

Yueping Yan
Zhaohe Lv

Chinese Ethnic Demography

Theory and Applications



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Yueping Yan · Zhaohe Lv

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Yueping Yan
Yunnan University
Kunming, China

Zhaohe Lv
Yunnan University
Kunming, China

Translated by Ms. Xiaoling Yue, Ms. Yiyang Li and Ms. Simin Tan

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Chapter 1

Ethnic Population Studies: Discourse, Methodology, and Theoretical Framework



1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 *Ethnic Demography: Theoretical Traditions*

Ethnic demography, whose origin dates back to the early 1980s, is an important branch of demography. Efforts of scholars in this field over the years have produced fruitful results. A number of milestones have been reached in the history of research in this field. In 1980, Wang Duanyu and several other scholars called for attention to “the studies of minority ethnic populations”; in 1981, *Population Handbook* (edited by Liu Hongkang) defined “ethnic demography” and its academic attributes for the first time; in 1982, “ethnic population” was included as a category in China’s national census. Chinese scholars have published a series of studies on ethnic populations by region or ethnicity, including “Minority Ethnic Populations in Gansu” (1987), “Demographic Changes in Tibet” (1989), “An Overview of Minority Ethnic Populations in Yunnan” (1990), “Minority Ethnic Populations in Sichuan” (1991), “Demographic Study of the Oroqen People” (1989), “Demographic Profile of Muslims” (1991), “Contemporary Demographic Study of the Tibetan People” (1992), and “Contemporary Demographic Study of the Oroqen People” (1993). The most important monographs on ethnic populations in China are *Ethnic Populations* (first edition: 1989; second edition: 1998) edited by Zhang Tianlu, Huang Rongqing’s *Changes in Ethnic Populations: Analysis and Prediction* (1995), and *Ethnic Populations* (2003) edited by Tian Xueyuan. Among them, *Ethnic Populations* was the first monograph in China to systematically elaborate on the scope, research objectives, and methodology of the discipline. In the past, demographic research of ethnic groups was scattered in various disciplines. The publication of this book marked the emergence of ethnic demography as an independent field of study in China, thus filling a gap in social sciences in this ethnically diverse country.

Demographers have clearly explained the purpose of ethnic demography from the very beginning. Wang Duanyu linked the demographic profiling of minority ethnic groups and areas mainly inhabited by minority ethnic groups to the “Four Modernizations” (i.e. modernization in the fields of agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology), and drew attention to the differences between minority ethnic groups and the Han people. According to Wang’s definition, ethnic demography is a discipline that studies the demographic characteristics of minority ethnic groups in light of their different history, geographical locations, customs, and political, economic, and cultural systems. The purpose of this discipline is to promote common prosperity for people of all ethnic groups. Wang also suggests that the quantity and quality of ethnic populations should be in line with the national economy’s demand for labor.¹ Ethnic demography, as defined by Wang, is built on Marx’s economic production and biological reproduction theories and searches for the “optimal combination of economic production and biological reproduction” for minority ethnic populations and areas mainly inhabited by such populations.² Marx’s economic production and biological reproduction theories are the cornerstones of ethnic demography in China. Therefore, they are also the foundation of ethnic demography which is a branch of demography. The two guiding theories require researchers to adopt the methodologies of dialectical and historical materialism when studying the evolution of ethnic populations.

Ethnic demography also has profound implications for policymaking. In other words, the research into minority ethnic populations could support informed decision making in relation to population policies. The design of population policy for a minority ethnic group must be evidence-based and supported by data collected through a scientifically designed demographic survey of the minority ethnic group.³ Minority ethnic groups should have their own family planning programs which should be designed based on their actual situation and incorporated in the country’s population control and development policy.

1.1.2 Demographic Anthropology: An Interdisciplinary Perspective

Ethnic demography is built on the theories and methods of demography. Ethnic demographers study changes in the quantity, quality, structure, and distribution of ethnic populations, specifically including population growth, distribution, fertility, mortality, age/sex structure, education, marriage, family, population development, and prosperity of ethnic groups. They primarily adopt the research paradigm widely used in the field of demography. Researchers studying ethnic demography also use

¹Wang Duanyu and Zhang Guangxian. “Demographic Profiling of Minority Ethnic Groups Is Important”, *Journal of Renmin University of China*, 1980(4).

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

theories and methods from other disciplines. The development of ethnic demography as a discipline has been slow, especially since the advent of the 21st century. Lack of conceptual and methodological breakthroughs has led to slow progress in this field.

