it is certainly impossible to change the traditional settings to meet the needs of the Western economy by Western efforts alone. Moreover, all ethnic groups may not wish to achieve such a transformation, because this is totally equivalent to the destruction of the relevant culture. The result can only give Myrdal's theory and proposition a welcome at the top of the relevant national politics, but it cannot shake the institutional settings of various ethnic groups. As a result, the efforts made by Western societies to this end either did not work or went to the private pockets of the upper-class rulers.

For Schultz, Mr. Yang highly agrees with his understanding of the basic status of agriculture of all ethnic peoples. He particularly praises Schultz's view that modern intensive agriculture is only applicable to Western Europe and North America, but not to other regions. In order to realize modern agriculture in these areas, we must construct our own modern agriculture instead of imitating the Western model (Schultz 1964). At the same time, it is pointed out that the way of accounting for economic growth in western economics is also not applicable to developing countries and nationalities. So, Latin America and other countries, which imitate the economic construction plans of the United States and Europe, often end up in failure, while Argentina, which can find a new way, pays much less for this.

In short, while criticizing and absorbing development economics, the book also reiterates the long-standing theoretical framework of ethnology, namely, the theory of historical particularity in the development process of various ethnic groups, the theory of cultural adaptation to the environment and the theory of multi-line cultural evolution. In fact, the theory of ethnology is thoroughly used to deconstruct the theory and practice of economics and development economics, from which the characteristics and general rules of “interphase management” are summarized. Among them, Mr. Yang's theory of cultural adaptation to the environment has also been deepened in his subsequent works, such as “The Foundation of Human Beings”, “Introduction to Ecological Anthropology” and “Introduction to Native Ecological Knowledge”.

THEORETICAL INNOVATION OF THE PRINCIPLES IN INTERPHASE OPERATION

In Mr. Yang's view, cross-cultural business activities, what the book calls “cross-cultural business”, are essentially the exchange of material energy and information between two or more quasi-life systems. The causal relationship between action and feedback is bound to be extremely complex. Therefore, there are substantial differences between economic activities recognized by traditional western economics. It certainly does not follow the rationality of a national culture, but shows the irrational existence that the parties have never expected. The role and feedback of such irrationality will be different in time, space and nature. Therefore, it is very important to discuss the differences in time, space and content of the non-economic factors and their different consequences. From Chapter 3 to Chapter 9, the book is based on this understanding to discuss them separately. Throughout the discussion, great attention is paid to the rational incompatibility of the parties.

Generally speaking, Mr. Yang believes that among the various non-economic factors affecting cross-cultural economic activities, the natural geographical environment and ecosystem in which each element is located can last for a very long period of time, and the spatial field involved is usually limited to the distribution of national culture. In contrast, the traditional cultures of different ethnic groups can continue steadily for a very long time, only slightly less than the natural background, but the scope of the role of culture is usually limited by the distribution of ethnic cultures. Economic activities under the cultural regulations should be adapted to the natural and ecological background, which means that under different ethnic cultures, the most suitable and beneficial way of resource utilization is sure to lag behind other ethnic groups. In this context, if we do not use the concept of “phase” to distinguish accurately, it will be very difficult to be close to the facts. As for the policies and development actions introduced in the national system, the duration is very short, the scope of impact is relatively limited, and the space to play a role is relatively limited, while the content to play a role is relatively single, either to give preferential treatment, or to give funds to technology. But, at the same time, the party who receives the policy impact will have a much longer period of time to continue to exert its influence, and the feedback time will also be very long. But, the feedback that can be given is extremely complex and varied, even beyond the expectations of policymakers. In this way, in cross-cultural economic activities, the role and feedback will be very complex, manifested in the complex interweaving of multiple causal relationships, but the consequent results are different in time and space. Multiple causal relationships do not work at the same time, but act as feedback in different ways.

In cross-cultural economic activities, the comparison of development strength will not follow the economic law identified by developers. The comparison of strength must be based on the criteria of both parties, so that the final evaluation of strength can be made only by the final consequences of function and feedback. This is certainly not in line with the traditional economic analysis methods, but it confirms Mr. Yang's subsequent “asymmetric principle of action and feedback”.

The book's chapter “Background Theory” focuses on the natural background of cross-cultural management. Because of the great material and energy contained in the natural background, the participants have no ability and need to change. Moreover, it will also have an impact over a long period of time, which will cause obstacles to the inter-cultural operation or enhance the operation effect. Without improvement of technology and change of the whole cultural background, these obstacles will continue to play a role, thus becoming the objective factors that the host of the planning interoperability has to pay attention to. In this chapter, Mr. Yang systematically analyzes the problem of “space attenuation effect”, in order to remind the parties to pay attention to the unavoidable objective factor.

