

Ethnological Economics with Chinese Attributes: History and Theoretical Contributions

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Abstract

This paper aims to comprehensively review the development of ethnological economics and its main theoretical contributions by presenting an introduction to the international community of applied economics to attract their attention. Ethnological economics is a branch of applied economics that studies the economy of ethnic minorities and ethnic regions, mainly in China. It discusses the content and development history of ethnological economics, details the contents of ethnological economics in different periods since the reform and opening up and composes the research history of ethnic economics. It also summarizes the significance of ethnological economics, emphasizes its role in promoting the collaborative economic development of ethnic regions in China, and provides an outlook for future research.

Keywords

Ethnological Economics, Development History, Reform and Opening Up, Economic Development

1. Introduction

Ethnological economics, a branch of applied economics with Chinese features, is recognized as a localized discipline by Chinese scholars. It was initiated and developed by Professor Shi Zhengyi, a famous Chinese economist, and his colleagues and students during China's modernization, given China's status as a multinational country. This paper aims to comprehensively review the development of ethnological economics and its main theoretical contributions. Furthermore, it will present an introduction to the international community of applied economics to attract their attention. Ethnological economics in China was based on China's long history as a unified, multinational socialist state. As a result, enthusiastic theoretical researchers coined ethnological economics as a new

branch of economics. China is composed of 56 ethnic groups, including the Han Chinese. Ethnic peoples other than Han Chinese had long suffered from uneven economic and cultural development in their settlements due to historical and geographical reasons. However, ethnic areas have economically outperformed others in contemporary reform and development efforts. Therefore, it is essential and urgent to investigate further the characteristics of the economic development of ethnic groups and their settlements.

Professor Fei Xiaotong and Professor Shi Zhengyi coined and promoted anthropology and ethnography in China. They devoted their lives to studying anthropology and ethnological economics and successfully applied their research results to various social sectors (Tian, 2021). They argued that studying ethnographic economics in China has enabled the integration of ethnic and economic issues. Specifically, scholars and researchers have examined the economy from an ethnographic perspective and ethnicity from an economic perspective, reflecting the unique value of economic anthropology research (Shi, 1993). From the perspective of economic anthropology, Tian (Tian, 2015) examines how economic problems arise and how economic theories evolve, contributing to the development of ethnological economics in China.

Since its inception, the theoretical and empirical research of ethnological economics has been focused on the significant issues in the economic and social development of ethnic regions in China. Chinese scholars proposed and created ethnological economics as an emerging discipline that grew with the reform and opening up. Over the past 40 years, the theoretical system of ethnological economics has been improved, the quality of research results has been improved, and the contents of research have become more and more diversified. Moreover, talent training has been increasing in scale and level, contributing significantly to the economic and social development of ethnic areas. In short, ethnological economics is an emerging discipline growing in China with strong Chinese attributes. With Chinese features, it is localized in China (Tian, 2021; Tian & Zhang, 2014). It aims to meet the economic and social development needs of ethnic regions in China and serve the ethnic work of Chinese governments at all levels.

Moreover, theoretical innovations are continuously made in specific studies. This paper uses literature review and analysis as the primary research methods. Based on the research results on ethnological economics in China (Huang & Yu, 2018), the research on ethnological economics was divided into four stages according to the progress of China's reform and opening up since the early 1980s. The first is the initial stage of ethnological economics (the 1980s), and the second is the deepening stage of ethnological economics research (the 1990s). The third is the fast-growing stage of ethnological economics research (the early 21st century), and the fourth is the stage for new opportunities in ethnological economics research (since the 1920s). Based on this, analyzing the focus and main theoretical perspectives of ethnological economics research in different pe-

riods is valuable. Moreover, it introduces the trajectory, characteristics and achievements of the economic development of ethnic regions in the past 40 years of reform and opening-up by reviewing the changes in research themes and contents of ethnological economics.

2. The Initial Stage of Ethnological Economics (The 1980s)

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the first generation of ethnic economists, represented by Professor Shi Zhengyi et al., proposed and founded ethnological economics despite many difficulties in response to the needs of the reform and opening-up era. At the same time, they devoted their efforts and pioneered in establishing research institutions, building the fundamental theories of the discipline and cultivating talents. During this period, the research of ethnological economics was strongly supported by the National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China, Minzu University of China and other related departments and universities. Furthermore, a particular research institute (the Minorities Economic Research Institute of the Minzu University of China) and a national academic organization (the China Association of Ethnic Economy) were established. Led by these two platforms, the national economy researchers were mobilized to investigate and study the ethnic economy in China. These two critical academic platforms became the center of national ethnological economics research for a long time afterward.

The annual conferences held by the China Association of Ethnic Economy since its establishment show that ethnological economics research has been based on reform and opening up. The theme was the strategies for the economic development of minority areas in China in 1982 and the theories of economic reform of minority areas in China in 1983. It was the development of the commodity economy in ethnic areas in China in 1986 and the opening of ethnic areas in China in 1987. During this period, ethnological economics research emphasized the economic system reform and economic development strategies of ethnic areas in China.

Some ethnological economics studies on economic system reform have specific emphases. Based on the specificity of ethnic areas in China, they adopt more flexible policies in price, investment, fiscal and financial systems, depending on the local conditions and characteristics of the regions and ethnic groups. They also illustrate that the household contract responsibility system has significantly motivated farmers in their production and achieved positive results. Some further studies have revealed working methods unsuited to the reality of ethnic areas in China. Therefore, it is suggested that the key to deepening rural reform in ethnic areas in China is to transcend the household contract responsibility system as a uniform model nationwide. Thus, it can recreate a microeconomic system compatible with its traditional business organization and facilitate its product development. Developing commodity economy and market economy has been accompanied by economic system restructuring. The reform starts with

gradually liberalizing the scope of market regulation and developing a commodity economy. Ethnological economics researchers have thoroughly researched the historical foundations and accelerated development of the commodity economy in ethnic areas in China. These studies analyze the basis, characteristics and influencing factors of developing commodity economy and market economy of ethnic minorities and ethnic areas in China. Besides, they actively explore ways to accelerate the development of commodity and market economies, such as Li's Research on the Commodity Economy in Ethnic Areas in China (The Ethnic Publishing House, 1986) and his papers. More studies have indicated that backward productivity levels, unfavorable physical and geographical environments, natural economic structures, and non-economic factors are the main constraints to the commodity economy in ethnic areas in China.

Moreover, it is recommended to transform business practices, change concepts, and build social service networks while accelerating economic restructuring and product development. Furthermore, it is recommended to transform business practices, change concepts, and build social service networks while accelerating economic restructuring and product development. In this way, it can contribute to developing the commodity economy in ethnic areas in China (Kuang, 2021).

