

RECENT ADVANCE OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY IN CHINA^①

Zhu Hong(朱) Xu Yongjian(徐永健) Situ Shangji(司徒尚纪)

Center for Urban and Regional Studies, Zhongshan University, Guangzhou 510275, P. R. China

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents a review on the advance of cultural geography in China since the open policy and reforms were carried out. Following a brief review on the theoretical system and general works, this paper focuses on the development of the principal fields of Chinese cultural geography, including cultural landscape, cultural ecology, cultural diffusion, cultural integration and cultural area. As to the prospect of this subject, first of all, the authors point out that cultural geography in China is comparatively under-developed. Yet much work can be done and should be done to improve the situation. Basically, cultural geography should be developed theoretically and methodologically. Besides, more applied research should be carried out to guide the planning of social, economic and regional development. It is believed that only by doing so, can we embrace the revitalization of cultural geography in China.

KEY WORDS: cultural geography, cultural landscape, cultural ecology, cultural diffusion and integration, cultural area

Cultural geography in China is a subject that has evolved from the ancient times through modern times, and distinguished achievements have been accomplished during all this period (Wang, 1991). Yet it is a “newly-established” inquiry in China in the sense that no substantial progress has been made until the middle 1980s, when more and more researchers perfected the theories and widened the scope of studies by publishing more and more standard works with academic value and social significance. At the turn of the century, it is worth while reviewing the course of cultural geography and looking into its future development in China. Such an attempt will contribute to the further development of this inquiry, too.

1 GENERAL WORKS AND FORMATION OF THE SUBJECT'S THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The modern cultural geography has advanced step by step in China. During the initial period, priority was given to introducing the achievement of the

West into China, among which the *Cultural Geography* written by Jordan *et al.* (Translated by Wang Enyong, 1986) and *Human Geography: Culture, Society and Space* by J. H. Dour Bury (Translated by Wang Min *et al.*, 1988) are two examples. While the Western theories and methodologies were applied to the cultural geography in China, some native researchers started their work in the fields such as culture's regional difference and historical cultural zoning (Tan, 1986; Lu, 1987). Meanwhile, some researchers retrospect the course of Chinese cultural geography; others try to identify the object of this subject (Qian, 1987). Thorough study in the specific branches such as dialect, toponym was carried out, too. Generally speaking, researches during this period were frequently limited to single cultural factor or specific branch of cultural geography, and no systematic, comprehensive and original results have been achieved because of the lack of perfect theoretical system and social practice participation. Nevertheless, all the researches launched in this period laid

sound foundations for further studies.

Of all the achievements in this period, *Chinese Cultural Geography* by Chen Zhengxiang (1983) deserves to be mentioned with emphasis. Though it is not a book on cultural geography with integrated theoretical system, the author discussed several special topics including the change of cultural centers, cities in China's mainland, and the place names in Taiwan. The book introduced the modern concept of cultural geography into China and acted as a link between past and future. It is *An Introduction to Cultural Geography* by Wang Enyong (1993), however, that may be called the first classical writing of this subject, in which the theories, methodologies and measures of modern cultural geography were discussed comprehensively and all the contents were expounded branch by branch. This book set up the theoretical framework of Chinese cultural geography and has come to be the classics for those who are engaged in the teaching or researching on this subject (Bao *et al.*, 1991). Following them, a series of monographs on cultural geography were published, including the *Outline of Chinese Cultural Geography* by Zhao Shiyu and Zhou Shangyi (1991), *Cultural Geography in the Han and Jin Dynasty* by Lu Yun (1991), *Chinese Cultural Geography* by Wang Huichang (1992), *Chinese Historical and Cultural Geography* by Zhang Butian (1993), *Cultural Geography of Guangdong* by Situ Shangji (1993), *The Huanghe River Culture* edited by Hou Renzhi (1994) as well as *Study on the Historical and Cultural Geography of Hunan* by Zhang Weiran (1995b). Together with the publication of a large quantity of research papers, studies on various topics of cultural geography were carried out in different perspectives and at different levels, which improved the Chinese cultural geography substantially, and accelerated its rapid maturation.