According to the asymmetry principle of function and feedback, all cross-cultural economic activities must be manifested in the coexistence of multiple causality. When Party A acts on Party B, it often triggers a variety of feedback. Each feedback will also act on Party A, so that Party A can give feedback, thus increasing the difficulty of analysis, and also causing the difficulty of adjusting countermeasures. In fact, Western aid or economic intervention to developing countries often fails because they have no way to understand what kind of “rational” feedback they receive from each other. But, deviating from their original intention is a common economic fact. This means that in order to find the right countermeasures,

and to truly achieve a fair and reasonable cross-cultural economic activities and sustainable operation, it is necessary to specifically analyze the main reasons for the poor results. To this end, the book proposes that we need to screen the superficial multiple causality from three dimensions: time, space and specific economic content. Only those overlapping in time and space, with clear sequence of causes and results, and the conclusion of causality are the main reasons for the poor results of cross-cultural operations. In order to avoid the disadvantageous factors of cross-cultural operation effectively and enlarge the favorable factors, we should put forward policies to deal with such main causes, so as to achieve the results of operation.

For example, in the book “Strength Theory”, it solemnly reminds developers and policymakers to pay attention to the fact that any policy lasts for a short time and mobilizes economic strength, which is limited to the actual economic needs of the developers. To test such duration and economic strength, to ask the developer to comply with the needs of the developer, and to complete the adjustment of the entire national culture, is certainly impossible. But, if we have a thorough understanding of the national culture and livelihoods of the developed people, and on this basis, we can choose to exert policy or economic influence, in order to achieve the “four or two sets of kilograms” of business results. If you are demanding to meet your own needs, you will surely end up with failure. In the past, the relevant parties would continue to operate in accordance with their original culture, and all measures would become a flash in the pan. On the contrary, as far as the affected party is concerned, they have their own rules of livelihood operation and evaluation criteria of value. In their view, the policy and economic impact are only accidental benefits. It's good to have, but it's not regrettable to have none. Excessive exertion of influence, on the contrary, will lead to universal dependence and irrational expectations of taking advantage. It should be noted that the ability to objectively evaluate the strength differences between the two sides of cross-cultural operations from a neutral standpoint, although widespread in the world today, rarely attracts the attention of the parties. Of course, this is also the crux of the difficulty in guaranteeing the effectiveness of cross-cultural business activities.

Furthermore, the asymmetry of feedback between the parties, and nature and ecology, the introduction or application of mature industries and technological management modes of other nationalities, will also show asymmetric feedback. Because of the homogeneity of natural environment and ecological background, it is really profitable to develop sugar industry in accordance with the economic law, and related industries. But if the industry, even the most advanced technology, is transferred to the deep valley of Guizhou Province, although high-quality sugarcane can be planted at the bottom of the valley, the problem is that in such a place, there is a great difference in relative altitude. After large-scale planting of sugarcane, the yield and quality of sugarcane will be greatly different. Not only can the expected results of the growers not be guaranteed, but the risks cannot be resisted. Sugar mills will accept such raw materials which will also result in the idleness of resources and the rise of production costs. The overall performance is that the whole industry is unprofitable. Because the natural environment and ecological background cannot be changed by production, it is beyond the scope of economic activities to change such environmental differences. Starting such cross-cultural economic activities is doomed to failure from the very beginning, which is also one of the key issues that the book solemnly reminds the readers. Similar numerous examples are given in this book. Owing to the limited space, readers are expected to give one example and another on this basis.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that the book “The Principles in Xiangji Operation” is a work of ethnology, not of economics. But, the object of the discussion is the characteristics and laws of cross-cultural economic activities. Just because all economic activities are bound to deal with the natural environment and the coexisting ethnic groups, it is not enough to consider only economic factors, but also ecological and ethnic factors. Therefore, unlike general ethnology, we should also discuss the social and natural background of economic activities from the perspective of “phase” instead of only discussing culture. We should discuss and analyze these factors as a whole. Finally, it makes the theoretical construction of the

book closer to the needs of cross-cultural economic analysis, and can more accurately accept, digest and absorb the relevant achievements of development economics, and at the same time, understand its shortcomings. For ethnology, it broadens the horizon of Ethnology research, discusses cross-cultural economic activities on the basis of ethnic culture, and is also a rare innovation for the theoretical construction of ethnology. It is for this reason that the book has been published for nearly 20 years, but the core issues discussed and the theories put forward in the book are still valuable for reference. The reason is that the natural background and ethnic culture must be involved positively in the “phase” mentioned in the book. During this period, no substantive changes would take place. The obvious changes will only take place in the policy, the mode of economic activities and the world pattern. But, such changes are also short-lived, which is not enough to affect the applicability of the book's relevant theories. It is obvious that we can achieve ideal results by taking this point into account and putting it into practice in cross-cultural economic activities.

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