In September 1982, the Chinese leadership proposed China's economic construction goal from 1981 to the late 20th century. China would quadruple the annual gross output value of China's agriculture and industry and enable its people to live a well-off material and cultural life while continuously improving economic benefits. Around this strategic goal, ethnological economics researchers combine national and regional conditions and conclude that ethnic areas in China are minority-specific, region-specific, backward, complicated and universally developed. The strategy for the economic development of ethnic regions in China should be based on China's overall strategy and adapted to the local conditions. The breakthrough in developing the national economy lies in the availability of economic and technological capabilities. Such capabilities are necessary to combine natural resources with other economic development factors in a few ethnic areas in western China. The first step to improve economic and technological capabilities is to sell natural resources and attract technology and capital with high-profit margins. The second step is to strengthen intellectual development, improve the quality of human resources and address the problem of human resources. China Association of Ethnic Economy and Minorities Economic Research Institute of Minzu University of China edited and published "Ethnological Economics Research (Vol. 2)" (Ningxia People's Publishing House, 1984). It is a collection of papers dedicated to the economic development strategies of ethnic regions in China, including 13 articles by Yu, Liu and Shi et al. Moreover, it involves a comprehensive study of the economic development strategies of ethnic regions in China and a special investigation of eight ethnic provinces and territories.

The “two-step” strategy implemented since China’s reform and opening up has widened the gap between the Eastern and Western regions. The study of national economic development strategies was combined with narrowing the gap. A comparative analysis was conducted on the two-step theory, the gradient theory, the leap theory, the synchronization theory and other regional economic strategies of the time. The accelerating strategy was introduced on this basis, and Cao and Ma fully elaborated and justified the accelerating strategy. While investigating development strategies, researchers in ethnological economics have addressed the issue of coordinated economic, social and natural development. In ethnological economics research, the development of Western China is a critical element in the development strategy of ethnic areas in China. It is suggested that we analyze and choose the economic structure and model and establish a holistic concept of economic development to develop the economy of minority areas in China. At the same time, it is essential to maintain a dialogue with nature and build relationships of mutual trust between people, society, and nature.

In the late 1980s, young scholars, including Zhu, Guo, Feng, and Tian, founded the Center for the Study of Western China Development. They organized surveys and studies on the economic development of the Western region and published several influential papers. Meanwhile, they proposed creating a theory of Western China. In this regard, in the book *The 1980s and Chinese Economists*, Liu presents a picture of the research on Western ethnic areas in the 1980s. From economists’ intellectual explorations, Liu investigated the specific events of the Center for Western Development Studies. It facilitates the understanding, awareness, and examination of early research on the development of Western China (Liu, 2019). In this period, Shi (Shi, 1988) edited the book *Research on Economic Development of Western Ethnic Areas in China* (The Ethnic Publishing House, 1988). In conjunction with the regional economic development plan of the Seventh Five-Year Plan, Shi systematically investigated the economic development strategies of ethnic regions in western China (Shi, 1988).

Given that those ethnic areas in China are inland and along the border, some scholars have presented the “two-way circulation” theory for opening Chinese and foreign markets. By discussing the economic relationship between the East and the West, they analyzed the operation mechanism of the embedded economy and its drawbacks. Also, they examined the relationship between the transmission and creation of resources in the economic development of ethnic regions in China. Ethnic economists also actively participated in academic exchanges in China and initiated theoretical debates on some issues, such as the debate between gradient and anti-gradient theories (Liu, 2019). He and Xia proposed “the gradient shift law” of technology from the East to the Middle and then to the West of China. Based on this, several young scholars from Inner Mongolia proposed and discussed the anti-gradient theory. They argue that underdeveloped regions can achieve leapfrog development by relying on their rich resources and importing capital, technology and talents globally. Hence, it is not

necessarily subject to “the gradient shift law” (Guo, 1986).

At the same time, scholars conducted applied research in close connection with China’s reform and opening-up efforts. Also, they discussed the title and affiliation of the discipline, research objects and methods when the discipline was first established. The discipline is mainly termed “ethnological economics,” “ethnic economy of China,” “the economy of ethnic regions in China,” and “ethnic development economics.” While advocating the term “ethnological economics,” Shi divided the object of study of ethnological economics into broad and narrow categories. In a narrow sense, he considered that ethnological economics addresses the economic problems of China’s minority groups.

Moreover, he noted that the primary task of ethnological economics is to serve the cause of the economic construction of minority areas in China. Those who insist on the term of China’s ethnic economy believe that its primary task is to study and reveal the characteristics, structure and laws of the socialist economic development of ethnic areas in China and provide the basis for China to formulate policies. In this way, it can accelerate the socialist modernization of ethnic areas in China. As a new discipline integrating ethnography and economics, ethnic development economics has emerged in response to the objective requirements of China’s economic development. This discipline examines and analyzes the economic life of each ethnic group, historically and currently. It reveals the typical characteristics of the economic development of various ethnic groups, the industrial structure and its development pattern, the strategic choice of economic growth and the development model. Moreover, it points out that research on China’s national economy should be based on ethnic areas in China (Shi, 1998).

Despite the differences between the three terms mentioned above, they have significant similarities. They all agree that ethnological economics is an interdisciplinary discipline, and its research task or focus is on the economic construction and development of China’s ethnic minorities and ethnic areas. Yu believes that the ethnic economy and the economy of minority areas in China are similar and closely related, but they are two different concepts. He also pointed out that the ethnic economy is part of the national economy, while the economy of minority areas in China is part of the regional economy. The scholars did not make a strict distinction in the subsequent studies. Most studies of ethnological economics or ethnic economy emphasize the economy of ethnic regions in China or the integration of ethnicity and region. In this regard, Wang argues that there are distinct differences between the national economy, ethnic economy, and the economy of ethnic regions in China. The definition of ethnic structure and regional status delineates these three concepts. The connection between the three concepts is also visible, as the form of economy is inseparable from the behavior of specific persons and specific spatial states. The national economy is necessarily implemented and expressed through the particular activity areas of specific ethnic groups. The ethnic economy is necessarily mirrored in the economy of

minority areas in China. The economy of minority areas in China must also accommodate the ethnic economy (Wang, 1999a).

These three concepts are often abbreviated or used similarly in real life. The ethnic economy or even the economy of minority areas in China is abbreviated to the national economy or the economy of ethnic regions in China. It should be noted that the famous ethnologist Professor Yang Kun proposed the relationship between Western economic anthropology and ethnological economics when the latter was coined. He introduced Western economic ethnography (economic anthropology) as a marginal discipline between political economy and ethnography. Moreover, he considered the discipline of Chinese ethnological economics as part of economic ethnography.

Organized and mobilized by the China Association of Ethnic Economy, a favorable academic environment was established for national economy research during this period. Academic exchanges and collaborations are closely developed, with hundreds of participants attending the annual conference each year. Professor Shi presided over the project “Research on the Economic Development of Minority Areas in China,” a Philosophy and Social Science Planning project for the Seventh Five-Year Plan of China (1986-1990). The project was launched at the end of 1986, and Shi commenced his investigations and writing in 1987. The project consists of 3 main topics, 29 sub-topics, 10 special reports, and 22 monographs (some of which were published in the early 1990s). The project produced a group of significant primary and applied research achievements and trained a group of excellent young and middle-aged scholars.

During this period, Shi (Shi, 1988) published a book entitled *Research on Economic Development of Western Ethnic Areas in China*, Tian and Han (Tian & Han, 1987) published a book entitled *Choice and Development: A Review of Economic Revitalization in the Western Ethnic Regions*. Tian (Tian, 1988) published his monograph entitled *Ethnic Regions in China: The Opening to the Outside World and Economic Development* Cao and Ma (Cao & Ma, 1990) published a book entitled *A Strategic Concept Before Take-off*, and Li (Li, 1990) published a book entitled *The Development of Tibetan Economy and Countermeasures*. These works were highly appreciated and provided essential theoretical support for the economic development of ethnic regions in China.

