

From Hermeneutics to Critical Realism: An Ethnographic Study of Chinese-Canadians, Canadian-Chinese

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ABSTRACT

In its elaboration of the essentials of ethnographic methodology, it addresses the basic philosophical ideas and propositions of interpretivism and critical realism and analyzes the characteristics of ethnographic research from these two perspectives. It interprets the classic ethnographic research of Chinese-Canadians, Canadian-Chinese: Coping and Adapting in North America. It analyzes the essential features of ethnographic methodology in the specific case study from hermeneutics and critical realism perspectives. At the same time, it explains the particular application of ethnographic methods in this classic case study and analyzes its research process and results. It also proposes the theoretical view that ethnographic case studies must follow the trends of social sciences and suggests concrete strategies for ethnographic research from the perspective of critical realism.

Keywords: Ethnography, Methodology, Interpretivism, Critical realism

INTRODUCTION

In anthropological research, ethnography is an important and commonly used research method. The root of the word ethnography comes from the Greek word “ethnos,” meaning “a group of people,” “a nation,” or “a cultural group (Chen, 2000; Pokhrel, 2022).” Anthropologists place themselves in different cultures, depict what is formed and occurs in daily life, and present their writings to the people of their native culture. These writings are categorized as “ethnographies” (Clifford et al., 2006). At the same time, ethnography is also a research methodology where social anthropologists use social or anthropological theories to collect, record, evaluate and interpret specific cultures through research object observation while reporting on social observations (Schmid & Eisewicht, 2022). The ethnographic methodology requires the researchers to delve into the life world of the subjects, going deep into their inner worlds to reflect on their real lives and find out what they think (Li, 2013). Thus, researchers can capture an intuitive understanding of people’s beliefs, values, and fears (Erikson and Liam, 2003). Ethnographic methods cover fieldwork, comprehension, and textual work (Maanen, 2011). Through anthropologists’ continuous efforts and improvements, ethnographic research has developed into a critical qualitative research method in social sciences (Liu, 2019).

There has been a debate in academia between “quantitative research” and “qualitative research” on social sciences (Maksimovic & Evtimov, 2023; Wang, 2012). The theoretical basis of quantitative research is positivism, the founder of which is Auguste Comte. Durkheim, who introduced positivism into sociological research, proposed that positivism extends the boundaries of scientific rationalism to the research of human behavior (Gadwal, 2022). It allows people to see that when human behavior is reduced to a causal relationship. Supplemented with rational processing, causal relationships can become a code of conduct for people in the future (Durkheim and Di, 2013). The theoretical basis of qualitative research is interpretivism. Since the 1980s, the independence and superiority of qualitative research methods have been fully recognized and developed in social

work research, with the rise of interpretivism and critical realism paradigms in Western societies. Also, the theoretical bases of qualitative research are enriched (Li, 2013). From the viewpoint of interpretivism, the object of qualitative research is the “life-world (Eberle, 2023).”

Qualitative research cannot only stay on the shallow description of the action, but it should also provide insights with “universal significance” to the research object. It is the philosophical foundation of ethnographic research. Hence, ethnographic research is qualitative research based on interpretivism (Schnegg, 2023). However, the dispute between positivism and interpretivism in social science research has become increasingly pronounced. The British scientist and philosopher Blaise Bhaskar introduced critical realism after discussing the limitations of positivism and interpretivism. The empirical essential research of realism also frequently employs qualitative research methods. In the fields of social sciences and philosophy, critical realism validates naturalism. Although social research methods are not identical to natural research, social research is also scientific, just as natural processes can be studied scientifically (Benton and Craib, 2011). Critical realism and quantitative research methods are not mutually exclusive in social work research. However, unlike the external morphological structures revealed by quantitative research methods, critical realism advocates the revelation of the overall structure or deep structure of society or something at the level of cultural structures (Li, 2013). From the perspective of ethnographic research, interpretivism raises the question of how it recognizes the object of research. At the same time, critical realism presents thoughts and inspirations for the ontology of ethnographic research (Paudel, 2024).

