

# **Interphase (Xiangji) Economic Principle and Targeted Poverty Alleviation: Strategic Breakthrough of Non-economic Factors**

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*The theoretical model of the “interphase (xiangji) economic principle” proposes that in economic activities, if the complex problems caused by cross-ethnic and cross-culture contact are ignored, the restrictive effects of various “non-economic factors” must follow. Therefore, in the practice of the “targeted poverty alleviation program”, it is necessary to fully understand and grasp the restrictive roles of “non-economic factors”, assess the situation, maintain rational behaviors of cultural traditions, and effectively avoid and overcome its unfavorable factors on economic activities. Therefore, the poverty alleviation action can achieve twice the result with half the effort.*

*Keywords: interphase (xiangji) economic principle, targeted poverty alleviation, non-economic factors*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The influence of “non-economic factors” of each ethnic group on the economic activities of the ethnic group has both good and bad sides, and the key to success lies in whether it can make use of strengths and avoid weaknesses. Based on conditions of ethnic groups in China, Professor Yang Tingshuo proposed “interphase (xiangji) economic principle”. This principle proposes to understand the “non-economic factors accurately”. It affects the social and economic development of ethnic areas and their history and causes. In addition, it explains how to find the convergence point of promoting product development from the “non-economic factors”. It tells how to avoid and overcome the impacts on the adverse effects of economic development, etc. Therefore, the principle has important practical significance and theoretical value. In

poverty alleviation practice, individuals who carry out specific poverty alleviation actions generally tend to have one-sided intuitions about different ethnic groups. For this reason, while carrying out cross-ethnic and cross-cultural poverty alleviation programs, we should understand “theoretical discussion that is worse than useless in practice”, and let alone starting from a personal cultural perspective, especially without any prejudice toward ethnic cultures. Only by grasping “non-economic factors” can truly receive the effects of poverty alleviation and development. This poverty alleviation idea is just the concentrated expression and strategic breakthrough of China’s “targeted poverty alleviation” program.

## **REVIEW OF PROPOSITION OF THE “TARGETED POVERTY ALLEVIATION” STRATEGY AND RELATED RESEARCH**

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China’s President Xi Jinping has conducted research in poverty-stricken areas such as Fuping, Dingxi, Qionghai, Xiangxi, Linyi, Lankao, and Kashgar (Zhang 2017). The president put forward the concept of “targeted poverty alleviation” from the strategic height of accelerating the realization of a well-off society in an all-around way during his inspection in Xiangxi, Hunan Province, in November 2013. Xi Jinping pointed out that poverty alleviation should seek truth from facts, adopt measures to local conditions, provide classified guidance, and target poverty alleviation, and don’t shout big slogans, and don’t set those lofty goals (Xinhua Network 2013). The proposal of the “targeted poverty alleviation” strategy is a reflection and improvement of past poverty alleviation programs. It is also a major innovation in China’s poverty alleviation practice. Thus, it has a significant and far-reaching impact on China’s poverty alleviation and development in the new era.

To thoroughly implement and promote the “targeted poverty alleviation” strategy, academic circles have conducted relevant research on “targeted poverty alleviation” in recent years. Still, there is no unified concept of “targeted poverty alleviation”. Therefore, it is necessary to sort out relevant “targeted poverty alleviation” concepts to reinforce our understanding of “targeted poverty alleviation”.

Some scholars only understand “targeted poverty alleviation” as the precision of “to the village, to the household, and the person” and implement targeted assistance to the identified poor households to realize their poverty alleviation. Wang Sangui (2015) believes that the most basic definition of “targeted poverty alleviation” is that poverty alleviation policies and measures should be aimed at the real low-income families and populations and the goal of sustainable poverty alleviation.

Some scholars argue that “targeted poverty alleviation” refers to a poverty alleviation method. According to the environmental conditions of different poor farmers, it uses compliant and effective procedures to accurately identify, assist, and manage poverty-stricken objects (Mo 2015). Another scholar proposed that the meaning of “targeted poverty alleviation” is mainly reflected in two aspects: first, the targets of poverty alleviation should be precise so that the poor people can get real help; second, poverty alleviation measures and results must be precise. It is necessary to implement the country’s policies and help the poverty-stricken people truly get rid of poverty (Dong 2014).

