

Cultural anthropologists see broader research vision

By MING HAIYING

Cultural anthropology focuses on cultural difference and variability.

Development course

In the early development of Chinese anthropology, a batch of mature fieldwork sites were formed, such as Jiang Cun [Kai Xian Gong Village] in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, Taitou Village in Qingdao, Shandong Province, Phoenix Village in Chaozhou, Guangdong Province, Nanching Village in Guangzhou, Guangdong, and Xizhou Town in Dali, Yunnan Province, which laid the foundation for later anthropological re-investigations. Since 1978, these anthropological fieldwork sites have once again being welcoming visitors. Zhang Liming, a professor from the School of Ethnology and Sociology at Yunnan University, said that since the late 1980s, the number of people from the Chinese mainland who went to Europe, the United States, Japan, and other countries to further study anthropological theories and methods has been increasing. They spontaneously chose to go back to the domestic sites to do fieldwork.

However, the research methods of Western anthropology, formed on the basis of investigating the indigenous peoples of the colonies, are not applicable to China with its 56 ethnic groups. The older generations of Chinese scholars did not indiscriminately copy Western research methods, but integrated them with traditional Chinese ones, namely, the combination of historiography and anthropology, highlighting both historical resources and fieldwork.

Since the 1990s, most of the new generation of Chinese scholars have the background of overseas learning and academic exchanges. They have been making academic reflections and innovating with research models while absorbing foreign research

methods. According to He Xingliang, a Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Member, many young and middle-aged scholars are applying new research methods to investigations, and they employ different methods according to specific research objects. Some proceed from a structural angle, some use symbolic anthropological methods, some stress both empirical and theoretical analysis in a combination of Chinese and Western research methods. At present, Chinese anthropological research methods are seeing an increasingly obvious trend of diversity.

Nowadays, cross-border or cross-regional mobility is the norm. In Zhang's view, fieldwork sites need to shift from a traditional fixed point to "multi-point" places to connect the local with the world. With the advent of the internet society, the virtual communities that exist based on the internet will also be new fieldwork sites. Observing interactions in the virtual community over a long period of time to determine whether the virtual body is present, and whether it integrates into the virtual community, will be a new topic of cyber fieldwork.

Broadervision

Network linking, cloud computing, complex databases, and computing have changed the connections between humans and the world. The spatial change under the state of flow and linking, the evolution of interpersonal relations, and the new cultural order are becoming new academic topics. Zhou Daming, a professor from the School of Sociology and Anthropology at Sun Yat-sen University, noted that we are facing a cultural shift in the "liquid society" proposed by British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. It is necessary to understand self-presentation and adjustment in this cultural shift. In the middle of observing temporal change, spatial change, and cultural change, we could proceed from a rapidly

changing and prominent angle. For example, scholars can, from the perspective of cultural change, examine the influence of the internet on the lifestyle of villagers, including their leisure time, the behavior of shopping, the way of livelihood, and social intercourse.

Refining original concepts based on Chinese practice is what Chinese scholars have been committed to. Since the late 1970s, Chinese scholars have been reflecting on anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan's model. Based on the investigation of various Chinese ethnic groups, they actively conduct theoretical exploration, dare to challenge the theory or views raised by classic works, and put forward a series of excellent new theories and new ideas, ranging from the concept and formation of ethnic groups, the origin of human society, the division of the primitive society by stages, the transition from matriarchal society to patrilineal society, the origin of kinship systems, the forms of early marriage and family, the origin of religion, primitive religion, etc.

Anthropology consists of micro village studies, meso ethnic and regional studies, and macro cross-cultural comparative studies. In Zhou's opinion, delving into ethnic groups and regions with a broader vision is the inevitable path for Chinese anthropology to enter a new development stage. Anthropologists need to slowly move out of the original "small community," and place the villages they probe into in a broader, holistic background for further consideration and investigation.

To this end, since the 1990s, the anthropology department of Sun Yat-sen University has actively carried out ethnic and regional cultural studies. This shift is reflected in the initial research on the southwest region to the later research on the southern region and the Pearl River delta. In particular, towns and villages filled with returned overseas Chinese and farms established by them later, which are widely distributed in South China, have close overseas connections, thus containing special anthropological research value. These special villages and social organizations are, in part, an overseas mirror image. The lens of these farms help examine the influence of overseas Chinese and transnational networks on the above-mentioned towns and farms' cultural landscape, social culture, and habitus. After bringing these farms into larger social categories such as the cultural area of Lingnan [regions south of the Five Ridges], we can see not only the change of society, but also the formation of transnational networks and their effect on people's lives.



