

Informal Immigrants Adaptation Process in Canada: An Anthropological Case Study by Tian Guang

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KEYWORDS Informal Immigrants. Tian Guang. Critical Cogitation. Process Study. Humanistic Feelings

ABSTRACT The famous Chinese anthropologist Tian Guang made an extraordinary contribution in the field of Chinese overseas immigration by advancing the term “informal immigrant”. Professor Tian had been focusing on the exceptional group of Chinese immigrants in Canada, which he referred to as “informal immigrants”, with the intention of addressing key gaps in this research area. Moreover, Tian also used a novel research method that inspires people to continue such anthropological studies in future. This paper summarizes and interprets Tian’s study of informal immigrants as well as his research method from various aspects.

INTRODUCTION

There are three waves of Chinese immigrant periods to North America in history, respectively the immigrant periods from 16th to 19th century, from mid-19th century to early 20th century, and from 1970s to present. The third period may also be referred to as “the new immigrant wave”. According to statistics, the number of the third immigrants’ wave had reached 10.4 million by the end of last decade (Zhuang 2015). Many of those immigrants take Canada as an ideal country for them to immigrate to. However, there are not only legal immigrants but also a lot of illegal immigrants, who reached Canada by illegal means. Scholars usually focus research on legal immigrants while ignoring the illegal immigrants. As such, Tian’s study challenges these research assumptions and brings light to current issues regarding immigration research. Generally, behaviors of illegal immigrants are treated by the public as illegal and irregular, by whom the legitimacy is usually ignored. To avoid the prejudice on this type of immigrants, Tian puts forward a new concept of informal immigrants, which addresses a gap in the research area. His major research accomplishment in this area is represented in the book of Chinese translated version by Wang Tianjin and Gu Libusitan, published by the Commercial Press in Beijing in 2013.

Professor Tian’s Doctoral Thesis was completed in York University, Canada in 1995. It decrypts the Chinese informal immigrants in North America. His study, a modified version of his

thesis that was translated into English, was published, and receives large-scaled academic attention. Also, Tian expressed his research interests in the field of Chinese immigration by referring to the Chinese informal immigrants in Toronto, Canada, focusing on marginalized groups and eloquently articulating his insightful perspectives.

Till 2017, Tian’s academic career has passed more than 20 years. His research on the illegal immigrants, however, has never stopped. It is becoming a more and more typical case study due to the globalization and local crisis. Except for Canada, in some other areas in America (Orrenius 2001; Kwong 1997), Europe (Duvell 2006; Burroughs 2015), India (Singh 2009), Malaysia (Islam 2017) and China (Sun and Hou 2006), the research about illegal immigrants is also a very significant topic. As such the researchers maintain that Tian’s study on illegal immigrants is prospective. In recent years, problem of refugees become internationally focused, as well as an obstacle for development. Tian’s research, especially about informal immigrants’ adaption to the new environment, can provide some workable solutions to solve the international refugee problem.

This study has strong directionality with the use of anthropologic method and its analysis on migrant people’s daily life. The content of this review includes some key definitions, unique methods of fieldwork, critical thinking, humanistic feeling and hope for further study.

Conceptualizing Informal Immigrants

The central theoretical concept of the study is the informal immigrant. Before further explanation, the researchers must clarify the definition of an immigrant. It can be considered as the immigrants' right to keep in touch with local people in their social, culture, political and economic relations. These kinds of rights should be protected by the immigrant law after the immigrant's migration and permanent settlement. For the term of "emigrants", it mainly regards the emigrants' behavior as a process to study, which is essential to the whole study. The process of immigration illustrated in this research has great contribution to studies on human beings' features. It is necessary to demonstrate an academic concept distinctly, as the researchers insist that scholars must clearly describe the concept they are conceptualizing rather than ambiguously explaining it.