The above two concepts emphasize that “targeted poverty alleviation” should not only achieve the goal of “to the village, the household, and the person”, but also combine the actual situation and adapt measures to local conditions. This viewpoint has laid a certain theoretical foundation for the research of this paper.

Some scholars believe that targeted poverty alleviation is to delegate the right to choose and decide projects to the grassroots. Such an idea of poverty alleviation is conducive to overcoming the “one-size-fits-all” poverty alleviation model in the past to avoid adverse consequences caused by improper project selection (Luo 2014).

The above works focus on linking “targeted poverty alleviation” with poverty alleviation policies and attach great importance to the role and power of poverty alleviation cadres, which is beyond doubt. However, it is one-sided if we only see the power of the poor in the poverty alleviation action without paying attention to the ecological culture of the poverty-stricken areas. In fact, “targeted poverty alleviation” is a social system project, not only to be accurate to the village, the household, and the person, but also to be accurate to the ecological and cultural characteristics, especially to the differences in the “interphase” economic activities of cross-ethnic and cross-cultural areas.

## RE-UNDERSTANDING OF THE “INTERPHASE (XIANGJI) ECONOMIC PRINCIPLE”

Influenced by the “gradient development theory” and other theoretical trends, the development gap between China’s eastern coastal areas, the central and western ethnic areas has widened since the reform and opening up. The “interphase (xiangji) economic principle” with nearly 400,000 words was first published in 1995. The book provides theoretical guidance and practical operation plans for China. The research helps build a moderately prosperous society in ethnic areas in central and western regions of China and even similar areas in the world. It provides a theoretical model of economic ethnology for reference (Tian 2013).