Ethnic demography is a sub-field of demography, which is a second-level discipline of sociology. Sociology itself is a first-level discipline in China. An important reason for this attribute of this discipline is that China is an ethnically diverse country and the population development of each ethnic group is a process in a specific social context. Ethnic demography focuses the attributes of ethnic populations within the research paradigm of demography. Although it has borrowed some methods of anthropology, it does not systematically discuss the theories underpinning demographic anthropology. Neither has it developed a research paradigm that is different from but deeply rooted in the research paradigms of demography and ethnology.

This study seeks to break some established norms in ethnic demography. Firstly, it tries to reexamine the theoretical structure of ethnic demography on the basis of the theories and methodologies of demography and ethnology. Secondly, ethnic populations are considered social systems in this study. The study tries to provide an understanding of the systems of ethnic populations from macro, meso and micro perspectives by integrating the methods of demography and ethnology. By employing the systems theory, it seeks to discover the relationships between macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors of ethnic populations and examine the theories of demographic anthropology for the purpose of promoting the development of ethnic demography as a discipline.

1.2 Discourse

1.2.1 Demography

A broad range of conceptual and theoretical instruments are deployed in the study of the human population. As Karl Marx put it, “The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.”⁴ And it is the sum of many rules and relations.⁵ This proposition is the foundation of contemporary demography. Therefore, demographers probe into a wide range of human activities and create an analytical framework that involves many fields of society and social relations. In the process of studying the links between population and the economy (e.g. economic consequences of demographic fluctuations for labor supply and consumer demand), researchers have developed a series of

⁴The Translation and Compilation Bureau for Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. *Collected Works of Marx and Engels (Vol. 3)*. People’s Publishing House, 1995, p. 7.

⁵The Translation and Compilation Bureau for Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. *Collected Works of Marx and Engels (Vol. 2)*. People’s Publishing House, 1995, p. 103.

concepts falling within the scope of population economics, such as demographic-economic processes, demographic-economic relations, and demographic-economic patterns. There are also socio-demographic concepts, including concepts dealing with marriage, family, social organization, and social structure (e.g. demographic perspective on marriage, family change, social issues, and so forth). Another major area of demography is the relationship between populations and the environment. Concepts in this area include ecological balance, environmental capacity, environmental degradation and pollution, and balance between population, resources, and the environment.⁶

The conceptual system of demography mainly contains subject-specific content. Many concepts deal with issues in the specific subject field (i.e. populations) and cannot be found in other subject fields. These subject-specific concepts are the foundation for logical reasoning in demography. For example, in demography, “type of reproduction” refers to classification of the reproduction of populations over the long term; “population investment” refers to the investment of a society in the survival and reproduction of its population; “population capacity” refers to the maximum population the Earth or the environment can carry. Suffice to say, demography is already a full-fledged scientific discipline, and its scope is still expanding. Ethnic demography is a sub-field of demography, which is broadening out gradually.⁷ The first attempt to establish ethnic demography as a discipline was made by the Soviet academic circle in the 1960s. The *Marxist-Leninist Theory of Population* edited by Valente contains a chapter dedicated to discussing ethnic demography as an independent discipline.⁸ In China, ethnic demography emerged as an independent discipline after the Chinese government adopted the reform and opening-up policy. But it was not until the 1990s that it was officially recognized as a branch of demography. There are no entries of “Ethnic Demography” in China’s most authoritative *Dictionary of Demography* (1986). Instead, entries related to ethnic demography are listed in the “Population and Society” section.⁹ Neither is it recognized as an independent discipline by China’s most comprehensive dictionary of demography

⁶Wu Zhongguan (Ed.). *Dictionary of Population Science*. Southwestern University of Finance and Economics Press, 1997, pp. 11–18.

⁷In his *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, Thomas Malthus conducts a comparative study of different population research methods by country and ethnicity to provide support for the assumptions that underpins his population theory. When studying reproduction behavior, he uses India as a typical example of a country consisting of different ethnic groups. This study is a substantial attempt at theoretical research into ethnic populations.

⁸Editorial Board of the Sociology Volume, Editorial Department of Encyclopedia of China Publishing House. (1991). Ethnic Demography. In *Encyclopedia of China (Sociology)* (p. 195). Encyclopedia of China Publishing House.