Since establishing ethnological economics, scholars have attached great importance to basic theoretical research and talent training. The first professional textbook on ethnological economics was “*Introduction to Ethnic Economy in China*” (Compilation Group, 1985). The book was initially edited in 1979, completed in 1981, used as an internal textbook, and revised and published in 1985. It initially formed the research system of ethnological economics and systematically researched and defined its research objects, methods, and contents. The China Association of Ethnic Economy and the Minorities Economic Research Institute of Minzu University of China (1983) edited and published *Ethnological Economics Research* (Vol. 1). The book contains papers on ethnological eco-

nomics research by Yu, Shi, Huang, Shi, Dong, Yang, and Li. These papers cover the objective basis, research objects, methods, and the economy of minority areas in China and the ethnic economy. They are critical to developing the discipline and constructing the theoretical system. Shi's book *Ethnological Economics and the Four Modernizations of Ethnic Areas in China* is an influential work on ethnological economics (Shi, 1987). It includes 11 papers from Shi between 1979 and 1986 on ethnological economics and the strategies for developing the national economy. Regarding talent cultivation, the Minorities Economic Research Institute of the Minzu University of China and Yanbian University first enrolled master's students in Chinese ethnic economy in 1982 and 1984, respectively.

The older generation of economists and ethnographers, including Yu Guanyuan, Ya Hanzhang and Yang Kun, strongly supported the establishment of ethnological economics. The leading representative researchers in the early years of the discipline included Shi Zhengyi, Huang Wanlun, Dong Zijian, Shi Zheng, Bayin Menghe, Fei Huaixin, Xu Jingjun, Pan Wen, Zhang Kewu, Li Wenchao, Li Zhuqing, Bai Zhensheng, Na Ri, Kuang Haolin, Yang Jingchu, Zhao Suqin, Zhang Jitao, and Li Fuchun. They made significant contributions to the creation and development of ethnological economics. Some young scholars emerged, like Guo Fansheng, Pan Zhaodong, Cao Zhenghai, Tian Guang, Wang Wenchang, Long Yuanwei, Ma Biao, Tan Minghua, Zhang Xietang, and Lai Cunli. They published many influential papers as the young force of ethnological economics research.

3. The Deepening Stage of Ethnological Economics Research (The 1990s)

In the 1990s, the ethnological economics research system and framework were initially formed based on its achievements in the 1980s, with a broadened scope and more profound contents. More talents were cultivated, and the research team became stabilized. The research team in this period remained centered on the first generation of scholars engaged in ethnological economics research in the 1980s. At the same time, with the development of the discipline and the expansion of talent training, a more stable research team represented by universities was established. Regarding talent training, South-Central Minzu University enrolled master's students in China's ethnic economy since 1991, and the Minzu University of China began training doctoral students in China's ethnic economy in 1994 (Ma, 2019).

There are still different terms in the discipline, such as "ethnological economics" and "the economy of ethnic regions in China." Despite the differences in research systems and contents, the core areas are ethnic minorities and the economic development of ethnic regions in China, with a significant problem orientation. While researchers continued to study and address the issue of "disparities," they also focused on the economic reform of ethnic regions in China,

the cultivation and development of a market economy, and the opening up of China to the outside world, as well as ecological issues. The China Association of Ethnic Economy organized academic activities of different scales, but it was less capable and influential in organizing and mobilizing national academic research than in the 1980s.

Disparity remained a hot topic of ethnological economics research at that time. At that time, researchers mainly comparatively analyzed the discrepancy in development levels between ethnic areas in China and the eastern coastal regions and the national average using relevant data. Based on this, they examined the causes of disparity in economic development, explored the possibility of narrowing it, and proposed some countermeasures. Meanwhile, they argued that the long-term unbalanced effect was detrimental to the coordinated development of the national economy and the stability of the frontier. In 1992, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China formalized the objective of economic system reform to establish a socialist market economy. In 1993, it issued a Decision on Some Issues concerning setting up the Socialist Market Economy. During this time, the works on the market economy of ethnic areas in China primarily explored the unique characteristics of the market economy of ethnic areas in China, the fundamental role of resource allocation, the cultivation of the market economy and the improvement of the mechanism. Also, they addressed the construction of the rule of law in the market economy and the challenges and opportunities in the structure of the market economy. They initially outline the basic framework for building a market economy in ethnic areas in China, which has significant theoretical and application values.

In June 1992, Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and other documents centered on sustainable development were adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The Chinese government subsequently prepared Agenda 21 - White Paper on China's Population, Environment, and Development in the 21st Century in March 1994. It incorporated the sustainable development strategy into the long-term planning of China's economic and social development for the first time. Since then, ethnological economics research has dealt with the characteristics of the ecological environment, the environmental problems facing ethnic areas in China, and the path of economic development under environmental constraints. It also pioneered the compensation mechanism for the ecological environment. With the rapid development of border trade and the implementation of China's strategy of opening up along the border, more and more studies have been conducted on the opening up of ethnic areas in China and border trade. Based on the summary of experiences in border trade, it proposes countermeasures for further development (Wang, 2002).

During the 1990s, many books were published under ethnological economics or Chinese ethnic economy, even more than in the first decade of the 21st century. Although these books were published in the 1990s, many continue the re-

search done in the 1980s. Most of the authors are also the first generation of ethnological economics researchers. These works share common aspects in the objects, methods and contents of ethnological economics research and have unique characteristics and research systems. Some supplement and improve the original study, while others attempt to establish a new research system. The representative works include *Ethnic Development Economics* by GaoYanhong (Gao, 1990). *An Introduction to Ethnological Economics* by Shi Zhegnyi (Shi, 1993), *Ethnological Economics Tutorials* (Shi, 1997), and *Contemporary Chinese Economic Dictionary - Ethnic Economy* by Chen Hong and Ha Jingxiong (Chen & Ha, 1993). In addition, there are *Ethnological Economics* by Chen (Chen, 1994), *Tutorial on China's Ethnic Economy* by Huang Wanlun and Li Wenchao (Huang & Li, 1998), *Introduction to China's Ethnic Economy* by Li Zhuqing and Na Ri (Li & Na, 1998), and *The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau: Population and Environmental Carrying Capacity* by Wang Tianjin (Wang, 1998). Their theoretical studies have been presented with their distinctive features. In his thesis, Wang elaborated on a profound theory of compensation mechanism. He argues that Tibetans, Qiang and Han Chinese living on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau plant grasses and trees to conserve water. Thus, the Yangtze, Yellow, and Lancang-Mekong rivers flow with the materialized abstract human labor described by the Marxist labor theory of value. A Socialist market economy can only develop if the labor paid for is reasonably remunerated. In 2000, Wang's treatise *The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau: Population and Environmental Carrying Capacity* won the first prize in publications of the Social Science Award of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China.