Outline of Chinese Cultural Geography initiated the tentative studies on the issues such as man-land view, origin of Chinese civilization and its relationship with environment, the variation and diffusion of Chinese culture. The works of Lu Yun, Zhang Bu-

tian and Zhang Weiran, on the contrary, made thorough studies on the folk custom, talent, dialect, cultural center and cultural area of certain region based on the textual research of a vast amount of historical data. *Chinese Cultural Geography* by Wang Huichang is considered to be the first trial to explain and elaborate the broad and profound Chinese culture in cultural geographic perspectives systematically and comprehensively (Fan, 1992; Wang, 1993). In this book, the relationship between the formation of Chinese culture and the characteristics of geographic environment was analyzed precisely and appropriately, and the process of cultural area formation and the law governing it were studied tentatively. Obviously, the author's opinion on the variation of climatic environment and its influence on the historical evolution of cultural geography is original. Although much of this book is still open to discussion, it is safe to conclude that, due to its originality in building up the Chinese cultural geographic research system and in studying the culture-environment interrelationship, this book proves to be another classical works of cultural geography following that of Wang Enyong.

As to the *Cultural Geography of Guangdong*, it is the first academic writing on regional cultural geography in China. It filled the gaps in such research field and can be used by cultural geographic researches of other regions or provinces for reference. In this book, the cultural landscape and regional variation of the Lingnan culture as well as the origin and evolution of Lingnan culture are discussed in detail, which developed the regional cultural geography theoretically. Besides, the subject's characteristics were manifested in the book by cultural zoning with the agricultural land-use landscape and comprehensive multi-factors as the criteria. In addition, since the early and middle 1980s, a series of books on Chinese cultural history have made Chinese cultural geography develop to some extent in virtue of their studies on the regional cultural history as well as spatial relationships between religion, nation and culture (Ge, 1987; Tian, 1996). Such researches all went deep into certain geographical regions, though not necessarily from geo-

graphic point of view (Zhang, 1996). It is also the case with the *Chinese Regional Culture Collection* published by the Liaoning Education Press, consisting of *The Bashu Culture*, *The Wuyue Culture*, and *The Culture of Taiwan* etc. (Yuan, 1991; Zhang, 1991; Hu, 1995). Each book of this collection, though not necessarily follow the style of cultural geography, based its studies on a specific region and therefore manifested a good deal of features of regional cultures. Naturally, the combination of culture with region benefited the development of Chinese cultural geography. It's also true that the present prosperity of cultural geography in China depends on the joint efforts of geography, history, philosophy, anthropology, and other related subjects.

2 ADVANCE IN THE PRINCIPAL FIELDS OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Cultural geography, being believed to study the spatial composition of human culture, is one of the principal branches of human geography. It is believed by some researchers to be concerned with the interrelationship between human culture and geographic environment (Li, 1985; Zhang, 1989), or by others, with the difference of culture and man-land relationship (Zhao *et al.*, 1991). Moreover, it brings every aspect of historical cultural geography into its scope of research, going beyond that of the modern cultural geography. The generally recognized main fields include cultural landscape, cultural ecology, cultural diffusion and dissemination, cultural integration and cultural area (Wang, 1989). The origin of culture has been nominated by some researcher as one of the main fields, too (Jin, 1994). Besides the three basic theories of human geography, i. e. man-land relation theory, location theory and behavior theory, theories on cultural migration, cultural diffusion and cultural integration have been introduced into cultural geography from cultural anthropology (Zeng, 1994). Moreover, related theories have been borrowed by cultural geography from folklore and ethnology (Gao, 1996; Wu, 1991). All these theories contribute to the theo-

retical progress of cultural geography. Of course, one has to admit that since cultural geography has been relatively 'young' in China, much work has to be done on it, especially on its theoretical side.