In terms of research objects, Tian's study primarily examines the immigrants who emigrate from China to Toronto in Canada and provides a rich multitude of insightful commentary. This study is an interesting piece of academic accomplishment discussing Chinese immigrants, with certain cultural backgrounds, experiences with how to earn the rights to survive and how to adapt to foreign environment. It describes how the Chinese people gained the rights in life and developed the capacity to adapt to circumstances in a new culture. It is still easily readable and accessible to a wide-ranging audience. With sharp-eyes, prudential thoughts, meticulous brushwork and humanistic care, Tian presented a strong theoretical, readable and profound academic feast. The immigrants are categorized as "new immigrants" according to transnationalism, which refers the migrating among countries.

The highest rate of emigration from China to other countries was between late 1980s and early 1990s, during that period China was still relatively underdeveloped. In Mainland China, informal immigrants refer to people who have applied for refugee subsidies in Canada, no matter of the acceptance or rejection of this petition. These immigrants can be classified into three types: immigration for political reasons, immigration for economic reasons, and immigration for personal reasons. Tian created the term of "informal immigrant" to indicate his research object instead of the term of "refugee". His con-

siderations and justification can be elaborated in detail below.

The research objects are not authentic refugees. "Refugees are involuntary migration group moved out from their home due to push forces." From the motivations of moving, Chinese immigrants do not possess any of the characteristics of the authentic refugee. They came to Toronto purely to pursue their dream. Although many times, things did not turn out as the immigrants hoped, they had to struggle for an application of refugee status to help for the sake of their livelihood. In fact, it is just a tactic for immigration. They would conceal their refugee status once the hard transition period passed. The Chinese immigrants are concerned about being regarded as refugees because they fear the humiliation that may ensue once their "refugee status" is made known to relatives.

Therefore, "refugee" in their minds, especially in the eyes of Chinese people, is just a stigmatized group brand. On one hand, they had to apply for a "refugee status" just to sustain their life. On the other hand, they tried hard to deny their "refugee status" to save their reputations. It is necessary to maintain academic rigor, humanism solicitude as well as academic morality. As such, Tian used the term "informal immigrants" instead of "refugees" throughout the entire study process as the former definition avoids prejudice. Tian studied informal immigrants carefully, and concluded that their status represents diversity and suffers marginality. The diversity indicates that the informal immigrants possess a sense of "dual-culturalism", as they possess both traditional Chinese culture and may internalize the culture of their new destination. The marginality refers to how these immigrants are stigmatized by others, and how they face substantial hardship, with little sympathy from authorities and neighbors.

The focus on informal immigrants is within the scope of Toronto, discussing about "who" are informal immigrants in mainland China. Why and how they decide to become immigrants and choose North America as the destination. What kind of pressure did they experience? How did they use social resources coming from personal relations and communities to deal with pressure? What kind of strategy did they used to adapt to new environments? How, why, when, where and to whom did they present themselves as and self-identify as? Finally, how were they identi-

fied by the Chinese and non-Chinese who come from different social and cultural backgrounds?

Evidence of humanistic feeling was apparently shown throughout the research because Tian had himself involved into the internal life of the research objects. To face the objects, humanistic feeling is one of the most important perspectives that he utilized in his research. As such, he did a lot to help the research objects to remove themselves from the misunderstanding of stigma to support and justify them. He adhered to the rigorous academic style when he did fieldwork, and he understood that the immigrants tried to fabricate lies for livelihood and wellbeing, just like he mentioned that the refugee system of Canada made these immigrants dishonest. In fact, he thought that it is the way to integrate the society much better. The action to trump up lies contributed to find out the underlying causes. The goal of Tian's study is to restore the truth and to present the facts through applying refugee identity in his research. As the outcomes of his research, he proposed some transcending thinking and advice about national policy. He recommended that the government should effectively formulate about the refugee hearing and decision-making process. Being a researcher, to face the transcending and deep thoughts is the responsibility that an anthropologist should have.

In addition, the researcher himself is also an immigrant from Mainland China. The personal mindset always impacted this research. During the research, Tian expressed his ideas from the view of first person. He objectively described the objects and balanced the position between "I" and the objects. The objects from informal immigrants of China are currently in foreign land and culture, due to the academic thinking, he had been in the neutral of the research, and however, some emotions were also evolved in this study unconsciously. The feeling that he experienced was the same as those of who were informal immigrants. Like many other Chinese immigrants, Tian also experienced strong diverse cultural shock, such as livelihood pressure and nostalgic thinking. At the beginning of fieldwork, he tried hard to fit his style of living to that circumstance. As most immigrants did, he kept in touch with people in China.