⁹The *Dictionary of Demography* compiled by Liu Zheng was published in 1986 by People’s Publishing House. It is China’s first comprehensive dictionary of demography, covering four interdisciplinary fields: demographics, population economics, population sociology, and population geography. Many concepts and research problems of ethnology are integrated into the “Population and Society” section. This shows that the research paradigm of ethnic demography had not yet been separated from the “population and society” knowledge system when the dictionary was published. In other words, ethnic demography had not been recognized as an independent discipline. This also

Dictionary of Population Science (1997). In the massive system of population science defined by this dictionary, which contains 11 interdisciplinary fields, entries related to ethnic demography only account for an insignificant portion.¹⁰ Ethnic demography is included as an academic discipline in *Population Handbook* (a journal for internal use only) edited by Liu Hongkang. In the journal, ethnic demography is defined as “a division of demography and ethnology that applies general principles of demography to a specific ethnic group in order to shed light on demographic patterns of the ethnic group”. Therefore, it is an interdisciplinary field of study.

1.2.2 Ethnology

In the *Encyclopedia of China (Sociology)*, the methodology of folklore studies is also referred to as “ethnological and indigenous methodology”, and folklore research is defined as a sub-field of sociology that studies “the rules of social interaction that are followed by members of a particular community”.¹¹ The simplest definition of ethnology can be found in the *Dictionary of Ethnicity* published by Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House in 1987. It defines ethnology as “a branch of social sciences that studies ethnic groups”. This discipline mainly explores patterns in the occurrence, evolution, and integration of ethnic communities and studies the composition, origin, geographic distribution, lifestyle, social status, and culture of ethnic groups within a country or region and their relationships. According to the *Dictionary of Ethnicity*, the main research methods employed in this field of study include field survey, literature review, and use of research results in related disciplines.¹²

reflects that the population sociology discipline was still not mature enough to allow population researchers to clearly distinguish population sociology from ethnic demography.

¹⁰The *Dictionary of Population Science* is compiled by Wu Zhongguan and published by Southwestern University of Finance and Economics Press. The dictionary has 1,600 entries that are arranged into 23 thematic categories. Major areas under demography include theoretical demography, population economics, population sociology, population biology, population ecology, population structure, population quality, elderly demography, population policy, population geography, and demographics. Entries relating to ethnology are listed under population sociology which consists of two major fields: marriage and family. However, nowadays, population sociology has extensively absorbed concepts of sociology. The ethnology-focused definition in the *Dictionary of Population Science* is no longer suitable for the current population sociology discipline. A more suitable definition should point out that population sociology is an intersection between demography and sociology.

¹¹Editorial Board of the Sociology Volume, Editorial Department of Encyclopedia of China Publishing House. (1991). Ethnic Demography. In *Encyclopedia of China (Sociology)* (p. 193). Encyclopedia of China Publishing House.

¹²Editorial Board of the Dictionary of Ethnicity. (1987). Ethnology. In *Dictionary of Race and Ethnicity* (p. 346). Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House.

1.2.3 *Redefining Ethnic Demography*

Ethnic demography is “an interdisciplinary field that studies the population dynamics of ethnic groups”.¹³ The majority of demographers agree that ethnic demography should employ the research paradigm of demography. Although they often apply ethnological and anthropological theories and methods to ethnic population research and borrow many research materials from ethnological and anthropological studies, the preference for demography is clear, and the identification of academic norms is more consistent. This discipline is rarely controversial in the demographic community, and the historical clues are clear, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific attributes of the discipline’s development. Since ethnic demography is considered an interdisciplinary field between demography and ethnology, it should be more balanced to achieve the integration of the two disciplines, but researchers in this field are still adopting the traditional research paradigm of demography.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

1.3.1 *Theories of Ethnic Demography*

Demographic anthropology or population anthropology¹⁴ is an interdisciplinary field of study that integrate theories and methods of anthropology and demography. The term “demography” has both a broad and a narrow meaning. Demography in the narrow sense is also called formal demography. It focuses on the size, distribution, structure, and change of population. In addition to what is examined by narrow-sense demography, demography in the broad sense also studies economic, social, geographical, ethnic, and other features of population, and applies data and results of population surveys to the study of related issues, including population and resources, family planning and eugenics, urbanization and population migration, and human resources and income distribution.¹⁵ Some scholars use “demography” and “population studies” to distinguish broad-sense and narrow-sense demography.¹⁶

Statistical analysis and modeling are important research tools in demography, in both its narrow and broad sense. Compared to cultural factors, population researchers attach more importance to the impact of economic and social factors on populations.