The *Contemporary Chinese Economic Dictionary - Ethnic Economy* is a collection of research from the 1980s. With two million words and nearly 50 contributors, the book contains extensive information and a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the national economy. During 1990-1999, about 20 papers were published on the nature of ethnological economics, research objects, methods, content, and its relationship with other disciplines. They include Jia's *Perspectives on the Development of Ethnological Economics Disciplines* (Jia, 1992). Chen's *Theoretical Development of Ethnological Economics* (Chen, 1993), and Long's *Review and Prospects of Ethnic Minority Economic Research* (Long, 1998), Wang's *Economic Anthropology and Ethnological Economics* (Wang, 1998) and Wang's *Several Issues on Ethnological Economics Research* (Wang, 1999a, 1999b).

These papers all acknowledge the significance and necessity of the discipline and offer constructive suggestions for its further development. Some scholars also propose different research ideas and systems. Unlike other studies, Chen's views on the object of study, disciplinary relationship, and research content of ethnological economics aroused much attention and discussion at that time. Chen believed that the research object and priority of ethnological economics would focus on the economic development of nationalities after industrializa-

tion. At the same time, he thought ethnological economics was the product of economic anthropology and development economics. In the methodology of ethnological economics, he considered that ethnological economics integrates physical indicators, national cultural characteristics and the choice of social goals based on the equal status and comprehensive development of national economies in the global structure. Ethnological economics describes, explains and develops arguments about economic processes and institutional changes that continue under different cultural conditions. Thus, it enables all nationalities' shared prosperity and similar progress within the same development process. National economic issues must be investigated in the direct association of anthropology and economics. Moreover, it should transcend these two old sciences and explore the right path to develop the national economy. In their later studies, scholars borrowed and applied more economic anthropology theories and methods and pioneered the study of economic anthropology in China (Chen, 1993).

Regarding the background and research system of ethnological economics, it draws on the theories and methods of economics and ethnography and shares standard contents and research methods. However, it has no direct relationship with western related disciplines, nor is it directly united with Western disciplines. With independent research objects and tasks, ethnological economics research is a discipline with Chinese characteristics, proposed and created by Chinese scholars. Instead of promoting specific disciplines as the theoretical roots of a particular discipline, it is better to downplay their relationship as related disciplines. Commonly, disciplines are theoretically correlated, and theories often induce and penetrate each other to foster new disciplines.

Regarding the relationship between economic anthropology and ethnological economics, it has been suggested that they overlap and intersect in some aspects of their objects and scope of study. However, the differences between economic anthropology and ethnological economics are much more significant than their commonalities. They differ widely in the problems they address, their functions, and their research approaches. Therefore, they are irreplaceable in accomplishing their respective tasks. However, as an emerging social science discipline being formed and improved, ethnological economics can draw valuable nutrients from economic anthropology (Zhang & Yang, 2016).

Following the research object of generalized ethnological economics, Shi edited the *Ethnological Economics Tutorials* to build a systematic research system of ethnological economics. As a textbook for graduate students, it plays a significant role in talent training. He constructs the theoretical system of the discipline from the perspective of generalized ethnological economics. He discusses the relationship between ethnicity and economy, various aspects of China's national economy, the national economy of developing countries and the ethnic economy of developed countries. Thus, for the first time, the disciplinary term ethnological economics indeed conformed to the content of its research. The

publication of this book marks the gradual maturation of the theoretical construction of ethnological economics (Shi, 1984). Wang regarded ethnological economics as a synthesis of economics and ethnology, as it concretizes the research direction of economics, deepens the research content of ethnology, and is an organic combination of economics and ethnology. It is a system of economic theory with a distinctive national character. Ethnological economics studies the forms of movement of productive forces and relations of production under the combined effect of general economic laws and special laws.

The methodology of ethnological economics is divided into three levels: epistemological, basic argumentative, and specific analytical approaches. Also, it studies how the interests of the nation are realized and what is the economic basis of national unity. His view further deepens the awareness of ethnological economics research. Moreover, he clarifies the relationship between ethnological economics and economics and ethnography and the main areas of study (Wang, 1999a).

4. The Fast-Growing Stage of Ethnological Economics Research (The Early 21st Century)

The Central Economic Work Conference held in November 1999 listed the develop-the-west strategy as the focus of economic work. It put forward the basic ideas and strategic priorities for implementing the develop-the-west strategy. In 2000, the develop-the-west strategy was fully implemented. Thus, the Western region became a hot spot for economic theorists, providing a new historical opportunity for ethnological economics research. Moreover, national economy research has received more attention and concern. In addition to the previous institutions and personnel engaged in national economy research, many central and local research institutions and universities are investigating the economic problems of Western China and ethnic regions in China. More researchers are working on ethnological economics and economic research of ethnic areas of China, with more research results and broader research fields. With a grander scale and higher levels of talent training, the researchers have become younger and highly educated. Since 2000, ethnological economics research has produced numerous results in various fields and subjects. In addition to the basic theoretical research, most research results are found in national culture and economic development, finance and economics, population, economy and employment, industrial action, development-driven poverty alleviation, urbanization and industrialization, and transformation of economic development. The research also involves some national strategies and policies. Specifically, China has formulated strategies and policies for developing the West, building new countryside, and building a moderately prosperous society. Also, China offers exceptional support for ethnic groups with small populations and issues the Program to Revitalize Border Areas and Enrich Residents' Lives. China launched paired assistance programs between developed areas and less developed ethnic autonomous areas

(Mou, 2002).

In development strategy research, ethnological economics researchers continue to study the gap between areas and the accelerated development in ethnic regions. On this basis, it comprehensively examines development issues by incorporating new development theories and ideas. Moreover, it introduces and explains the development concepts such as harmoniousness acceleration, inclusive development, people-oriented development and endogenous development. Hence, it further enriches and improves the theory of national economic development. Some scholars have also researched the economic development of ethnic regions in China using the theory of late-development advantage and the view of great-leap-forward development. Since 2000, national economy researchers have conducted large-scale socio-economic surveys in urban and rural ethnic areas in China. They have published research reports and economic surveys with abundant data and comprehensive content. The representative ones are Liu and Li's "The Report on Economic Development of Ethnic Regions in China" (Liu & Li, 2011). It also includes the Minority Village Survey Series organized by Yunnan University and the China Ethnic Economic Village Survey Series organized by Minzu University of China (Liu & Li, 2011).

Regarding industrial economy research, it has conducted a holistic study on the development, structural optimization and transformation and upgrading of primary, secondary and tertiary industries. Meanwhile, it also researches characteristic agriculture and animal husbandry, tourism, cultural industry, and ethnic medicine industry. It proposes targeted countermeasures based on analyzing these industries' development basis, advantages and problems. As a critical component of the economy of ethnic regions in China, grassland animal husbandry has distinct ethnic and regional characteristics. Its related researches are also abundant, mainly related to the characteristics of grassland animal husbandry, ecological protection and sustainable development, industrialization of animal husbandry, and changes in pasture systems. Scholars study the finance of ethnic areas in China mainly on fiscal transfers and tax incentives, cultivation of financial markets, formation and development of capital markets, rural finance, financial support in developing specific regions, protection of financial development rights, financial regulation, and financial poverty alleviation. Most of these studies propose countermeasures from the specificity of financial development and the needs of ethnic areas in China (Deng et al., 2022).

