Social Anthropological Research on Urban Ethnic Groups

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Abstract —**This paper provides theoretical reviews on the urban ethnic studies from the social anthro-pological perspective . It also provides the possible directions and the methods on the urban ethnic studies.This paper points out that there are at least three kinds of studying areas on the urban ethnic studies in China . One is the representing study of overseas Chinese ethnic identity，cultural identity and national identity in Chinese cities; another is the representing study of minority ethnic groups，cultural and social identities after their blending in the big cities; and the third is the study of regional ethnic identities after the new migrants entering the cities.The author thinks that in research , we should pay attention to all these problems of primordialism，ethnogenesis，rational choice of ethnic identity and the function of historic memory in construct.**

Key Words —*social anthropology; ethnic identity; urban ethnic groups*

I. Introduction

Study of ethnic groups is currently one of the hottest fields of study about social anthropology around the world. Anthropological, ethnological and sociological researches on ethnic groups, ethnic group identity, cultural identity etc. in China mainly focus on ethnic minorities. Although studies of ethnic groups about metropolises have been carried out for a long time, yet there is not adequate attention on the whole. Some scholars simply regard studies of ethnic groups as the republication of "ethnic studies" and even believe that "studies of ethnic groups" is just another name for "ethnic studies". As a matter of fact, as discussed by many scholars, there is overlap between the concepts of "ethnic groups" and "nations", but they are not equivalent to each other (Harrell 2002; Chen Zhiming 2002; Fan Ke 2003; Hao Shiyuan 2002; Ruan Xihu 2004). Chinese researches on urban ethnic groups cover three fields: 1. Researches on the ethnic group identity, cultural identity and national identity of overseas Chinese people in Chinese metropolises. The research objects include Canadian Chinese, Singaporean Chinese, Hong Kong people, Taiwan people, Macao people etc.; 2 Researches on ethnic group identity, cultural and social identity of ethnic minorities while integrating into metropolises. The research objects mainly include Tibetan people in Shanghai Tibet Middle School, Uygur and Yi people in Beijing etc.; 3 Researches on ethnic regional identity of new migrants after entering metropolises. The research objects include Wenzhou people in Beijing, Ningbo and Fujian people in Shanghai etc.

Since the 1960s and the 1970s, the theoretical orientation of social anthropology mainly explores the practice of subjective identity rather than emphasizes objective identity. For example, Tai Lue people are identical with Thai people in culture, but they subjectively think that they are ethnic groups different from Thai people (Moerman 1965). Peranakan in Malaysia and Singapore are offspring of Chinese in the earlier stage, most of them have accepted local cultures but they still strongly identify with Chinese subjectively (Tan 1988). "Imagined Community", the concept put forward by the American scholar Anderson, has a far-reaching influence on ethnic group and social identity which are established on the basis of "imagination" to some extent.

As for the explanatory model of ethnic group and social identity, modern social anthropology usually adopts the constructionist approach which can be dated back to Weber's definition of "ethnic group" in 1922 (Weber 1978: 335 — 396). In 1948, the American sociologist Hughes pointed out the differences between ins and outs, which have a huge impact on the subsequent constructionist approach. From the theoretical development venation, Weber and Hughes already put forward the viewpoint about the constructive model in last century. In 1954, the British anthropologist Leach expressed the interaction between ethnic groups in the Burmese highlands and promoted Kachin's construction of ethnic identity. In 1969, the Swedish anthropologist Fredrik Barth proposed the concept of "Ethnic Group Boundaries", pointed out that ethnic groups are "social organizations affected with cultural differences" (Barth 1969), ethnic group boundaries are subjectively constructed in most cases. In 1977, the concept of "ritual" in Pierre Bourdi-eu's practical theory is extremely important in explaining the

constructivism of ethnic groups and social identity (Bourdieu1977). In 1987, the American anthropologist Carter G. Bentley explained the identity construction of the Maranao ethnic group in the Philippines (Bentley 1987: 29). On the whole, the constructionist approach of the anthropological theory about ethnic group is directly affected by scholars like Weber, Barth etc. (Jenkins1997; Chen Zhiming 2002, 2005).

II. RESEARCH ON IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

From the perspective of academic significance, featured by subjective identity and the constructionist approach, research fields like inner feelings of ethnic groups, the formation process of ethnic groups, the rational choice theory, historical memory etc. have become the mainstream research paradigm about ethnic group identity in the contemporary European and American society. On the premise of deeply studying urban ethnic groups in Chinese metropolises, Chinese scholars in the field of social anthropology have worked out an ethnic group identity form with Chinese characteristics by comparing them with European and American study cases. Research content about urban ethnic groups roughly covers the following aspects:

A. Research on Identity Construction

The construction of ethnic group identity and social identity of different ethnic groups in contemporary Chinese metropolises includes the formation process of the consciousness of urban ethnic groups, the boundary of urban ethnic groups, urban ethnic relations etc. For instance, Ma Qiang (2006) describes that as a Muslim from the northwest, he wanted to land a job in Guangzhou when he graduated in 1994, but he found that there was indeed no shadow of any religious sect in Guangzhou, so he believed that he definitely should not find a job in Guangzhou. However, eight years later, when he went to Guangzhou for the second time, he found Islamic activities. The author wrote that the Jumah held in the Huaisheng Mosque presents a diversified social culture. Muslims from all over the world go to church in the same one Mosque. The author was greatly shocked by the numerous people and large scale. The scene featured by multiple ethnic groups and diversified culture is very rare in Chinese mainland. For a person who has never seen so many foreign Muslims in different colors who speak different languages, the "cultural shock" brought by such a close contact are quite huge (Ma Qiang 2006:2).