¹³Editorial Board of the Sociology Volume, Editorial Department of Encyclopedia of China Publishing House. (1991). Ethnic Demography. In *Encyclopedia of China (Sociology)* (p. 195). Encyclopedia of China Publishing House.

¹⁴In this book, the term “demography” is used in its broadest sense.

¹⁵Henry S. Shryock & Jacob S. Siegel. (1971). *The Methods and Materials of Demography*, New York: Academic Press, Inc., p. 1.

¹⁶Ibid. p. 2.

They are less likely to adopt a macro perspective in empirical studies of populations.¹⁷ The principal empirical research tools of anthropologists are fieldwork and case studies. They focus more on theoretical analysis and inductive reasoning centered around real-life phenomena, and place more emphasis on the impact of cultural factors on population change and the cultural implications of demographic phenomena.¹⁸ Demographic anthropology combines the theories and methodologies of demography and anthropology, including the analysis of population data to “accurately” grasp the general trend and characteristics of population dynamics which is the strength of demography, as well as fieldwork, case studies, in-depth interview, and participatory observation, which are often used in anthropology to analyze and explain population-related phenomena in a specific cultural context.¹⁹ Researchers in the field of demographic anthropology are constructing their own research paradigm by combining the research paradigms of demography and anthropology.

Since the 1980s, the academic circle of ethnic demography in China has been very active. Research results in this field have been fruitful. As a sub-field of demography, ethnic demography is hugely different from demographic anthropology in both theoretical framework and research paradigm. Ethnic demography focuses on the attributes of ethnic populations within the research paradigm of demography.²⁰ Although it has borrowed some methods of anthropology, it does not systematically discuss the theories underpinning demographic anthropology. Neither has it

¹⁷For example, *A Study of Contemporary Demography* edited by Wu Zhongguan in 2000 mainly discusses the development, methodology, scope, and prospect of demography in its narrow sense (i.e. statistical study of population), as well as modern demographic analysis techniques and mathematical demography based on census data.

¹⁸According to Wang Xiaoli, “Anthropologists nowadays are more inclined to interpret phenomena of humanity and focus on the humanistic characteristics of the subject and local cultural factors. Obviously, the balance between the two linchpins of anthropology—social science and humanities—have been broken due to current anthropological emphasis on localization.” (*Ethno-National Studies*, 2002(5), p. 40). According to another Chinese scholar, Bao Zhiming, “Quantitative methods are important if anthropologists want diversified, accurate, and scientific research results. Promoting the application of quantitative methods is beneficial to the development of anthropology.” (ibid. p. 54).

¹⁹Some researchers believe that “anthropologists usually do not care about the common features of a society and most of them focus on the unique features of a specific group of people or community”. (See Zhang Jijiao. Characteristics, Deficiencies, and Areas of Improvement of Anthropological Research Methods. *Ethno-National Studies*, 2005(5).) It is not that anthropologists do not care about the common features of a society. Anthropologists do sum up the general pattern of human history, but such holistic knowledge is acquired based on extensive studies of “the unique features of specific groups of people or communities”, rather than simple logical reasoning.

²⁰*The Discipline of Demography*, edited by Wu Cangping and published by Renmin University of China Press in 2006, studies the evolution of ethnic demography as a discipline. According to this monograph, “It was not until the late 1970 s when researchers began to use relatively standard research methods of demography to study ethnic populations. Before that, most of them employed ethnological or anthropological methods to study ethnic minorities.” “Researchers primarily use the research paradigm of demography, combined with some research methods of anthropology and ethnology, to study ethnic minority populations.” (*The Discipline of Demography*, pp. 321–322). At present, there is still no in-depth discussion of theories and methodology in demographic anthropology. The theoretical framework of demographic anthropology is yet to be formed.

developed a theoretical analysis paradigm that is different from but deeply rooted in the research paradigms of demography and anthropology. The theories underpinning the discipline of demographic anthropology, including its basic assumptions, concepts, theories, methodology, scope of research, and research paradigm, are yet to be thoroughly discussed, organized, and defined.