The research on ethnic culture and national economy yielded the most results in this period. The research topics include the psychology of national economy, the interaction between ethnic culture and economy, the development of national economy and cultural change, and the cultural explanation of national economic behavior. They also address cultural preservation in the economic development of ethnic regions in China and the transformation of the economic system and cultural adaptation in agricultural and pastoral areas. In 2002, Wang Tianjin wrote *Environmental Resource Industry in the West*, illustrating the

picture of a new economic sector, the environmental resource industry, with innovative ideas. The book advocates adopting various novel approaches to systematically produce fresh air on a large scale in the western regions inhabited by ethnic minorities. Furthermore, it should follow the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to trade carbon sinks and create a beautiful environment. In 2004, the “Western Environmental Resources Industry” won the “Selected Works Award” for the Ninth Five “One” Project¹ for the construction of spiritual civilization in Liaoning Province (Wang, 2002).

Scholars have studied and explored the policy and rule of law of the national economy. They have systematically reviewed national economic policies, analyzed the changes, achievements, and problems in implementing national economic policies, and proposed ideas for further improvement. The legal system of the national economy, which was the weak point of previous studies, has been significantly enhanced since 2000. Deng & Li (Deng & Li, 2005) proposed specific legal measures to ensure the develop-the-west strategy, ecological protection of ethnic areas in China, development-driven poverty alleviation, and urbanization, enriching the research content of the discipline.

With the increase in institutions granting master’s and doctoral degrees in ethnological economics, basic theoretical research has been highly valued with increased research results. New research findings have emerged in discussing the nature of ethnological economics, objects, methods and contents of the research. These researches mainly focus on the heart of the discipline, its orientation, research objects, and relationship with other disciplines, core concepts, theoretical system, research methods and contents. At the same time, they identify the difficulties facing the development of the discipline and propose ideas for improving the discipline. Some representative studies include Li’s *A Discussion on Several Issues in Ethnological Economics Research* (Li, 2003), Wang’s *On Economic Research from an Ethnic Perspective* (Wang, 2005), and Ye’s *Globalization, Ethnicity and the New Developmental Perspective: Theoretical Considerations Based on Ethnological Economics* (Ye, 2005). They also include Deng and Li’s *A Shift in Thinking about Ethnological Economics Research* (Deng & Li, 2005), and Bao’s *Economics of Ethnic Minorities in China: Core Concepts, Conceptual Systems and Theoretical Implications* (Bao, 2010).

The above papers present some new suggestions and ideas on constructing the theoretical system of ethnological economics, logical starting points, core concepts, research contents and paradigms. They are of great significance to deepen and improve the theoretical system of the discipline. Several textbooks and monographs titled or related to ethnological economics were also published in this period. They include Li’s *New Theories on the Development of National Economy* (Li, 2004), and Long’s *Introduction to Ethnic Economy Research in China* (Long, 2004).

¹Five “One” Project refers to the production of a good book, a good TV series, a good play, a good film, a good article.

In this period, scholars focused on the fundamental theoretical research of ethnological economics. Deng and Li believe that the further development of ethnological economics theory depends on the overall shift of research thinking from the ethnographic to the economic paradigm. The combination of ethnography and economics should be within the framework of economics. The most significant feature of the new ethnological economics is its integrated approach: firstly, it is based on economics research, with interdisciplinary research in ethnography and social anthropology. Secondly, it incorporates economic and non-economic factors into a unified theoretical framework of economics for multi-factor analysis. Thirdly, it is a comprehensive view of development that considers the economic development, social progress, and political stability of minority areas in China (Deng & Li, 2005). Wang (Wang, 2005), through a review of ethnological economics research, argues that the dilemma in the development of ethnological economics is due to external and internal reasons. However, the fundamental reason is that it has no research paradigm or distinct and recognized logical starting point and core concept.

In this period, ethnological economics researchers believe that the fundamental way to develop ethnological economics is to strengthen the exploration of its logical starting point and core concepts to establish its original research paradigm. So far, the discipline community has no universally accepted research paradigm. However, most scholars consider ethnological economics research mainly as an ethnographic research paradigm, which is not in line with the facts of disciplinary research. From the background and research results of ethnological economics researchers since the origin, it can be easily found that the mainstream research paradigm is still economics, and most researchers have a background in political economy or economics-related disciplines. On this issue, Chen et al. came closer to reality as studies from 1978 to the mid-1990s emphasized the economic development of western and ethnic areas in China. Some economists mainly undertook these studies. Since the mid-1990s, the study of the national economy in China has been in a new period of multidisciplinary integration and diversified research horizons. He also points out that as a secondary discipline under the first-level discipline of ethnography, ethnic economy research in China should focus more on fundamental ethnographic theories. At the same time, he advocates that the national economy study should be conducted from the historical, cultural and ecological dimensions. Practically, the national economy requires a cross-fertilization of theoretical and practical dimensions to solve the problem together. Theoretically, it deepens the content and expands the research field of economic anthropology and even ethnography/anthropology (Chen, 2019). Bao argues that ethnic economy is China's core concept of ethnological economics. On this basis, he proposes corresponding conceptual systems for the ethnic economy and the economy of ethnic regions in China, clarifying the orientation of the study. It is valuable that the conceptual scope of ethnological economics is condensed and specified, representing a posi-

tive exploration of structuring the theoretical system of the discipline. In the same issue of this article, the editorial board of Ethno-National Studies also organized and published relevant papers for discussion. While acknowledging its positive significance, scholars have also expressed different views (Bao, 2010).

Due to the context in which ethnological economics was created and developed, research in the 1980s and 1990s was based on regional and national specificities. When studying the specificities, it focused more on development issues and the influence of non-economic factors on national economic development. However, not enough research was done on the cultural factors of the economic process and their influence, which has been enhanced since 2000. It was believed that the uniqueness and value of national economy research lie in emphasizing the cultural factors of economic processes. Ethnological economics does not simply “cross” or “blend” economics and ethnography but is instead generated by making innovations on integrating the two at a higher level. It also involves another aspect, namely, cultural studies (or, more appropriately, cultural anthropology). Thus, in the case of national issues, the relevance of economy and culture is particularly prominent. National economy studies require more attention to the effect of cultural factors, which should be combined with non-economic factors such as national culture, traditional customs, and psychological habits.

Moreover, it should stress the values, moral consciousness, and behavioral preferences given by the characteristics of national culture, which are accumulated as the essential elements of national economic lifestyles. Wang holds that the natural environment of a nation and the cultural traits of a nation’s identity constitutes the inherent provisions of the concept of a nation. It is presented as the duality of natural and cultural differences in national economic lifestyles. Grasping the duality of differences in national economic lifestyles is the key to building the theoretical framework of the discipline. He made the ethnological economics research system based on the natural environment’s duality and cultural differences, which features strict logical self-consistency (Wang, 2005).

Since 2000, the research results of economic anthropology have increased significantly. While introducing Western economic anthropology, scholars represented by Chen and Shi actively explored the relationship between economic anthropology and ethnological economics. In Shi’s view, Western economic anthropology and Chinese ethnological economics are marginal disciplines between anthropology (ethnography) and economics. It can be understood that there are some similarities and differences between the two. They emerged in different times and countries, with various historical and theoretical origins and socio-historical backgrounds. They vary significantly regarding their fundamental guiding ideology, research objectives, priorities and service targets (Shi, 2002).