Dr. Tian himself is a Chinese from the Mainland China, having much in common on cultural values and experience with these immigrants, so

it is hard to avoid the objectivity in study. As a researcher, it is also hard for him to completely get involved into local life. Obviously, Tian has been in a dilemma, not only being into their life but also being into the objective position. Based on the emotional perspective, the study is from the Chinese view with humanistic care. It shows some anthropology reflections, while is there real reason and ethnography. Chen Qingde, a Chinese anthropologist, indicates that the theoretic analysis and statement of facts from ethnology or anthropology, is not only related to the facts that could not be self-assured from neutrality but also presented and helped understand the different culture background and lifestyle from the fundamental task of subjects. These goals could not be achieved by neutral value criterion (Chen 2006).

The study of Tian's informal migration is a typical experimental ethnographic study. It aims to extract some deep reflections from diversity culture. As Qu Mingan thinks, the postmodernism anthropologists deem that individualism, ego and emotion are issues of traditional ethnography frame that could not be avoided. While for the experimental ethnography, to explore the three factors could make anthropologists deeply dissect the cultural difference, because the culture diversity roots in personal emotion and the innate thought of different nation to the personal and social relationship. Without clearly investigating the feelings and experience of diverse cultures and manifestations patterns, it is difficult to appreciate its nature or even to transmit culture from one to another (Qu 2009: 36).

It is worth noting that though the study was recounted from Chinese view, Tian did his best to get the reason from the strict and emotional point of view. To reveal the humanistic feelings is based on facts and academic rational. If only from the Western view, the researchers do the same research about informal migrants, it must be another presentation of facts.

Being a Chinese, Tian tried to hide the real identity to conduct the immigrants' research and kept the mid attitude on academic view for the way of rationalization. All he did is to be appreciated. Being a spokesperson of China mainland's informal migrants, he told the truth of their tough life and analyzed the root of the main pressure, which is that they had no legal status. For them, applying for the refugee status is one of the most useful tactics to achieve their immigrant

dream, while if they are refused to accept their application, their dreams are difficult to achieve. Being in the social situation of triangle nexus, like being amongst Chinese mainland informal immigrants, the host country and their motherland, it is hard to adapt, survive and improve. When Tian stayed in their life circle, he found their endless mental state. Being in this kind of group, they are often discriminated by Chinese and North American. To conquer all the trouble as they were treated as such, they did all they could to obtain the legal status. Successfully transforming is an available strategy to gain their status.

The humanistic feeling that he mentioned is not only from his own emotion but also from the characteristic and contribution of the subject. In the preamble of *One Discipline, Four Ways*, Gao Bingzhong indicated that anthropology is a subject about getting into the inner life of a certain group to find the truth of the group's life, or in other words, anthropology is to do surveys in a specific society and to give the humanistic care for some people (Barth 2008: Preamble). Anthropology could be a basic subject of social science, due to the special view, mind and methods of subject. It shows the research in some certain societies of the various politics, economy, law, education and psychology. Thus, the study could be a sample of humanistic feelings in fieldwork undoubtedly.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The same identity as a Chinese may or can offer some help, but when Tian stepped into the field, inescapably he also had to face many troubles. Facing so many kinds of problems, Tian handled them with effect and set a perfect example for anthropologists. As an international student from China to Canada, his doctoral thesis got the local government funds, however, this made the target groups think that his work was for the government and took precautions against him. At the beginning, Tian did not know whether he should tell the truth to the objects or not. As being an anthropologist, being honest is the theoretical moral of anthropology. On the one hand, if he told his intention, the objects may give him a cold shoulder, while on the other hand, if he hid the fact and got exposed one day, the objects will not forgive his deceptive behavior. After weighing and pondering, he decided to

follow ethical standards of anthropology and disclose his identity as a researcher. During his fieldwork, he did his best to do all the affairs that he could to help the objects, and inadvertently he also gained the trust from them.