Anthropology is broken down into physical anthropology and cultural anthropology. We believe that demographic anthropology should fall under cultural anthropology. In other words, demographic anthropology tries to explain human behaviors that differ between ethnic groups and are related to population changes from a cultural perspective,²¹ or the different cultural origins of human behaviors in different ethnic groups. Demographic anthropologists' cultural interpretation of demographic changes in an ethnic group are supported by case studies, empirical research, and historical studies of the ethnic group. They try to understand population dynamics and phenomena and solve population-related problems by focusing on the study of the differences between different peoples.

Therefore, in this book, demographic anthropology is defined as a set of theories that try to explain changes in ethnic populations and factors that influence ethnic populations and the relationships between them from cultural perspectives. There are three points we should pay attention to: (i) population changes, with specified scope, can be measured by a full set of quantitative demographic indicators that constitute the overall analytical framework; (ii) cultural interpretations of population phenomena are based on theories and methodology of cultural anthropology, seeking to shed light on population dynamics in specific, heterogeneous social and cultural contexts, with a special focus on cultural explanations of behavior of human populations in their respective habitats; and (iii) ethnic population here refers to the population of a nation or an ethnic group. As we can see from the above analysis, demographic anthropologists adopt an analytical paradigm that integrates inductive reasoning and quantitative research methods in demography and micro-level investigation and qualitative analysis methods in anthropology. Statistical analysis is an important research tool of demographers who summarize overall characteristics, predict trends, and make qualitative judgments based on the results of statistical analysis. Anthropologists primarily use qualitative methods and focus more on phenomenon description, factual judgment, personal experience, and observation of the state a population is in.²²

In China, the earliest mention and definition of the term "ethnic demography" can be found in *Population Handbook* co-edited by Liu Hongkang and Wu Zhong-guan in 1981. According to the book, "Ethnic demography studies changes in the population of ethnic groups caused by natural or social factors, as well as the impact

²¹American anthropologist William A. Haviland defines culture as a set of values, ideals, and standards that members of a society share. William A. Haviland. (2006). *Cultural Anthropology: The Human Challenge* (Qu Tiejeng and Zhang Yu, Trans.). Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press.

²²Bao Zhiming. "Application of Quantitative Methods in Anthropological Research". *Ethno-National Studies*, 2002(5). As the author points out, "Most anthropological studies are qualitative research. Quantitative methods are not popular among anthropologists."

of economic, social, religious, and psychological factors on birth, death, marriage, family, and population migration within/between ethnic groups. Ethnic demography applies general principles of demography to a specific ethnic group in order to shed light on demographic patterns of the ethnic group.²³ The earliest definition of ethnic demography set a future direction for the discipline.²⁴ One of the most important tasks of ethnic demography is to identify the ethnic composition (religious groups, ethnic groups, hierarchical arrangement of social classes, and so forth) in a region and changes in ethnic populations and ethnic composition in the socioeconomic context of the region. Another important task of ethnic demography is to analyze demographic indicators (birth rate, mortality, gender, age and class composition, education level, and so forth) of ethnic groups and identify the connections between the indicators and the culture and customs of ethnic groups.²⁵ Over the past 30 years, ethnic demography in China has been consistently moving along this academic direction, and Chinese scholars have published many monographs and more than 600 papers on ethnic demography.²⁶ At present, more than 50,000 articles on ethnic population studies can be found in Chinese academic databases.

The research scope of ethnic demography and that of demographic anthropology are roughly the same. Demographic anthropology also studies the changes in ethnic populations and social factors associated with such changes. Researchers often analyze data and survey results to find out the change and current state of ethnic populations and, on that basis, identify social factors associated with the changes in ethnic populations as well as different demographic effects caused by cultural differences. However, it is still necessary to differentiate between the two fields of study in terms of the scope of study. Ethnic demography primarily examines the relationship between ethnic populations and cultural, socioeconomic, and environmental factors from a macro perspective. The comparative analysis of indicators is intended to generalize about features, changes, and trends. Studies on ethnic demography usually do not focus on small-scale phenomena, local knowledge and experience, or unique features of certain groups, which are the basis for the analysis of general features of a society but the analysis of which does not necessarily lead to results consistent with the quantitative judgments of a population. In other words, the two fields can be differentiated by value orientation. Therefore, in response to ethnic demography's focus on macro perspectives, qualitative analysis, and abstractions and its

²³Luo Chun. An Emerging Discipline—Ethnic Demography. *Thinking*, 1998(8).