In terms of research teams, researchers born after the 1960s have become the backbone and mainstream of ethnological economics research in this period. They can be regarded as the “second generation” of ethnological economics researchers. There is even a younger “new generation,” mainly at ethnic colleges

and universities or universities in ethnic areas in China. Currently, 28 universities and research institutions in China are authorized to grant master's degrees in the Chinese ethnic economy. Eight schools are permitted to confer doctoral degrees in Chinese ethnic economy (some other schools enroll doctoral students in Chinese ethnic economy under the second-level discipline of ethnology). Most of these degree programs started to enroll students after 2000. The number of talents cultivated has grown from a few dozen per year in the 1990s to hundreds. Moreover, the training objectives and orientations have distinct regional and ethnic characteristics, embodying the disciplinary advantages and features of the institutions. Also, some programs in universities in non-ethnic regions have devoted more attention to researching the economic development of ethnic areas in China, such as regional economics, population, resources and environmental economics, history, and sociology.

5. The Stage for New Opportunities of Ethnological Economics Research (Since the 2020s)

In the new era, ethnological economics in China faces many new opportunities. Scholars continue to explore theories of regional economic development with Chinese national characteristics, propose concrete policy recommendations, and cultivate talented professionals in ethnological economics. In addition, Chinese ethnological economists should seriously consider how to effectively introduce ethnological economics with Chinese features to the international academic community. Thus, international economists can learn about and study the ethnological economics initiated in China. Some scholars have taken the lead in introducing the development of ethnological economics in China to international scholars (Zhong et al., 2023). In particular, Professor Shi proposed accelerating the development of ethnic regions in the West and narrowing the regional development gap within China (Tian, 2022; Xia & Tian, 2022).

In 2018, the English-language edition of *China Environmental Anthropology* by Wang, Tian, and Ma, published in the United States, made a big difference in the North American continent and Europe. This English-language monograph is based on the Chinese publication, edited by Wang and Tian (Wang & Tian, 2012). It is the first and the only monograph 2012 on environmental anthropology in China. The book suggests that economic construction in ethnic minority areas must be people-oriented. More humane and nature-friendly products should be produced through various channels. In this way, the intangible ecological products containing abstract human labor can be successfully realized in the commodity market and contribute to the preservation of human civilization. In 2015, the book won the first prize in the Social Science Research Achievement Award of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China. Despite no comprehensive and systematic knowledge of ethnological economics in the international academic community, it is expected that the diversified research results of ethnological economics in China will influence the

international applied economics community to some extent. Thus, it can encourage international scholars to apply the research results of Chinese ethnological economists to other similar developing countries. In this way, ethnological economics, native to the Chinese academic community, can blossom on the world academic platform.

In the past few years, Chinese leader Xi Jinping has proposed ideas and strategies for state governance. These are the guiding ideology for building the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese attributes in the new era. For ethnic work, Xi Jinping put forward new ideas and concepts for consolidating ethnic unity and joint development and prosperity in the contemporary period from the strategic height of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The Central Ethnic Work Conference held in September 2014 stated that ethnic areas in China and the whole country must accelerate development and achieve leapfrog development to finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. To achieve leapfrog development, it should combine policy impetus and endogenous potential to boost infrastructure, development-driven poverty alleviation, urbanization and ecological construction. In addition, it calls for vigorously developing industries with particular advantages, constantly releasing the development potential of ethnic areas in China and enhancing the capacity of ethnic areas in China for self-development. The Belt and Road Initiative targeted poverty alleviation, and ecological civilization construction are also closely related to the economic and social development of ethnic regions in China. The priority of ethnological economics research in this period is how ethnic areas in China can eliminate poverty through targeted poverty alleviation and build a moderately prosperous society. At the same time, it should examine how to grasp the historical opportunities of The Belt and Road Initiative, ecological civilization construction, and rural revitalization. Thus, China can achieve innovative, collaborative, green, open and shared development and realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Li & Xu, 2021).

Chinese leader Xi Jinping has delivered important speeches on ethnic work at different times and occasions, developing the Marxist theory of ethnicity based on China's reality. Xi pointed out that the core issue of solidarity is to actively promote the economic and social development of ethnic minorities and ethnic areas in China by all means and foster the shared prosperity and development of all ethnic groups. How to help ethnic minorities and ethnic areas in China develop, Xi proposed that ethnic areas in China must achieve leapfrog development. Both material and spiritual civilizations must be strengthened, and we must make it a strategic task to build a typical spiritual home for all ethnic groups. Ethnic peoples must be encouraged to move across regions. Scholars have reviewed the critical statements of Chinese leader Xi Jinping on ethnic work. The work of the national economy is mainly reflected in three aspects. First, it is proposed that all ethnic groups synchronize to build a moderately prosperous society. Also, no nation should be left behind, no ethnic minority should be left

behind, and no ethnic group should fall behind. Second, a judgment of “five coexisting²” is made on the ethnic work situation. Among them, the opportunities and challenges of reform and opening up and socialist market economy coexist. The accelerated economic development of ethnic areas coexists with the low level of development. Also, the state’s growing support for ethnic areas coexists with the weakness of essential public service capacity building in ethnic regions. Third, in The Belt and Road Initiative, ethnic places in China, historically on the periphery, will be lifted to the front and center of a new round of opening and development. In this way, border and ethnic areas in China will become a new space to support and expand China’s development and become the most dynamic area with the most late-mover advantages (Wang, 2019).

As China is a unified multiethnic country, Xi proposed that the great unity of multiethnic groups and the pluralistic agreement of all ethnic groups is a great asset left to China by our ancestors and one of China’s main advantages. This great asset and main advantage can be seen in the benefits of rich resources, water sources, ecological barriers and cultural characteristics. It also reflects the shortcomings of ethnic work in frontier and poverty-stricken areas. In this context, China should build the border areas, undertake the Program to Revitalize Border Areas and Enrich Residents’ Lives, and fight poverty with “no ethnic group left behind. Moreover, it has become a practical and urgent task for China to build up the country and the Chinese nation.

The Belt and Road Initiative has transformed ethnic areas in China from the periphery of the opening-up strategy to the forefront. It has been argued that implementing The Belt and Road is highly compatible with the economic development of ethnic regions in China. Precisely, the strategic policy fits the development of an export-oriented economy in ethnic areas in China, and the standard geopolitical features reduce the cost of the border economy in these areas. The two-way factor flow drives the economic growth of ethnic regions in China, and the low-end economic paradigm forces their industrial restructuring. Moreover, the cultural and psychological identity stimulates the trade and economic prosperity of ethnic areas in China. Ethnic areas in China are The Belt and Road’s core and essential support. The Belt and Road development will make western China a new frontier of opening up to the outside world and an economic growth pole. It offers an unprecedented opportunity for ethnic areas in West China to achieve leapfrog development. Ethnic areas are the center of transnational regional and sub-regional economic cooperation in the economic, trade and industrial cooperation along The Belt and Road. It has also advanced

²China’s ethnic work features “five co-existing” stages. First, the opportunities and challenges of reform and opening up and socialist market economy coexist. Second, the accelerated economic development of ethnic areas coexists with the low level of development. Third, the state’s growing support for ethnic areas coexists with the weakness of basic public service capacity building in ethnic areas. Fourth, the increasing trend of exchanges and integration among ethnic groups coexists with the rise of conflicts and disputes involving ethnic factors. Fifth, the significant effectiveness of the struggle against ethnic division, religious extremism, violence and terrorism coexists with the active and frequent occurrence of violent and terrorist activities in local areas.

the implementation of capacity cooperation, industrial development and anti-poverty strategies in ethnic areas in China. The inland border ports of ethnic areas in China are most economically affected by The Belt and Road. Deng & Li (Deng & Li, 2018) analyzed the ethnic and economic development around The Belt and Road's six economic corridors and related regions. Based on this, they designed an industry-city (town) integration model to coordinate population concentration and industrial layout in conjunction with The Belt and Road.