A contest of e-commerce live streaming to encourage rural entrepreneurship in Yunmeng County, Hubei Province, on July 9 Photo: CFP

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being more diverse or participatory on an allegedly equal global level playing field," Waldmüller said. Decolonization is fundamentally about effectively remedying historical injustices, and a fully-fledged transition on global levels with regard to still prevalent forms of colonial-like conditions in knowledge development and dissemination.

The obstacles to achieving academic decolonization are multifold, Maldonado-Torres said. "They include the logics of 'diversity and inclusion' that leave the coloniality of disciplines and fields of study untouched and have become tools to manage potential challenges to discourses of white innocence."

Maldonado-Torres further identified the idea that advancement in the Global South is understood in terms of modernization and development as another challenge.

Modernization and development presuppose that the "modern West" is an ideal which the Global South must strive towards. "In the academy, the presuppositions of modernization and Euro-centered development are particularly grave, since academic recognition and success tends to be determined by recognition by, or imitation of, the academy in the Global North," he said.

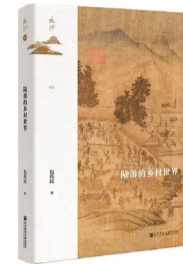
Suggestions

To decolonize academia, Waldmüller suggested, at a macro level, instituting globally administered research, network, and publication funds, and fostering open access to library resources and translational efforts, especially for the Global South. Research, particularly in times of climate change and planet-threatening risks, should become disentangled from national logics of regional and global competition, he said.

At the meso level, key science programs,

not only technology, business, and legal, but also historical studies, need to be revisited, inter-culturally sensitized, and cleaned out from content that reproduces claims to superiority on any misinterpreted basis of social constructivism, Waldmüller advised. At the micro level, academia should reinterpret the questionable concept of ex-cathedra teaching and learning, and of performance evaluations for both students and teachers alike, based on questionable hierarchies.

Maldonado-Torres said that decolonizing the academy requires acquiring critical distance from mainstream models of knowledge and education in the West, and bridging the gap with decolonial knowledge producers inside and outside the academy everywhere. "Decolonizing knowledge is a collective project across multiple borders: institutional, linguistic, national, etc.," he said, urging efforts to build epistemic coalitions and engage in "combative decoloniality."



The Rural World of Lu You

By Bao Weimin
Social Sciences Academic Press (China)
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A historical narrative of Lu You's poems

By LU MINZHEN

The Rural World of Lu You, written by Bao Weimin, a professor from the School of History at Renmin University of China, sets its focus on historical narration instead of theoretical analysis, with the aim of returning to the original meaning of history and describing the multiple aspects of villagers' daily lives, rather than analyzing the nature of historical changes.

With a total of 9,632 poems written by Lu You, a famous poet in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), the book tells the story of rural society in eastern Zhejiang during the Southern Song Dynasty. The reason for taking poetry as the main historical source is that most of Lu's poems reflect rural life. Additionally, a thorough compilation of Lu's poems provides a necessary prerequisite for them to be cited as historical materials.

The Shanhui Plain in Shaoxing City, Zhejiang Province, can be assumed as a full shot of the rural world, which includes the historical evolution of administrative divisions, the natural conditions of the area, the development of agricultural production, and the gradually prominent contradiction between man and land. A medium shot and close shot can be exemplified by Lu's travel footprint. Using more than 20 poems of Lu's, the author centers around Lu's residence in Sanshan [Three Hills] by the Jianhu Lake, one of Lu's residences in Shaoxing, to describe the residence's location, surrounding villages, ancestral temples, lakes and weirs, rivers mainly for transporting tribute grain, and fairs. With another nearly 30 poems, the author describes the construction, materials, housing distribution, and various gardens in the Sanshan residence. Lu's focus on the "boats" can be seen as a close-up shot. The author uses suite poems [a set of poems sharing the same theme but being relatively independent of each other] to narrate the coming and going of boats and their connections with country fairs.

Taking the Song Dynasty as the time axis and eastern Zhejiang as the observation site, the book is not limited to the time and place. For instance, when narrating the development history of Shaoxing, the traditional Chinese primary-level rural management system, the rice-wheat-based farming industry, and the rice and salt market in Shanhui, they are placed against a long period of time for detailed or concise narratives. In this way, from *bianhu qimin* [an early household registration system] in the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE) to the standard market formed by shipping in the 1930s, from *zaohe* [early season rice], *zhonghe* [middle season rice], and *wanhe* [late season rice] recorded in literature to early indica rice, late indica rice, and japonica rice in modern agronomy, the long history rolls out unintentionally.

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