²⁴In the *Dictionary of Ethnicity* edited by Chen Yongling and published by Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House in 1987, ethnic demography is defined as a division of ethnology that studies “the ethnic composition and ethnic populations in a region, as well as changes in ethnic populations caused by natural or social factors.” The scope of this field of study was later expanded to include the analysis of basic demographic indicators from the perspective of ethnology as well as the connections between the indicators and the culture, customs and traditional lifestyles of ethnic groups so as to look at the impact of ethnic factors on population development.

²⁵Zhang Kewu. (Ed.). (1996). *A Brief Introduction to Ethnic Demography*. Ethnic Publishing House, p. 25.

²⁶Wu Cangping. (Ed.). (2006). *The Discipline of Demography*. China Renmin University Press, p. 324.

neglect of micro perspectives, perceptual knowledge, and observation of small-scale phenomena, we believe it is necessary to construct a new theoretical framework and research paradigm by integrating strengths of both demography (the strength of which lies in accurate quantitative analysis) and anthropology (the strength of which lies in identification of diverse population behaviors of ethnic groups from a cultural perspective). The goal of the new paradigm is to reduce reliance on the theoretical and analytical tools of demography and strike a balance between macro and micro perspectives.

Based on our study of the current state of ethnic demography, we believe that, in addition to using demographic statistics to analyze the overall dynamics of ethnic populations and identify factors that influence ethnic populations, ethnic population researchers should also attach importance to cultural interpretation of different, micro-level phenomena and causes thereof and build a research paradigm that combines macro and micro perspectives and focuses on both commonality and uniqueness of ethnic groups. Francis L.K. Hsu, an influential Chinese American anthropologist and former President of the American Anthropological Association who studied under the renowned anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, presents a new research method—comparative approach—in his book *Clan, Caste, Club*. This approach compares both macro-level and micro-level cultural systems instead of specific cultural phenomena.²⁷

Therefore, it is necessary to explain the origin of the theoretical system of demographic anthropology, delineate the intersection between demography and anthropology in terms of theoretical framework and methodology, build a conceptual system for demographic anthropology and define its research scope. To do that, we should start from the presuppositions, assumptions, and premises of this discipline.

1.3.2 Basic Assumptions of Demographic Anthropology

The focus of empirical research in ethnic demography is usually on the differences between ethnic populations. It is believed that “due to geographical and socioeconomic differences, there are huge differences between ethnic groups in fertility, death rate, and population structure”.²⁸ Ethnic population researchers do not deliberately apply anthropological theories and research methods, but focus solely on analysis of macro-level factors. Ethnic demography has a theoretical presupposition—the intrinsic values underlying population phenomena and behavior are consistent. The logical conclusion arrived from this presupposition is that researchers can use quantitative methods to accurately describe the common features of ethnic populations and then abstractly summarize the patterns in the evolution of such populations, their

²⁷Francis L.K. Hsu. (1990). *Clan, Caste, Club* (Xue Gang, Trans.). Huaxia Publishing House, p. 38.

²⁸Wu Cangping. (Ed.). (2006). *The Discipline of Demography*. Renmin University of China Press, p. 320.

common features, and general principles that can be scientifically understood. The conceptual system and analytical tools that support this presupposition have been developed as the research into ethnic demography goes further and researchers have been striving to construct a theoretical system in the same line as empirical sciences. Although we do not intend to completely negate the correctness and explanatory power of this methodology, we do question its thoroughness and effectiveness to interpret complex phenomena related to ethnic populations. We believe that it is difficult to interpret phenomena of ethnic populations while ensuring consistent results of macro- and micro-level analysis by only relying on theories and analytical tools of demography. Therefore, it is necessary to build a complete theoretical framework for demographic anthropology by integrating the basic theories and methodologies of demography which is good at statistical and macro-level analysis and anthropology whose strength lies in field survey, case studies, and observation of micro-level phenomena.