2.1 Cultural Landscape

According to Li Xudan (1984), cultural landscape is the complex of cultural phenomena on the surface of the earth, which reflects the geographic characteristics of certain region. Generally speaking, cultural landscape can be defined as the juxtaposition of physical landscape and man-made landscape created by the labor of inhabiting human groups, who make use of the nature and remake it consciously in order to meet their demands. The physical environment is crucial to the formation of regional cultural landscape, while man's reaction to environment and the corresponding human elements are the principal factors influencing the cultural landscape (Liu, 1996a). As a result, evident difference exists between the urban and rural cultural landscapes, caused by the different backgrounds (Li, 1993; Tan, 1993). Cultural landscapes are of variety and complexity, too. Each region presents landscape of characteristic style, since its cultural landscape such as religion, custom, diet, costume and music will coordinate themselves with the physical and human environment (Tian, 1993; Zhang Shulin, 1995; Liu, 1996b). As to the study on landscape, cultural geography lays stress on settlement pattern, land-use and architecture style (Lin, 1995; Situ, 1993). For example, there have been many studies on topics such as agricultural land-use landscape and its distribution, settlement and cultural landscape as well as Earth Tower and Kejia Culture. The temporal and spatial distribution of cultural relics and elaboration of landscape's geographic significance have been topics in such a field, too (Huo, 1992; Feng, 1995). Besides all the above-mentioned visible elements of cultural landscape, many invisible ones have been explored tentatively, folkway being an example (Zhang Guoxiong, 1995). Yet it is a fact that cultural landscape study hasn't gone beyond descrip-

tion of phenomena. Works that reveal the law governing landscape formation is rare, and the theoretical base should be strengthened.

2.2 Cultural Ecology

Cultural ecology studies the relationship between civilized human beings and the physical environment, laying emphasis on the impact of geographic environment on the origin and evolution of culture and the environment-culture relationship (Cai, 1992). Frequently, the attributes of the geographic environment as a whole influence the features of traditional culture of certain state or certain nation, while the diversity of geographic environment is most significant factor that brings distinctive national features and regional features to cultures, and even causes the distinctiveness of cultural products (Cao, 1994). Especially at the initial stage of human civilization and culture development, geographic environment acted as mighty or even determinative factors. For example, the Huanghe River valley became the original cradle of Chinese ancient civilization because of its superior geographic environment in the early days (Wang, 1992). Studies were also carried out concerning the geographic environment's impact on the way that the regional cultural characteristics and cultural divergence are shaping (Liu, 1997; Han, 1990). As to the ecological studies on culture, the most outstanding one is Huang Chenglin's case study of Huizhou (Huang, 1995a; Huang, 1993). He elaborated the cultural elements such as style of civil architecture and cuisine of Huizhou and the rising of merchants there. Beyond this, he discussed the influence that the merchants of Huizhou exerted on the local culture (Huang, 1995b). His achievement made contribution to the development of related theories and methods of cultural geography.

Practically, it is meaningless for cultural ecological researchers to argue, on which they should rely, environment determinism, environment probabilism, environment adaptivism, or environmental perception and culture determinism. Culture as the synthetical

result of various factors, can't be satisfactorily explained by any one-sided theories of any single approaches. Instead, advanced theories including behavior theory should be applied to analyze the unsolved cultural issues such as the geographic environment's impact on human mentality and behavior. Only in this way can the development of cultural geography in China be promoted.