Current ethnographic research generally focuses on interpretivism as a philosophical foundation. There is still a lack of ethnographic research based on critical realism. I have read relevant ethnographic research literature, including 中国人非规则移民北美历程揭秘 (Originally published in English entitled “Chinese-Canadians, Canadian-Chinese: Coping and Adapting in North America” by the Edwin Mellen Press, 1999) (“Tian’s Book”). Professor Tian’s research methods and perspectives reflect both interpretivism and critical realism. It provides an inspiring perspective and methodology for researchers and learners of ethnographic research and deserves in-depth analysis and exploration. Tian’s book is a revised version of the doctoral dissertation of applied anthropologist Prof. Tian. Prof. Tian has devoted particular attention to the special group of irregular immigrants from the Chinese mainland to Toronto, Canada. He utilizes ethnographic research to vividly depict this group’s integration into Canada. The book was translated into Chinese by Prof. Tian’s old classmate Prof. Tianjin Wang and his student and published by the Commercial Press in China in 2013. In this paper, I intend to analyze the philosophical basis of ethnographic methodology and derive the theoretical and practical guidance of ethnographic methods.

PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS AND PROPOSITIONS OF INTERPRETIVISM AND CRITICAL REALISM

The philosophical thought of ethnographic methodology is based on hermeneutics. The famous German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer published his book Truth and Method in the 1960s, which attracted scholars’ attention to hermeneutics. Hermeneutic philosophical ideas and propositions have gradually and profoundly influenced various fields of social sciences, giving rise to the postmodern trend (He, 2003). Hermeneutics later developed into interpretivism. It involved different philosophical perspectives and research methods, such as Max Weber’s social constructivism, Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology, ethnography, semiotics, and humanism. Despite divergences between the perspectives, the underlying philosophical ideas are the same, giving rise to interpretivism. Researchers have further summarized the essential differences between the natural and social sciences.

Furthermore, the fundamental epistemological difference between the natural and social sciences needs to be examined from the perspectives of correlators and interpreters, respectively (Taylor, 1994). According to interpretivism, the objective world advocated by positivism does not exist, and human beings construct the so-called world (Zhu, 2007). In other words, the world is “projected” by human eyes and thoughts. Reality is essentially psychological and perceived (Hisashi, 1997). It is believed that truth or meaning emerges from interactions between people or between people and society, so the situation or context is necessary for the emergence of truth. The exclusion of subjectivity, as positivism suggests, is not desirable.

Moreover, truth is not a law and cannot be applied universally to all conditions as contexts change. Understanding and interpretation are the fundamental methodologies of social sciences. As Wilhelm Dilthey puts it, “We explain nature, but we understand the soul” (Hong, 2021). Interpretive research mainly uses a qualitative approach, considering research as understanding phenomena in a particular time or space, not seeking universality and regularity. The authenticity of reality is influenced by a specific time or space and is characterized by locality. Researchers view society as an emergent process created by individuals, which varies according to contextual factors such as history, culture, geography, and personal experiences (Mao and Su, 2019). Ethnography, an early qualitative research method based on interpretivism, provides a detailed and dynamic description of humans and

their cultures. It aims to present the overall pattern of life, attitudes, and behaviors of people from a culture. To realize this research goal, researchers must live and integrate with local people for a long time and truly know the local people and culture through first-hand experience (Jing and Sun, 2021). In ethnographic research, under the perspective of interpretivism, it is essential to realize the combination of subjective and objective portrayals. At the same time, it also realizes the interaction and communication between the two, encompassing the researcher, the research object and the research process (Zhang and Wu, 2022).

In the history of social science methodology, there have been two opposites, i.e., positivism advocating naturalism and interpretivism against naturalism. Bhaskar pointed out the limitations of positivism and interpretivism, and he analyzed that these two methodologies are antagonistic because they reduce ontology to epistemology. Bhaskar started his research from ontology and proposed the third path of philosophy of science, i.e., critical realism (Ma, 2012). Since its inception in the 1970s, critical realism has had a significant impact on the study of social sciences (Wang, 2014). Since the rise of critical realism in the 1970s, its fundamental philosophical ideas and propositions have also had a substantial impact on research in various fields of the social sciences (Wang, 2014). For critical realism, the word “critical” reflects the fundamental characteristics of realism. In contrast, “realism” is its underlying philosophical idea and proposition, indicating that critical realism remains within the area of realism (Zhang, 2014).