However, like he mentioned that the identity ambiguity of being in a specific cultural context put him in dilemma. Some of them regarded him as their friends but not all of them. Sometimes they respected him as a scholar but not their friend. Though Tian wanted to join them, they always kept a distance from him. Doing fieldwork is hard to assimilate into field, and one must face some unexpected things. As most anthropologists, when contacting the objects, it is inevitable to put oneself in potential danger or illegal activities. Being observed, Tian always reminded himself to appropriately deal with these sensitive issues and relative problems. He often needed to choose from many choices, whether he should disclose lies or keep silent. Keeping silent became his normal behavior except touching some illegal activities. Usually, he must tell a lie for protecting his objects so that they are not discriminated or recognized by their status. After gaining the intimate relationship, to consider the objects' profit became the main principle.

Tian always reminded himself that it is essential to make self-adjustments during fieldwork. He thought anthropology research or observation is a communion form between researchers and their objects or between observers and their objects. Facing troubles when being in fieldwork, it can be adjusted by oneself or settled by sincerity to object, which is exactly what Tian did in his study process. As is well known, the long-term participation is one of the best ways to research than any other methods. Facts speak louder than words. Maybe owing to frequency of contact with the object and serving them, gradually these informal immigrants began to regard Tian as one of their members, trustworthily and helpfully. Based on the principle of mutual benefit, Tian deemed that the principle was the best way to get on well with objects and deeply involve into the life of objects. Tian thought that the goal of fieldworkers and the community interests are complementary. Being reciprocal is the way to establish a harmonious relationship. He positively devoted his effort into the establishment process and the running of refugee organizations in Mainland China.

The organizations gradually got more attention from governments. This organization just like media conveyed their heartfelt wishes that they concerned to government and some certain communities. Successfully intervening into and obtaining study effect as expected made him rethink the position of researchers. Traditionally, the anthropologists can get their most valuable and reliable information mainly due to their status as “foreigners”. Observation and participant observation are made full use by Tian during his fieldwork. Moreover, not being a stranger, for smoothly launching work and sustained doing survey, he thoroughly involved into and properly went into the object’s life with faith, persistence and reciprocity. The methods effectively merged to use the subjective and objective of anthropology research clearly appeared in his research.

Naribilige emphasized the importance of process study, only regarding the social development and social lifestyle, as a process that can be observed as movements of traditional culture accurately, then transform it to social productive forces and positive humane capital (Na 2011). As to current overseas immigrant study, “regular immigrants” had attracted many people’s attention while “irregular immigrants” and “illegal immigrants” were not paid enough attention. Moreover, most immigrant studies are focused on the level of system and policy studies, and most of them are from macro perspective.

Tian conducted a microscopic research under the macroscopic vision. He took a concrete community as the study object, and then went deeper into daily life of immigrants who are living in the community and studied their adaptive process. It is rare to take immigrants’ behavior as a lasting process to study. The study of informal immigrants, which the writer has been studying, is deep and representative. The immigrant is a process, which is influenced by social culture and personal changes. Adaptation is not only a “process” but also can be regarded as a “state”. As a process, adaptation can be viewed as a changing process of self-identity and social system acceptance, helping immigrants to use the host country’s system to adapt local social environment. By studying how the family influenced the immigration policy and adaptation in immigrant process of Chinese mainland informal immigrants, Tian pointed out that as for Chinese, family and kinship are the center of most social

function (politics, economy, culture and entertainment). He highlighted that the self-identity of the Chinese new generation is becoming increasingly solid, and they would rather acknowledge egoism and materialism than maintain family relationships and traditional values like before.