2.3 Cultural Diffusion and Cultural Integration

Cultural diffusion is the communication and dissemination process between different cultures. According to the classification of Western researches, cultural diffusion can be divided into spread diffusion and migration diffusion. For example, the nationwide spread of Karaoke is a case in point of spread diffusion for as we all know, as a fashion of entertainment, Karaoke has spread from the economically developed regions to developing regions, from large cities to small towns or even villages in China. On the contrary, the historical south push of northern migrants in China is an example of migration diffusion, which gave impetus to the development of South China by bringing with migrants the comparatively advanced agricultural technologies and living custom from north to south. The spread diffusion can be subdivided into infection diffusion, hierarchy diffusion and stimulated diffusion and the time-distance decay law generally applies to the cultural dissemination process. The migration diffusion can be subdivided into four patterns, i.e. occupying, spreading, bleeding and varying patterns. Different forms of migration will bring about different cultural migration diffusion, too (Zhang, 1997). Cultural dissemination has its material base and specific mode (Dou, 1996). Human's unremitting pursuit for material wealth and spiritual values not only created the culture, but also stimulated the cultural dissemination, for it furthered the mutual communications of human being and led to the spread of culture from one region to another. Empirical studies have been carried out on cultural diffusion (Zhang Weiran, 1995b; Wong, 1992), of

which the Frontier Pioneering culture is an example that merits our attention. Frontier Pioneering culture is a new form of culture which springs up in pace with the exploitation of frontier sea islands through the joint efforts of dismissed government officials and station troops historically and by means of farm reclamation in modern times (Chen, 1992). Naturally, physical and artificially imposed separation exists in the cultural diffusion. For example, in the island's embracing cultures disseminated from the land, different features of dissemination were presented because of the sea isolation (Chen, 1992). Thanks to the cultural diffusion, the productivity and economic development of the previous under-developed regions were promoted, and following the rational exploitation of natural resources and the changing of other human factors there, changes took place in the cultural center, too, with the old centers replaced by the new ones (Chen, 1983). Because of the cultural dissemination and diffusion, different cultures assimilate, blend or even merge into an organic one, which we call cultural integration, or cultural synthesis. Cultures are able to blend despite their exclusiveness, and a new system of culture consequently emerges through the integration process (Situ, 1990). The spatial distribution of certain cultural element is influenced not only by the environmental/physical factors, but also by other cultural elements, and the interaction is often very complicated. For example, religion frequently affects the spatial distribution of various cultural phenomena (Li, 1990). As to the molding of new culture by means of cultural integration, there are many examples. For instance, the shaping of the principal part of the Chinese culture is the result of integration and blending of the northern nomadic culture with Central Plains agricultural culture after many conflicts between them. Similarly, the prosperity of the present Lingnan culture is due to the synthesis of Central Plains culture, Chu culture and many other non-native cultures with the native Nanyue culture. It is true that much achievement has been made in the cultural integration studies in China. Yet it should be pointed out that, the basic law

and dynamism of cultural integration remained unrevealed, and the questions remained unsolved such as how to demonstrate and analyze the means by which the integration is carried out and how to deal with the spatial distribution of cultures quantitatively.

2.4 Cultural Area and Other Fields

Since cultural geography is based on the physical and human elements of certain regions, the regional variation of the latter naturally leads to the divergence of the former. For instance, the Chinese traditional culture and residential culture manifest regional difference more or less (Wang, 1988). Despite their divergence, cultures of certain region or within certain limits tend to be identical. Since one or even more than one cultural element show no difference in certain regions with similar or just the same physical settings, the cultural area comes into being. Here, many methods of classification may be adopted, and the simplest way is to identify different dialect zones in the light of dialect, the only one chosen cultural element (Zhou *et al.*, 1986). More complicated classification were tried by Zhang Weiran, Situ Shangji and Wang Huichang *et al.* To be more specific, Zhang Weiran identified the primary cultural areas of Hunan Province by using dialect and custom as the dominant criteria while folk song and religion as the supplementary indices (Zhang Weiran, 1995a). Situ Shangji, who successfully identified the comprehensive cultural areas and sub-areas of the Lingnan region, has primarily adopted 'five principles' besides giving consideration to geographic location, the pedigree of nation and zoning. The 'five principles', namely five criteria, include similar or roughly identical cultural landscapes, the same or similar extent to which culture is developed, similar process of regional cultural development, connectedness of certain cultural areas, and the existence of a cultural center which embodies the regional cultural features (Situ, 1993). Also, Wang Huichang identified 16 major cultural areas in China, with the physical and human factors as well as historical and current situation as the criteria