Critical realism redefines ontology as the object of scientific research or other social practices independent of human cognitive activities or established bodies of knowledge. Cognition is the process by which scientific experiments or other social practices are transmitted. The cognition results are collectively called “knowledge” (Ma, 2012). Critical realism insists that worlds do not exist in dependence on the discourses that describe them and that the basic features of the world are recognizable. Moreover, it insists that the world is a structured open system (Fu, 2011). According to critical realism, there are three levels of social reality. They are the empirical level (experiences and sensed perceptions of knowing subjects), the actual level (objects and events that occur in the real world), and the actual level (the structures, forces, mechanisms and trends that are not perceived). The first two levels are empirical “surface reality,” and the third level is “deep reality” (Ma, 2012). The actual level is the most important, followed by the exact and empirical levels. In addition, these three levels are not synchronic. People cannot perceive all three levels simultaneously and do not necessarily observe identical events observed at the empirical and actual levels (Wu, 2012).

According to Bhaskar, social sciences should be based on studying relatively enduring social relations. The study of human social relations can be based on the “transformative model of social action.” The model recognizes that social relations, institutional structures, practices, and the forces and mechanisms of their functioning are derived from human activities but are independent of individual existence. In addition, society is the precondition for individual purposeful action, and individuals’ skills, abilities, habits, perceptions, and beliefs are adapted to the social relations and environment. Individuals inevitably undergo such socialization processes, and individual action becomes necessary for social reproduction and transformation (Bhaskar, 1998). The transformative model of social action distinguishes categories between man and society, human action and social structural change. Based on this, it articulates the duality between society and individuals. Society is the necessary condition for individuals’ purposeful activities. At the same time, individual purposeful activities are also required to reproduce and transform social relations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FROM TWO PERSPECTIVES IN TIAN’S BOOK

Ethnographic research methods are well applied in Tian’s Book. First, ethnographic methodology differs from other research methods in that “ethnography relies on the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection.” In other words, the researcher is a research instrument. Therefore, the researcher should know his/her identity (Schensul, Kang and Li, 2012). Ethnographic researchers actively place themselves in different cultures. The culture shock and identity collision they experience during the research process require them to be more self-aware and stronger than others (Kang, 2013). Prof. Tian starts his research with a clear perception of his identity and in-depth considerations. He has a unique identity as an immigrant from China to Canada, just like the research objects. Therefore, he is conscious of his identity and thinks deeply about studying with that identity. He mentioned that when he first approached the research objects, he thought twice about whether or not to disclose his identity. If he had hidden the purpose of his research, he could have undoubtedly obtained more information, but he did not do so. Instead, he made his identity and research purpose known to the research objects openly and honestly. Self-disclosure is suitable for academic research. The level of self-disclosure to reveal personal identity and emotions depends on the individual’s perception of where he or she is and who he or she interacts with (Tian, Wang and Gu, 2013). Ethnographic research, in a sense, depends on ethnographic researchers’ professionalism. It concerns whether the researchers can be honest and sincere to themselves and others in the field (Kang, 2013). Prof. Tian did all these during his research as a qualified and outstanding ethnographic researcher.

Secondly, the success of ethnographic research also lies in the researchers' ability to communicate well enough to establish a trusting and intimate relationship with their research objects (Tian, Wang and Guli, 2013). The author actively deals with some matters related to his research objectives during the research. Then, the research objects trust the author and are more willing to tell him their situation and thoughts. Prof. Tian also soberly recognizes that anthropological research or observation is essentially a form of interaction between the researcher and the one being researched or the observer and the one being observed (Tian, Wang and Guli, 2013). "Many informants also began to see me as a problem solver and started to discuss more and more of their concerns with me. With their trust, I could further my anthropological research and broaden my horizons. I could figure out who they are, why they came to Canada as refugees, how they came here and recognize themselves in social interactions and how they present themselves in their daily lives (Tian, Wang and Guli, 2013)." One of the research objects was an irregular Chinese immigrant who came to Canada from Japan at the end of 1989. Prof. Tian gained the trust of the research object through his efforts and assistance. He introduced Prof. Tian to other irregular immigrants and promised that Prof. Tian would maintain their confidentiality. In this way, Prof. Tian gained the research objects' trust through continuous interaction and could further reach out to more research objects for research.

Since Prof. Tian is very clear about his identity and actively interacts with the research objects, he can easily empathize with them. He mentioned in his book, "Although I have been studying anthropology in a Western university for some time, I still consider myself a newcomer to Canada and engage with my target group in that capacity. Thus, formally and socially, like many 'irregular immigrants from mainland China,' I experienced culture shock, life pressures and nostalgia. Even when I started fieldwork, I did not know my new environment well. In addition, like them, I keep in touch with my family in China and consider China as my real home (Tian, Wang and Guli, 2013)." Prof. Tian can empathize with the research objects about their environment, difficulties, and various concerns that only Chinese people can experience. In this respect, he formed a fusion of horizons with his research objects.