B. Research on Cultural Expression

The paper systemizes cultural changes and development of metropolises and analyzes the cultural expression forms of different ethnic groups in contemporary Chinese metropolises from the perspectives of acculturation, enculturation etc. With Shanghai as an example, Shanghai is a city which is constantly absorbing foreign cultures of different ethnic groups and Shanghai culture is also changing all the time. In the 1950s and the 1960s, more than 100,000 Shanghai young people were dispatched to work in the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. Gradually, they have accepted some local culture in Xinjiang, especially the culture of some local minorities. Twenty or thirty years later, some people came back to Shanghai. At that time, with an identity of "re-migrants", their culture was different from the original Shanghai culture to some extent. Meanwhile, after coming back to Shanghai, they expressed their identity with Xinjiang culture through "ethnic cultural capital" and tried to reconstruct a new social identity (Wu Da 2011).

C. Research on the Formation Process of Metropolitans' Consciousness and Identity

The paper explores how people from different ethnic groups express the "identity of metropolitan" so as to mark out an "ethnic group boundary" between local people and "others" (outsiders). Different ethnic groups express the same "identity of metropolitan" so as to form a new ethnic regional identity group, for instance, the identity of "Shanghai people" relative to "outsiders" and "Subei people" (derogatory). "Shanghai people" consist of new and old migrants from all over the country and the world. Migrants and their offspring in different periods of time have their own unique cultural and ethnic characteristics. Corresponding to other metropolises, the nature of Shanghai people's consciousness has already been regarded as an entirety with regional ethnic consciousness and is expressed by culture. According to the concept put forward by Anderson (1983), metropolitans' ethnicity and ethnic consciousness are realized by the community of imagination. Metropolitans' consciousness is a product of the constructionist approach in nature. The formation of metropolitans' ethnic consciousness and the maintenance of ethnic group boundary together form the cultural landscape about contemporary metropolitans' ethnic consciousness (Wu Da 2010b).

From the perspective of the research method, social anthropological researches on urban ethnic group identity need to be accomplished by the traditional participant observation method and the in-depth interview method. In the meantime, importance should also be attached to written materials like oral history, historical archives, family tree etc. Relevant historical archives and data should be collected as much as possible for reference and research. Participation in the observation means keeping an eye on various manifestation patterns about the ethnic group identity of the research objects whenever and wherever possible, timely record the observed results, systemize, summary and explain the observed content, adjust, increase or decrease the inspection content at any time. As for the interviewees, a

certain number of typical members with different ages, genders, educational backgrounds, native places and ethnic groups should be selected to be interviewed. Besides, a part of them should be selected to participate in the autobiographical in-depth interview.

III. URBAN ETHNIC GROUP IDENTITY

Social anthropology can study urban ethnic group identity from various theoretical perspectives such as inner feeling of ethnic groups, the formation process of ethnic groups, rational choice of identity, the function of historical memory in the construction of identity, which are briefly explained as follows:

A. Inner Feeling of Ethnic Groups

While discussing the constructionist approach of ethnic group identity, we need to face "primordialists" which is also known as primordialism. After the Second World War, original colonial countries became independent one after another. Facing ethnic group identity and national identity construction presented by emerging independent countries, the American anthropologist Geertz successfully uses "primordialists" to explain the psychological and cultural foundation of their identity construction (Geertz 1963). Affected by Geertz, other ethnic group research experts also admit that the construction of ethnic identity implies "ethnic group inner feeling" relationship among people in the ethnic groups. As a type about the nature of human being's identity, "ethnicity" exists in all types of societies, including the industrial society and non-industrial society (Keys 1981).

One of the important steps to reveal the ethnic group and identity problem of contemporary Chinese metropolises is to observe the inner feelings of overseas Chinese, ethnic minorities and new migrants living together in the same one metropolis.