New Chinese communities have weakened traditional structures as well as the moral community, which is based on kinship. Family kinship is no longer the main principle of social interaction. Meanwhile, the personal social relationship has been playing a very important role between Chinese and other ethnic groups, and between Chinese people of different sub-social groups and sub-cultural groups. Tian analyzed the changing of informal immigrants’ cultural values deeply through the study process. Only the immigrant individual re-views himself or herself could he or she adapt to the unfamiliar environment. However, this process should be accompanied with another process, which is the changing of their previous social and cultural values. In traditional Chinese people’s mind, the difference between subjective ego and objective ego is very vague. In Chinese, the expression of “I” and “we” is not clearly distinguished. In this case, human egos are usually displaced, as people’s social roles are usually particular. After settling down in North America, most Chinese immigrants had learned how to highlight themselves and learned how to place themselves in the position, which could be better than others. Tian just used the angle of process study to pay close attention to position changing, which was triggered by social changing of immigrants.

A good academic research project outcome can create more opportunities for the researchers to better continue their research. Tian’s study developed in the same direction as this way. In the end of the study, the writer considered modestly where is the forum for developing in future, then put forward the self-confidence for future task with prospective theories and problems. Tian took the study of immigrant process as the process of continuous research. He thought the study could further develop in the process of immigrants’ adaptation and coping skills due to the relative problem of adaptation has further rooms to be discussed. Different from the social economic adaptation, which only needs short-term observation, the observation of social cultural adaptation needs a long-term

practice. If it is true the social cultural adaptation is a protracted process, Tian thought for those Chinese informal immigrants who just came from China only three and four years the social cultural adaptation was just beginning. He had steered start-up works for the study of social adaptation of informal immigrants, and it is also a leading work. How the future's immigrants to regard their new social environment, which they need to adapt and what is their expression in ten or twenty years? What is the new insight for China and Canada? These are questions that Tian believed need further discussion.

Theoretical Dialogue: Critical Thinking

Critical thinking refers to the ability and process to assess elements of thoughts by using certain standards of evaluative thinking. Critical thinking and skills play a significant role in sincere and rightful debate as well as academic criticism (Wu 2002). The content of Tian's study is full of theoretical concepts, which are logically cogent. The process of argumentation is well argued and precisely reasoned. For readers, the study is not only a popular reading material, but also a rich source for theory. The writing process of a thesis also encompasses a process of developing dialogue with theory experts. Tian not only borrowed existing ideas but also rethought existing theories critically. He utilized theory to explain facts and presented evidence to construct a dialogue with past theories, and critical comment or judgment about existing theory and further supply and re-explain or innovate based on evidence.

Throughout the study, Tian communicated with several theorists hailing from different fields. In the process of dialogue with previous theories, Tian kept critical attitude as the support to read those theories critically. As the investigation deepens, the former theory cannot assure to support research objects in certain background so the writer would use existing resources to explain within certain scope. The critical consciousness of the writer could have built the foundation of an excellent doctoral dissertation, while the construction of critical thinking and theory were based on the field research. Ma Chongwei pointed out that fieldwork is not just to collect resources but the process to produce classical theories, including collecting information through participating in observation as well

as other methods (Ma and Zhang 2005).

The theories, which support the study mainly, include ego, self-expression and self-identification, nationality, national identity and adaptive process, pressure, solution and adaptation. Throughout the research, one can review the Tian's critical thinking through his theoretical discussion about ego, self-expression and self-identification. He had introduced how Western scholars, such as Marsella and Johnson, define "ego" according to their culture and then put forward their own ideas. However, when the researchers consider the impacts of culture, it should be not only take the difference between China and Western world on the definition, but also consider how the "ego" changes in different environments from broader angle of social and culture change. As such, the writer developed academic dialogue with Hu Qian, Du Weiming and Xu Langguang about the theoretical study about the change of ego and self-consciousness. He thought that the ego of traditional Chinese is not fixed, if without any support from society, oneself could not develop at all.