(Wang, 1992). Generally speaking, the culture zoning has been comparatively mature in China theoretically and practically. Its weakness lies in the fact that the zoning has not gone beyond qualitative analysis, and the results are consequently not so convincing. Hence, it is urgent to combine traditional qualitative methods with quantitative measures so as to make cultural zoning more precise and more convincing. Such an attempt will also be significant to the improvement of the academic standard of cultural geography as a whole.

In addition, the geographic distribution of talents and celebrity in historical times has been significant topics of this subject (Xiao, 1993). Greater importance has also been attached to issues concerning the national economy and the people's livelihood, such as culture versus environment protection and regional culture versus economic development and cooperation (Ma, 1995; Chen, 1995; Lu, 1993). The new trends are obvious that the cultural geography is enriching itself and making it more practical so as to serve the society better. At present, cultural geography is brimming with vigor and the tendency of unprecedented development is appearing due to many recent researches that are widening the scope of the subject. Such researches include the regional comparative studies on Chinese culture by Hu Zhaoliang (1998), preliminary studies on the regional system of culture by Qian Zhi (1998), and studies on the cultural context of Number One Scholar's (*Zhuang Yuan* in Chinese) distribution in ancient China by Han Maoli *et al.* (1998).

3 PROSPECT

In spite of the achievement in recent years in China, cultural geography is underdeveloped when compared with economic geography, tourist geography and urban geography, the other branches of human geography that are closely related with the economic aspects. Of all the 511 human geographic papers published by *Acta Geographica Sinica*, *Geographical Research* and *Scientia Geographica Sinica*

from 1982 to 1996, only 10 papers are on cultural geography. Similarly, papers on cultural geography published by the journal of *Human Geography* from 1985 (start of publication) to 1996 account for only 9.3 percent of the total. The figure itself is sufficient evidence showing the slowness of the principle's development. Lack of powerful research groups, the insufficient importance attached to the subject as well as the subject weaknesses of impracticality are among the factors that account for such a situation.

At present, great reforms are taking place in the political and economic fields in China, and the speedy advance of high technology is meeting the demands of people in every aspect. As a result, the concept, form and substance of culture are changing rapidly. New claims have been raised on the cultural geographic studies with the coming upsurge in material civilization construction and cultural and ideological progress as well as the popularization of Entire Nation Quality Education Campaign. Despite the distinct theoretical improvement of this subject, much more work has to be done by cultural geographic researchers, especially when methodology is concerned. The theories and methodologies of other principles should be borrowed to promote the progress of cultural geography. For example, quantitative measures should be enhanced so that more penetrating analysis can be carried out on cultural phenomena. Furthermore, with the social progress, the object of cultural geographic study has changed accordingly. Besides the traditional topics, many new issues should be discussed, including the global issue concerning man's survival, impact of information network and the preservation of traditional culture as well as the cultural dissemination and evolution of cultural areas in context of knowledge economy. Also, more importance should be attached to the following topics, namely the inter-regional flow of qualified personnel accompanying the unbalanced economic development, the enterprise culture of transnational corporation and its impact on the culture as well as the relationship between various popular cultures and regional social and economic development. For quite some time, geography has been considered a

principle not so practical, let alone cultural geography. In fact, culture will have great effect on economy in the long run, since culture will act as the guarantee of and reserved impetus to economic development and its potential as economic force should be paid enough attention to. It is believed that cultural geography will find itself useful in the fields such as macroscopic decision-making, policy making, tourist development, and urban planning. Indeed, it is of great importance to revealing the interaction and interrelationship between economic development and regional culture.

In a word, on the basis of summing up the past experiences, it is urgent for cultural geography to develop its strong points and strengthen itself so as to make more significant contribution to the cultural undertakings and modernization construction in China.

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