The primary task in constructing the theoretical system of demographic anthropology is to clarify its theoretical premises. We believe that ethnic populations are a social construct. The cultural interpretation of ethnic groups should be supported by solid micro-level observations (of sub-groups, communities, and so forth) and extensive acquisition of local knowledge and individual experience. However, ethnic groups are not isolated social entities. Unique features and identifiable commonality are the two cornerstones of the theoretical system of demographic anthropology. Cultural differences of ethnic groups, cultural context of populations, and common features of ethnic groups are the theoretical premises of demographic anthropology. On the one hand, quantitative expression of identifiable common features, general patterns, and logical relationships of/between population behavior is based on statistical analysis and abstractive summarization in the research paradigm of demography. On the other hand, researchers need to use anthropological theories and methods to examine and explain cultural differences between ethnic groups from a micro perspective. Common features of populations reflect the general state, processes, and trends of populations in different cultural contexts and can be accurately measured by using statistical methods. Researchers can use the analysis results of demographic indicators to support theoretical generalization, inductive reasoning, abstract summarization, and quantitative description of the common features and general trends of ethnic populations. When analyzing cultural differences between ethnic populations, researchers will need to use micro-level analysis tools and study ethnic populations in their respective cultural contexts. Therefore, the resulting conclusions are conditioned on ethnic groups' cultural context. Researchers are generally discouraged to abstract such research results into general knowledge about population. We are not sure whether the intrinsic worth of macro- and micro-level approaches in population studies is consistent. The results of macro-level analysis are not necessarily consistent with that of micro-level analysis. Therefore, under the paradigm of demographic

anthropology, the results of micro-level ethnological analysis can be used to verify or correct the results of macro-level analysis.²⁹

As such, the theoretical presupposition of demographic anthropology can be summed up as: **Human reproduction occurs in different cultural contexts and cultural traits are what ethnic groups use to identify themselves.** The importance of human population reproduction is affirmed in the production and reproduction theories. As Frederick Engels pointed out, “According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This, again, is of a twofold character. On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of articles of food and clothing, dwellings, and of the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species.”³⁰ Reproduction is both biological and social behavior of human beings. All ethnic groups follow the same biological rules. Fertility and mortality are most widely used quantitative indicators to measure population dynamics by region, race, or ethnic group. However, human reproduction is affected by a host of factors, including social factors. It is also a social phenomenon varying from ethnic group to ethnic group. If we strip away the hugely different ethnic habitats and behavior which are basis for value judgments and only focus on the technical aspects of demographic research, it will be impossible for us to gain insight into the customs of each ethnic group or sum up general rules that apply to all ethnic groups.

1.3.3 Rethinking Ethnic Demography: Borrowing Theories from Other Disciplines

Given the above considerations, it is necessary to re-establish the theoretical framework of ethnic demography based on the research paradigm of demographic anthropology. Demography is a discipline with a relatively full-fledged conceptual system and universally accepted quantitative indicators. For example, demographers divide population into children (aged 0–14), adults (aged 15–64), and older adults (aged 65+). This classification is also used in ethnic population studies to reflect social relationships, social functions, and social status of different age groups. However, this classification method disregards ethnic differences in age groups and the specific

²⁹For example, when minority ethnic groups are measured as a whole, some studies have reached the conclusion that the fertility rate of minority ethnic groups is high relative to the Han people and the national average and many of them still adopt outdated reproductive practices. However, studies focusing the differences between ethnic groups reveal that the fertility rates of a large number of ethnic groups are below the national average, and some are even far lower than that of the Han people. Results of macro-level analysis cannot shed light on the differences between ethnic groups. Therefore, researchers still need to use micro-level analysis results to verify macro-level analysis results. But we cannot expect that the former will always be consistent with the latter.

³⁰Frederick Engels. (1972). “Origin of the Family, Private Ownership and the State.” In *Collected Works of Marx and Engels (Vol. 4)*. People’s Publishing House, p. 2.

cultural context as well as the customs derived therefrom. For example, many ethnic groups celebrate the rite of passage of children into adolescence.³¹ But the definition of coming of age varies widely across ethnic groups.

1.4 Methodology

Analytical tools serve theoretical interpretation. The selection of social survey methods reflects researchers' logic thinking behind their studies. As the American anthropologist William A. Haviland put it, unlike sociologists, ethnologists usually do not use prepared questionnaires, which tend to collect information that researchers already know they want to have. Instead, they strive to keep their minds open and thus often make unexpected discoveries.³² This open-ended survey method reflects the attitude of ethnologists on the interpretation of humanities. They believe their research is a journey into an unknown territory and respect the target of study, seeking to describe ethnic groups and their behavior in an objective, non-biased manner. By contrast, some researchers adopt the top-down approach which is completely different from the above open-ended method. They consider themselves superior to the target of study and their purpose of research is usually to support policy making, show compassionate care, or even "civilize" the target of study. Their views on social progress are often one-dimensional. Such researchers often use words such as "advanced" or "backward" in value judgment. Most of them conduct research for the purpose of social transformation and fail to appreciate the value in traditional culture and local knowledge. This kind of research attitude, currently prevailing in the academic circle of ethnic demography, should be discouraged. Instead, we should try to construct a scientific theoretical framework and a scientific methodology for the study of population-related phenomena of ethnic groups.