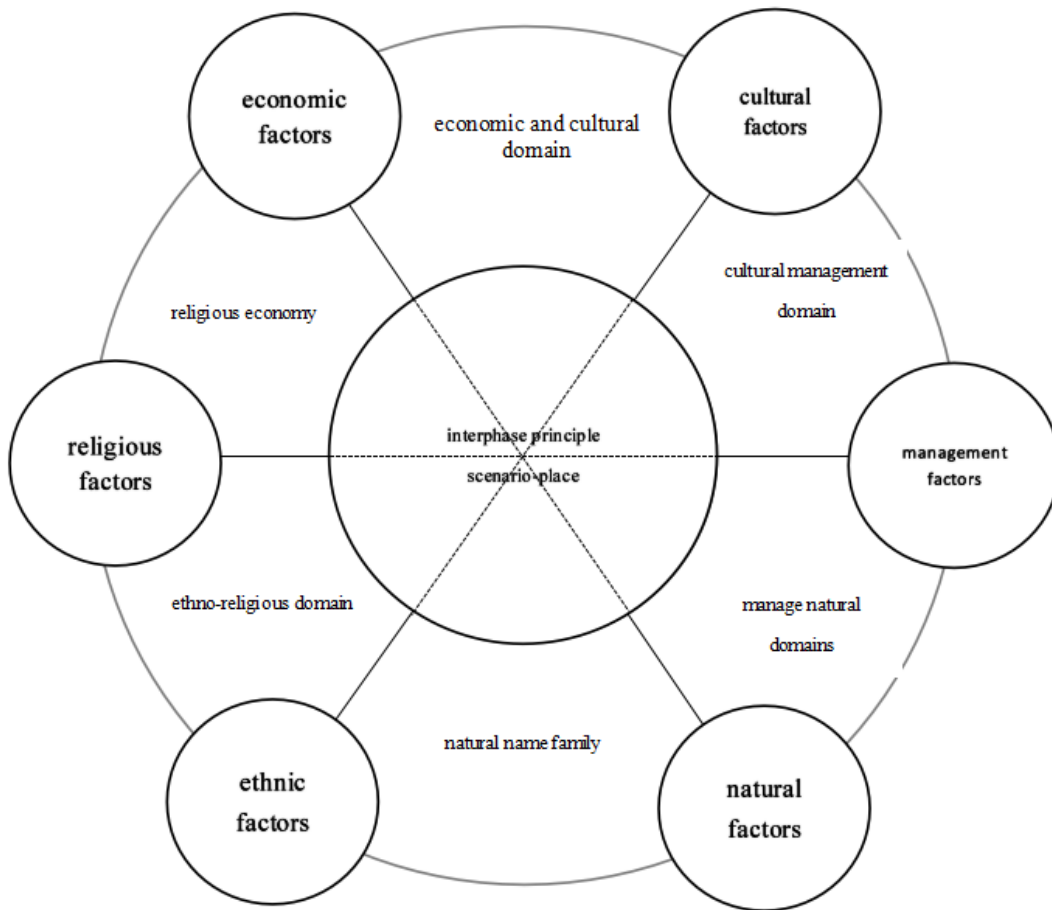


Figure 1. scenario-place of interpahse principle

Professor Tian Guang believes that the greatest theoretical contribution of the “interphase(xiangji) economic principle” is its ingenious thinking. It is an economic ethnology theory with Chinese characteristics (Tian 2018). This book refers to the social and natural entities with the system of non-economic factors. It has restricted cross-ethnic and cross-cultural economic activities as “phases”. Its research object is the essence of interphase economic activities. The book explains reasons for success or failure as well as measures of economic activities of “interphases”. Professor Yang Tingshuo uses “phase” to refer to the economic operation mode, scope and characteristics of different ethnic groups. And these ethnic groups have different natural, economic, social, and cultural environments. In terms of geographical

scope and administrative management, this economic operation mode has certain limitations, including natural, historical, political, cultural, and other factors (Chen & Du 2018). It can be seen that Professor Yang's high degree of condensed "phase" is not only in line with Chinese classical philosophical thought but also in line with modern scientific concepts. Therefore, the concept of "interphase" involves philosophical thinking and disciplinary integration that goes beyond the superficial meaning of the word itself.

After clarifying the basic concept and composition of "phase", it is also necessary to clarify the basic connotation and category of "phase management". "Interphase" outlines the understanding of different ethnic cultural and economic types in the same time and space and different ethnic economic systems in the same economic process (Tian & Wan 2018). In addition, this economic activity is also constrained by many factors such as nature, culture, and politics. Professor Tian Guang believes that the situational factors involved in "interpersonal management" include six elements such as economy, culture, management, nature, ethnicity, and religion. Interrelated domains include management-natural domain, nature-ethnic domain, ethnic-religious domain, religion-economic domain, etc. The elements and domains make economic and non-economic factors closely linked, interacting with each other and jointly affecting regional economic development (see Figure 1) (Tian & Wan 2018).

The nature of operations crosses "phases". This paper argues that the basic "interphase (xiangji) economic principle" category has at least three contents. First, the "interphase (xiangji) economic principle" does not belong to individual economic activities. In economic activities, if people do not adapt their economic activities to cultures which they have, and areas where they live, the economic behaviors will not achieve efficient effect. Such economic activities cannot be understood as operating across "phases" (Yang 1995). For example, Professor Yang Tingshuo mentioned in the "interphase(xiangji) economic principle" that in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing dynasties, many Han people migrated to the settlements of the Miao and Buyi peoples, forming a powerful "Han in the mountains". This is the term that refers to people living in the high mountain area adjacent to the Buyi people. Their ancestors were Han immigrants who moved in from the mainland without permission, so the local Buyi people gave them this name. To make a living, they worked as long-term laborers and did chores for the local Buyi people, and so in the Buyi language, the word "Gaoshan Han" often implies demeaning and discrimination. However, economic activities of these "Han of High Mountains" were not based on the Han culture, but succumbed to and adapted to the Buyi culture to seek survival. Therefore, their economic activities cannot be regarded as "interphase management".