Gadamer raised the fusion of horizons as an essential point. Some scholars have summarized that there are always two different horizons in the historical process of understanding the effects of understanding: one is the horizon of the text, and the other is the horizon of the understander. The text has a historical horizon, and the understander has a particular horizon. The understanding is the fusion of these two horizons of experience (He, 2001). In ethnographic research methods, the fusion of horizons is the ideal state. In the cross-cultural life experience of the famous Chinese scholar Shen Congwen, the starting point of his research also starts from the fusion of horizons. It has a local horizon, which enables ethnographic writing about the local culture from the inside of the culture. It can also scrutinize the culture from the outside and provide a calm, objective and scientific explanation. Such a characteristic of the fusion of horizons between internal and external cultures is the desired state of a culture writer (He, 2012). Prof. Tian's research methodology in this book also achieves the ideal state of fusion of horizons.

Moreover, he can learn about the differences among his research objectives and present new ideas in the case study. Refugee research lets anthropologists know the difference between their social status and the research objects. It then undoubtedly avoids subjective errors and enhances academic integrity (Tian, Wang and Gu, 2013). The author describes the researcher, the research object, and the process in detail and explicitly. It can help readers understand the main points of ethnographic methodology from the research process and comprehensively grasp its theory, paradigm and methodology. It also guides readers to focus on the philosophical basis of the research methodology and its relevance to theories, to uncover the essence of the theories, and then to apply the theories and their research methodologies.

Prof. Tian's ethnographic methodology does not stop at the hermeneutic horizon. He has placed his research in a more objective horizon of critical realism. The research in this book is layered and rich in content. First, it examines the different factors that led to the formation of irregular migrants from the Chinese mainland and analyzes how they came to North America and applied for refugee asylum. Second, it examines how this group of people self-identifies and self-recognizes when interacting with others in a new environment. Third, it investigates what happens to this group of people as they adapt to their new environment, revealing the various factors contributing to stress. Finally, it shows their adaptation strategies at collective and individual levels. It is considered that the change in the research objects is a critical factor in the research (Tian, Wang and Gu, 2013).

Barth (1981) argues that the quality of analysis of a given event is enhanced by regarding the event as a process. A "process" is an ongoing series of connected events. They interact with each other, remain continuous, and can be easily depicted and analyzed. The orientation of such a process concept is used as a methodology to explore the integration of refugees into new societies. He emphasizes that the way irregular migrants from the Chinese mainland deal with stress and adapt to their new environment is a social process.

Further, this study links the adaptation process to a range of other socio-cultural changes they experience, such as changes in their ways of thinking, self-identification and self-expression. At the same time, I believe that they

need time to cope and adapt. Their success varies from time to time and from group to group (Tian, Wang and Gu, 2013).

In Tian's Book, he describes the entire process of irregular migration from the Chinese mainland to North America. The study deals with the socio-economic context in which they left China. It analyzes the demographic characteristics of the particular area of residence in North America and the residents' initial reactions, adaptation, and creativity upon arrival there. Prof. Tian examines the relationship of these irregular immigrants with other Chinese immigrants, refugees, and the society's inhabitants. In addition, by describing the successful actions of some of them in fighting for their legal rights, the book shows the different results of their integration into the local society. It illustrates how they used their personal and social resources to relieve stress, overcome difficulties after immigration, and successfully integrate into North America. Through the research, Prof. Tian reveals to readers the conditions of North America for irregular immigrants' activities. Moreover, he shows how the purposeful activities of irregular immigrants change the perceptions of North America and how they reproduce and transform new social relations.

Conformity to Trends in Social Sciences

While collecting materials for the research, Prof. Tian utilized the ethnographic methodology with humanistic feelings under the hermeneutic horizon and gained the trust of the research objects. His considerations and efforts on identity perception, interaction with the research objects, and the fusion of horizons have impressed me deeply and provided excellent practical guidance for my future ethnographic research.