³¹A rite of passage, also known as coming-of-age ceremony, refers to "a rite or ceremony held to celebrate a young person's transition from being a child to becoming an adult" (see the "rite of passage" entry in *Dictionary of Ethnicity*. (1987). Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, p. 10). Different ethnic groups may have different gender-based requirements, rituals, and interpretations for rites of passage. In fact, rites of passage are empowerment ceremonies held by an ethnic group for its members. Their social meanings and influence vary widely across ethnic groups. For example, it is a custom of the Han people to hold a capping ceremony (*guan li*) and give a courtesy name (*zi*) to a male coming of age (20 years old) to celebrate his passage into adulthood. When a girl comes of age (15 years old), she will attend a *ji li* (hair pinning) ceremony and be given a courtesy name. Once entering adulthood, girls are allowed to enter into marriage (ibid.).

³²William A. Haviland. (1987). *Contemporary Anthropology* (Wang Mingming et al. Trans.). Shanghai People's Publishing House, p. 19.

It is acceptable to use well-designed field surveys to serve specific research purposes and support macro-level policy making and strategic planning.³³ However, the limitations and scope of this research method should be clarified in order to illustrate its limited explanatory power. We need to avoid biases in research. Some researchers have the tendency to search for, interpret, and favor information in a way that confirms their preexisting beliefs or hypotheses. This kind of confirmation bias is a serious logical fallacy in the interpretation of diverse human behavior. It is natural to have cognitive blind spots regarding local knowledge because it varies widely between regions. Presuppositions and/or common sense may lead to distortion in interpretation, which is often the case when applying the results of macro-level analysis to ethnic groups.

Therefore, the choice of research methods can reflect the researcher's judgment of his/her own research ability and knowledge structure. Anthropologists may be more aware of their own cognitive blind spots, knowing that it is impossible for one to fully grasp local knowledge which varies widely between regions, inexhaustible life wisdom, and unpredictable logical relationships. Anthropologists usually assume that they know nothing about the target of study³⁴ and try to be non-presumptuous and minimize the influence of their own social identities and pre-existing knowledge and beliefs on research.³⁵ Although not all anthropologists can achieve this, it is a conscious pursuit of anthropologists. Scholars in other fields of study, including ethnic demography, do not consciously minimize the influence of their own social identities and pre-conceived notions and beliefs.

For example, in other social sciences, hypotheses are aligned to clear research objectives. Research methods and analysis paths are carefully designed to avoid interference of unexpected factors and deviation from preexisting value judgment, reflecting researchers' rigorous control over their studies. By contrast, we could hardly find hypotheses in anthropological studies.³⁶ In terms of methodology, anthropologists attach great importance to participant observation which involves immersing oneself in the field, recording data and observations, and analyzing the information gathered. The former methodology is based on priori reasoning. The latter can help researchers avoid arrogant, condescending attitude and approach an unknown knowledge system with humility. The primary task of researchers

³³Field survey gained popularity as early as the 19th century in anthropology. It is later widely accepted by other sub-fields of sociology. It is a universally accepted research tool in demography because it can explain some demographic problems. Another reason for its popularity in demography is that scholars studying demographic problems have diverse academic backgrounds. The majority of Chinese researchers still follow the traditional research paradigm of demography. They focus more on macro-level, quantitative analysis and have a tendency to generalize. Field survey is not a mainstream research method of demography in China.

³⁴Zhang Jijiao. Characteristics, Deficiencies, and Areas of Improvement of Anthropological Research Methods. *Ethno-National Studies*, 2005(5).

³⁵Wang Xiaoli. Anthropological Fieldwork: Truthful Interpretation. *Ethno-National Studies*, 2002(5).

³⁶Zhang Jijiao. Characteristics, Deficiencies, and Areas of Improvement of Anthropological Research Methods. *Ethno-National Studies*, 2005(5).

adopting the participant observation methodology is to record and describe personal observation and experience in an unbiased manner.

We hope demographic anthropology will continue to grow by borrowing useful theories and methods from demography and anthropology. We also hope researchers interested in ethnic demography can use more theories and methods in ethnology and other disciplines and help boost the explanatory power of theories in this field of study and build a theoretical framework for better understanding of ethnic population-related phenomena and problems.