Second, the "interphase (xiangji) economic principle" is an interphase economic activity. Suppose some people's means of making a living always run across more than two ethnic groups, and the economic benefits are generated in the economic activities between the two ethnic groups. In that case, such economic behaviors belong to the category of "interdependent management" (Yang 1995). There is such a case in the book "Interphase (xiangji) Economic Principle". With the lifting of the ban on Miao areas, the timber trade in southeastern Guizhou became more and more prosperous after the middle of the Qing Dynasty (about the years of 1728-1820). Some Han people entered the Miao and the Dong areas. They used the customary laws of local Miao and Dong people to identify with the local villagers as "Lao Geng". The Han could use local Miao and Dong people to cut down trees. These trees were shipped to the Han people in the central areas. Such economic behaviors also have the nature of spanning two ethnic cultures and belong to interrelated business activities.

The third content is to take an ethnic culture as the basis for business activities. "Interaction management" is organized and managed by individuals or social groups, but these activities are by no means the arbitrary actions of individuals. They must rely on a specific culture as a basis and engage in economic activities following the inherent characteristics of that culture (Yang 1995). For example, in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the vast area of northwestern Guizhou, the territory of the chieftain of Shuixi, used to be a vast area for both farming and animal husbandry. The Yi and Miao nationalities mainly run animal husbandry, and large livestock such as cattle and sheep were usually transported along the transportation route through the Hui people. The role played by the Hui residents in this economic activity is precise as the host of the "interphase (xiangji) economic principle". In the business, the Hui nationality involved both

the Yi and Miao nationalities as well as the Han nationality. To ensure the success of the business, the Hui had to make necessary adaptations to the traditional culture of other nationalities. However, such an adaptation must be based on preservation of the Hui traditional culture, which always played a dominant role in their business activities. Moreover, the Hui traditional culture was used as the basis for their value assessment.

The theoretical model of “interphase economic principle” started from economic and social development of ethnic areas in China, and was based on the rich ethnography of economic anthropology. It is refined on the basis of a skillful grasp, digestion, and absorption of frontier theories of cultural anthropology, economic anthropology, and economics in China and abroad. It also forms a theoretical model of economic anthropology with Chinese characteristics (Tian 2014). This paper argues that there are many reasons for the long-term economic lag of ethnic regions in China. However, most of the reasons can be explained by “interphase economic principle”. Therefore, it is necessary to summarize the characteristics of “interphase (xiangji) economic principle”, and the non-economic factors which restrict the economic development in ethnic areas. And then the article explores effective ways and measures for “targeted poverty alleviation” in ethnic areas.

## **RETHINKING THE NON-ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS**

The “non-economic factors” represented by cultural factors have become increasingly active in economic activities in economic and social development. They have attracted the attention of experts and scholars in many disciplines (Tian & Shao 2014). Facts have proved to modernize the ethnic areas and catch up with the country’s advanced level. We must attach great importance to the research on non-economic constraints. And we put such research results into applications. It reverses the blindness to poverty alleviation and development in these areas (Yang 1995).

The earliest foreign scholar engaged in studying “non-economic factors” was Adam Smith of the classical school of economics. In his book *“The Theory of Moral Sentiments”*, he interprets the issue of morality from the perspective of economics (Smith 2012). In addition, Marx used the theory of economics to study politics and other “non-economic” behaviors in “Capitalism” (Marx 2011). After the 1850s, with the rise of traditional economics, main-stream economics abandoned the study of “non-economic factors” until the “Becker Revolution” occurred in the 1950s. Economists such as Becker and Schultz abandoned the research paradigm of traditional economics. They creatively used the theory of “human capital” to explain many economic mysteries that were difficult to solve in traditional economic theories. Although their views were initially rejected by mainstream economics, by 1979, Schultz himself had won the Nobel Prize in economics for it. In 1992, Belk also won the Nobel Prize in economics for expanding the scope of economics to non-economic fields such as family and crime (Zhu 2009). In addition, economists such as Nax, Myrdal, and Schumpeter analyzed the “non-economic factors” in economic activities from innovation theory and institutional economics. Myrdal pointed out that human beings do not have a single “economic” problem, so the distinction between “economic” and “non-economic factors” can only be said to be artificial. Explaining “economic factors” implies an inherent analysis that includes all “non-economic” determinants (Myrdal 1991). This paper proposes that foreign scholars’ research objects and contexts on “non-economic factors” are different from those of ethnic areas in China. However, they have important implications and references to rural development in ethnic areas of China.