According to interpretivism, social sciences differ from natural sciences because the uniqueness of interpretation, conceptualization, and language games characterizes social sciences. Their subject matter is to elucidate values, meanings, concepts, and rules (Ma, 2012). However, interpretivism also has some limitations. It overemphasizes the subjective role of human beings and views social activity as the product of individual activity. It may lead to, or have led to nihilism. Morris stresses that we experience the natural and social worlds as a "reality." Our experience is also a shared humanity that cannot be reduced to the fragmented discourse of local cultures (Morris, 1997). Society is also objectively accurate, and it is always prior. Society can neither be reduced to individuals nor created by them. It is necessary for any purposeful individual activity (Ma, 2012).

Dissatisfaction with and criticism of positivism, as the mainstream of social sciences, is the core point of postmodern thoughts. The postmodern thoughts represented by interpretivism have significantly impacted the world of thought and academic research. At the same time, its "anti-realism" position has become a problem in social science research. Critical realism criticizes positivism's misunderstanding of natural sciences and the anti-realism viewpoints of various postmodern thoughts (Huang, 2023). The essential transcendence of realism over positivism and interpretivism is embodied in the following aspects (Ma, 2012). First, it emphasizes the dependence of the existence of social relations, structures, forces, and mechanisms on social practices, ideologies, and spatial and temporal conditions. Second, it underlines that the objects of social science research include relations, structures, mechanisms, phenomena, and time, as well as their beliefs, value judgments, and interpretations of their meanings. Third, it underscores the interaction between the objects of social science research and research activities regarding causality. It also stresses the open-system perspective of social science research and the function of social science as "interpretive criticism," which is not found in the natural sciences. In short, the primary purpose of critical realism is to integrate the natural and social sciences (Hwang, 2012).

According to critical realism, most systems worldwide are "open systems." In an open system, the mechanisms of things interact and interfere with each other. Regular or fixed connections are established between events, which are only found in "closed systems" but not in "open systems" (Hwang, 2012). According to that philosophical view, society is open, complex, and stratified. Social phenomena include "emergence" such as behavioral, conceptual, spatial and temporal dependence. Therefore, social research can only result in the discovery of "seeming regularity" and "semi-regularity" (Lv, 2015). The factors governing the social and economic structure, forces and mechanisms are environmental factors from nature, and institutional, traditional, customary, cultural and historical factors from society. In specific space-time conditions, it is still possible to see some rough, localized rules of thumb for these factors (Ma, 2012). The so-called mechanism refers to the way things work. Mechanisms exist either within the structure of things or in the structure formed between things (Ren and Zhao, 2009).

Since the introduction of critical realism, it has been studied in sociology, management, geography, and other fields, especially economics. Critical realist economic methodology has become one of the new development trends of Western economic methods in the last 20 years (Ma, 2012). In Chinese management research, Prof. Lv pointed out that according to the "semi-regularity" proposed by Bhaskar, obtaining "strict rules" in management research is challenging. Therefore, the value of management theory lies in its ability to construct corresponding systems and guide practice. Theories such as management by objectives, strategic management, SWOT analysis, and management process control are widely used in management practice. Management experts summarize and refine

these theories, and many practitioners widely accept them as the theoretical framework for management practice. It implies the “semi-regularity” of the “underlying mechanisms” of critical realism (Lv, 2015). Critical realism is also studied in consumer behavior based on quantitative and qualitative research. In the study of consumer demand, researchers have found that salespersons can collect and quantitatively analyze the data of hot-selling apparel for different age groups. They can also use this data as a reference to make judgments and interpretations of consumers who come into the store using their personal experience and quickly recommend the right items to the consumers. Masanori Sakamoto, a Japanese researcher, suggests that all consumers are viewed here as “structural causation” and individual consumer explanations are viewed as “subjective causation.”

Over time, the structure changes dynamically through the subject. The “semi-regularity” of consumer behavior can be generalized by examining such changes (Wang and Sakamoto, 2018). A case study consists of five essential elements: the problem to be studied, the theoretical hypotheses, the defined unit of analysis, the logic of linking the data to the hypotheses, and the criteria for interpreting the results (Yin, 1994). In the case study, these five elements are organized into six steps based on the interpretive-critical principle of critical realism. The first step is to identify the phenomenon or event under study. The second step is to ask questions following the path of retrospective analysis: what the phenomena or events are, how they occur, how they develop, who the research objects are, and when and where they occur. The third step is to establish the entity or object of the case study based on some theoretical “foresight.” The fourth step is to collect information and data. The fifth step is to analyze the information and data. The sixth step is to write a case study report (Ma, 2012). In addition, it has been proposed that the two-way interaction between data from mixed methods and social theories be elucidated through the multivariate inference approach advocated in critical realism-counterfactual theory. It can be applied to complex and multifaceted issues, such as evaluating policies and interventions (Mukumbang, 2023).