Ethnic areas in China are the main battleground for targeted poverty alleviation, which Chinese leader Xi Jinping proposed during his visit to ethnic areas in China. Moreover, Xi has repeatedly stressed that "in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, no nation should be left behind." Xi Jinping's thought of targeted poverty alleviation guides the nation's fight against poverty. Targeted poverty alleviation is summarized as accomplishing "Targeted Efforts in Six Areas³" and taking "Five Measures for Poverty Eradication⁴." Scholars analyzed the current status and causes of poverty in ethnic areas in China. Based on this, they examined the latest progress of targeted poverty alleviation and the effects of policy implementation and analyzed the root causes of extreme poverty in different regions. Empirical analysis showed that multidimensional poverty differs by region and ethnicity and is more severe in the three southwestern provinces and regions than in the four northwestern provinces and territories.

Moreover, the multidimensional poverty of ethnic groups is more severe than Han Chinese. Thus, the targeted poverty alleviation strategy needs to be implemented by identifying the poor population more comprehensively and applying targeted and scientific policies from a multidimensional perspective. Contiguous poor areas cannot respond to differential poverty reduction measures by relying on previously homogenized economic growth approaches. Therefore, poverty alleviation policies should be tailored to local conditions. The "three areas and three prefectures⁵" are incredibly impoverished areas with high dependence on poverty alleviation policies. The specificity of poverty in the three areas and prefectures was analyzed using the basic framework of new economic geography and structural economics. It was found that these areas and prefectures can reduce their poverty and develop sustainably by improving the structure of factor endowments. Li (Li, 2019) argues that to alleviate and eliminate poverty in three

³This refers to efforts to identify the poor accurately, arrange targeted programs, utilize capital efficiently, take household based measures, dispatch first Party secretaries based on village conditions, and achieve the set goals.

⁴The measures include: boosting the economy to provide more job opportunities, relocating poor people from inhospitable areas, compensating for economic losses associated with reducing ecological damage, improving education in impoverished areas, and providing subsistence allowances for those unable to shake off poverty through their own efforts alone.

⁵The "three areas" refer to the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Hotan, Aksu, Kashgar prefectures and the Kizilsu Kirgiz Autonomous Prefecture in southern Xinjiang, and prefectures and counties with large Tibetan populations in the provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai. The "three prefectures" refer to the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, and the Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province.

areas and three prefectures, China must adhere to coordinated regional development strategies, implement unique poverty alleviation plans, and enhance the effects of poverty alleviation policies. Li (Li, 2019) argues that to alleviate and eliminate poverty in three areas and three prefectures, China must adhere to coordinated regional development strategies, implement unique poverty alleviation plans, and enhance the effects of poverty alleviation policies. Moreover, the positive energy of religious culture in poverty alleviation should be maximized, and efforts should be made to cultivate endogenous momentum.

On the model and mechanism of targeted poverty alleviation in ethnic areas in China, Xin (Xin, 2022) suggests that institutional arrangements can be made to promote the synergy between ethnic minority villages and targeted poverty alleviation. This way, it can generate more benefits than if the strategies are implemented alone. Based on field surveys, some studies have elaborated on the implementation, effect evaluation and problems of the exit mechanism of targeted poverty alleviation and proposed some countermeasures. Based on field surveys, some studies have elaborated on the implementation, effect evaluation and problems of the exit mechanism of targeted poverty alleviation and proposed some countermeasures. The government can further quantify and refine the poverty exit criteria and effectively reduce the probability of sinking back into poverty by differentiating non-poor people by poverty vulnerability. Moreover, it can dynamically adjust relevant poverty alleviation policies, encourage impoverished households to establish a conscious ambition to escape poverty and intensify the dynamic adjustment of income. In addition to the above studies, many studies have been conducted on targeted poverty alleviation of specific regions and ethnic groups, targeted poverty alleviation through industry and finance in ethnic areas in China.

Ethnic areas in China are ecologically fragile. It has become a significant issue for developing ethnic minorities and ethnic areas in China. We should promote the change of economic growth mode under the new normal and create a favorable ecological environment for a beautiful China. Scholars have examined Xi Jinping's thoughts on ecological civilization, the relationship between economic growth and environmental pressure, and regional and industrial development from the perspective of ecological civilization construction. They argue that Xi's environmental civilization thought features harmonious coexistence, sustainable development, and overall coordination and is coordinated, systematic, and strategic. Ethnic areas in China should effectively build an ecological civilization. Specifically, it should strengthen the top-level design of ecological civilization and establish a sound legal system and mechanism for ecological protection. In addition, it should stimulate folk ecological thinking and forces of environmental protection and promote eco-efficiency through innovative production methods (Xin, 2022). Chu (Chu, 2022) argues that ethnic ecological culture is compatible with low-carbon economic development. For this reason, ethnic areas in China should utilize the function of ethnic ecological culture for low-carbon de-

velopment and apply the public value theory to the evaluation of ecological construction projects. Moreover, it should construct a performance evaluation index system for ecological construction projects.

In 2014 China's National New-type Urbanization Plan (2014-2020) was issued, signifying that China's new-type urbanization strategy was elevated to a national one. The research results of new urbanization in ethnic areas in China are mainly related to the status quo, problems and path models of contemporary urbanization. Researchers generally agree that new urbanization is necessary to modernize ethnic areas in China. However, these areas are urbanized at a relatively low level, and their quality is generally declining. Some scholars have explored the models and paths based on analyzing the dilemmas and problems of urbanization in ethnic areas in China. These include expanding the border into the city, integrating small towns, rural-urban interaction, urban-rural integration, inter-city transition and town-village mutual promotion. They summarize the urbanization models of specific ethnic areas in China based on regional features, such as the mode of migratory bird-like ecological urbanization around Qinghai Lake and the five-in-one urbanization model of Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture.

Building villages with cultural significance is a systematic project for economic development, ecological protection and cultural inheritance. In 2009, the National Ethnic Affairs Commission launched a pilot project on preserving and developing ethnic-minority villages with cultural significance. It also targeted building 1,000 villages with cultural importance during the 12th Five-Year Plan period. Related studies summarize the connotation of ethnic-minority villages with cultural significance construction. They design indicators for the implementation and completion stages of constructing such villages. Thus, it can accurately identify the deviation of the actual construction progress from the expected target and formulate reasonable correction strategies to achieve the construction goal.