Professor Zhang Peigang, the founder of China’s development economics, believes that many aspects cannot be explained by simply using economic factors to explain economic activities or cannot be fully explained. Therefore, it is necessary to take advantage of non-economic factors and consider them comprehensively to understand many problems in China. In particular, historical, political, social, cultural, educational and other factors must be integrated to explain economic behaviors. It tells us how the cause can be found (Zhang 2011). In addition, through long-term investigations and research, Professor Yang Tingshuo deeply discussed the role of “non-economic factors” of ethnic minorities in Guizhou Province in economic activities from the perspective of ethnology. The insights are integrated into its theoretical model of the “interphase (xiangji) economic principle”. The “non-economic factors” are constituted by spiritual

factors, such as a nation's ideology, religious beliefs, and national consciousness. They are not relevant to economic activities. However, they maintain traditional economic structures and activities of a nationality (Zhang 1995).

The impact of non-economic factors on social and economic development is multi-faceted, and the impact on the development of ethnic areas is also stronger. Therefore, a systematic study of the "non-economic factors" and their restrictive effects on the economic activities of ethnic areas has important guiding significance for China's current "targeted poverty alleviation" strategy.

Although some groups make "irrational" behaviors in the eyes of "others", they are often rational choices made by the group based on its logic under the stipulations of economic, cultural, ethnic, and other factors (Chen & Wu 2016). Therefore, in poverty alleviation and development, the existence of different cultures will inevitably bring about a series of "non-economic factors" that lead to operational failure. Therefore, without a deepening understanding of "non-economic factors" in minority areas, the poverty alleviation work will easily repeat the mistakes of its predecessors. In addition, the root of many economic problems does not lie in the economic activity itself. It is in the depths of the cultural network. If there is no comprehensive and systematic understanding of the culture itself, the ins and outs of economic problems cannot be explained clearly. Therefore, in the poverty alleviation, special attention should be paid to the differentiated treatment and active guidance of various intersecting elements in transforming cross-cultural non-economic factors.

Respecting the diversity of ethnic cultures and emphasizing the role of "non-economic factors" in social development is an important feature of Chinese localization of economic anthropology (Tian & Zhang 2015). The American economist Nax's "*Vicious Cycle Theory of Poverty*" emphasizes that economic development is not a purely economic problem but an extremely complex social whole. The level of education, the accumulation of capital, the differences in ideas and the fluctuation of the external market are all sufficient to affect whether developing countries or nations can achieve the expected development goals (Nax 1966). What needs to be paid attention to is that the "non-economic factors" of a nation are, ultimately, still maintaining the nation's traditional economic structure and activities, and so in cross-cultural and cross-regional economic activities, encounters are inevitable. To a new form of economic activity, it is necessary to introduce new technologies and establish new interpersonal relationships. Under such circumstances, the "non-economic factors" constituted by these spiritual factors will resist the economic behaviors of different cultures and lead to direct conflicts (Luo & Tian 2014). Such disharmonious phenomena are almost ubiquitous for cross-cultural and cross-regional economic activities, but they are often not based on direct economic interests.