Tian had put forward the expression of "ego" after reviewed and dialogued with theories of ego, self-expression and self-identification. In short, the ego of traditional Chinese take society as the center, it is obviously different from the Western people's take on himself or herself as the center or Xu Lang Guang's theory of the new Chinese style "ego", Tian had a profound understanding about the theory when he discoursed to it, and he also extended the theory on this basis. He combined this theory and ego theory together and then put forward the concept of "dignity" and "face", which are important for Chinese after he had borrowed the idea from Goffman who made an analogy of social interaction and dramatic performance. Tian made the annotation to "face culture" of Chinese culture during his investigation. He thought that the face for Chinese just like social capital, which can be built for personal social relationship, if one's face is enough he or she could attain relationship and expand social relationship network easily. Tian absorbed current theories critically based on dialogue with many relative theories, then put forward a theoretical explanation, which is suitable to study. He had used the concepts of self-expression and self-identification in the study mainly referring to the process of informal

immigrants from Mainland China who are shaped by different identities. Due to this the ego is unfixed so it can form multiple identities.

The critical thought is not naturally or probably existing in untrained and spontaneous thought. Nobody can declare himself or herself as a scholar with complete critical thought while just in some extent. One has certain degree of insight and blind spot with tendency of self-delusion. Therefore, the skill of critical thought and the development of practice should be a lifelong endeavor (Wu 2002). Tian's critical academic thought in the process of study is worth learning and borrowing, especially for those young scholars who are just embarking on their academic path. Tian has taught that one should not simply just follow blindly with authoritative anthropological theory, but should dialogue with theories based on understanding and mastering them. The keynote of dialogue is communication. Through communication, the scholars can put forward advices as well as creative ideas. It is very important for scholars to query in academic study, and then put forward theories from different perspectives. Tian's critical thought has given scholars enlightenment, so it is necessary for scholars to cultivate critical thought.

CONCLUSION

The study on the discovery of the Chinese informal migrants in North America is an academic dissertation with academic norm and depth. Professor Tian based on detailed anthropological fieldwork, proposed a new immigrant category to be termed as informal immigrants that have not been studied enough by scholars previously. Locating informal immigrants to study in the wider context of social, political and psychological structures, Tian dialogued with different theories such as ego, nationalism and pressure theories. To integrate into the informal immigrants group, Professor Tian insisted on the principle of being mutually beneficial, adjusting himself when meeting difficulties, undertaking the doubt and exclusion from all sides. The long-term deep fieldwork provided the explanation of a typical case for the fieldwork methods of anthropology.

The research focuses on the "informal migration" of marginal groups, which shows the humanitarian mind and the migration behavior as a process, so the consideration on the same

time process research also provided room to research migration problem. Basing on the dedicate fieldwork, Tian presented an excellent work about international migration. Pondering the key points of the whole study, the outcome of the research provides some useful suggestions to readers.

Readers should pay attention to the initiative of informal migrate group. The initiative has penetrated every part of the study. This kind of migration possessing so much initiative is because of their special status in a pristine environment and culture. These people are not only ignored by the new state, but also are prejudiced by the formal Chinese migration society in Canada. This group adopted every strategy to survive and get happy life. The interesting thing is that they even have to cheat to approach the preferential policy of the Canada government. The informal migrants initiatively fabricate a story illustrating that they are forced to leave their county because of their democratic activities to get the identified refugee status, which is an effortless way to obtain Canadian citizenship.

Besides, the initiative also presents on how they change their self-identity, how they deal with the relationship with the Canadian and formal Chinese migrants, how to fight for the acceptance by Canada society, and how to alleviate the strength. Moreover, the way that Tian participated the informal group during the research process should be a good example to consider by relevant study projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are two kinds of investigators when conducting fieldworks as anthropologists—those who are neutral and those who take initiative to get involved with local people. Obviously, Tian adopted the second approach in his study. In fact, it is a reciprocity relation between investigator and those being investigated. In the process of research, Tian played roles of spokesman, translator, leader and so on. It means that he got involved into the informants' lives and helped them to face and overcome the difficulties. However, a dilemma situation occurred when the researcher got involved in the informants' lives too closely. The researcher might influence informants' thinking and social life as well, which should be devoid from the perspective of traditional view. Facing this dilemma, Tian held the opinion that it is not necessary to wor-

ry about it, the researcher should be involved in the informants' social lives, which can guarantee the formation of the good relationship between investigator and informant if the influence is positive to the people being studied.

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Paper received for publication on October 2016
Paper accepted for publication on December 2017