On the other hand, it proposes some propositions and countermeasures for balancing the interests of the communities in the construction of villages with cultural significance based on the participation-sharing mechanism in response to the imbalance of interests in such a structure. It also deals with cultural preservation and development in building ethnic-minority villages with cultural significance. Some researchers have investigated the targeted poverty alleviation by ethnic-minority villages with cultural relevance. Some have analyzed the integration of the construction of ethnic-minority villages with cultural significance and ethnic tourism development. Since a rural revitalization strategy was proposed at the Central Economic Work Conference in 2017, some scholars have investigated the industrial development of traditional villages and tourism-driven sustainable poverty alleviation in ethnic areas in China.

Regarding theoretical developments of the discipline, scholars further discuss the orientation, theoretical system and affiliation of the discipline. They consider

divergences in the theoretical result of ethnological economics, mainly its association. The discipline has no systematic, complete, stable and mature organizational structure. Moreover, no sufficient research bases have been built, and universities offering ethnological economics programs do not communicate with each other. Because of this, the professional training of postgraduates is not governed by standards and criteria, and it is still far from the mature economic disciplines.

In addition to the abovementioned issues and disciplinary trends, some scholars have also actively deliberated on the relationship between economic anthropology and ethnological economics, The Belt and Road and theoretical innovation in ethnological economics. According to Tian and Luo, economic anthropology was first localized in China in the late 1970s. The creation of Western development studies and the discipline of ethnological economics marks the localization of economic anthropology in China. They point out that ethnological economics and economic anthropology increasingly overlap in their research objects and contents. Moreover, their research methods have also converged. In this regard, they argue that it seems to be inevitable that ethnological economics and economic anthropology will unite and develop economic anthropology with local features in China. Economic anthropology in China must be developed based on ethnological economics.

Furthermore, economic anthropology with local features in China can only be formed based on ethnological economics. Tian & Luo present the issue of localizing economic anthropology. However, from the existing research, we cannot conclude that ethnological economics is a localized practice of economic anthropology in China. As mentioned by Wang and Shi above, ethnological economics and economic anthropology are related but distinct from each other. The two disciplines may draw on each other in future research but will not be mutually substituted (Luo & Tian, 2014). Li argues that ethnological economics involves the economic analysis of the political and cultural effects of ethnic processes and the normative study of them according to the economic paradigm rather than the ethnographic one. It investigates ethnic processes, including ethnic separation, ethnic integration, ethnic compatibility, and ethnic identity.

Besides, it explores the economic value of this process. It covers all ethnic groups in the world, not only Chinese minorities. Its theoretical foundation is the division of labor theory in classical economics. In particular, it is concerned with the impact of non-economic factors specific to the national process on the size and scope of the free market. Also, it addresses how to improve the performance of international trade in the national process based on the optimized flow of factors of production. It aims to establish a new economic discipline differing from all previous fields, observe the ethnic process from an economic perspective, and provide a rational economic explanation. In turn, it introduces ethnic factors into the process of economic globalization and provides a new dimension of theoretical support for The Belt and Road Initiative. It proposes an innovative

idea of ethnological economics research under The Belt and Road. However, further research and discussion are needed to build the disciplinary system (Li & Xu, 2021).

The works on the fundamental theoretical research of the discipline in this period include Liu's Ethnological Economics Tutorials (Liu, 2013a), Ethnological Economics in China (Liu, 2013b), and Shi's Ethnological Economics Tutorials (Shi, 2016). It also includes an Outline of Ethnic Economy Research in China (Zhang et al., 2013). With the improved postgraduate training system and teaching needs, the study of the history of ethnic minorities and the economy of ethnic regions in China has increased. It has enriched the content of ethnological economics research. Some representative works include Yang's Economic History of Mongolian Peoples (Yang, 2016). Huang's Economic History of Ethnic Regions in Contemporary China (Huang, 2016) and Forty Years of Ethnological Economics (Huang, 2018). It also includes Luo and Tian's Path of Localizing Economic Anthropology in China and Its Theoretical Contributions (Luo & Tian, 2014), Tian's Academic Highlights of Chinese Pioneers in Economic Anthropology (Tian, 2021).

6. Conclusions

A review of the history of ethnological economics research reveals that ethnological economics research has grown and developed rapidly along with the progress of reform and opening up. It has formed an academic system and research team with its unique characteristics. Ethnological economics is an emerging discipline with local features, proposed and created by Chinese people, and it is a truly localized discipline. Furthermore, it provides significant theoretical support for the economic development of ethnic minorities and ethnic regions in China. The international academic community does not know it well despite the high reputation and status of ethnological economics among Chinese theorists. Hence, national economy theorists need to work together to introduce the theoretical research of ethnological economics and its results to the international academic community. In this way, China's ethnological economics research can contribute to developing similar national economies in developing countries worldwide.

Ethnological economics research deals with social equity and coordinated development from the characteristics of economic development of ethnic minorities and ethnic regions in China. Since the inception of ethnological economics, researchers have studied the economic and social development needs of ethnic areas in China during reform and opening up. Considering the specific development environment influenced and determined by nature, history, and culture, they present theories and propositions that align with the local characteristics of economic development. While studying the development of the national economy, they explore the mechanisms and paths of common development, solidarity and mutual assistance among ethnic groups and regions as the sharing of

economic development benefits. Moreover, they combine economic growth with social, environmental and cultural development and emphasize the coordinated development among areas and ethnic groups.

The background and the nature of the discipline of ethnological economics have determined its distinctive problem-oriented approach. From the research results, most of the studies are applied. Compared with the extensive applied research, studies on the fundamental theories of the discipline are relatively weak. There are divergences in the logical starting point, core concepts, research objects, research paradigms, and theoretical systems of the discipline. In this regard, scholars need to refine disciplinary concepts further, deepen research contents, and improve the theoretical approach based on enriched applied research in the future. In terms of research paradigm, researchers have continued the research tradition of the 1980s, which was dominated by normative research in economics (also considered by some scholars as the research paradigm of political economy). In addition, there has been a significant increase in empirical studies since 2000. Researchers have conducted numerous empirical studies on the economic development of ethnic regions in China, making ethnological economics research feature a more pronounced economic paradigm. In addition to the research on the economic paradigm, some institutions, such as Yunnan University, have developed their unique characteristics based on the research paradigm of economic anthropology in the postgraduate training system of ethnic economy in China.

Recently, the central government of China has proposed theoretical guidance on the changes of the fundamental contradictions in society as Chinese society enters a new era, placing new demands on the study of ethnological economics. It also brings new historical opportunities for theoretical innovation in ethnological economics. Scholars have been following and researching the issues of targeted poverty alleviation, The Belt and Road and rural revitalization in ethnic areas in China. On this basis, ethnological economics researchers urgently need to investigate further the characteristics, manifestations, and trends of changes in the fundamental social contradictions of ethnic minorities and ethnic areas in China. Moreover, they should propose targeted theories and countermeasures. The Chinese leadership has made a collective vision to modernize and build China into a modern socialist country by the 100th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. As part of the Chinese family, ethnic minorities must achieve this ambitious goal together. Therefore, as a critical component of the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, the study of modernization also assumes an important position in ethnological economics. Guided by modernization theory, ethnological economists should analyze the economic and social development characteristics of ethnic minorities and ethnic areas in China according to the global layout of building China into a great modern country. At the same time, they should examine the modernization patterns and paths of different regions and ethnic groups to enrich the modernization theory with

Chinese characteristics and contribute to constructing a philosophical and social science system with local features.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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