Since any ethnic group's economic system is always immersed in the vast ocean of cultural environment, its social system, religious beliefs, ethics, customs, values, etc., which are formed in the historical process of survival and development, are adapted to the living environment. Traditional culture is often like a big invisible hand, implicitly or explicitly influencing and dominating the process of its economic development (Yang 1989). For example, religious belief is not only a spiritual activity in the form of an individual, but also a social activity. Because belief is universal, the effect of belief on economic behavior is unavoidable. In many ethnic minority societies, religious beliefs and various customs and habits run through the social life of the entire ethnic group. They affect the economic development of ethnic areas all the time. In poverty alleviation, the "non-economic factors", such as the religious beliefs, customs, and habits of poverty alleviation targets, are difficult to recognize and grasp. If the poverty alleviation program is launched in a hurry, the expected goals of poverty alleviation work are difficult to be achieved. This article will analyze the restrictive role of "non-economic factors" in poverty alleviation and development by taking the belief in "fairy water"(神仙水) in a Miao village of Z in the Laer Mountain area of the Wuling Mountains as a case study.

Located in the northwest corner of Z Village, there is a hill with bare stones. There is a well on the hill, and water flows out year round. The local Miao people call its water "fairy water". Local villagers believe that "fairy water" has special functions and meanings. For this reason, during the festivals, the villagers go to the mountain to fetch some "fairy water" and go home to bless the happiness and well-being of the whole family. Some villagers told the author stories about "fairy water" during the field investigation.

Local villagers believe that every time the “fairy water” stops flowing, it indicates that something ominous will happen in the village or the surrounding areas. According to Xiaolong (male, 33 years old), a villager of the Z village, the “fairy water” was depleted in 2001. Then a major fire broke out in a village in Tongren, Guizhou Province, and also a rare drought occurred in the Laer Mountain area. Villager Long Jincheng (male, 56 years old) also said that the water flows continuously year-round. It can be used to treat diseases. Local villagers call it “fairy water”. Primary school student Long Jia (female, 11 years old) said that people rarely come to the top of the mountain with “fairy water”, and she only went there once. Ordinary villagers, especially children, cannot touch the “fairy water” at will. Long Xianmei (female, 60 years old) said that when someone in the village was sick before, her family went to the top of the mountain to get some “fairy water”. After drinking the “fairy water,” the disease was cured. Shi Mingjun (male, 51 years old) said that four years ago, a “fairy lady” from Songtao, Guizhou Province put “holy water” into the “fairy water”. As long as the “holy water” is poured into one’s water tank at home, it can cure all diseases, including infertility.

Obviously, “fairy water” has become a belief of the local people, and the respect and fear of “fairy water” have also become a habit and rule of residents. However, at the end of 2013, the local government planned to transfer 3,000 mu of land in Z village to plant kiwifruit as a major measure for industrial poverty alleviation in Z village. The problem is that the hill with the “fairy water” falls within the scope of this land transfer. Immediately after this plan was announced, it was strongly opposed by many local villagers. On the day of the construction, in order to protect the “fairy water”, some villagers came to the construction site with hoes, sickles, and kitchen knives to confront the construction workers, which almost led to bloodshed. A few days later, under the mediation of the local government and the village committee, the construction party finally gave up on leveling the hill, which saved the “fairy water”. After negotiations, local government and industry developers agreed to build the hill as a viewing platform for the kiwifruit industry base. At the same time, the “fairy water” was planned to be made a scenic spot for future rural tourism in Village Z. Finally, the initial effect of the “best of both worlds” was achieved. But there is no doubt that such discordant incidents in Village Z delayed the smooth development of poverty alleviation industries and wasted time, and seriously dampened the enthusiasm of local villagers to participate in poverty alleviation and development.

In addition, Manager Long (male, 43 years old), in charge of the Kiwifruit Base in Village Z, once told the authors a thrilling story that happened to him. He said that one day in early 2015, he instructed some workers to drive excavators and work on the base. A middle-aged man rushed up from the bottom of the mountain with a sickle in his hand. The man aggressively asked who dug the land below. He said that it was his family’s “Dragon Vein”. If he couldn’t explain it, he would hack them to death one by one with a sickle. Although Manager Long was afraid, he still calmly said it was the local government that told them to use the excavator to sort out the land, or they didn’t dare to dig up villagers’ land, even if they borrowed ten courage from them. They were also just workers working on the construction site. They would start construction whenever the government told them to start. After clarifying the words, the man angrily said they must stop work now, and could work again after he asked for reasons for the matter. This “sturdy” Miao villager guarded the construction site with a sickle every day for the next few days. In a nutshell, the word is that no one should be too busy to move until things are clear. Of course, the problem was solved in the end. Now the villager met Manager Long and even apologized to him. The main reason for this conflict was that this fellow was a bachelor. Since he worked outside all year round and had no relatives in the village, he had no idea about the development of the village in the past few years, nor was he aware of some regulations on land transfer in the village. When he returned to the village during the Chinese New Year, he suddenly found that his “Dragon Vessel” had been destroyed. Of course, he was too angry, so he went desperately to the construction site with a sickle.