In summary, critical realism unifies and transcends positivism and interpretivism. It advocates objectivity in ontology but subjectivity in epistemology. The study of social sciences is not limited to empirical phenomena, but it believes that underlying structures and mechanisms exist. Social science research aims to discover, explain and interpret the underlying structures and mechanisms. From this view, Prof. Tian’s research methodology is undoubtedly far-sighted and conforms to the development trends of social sciences. The development trends in the social sciences have provided us with new horizons for looking at society. These horizons are built on the previous horizons rather than eliminating them. They allow the researcher to examine more objectively and with greater depth and breadth.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ethnographic research based on interpretivism has certain advantages in approaching, recognizing, and understanding the research object. However, for analyzing the underlying social structure or mechanism, the approach based on critical realism is more advantageous. Tian’s Book is an in-depth scholarly work on ethnographic research. First, Prof. Tian conducted lengthy field research on irregular immigrants in North America. The research methodology illustrates a typical case study of ethnographic methods, providing a reference for other similar studies. Second, he conducts a specific and detailed analysis of how irregular immigrants integrate into North America. Tian’s Book unfolds a panoramic picture from the perspective of people and social structures. By allowing readers to understand the realities of North America fully, it reveals the purposeful social activities of irregular immigrants and how these activities have changed the way they are perceived in North America. The research horizon of critical realism, beyond positivism and interpretivism, also deserves our learning.

Influenced by the book’s research methodology and paradigm, I gradually extended my ethnographic research from the horizon of interpretivism to critical realism. In the study of Wuyi Rock Tea drinkers in Fujian Province, China, I mainly used ethnographic methodology and collected data through in-depth interviews, research object observation, and other techniques. I learned about tea drinking very early and joined a group of Wuyi Rock Tea enthusiasts. During my research, I often drank tea, chatted with the tea drinkers, observed them, and collected relevant information. After more than two years of interaction, I gradually became familiar with this group and developed a trusting relationship with them, gaining extensive first-hand information. Tea drinkers’ consumption behavior was mainly displayed through economic, cultural, and social capital. It portrays the effects of cultural, economic and social capital on tea consumption, thus revealing the profound relationship between face culture and conspicuous consumption (Wang and Tian, 2022). Based on this study, I further analyzed the phenomenon of Wuyi Rock Tea presented as a gift. From the dual horizons of the giver and the recipient, I analyzed the dynamic changes in the social structure through the subject. I also discovered the characteristics and effects of presenting Wuyi Rock Tea as a gift in social relations. I explored the essence of the gift and its impact on people’s social relations. It also revealed the effects of Wuyi Rock Tea on the functioning of social relationships. It was found that those who presented Wuyi Rock Tea as a gift intended to integrate into social relationships that were valuable to them and to maintain them for long-term reciprocity. There are screening, safeguarding, and reciprocal

mechanisms in the social relationship constructed by the gift of Wuyi Rock Tea. These mechanisms allow for the construction of social circles and the exchange of social resources. From my research work, I have found that, based on the horizon of critical realism, we can analyze the social significance of the data obtained from ethnographic methodology and examine the deeper mechanisms.

Based on the horizon of critical realism, ethnographic research has specific inspirations. Firstly, ethnographic research is about interpretation and identifying deeper realities as a methodological purpose. Secondly, ethnographic research transforms the relationship between the researcher and the text to the relationship between the actor and the social structure. Thirdly, the researcher correctly recognizes the relationship between specific empirical research and general theoretical research, and it can sublimate from empirical research to general theoretical research retrospectively. Any research methodology requires continuous reflection, and so do ethnographic methods. Researchers must deeply understand the underlying ideas and propositions behind different philosophical ideas. So they can identify the functions and limitations of different paradigms in their research. At present, scholars have learned much about the paradigm of interpretivism in Chinese ethnographic research. However, there are insufficient research results on the critical realism paradigm. The above two philosophical paradigms are formed by constantly rethinking and improving the original research paradigms in history. We believe they will change as society develops and people's knowledge improves. As Chinese researchers, we can continue to summarize the local research experience and shortcomings and provide more insights for the future development of science.

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