B. The Formation Process of Ethnic Groups

The process for new migrants, including overseas Chinese and ethnic minorities, to integrate into the metropolis is the process for this metropolis to cultivate its townsfolk consciousness and identity, and the process for it to form its ethnic regional identity group. Such a phenomenon can be explained by the ethnogenesis theory. Studies show that political and economic changes usually lead to changes in ethnic consciousness and identity. For instance, during the Republic of China era, the Minjia people in Dali, Yunnan regarded themselves as Han people rather than a minority group (Hsu 1948). However, in the 1980s, those who used to call themselves Minjia people in the past regarded themselves as the minority group — the Bai nationality, and actively constructs an identity towards "the Bai nationality" (Wu 1989). As pointed out by the American scholar Katherine Palmer Kaup in her book Creating the Zhuang: Ethnic Politics in China, the Zhuang identity in China was "created" later (Kaup 2000: 3). All those researches imply that consciousness and identity of ethnic groups are dynamic rather than invariable.

In contemporary Chinese metropolises, apart from local people who have already had local registered permanent residence, some overseas Chinese, ethnic minorities and new immigrant groups gradually get closer to local residents in political, economic and cultural aspects through obtaining "residence permits". Their consciousness also gradually forms ethnic regional identity named after the city, for example, Shanghai people. Corresponding to the generation of the ethnic group, "Subei people" (Han Qilan 1992), the formation process of the concept of "Shanghai people" is actually "the formation process of an ethnic group". By studying the ethnic group and social identity performance of overseas Chinese, ethnic minorities and new migrants, we can probe into the formation process of common ethnic regional identity in contemporary Chinese metropolises.

C. Rational Choice of Identity

Overseas Chinese, ethnic minorities and new migrants living in metropolises express ethnic group inner feelings towards their birthplaces in the cultural aspect, but they also have identity towards the metropolises where they are living. Such a situation can be explained by "the rational choice theory". The rational choice theory is usually explained as the individual behavior to gain the maximum interests, thus, ethnic group and social identity behaviors usually seem to be irrational (Hechter 1986: 264). The rational choice theory emphasizes that what the behaviors of the actors pursue is the maximization of value and material gain (Coleman 1990:15). The British scholar Michael Banton is the one to introduce the rational choice theory into the field of social anthropology (Banton 1985). From the perspective of the rational choice theory, one person chooses to identify one metropolis for his own purpose and utilitarian idea; similarly, if a person refuses to identify with one metropolis, he also has his own purpose and idea, which is also for maximizing his individual interests. Different ethnic groups in contemporary Chinese metropolises are diversified in the choices they make in ethnic group and social identity. Exploring those phenomena with the rational choice theory is a relatively concise research method.

D. The Function of Historical Memory in the Construction of Identity

Memory is a necessary element for every individual or collective identity (Le Goff 1992: 98). Historical memory plays a significant role that cannot be ignored during the process of choosing identity, especially in researches on migrant and transnational ethnic groups. For instance, Ke Qunying studies the historical memory of Singaporean Chinese and their ancestral home Anxi, Fujian (Kuah 2000). As a subjective process of thinking, memory can be handed down from generation to generation through keeping diaries, biography, letter, storytelling and other oral forms (Watson 1994). No matter a memory is correct or not, people will continue to inherit this kind of memory for their own subjective needs. The construction of ethnic group and social identity is usually established based on the foundation of historical memory to some extent. People often accept or

reject some historical memories according to their own needs. They usually emphasize certain kinds of history and deliberately "forget" some historical contents (Wang Mingke 2006). Every metropolis has its own history. How different ethnic groups in a metropolis utilize historical memory to construct their ethnic group and social identity is an important field that deserves to be studied for a long time in the circle of social sciences.

IV. THE IDENTITY OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS

Researches on ethnic groups in contemporary Chinese metropolises can focus on the observation of the constructionist approach of the identity of different ethnic groups, the exploration of the expression ways of ethnic culture of different ethnic groups and summary of the formation process of the "Unity in Diversity" (a concept put forward by Fei Xiaotong) of the identity of contemporary Chinese metropolitans. In metropolises, the research difficulties lie in the confirmation of representative ethnic groups, the selection of investigation sites and the screening of interviewees. There is a wide range of research objects because there are different types of ethnic groups like overseas Chinese, ethnic minorities and new migrants. In contemporary Chinese metropolises, overseas Chinese identify with Chinese deep down in their hearts, but facing political and economic interests, they rationally choose different ethnic regional identity. For example, Singaporean Chinese identify with Chinese deep down in their hearts, but they acknowledge their Singaporean nationality; ethnic minority groups can express different cultural contents, but what they express more in metropolises are acculturation and enculturation; new migrants from other regions usually actively construct their identity with the metropolis through historical memory.

Social anthropological researches on ethnic groups usually conduct in-depth studies on single ethnic group in a small-scale society and discover and develop the identity theory within the same one ethnic group. To conduct ethnic group researches in modernized metropolises, you often need to make investigations of two or more ethnic groups at the same time. Such researches are targeted comparative researches established based on existing research theories and cases. Such research achievement is actually ethnography based on metropolises. The research achievements can be shown in the same one ethnography and research materials about multiple ethnic groups can be used alternately at the same time. From the perspective of research method, this is a brand new research idea and it is a practice of multi-sited ethnography advocated by social anthropologists at present.

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