During the field investigation, a villager surnamed Wu told the authors that an incident in Z village a few years ago put the poverty alleviation cadres and the local government at a loss. The Z Village is located in a mountainous area with karst landforms. It suffers from water shortages all the year-round. The cadres in the village raised funds of 100,000 yuan to build a large water storage tank. It would help Z Village solve the problem of drinking water for people and animals. After the water storage tank was built, a very

unfortunate thing happened. It was said that a 6-year-old child in the village accidentally fell into the water pool while playing and drowned. According to the ideology of the local Miao people, they agreed that there must be ghosts in this pool, disturbing the safety of the villagers. “Bax deib” must be invited to hold a ritual to drive away the evil spirits. “Bax deib” is the eastern dialect of the Miao nationality, and is a title given to the shaman of religious ancestor worship ceremonies by the Miao nationality (eastern dialect) in western Hunan Province.

After that, the pool must be abandoned. Or something similar might happen in the future. In this way, poverty alleviation projects that consume a lot of human resources, material and financial resources have been discarded by villagers, becoming ineffective and wasted.

The above three cases show that religious beliefs are closely related to economic activities. The inertial continuation of beliefs can also easily induce conflicts between traditional customs and the introduction of economic factors, lead to fluctuations in trust in development, and hinder economic development (Yang 1989). Therefore, in the “targeted poverty alleviation” actions, we effectively avoid and overcome unfavorable factors by fully understanding and grasping the restrictive role of ethnic minority’s “non-economic factors”, and by assessing the situation and maintaining the rational behaviors of cultural traditions to economic activities.

## CONCLUSIONS

At present, the Chinese academic has not paid enough attention to the “interphase economic principle”. Researchers need to work together and bring the theoretical model of “interphase economic principle” to a new level. In 2013, China proposed the “targeted poverty alleviation” program. Therefore, during the practice of the “targeted poverty alleviation” program, it is necessary to take culture as the starting point, and it should be based on the holistic view of culture, the relative view of value, and the structural-functional view to understand economic activities of China’s ethnic minorities. It is one of the outstanding features of Tingshuo Yang’s “interphase economic principle”, and will represent a development direction of the theoretical construction of economic anthropology in the 20th century.

“Interphase economic principle” makes economic anthropology pay more attention to basic theories of human social development than economics. From different perspectives, Tingshuo Yang studied economic history and problems, poverty, inequality, and development of economic system in the contemporary world. He proposed “interphase economic principle”, a Chinese localized theoretical model of economic anthropology. It largely corrects the stereo- typical model of development economics of the West as the modernization, which is a major contribution of Chinese economic anthropologists to development of Anthropology.

Although “non-economic factors” do not appear as direct economic conflicts for cross-cultural and cross-regional business activities, they are ubiquitous. Culture is a systemic structure that possesses special functions and is responsive to external disturbances. In business world, when business activities are operated beyond the scope of economics, it will lead to the complexity of cross-regional and cross-cultural economic behavior. If this complicated reality is ignored in economic activities, the restrictive effects of various “non-economic factors” will inevitably follow. One of the reasons for the failure or ineffectiveness of poverty alleviation projects in ethnic minority areas is the neglect of the constraints of non-economic factors. Therefore, only by paying attention to the investigation and research on people, human society, and ecological environment can the restrictive effect of “non-economic factors” in economic activities be effectively resolved. In this way, poverty alleviation and development in ethnic areas can achieve twice the effect with only half the effort.

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