

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

INTRODUCTION IN SPECIAL ISSUE ON PRINCIPLES IN XIANGJI (INTERPHASE) OPERATION

Economic life of human beings has been the focus of study in anthropology ever since anthropology was established as an academic discipline at the end of 19th century. The early anthropologists studied economic activities in non-western societies so as to show the evolutionary pattern of human civilizations. Later, two theoretical schools of thoughts (substantialism and formalism) have been developed to explain economic activities of western and non-western peoples, which led to the heated debate in anthropology over a long period of time. Until today in the context of globalization in the world, the subject of economics continues to be an important field of study for anthropologists. New theoretical models or approaches have kept coming up to address market and non-market economies. The model of principles in *xiangji* (interphase) operation is one of them. *Xiang* (phase) refers to modes of economic operation of ethnic groups in different natural, economic, social and cultural environments. *Xiangji* (interphase) indicates the relationship, interaction, influence, scope, and characteristics of those modes of economic operation.

The model of principles in *xiangji* (interphase) operation was proposed by Professor Yang Tingshuo in his book published in 1995 and titled “The Principles in Xiangji Operation”. Professor Yang is a Chinese anthropologist and historian. He was born in 1942 in Guizhou Province of China in a large ethnic Miao family. In 1963, he went to Guizhou Normal University to study Chinese language. From 1979 to 1982, he was a MA student at Yunnan University, majoring in ethnology. After graduation, he returned to Guizhou to teach at Department of Sociology at Guizhou Institute for Nationalities. He specialized in studying the differences between Han and Miao societies, and characteristics of Miao peoples in making use of natural resources. From 1992 to 1999, he was engaged in ethnological studies at the Institute of Nationalities of Guizhou Institute of Nationalities. From 1999, he was hired by Jishou University to do anthropological and ethnological research. His major research interests then include economic life of various ethnic peoples, local knowledge and economic and ecological values of ethnic groups. He has done extensive fieldwork in Guizhou, Hunan and Sichuan among Miao, Yao, Yi, Shui and Buyi people. Professor Yang’s ethnic family background and his research work let him see economic activities of various ethnic peoples in Southwest China.

China launched its reform and open-up policies in the early 1980s. Since then, China has experienced tremendous economic, political and socio-cultural changes. One of the most obvious changes is the unbalanced regional development between East and West China. The economic and social development in West China where a large number of ethnic minority peoples live is far behind the eastern regions in China, even though the Chinese government has launched various campaigns such as the great western development strategy to promote economic development in West China. This situation has drawn researchers from China and other parts of the world to conduct studies from various perspectives in different academic disciplines. In a sense, West China has become an experimental lab for social scientists to put forward and test new theories or models that can be used to explain and even help to solve the seriously unbalanced deadlock in its economic and social development. Professor Yang is an eye-witness of these changes and problems occurred in West China since China’s reform. After a decade’s of study of existing anthropological and ethnological theories or paradigms related to human economic life, and intensive fieldwork in ethnic communities in West China, Professor Yang finally put forward his theoretical model in 1995 in his book *The Principles in Xiangji Operation*.

This issue of *International Journal of Business Anthropology* contains four articles introducing Professor Yang’s model of principles in *xiangji* operation. The first article “The Principles in Xiangji Operation: The Theoretical Crystallization of Chinese Economic Anthropology” by Luo Kanglong and He

Zhimin outlines the background of the formation of the model, and then discusses the three subsystems of each xiang which include cultural system, environmental (habitat) system, and political system (legal policies and administrative systems), and finally comments on the theoretical innovation of Professor Yang's model. The second article "New Economic Anthropology Paradigm with Chinese Characteristics: on Yang Tingshuo's Interphase Operational Development Theory" by Tian Guang and Jiang Youchun explores Professor Yang's model from different angles, and discusses its value and significance in both the aspects of theory and practice. The third article "Influencing Mechanism of Background Similarities and Differences in Xiangji Operational Activities" by Huang-fu Rui uses some examples to discuss the influence and restrictive impacts of non-economic elements on xiangji operation. The fourth article "The Academic Significance and Value of the Principles in Xiangji Operation" by Du Xingmei and Chen Qingde is a book review which highlights the contribution of Professor Yang's model to economic and ecological anthropology in China.

